



Competing Devotions: Career and Family among Women Executives

Mary Blair-Loy

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The wrenching decision facing successful women choosing between demanding careers and intensive family lives has been the subject of many articles and books, most of which propose strategies for resolving the dilemma. *Competing Devotions* focuses on broader social and cultural forces that create women's identities and shape their understanding of what makes life worth living.

Mary Blair-Loy examines the career paths of women financial executives who have tried various approaches to balancing career and family. The professional level these women have attained requires a huge commitment of time, energy, and emotion that seems natural to employers and clients, who assume that a career deserves single-minded allegiance. Meanwhile, these women must confront the cultural model of family that defines marriage and motherhood as a woman's primary vocation. This ideal promises women creativity, intimacy, and financial stability in caring for a family. It defines children as fragile and assumes that men lack the selflessness and patience that children's primary caregivers need. This ideal is taken for granted in much of contemporary society.

The power of these assumptions is enormous but not absolute. *Competing Devotions* identifies women executives who try to reshape these ideas. These mavericks, who face great resistance but are aided by new ideological and material resources that come with historical change, may eventually redefine both the nuclear family and the capitalist firm in ways that reduce work-family conflict.

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