Mompreneurs, Leaning In, and Opting Out: Work/Family Choices under Neoliberalism

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Abstract

This article explores three trends in the search for work-family balance and relates these trends to the neoliberal family policy context in Anglo-Saxon states. I argue that these models reflect current ideologies about motherhood, the state, and work. Ultimately, these models reinforce current ideas about intensive mothering and the "good mother" and neoliberal norms surrounding the good worker and citizen.

Résumé

Cet article explore trois tendances dans la recherche de l'équilibre entre le travail et la vie personnelle et relie ces tendances au contexte de la politique néolibérale de la famille au Canada. Je défends l'idée que ces modèles reflètent les idéologies actuelles sur la maternité, l'État et le travail. En fin de compte, ils reflètent les idées actuelles au sujet du maternage intensif et de la « bonne mère » et les normes néolibérales concernant le bon travailleur et le bon citoyen.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, much attention has been given to three trends in mothering: mompreneurs, leaning in, and opting out. These three trends purport to help women balance the competing demands of a career and family life by allowing women to run businesses from home, opt-out of the paid workforce to be a stay-at-home mom, or lean on other women for support while leaning into their career. This article suggests that these three models are not solutions to the problem of work/family balance, but rather compromises reflecting neoliberal understandings of motherhood, the state, and the nature of work. Ultimately, all three models reflect current ideals in western Anglo-Saxon societies about what makes a good mother combined with the neoliberal norms surrounding the good worker and citizen. By exploring current trends within mothering —the mompreneur, leaning in, and opting out—within the context of neoliberal social policy, the impact of family and work related policies on women's choices becomes apparent. I argue that the choices offered under neoliberal welfare states are not really choices at all; rather they reinforce the values of neoliberalism and deny the importance of societal responses to the needs of women, mothers, and families. What is really required is a new social model that reflects contemporary family structures and changing gender roles.

This article explores the relationship between mothering and the welfare state within the context of Anglo-Saxon western states. Gøsta Esping-Anderson's (1990) typology of welfare states continues to dominate discussions of welfare states and comparative welfare state policy. He describes the liberal welfare state as characterized by means-tested assistance and modest universal transfers or social insurance plans that cater to lower- and working-class citizens (26). He argues that the progress of social reform in these welfare regimes is restricted by "traditional, liberal work-ethic norms" (26). Examples of liberal welfare regimes include Canada, Australia, the UK, and the USA. Although there

are significant differences between these states and their social welfare policies, they are more similar than different in the types of means-tested benefits and limited parental leaves they offer. Liberal welfare states are particularly interesting to study in relation to motherhood because of the limited role the state has historically played in supporting mothers and families, the strong influence of neoliberal ideology, and the recent emergence of the motherhood models of mompreneurs, opting out, and leaning in as a way to negotiate work and family obligations in the absence of strong state supports for women's participation in the labour force.

This article begins with a discussion of motherhood in contemporary times. It draws on the existing scholarly literature on mothering and links this literature explicitly to the work on family policy. In doing so, I first examine the role of the state in defining, reinforcing, and constructing gender norms around mothering and, second, the impact of family policy on women's choices. The discussion then focuses on the impact of neoliberalism on the family policy context for mothering. The final section of the article analyzes mompreneurs, opting out, and leaning in as manifestations of the neoliberal discourses of individualism and free choice and the limited ability of these discourses to address the real challenges mothers face in their efforts to balance work and family. While this article is largely based on existing scholarly research, it brings together the often isolated bodies of research in motherhood studies, public policy, and popular discourses around work and family. The article identifies the linkages between these areas of scholarly inquiry and demonstrates the embeddedness of neoliberalism within contemporary motherhood in liberal welfare states.

This research is, by necessity, interdisciplinary. Not only does it draw on the field of family policy by explicitly exploring the linkages between culture and policy, it also strives to develop our knowledge of the gendered, classed, and racialized implications of these policies. Through the interdisciplinary and intersectional lens used in this article, I hope to begin the process of addressing some of the weaknesses within the field of social policy studies such as the need to understand the symbolic value of public policies (Hennig, Gatermann, and Hägglund 2012); to explore the relationship between cultural gender arrangements and family policy; and to determine how these relationships may influence the decisions of individuals regarding balancing family and work (Hegewisch and Gornick 2011). In particular, this research is influenced by John Clarke's (2004) work on the welfare state in which he argues for the need for analysis that explores how a specific moment is shaped by multiple and potentially contradictory forces, pressures, and tendencies.

