

Alone and pregnant on purpose

TRALEE PEARCE
FROM TUESDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL
JULY 1, 2008 AT 9:25 AM EDT

Lily is not waiting for her biological clock to tick any louder. At 33, she has given up on dating. So she is planning to have a baby on her own next year, via a sperm

While she has told some supportive family members of her plans, the Toronto resident has looked elsewhere for both practical and emotional advice: an online group called Choice Moms.

"I've always felt like an outsider because almost everybody is married with kids, so it's hard for me to find people who understand my feelings," says Lily, who asks her full name not be used.

"I feel like I've found people who understand me."



[Enlarge Image](#)

Kathleen Jeffrey decided to have and raise her son on her own. *(By Hyle Stafford for The Globe and Mail)*



For women like Lily, the choices never stop. First, you have to choose how you are going to become a mother: adoption, sperm donor or unprotected sex? If it is a sperm donor, will it be a known donor or anonymous?

Then, there's what to call yourself. Are you a Choice Mom? A Single Mother By Choice?

As a social movement comes of age, this may sound like a branding exercise. But for those on the inside, how you identify yourself is a crucial part of the process.

For one thing, it is difficult to know exactly how many like-minded women are out there – or where to find them. According to Statistics Canada, 25 per cent of women in this country in 2005 were to single women, but the circumstances of those births are not collected. Some may have started out with a co-parent. Still other solo mothers may be classified as divorced even though they chose to be parents for the first time post-divorce. So, the demographic pieces itself together from within.

"It's like you're inventing yourself all the time and figuring out what your priorities are and your values are," says Mikki Morrisette, the author of a new advice book *Choosing Single Motherhood: The Thinking Woman's Guide* who created the label Choice Moms.

She started the Choice Moms website in this last February, and it is now attracting about 2,000 visitors a month. A Yahoo message board she started a few years ago has about 800 regular members. She is hoping to find more. "There's a lot of us out there, we just don't know it," she says.

Ms. Morrisette is the new solo mom on the block. A group called Single Mothers by Choice is considered the godmother of the genre. It was founded in 1981 by psychologist Jane Mattes and runs support groups across North America.

Ms. Morrisette, a journalist and mother of two who lives in Minneapolis, credits Ms. Mattes and her work for boosting the acceptability of going it alone. But she thought it could use a fresh moniker. She coined the term Choice Moms when she was writing her book because it was shorter. More importantly, it dropped the "single," mentioning a major distinction for followers.

"A lot of people think we chose to be single," Lily says. "We didn't. We ended up single through circumstances and we're choosing to be mothers." (And for Ms. Morrisette, that is not how it ended up. She met her husband when pregnant with her second child, now 4.)

The Choice Moms parameters are otherwise fairly rigid. Ms. Morrisette mostly serves women using sperm donors, but welcomes women who adopt, women who accidentally become pregnant, and single lesbians.

However, she admits she has turned women away if they started with a partner but are now single: "It's a completely different beast. There are different emotions. Choice Moms don't grapple with child support or custody, for instance.

Instead, she caters to the next generation of moms-to-be, who are opting for solo motherhood earlier than their predecessors. Lily reports seeing women aged 25 or 27 seeking advice on the site; she says they were gently told by many to give it a few more years. When they do choose to go ahead with being a Choice Mom, Ms. Morrisette hopes to address some of the stickier issues she and other solo mothers may not have felt comfortable talking openly about in the past, such as how to tell a child she has no father and how to admit not having a spouse is tough.

"We tend to be very focused on conceiving or adopting; we don't really think about what happens later," Ms. Morrisette says.

For instance, when Atlantic Monthly writer and single mom Lisa Gottlieb wrote an essay in March suggesting that she may have been better off "settling" for Mr. Good Enough instead of using a donor, some members on the Choice Moms discussion board went wild with disapproval.

"Then there were some women who said, 'Let's admit there's some loneliness that comes with it, but we're afraid to say it,'" says Ms. Morrisette, who eventually interviewed both Ms. Gottlieb and one of those women for a podcast. "Those are the things we need to acknowledge. It's hard to do that outside the community

because you get the I-told-you-so's."

Even women completely at ease with their choices, like Vancouver school principal and single mother of one, Kathleen Jeffrey, find they could use a little face tin with others like them.

"I learned a lot though this experience," she says. "It is a hard decision to make. Some people look at you like you're out of Star Trek."

Ms. Jeffrey, 42, chose to align with SMC and is trying to start a Vancouver support group. In the United States, she says, some SMC groups are so close-knit they arrange cruises together.

That different labels are emerging indicates the movement is coming of age, says Andrea O'Reilly, an associate professor of women's studies at York University in Toronto and director of the school's Association for Research on Mothering.

"In the last decade we have been redefining or reshaping what it means to be a mother," she says. "A woman 48 and single can say, 'I chose this.' And a woman at 18 'I chose to keep my baby,'" she says. "It's something we would not have seen a decade and a half ago."

Recommend this article? 58 votes

View the most recommended

Autos



Driven one lately? No? Ford reinvents itself

Travel



Celebrating 400 on the ninth hole

Business incubator



Building on a Gouda reputation

Real Estate



Kimberley Seldon puts emphasis on comfort

Technology



The iPhone's cross-border price clash

© Copyright 2008 CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

CTVglobemedia

globeandmail.com and The Globe and Mail are divisions of CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. 444 Front St. W., Toronto, ON Canada M5V 2S9
Phillip Crawley, Publisher