When Mothers Work: Loving Our Children Without Sacrificing Our Selves, Joan K. Peters, Addison-Wesley, 1997, 0201127946, 9780201127942, 251 pages. In When Mothers Work, Joan K. Peters argues that such sacrificial motherhood isn't good for children, much less for marriages or for mothers. The real question is: why haven't we adapted motherhood and work to accommodate our vastly changed lives? Drawing on the latest research and discussions with prominent psychologists, Peters explains our deep-seated resistance to mothering (and fathering) in new ways. She makes the case that, given sensible working conditions, a mother's employment means a richer parenting experience, stronger marriages, and more balanced children. With portraits of a dozen real families - corporate and blue collar, religious and secular, step- and single parents, urban and suburban - Peters illustrates the strategies that make this new family life succeed.

The Awakening, Kate Chopin, 1993, Fiction, 116 pages. First published in 1899, this novel shocked readers with its open sensuality and uninhibited treatment of marital infidelity. The poignant, lyrical story of a New Orleans wife ....

What's happening to home? balancing work, life, and refuge in the information age, Maggie Jackson, 2002, Business & Economics, 190 pages. In our modern world, where technology offers the promise of mobility and flexibility, the lines between work and home become increasingly blurred. In What's Happening To Home ....

Perfect Motherhood Science and Childrearing in America, Rima Dombrow Apple, 2006, Family & Relationships, 209 pages. Parenting today is virtually synonymous with worry. We want to ensure that our children are healthy, that they get a good education, and that they grow up to be able to cope ....


When Mothers Work, who Pays?, Martha Hahn Sugar, Jan 1, 1994, Family & Relationships, 151 pages. A comprehensive look at the results of a study of the adult children of working mothers and the detrimental effect that their mothers' employment has had on their adjustment to ....

Not Guilty! The Good News For Working Mothers, Betty Holcomb, May 2, 2000, Business & Economics, 384 pages. An accomplished journalist and editor at Working Mother magazine dispels the convention that women who stay at home are better mothers, drawing on decades of research to ....

Should you be the working mom? a guide for making the decision and living with the results, Bee-Lan C. Wang, Richard J. Stellway, 1987, Family & Relationships, 173 pages.

The third shift managing hard choices in our careers, homes, and lives as women, Michele Kremen
Women who seek to balance a career and family find themselves facing a "third shift", or the inner dialogue that often second guesses their decisions and actions. An executive...

The Time Bind When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work, Arlie Russell Hochschild, Apr 1, 2001, Social Science, 316 pages. A groundbreaking analysis of the "work/family balance" explores the tenuous relationship between career and family commitment and challenges the growing encroachment of the....


God's vitamin "C" for the spirit of men, D. Larry Miller, Sep 25, 1996, , 299 pages. A compilation of unique and inspiring stories for Men on topics such as value and virtue..

Asylums Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates, Erving Goffman, 2007, Psychology, 386 pages. A total institution is defined by Goffman as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated, individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable....

Forced labor what's wrong with balancing work and family, Brian C. Robertson, Oct 1, 2002, , 240 pages. The last thing parents should do is try to balance work and family. A revolutionary shift of time and attention from home to the workplace has left the family on the ropes....

Creating a Life What Every Woman Needs to Know About Having a Baby and a Career, Sylvia Hewlett, Jan 7, 2004, Social Science, 352 pages. A provocative and thought-provoking book, filled with personal stories, examines the results of a nationwide survey, which shows that 40% of women earning $50,000 or more a....

Redesigning the American Dream The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life, Dolores Hayden, 2002, Architecture, 286 pages. In a provocative critique of American housing patterns that perpetuate Victorian stereotypes of the home as "woman's place" and the city as "man's world", urban historian and....

Here's a radical concept: motherhood, as it is currently envisioned and practiced in American culture, is bad for the family. This theory is the heart of Joan K. Peters's controversial When Mothers Work, a book guaranteed to make readers question everything they thought they believed about parenting. In Peters's view, the myth of the perfect mother, who is not only willing but glad to make huge sacrifices for her children, is really a trap that creates unhappy, unfulfilled parents and miserable children. Why, Peters asks, do we assume that the transformation into primary caregiver and ultimate authority on all things having to do with home and child is welcomed by women? Why is it that the birth of a baby radically changes most mothers' lives while fathers often go essentially untouched? Peters is not afraid to question the sanctity--or the satisfaction--of motherhood; she points out that parenting, as it is organized today, requires women to make most of the sacrifices and take on most of the stress while depriving men of both the responsibilities and the rewards of being a parent.