Mothering in Contemporary Times

Public policies—the collection of laws, policies, measures, and actions taken by governments on a particular issue or topic—reflect and influence cultural norms and behaviour. When we look at mothering and families, public policies can be understood both as resulting from society's beliefs about the role of mothers in caring for and raising children and as shaping those beliefs. Following the Second World War, most western democracies developed welfare states that, among other things, reflected and influenced the shape and character of families as well as the choices available to women. Over the past century, however, women's participation in the paid labour force has increased dramatically and the policy framework for families has expanded significantly; yet, the idealized roles and expectations of mothers remain an enduring challenge and source of women's oppression.

Ideas about motherhood and mothering are culturally derived and reflect not only normative ideas about gender, but also race and class. Shari L. Thurer (1994), in her iconic text on mothering *Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother,* argues that "the good mother is reinvented as each age or society defines her anew, in its own terms, according to its own mythology" (xv). Similarly, Ian Hacking (1999) asserts:

Men's and women's domestic roles are not ordained by human nature, biology, or men's and women's psychology. Rather, they are the product of particular historical circumstances, social processes, and ideologies, and vary widely by race, religion, and time period. Far from being fixed and static categories, motherhood and fatherhood are social, cultural, and ideological constructs. Their social definition and meaning has been changing, varied, and contested. (qtd. in Mintz 2014, n.p.)

While the socially constructed nature of mothering, parenting, and families is widely acknowledged, ideas about mothering have an enduring quality. The

idea of the mother as "loving, nurturing, tending every need, seeking tactfully to guide [the child] toward becoming a cooperative member of a happy family, and, all the while, 'having fun'" (Thurer 1994, 248) remains powerful. It is under the shadow of these unrealistic expectations that mothers over the past few generations struggled to balance their own economic and personal needs and desires with those of their partners, children, and society.

These social, cultural, and ideological constructs are necessarily impacted by race, ethnicity, ability, and class as well as gender. Racialized and working-class women often experience motherhood differently than middle- or upper-class women. For example, they may not have the option of not working or staying at home with the children. The intensive mothering expected of middle- or upper-class women is not necessarily expected of lower class or racialized women (Elliott, Powell, and Brenton 2015; Byrne 2006; Hughes Miller, Hager, and Jaremko Bromwich 2017). Thus, the commonly defined discourses around the good mother are often applied most stringently to the middle-class mother who has more choices available to her with regards to balancing parenting and career and, therefore, can be seen as making the "wrong" choices.

Current social norms around motherhood continue to assert the importance of a mother's presence, especially during the early years, as a mother's nurturing love is seen as necessary for the proper emotional, physical, and intellectual development of the child. Thurer's (1994) comment from twenty years ago that, "Current standards for good mothering are so formidable, self-denying, elusive, changeable, and contradictory that they are unattainable" (xvi) still holds true. This over-emphasis on the role of the mother, often described as intensive mothering, puts tremendous pressure on mothers to achieve unattainable levels of perfection. As Sharon Hays (1996) argues in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, "intensive mothering is a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children" despite the increasing numbers of women in the workplace and a social emphasis on self-interested gain under neoliberalism (x). Unfortunately, cultural expectations and the structure of the family and workplace have not evolved with the changes in the structure of families or the participation of wom-

en in the workforce and professional careers (Christopher 2012). Again, however, the women under scrutiny in the popular media are generally white, educated, and middle or upper class. The discourses surrounding more marginalized women tend to focus on their failures, for example, through media discourses on welfare mothers, teen mothers, or lone mothers (Hughes Miller, Hager, and Jaremko Bromwich 2017). The choices of establishing a home business, opting out of their career path, or leaning in to their career (while paying others to do their care work) are not choices that are available to all women.

Over the course of the twentieth century, families and our ideas about what constitutes a normal family changed quite dramatically. More women continue working outside of the home following the birth of their children. Men are less likely to earn a family wage and families increasingly need two incomes to attain a desirable standard of living. More marriages now end in separation and divorce, more children are born outside of marriage, and more children are raised in single-parent homes, predominantly headed by women.

As mentioned above, public policy both influences and is influenced by national and regional cultures. For example, laws regarding marriage, child custody, legitimacy, citizenship, and property are a reflection of cultural norms or how we, as a society, think of families. At the same time, these rules and regulations also shape our behaviour. When we look to mothering, public policies play a similar role. Family policies, including maternity leaves, childcare programs, and economic supplements for families, fall largely within the domain of the welfare state. Different types of welfare states are more or less likely to have strong family policies and the policies themselves are likely to be influenced by the political culture of the state as well as by cultural norms around family and mothering (Pfau-Effinger 2012). Thus, dominant cultural models of the family influence women's behaviour and choices regarding the care of their children and the combination of paid employment outside of the home and family responsibilities. The policies themselves are a product of society's beliefs about the role of mothers in caring for and raising children. However, the existence of maternity and paternity leaves, publicly funded quality childcare, and economic incentives also influence the choices of women (and families more generally) when it comes to how

they engage in the practice of mothering, providing care for their children and balancing their work and family lives.

