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Smart Sex in the Neoliberal Present

Rethinking Single Parenthood in a Mexican Tourist Destination

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Oraida and Fernando arrived in Huatulco from Oaxaca City four years ago with four children. They brought just enough money to pay one month's rent and invest in what is still today their Huatulco business venture—a semi-formal stand from which they sell sandwiches along with Coca-Cola products and goods from the giant Mexican bakery Bimbo. Fernando's parents watch the children while Oraida and Fernando work. Despite Fernando's research and ever evolving marketing strategies, his business, like most in Huatulco, barely survives—even with Oraida delivering sandwiches to doorsteps, free of charge, on her rent-to-own motorcycle.

When Fernando is alone at the business, he fills the empty hours, sometimes days, thinking. One day in January 2009 I sat before him at the counter of his stand, and, aware that I was studying the lives of single parents in the region, he asked: "Do you know why matrimony has changed in Mexico?" Fernando, one of my most eloquent interlocutors, then pivoted to open the coke cooler. "This," he exclaimed, holding up a twenty-ounce bottle of Diet Coke, "this is what changed matrimony in Mexico. Do you understand me?"

I did not understand.

"Fine, I'll tell you." Fernando sighed, with exaggerated impatience which I believe he thinks builds credibility. "Think of it this way," he went on. "The people drink Coca-Cola and they love Coca-Cola. Everyone loves Coca-Cola. And Coca-Cola has a great taste, but it also has calories. You just know—that's one part. But then one day Coca-Cola comes out with this." He holds up the bottle to remind me. "*Coca-Cola Light*. And what? I tell you, now you have all of the good taste of Coca-Cola and none of the calories. This is what happened to marriage in Mexico. The people have learned to want all of the taste with none of the calories. But marriage isn't like that. There's good and bad. Now people want it without the bad."

This conversation took place in Huatulco, Oaxaca, a twenty-five-year-old federal tourism development project located in the south of Mexico on the Pacific Coast. Journalists describe Huatulco as pristine and idyllic, and tourism promoters overuse descriptive terms such as "natural" and "virgin." Anthropologists, on the other hand, write of the region's seclusion, economic instability, out-migration, and manufactured authenticity, though, in their footnotes, they recognize that tourism has sometimes produced benefits (Barkin 2000, 2002; Gullette 2004, 2007; Long 1990; Pankonien 2008). Residents are more attentive to the cost of living. Whole milk, tortillas, and other staple foods cost 15 to 20 percent more in Huatulco than in Mexico City and as much as 35 percent more than in surrounding areas of southern Oaxaca. "Huatulco is expensive," I am told again and again.

The percentage of births among women who are single, separated, divorced, or widowed is 50 percent higher in Huatulco than in Mexico City (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [INEGI; Institute of Statistics and Geography] 2000), and local discourse suggests rates that are even more extreme: "Half of the women here are single mothers," say most Huatulco residents willing to venture a guess. By claiming that this is the result of Diet Coke, Fernando is locating the cause in a global, political, economic, and now cultural shift toward instantaneity and cyclical consumption fostered by the neoliberal ideology guiding capitalism today.

In this chapter I examine the interrelation of neoliberal tourism development, urbanization, and the formation of single-parent families. I represent cross-class, indigenous, and non-indigenous single parents as economic actors and am concerned with the ways that political, economic, and cultural shifts might render single-parent families increasingly viable, attractive, and perhaps even necessary. I suggest that single parents, unconstrained by the institution of marriage, are free to wield sex and sexuality as tools. And I argue that this is key to surviving the economic instability wrought by high unemployment rates and seasonal employment in neoliberal tourism development zones. Sex, in this context, is smart, economically motivated, and easily called sex work without at all resembling what we have come to call "sex work." This micro-level manipulation of sex, of course, makes sense only inside a macro-level analysis of history and political economy.

