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Final Argument Proposal

The Importance of Motherhood

A middle-aged woman stands alone in her cramped kitchen; she's watching a re-run of a *Lifetime* movie she has seen five times in the past on her small television. The sun begins to set; the room looks ominous. The only brightness comes from the dull glow of a stove light. As the clock strikes seven p.m., she feeds her two small dogs. They jump all over her in anticipation to eat. Being what she calls an "empty nester," all of her children are in college or working; thus, she is left solely with her two dogs to feed and keep her company. "It's so strange to be alone. I raised children for twenty-two years. Even though I divorced my husband a few years back, I have never felt so lonely. It gets pretty boring around here," single mother of three Jan Heath explains. "I'm so proud of my children. I love hearing from them about what's going on in school or their latest accomplishments. I'm looking forward to my son and daughter coming home from the summer. Things tend to liven up then" (Heath, Jan). Regardless of her home's silence and emptiness, a feeling of warmth seems to pervade through the house. The pictures of her children's senior portraits and the myriad of stories she tells bring life to her wrinkled face and the house's quiet air. At her age and stage in life, Jan Heath realizes that the difficulties she's encountered in the past are trivial as she smiles with the pride of an accomplished mother.

Heath is now able to reflect on the benefits on motherhood and the joy that her children provide for her. Nonetheless, motherhood has become debated in the United States to the point where its disadvantages are greatly portrayed. Although women traditionally acted as child bearers and were confined to the home, feminism historians Caldwell and Schindylmayr explain

that education and urbanization allowed for women to question their roles and rights in society: “The women's movement provided the justification, and huge growth in the tertiary sector of the economies provided the opportunity” (4). Women were working and able to plan their lives due to the new contraceptives of the 1960s, parallel attitudinal and legal changes affecting sterilization, and abortion (Caldwell and Schindylmayr 4). Unfortunately, women encountered difficulties regarding the balance of children with careers and daily obligations, the economic penalties of motherhood, and the unwillingness to have children due to increased immigration. They began concentrating their resources on a smaller number of children rather than having large families like in the past (Caldwell and Schindylmayr 5). Nonetheless, the physical and mental benefits of pregnancy, the growth in the phenomenon of “mompreneurs” and equally-shared parenting, and the economic need for increased birth rates in Western countries show that motherhood should still be cherished and encouraged. In essence, women should be valued and take pride in their unique ability in order to benefit both themselves and their nations.

Although many women use contraceptives to avoid the difficulties associated with pregnancy and childbirth, this unique experience can be very beneficial. Pregnancy causes women to become more clever due to the growth of the hippocampus in the brain. Motherhood also gives women a better sense of sight, allows for stress-relieving hormones to be released, and decreases the risk for breast, ovarian, and uterine cancer (Turner 1). Unfortunately, *Harvard Business Review* writer Hewlett explains that the early years of career building overlap with the prime years of childbearing (4). Regardless of these physical and mental benefits, young women evade pregnancy because are told that they need to be seriously committed to their careers while in their 20s in order to be successful later in life (Hewlett 5). Many who take this path end up on the “wrong side of 35” and believe that they can have children when in their 40s; nonetheless,

89% of women are misguided in thinking that they will not face difficulties in conceiving at this age (6). If women chose to have children earlier in life rather than waiting until their 30s and 40s, there would be a decreased likelihood of complications in childbirth. Until then, 22% of women with professional degrees are not in the labor market at all due to pregnancy (Hewlett 6-7) while 42% of American women in corporate positions are childless (Hewlett 2).

Statistics tell women pregnancy and careers are hard to balance; nonetheless, *Washington Post* writer Vaugh interviewed many about the phenomenon of "mompreneurs," mothers who become motivated and business-minded due to motherhood (Vaugh 1). Meg Mateo Ijasco, who was blindsided by pregnancy right after quitting graduate school to start an independent craft business in 2001, said the following: "Pregnancy was new to me and business was new to me . . . I was just open minded and felt like I could do or try anything" (Vaughn 1). Joyce DeLucca started up her successful Wall Street investment group, Kingsland Capital, while pregnant. "The company closed their first \$400 million CDO fund 90 days after the birth of her first child" (Vaughn 1). Pregnancy gives women inspiration for a new business venture. Penny Domschot conceived a baby in addition to Baby Celebration, a designer baby merchandise trade show hosted in Los Angeles every year. "Being pregnant and being a mom teaches you to be a master juggler that goes all day long--and that's really the essence of being an entrepreneur," Domschot says. "So it's really the best training you can get in so many ways" (Vaugh 1).