Many of these arguments have been made before, but what makes Peters's book both unique and persuasive is that she doesn't assign blame to men only; she is quick to point out that it is women themselves who are often reluctant to give up the lion's share of responsibility for child rearing. Yet, in order for families to be truly functional, mothers must share parenting equally and accept that,
while men may nurture children differently, they are just as effective. Happy children require happy parents, Peters argues, and having a life and identity outside of the home is essential to both men and women. When Mothers Work is a thoughtful critique of the state of American parenting today and a blueprint for change. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

...[Joan Peters] makes the case that, given sensible working conditions, a mother's employment means a richer parenting experience, stronger marriages, and more balanced children. With portraits of a dozen real families ... Peters illustrates the strategies that make this new family life succeed. -- Addison-Wesley

"We no longer have a problem that has no name," she declares. "Most women know exactly what the problem is: men have to do half the child care, and schools should be better, work more humane and child care subsidized." But before any of these far-off developments can be realized, we have to learn "how to be different parents." Peters's book is an excellent place to start. -- The New York Times Book Review, Elizabeth Crow --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a woman contemplating beginning a family, I've been concerned with the issue of how I will balance my desire to be a good parent while also still having a life. I wasn't looking for validation of a career choice so much as guidance for thinking about the issue on my own. To that end, I found this book to be extremely useful and stimulating for thought--Joan Peters shed light on attitudes and assumptions I have had without every questioning or examining their sources. I came to realize that many of them are not consistent with my values, and reading the book was the first step in changing them. I appreciate the book's sensitivity to the many concerns women have regarding motherhood and career, and the fact that it isn't just saying "buck up and put your kid in childcare, you have a right." That would not have served me. Instead, it focuses much more on gender issues and how we can adapt parenting to better include both the mother and father for the everyone's benefit. It also brings to light the way that some women use having children as a way to avoid identity conflicts of their own. She asks some tough questions with regard to this, which I think will help some women get to the heart of their real motives for motherhood. If you simultaneously feel that you weren't put on the earth solely to reproduce but also care deeply about doing right by your children, this book will assist you in striking a balance that will work.

This book is about raising healthy children. This is not meant to be a political or controversial book. It deals with the real issues all parents face when confronted with wanting to raise your children and having to support your family. The author's theory is that fulfilled parents raise independant, self-reliant children. There are examples of families that use many different strategies to raise their children successfully, without guilt for the time they spend at work. The author talks about the satisfaction that BOTH parents get from caregiving. Unlike the family dynamic of the 1950's, if the mother is sufficiently supported in child rearing by the father, she can parent effectively herself without becoming burnt out. In addition, the children benefit from having 2 involved parents, rather than just 1 or 1 1/2, and the father gains from having a closer relationship with the children. At the same time the parents have the satisfaction of working and supporting their family together (or however it works best for that family). This book helped me quite a bit. I don't know how I will feel after my child is born and my maternity leave is over. My husband has always promised we would share all work in raising our family but I just couldn't give up the power of running the house. I didn't believe he could do the job as well as I would. This book explains that dads don't do things the same way as moms. They do them differently, and the kids benefit from both parenting styles. This book gave me the courage to trust him to do his very best, just as I know I will.

We are still a couple of years away from starting our family, but already I felt the pressure to give up a career in investments that I love. I "want it all" (successful career, great kids), but could not figure out how to make it happen. This is the first book I've found that really convinced me that not only could it be done, but it has to be done! Very liberating to read -- shattering the myth of the perfect, sacrificial mother. It certainly won't be easy, but now I can stop sewing my SuperWoman outfit and really look forward to having kids!
The first two years of my daughter's life, I was thoroughly conflicted. Was she going to end up "damaged" because I worked? Was I a bad mother because I wanted to work? When I read this book, it was like an enormous weight had been lifted off my shoulders! I am now buying this book for my sister who has the "guilt" also. I began to see what a positive roll model I was for my daughter - and now my newborn son. In fact, I am going back to work tomorrow. I am a little anxious - but no longer because of my guilt, just my added responsibility!

