

Book Reviews

The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World Is Still the Least Valued

Ann Crittenden
New York: Henry Holt, 2001

Reviewed by Aimee Berger

The Price of Motherhood is a compelling book, so well documented as to be virtually unimpeachable. It should be required reading for every first year college student, or better still, part of the high school curriculum. Maybe then we could look forward to an honest public discussion about the dangerous ideologies and policies that work against mothers and children in America. We could begin to focus on valuing the family instead of bludgeoning women with the hollow club of "family values."

Crittenden argues that women who mother face discrimination and she illustrates the myriad ways in which that discrimination has been institutionalized and perpetuated by public policy, the legal system, and the values of "turbo-capitalism." In particular, she shows how mothers and children are devalued by the childcare industry.

Crittenden debunks myths that have worked to further complicate and denigrate the work of mothers, such as the myth that children necessarily suffer when mothers work outside the home ("mothers today spend as much if not more time with their children as mothers did in the 1960's" (19)); the myth that

fathers are becoming equal partners (even if a married father becomes unemployed he “will typically contribute no more than 30% of the domestic services and childcare” (24); and the most damaging myth of gender equality (“there is overwhelming and systemic evidence that mothers can never achieve economic equality in the labor market as things now stand” (44).

Through an analysis of trends, recent court cases, and comparisons of current American policies and ideologies with those of more “family friendly” nations such as Canada, Norway, and Sweden, Crittenden firmly establishes the need for and possibility of change, not only in policy but in how the United States thinks about women and family. For example, she writes in Chapter 13 that an interesting question to ask might be “why the worldwide problem of absentee fathers has been interpreted in Sweden as a call for equal partnering, while in the U.S. the same phenomenon has prompted cries for a return to traditional marriage, complete with breadwinning husband and stay-at-home wife” (246).

Crittenden’s final chapter, “How to Bring Children Up Without Putting Women Down,” leaves the reader with a sense of hope and call to action. She acknowledges that “Americans may never accept the kind of compassionate capitalism or caring state that western Europeans demand,” but she can nevertheless “easily imagine adding care to our pantheon of national values” (258). She outlines changes in the workplace, government, family, and community that will improve the conditions for women and children, and in turn enhance the public good. She reminds us that none of these changes will occur unless we realize that our decision to mother should not necessitate our exclusion from full participation in the economy and society, and that we, along with “all the free riders—from employers to governments to husbands to communities—have to pitch in and help make the most important job in the world a top national priority—and a very good job” (258).

Balancing Family and Work: Special Considerations in Feminist Therapy

Toni Schindler Zimmerman
New York: Haworth Press, 2001

Reviewed by Linda R. Ennis

Balancing Family and Work offers hope for working mothers who seek balance in their life at home and at work. It moves from the lived reality of Toni Schindler Zimmerman to the realities and reflections rooted in the research of the other contributors to this volume. Each chapter offers a unique vantage point from which to explore the issue of “balance.” Bacigalupe, Haddock, et al. and Macdermid, et al. offer insights from clinical research, while Brockwood,