
Let’s start with a classic brainteaser. “A patient is brought into the emergency room. The surgeon says, ‘I can’t operate on this patient: he’s my son.’ The surgeon is not the patient’s father. Why can’t the surgeon operate?” (p. 77) Need a hint? The brainteaser works because it relies on the underlying assumption that surgeons are male. The answer? The surgeon is the patient’s mother.

In Reshaping the Work-Family Debate, Joan C. Williams argues that to achieve a more progressive work-family model, the disadvantage, to both women and men, of traditional gender roles and the impact of class must both be a part of the conversation. Williams frames the issue of the work-family debate by informing readers that the United States has the most “family-hostile public policy” in the developed world and that 90% of American mothers and 95% of American fathers wish they had more time to spend with their children (pp. 1-2). Williams suggests there is a “mismatch between the workforce and the workplace” that is “fueled by social norms, namely, old fashioned and rigid definitions of masculinity and the resulting gender pressures on men.” (p. 1) She argues that to improve work-family issues we need to examine both gender and class assumptions. Until both are adequately examined, policy changes will remain politically infeasible (p. 2). Williams believes that the traditional view of the work-family debate is misguided in focusing solely on women because the assumptions about gender in the workplace actually disadvantage both men and women. In addition to including men in the work-family debate, Williams argues that real reform will only take place when attention is given to the dysfunctional class dynamic between the white working class and the professional-managerial class.

Williams divides her book into three distinct sections. In the first section, she uses the recent narrative of women “opting out” to describe the gendered framework that shapes the work-family debate in the United States (pp. 2-3). In the second section, Williams argues that masculinity needs to be placed at the center of the feminist analysis because traditional gender norms, created by society, adversely affect women and men (p. 107). Williams examines how masculine norms can lead to biases against women, forcing them to choose between acting like a “tomboy” or acting “femme.” (p. 5) Williams challenges the conventional notion that work-family conflict arises from gender roles in the
family, arguing that the workplace also plays a substantial role in the creation of gender norms (p. 5). The third section of the book switches the focus from gender to class. Williams argues that class is important not only because of the role it plays in politics, but because class also plays a key part in perpetuating gender roles (p. 10). Williams discusses the “culture gap” that exists between “reform-minded progressives” and the white working class and the effect that this gap has on American politics (p. 6). Williams narrows her discussion of class in two ways. First, she limits her examination to the white working class because this group has largely shifted from being “Reagan Democrats” to Republicans whereas African Americans have largely remained Democrats (p. 9). Second, she focuses on men because she believes that masculinity has a central role in shaping society, and “[t]he ability to fulfill ideals of manliness has become a class-linked privilege.” (p. 9) Covering a wide range of topics, Williams’ introduction is crucial to helping her readers understand her thesis while navigating the book, especially when her argument veers from an examination of gender to the lesscharted territories of class and its relation to the work-family dynamic.

CHILDREN, WORK, AND CLASS: OPTED OUT, PUSHED OUT, OR FIRED?

In 2003, Lisa Belkin published an article in the New York Times Magazine entitled “Why Don’t More Women Get to the Top?” Belkin interviewed eight professional women who graduated from Princeton and, despite her acknowledgment that her subjects are all “elite, successful women who can afford real choice,” Belkin’s article concludes that women in general do not make it to the top of their careers because they choose not to. Indeed, these women “opt out” of their “prestigious, high[ly] paid career[s],” preferring to stay at home to take care of their children (p. 12).

The first third of Williams’ book examines Belkin’s article, and a barrage of articles that followed, and critiques the idea that women step off the fast track career path as a result of their own “psychological or biological pulls rather than workplace pushes.” (p. 13) Williams argues that these articles reinforce a separate spheres ideology, where women are seen as having different biological and psychological characteristics than men and, therefore, thought to be more suited to stay at home than to work in the public realm. By propagating this ideology, these articles contribute to gender-based bias against women in the workplace (p. 4).

Williams presents the results of a content analysis of 119 print news stories from 1980 to 2006 conducted by the Center for WorkLife Law (p. 13). Pointing out that the articles focus solely on American women who are highly-educated white professionals (3.7% of American women), Williams argues that these articles reflect and reinforce the stereotype that women want to leave the workplace and, once home, find themselves happy and fulfilled (pp. 13-16). While Williams concedes that 43% of the articles mention the adverse sides of
“opting out,” such as depression, loneliness, and boredom, she argues that the articles make light of these problems. For example one article states: “many women feel isolated and lonely when they first elect to stay home, because they are in transition between two lifestyles . . . [but] [i]t’s a temporary problem” (p. 17).

