



The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood

Sharon Hays

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"Hays's intellectually incendiary Cultural Contradictions could add needed nuance to feminist thought-and perhaps ignite change in mothers' overburdened lives."-Phyllis Eckhaus, The Nation "A lucid, probing examination of our culture's contradictory and troubled relationship to motherhood-and how it affects mothers. . . . A thoughtful analysis of the paradoxes that surround mothering. Hays is sensitive to the emotional issues involved-and equally astute in perceiving their sociopolitical context."-Kirkus Reviews "A thoughtful and carefully written new book that provides excellent material for family demography or women's studies courses at the graduate level."-Sandra L. Hofferth, American Journal of Sociology An ideology of 'intensive mothering' exacerbates the inevitable tensions working mothers face, claims sociologist Sharon Hays. While women are expected to be nurturing and unselfish in their role as mothers, they are expected to be competitive and even ruthless at work. Drawing on ideas about mothering since the Middle Ages, on contemporary childrearing manuals, and on in-depth interviews, Hays shows that 'intensive mothering' is a powerful contemporary ideology. These unrealistic expectations of mothers, she suggests, reflect a deep cultural ambivalence about the pursuit of self-interest.

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