



## How Global Feminism Forgot Motherhood—and Waged the UN’s Quiet War on Love

By Mahayla Bassett

### DIALOGUE

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*What if love, not labor, is the foundation of a just society? Motherhood proves essential to human flourishing.*

“What about love?”

My question hung in the air of the United Nations conference room, met with a ripple of snickers. In 2024, I attended the annual 68th [Commission on the Status of Women](#) in New York City. At this annual event, experts discuss economic freedom for women and the so-called crisis of “unpaid care work”—a sterile term for what most people simply call motherhood. Their proposed solution for gender economic equality? More government-funded childcare centers so mothers can work full time.

I continued, “Isn’t a child better off with an unpaid caregiver who loves them, like a mother, rather than a government-paid care worker who has no emotional connection to them?”

There was silence. Then another wave of muffled laughter. The presenter turned to me and answered in a tone one would use to correct a naive child.

“Love is a dangerous angle,” she said. “We can’t afford to talk about love. What matters is the injustice of unpaid care work and the lack of opportunities for women.”

As the 69th conference convened this spring, I reflected on my time at CSW-68, where motherhood was framed as ‘unpaid care work’—an oppression for women to overcome. The analysts presented gender-equal economic freedom through government intervention in childcare as the solution.

Modern discussions around gender equality often prioritize financial independence at the expense of the relational and emotional aspects of caregiving. The [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), considered the most progressive blueprint for advancing women’s rights, stresses the need for women’s economic independence. While economic independence is important, what’s overlooked in this document is that true empowerment doesn’t lie in monetary gain or participation in the public sphere. What is missing from the modern conversation are the unquantifiable, yet vital factors: love, dignity, and the intrinsic value of human life. The “experts” at the UN didn’t understand that it is precisely this unquantifiable work that ensures the happiness and continuity of society.

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State-sponsored childcare frees mothers for careers, but is it ideal for children? Erica Komisar, a psychoanalyst, child development expert, and author of the book *Being There: Why Prioritizing Motherhood in the First Three Years Matters*, said: “Institutional care is not and never will be a good option for children under the age of three. There are so many studies which link institutional care from zero to three with increased cortisol stress hormone levels, behavioral issues, anxiety, and increased aggression.”

Jenet Erickson, a senior research fellow at the Institute for Family Studies focusing on maternal and child well-being, agrees. She **highlights** a study demonstrating that there were correlations between time spent in institutionalized care and child outcomes: “By age four-and-a-half, children who had spent more than 30 hours per week in child care had, on average, **worse outcomes** in every area of social-emotional development— weaker social competence, more behavior problems, and greater conflict with adults—at rates **three times higher than their peers.**”

Of course, many mothers of young children work not for personal gratification but to help provide for their families’ needs. Yet many would prefer to work less and stay home more, if given the option. In 2013, **Pew Research** found that nearly half (47%) of all American mothers said their ideal situation would be part-time rather than full-time employment. Among full-time working mothers, 44% said part-time would be ideal, and another 9% would prefer not to work outside the home at all. Even among mothers who were not employed, 40% said they would ideally work part-time, while only 22% preferred full-time work.

Preferences vary by circumstance, but overall, the data suggests a significant portion of American mothers do not see full-time employment as the ideal. This should be telling. While the UN continues to push for more and more female “representation” in the workforce, many women’s actual preferences seem to contradict that goal. For half of mothers, *working less*, not more, would be better. Mothers intuitively understand that their place is with their babies. Rather than undermining this bond, governments should aim to support and strengthen it.

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In Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, eudaimonia—human flourishing—is the ultimate goal of life. Unlike wealth or pleasure, which are pursued as means to other ends, eudaimonia is an end in itself. For Aristotle, true happiness is found not in the accumulation of wealth but in cultivating virtues like wisdom and courage. Economic productivity, in this view, is a tool, not the goal. The real purpose of life lies in moral growth. This is why roles like motherhood, grounded in love, education, and care, are so vital. They shape the virtues that enable both individuals and society to thrive.

In the *Ethics*, Aristotle writes: “For without friends” — and here I’d insert ‘all meaningful relationships’ — “no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods....for what is the use of such prosperity without the opportunity of beneficence?” Beneficence—which encompasses [mercy, kindness, generosity, and love](#)—is not just a virtue but the essence of humanity’s most meaningful relationships.