In contrast, Williams presents studies that paint a bleak picture of women trying to re-enter the work force after taking time off. One study found that women who took one year off sacrificed 20% of their lifetime earnings, while women who took two or three years off sacrificed 30% (p. 25). Williams presents an immense amount of information in a cohesive and approachable fashion that vividly supports her thesis that women are not necessarily opting out, but being pushed into a “traditional” role. For example, citing a study from 2004, stating that nine out of ten women cited work-related issues as the reason they quit their jobs, Williams argues that reporters need to write about “workplace pushes” rather than focusing on “family pulls.” (p. 27) She concludes the chapter by examining the current “family-hostile public policy” in the United States. She analyzes five areas that are important for work-family reconciliation: short-term leaves; good, affordable child care; regulation of work hours; universal health coverage; and a tax system that does not penalize dual-earner families (pp. 33-34). Although Williams claims to take an “in-depth” look at these five areas (p. 34), her review is relatively cursory, leaving readers wanting more information on how to actually implement her suggested changes. For example, Williams points out that in 2000, all European countries offered paid leave ranging from five to forty-two weeks whereas the United States offered “zero weeks of paid leave.” (p. 35) Williams notes that having a paid leave program would help employers keep skilled employees in the workforce (p. 36). She cites California as an example of a state that provides a paid family leave insurance program, but unfortunately, she stops short of giving any concrete suggestions for how other states might implement a similar program (p. 36). Despite the surface-level review of these five areas, Williams’ conclusion is manifest: there are areas where change needs to occur to create a less hostile work policy for families in the United States, and this change is feasible.

Switching her focus from professional women to working-class women in the second chapter, Williams looks at what women do when they cannot “opt out.” She examines WorkLife Law’s One Sick Child report and how nonstandard working hours, inflexible schedules,1 and “no-fault” discipline systems adversely impact working-class families (p. 43). The report, which analyzes ninety-nine union arbitrations,2 provides an interesting vantage point into the lives of

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1. One poignant example of inflexible schedules is when an employer ordered factory workers to work overtime, the workers had the babysitters drop the children off at the factory. When the employer confronted the women, they said “I would be put in prison and my children would be taken away from me if I leave them home alone—I cannot do that. You told me to stay, so they’re going to come here.” (p. 42)

2. Williams recognizes that only 12.4% of Americans are unionized and that most
working-class parents as they struggle to work and keep up with the demands of family life (p. 43). Williams extrapolates several trends that result in firings due to work-family conflict such as unpredictable family crises, mandatory overtimes, and men who refused to tell employers that they needed to leave work to care for their children.

While this section is meticulously researched, Williams risks losing the reader’s interest with the sheer volume of cases cited, some of which begin to blend into one another. The overall impact of the chapter may have been greater with some judicious editing. The strongest section of the chapter is Williams’ suggestions for unions and employees. First, Williams suggests that unions and employers need to formalize a system where employees can ask for time off while allowing them to maintain their privacy (p. 61). Second, unions and employers need to instruct men that they are expected to know how to arrange backup child care if necessary while maintaining the understanding that last-minute child care is often hard to arrange (p. 61). Finally, unions need to reframe the issue of a parent’s need for time off as a worker’s right, rather than a mere familial obligation (p. 61). Citing real world examples, Williams demonstrates that workplace flexibility can actually improve business—from improved workplace safety to decreased turnover (p. 64). This chapter points out that work-family conflicts are not just a professional women’s issue. Williams argues that as soon as the press acknowledges this, policymakers will be confronted with the irony that “in a country where family values are an accepted part of political discourse, family members . . . are often ‘one sick kin’ away from being fired.” (p. 76)

“CHANGING THE WAY WE TALK ABOUT GENDER”

Williams begins the second part of her book with a thought-provoking quote: “[w]hat we know about jobs . . . has more to do with [the people who inhabit those jobs] (e.g., their gender, status, lifestyles, personalities, traits, etc.) than the tasks the jobs actually involve.” (p. 77) Williams offers an overview of the history of gender stereotypes and how the notion of separate spheres continues to hold a significant influence in society (p. 78). Men are still seen as

nonunionized workers have fewer rights and protections.

