**Integrative Book Review**

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The work-family conflict faced by mothers of many families is a major crisis. A number of Western industrialized countries’ cultural expectations of gender roles and lack of work-family policies leave families in shambles as they struggle financially and emotionally, making their lives much harder than need be. Mothers are often still expected to do most of the housework, take care of the children, all while many of them are the breadwinners of their family. Caitlyn Collins, author of *Making Motherhood Work,* goes into depth about the struggles of mothers as well as fathers in regard to the work-family conflict. Collins interviews 135 mothers from the United States, Italy, Sweden, and Germany about their experiences with the work-family conflict (Collins, 1). She is able to collect information from these mothers to analyze how they are affected based on the country they live in, due to varying policies and cultures.

**Book Outline**

**Sweden, Germany, Italy, & the United States**

Of the four countries from which Caitlyn Collins interviews mothers, the most work-family supporting country is Sweden. “Our whole system and all of our policies are based on the thought that you’re supposed to be able to work as a woman, if you have a family.” (Collins, 28) says Josefin, a Swedish mother with a job and two young children. The norms or expectations of mothers and fathers are divided equally in regard to taking care of the children and work around the house. Sweden’s child education and care system is a major factor of what makes their country work-family friendly. This allows for better development of children in all facets and for mothers to focus more on their work during the day.

Due to the separation after World War II, policies and stances on the work-family conflict differ in East Germany and West Germany. Even after the Berlin wall came down, the typical model family in East Germany and West Germany were completely different (Collins, 69). West Germany was more traditional with a male breadwinner and female caregiver, which was consistently reinforced by policies that supported this structure of family. It was more normal for mothers to work in East Germany, for mothers were supported through paid leave and a quality childcare system to allow for an easier balance between work and family (Collins, 114). Gender inequality nevertheless exists in East Germany, though their family model is more comparable to Sweden than West Germany’s.

After reading a couple chapters it becomes apparent that each country’s policies are established early in their history, where those cultural norms are passed down generation by generation to eventually create their policies.

Italy’s culture of Catholicism being their official state religion until 1984 is what reinforces their norm of a traditional family: A breadwinner father and caregiver mother. Though their culture is rapidly changing, women are traditionally supposed to rely on their husbands financially and take care of the children and home. If they do decide to work, it is usually temporary or a small workload partially because it is not entirely supported in Italy’s economic and social systems (Collins, 153).

The United States is one of the most powerful and wealthiest countries in the world. Unfortunately, the structure of the US government and its social policies are very outdated compared to the rapid and constant culture change, leaving America with arguably the worst work-family policies out of all Western countries. The US has no national policies for caregiving or childcare. There is no universal healthcare or paid leave. It is all left up to cities and states to offer these, but they still do not support everyone who is in need of help (Collins, 200). Cultural norms of a traditional family still exist in many American families, but this is slowly shifting to a more progressive, gender neutral style in some families.

**Takeaway**

The main points made from *Making Motherhood Work* are mothers in general are not nearly supported enough by the government nor their family. Women are left to make unfair decisions about their careers in order to take care of their at-home duties. Fathers are often unaware about how much more their wives are going through in order to make their work-family situation work. As we saw in Sweden, when a country’s system provides help for and supports families, it makes life much less stressful and more manageable for mothers. An adequate balance of work and family allows mothers to optimize their success both in the workplace and at home, making for a happier, more successful life.

**Book Structure**

Caitlyn Collins organized her book in seven chapters. The first chapter is an introduction of the concept of the work-family conflict. Collins touches briefly on what she explains in depth in later chapters, like experiences from mothers, social issues, stigmas, and graphs comparing government policies and spending, employment rates, and other social factors of each of the four countries covered in the book.

The following five chapters cover each country respectively: Sweden, East Germany, West Germany, Italy, and the United States. They all follow the same sort of format. Each chapter includes Collins’ interviews with mothers from that country, which hold information about their experiences with attempting to balance work and family. Also included are graphs and other facts to further provide information about the country’s system.