The welfare state, the combination of policies and programs aimed at providing health and economic services for all members of society, also reflects assumptions about families and parenting. Welfare states are made and remade under the influence of complex social and political relationships and forces. These forces vary between societies and over time, making cross-national or cross-cultural analyses difficult when taking culture into account (Clarke 2004, 25). The form and content of the welfare state impacts family forms and choices. For example, the availability of affordable childcare influences a family's decision regarding whether one or both parents should work outside the home. Emanuele Ferragina and Martin Seeleib-Kaiser (2011) argue that the relationship between care and welfare is a core element of the modern welfare state. Furthermore, "demographic trends and the difficulty for parents to reconcile work and care further demonstrate the importance of this nexus…the future of welfare state systems will be dependent on the ability to balance work and family life" (597). Questions remain regarding what role the state should play and the costs and benefits of these programs. These debates are further complicated by gender stereotypes and cultural assumptions about what is best for children and families.

The importance of culture in the social construction of norms around families and mothering must be taken into account. Birgit Pfau-Effinger (2012) argues that the "attempt to explain cross-national differences in the employment behavior of mothers with small children mainly by differences in welfare-state family policies is of limited value. We need a more complex explanatory framework that, besides other factors, also seriously considers the role of cultural factors" (531). Similarly, Michelle Budig, Joya Misra and Irene Boeckmann (2012) asserts that "work-family policies are replete with gendered meanings about the role of women in employment and families" (165). They suggest an interdependent relationship between culture and policy, in that the culture itself leads to the creation of specific family policies and the level of individual "take up" of policies and programs through societal/cultural expectations about the role of women and mothers. These expectations influence women's decisions about work-

ing and how employers understand and treat mothers in the workplace (167). Thus, laws related to custody, punishment of adultery, inheritance, and adoption have reinforced this ideal of the family. Social norms and culture, family policy, and the choices of women and families combine to create the context for mothering within the specific country. This context, in turn, both enables equality to varying degrees and limits the options and choices of women and men.

When we look at the liberal, Anglo-Saxon welfare states of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the levels of women in the workforce are very similar.

Table 1.1 Women's and the Labour Force

	AUS		CAN		UK		USA	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Participation in Labour Force (%)	59	72	67	71	56	69	56	69
Births Per Woman	1.9		1.6		1.9		1.9	

W- Women, M- Men

Source: Feng et al. 2016. *Little Book of Gender Data*, World Bank.

As Table 1.1 shows, among these four countries, Canada is an outlier in terms of women's participation in the labour force and the number of children per woman. This trend continues when we explore in more depth the participation of mothers in the work force. In Canada, the number of women with children under the age of three who are working outside the home has doubled since the 1970s to 64.4 percent (Ferrao 2010). As well, 68.9 percent of female lone parents with children under the age of sixteen are employed and 73.8 percent of women from two parent families with children under the age of sixteen are employed (Ferrao 2010). Women are much more likely than men to work part-time, as seven out of ten part-time workers are women, and one in five of them state that they work part-time for personal or family reasons (Ferrao 2010). In Australia, 36 percent of mothers work part-time and 25 percent work fulltime. The numbers of mothers working outside the home increased in Australia, but remains lower than in Canada (Baxter 2013). In the UK, statistics demonstrate that there is an overall increase in the number of wom-

en working, which is partly attributable to an increase in the number of mothers who work (Jenkins 2013). Over the past twenty years, the number of mothers working outside the home increased from 67 percent to 72 percent, and the number of lone mothers working increased from 43 percent in 1996 to 60 percent in 2013 (Jenkins 2013). Finally, in the USA, 69.9 percent of women with children under the age of 18 were employed in 2013, an increase of over 30 percent since the 1970s ("Mothers and Families" 2017). Perhaps more significantly, 57.3 percent of mothers with children under the age of one are employed outside the home ("Mothers and Families" 2017).

The relationship between parental leave, childcare, and women's participation in the labour force is complex, as discussed in the next section, but limited conclusions can be drawn from the numbers above when we examine them in the context of policies. As Table 1.2 shows, these four countries offer a range of paid parental leave benefits.

