

Family on film



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FAMILY The movies “ Ordinary People” and “ Antonia’s Line” both show mothers who break the bonds of tradition and cultural expectations of mothering. However, the main maternal characters of each movie respectively, Beth and Antonia, break these bonds in negative and positive ways. For Antonia and her progeny, including Danielle, the break is positive, and shows a feminist spirit towards a new day in which women won’t need men to have children. But for Beth, the bonds are broken in a negative way, as she tries to exert too much control over her sons, resulting in psychological trauma and lasting scars on the family. In both of these movies, the directors show these mothers in different terms of success: Beth does not succeed because she cares too much about society, and Antonia and Danielle succeed because they are willing to break free from society’s constraints. In “ Ordinary People,” Beth is the mother of Conrad and Buck. After Buck dies in a boating accident, Beth focuses a lot of pent-up guilt and blame on Conrad, and acts in a way that defies the expectations of what it means to be maternal. Mostly, people think of maternal nature as being warm and nurturing, but Beth is cold and sarcastic towards Conrad, and berates him for being weak, just because he needs to see a psychiatrist about their dysfunctional family. Beth is fixated on the idea that the family should appear “ normal,” and fit in to society. For example, when Calvin, Conrad’s father, lets it slip that Conrad has been seeking mental help at a party, Beth is furious, because this disrupts the idea of the normal family that she has strived so hard for (Ordinary, 1980). And when Conrad finally gathers the courage to tell Beth that he blames her for never visiting him in the mental hospital, she is still cold and sarcastic to him, using this as an opportunity to tell him once again how much more she loved Buck than she

loves him. Beth's lack of love and warmth defies traditional notions of what it means to be a mother, but not in a positive or constructive way. Instead, her maternal love is more like poison. In "Antonia's Line," Antonia and her progeny also defy cultural expectations of what it means to be a mother. However, their journey is all about freedom and liberation from society's expectations, whereas Beth's was about being trapped by the codes and strictures of what the "perfect mother" should be. Antonia, when she hears that her daughter does not want to have a conventional nuclear family, does not react by being cold and sarcastic; she fully supports her daughter, and thus Danielle, Therese, and Sarah start and continue a line of strong, individual women who are able to live free of the expectations of this typical sort of family the society expects. They are independent women who don't need men to raise a family (Antonia, 1995). In conclusion, these two movies, "Antonia's Line" and "Ordinary People," show mothers moving in different directions. In the former, the women are moving away from conventional society and towards a newfound freedom, in which motherhood is respected as a choice and a liberation. In the latter, Beth represents women who move towards conventional society and its structures of gender and motherhood, which is more of a mirage or illusion, than a reality. Beth focuses blame and guilt on Conrad and essentially cripples him, emotionally and psychologically, instead of being a warm and nurturing mother. She thinks that she is doing what society wants, but it does not make her any better of a mother. Antonia and Danielle, on the other hand, represent nurturing women who respect the choices and behaviors of their offspring unconditionally, and offer warmth and encouragement. Both films show mothers breaking cultural expectations, one in a negative way, and the

other, in a positive way. REFERENCE “ Antonia’s Line; Ordinary People.”
(1995/1980)