3. For example, when First Tennessee Bank focused on creating flexibility in the workplace, employee retention was 50% higher than normal, “which contributed to a 7% higher customer retention rate—and $106 million in additional profit over two years.” (pp. 66-67) In addition, employees have stated that workplace flexibility was very important to them. For example, AstraZeneca, a pharmaceutical company, surveyed its employees and found that “96% claimed that flexibility influenced their decision to stay with the company. Allstate Insurance found that 92% of its employees rated flexibility as ‘important’ or ‘very important.’” (p 67)

4. Beginning in the Enlightenment, Williams claims that women were no longer seen as inherently inferior, but were seen as belonging in a separate sphere than men. This separate sphere ideology understood women as being nurturing and more moral than men, and therefore relegated women to the home, whereas men were aptly suited for the public sphere because they were independent, competitive, and more ambitious than women (p. 78).
independent, competitive, and breadwinners, while women are seen as nurturing, emotional, and naturally suited to be homemakers (p. 78). These stereotypes lead people to associate success in historically male professions with purportedly male characteristics, such as being assertive and proactive (p. 78). For example, one prominent physicist noted that “[i]n particular, our selection procedures tend to select not only for talents that are directly relevant to success in science, but also for assertiveness and single-mindedness.” (p. 78) Social scientists have consistently documented that men are viewed as “convey[ing] more assertion and control,” whereas women are seen as more “communal.” (p. 78) Perceptions of women as “communal” and less “assertive” supposedly make them less fit for jobs like physicists (p. 79). Williams argues that these stereotypes will continue to prevent women’s economic progress so long as men “continue to feel threatened by the possibility of being perceived as wimps and wusses unless they live up to the norms of conventional masculinity.” (p. 79)

Williams starts by looking at the impact of masculine workplace norms on men, particularly the idea that men have two choices, either to “be a manly, successful ideal worker, or be a wimpy nurturing father.” (p. 80) She notes the catch-22 that men are expected to live up to the old-fashioned breadwinner ideal, yet the current economic era makes it nearly impossible to provide for a family on one salary (p. 81). Men who live up to the breadwinner standard do so by working fifty to sixty hours weekly (p. 81). By contrast, the overwhelming majority of men would prefer to work, on average, thirteen fewer hours a week (p. 81). Those who work sixty or more hours would prefer to work twenty-five hours fewer (p. 81). While Williams points out the disparity between the hours men actually work as compared to the amount of hours they would prefer to work, it remains unclear that men would like to have the extra hours away from work to spend at home caring for their children or doing other household chores. In fact, Williams points out that many fathers have the idea that they should “play an active role in their children’s lives” but over-report their household labor by 149% (p. 82). Williams highlights the “straightjacket of conventional masculinity,” arguing that it not only hurts men who are unable to live up to the socially accepted male role of breadwinner, but also those who are playing that role and feel imprisoned by it (p. 83).

Williams argues that while family may be a gender factory, helping to create and reproduce gender stereotypes, the workplace is as well (p. 83). She looks at how a machismo culture is found not only amongst working-class men, but also among professionals such as Silicon Valley engineers (p. 87) and lawyers in big law firms (p. 88). For example, Scott Webster, a Silicon Valley engineer, notes that:

5. Jacobs and Gerson find that only 17.6% of men report wanting to work fifty or more hours a week, but over twice as many men actually do (40% of whom are college-educated men). JERRY A. JACOBS & KATHLEEN GERSON, THE TIME DIVIDE: WORK, FAMILY, AND GENDER INEQUALITY 66, 69 (2004).
Guys try to out-macho each other, but in engineering it’s really perverted because out-machoing someone means being more of a nerd than the other person . . . . It’s not like being a brave firefighter and going up one more flight than your friend. There’s a lot of see how many hours I can work, whether or not you have a kid . . . . He’s a real man; he works 90-hour weeks. He’s a slacker; he works 50 hours a week. (p. 83)

Williams argues that the “macho” workplace may not be effective, citing Marianne Cooper’s study, “Being the ‘Go-To Guy,’” which finds that this culture of work devotion can actually detract from a company’s bottom line (p. 87). Williams notes that some younger men are less willing than previous generations to work long hours, but that there is still a need for society to help men invent and discover a wider range of masculinities (p. 91).