Table 1.2 Paid Parental Leave Benefits

	Total Number of Paid Weeks	Average Payment Rate	Full Rate Equivalent in Weeks
AUS	18	42.3	7.9
CAN	52	52.8	27.4
UK	39	30.9	12
USA	0	0	0
European Union Average	65.6		

Source: OECD 2016

The level of benefits covers the extremes of the USA, with no federal paid leave entitlements, to Canada with fifty-two weeks paid leave, although at a fairly low rate. The UK and Australia claim the middle ground with fairly restrictive and limited benefits. All four liberal welfare regimes, however, are significantly below the European Union average. The lack of paid leave in the USA contributes to the high number of working women with children under the age of one. The longer guaranteed leaves in Canada can also be understood as contributing to the higher level of women in fulltime work, as women do not have to leave employment to care for young children.

The increasing numbers of women with children who work outside the home has both led to changes in policy—for example, through demands for the right to childbirth and maternity leave, high-quality and affordable childcare, and pay equity—and reflects the limitations of the policies available. These effects combine with social norms around motherhood that continue to assert the importance of a mother's presence, especially during the early years. Mompreneurship, opting out, and leaning in are ways in which women struggle to reconcile the conflict between home and work within a policy context that offers limited support. As well, it is important to remember that the choices of other women are even more restricted as they may not have the personal or familial resources available to them to choose the more privileged path. The evolution of the welfare state provides greater choice and support to more women, but continues to have its limitations, particularly under neoliberal ideology.

The Rise of Neoliberalism

Towards the end of the 1970s, the Keynesian welfare state came under attack from neoliberalism. Neoliberalism represented a backlash against the welfare state of the post-war period and argued for more market freedom and less government and state interference (both in markets and in individual lives). With regards to the welfare state, neoliberalism's emphasis on rolling back social programs, reducing government spending, and individual/familial responsibility for their own economic success and security, rather than dependence on state programs, was particularly impactful.

As John Clarke (2010) notes, "For market enthusiasts, there was no domain of social life that could not be improved by its engagement with market dynamics. While this was perhaps most visible in relation to state-related practices, such as social welfare or public service provision, it was claimed to extend to questions of sexual relationships, partner choice and household organization" (376). Whereas the Keynesian welfare state of the post-war period advocated for the political control of markets, neoliberalism aimed for market control of politics (Fraser 2009); the assumption underpinning neoliberalism was that states are inefficient distributors of social goods. Rather markets could do

it better and cheaper and without creating intergenerational dependence on social programs.

Neoliberalism impacts women in unique ways. Alexandra Dobrowolsky (2009) notes that neoliberalism often meant the off-loading of responsibilities from the state to families. Embedded in this was the assumption that women would fill the gaps created by the elimination of political, economic, and social supports. Under neoliberalism, western states, such as Canada, Australia, the USA, and UK, saw an increase in the feminization of poverty (Goldberg and Kremen 1990, 2). Women tend to rely more on government programs, such as childcare and mother's allowances, and be employed by the shrinking government departments that provided them and, thus, feel the impact of these cuts to a greater extent (Dobrowolsky 2009). Ultimately, under neoliberalism, families were to be responsible for themselves rather than dependent on government assistance. In the late 1990s, a shift occurred within these countries—from neoliberalism towards a social investment model. Instead of talking about taxation and spending, governments began talking about strategic "social investments" in areas where the possibility of social and economic returns existed (Dobrowolsky 2009). Ultimately, this model focuses on "employability and creating a knowledgeable, skilled workforce" (Dobrowolsky 2009). Government was to take a more active role in the economy and society than under neoliberalism, but without returning to the perceived "excesses" of the post-war welfare state. The goals of the social investment perspective are increasing social inclusion, minimizing intergenerational poverty, and preparing individuals for likely job conditions, such as decreased job security and an aging population, while overall allowing "individuals and families to maintain responsibility for their well-being" (Jenson 2009, 447).

According to many social policy analysts, the social investment perspective recognizes the contribution of women to society and strives to help women into the workforce, as is argued in the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2012* (Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi 2012). Some maintain that the social investment perspective is helping women attain "life course masculinization" within which women's life and career trajectories would more closely mirror those of men (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002, 94-95). Jane Jenson (2009) suggests that this new approach continues to marginalize women by, first, making them invisible as policies shift to a focus on children, rather than mothers (children, arguably, offer potentially a better return for the investment) and, second, by denying the reality of systemic barriers to women's equality on the "demand" side of the market equation. Neither does it challenge the normative status of the male career path and its dependence on the caring work of women in the private sphere.

