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*Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and their Children in the Other
America.* Valerie Polakow.

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offers opportunities for artistic expression is highly effective. Its oral histories are perhaps of most significance to social scientists. They unveil the essence of what it means to be a Latina lesbian today.

Dusty Miller, *Women Who Hurt Themselves*. New York: Basic Books, 1994. \$22 hardcover.

In this book, psychotherapist Dusty Miller discusses the problem of Trauma Reenactment Syndrome, a condition in which people repeatedly inflict physical harm and pain on themselves. Although both men and women are involved, TRS occurs more frequently among women than men.

TRS is a complicated syndrome which is manifested not only in self-inflicted pain but by intense secrecy about sufferers' personal lives, a failure to respond to traditional psychotherapy, and a disassociated personality which often fragments into three-part self consisting of the victim, the abuser and an uninvolved 'bystander'.

Miller is an authority on TRS and its treatment, and her book is intended to offer insights into this condition as well as prescriptions for effective intervention. She provides gripping case histories of some of her clients and shows that many have failed to respond to treatment, and particularly behavioral treatments which do not deal with the complex causative factors underlying this condition. Her own therapeutic prescriptions involve a time-consuming but effective system of care that uncovers the hidden childhood experiences of abusive relationships that most of her clients have encountered. She also advocates the active involvement of family members and friends. The book is a useful guide to this little known condition and will be of interest to practitioners as well as other social scientists interested in family abuse.

Valerie Polakow: *Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and their Children in the Other America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. \$22.50 hardcover.

As Polakow shows in this readable and important book, more than thirteen million children live in poverty in the United States today. The vast majority are to be found in poor single-

mother families. Most are, in turn, African Americans or Hispanics. However, this book is not about statistics but rather about the real-life experiences of these women and their children. Polakow takes the reader into their daily lives, and starkly exposes their perennial experience of deprivation, struggle and suffering. It is a disturbing narrative which cries out not for sympathy but for remedial action.

And yet, as Polakow notes, it is unlikely that mere appeals for help will result in significant change. Popular attitudes today are so conditioned that single women have little prospect of eliciting public sympathy. The successful portrayal of poor single women as welfare queens who exploit an overgenerous income support system is deeply ingrained. It may take a writer with the appeal and literary power of a Dickens to change these attitudes. Indeed, Polakow effectively cites Dickens's writings to demonstrate that the conditions under which many single parent families live today were once widespread.

Polakow effectively combines narrative reports on the interviews with her respondents with wider theoretical analyses of the dynamics of childhood poverty. The book does not deal in any depth with possible solutions to the problem but references are made to the need for universal health care, affordable housing, adequate child care, access to improved schooling and finally to universal family allowances which are widely used in Europe to prevent child poverty. The problem of course is whether any of these policy options are politically feasible in a society which has traditionally rebuffed attempts to help those whose lives are on the edge.