Williams discusses how the masculine culture in both blue-collar and white-collar jobs adversely impacts women. She recognizes four basic patterns of gender bias, presenting each with empirical evidence based on the findings of over 200 social psychology studies. First, the “maternal wall”—a bias that prevents women from getting jobs as well as keeping jobs once they have a child (p. 92). Second, the “prove it again!” problem—women finding that they have to work twice as hard to prove that they are as competent as male coworkers (pp. 95-96). Here, Williams briefly looks at the impact this has on women of color, noting that black women have an even harder time than white women; she also notes that evidence of bias against Asian-American, Latina, and Native American women is scant, but that many Asians are stereotyped as both too competitive and ambitious, and only having technical skills and not leadership skills (p. 96). Third, “double binds”—women being required to act with traditional masculine characteristics to gain respect but maintain feminine characteristics so as not to be perceived as too macho (pp. 96-97). Take, for example, the Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins case, where Ann Hopkins, a highly successful senior manager, was denied a promotion and told to “walk more femininely . . . dress more femininely, wear make-up.” (p. 97) Williams describes this paradox as women having to choose between being “a bitch or a bimbo—and [being] judged as unqualified either way” (p. 97). Lastly, “gender wars”—a rarely studied pattern of gender bias against women involving a conflict amongst women, which is often prevalent between older and younger generations (p. 100). Because women are often pressured into filling certain feminized roles, those who fill the roles may be rewarded by men for being good girls, resulting in men having negative feelings toward bad girls—women who

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6. For example, one study asked male and female psychology professors to review identical applications for professorship. The male applicant was preferred over the woman by two to one, despite having identical qualifications (p. 93).

7. When evaluators were shown two identical resumes, one with an Anglo-American name (Greg) and the other with an African-American name (Jamal), white candidates got “as many callbacks as blacks with eight additional years of job experience.” (p. 97)
do not fill the role (p. 100). The result can often be bad blood between groups of women who judge each other for the roles they have chosen to fill at work (p. 100). Another related pattern is the “queen bee” syndrome, where one woman is incorporated into the in-group of men and consequently “fails to support, or even targets” other women in order to maintain her elevated status (p. 101). Williams argues that people need to recognize the battles between women as often resulting from “masculine norms that force women to play the femme or the tomboy and then penalize each group.” (p. 102)

Many readers may find Williams’ discussion of gender bias in the workplace familiar, however her argument that feminists need to deconstruct gender and allow men to be caring and communal while letting women be assertive and competitive sheds light on a new approach to tackling the common problem of gender biases (p. 107). With this approach, Williams cautions readers that the goal is to replace both the “selfless-mother model and the breadwinner model with the model of a balanced worker, one who combines serious work commitments with serious family commitments and also with serious commitments to long-term self-development and enriching community life.” (p. 107)

Chapter Four begins by describing various feminist theories with the recognition that feminism is useful for exploring gender dynamics that disadvantage women but that feminism does a poor job “illuminating identity.” (pp. 109-110) Williams takes readers on a whirlwind tour of feminist legal theory from the 1960s to the 1990s that is surprisingly understandable and accessible given the amount of theory she covers in two pages. She notes that the work-family debate is typically framed in the feminist “sameness-difference debate”8 but that this debate inadvertently lumps two distinct dialogues together, one concerning policy and one concerning psychology. While many sameness feminists might believe that women and men do not have natural psychological differences, these same theorists might argue that public policy that blindly treats women the same as men is flawed (p. 114). Therefore, rather than focus on these categories, Williams describes two new categories of feminists: assimilationist and reconstructive, asserting that “these offer the promise of busting out of the frame of the sameness-difference debate.” (pp. 114-115) Assimilation feminists seek access to traditional masculine rights and roles (p. 115). Early nineteenth-century feminists, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who fought for women to have a right to vote, are seen as assimilationists (p. 115). On the other hand, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is seen as the first reconstructive feminist because she worked to deconstruct gender by undermining the ideology

8. Sameness feminists argue that women should be seen and treated the same as men and therefore, entitled to the same rights, protections, and privileges. Difference feminists argue that at least some of the differences between men and women are significant and need to be considered in order to achieve equality. For example, in 1982 Carol Gilligan argued in her book, In a Different Voice, that institutions need to be reshaped around women’s voice, because women have a different moral system than men (p. 112).
of the separate spheres, not simply fighting for women to have a place in a masculine world (p. 115).  

