



Single Mothers in Contemporary Japan: Motherhood, Class, and Reproductive Practice (New Studies in Modern Japan)

Aya Ezawa

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Combining work and family remains a major challenge for married women in contemporary Japan, and it's not uncommon for them to quit working when starting a family. Single mothers, by contrast, almost always work, regardless of the age of their children. Despite their eagerness to support themselves and their children through employment, their average income remains low and many live on a household budget close to the poverty line. This book examines how the difficult living conditions facing single mothers in Japan highlight not only the challenges they face in earning a family wage and managing the work-family balance, but also reveals the class dimensions of family life in contemporary Japan.

The need to make ends meet with few resources means that mothers may find it difficult to uphold the lifestyle they may consider as most appropriate for the upbringing of their children, and that they may have to choose between their presence at home, in line with the ideal of the middle-class housewife and mother, or devoting more time to earning an income that can pay for a good education. Social class, in this case, is not just a matter of education, occupation, or income, but is also expressed by mothers' approaches to their children's upbringing and future opportunities in education and employment. Based on life history interviews with single mothers, this study examines the gendered meanings of social class and social achievement and the role of maternal practices in shaping their children's future life trajectories.

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