

MOTHERHOOD IS MADNESS: HOW TO BREAK THE CHAINS THAT PREVENT MOTHERS FROM BEING TRULY HAPPY

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Preface

My mother and father divorced when I was a teenager. I saw my mother, who had spent her entire life dedicated to raising five children, walk away with almost nothing. She had no resume, no real job skills and was at the age where it was not practical to return to college or university. She ended up working in a retail shop because that was the most she could hope for as an “older unskilled woman.” My father on the other hand still had his career, his networks and half the value of our family home.

My mother seemed to enjoy raising a big family (a twelve year span) and never asked for much thanks. She also seemed reasonably content with sacrificing her career and livelihood for us. As a strict Catholic she believed that her role as a mother and wife was to be a martyr to her family. At the young age of eighteen I thought this whole situation was grossly unfair. However, I never understood why it bothered me so much until I started writing this book.

When I first began conducting research for this book I came face to face with some very uncomfortable questions. I knew that by simply asking these questions I would make some mothers feel bad about their life decisions, but I had to ask. For example, why do so many mothers abandon their careers for their families? Why do so many mothers continue to do the bulk of the child care and house cleaning for no pay? Even with full time jobs? And the most difficult question I faced was this: Why do mothers today choose to still have children at all when they likely know that they will likely have to sacrifice their lives and may end up divorced and even destitute?

This book answers these questions and many more. What started as a few ideas slowly morphed into three books about the situation of women today and the many barriers that hold women back. I wrote one book on motherhood (this book); one on corporate barriers (*Lean Out*) and one on societal barriers (*Occupy Women*).

These three books contain all of the information, research and advice that every mother needs to tell her daughter before she heads out into the world. They include all of the data and research that would have greatly helped me as I navigated my own life – when I decided to get married, when I chose my career as a lawyer, when I chose to get pregnant and most important, when I chose to quit practicing law so that I could raise our family.

By researching and writing this book, I have come to learn that motherhood is made difficult only because we as a society make it so. It does not need to be so hard on women nor does it need to tear families and relationships apart.

As you read *Motherhood Is Madness* you will begin to see how the institution of motherhood and our personal biases work together to maintain the status quo and hold women back, not only by husbands (who often accept their role in the system) but by our whole societal system. You will also learn (in the form of 15 strategies) how to dismantle this system and build a new model of motherhood that is good for mothers, their families and the whole world.

I would not have been able to write this book if not for the following authors and their books. They had a huge impact on my thinking.

- Leslie Bennetts, *The Feminine Mistake*.
- Susan Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels, *The Mommy Myth*.
- Sue Monk Kidd, *Dance of the Dissident Daughter*.
- Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*.
- Judith Warner, *Perfect Madness*.

I would also like to thank all those who helped me write this book and gave me their feedback. In particular, Karin Mizgala, Sandra Herd, Monica Beauregard, Mary-Jean Payeur, Mary Pappajohn, Christine Dearing, Denise Withers, Jennifer Leslie, Christine Unterthiner, Susanne Doyle-Ingram, Darrell Tomkins, Catherine Leek and my husband Paul.

I hope that by sharing what I have learned through my research, women and men can work together to free mothers from the shackles of motherhood and couples can live much more balanced and loving lives. I imagine a future world where husbands and wives equally contribute to raising their children, working and participating at work, at home and in society.

I think that with better understanding of the institution of motherhood we can not only create flourishing families and loving relationships but we can make the world a better place to live.

Introduction

“To say there is a sinister plot against American women is both overblown and exactly right. Technically speaking there is no War on Moms, of course. There is no concerted effort to kill or maim women who have children. But if some sinister think tank had spent the last thirty years cooking up the ideal way to make American women miserable, it likely couldn’t have served up more unpleasantness than women now encounter on a daily basis.” ~ Sharon Lerner

Mothers today feel like they are going absolutely crazy. They are exhausted, underpaid and under-appreciated. They feel like slaves to their kids, to their home, to their husbands and often to their careers – just like their mothers did.

Corinne Maier's best-selling book, *No Kids*, describes how devastating child-rearing can be. From ruining sex lives and relationships to sucking up every spare moment attending kids' soccer games, it's no surprise that couples are struggling so much these days.

So what went wrong? Why is being a mother so difficult? Did the suffragists and feminists fail mothers?

Most people blame mothers for this state of affairs. We tell them they are simply taking on too much and trying to be supermoms. We point out that in their effort to please everyone, they often fail. We tell them that all they need to do is slow down, stop being perfectionists and work harder at finding work-life balance; stop micro-managing kids and take a break. And if this does not work we remind them that they brought all these struggles upon themselves and it's their own fault for choosing to have children. We tell them that wanting to have both a happy family and a meaningful career is crazy. And we say things like, "You can't have your cake and eat it too." We expect them to lie in the bed they made.

The research, however, paints another picture. As you will see in this book, mothers and their choices are not the real cause of all these difficulties. Indeed most mothers do not have the option to scale back. Indeed 70% of mothers work outside the home and still carry the bulk of the domestic chores and child-rearing.

At the root of all these so-called, "mother's problems" is a whole "institution of motherhood" that we have inherited that constrains mothers. The academic experts on this topic call this system several different names such as, "the institution of motherhood," "momism," the "MRS," "the sticky floor" or "the mommy trap. "

Motherhood Is Madness shines a light on the mommy trap and shifts the blame from mothers to a whole system, consisting of hundreds of barriers and biases that make it extraordinarily difficult to raise children today. This "sticky floor" is so deeply rooted in long-standing beliefs that we can barely see it. Yet in combination these factors systematically curtail mothers' choices in many different ways, limiting options to such a degree that women feel they have no choice at all.

Here you will learn that motherhood is truly madness, but need not be. By looking at the expectations and pressures that mothers face we can see why so many mothers feel trapped and unhappy.

Motherhood, as we know it, is complete insanity and it must stop! In this book I do three things:

- I acknowledge the reality of mothers' lives and describe the very real circumstances and decisions mothers must make regarding family and career. I challenge the myth that all motherhood is blissful.
- I provide information and research that shows the many ways that our society holds mothers back – from inflexible workplaces to financial dependence on husbands. This helps women stop blaming themselves and understand better why they are so stressed out.
- I provide specific action steps so both men and women can begin to challenge our outdated model of motherhood and usher in a new one that not only supports mothers and gives them the status they deserve, but also values children and families.

I believe that when mothers (and fathers) learn the truth about what is really going on they will not only free themselves from the shackles of motherhood but will be more able to contribute to making the world better for their daughters and sons. After all, aren't our families the most important "possessions" in our lives and isn't motherhood the most important job in the world?

I also want to remind all mothers they are perfect just as they are and that they are probably doing enough. As a society we are treating you poorly and unfairly and you deserve so much more. END