I loved the concept of this book and had such hopes for it. However, the author's whole point is this: men should share equally in all the parenting duties (what a brilliant idea that no woman ever thought of before!), and corporations need to accommodate working moms and be genuinely flexible about it (another fabulously original notion), and no woman should ever be a stay-at-home mom because of all the things it deprives her of and deprives her child of a lot of things to (excuse me? what about personal choice? just because I plan to continue to work in an office doesn't mean I'm going to tell other women what to do). She makes these points in the first two chapters, which otherwise make some pretty good points except for the obvious agenda. After that it becomes kind of a storybook about all of her friends.

While this book was written for a primarily American audience, it still made a lot of good sense for me as a New Zealand mother-to-be. What she proposes is really very simple - moving away from the overparenting trap, including our children as part of our lives as women rather than our whole reason for being, allowing the parenting to extend beyond just the nuclear family and most importantly of all, elevating the role of the father as parent. Made sense to me.

Soaring with joy at the birth of her first child, many a mother also finds herself with an unsettling premonition: this cherished infant, his skin so new the very air would seem too rough to touch him, his gaze more trusting than any she has known before, might someday glare at her and say, Look what you did to me. You: Mother. She may also know that however much he blames her, she will blame herself more.

Mercifully, this scene is set in some distant hazy future. But in a startlingly short time every mother realizes that should something go wrong, should the baby's father want to flee the relentless crying of a colicky child, should the snowsuit be insufficiently insulated or the stairwell gate be left ajar, all will hold her responsible.

Yet there she is, as new to mothering as her child is to the world, as eager, as innocent, filled with the same awe her infant's eyes express, more delicate in her handling than a museum curator with a Ming dynasty vase. The child molds to her body, his breath on her neck. Nothing has ever felt so warm. The snuggling infant, the smiling baby, the toddler rushing into her arms, the child who can say, "I love you, Mama." That your children love you back is nearly as miraculous as their birth. That you witness so intimately the unfolding of a human being--a stage play moving from a single emotional tone to the complexity of a Shakespearean drama by the time they reach five. By ten they are the history of civilization, by twenty a cosmos.

Why should the worm of anxiety intrude so early on such pure pleasure? Why does the new mother hear whispers of self-recrimination? Why does she feel that nothing less than sacrificial devotion can ever silence them--and maybe not then? Because guilt has become a part of American motherhood, which demands a mother's total self.

When the cause of a child's problem is unknown, mothers are suspect. For two decades doctors believed childhood autism was the fault of the mother's coldness instead of the child's flawed neurology. Though we are supposedly wiser now, a recent newspaper article quoted a neurologist who told the mother of a boy with what was later diagnosed as a rare genetic disease that he was suffering because "she was having a hard time adjusting to motherhood."

Such social opprobrium has grown in these times of transition from woman as housewife to woman as equal partner in marriage, and with it has grown maternal guilt. Instead of reducing her maternal responsibility, a woman's new economic obligations have increased it. We now presume that the
common cause of all children's woes is their mother's work, which prevents full-time nurturing. Meanwhile, we ignore the more complicated root cause: our failure to modernize motherhood, to restructure family and change society along with the changing character of women's lives.

Now considered the equal of a man, and her labor an economic necessity, a woman prepares for the demands of the job market. However, she still tries to mother the way her own housewife-mother did, as if her sole task were raising her children. For the transgression of having her own life--or simply wishing to have it--a mother is more culpable now than ever, both in society’s eyes and in her own.

Mothering itself is not the problem, nor is work. No woman should have to choose between an independent life and a baby. In fact, this may be the best of times to become a mother since women have the training, inclination, and opportunity to cultivate their independence and define motherhood for themselves. That is, to redefine motherhood so that they can love their children without sacrificing self. But doing so requires that women share the management of family life and the responsibility for raising children, and that, in turn, men coparent and society rebuild an educational system in decline.

Most important, however, is that mothering differently must begin with women. For if women do not change, they cannot make the necessary familial changes or press for the requisite extrafamilial supports. Therefore, we must start with a better understanding of the psychological difficulties women face in trying to adapt to the social changes they themselves have generated.

Good mothering does not require mothers to focus so intensely on their children that they give up crucial parts of their own identities. Indeed, such sacrifice is not even in their children's interest. For if women who are reared to participate economically, socially, and politically stop doing so, they risk their sense of self, their contentment, and, therefore, their effectiveness as mothers.

