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Book Review: *Weaving Work and Motherhood* by Anita Ilta Garey

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BOOK REVIEW

Weaving Work and Motherhood. Anita Ilta Garey.

Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1999. 239 pp.

ISBN 1-56639-700-6. \$59.50 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Weaving Work and Motherhood is an engaging challenge to conventional “orientation” approaches to work or motherhood, offering instead the metaphor of weaving. Beginning with the experiences of 37 mothers employed at a hospital, Anita Ilta Garey’s goal is to understand “what it means to be a *worker with children and a mother at work*.”

Garey favors the metaphor of weaving as a way to “step back and view the whole, to think of the fabric of a life, the strength of the weave, and the intricacy of design. It reminds us not to get lost in the close examination of one moment or one strand, and to remember that moments and strands are parts of the weave but not the weave itself. Work, family, friendships, reflection, vocation, and recreation are parts of a person’s life. They are not separately and on their own, the life or the person” (p. 192).

Rather than decide a priori how to group the women, she provides a convincing argument for letting the stories reveal relevant categories. Hers “is a study of an actual group of workers in a particular place at a particular time—and the diversity of the group is represented in the interviews” (p. 18). Work schedules were organizing

structures reflected in the chapter titles: “Calling the Shots” or voluntary part-time worker, “A Foot in the Door” or involuntary part-time worker, “Motherhood on the Night Shift,” “Nine to Five: A Collection of Days,” and “Sequencing: Patterns over the Life Course.” Women’s stories bracket the chapters, providing the reader with evidence of the similarities and differences between and within the groups. Garey organizes these complex and seemingly unique experiences into common struggles shaped by ideologies and social structures that restrict an integrated mother-worker life.

The concept “strategies of being” explains how employed mothers make sense of their lives, regardless of how others might see them. The way employment is incorporated into conceptions of motherhood is complex but rarely obvious. The meanings of “being mothers” and “being workers” were distorted by dominant assumptions of orientation model language (presuming work and motherhood compete as identities). Additionally, the mother’s location in a constellation of resources, the meaning of those resources, and the structure of their workplaces emerged as important to weaving work and motherhood.

This book also contributes to our understanding of both single mothers and dual-earner families. For example, if husbands are present, they can (but do not always) facilitate the wife's ability to weave work and motherhood. Garey's historical and contextual sensitivity to the patterns in which gender shapes parenting, work relations, and the social organization of work and motherhood provides a telling contrast to cross-sectional studies that may reify mother-worker dichotomies.

The women's stories present a familiar conundrum: Individual solutions often undermine social structural change. Comparing the American to the French experience, she highlights the damaging effects of plac-

ing work over family priorities. The only real weakness I find in this book is connected to just this point. Because Garey interviewed only employed women, she has no information on women who could not successfully combine motherhood and employment for comparison. Perhaps the stories of women who could not weave work and motherhood would add more weight to the need for wider social change. This book is excellent reading for students and researchers interested in a variety of family, work, gender, and policy issues.

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