The economic crisis of the early twenty-first century, sparked by the collapse of the American sub-market mortgage market, led to new challenges in public policy. The global economic recession placed additional pressures on governments as they faced decreased revenues and increased costs, and demands from citizens for government's assistance in recovering from the crisis. Although global capital has arguably recovered much of its influence in the past few years, the economic crisis did lead to two distinct responses to the previous welfare state models. First, there has been a return to the idea of the state as the "protector" of the people (e.g. Clarke 2010). Second, we are witnessing the emergence of "austerity" as the governing principle in public policy and social programs, particularly in Europe, where countries such as Greece and Ireland have had austerity measures imposed on them by the European Union in exchange for the financial investment necessary to save the countries from bankruptcy. In this sense, austerity appears to be a throwback to the language and the extremes of neoliberalism. Put simply, this approach blames the excessive spending of states, particularly related to the welfare state, for their current economic woes. Advocates of austerity measures argue that the remedy is to be found by drastically reducing the size and scope of the state, government, social programs, and public policy (Mandel 2009). The consequences of this, as with neoliberalism generally, are potentially quite dangerous for women.

Joanne Baker's (2014) analysis of neoliberalism and motherhood in Australia explicitly connects the neoliberal agenda of a smaller state, reduced spending, and individual responsibility to motherhood. She asserts that the "regulatory dimensions of neo-liberalism interact with post-feminism to create an updated and complex environment in which to navigate motherhood" through its focus on private responsibility and the undermining of collective social responses to care-

giving (170). Similarly, a report by the Women's Budget Group in England maintains that female single parents and pensioners in particular are impacted negatively by the cuts to benefits and public services (McVeigh 2013). Specifically, "public sector cuts have reduced job opportunities for women and are making it harder to combine earning a living and taking care of families, and also making it more likely that the gender pay gap will widen" (McVeigh 2013, n.p.). Jane Chelliah (2014) provides further support for this position, arguing that the austerity cuts in the UK have had a disproportionate impact on women, contributing to the feminization of poverty. She connects the "airbrushing" of mothers from public policy to neoliberalism, stating, "neoliberal ideologies claim individuals must work out their own problems within the sphere of the nuclear family because it is too expensive for the government to provide provision…thus, a mother's unpaid work of caregiving becomes integral to the functioning of the neoliberal state" (190).

This political and economic context can be understood as constraining the choices of mothers and families; however, as discussed below, the liberal language of free choice utilized by governments and mothers masks the ideological assumptions and bias within the family policy framework. Although state supports for mothers vary significantly between the Anglo-Saxon liberal states, maternity and parental leaves in these countries provide substantially less income replacement and time away from work than their counterparts in Europe, particularly Scandinavia. The lower level of support for new mothers can be understood as both forcing women back into the workforce shortly after childbirth or adoption to provide financially for their families, or to exploring alternate models of combining work and family; namely: mompreneurship, opting out, or leaning in.

Mompreneurs, Opting Out, and Leaning In

Three models of contemporary motherhood attempt to reconcile the competing claims of home and career for individual women: the mompreneur, opting out, and leaning in. These three models emerged in the context of neoliberal social policy in North America combined with neoconservative ideology aimed at preserving the role of the nuclear family and mothers as caregivers within Canada and the USA. Women's ex-

pectations regarding work, careers, and gender equality within the family have risen significantly over the past few generations (Asher 2011); yet, women remain stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place. While women are increasingly achieving higher levels of education and skills, their ability to accommodate their families within their careers is limited (Ely, Stone, and Ammerman 2014; Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013). The ideas surrounding mompreneurs, leaning in, and opting out speak directly to the challenges mothers face today and the creative ways they are attempting to address them. All three models are limited by the fact that they fail to challenge the status quo and the larger social and structural barriers women face. Instead, they focus on their individual lives and choices. As long as the options for combining work and mothering remain viewed as individual choices, separated from the social and political context that shapes and constrains these choices, little change is possible.

The focus on these types of mothers also ignores the reality of most mothers for whom leaning in, opting out, or mompreneurship are not viable options. The discourse of choice surrounding the models of modern motherhood obfuscates the lack of welfare state social policy, particularly within liberal welfare states, and governmental supports as well as the continuation of gendered expectations around home and caring work. As the sections below demonstrate, these options are only really options for women with the education and personal and financial resources to make them work. Furthermore, instead of challenging barriers to women's equality and full participation in society, these three models reinforce them under the logic of neoliberalism.