This reverence for relationships is deeply embedded in ancient thought. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the hero of the epic, Odysseus, is more than a warrior; he is the clever king of Ithaca and a family man who never wanted to go to war in the first place. After the Trojan War, he endures a decade-long struggle to return home, facing countless trials and obstacles. He encounters monsters and deities who live in isolation and tempt him to live by appetite instead of duty. The Cyclopes live in chaos, rejecting both law and social bonds. The enchantresses Circe and Calypso offer him worldly comfort and immortality, urging him to remain.

Though these offers are tempting, Odysseus resists. He gets distracted in adventures along the way, but ultimately, what he truly longs for is neither wealth nor power, but his wife, his son, and his homeland. He recognizes that these relationships are where his identity and purpose lie. When the nymph Calypso desires to keep him forever on her island, he [tells](#) her: “... I wish and long day in and day out to reach my home, and to see the day of my return. And if again some god shall smite me on the wine-dark sea, I will endure it, having in my breast a heart that endures affliction.” The Greeks understood that a meaningful life is not built on material success or independence alone, but on love, duty, and belonging. Like Aristotle, Homer reminds us that without these, even the greatest achievements ring hollow.

If it is relationships in general that give life meaning, why is it so vital that a mother, in particular, be the one to provide care? The answer lies in what only a mother is able to give her child. Komisar explained in an interview at [ARC Conversations 2024](#), “Babies are born neurologically fragile, not resilient. And so what it means is they need their mothers to do a few really important biological things for them. They need them to buffer them from stress. They need [their mothers] to help regulate their emotions ... and to teach them about relationships and

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intimacy in the world ... Mothers really are, in providing that emotional security in the first three years, kind of like the central nervous system to a baby in the first year ... That first three years lay down ... the emotional security [and] the mental health for their future.” In other words, a mother’s presence is not simply comforting—it is formative.

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A 2023 [study](#) on the mother-baby bond highlights that this bond is not just emotional, but also “a bodily, immunological, perceptive, and affective relationship” that begins before birth and continues through touch, eye contact, and breastfeeding. This physical relationship plays a crucial role in both postpartum maternal well-being and infant development, influencing emotional attachment, mental health, and even neurodevelopment. Ultimately, the mother’s physical and emotional availability, or *being there*, is both foundational to the child’s lifelong emotional security, and protective for the mother herself.

*The Family: A Proclamation to the World* affirms this truth: “Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.” President Henry B. Eyring elaborates on this divine design in his 2018 talk [Women and Gospel Learning in the Home](#), observing that a mother’s unique spiritual sensitivity and capacity to love are key to her ability to nurture: “It takes great love to feel the needs of someone else more than your own. That is the pure love of Christ for the person you nurture ... As daughters of God, you have an innate and great capacity to sense the needs of others and to love.”

This nurturing love—where children first learn trust, empathy, self-control, and a sense of identity—is most naturally and powerfully given by a mother. These lessons cannot be taught impersonally; they must be modeled through an emotional and physical relationship. The best way to teach a child through relationships is to be in one with them. In this, no person can replace a mother, who has the first physical and emotional connection to her child. Though children will learn from many people throughout life—fathers, teachers, friends, and others—the mother is the first and most formative teacher. Her

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school of love lays the foundation for moral character, relational health, and ultimately civic life—the foundation for how to navigate in the world. Can an institution truly replace a woman whose body formed the child and whose presence now forms the soul?

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In a world that continually tells women how much they need to walk away from motherhood, we should seriously consider how much mothers do for the world. What if we valued motherhood as much as labor? What if we saw caregiving not as a burden to pass off to someone else, but as the soul-shaping, culture-forming vocation that it truly is? The greatest opportunity—and perhaps the greatest power—lies in the quiet work of nurturing, educating, and loving the next generation.

The role of mothers is irreplaceable. There can be no serious discussion of childcare or “unpaid care work” without acknowledging that emotional attachment and maternal bonding are vital components of child development. A mother’s love is not just a sentiment—it’s a developmental necessity. When wealth and equality become the only measures of value, we lose sight of the very people who make a healthy civilization possible. This Mother’s Day, may we honor not just what mothers do, but who they are—the hands that rock the cradle of the world, the hearts that keep humanity alive.

About the author

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Mahayla Bassett is completing her Master's in Humanities at Ralston College. She is passionate about education in the classical tradition and the enduring role of the home in shaping culture.