Williams spends time explaining assimilationist feminism, but ultimately she argues that assimilationist feminism “works well to help the tomboys whose goal is to assimilate into masculine roles, but it offers little to feminists focused on women whose gender inequality stems from their insistence on ‘acting femmy.’” (pp. 116-117) Women may find that “assimilationist feminism alienates not only many younger women but also homemakers who do not appreciate being called infantilized servants.” (p. 126) It is unclear why Williams is introducing assimilationist feminism when ultimately she argues that reconstructive feminism is a better approach because it recognizes that people have differences and asks the question of “why these particular differences become salient in a particular context and then are used to create and justify women’s continuing economic disadvantage.” (p. 128)  

Williams takes a deeper look at reconstructive feminism and how it interacts and compares with different camps of feminism. For example, she argues that unlike difference feminism, which focuses on “real differences” between men and women, reconstructive feminism acknowledges that there are “real differences” but “rejects the view that any of these differences, whether physical, social, or psychological, are meaningful by shifting attention away from women and onto masculine norms.” (p. 129) Williams draws ideas from queer theory, noting that rather than concentrating on men and women as either similar or different, the conversation should be about how society creates gender identities. How gender is “not something we are but something we do.” (p. 142)  

Williams maintains that the “distinction between sex and gender is vitally important on the work-family axis” because it is undeniable that biological differences exist (only women can give birth to children), but critiques the idea that men and women have “real” psychological and social difference. She notes that “‘[r]eal psychological differences reflect only the unsurprising fact that, given hydraulic social pressure to conform to societal expectations surrounding gender, women as a group tend to behave more femininely than do men as a group.” (p. 149)  

Williams’ discussion of feminist theory is largely academic, filled with names with whom readers who are new to feminist theory may be unfamiliar. While it is unclear that assimilationist or reconstructive feminism offers an

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9. In the 1970s, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, then general counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union, brought multiple cases to the Supreme Court to affect positive change for women’s rights. For example, in Reed v. Reed, the Supreme Court invalidated a law in Idaho that preferred men over women as estate administrators. 404 U.S. 71 (1971). Ginsburg’s goal was to “deconstruct gender by undermining the institutional infrastructure undergirding separate spheres.” (p. 115) For example, in a 1975 law review article, Ginsburg wrote, “If Congress is genuinely committed to the eradication of sex-based discrimination and promotion of equal opportunity for women, it will respond to the uneven pattern of adjudication by providing firm legislative direction assuring job security, health insurance coverage, and income maintenance for childrearing women.” (p. 116)
original solution to the sameness-difference debate, Williams’ message comes through. In order to reshape the work-family debate, feminists need to deconstruct “the masculine norm” and move from a focus on women’s identities to the gender dynamics that create their identities (pp. 132, 128).

**WHY CLASS MATTERS**

In the third part of her book, Williams argues that to reduce work-family conflict, we must change the way we think about class (p. 6). The switch from a somewhat traditional analysis of gender in the workplace to a class-based analysis of voting habits might catch some readers off-guard, and a more guided transition may have been helpful. She notes that, because gender analysis is not typically melded with class analysis, gender performance driven by class aspiration has also rarely been explored (p. 158). In Chapter Five, Williams exposes the reader to cultural differences between the working and professional classes. Noting that many people in the United States refer to themselves as “middle class,” Williams presents evidence that people who think of themselves as the “upper-middle class,” with a median income of $120,000, actually represent the top 15% of American earners (p. 155). She explains that there has been an overall drop in family income since 1979, with white working-class men experiencing a wage decrease of 15% between 1979 and 1998 (p. 157). Men who once felt that they were solidly middle class now find themselves unable to earn enough to attain a middle-class standard of living (p. 158). Because the breadwinner-homemaker family is emblematic of middle-class status, Williams argues that working-class families who aspire to become middle-class see traditional gender roles as vital to that aspiration, and therefore propagate the stereotypical roles of men and women (p. 158). The good news, according to Williams, is that men can be happy with family caregiving as long as they feel their masculinity is secure (p. 159). Williams cites to a study by Carla Shows and Naomi Gerstel, which showed that “EMTs emphasized private fathering . . . they talked about routine involvement in the lives of their children.” Some EMTs even turned down overtime, and others were willing to swap shifts to accommodate family responsibilities. Shows and Gerstel acknowledge that EMTs work in a “hypermasculine work culture” and perhaps they did not feel their masculinities were threatened because “they work in highly masculine jobs and do not need to use family relations to shore up their identity as men.” (p. 159) Unfortunately, during the “Great Recession” of 2008-09, three-fourths of the jobs that were lost were men’s jobs and many men now feel their masculinity threatened by jobs that they see as “beneath their dignity” or insecure (p. 159).