Mompreneurs

There are many definitions of a mompreneur, including a woman who balances the role of motherhood with being an entrepreneur, a woman who becomes an entrepreneur after having children, work-at-home moms, a mother who runs her own business out of her home while caring for her children, or a woman who runs a business from her home that focuses on selling goods and services to other moms (Jean and Forbes 2012, 115). The subject of mompreneurs received a great deal of popular attention in recent years. Gillian Anderson and Joseph G. Moore's (2014) analysis of the profiles of mompreneurs in magazines indicates that

mompreneurship reflects as ongoing struggle for these women to earn and care enough to meet their needs and social expectations. Their analysis of the magazines found that:

> while struggles to manage the dual demands of (un)paid work are not altogether ignored, the clear intent of these women's profiles is to celebrate the possibility that mothers might simultaneously carve out a rewarding life, forge stable family relationships, engage in personally rewarding, socially useful paid work, and yet still embody expectations of physical beauty, a sense of self and opportunities for self-care. (99)

Similarly, Franci Rogers's (2012) profile of successful mompreneurs reinforced this ideal with quotations such as "the great thing about this is that I can do it at any hour…I can work things into naptime without being interrupted, or I can do things early in the morning while the kids are still asleep" (41). Being a mompreneur, then, becomes a way of "having it all": the children, the rewarding career, and a stable home and family life while maintaining traditional gender roles. At the same time, the women representing the success of the mompreneur movement are most often white, middle-class, and beautiful, in contrast to the welfare moms of the popular media who are portrayed as racialized, poor, miserable, and lacking in self-control (Anderson and Moore 2014, 99). This dichotomy reinforces gender, class, and racial stereotypes and demonstrates the integrated and intersectional nature of women's struggles to balance work and family.

The rise of the mompreneur as a popular model of motherhood also reflects a subtle critique of the expectations placed on women to be ideal mothers under neoconservatism and to contribute to the public economy under neoliberalism. D. P. Moore (2010), for example, argues that the rise of mompreneurs is partially due to the unrealistic expectations women face regarding their dual (and sometimes conflicting) commitment to their job and their family and the guilt resulting from their failure to balance these two roles successfully (in Jean and Forbes 2012, 115). Melissa Jean and Caroline Forbes (2012) suggest that "becoming a mompreneur can be viewed as a solution to the demanding societal expectations women face" (115). In addition, their 2012 study of mompreneurs in Canada found that most of the women they interviewed came from homes where the income was over $100,000 per year and that the businesses of the mompreneurs comprised less than 20 percent of the family income, suggesting that these were women with the financial freedom to choose entrepreneurship. The business ventures of these women were not solely economically driven. The main reasons for starting their own business was found to be finances, dissatisfaction, market opportunity, and the desire to balance work-family demands. However, as the businesses grew, these women found it increasingly difficult to both care for their children and manage their work (Jean and Forbes 2012).

Part of the popularity of mompreneurs can be tied to its ideal fit with the values of neoliberalism. Mompreneurship can be understood as a reaction to neoliberal and neoconservative ideals and policies that make it harder for women to work outside the home; for example, the lack of affordable quality childcare or the difficulty in finding flexible employment. Yet, mompreneurship is presented as a valuable option for women who want the best of both words. They are viewed as freely making a choice about how to manage family and work, in isolation from the social structures that shape women's working lives. At the same time, this model reifies the role women play as the primary caregivers of small children. Mompreneurs are able to fulfill these conservative roles while still participating in the paid labour force—contributing human capital, utilizing their hard won education and degrees, and making necessary contributions to the family income. As such, the mompreneur is the perfect combination of the liberated woman and the nurturing mother figure.

Opting Out
Opting out speaks to neoconservativism and the idea that women are somehow working against their nature in the public sphere. The "opt-out revolution" is a term coined by the American media and refers to a trend of college-educated, married professional women leaving their careers to become fulltime mothers in recent years (Lovejoy and Stone 2011, 631-632). By "choosing" to opt-out of the paid workforce, these women were represented as reaffirming their roles as mothers. Many scholars, however, question whether or not opting out is really a choice, as opposed to a reaction to the systemic barriers to the inclusion of mothers in the workplace. Brenda Cossman (2009), for example, views the opt-out movement as being an issue of self-governance, there-

by "dissolving any broader sense of collective responsibility for the work/family conflict" (409). Furthermore, research suggests that once these women opt-out, it is difficult to opt back in. Meg Lovejoy and Pamela Stone (2011) question whether these women want to and are able to return to work. Research suggests that women who do re-enter into the workforce after opting out often enter different career streams, abandoning the investment in their previous careers (631-632). In fact, Judith Warner (2013) found that while two-thirds of the women she interviewed had originally been working in male-dominated professions, only a quarter returned to work in those fields. The rest chose more female-dominated and less lucrative occupations, such as teaching and non-profit work, that are more closely linked to the socially ascribed role of women as caring and nurturing. In this sense, opting out appears to be less about women being "liberated" from the paid work force to care for their children and more about women either conforming to traditional gender roles or being squeezed out of their career by structural barriers (Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013). Again, the opt-out women covered by the popular media are more likely to be white, educated, and middle to upper class. They tend to have a husband who can provide for the family, thereby allowing them to opt-out (Warner 2013). In this sense, this is not a free choice available to all women, but a choice for some privileged women.