And what about their children? A recent British report comparing 100,000 children of employed mothers with the general population demonstrated that children with mothers in offices and factories have higher reading scores than children with mothers at home. A fourteen-university American study found that children in high-quality day care from one month old have better language and cognitive ability than children at home. Alison Clarke-Stewart's work on day care argued that if children have good day care, they have greater confidence and social skills than children of mothers-at-home. These and other similar studies suggest that mother-at-home is not the most beneficial arrangement for children, and for other reasons as well.

Children flourish with multiple attachments. Far from depriving them of full-time mothers, maternal employment creates an opportunity for children to form other close connections--not only with their fathers but with a network of caring adults who can both diffuse and reinforce maternal love, relieving it of the isolation, self-abnegation, and involution that too frequently have given it unhappy and sometimes tragic dimensions.

And what about women who want to stay home with their children? Many do, but often for the wrong reasons. Women are still deeply ambivalent about independence and success in the "harsh" world of business. Although they may have initially desired and even succeeded in that world, they sometimes prefer to retreat into the kinder, gentler (and safer) world of motherhood when the option arises. In fact, knowing deep down that they would do so may have made their independence more of a game than a real commitment and thus rendered it less frightening. Sometimes I hear such women say that working just didn't work anymore, or that they didn't really like their jobs anyway. But instead of finding more fulfilling work or sticking it out until they garnered more power, as men usually do, they opted out in the name of motherhood.

Our culture offers mothers two choices. It constructs four walls around mother and child even as women gasp for space, trying to mother and also pursue careers, maintain friendships, work out at the gym, and maybe have time to read a book. Stay or go, the culture declares. If you want to be a mother, watch the bricks and mortar set around you. Otherwise, peer at your child through the
The message is this: either women embrace motherhood in the traditional way, focusing primarily on their children, or they must turn their backs on mothering, relegating child care to others and carrying on as if reproduction were just a brief detour on the road of life. Even the traditionally inclined mother obliged to work to keep bread on the table may find so little support from her employer, from schools and children's services, and from her husband that she too feels shut out of her family's life.

The majority of mothers do not want either extreme. But with only two models to choose from, the devoted mother or the cold careerist, most women struggle in isolation to push back the walls and live an airier, less confining mothering life. Many, however, find the struggle worthwhile. Recently, Working Mother magazine surveyed one thousand working mothers about how happy they felt. Nine out of ten considered themselves "very happy" and found work to be an essential ingredient--"a challenge and an outlet," as one respondent wrote. On the other hand, most conventional media report that these jugglers are exhausted and self-destructive, ruining their marriages and abandoning their children to day care, and so conflicted that they can barely live with themselves.

The parenting gurus, while sympathetic with working mothers, essentially corroborate the media's view. In a searing critique of the best-selling baby care books, the New York Times reporter Susan Chira notes that "to read them is to be immersed in a world in which a mother's needs do not count." While the widely respected tomes of Benjamin Spock, Penelope Leach, and T. Berry Brazelton help women cope with what is always perceived as their work-family dilemma, "nowhere," Chira writes, "is there mention of the compensations even hard-pressed working class mothers have said they enjoy: self-sufficiency, social contacts, and the work itself." And nowhere, I would add, is the idea broached that a mother's self-development is an asset to the development of her children.

The result is that women contemplating motherhood or women who have just had their first child often cannot imagine a kind of mothering that doesn't require an unappealing choice. In The Mother Puzzle, a 1993 addition to the public discussion of motherhood, Judith Schwartz, the childless author, observes that her girlfriends scaled down their professional lives or dropped out entirely when they had children. Motherhood today, she concludes, seems "unreal, even surreal, given the way our adult lives had begun."

Naturally, since Schwartz considers only these two kinds of motherhood, one good and the other bad, she concludes that the pieces of a woman's life just don't fit together. On the one hand, women now fantasize being Jackie Joyner, Toni Morrison, Murphy Brown, or Ruth Bader Ginsberg; on the other hand, they are supposed to stay home with each child for at least eighteen months (Penelope Leach) or two and a half years (Burton White) or until kindergarten (still the conservative view). If you have two children, that can add up to somewhere between five and ten years out of your professional life.

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