In my attempt to understand the evolution of family forms in their economic contexts, I look at the works of Victorianists Lewis Henry Morgan (1877) and Friedrich Engels (1884). My goal is to create an argument for today's single-parent families according to a simple formula: monogamy replaced the pairing family which replaced group marriage. Charles Darwin's

evolutionary schema provided a framework for understanding shifting social institutions, inspiring Morgan, Marx, Engels, and countless other contemporary scholars. Engels argued that the pairing family already represented an end of the natural selection process: "In the pairing family, the group was already reduced to its last unit, its two atom molecule—to one man and one woman." Engels told us it was the unnaturalness of capitalism that necessitated monogamy. I am convinced that it is just as neat, just as simple, to posit that the unnaturalness of capitalism now relatively privileges poor, single-parent families, often in ways we do not notice. I suspect, in the cases of women in particular, that this is because single parenthood allows women to maintain the rights to their sexuality or even to sell their sexuality of their own will.

Welcome to Huatulco

Huatulco, Oaxaca, Mexico is a federal tourism development project that has grossly underperformed compared to the projections accompanying its design and implementation. Proposed by the creators of Cancun, Loredo, Los Cabos, and Ixtapa, Huatulco's master plan details the construction of hotels, restaurants, and an eighteen-hole golf course, all situated along thirty kilometers of coastal terrain which, in the mid-1980s, held fewer than four hundred people. Federal statistics from that time suggest a region that was 0 percent urban with inhabitants divided into small communities situated on the beaches of varied bays (INEGI 1985). Development was to bring ten thousand hotel rooms by the year 2000; at the end of 2009 there were twenty-five hundred hotel rooms in the Huatulco development zone (INEGI 2000; Ana Laura Valderez, Huatulco director of SECTUR: personal correspondence 2009). In other words, Huatulco was 75 percent short of a planning goal that was, in 2009, nearly one decade old.

Despite many failings, Huatulco is a region of great hope, partly because those who have lost hope have sold out or moved elsewhere and partly because the federal government still heavily invests in Huatulco. Roads are straight and repaired annually, and tap water is chlorinated so that too many showers over too many months leave one's hair falling out, but tourists don't get sick from the ice cubes. Hedges are manicured; palm trees are aligned; and low-waged gardeners keep the region green many months into the dry season. The countless projects that have been abandoned before completion—now half-built structures dotting the Huatulco landscape—suggest to the unknowing onlooker investment rather than desertion. And even when

one knows what Huatulco was supposed to be by now, the region still evinces rapid, radical redevelopment and urbanization: the municipality that was 0 percent urban, is now, according to INEGI, more than 80 percent urban, growing by at least 8 percent annually into the mid-2000s (INEGI 2000; Ramon Sinovas, Huatulco director of Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo [FONATUR], personal correspondence, 2005).

The many single parents in Huatulco have gone unnoticed in anthropological studies of the region. And though scholars, who have worked elsewhere in Mexico specifically with single mothers, have documented the ways in which women stress chastity and religious faith in attempts to salvage honor (Hirsch 2003; Murphy 1998), my observations in Huatulco do not conform. I find, instead, a community of women and men who are unapologetic regarding their single parenthood.

The lives and choices of the single parents with whom I worked make politico-economic sense. To say this requires that I define single mothers and single fathers, and, in Mexico, where free unions are not only an accepted form of marital union but in some places are increasingly preferred, this is not easily done. In my project a woman who identified herself as a *madre soltera* (single mother) at any point in her life qualified as a single mother. Those I might call the "purists" in the region spent two and a half years telling me that my project was deeply flawed, as "everyone knows" that a single mother can only be a mother who has never married. All those women who are separated, divorced, or widowed are not actually *madres solteras,* I was told. And although the federal statistics agency INEGI would agree, I chose not to and stayed with my own definition. (Mexicanist scholars have remedied this by using *madre sola* in place of *madre soltera*.) Regarding my definition of single fathers, I exclude men identifying as single fathers who had never been in contact with their children.