Shireen Kanji and Emma Cahusac's (2015) analysis of the opt-out movement argues that "research on women's exit from paid work often constructs women as making a binary choice between career and family" (1416), but this is a false dichotomy reflecting the emphasis on individual choice at the root of neoliberal ideology. While the popular media may suggest that women who are opting out are finding their true vocation as mothers, the reality is much more complex. Many of the women Kanji and Cahusac studied wanted to work. Many of their study participants who left work, or opted out, to stay at home with their children, experienced a crisis of identity as they adapted to their new roles as stay-at-home mothers (1423).

The idealization of opting out for mothers is problematic in a number of ways. First, it serves to reify traditional gender roles. Not only does the popular rhetoric surrounding opting out reflect traditional, conservative views on women and motherhood, the choice of opting out is presented as a choice for women or mothers, not men or fathers. Second, as with neoliberalism, this model of motherhood focuses on the individual and individual choices, neglecting the social norms and structures, and the existing public policies that shape the choices available to women. The women choosing to opt-out are overwhelming white professionals who have extensive resources to support their choice, most significantly their spouse's income and financial support. While their lack of dependence on social welfare policies and supports is lauded under neoliberalism, the rhetoric of free choice undermines the very real need of most women for greater state support and their lack of choices. The popular coverage of these women thus glorifies their choice, simplifies the context and complexity of their choices, and serves to reduce pressure on the state to provide adequate support for new mothers negotiating work and family obligations. Finally, a Harvard Business School study of alumni found that the vast majority of women are not opting out at all. It revealed that only 11 percent of their graduates leave the workforce to care for children fulltime. Even fewer women of colour (7 percent) leave the workforce for family reasons, and Black and South Asian women are least likely to leave to care for children fulltime at only 4 percent (Ely, Stone, and Ammerman 2014). These numbers suggest that the phenomenon of opting out is limited to a small minority of women. The fact that women are not opting out of the workforce in significant numbers to care for children fulltime challenges the traditional understanding of gender roles and gender biases that suggest that women are less likely to be committed to their career or more likely to prioritize children over work (Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013).

Leaning In

Leaning in, alternatively, aims to support the career-oriented mother who does not choose to opt-out. Leaning in suggests that women can support each other while keeping their public and private lives separate. Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook chief operating officer and the author of the book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013), argues that the movement is "focused on encouraging women to pursue their ambitions, and changing the conversation from what we can't do to what we can do" (LeanIn.com 2015). In the introduction to her book, Sandberg (2013) maintains that the wom-

en's movement has stalled. Women, she says, have made huge advances, but men still rule the world and "conditions for all women will improve when there are more women in leadership roles giving strong and powerful voice to their needs and concerns" (7). While leaning in is also focused on the choices of individual women, Sandberg does recognize that structural barriers, such as sexism, discrimination, or a lack of leave, do hold women back. However, she is more concerned with the "barriers that exist within ourselves," arguing that "getting rid of these internal barriers is critical to gaining power" (8). In this sense, women are both to blame for their own situation and responsible for changing themselves and, in turn, the world around them.

Sandberg's book remains a source of controversy and is heavily critiqued by feminists for its dismissal of structural barriers and the uncritical adoption of corporate mentality. In particular, the movement is often criticized for refusing to recognize the challenges and conflict women face because of these two roles. Instead of looking at how to change society so that women can succeed, *Lean In* explores how to change ourselves so that we can succeed. Susan Faludi (2013) writes:

> When asked why she [Sandberg] isn't pushing for structural social and economic change, Sandberg says she's all in favor of 'public policy reform,' though she's vague about how exactly that would work, beyond generic tsk-tsking about the pay gap and lack of maternity leave. She says she supports reforming the workplace—but the particulars of comparable worth or subsidized child care are hardly prominent elements of her book or her many media appearances. (n.p.)

Similarly, Linda Burnham (2013) argues that, *Lean In* "has essentially produced a manifesto for corporatist feminism," a "1% feminism" that "is all about the glass ceiling, never about the floor" (n.p.). Instead, Sandberg focusses on how women can change themselves, embrace corporate culture, and encourages women to engage more with that culture in order to (somehow) change the world around them. In doing so, she leaves herself open to the criticism of people, such as Christine Williams (2013), who maintain that *Lean In* supports a vision of neoliberal feminism and corporate capitalism. Furthermore, the vision represented in the book and movement focuses largely on elite and educated individuals. Sandberg (2013) refers to the men that still rule the world (7), but neglects the role that race and class play in the world and under patriarchy. This omission makes her argument even more simplistic.

