



Paradox Of Natural Mothering

Chris Bobel

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Single or married, working mothers are, if not the norm, no longer exceptional. These days, women who stay at home to raise their children seem to be making a radical lifestyle choice. Indeed, the women at the center of *The Paradox of Natural Mothering* have renounced consumerism and careerism in order to reclaim home and family. These natural mothers favor parenting practices that set them apart from the mainstream: home birth, extended breast feeding, home schooling and natural health care. Regarding themselves as part of a movement, natural mothers believe they are changing society one child, one family at a time. Author Chris Bobel profiles some thirty natural mothers, probing into their choices and asking whether they are reforming or conforming to women's traditional role. Bobel's subjects say that they have chosen to follow their nature rather than social imperatives. Embracing such lifestyle alternatives as voluntary simplicity and attachment parenting, they place family above status and personal achievement. Bobel illuminates the paradoxes of natural mothering, the ways in which these women resist the trappings of upward mobility but acquiesce to a kind of biological determinism and conventional gender scripts. Author note: Chris Bobel is Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

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