The final chapter gathers all of the collected information from the interviews conducted by Collins and analyzes it. Graphs are shown comparing mothers’ opinions of work-family related ideas, such as solutions to the conflict. It ends with Collins’ opinions and ideas for a better future regarding the work-family conflict. These opinions are all based on her findings from her work.

**Evaluating the Argument**

Caitlyn Collins argues that work-family policies do not adequately help mothers and further push gender inequality, work systems and dynamics must be updated and improved, and in order to improve the work-family conflict for mothers, action must be taken by the general public to spark change. Based on Collins’ collected information, these arguments are completely valid, and I agree with all three of the generalized statements. Most importantly, it is vital for our society to continue to talk and spread knowledge about this topic. The work-family conflict for mothers is a topic that is not widely known or spoken about, so once more people learn about it, change will take off. As we saw in Andrea Hsu’s “*'I'm A Much Better Cook': For Dads, Being Forced To Stay At Home Is Eye-Opening”,* many husbands of mothers who go through the work-family conflict were completely unaware of what their wives endured until they were forced home due to COVID-19 (Hsu, 2020).

Caitlyn Collins’ organization and her way of presenting her information was effective and descriptive. Basing the body of the book around the interviewees and their respective countries, then providing quality background information enabled Collins to validate the mothers’ arguments and experiences as well as her own arguments. The amount of facts she provided to support the experiences from mothers in part is what made the book so powerful.

**COVID-19 Pandemic & its Connection to the Work-Family Conflict**

As we all are well aware, the coronavirus pandemic has negatively changed the lives of many. Though this historic time has been awful, there are some positives that can be taken out of it. For one, it has exposed the faulty and poor work-family policies made by our government system. The work-family conflict is a topic that is not widely known or talked about. As previously stated, we saw in Andrea Hsu’s article there are many husbands who are so tied up in their work duties that they do not spend much time at the house and are not aware of the everyday tasks of the rest of the family. When many fathers, like Nathan Bieck, were let go of or moved to work remotely, they were able to see first-hand how stressful, busy, and important their wives’ at-home duties are (Hsu, 2020). My connection is the amount of fathers who were around the home and family more often due to the pandemic led to many of them realizing the work-family conflict their wives go through. This can be taken positively because now that more people have caught attention to the lack of policies implemented for mothers and families, a shift or change in policies could take place over the coming years. Many people, but women in particular, have struggled immensely to find a balance between work and family after losing their jobs or getting pay cuts due to corporations struggling financially. As said in Kirsten Fenn’s “*How understanding women's pandemic experiences can help build a better post-COVID world”,* many women have had to change their work to different locations or working multiple jobs in order to remain financially stable. On top of this, they must protect themselves to the best of their abilities in order to keep their children safe, so they can continue to provide for them (Fenn, 2021). The coronavirus pandemic has changed our world forever, but in some ways like this one, it has its few positive effects.

**Would I Recommend This Book to Others?**

I would undoubtedly recommend this book to others. Typically when a book is assigned for a class it tends to drag on and dump the reader with unneeded information. *Making Motherhood Work,* however, provides the reader with real life experiences from mothers which I find to be incredibly interesting and has the perfect amount of information to supplement and add on to the mothers’ experiences. The book was not repetitive and was an interesting and valuable read.

Unfortunately, there are lots of people in our society who still continue to disrespect women and invalidate their opinions and feelings. If they were open to it I would recommend this book to them. It is people like them who hold us back from progressing as much as we could be as a society. The lack of education in some regions of this country is astounding and a book like this could potentially shift the way those people think about women, which would be useful in order for more people to take action to resolve this issue.

This book and class has opened up the eyes of me and likely many others. If we can work as a society and continue to educate each other about topics like these that are not spoken about enough, we will progress and hopefully make the world a better place for all.

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