This left me with forty of eighty-eight formal informants who identified as single parents at the time of their interviews. Only fifteen of those would have been labeled "real" single mothers by the "purists." Five were single fathers. All the others looked more or less like real single mothers, although that varied greatly over time, for single motherhood is as impermanent an identity as many others. Just as the residents of Huatulco move in and out of jobs, in and out of work, in and out of the region, so, too, do they move in and out of relationships.

Single parents, in fact, are somewhat more likely to be first-generation migrants to Huatulco than residents as a whole. In the sample of seventy-six residents I constructed to represent Huatulco's diverse population, 82 per-

cent were first-generation migrants to the region. Meanwhile, 90 percent of the single parents in my study were first-generation migrants, and more than half arrived to the region years before other family members. This is meaningful. Following sociologist Larissa Lomnitz's 1974 study of reciprocity networks in Mexico,[1] scholars examined the ways in which kin and fictive kin relationships mitigate poverty. Such strategies become particularly important among immigrant populations, as suggested by the works of anthropologists Cristina Oehmichen Bazán (2005), Li Zhang (2001), and others. Yet my work, along with many other recent studies, indicates that it is becoming much harder to sustain such reciprocity networks. Neoliberal policy immiserates all, eroding support systems today based both on kin and fictive kin (Gonzalez de la Rocha 1994, 2000, 2002; Willis 1993, 1994).

Sex as Strategy

In Huatulco, where residents are necessarily incorporated into the market economy, where consumption costs are high, wages are low, and employment is seasonal, single parents must become even more creative in their attempts to sustain themselves and their children. As neoliberal policy reform continues to roll back social programming, this means that single parents are providing their own safety nets. Sex-based relationships, whether temporary or permanent, become ever more vital.

Single fathers who are quick to assume girlfriends suggest such economically based sexual strategizing. The unpaid household labor of a girlfriend functions just as does that of the bourgeois wife in Engels's work. The status of single father might even work as bait: three of the single fathers in my work, all of the professional class, described women's attraction to them as single fathers. Women, they told me, see them as caring, invested in their children, and good fathers, and thus as good long-term relationship partners.

For women, the employment of sex as an economic strategy looks far different. I used to tell Alma with a laugh that she was my study's outlier, and at first glance she looks little like the other women in my study. She is the single mother of three boys to whom she gave names such as "Divine Confidence" and "Gandhi." In Huatulco, she survives by reading tarot cards, teaching yoga, giving massages, tailoring clothing, and taking people into her home so they might learn healthy living. Alma rarely has excess pesos and never has secure employment, but like many of the single parents in the region she patches jobs together and sometimes pays her rent a bit late. Upon closer examination, she is not so much of an outlier.

In 2008 Alma's landlord grew stricter on rent payments at the same time the economy tightened. As Alma's clients became boyfriends and boyfriends became clients, onlookers became confused. "Alma's a prostitute," they murmured, quietly at first. But Alma wrote up a resume, in which she announced that she gives sexuality conferences, that she will teach women to reach orgasm and men to "be alive between their hips." Alma had a friend who promised to teach her how to advertise on the Internet.

The single mothers of my study said repeatedly in their interviews that one difficult aspect of being a single mother is that people think you are *facil* (easy). The mothers described extravagant strategies to test potential boyfriends for sincerity. Some wait a year or more before introducing a man to their children. Yet almost all the women showed, through the course of their narrative accounts of life in Huatulco, that they could switch from mother to martyr to girlfriend and even to the sexualized single mother troped as easy—as in the example of Alma above.

Nayeli claimed that, at the gas station where she worked, the trick is not to ask if a customer wants his or her windshield washed. You just do it, and they will give you five pesos and sometimes more. It helps to wear sexy clothes. Lupita, who works at the gym owned by her cousin, told me that the men like her to tell them how to use the machines, to show them how to work out different muscles. She would grin and tell me how they like to flirt and that this makes the time pass much faster. As female laborers of Huatulco have grown prominent in receptionist positions at hotels and restaurants, at gas stations and gyms, they have grown increasingly adept at enacting various identities. Single mothers, with children as scarlet letters, are particularly free to sell sex and sexuality to today's global consumers in the local, tourism-dependent economy of Huatulco.