Rebecca Colesworthy (2014) also criticizes Sandberg for blaming the victim (although the victims are working women who fail to make it to the top), favouring the individual over the collective and prioritizing economic equality over other forms of equality (155-156). Other critics, such as Sylvia Maier (2014), challenge Sandberg's enchantment with the American myth and the corresponding obfuscation of entrenched systems of gender inequality by looking beyond America to see if leaning in really works. Maier concludes that Sandberg's view is ethnocentric and does not apply to women "living and working in parts of the world where socio-cultural factors and not a lack of work ethic or will to lead are the paramount obstacles to women's professional success" (63). Arguably, this quotation also applies to women in western, Anglo-Saxon democratic states.

The privileging of markets over states under neoliberalism also underpins the arguments in Sandberg's book. Although corporate America is Sandberg's area of expertise, her dismissal of social and policy change as someone else's job reinforces the importance of corporations in women's lives. By focussing on what women can do to change their attitudes and lean in, she reinforces the myth that hard work is the key to success and that women's choices will determine how successful they are.

Discussion and Conclusion

All three models—mompreneurs, opting out, and leaning in—focus on the challenge of combining the ideals of gender equality that working women today grew up with and the continuing barriers parents of young children face when trying to negotiate work and home responsibilities. All three models adopt the language of free choice that is so important to neoliberal ideology, arguing that women have choices about how they combine work and family. Mompreneurs can embrace liberalism's work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit. Those who opt-out can be seen as freely choosing motherhood over career and those who lean in are choosing not to let gender be a barrier to their success.

The three models are also related in that none of them advances a critique of market capitalism or the

laissez-faire state. While the critics of these models of motherhood are quick to point to the structural barriers that lead to women having to choose between spending time with their children or having a successful career, the advocates of these three options neglect the societal factors that shape women's choices such as paid parental leaves, affordable quality childcare, and flexible work arrangements. Positive popular representations of mompreneurs, opting out, and leaning in also render race, class, and ability invisible. The options are presented as choices for all women whereas the evidence indicates that these limited options are still only options for women with the education, money, and support to access them. They do not speak to the experiences of most women. The women profiled in studies on mompreneurs, opting out, and leaning in are overwhelmingly white, middle to upper class, educated, married, and heterosexual. Their experiences are not evidence of broader societal change, innovative family friendly policies, or a dramatic rethinking of gender roles within the family. Rather they are the experiences of an elite few who are lucky enough to have these options for balancing work and family.

The supporters of these models of motherhood appear to have accepted the premises of neoliberalism and neoconservativism that focus on women's duty to home and family as well as the individual responsibility (versus a societal responsibility) to provide and care for their families. These shifts reflect the values of neoliberal feminism, which promotes individual responsibility, limited government, and market driven solutions to social problems (Williams 2013, 59). As well, it "absolves capitalism of playing any role in the oppression of women" (59). It is not surprising, then, that these options for mothers are most prevalent and popular in liberal welfare states where the social supports for women and men to balance family and work are sorely lacking.

Over the past 100 years, women in western Anglo-Saxon countries have made remarkable gains towards equality. Women are far more likely to be educated and employed now than during previous generations. While women's role in the public sphere and paid workforce has changed substantially, the cultural norms around motherhood and the unattainable ideals imposed on mothers by society, popular culture, and experts have been (in some ways) slower to change and less likely to change for the benefit of women. Today's

mothers are more likely to pull the double shift of paid work and caring work and less able to connect the burdens and barriers they face in relation to systemic and structural causes. Instead, they are required to either "lean in" or "opt-out." The idea of a mother as self-sacrificing and fulfilled primarily through the care of her family endures despite the critique of many feminists before us. The major challenge of our times is the rise of neoliberalism, followed by its variations of investment and austerity, and the disconnect between these ideologies and the lived reality of mothers and their social, political, and economic causes. In my working environment, as a professor, I am told that it was my "choice" to have children and so I have to live with the consequences of my decisions. The problems I face are the result of my individual "inability" to manage my commitments, not the fact that I work in an environment that demands total commitment from its workers and which is based on the assumption that professors have wives at home who are responsible for the home and hearth. Until we, as a society, begin to seriously challenge the norms of mothering and the norms of the workplace, the double burden placed on women will not change.

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