With those facts as a backdrop, Williams takes an in-depth look at the effect of class on culture. She starts by examining the differences in child-rearing philosophies, the different social networks, and the divergent lifestyle choices of white workers and the elite. In Chapter Six, Williams argues that what is often referred to as a “culture war” is actually an expression of class conflict (p. 186).
Although this part provides an interesting look at cultural differences, readers could benefit from a more explicit tie back into Williams’ thesis about the work-family conflict, which doesn’t come until the end of the chapter (p. 207). In the meantime, impatient readers may find themselves flipping back to her introduction to remember Williams’ reason for including class in the book. In her introduction, readers are reminded that Williams believes that culture gaps between the elite and working classes have fueled culture wars and that these wars have driven white workers into an alliance with the business elite (pp. 7, 10). Williams argues that to create “a new long-term coalition . . . reform-minded elites [must] develop a true sensitivity to issues of class,” and then changes might be made to improve the work-family dynamic (pp. 6, 10). She also suggests three steps to achieving change: first, society needs to “institute the same kind of taboo against insulting white workers as now exists against using racial innuendo and insults;” second, society needs to recognize that class is a “key axis of social disadvantage;” and last, society needs to identify aspects of “non-elite culture,” such as work devotion, which offer useful insights for the upper-middle class (p. 213). Williams’ suggestions seem ambitious, especially when Williams herself refers to the last forty years as a “poisonous political dynamic” between the upper-middle class and the lower class (p. 213). In the end, this section is much more about raising awareness and bringing class into the work-family debate than presenting solutions.

**CONCLUSION**

Readers will finish Williams’ book with a much better idea of how masculinity plays a role in the work-family debate and a slightly less clear understanding that class must also be examined before society can begin to achieve a better work-family policy. Williams’ examination of gender with a focus on masculinity, rather than femininity, makes it clear to readers that men are a central part of the solution to the work-family problem. The detailed use of real stories and examples is not only interesting to read, it also allows the reader to get a sense of the problems that actually exist. Williams’ expertise is apparent through her presentation of the Center for WorkLife Law’s surveys as well as her extensive outside research, evidenced by an abundance of footnotes. With this book, Williams stakes her claim as one of the leading scholars in the work-family debate.

Although parts of Williams’ analysis echo well-established theories in the academic world, such as the masculine environment of the workplace and its effects on women’s participation, Williams reframes the work-family debate by emphasizing the importance of deconstructing masculinity and rebuilding an alliance between different social and economic classes. The influence of class on the work-family struggle has been recognized; however, Williams’ emphasis

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10. Attention to caregiving struggles of working families has come from different angles. For example, Richard Fischl writes a thought-provoking article about a hypothetical world where
on class as a hindrance to achieving new social policy in the work-family debate is an original step in what appears to be the right direction. The one downside to Williams’ class analysis is her sole focus on white workers, a caveat she fully discloses in the introduction. Although she recognizes that people of color vote largely for Democrats, one can’t help but wonder how her analysis would differ if she took into account both race and culture. Perhaps this is an area that she can tackle in her next book.

At the end, readers understand that the key to reshaping the work-family debate will be changing the way Americans think about gender and class. Changing an entire society’s thought process and discourse will not be easy, but hopefully Williams’ book will at least start the discussion of the need for change.

Erin Everett

there are state-funded “care-giving” centers and traditional state-funded areas such as law enforcement and fire-fighting are no longer funded. In this world, women have the best jobs and men must adopt certain “feminine” characteristics to be able to work alongside women in “care-giving” centers. Fischl draws attention to class differences pointing out that:

Historically, of course, this work [providing unpaid protective services for the family] was so consuming that it was immensely difficult for men to venture into the market for paid work, and women were accordingly the primary breadwinners for many families. To be sure, working class and poor families who needed a second income to make ends meet didn’t have the luxury of a full-time “stay-at-home dad,” but decently paid jobs for men were scarce, and substitutes for the protective care of absent fathers could be awfully hard to come by.