In September 2009 Lupita and her fifteen-year-old were competing to see who would find a boyfriend first. Lupita explained that her relationship with her daughter is much different than the way her parents treated her. Local restaurant owner Paola said that was true for her as well, that her parents' strictness drove her to seek freedom, the kind that comes with rebellion and results in teenage pregnancy. Both women agreed that Huatulco is a good place to raise children—small enough that your friends will tell you if your children are in the streets but not as small as other places. Small towns, big gossip, they warned. Many used this phrase to describe the towns from which they migrated. In Huatulco there is more privacy and less gossip, they maintained. On a bad day, however, the women with whom I spoke would forget this and contradict themselves, telling me there is too much gossip in Huatulqu-ito, "little Huatulco."

What the single mothers in my study did not say, but which I nonetheless suspect, is that much of the privacy in Huatulco stems from the absence of extended family members. Almost all who live in Huatulco now do so neolocally. Rural migrants have left communities where siblings build houses on land owned by their parents or on communal land. They have left communities where three- and four-generation families remain in daily contact. Similarly, longtime inhabitants of the Huatulco development zone were relocated from the beachfront, where they farmed, fished, or ran small convenience stores, to a designated residential sector. They were given plots of land measuring ten by twelve meters and the materials to build concrete homes. But families soon outgrew these plots, or they sold out. Others learned that establishing small businesses or renting rooms to outsiders was more profitable than housing adult children. Households, whether headed by migrants or by Huatulco's original inhabitants, are now far less likely to be multigenerational.

Although single parents in Huatulco are more likely to be first-generation migrants than other residents, they are also more likely than the population of residents as a whole to set up independent households. Eighty-eight percent of the single parents with whom I worked live in rooms, apartments, or houses which they rent or own and fund in their own names. As *jefes* and *jefas* (heads) of households, they increasingly depend on themselves. Might this turning inward suggest more than the corrosion of kin and fictive-kin relationships that results from neoliberal policy? Might this also imply attempts to escape social stigmatization made possible by women's increasing incorporation into low-waged service sectors everywhere? Is this turning inward an indication that women want to make decisions independent even of those to whom they are closest?

Virtual relationships leave single parents turning inward and outward at the same time. Jenyfer, Lili, Carlos, Memo, Alma, and many other single parents with whom I worked shared the conviction that, even with one's own space, Huatulco grows too small. Nearly one-quarter of the single parents in my study dated online. Alma was the most enthusiastic in her promotion of Internet relationships, and she maintained the most profiles on the most social networking sites. On my last day in the region I stopped by with my camera because she needed digital photos for a second Tagged profile: "I'm going to wear a hat and sunglasses, and I will dress like this isn't the beach. No one knows my given name, I'll use that. I'm going to friend the actor, the one who quit talking to me. I know he likes sexy women. These will be sexy pictures. He will try to talk to me, and I will ignore him."

Alma had been sure, one week earlier, that this actor, with his photos of yachts and mansions, would invest in her dream to build a little café filled with food for the body and spirit. The German scientist Alma dated online the year before had arrived in Huatulco six months into their relationship and decided that he didn't like the fuchsia bedroom walls at Alma's; communication was much more difficult without the online translator. Alma had also envisioned this man as a potential investor in her dream.

Jenyfer who has had the same Internet boyfriend for four years tells me there are no men in Huatulco—her boyfriend lives somewhere in the Yucatan Peninsula. Alma says, "Why would I limit myself to Huatulco when I have access to the whole world on my computer?" Jenyfer talks with her boyfriend daily, although she has not yet seen him in person. Her friends call her crazy. "Actually, this is perfect," she answers, "because it doesn't take time away from my children, and I don't have to worry if he gets along with my children. This functions for now." With more than twenty Internet cafés in the town's center and a cost of U.S.$0.66 per hour online, such Internet-based relationships do in fact function in Huatulco.

I also find that single mothers, with ever greater frequency, are choosing to assume multiple lovers. Polyandry, once one is free, or perhaps freer, of the institutions and social relationships that limit the performance of polyandry, becomes smarter than monogamy. Such choices are historicized with local meanings: "We are from the beach, from the hot zone, we are a hot people. This is why our daughters develop early," explained Doña Chayo, days into my stay in the region, but I would hear this many more times before I left. Oaxaca is renowned for its many indigenous residents. Here, as in many tropical regions where the exotic, dark-skinned other is perceived as hypersexed, the hot temperature is conflated with hot bodies, sexual bodies, and is used to explain the sexual activities of adolescent and adult women.

Additionally Huatulco is three hours up the coast from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a region long famous for its pre-Hispanic three-gender system, matriarchal families, and *macha* women (Chiñas 1991; Stephen 1991). I once asked a girlfriend, as we watched a drunken man stumble past our table in the coffee shop at midday, why I kept seeing drunken men in Huatulco but had not yet seen any drunken women. Magda smiled knowingly:

> I'll tell you. Think of our friend Dani. She's from here, from the isthmus. You see how she's very strong, very *brusca* [abrupt]. This is how the women here are. The men, they get here, and they have come from places like Mexico City or Acapulco. They have come from places where they are

used to being the men, and they arrive here, and here they learn that they are not the men. Because here the women are the men. And that's why they [the men] drink.

Local discourse depicts Oaxacan women as *machista* and coastal women as highly sexual. Thus the local social expectations are that women have sex, repeatedly, even casually. This notion is increasingly exploited, and the histories that create it are continually reworked to give new meaning to the growing number of single parents.

Politicos on the Family

The politicians who occupy my field site readily confirm the presence of many single mothers in Huatulco, and their campaign strategies to pitch to single-mother voters further indicate political recognition. I asked, "*Si haya una interés*—is there an interest—in single parenthood in the region? "Yes, yes, we are very interested in the family," federal development director Ramón Sinovas answered: "Work brings people here, but marriage keeps them here." Municipal vice president and one of the largest business owners in the region, Don Wilo Garcia, responded, "The nuclear family is the base of all; when nuclear families learn to live together this then becomes a community and these communities, ultimately, form a society." Politicians are concerned with economic stability, and in their efforts to map the path to such stability, they imagine social typologies with the nuclear family unit as a foundation.

Huatulco's politicians have read sociologists' reports on out-of-wedlock childbirth. They understand that single parenthood correlates positively with poverty and suspect that single parents are unstable residents in a region already overflowing with cyclical migrants. These politicians, nearly all from large urban centers in central and northern Mexico such as Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Mexico City, then blame a dysfunctional educational system and high percentages of indigenous residents for the many unwed mothers. But many other factors are at least as culpable when one shakes free of the idea that "Oaxacans are *IOPs* (*Indios Oaxacos Pendejos*[2])" which lends itself to racist, classist interpretations of all that might be deemed problematic in Huatulco. The next most common explanation for single motherhood in the region, for example, is "the taxi drivers—it's because of the taxi drivers." Thus I learned that Huatulco's taxi drivers have reputations for infidelity. But although this explanation seemed to escape the racism of other explanations,

and indeed this one hinged on indigenous taxi drivers' abilities to usurp class boundaries (and thus lure women) through access to cars and tips, this did not explain the lives of any of the single mothers with whom I worked.

What did account for these single mothers were factors spawned by politicians' own development policy and implementation. Neolocal living, the absence of parents, grandparents, siblings, and in-laws who might judge, neighbors from different regions with new traditions and understandings, smaller households, shared apartment buildings, the impermanence of work and residence (replacing coworkers and neighbors with strangers)—all characteristics tied to migration and urbanization—now shape the quality and character of the social relationships that single parents maintain in Huatulco. Women's access to paid labor positions enable them to raise children in the absence of a partner. The sexualization and then commodification of the exotic other, fostered by the architects and promoters of tourism, create positions that skew earnings scales for the better if one can deliver sexualized otherness. Labor casualization allows one to work multiple jobs; at the same time the devalorization of labor makes working multiple jobs a requirement for many who hope to sustain a family.

Just Plain Smart

Judith Stacey argues that "marriage became increasingly fragile as it became less economically obligatory" (1997:461). Women's ability to raise children independent of husbands has led many to do so. Anthropologist Mary Weismantel found in Zumbagua, Ecuador, that many of the market women with whom she worked "became mothers for reasons that had little to do with male desires . . . They became mothers because they wanted children, and remained unmarried because they did not want—or need—a spouse" (2001:234). Sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas (2005) also found impoverished women in the urban United States choosing motherhood before marriage, deciding they were fit to parent, yet certain that they had not yet met their life partners; they chose to have children in the meantime. Feminist scholar Geraldine Heng and scholar-journalist Janadas Devan wrote of women who suggested, ironically, in response to the prime minister of Singapore's call for elite women to have children out of patriotic duty, that "if increased numbers of superior children were exclusively the issue, then women ought to be encouraged, nay, urged to have children outside of the institution of marriage" (1997:111). Their informants, too, described the many women who wished to have children without marrying.

In the case of Huatulco in 2009, I argue, single parenthood increases in popularity not because marriage is no longer economically obligatory but because it is, frequently, no longer economically sustainable. In many ways, choosing single parenthood from within a tourism economy as precarious as that of Huatulco limits an individual's risk of poverty. If one begins as a single parent, there is not, at any point, a partner who might lead one down the slippery slope to dependence and then disappear. Unmarried, one also maintains the freedom to trade one partner for another as all individuals move in and out of employment throughout the year—single parenthood thus allows one to hedge one's bets in a low-wage, high-unemployment service economy.

Juanita has been a single mother twice—once with her thirteen year old and once with her ten year old. At the time of our interview, she was married to the father of her youngest children, ages three and one. "Don't ever marry a man without knowing two things about him first," she warned, during our conversation at her house located in a town outside Huatulco. "You need to know how his mother washes his clothes and how she prepares his food. This is what he is used to. Then you decide if you want to marry him." She told me this lack of information at the outset of her relationship was now causing her many problems:

J: He lives with me, but we have many problems.
DP: What does he do? (I am asking about work.)
J: Nothing. That's the problem. He's *flojo* [lazy].
DP: But does he work?
J: No. He doesn't do anything.
DP: Does he take care of the kids—is he like a house-father?
J: Sure, something like that. But my mother comes over to take care of them so he doesn't have to. . .
J: I married the father of my last child. It was what he wanted. But civil marriage is bad luck. And divorce is very expensive.

Even while the development discourse in Huatulco and other tourist destinations continues to relate to nuclear family structures and social stability, the politico-economic shift, and the policies that drive such a shift, increasingly necessitate both family structures and family members that can accommodate instability. Anthropologist Mercedes González de la Rocha (1994, 2002) has argued repeatedly that women's control of resources—in the absence of a male head—has led to more equitable distribution of resources among household members, and therefore "is a crucial factor for well-being achievement and protection" at the household level during economic down-

turns (2002:15). Geographer and gender studies scholar Sylvia Chant (1985, 1991) has argued, similarly, that the nuclear family structure "often mitigates against economic progress" (1985:27). Male heads are likely to prohibit females from working, limiting women's autonomy and earning potential. Men often contribute less of their total incomes to household costs than do women. While findings such as these are rarely contested, they have done little to undermine the social and political correctness of the nuclear family.

One-third of the single mothers and fathers I interviewed outsourced the care of their children to parents in lower-cost rural regions. Two others, single mothers, both college-educated with professional positions, chose to bring their mothers to Huatulco so that these mothers could share their homes and assume child-care responsibilities there. Yet another, Viki, brought eight siblings, one by one, to care for her child as he grew from an infant to a teenager. As the siblings adapted to urban Huatulco, they would get a job in the formal sector, and the next brother or sister would arrive to care for the child.

All non-*originarios* in my study, female and male, cited a need for money, the need to work, as their motivation for migrating to Huatulco. And though single fathers were more likely to become single fathers once in Huatulco, more than half of the single mothers I interviewed arrived following the births of their children. They are not, it seems, the ignorant, unsuspecting, new arrivals to the city and thus unprotected, accidentally impregnated, and then abandoned single mothers that middle- and upper-class residents in the region describe. Nor are they the asexual and pious single mothers that scholars describe as attempting to correct for the discourses of immorality that surround single mothers.

Huatulco's single parents reinterpret matrimony and polyamory. They manipulate transnational and transregional relationships that they construct both in shared geographic spaces and via the Internet. The anonymity of an urban tourist destination filled with migrants, the abundance of commodified sex and sexuality, and the sexualization of indigeneity (catalyzed by the tourism development project) provide both context and tools for experimentation. Fishermen bake, daughters drive taxis, work gets harder to gender, and everyone has access to pesos, however limited. Here single parents are smart, sexual, and are challenging norms in order to transform the institutions that suggest they are other than this; in so doing they are transforming the institutions that have organized urban social interaction in the past. Meanwhile, they are constrained by new structural conditions arising from current neoliberal development practices.

Rethinking the Family, Rethinking Economic Policy

The existence of so many single mothers now residing in Huatulco and comparable regions already suggests our need to radically rethink today's family. Rethinking the family, in turn, requires us to rethink family policy, which includes economic policy that inadvertently shapes the family. That policy is currently neoliberal.

Worldwide, neoliberal reforms have protected private property rights and free markets while steadfastly eliminating social programming. Mexico, because of its proximity to the United States or perhaps because of its untimely bankruptcy, has served as a neoliberal playground of sorts; repeatedly it has been one of the world's earliest nations to adopt neoliberal reforms. The most prominent example is the ratification, in 1994, of President Salinas's North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the vociferous praise of his U.S. and Canadian neighbors. Two years later more than two million Mexicans had lost jobs, more than twenty-eight thousand Mexican businesses had declared bankruptcy, banks were failing, consumer debts were skyrocketing, and the minimum wage had dropped below its level at the time of Mexico's bankruptcy.

Transnational and federal attempts to bolster state economies reflect a generalized shift from industrial to service production. In 2000 the World Bank began promoting tourism as a primary development tool for the global south. State officials in Mexico, as in many countries, now hail tourism as "a costless generator of employment and well-being." Consumption, as Marx warned, is cyclical and approaching instantaneity. Nearly everything has been commodified. Labor is feminized, casualized, pressuring laborers, male and female, to compete for ever lower wages in capitalism's race to the bottom. Failure by systems of governance to provide for citizens is hidden in a discourse that locates blame with the individual. One is poor because one did not pull on his or her bootstraps hard enough.

All this means that individuals need new strategies for survival. Single parents, as I have argued above, are providing their own safety nets. Child care is being outsourced to the country. Single parents are taking up multiple jobs, piecing them together, and paying rents late. Sexual relationships—whether temporary or permanent, multiple, cyclical, local, or virtual—and the (sex) work of sustaining such relationships, are becoming ever more vital.

There is much to conclude, but I leave you with the following: humans now operate inside a political economy that privileges individuality, not interdependence. As a result, smart sex, it seems—the kind that produces

wanted children, economic stability, social power, and more—has less and less to do with marriage. Marriage, one could even argue, to the extent it engenders monogamy or a sense that one should be monogamous, might preclude one from obtaining such things. Single parenthood, it turns out, is not pathological but is politically and economically motivated.

NOTES

1. This also follows Carol Stack's 1974 study of "swapping" and interdependence among black residents in U.S. cities.

2. This may be translated as "Dumb-ass Oaxacan Indians."