In addition to the mental, physical, and possible entrepreneurial benefits of giving birth, there are many added perks to having children. Parenthood can lower blood pressure, give parents tax savings (\$3,500 per year), ensure greater mental health (greater satisfaction and emotional well-being), enhance memory by revisiting and renewing knowledge, increase self-esteem, allow for more relaxing activities, and is associated with greater happiness compared to

childless couples (Murphy 1-10). Unfortunately, women often face financial difficulties when having children and feel as though they become the primary care-giver. Motherhood carries enormous economic penalties: women in the U.S. make 78% of the male wage (Hewlett 4), and motherhood also results in a wage penalty of about 7% per child (Hewlett 6). Furthermore, women face inequality in both being mothers and workers. Currently, 9% of men primarily prepare meals, 10% do laundry, 5% clean the house, 9% take off from work when a child is sick, 9% take the lead with helping children with homework, and 3% organize activities (Hewlett 5).

Luckily, there is a solution to motherhood's financial burdens and women's stress in balancing careers and children. The phenomenon of equally shared parenting proves that managing two jobs with children works better with dual parenting. Francine Deutsch, psychology professor at Mount Holyoke College explains, "Equally sharing parents develop more egalitarian ideas about gender, and make choices that result in comparable work hours and salaries" (1). Couples equally share certain roles like preparing meals, changing diapers, kissing their children's boo-boos, taking off from work when their kids are ill, and teaching them skills such as riding a bike. Although the "'ideology of intensive motherhood' prescribes that mothers have an exclusive responsibility to children," fathers in equal parenting situations accept equality in nurturing ability; thus, they work out shared care of their children (Deutsch 2). Deutsch uses the latest government figures available to show that "fathers are the primary caregivers of 11.4% of all preschool children whose mothers are employed" (3). In essence, mothers feel relieved as interviewed fathers express their positive experiences: "That caregiver side of me just got to blossom . . . that part of me that can just really give, be really nurturing and supportive. I feel really great about it" (Deutsch 4).

Not only is child rearing a life-changing experience for mothers and parents, but having children is essential for countries' economies and their standards of living. Leonard Schoppa, professor of politics at the University of Virginia, explains the following: Fertility rates have been declining in most of the developed world since the 1950s, falling below the replacement rate of 2.1 in many countries in the 1970s (1). Countries such as Japan, Korea, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, Greece, and many of the former Socialist Eastern European nations are now faced with the problem of the "lowest low fertility rates" of 1.2-1.4 in the first decade of the 2000s (Schoppa 1). According to the formulas used by demographers, a sustained birthrate of 1.3 will "reduce the size of a nation's population by 75 percent over the course of a century" (Schoppa 2). This falling birthrate threatens to disrupt pension and health insurance programs that rely on tax-paying workers to cover the cost of providing benefits to retirees. Schoppa explains, "Policymakers in charge of these programs warned that low fertility rates would produce worker-to-retiree ratios below 2:1 that would put a crushing tax burden on the small younger cohorts that would be called upon to cover their elders' pension and health obligations" (2).

When looking at these figures of population decline, many may point to immigration as a solution low birth rates in Westernized countries. According to the United States Population Division (UNPD), "[for] France, United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union, the numbers of migrants needed to offset population decline are less than or comparable to recent past experience" (4). The U.S. Census Bureau shares that "[over] the last 10 years, the foreign-born population from Latin America increased by 5.1 million, reaching 21.2 million in 2010 (Acosta & de la Cruz), which is over half of the total foreign-born population. Nonetheless, "[the] numbers of migrants needed to offset declines in the working-age population are significantly larger than those needed to offset total population decline" (UNPD 4). The UN

found a general trend throughout industrialized countries showing that international migration is needed to reduce declines in the potential support ratio in order to increase the size of the working-age population and maintain retirement ages (4). “Maintaining potential support ratios at current levels through replacement migration alone seems out of reach, because of the extraordinarily large numbers of migrants that would be required” (UNPD 4).

After realizing that the fate of many industrialized nations is in the hands of mothers, one realizes that motherhood is undervalued and that urgent change is needed. Considering that pregnancy helps women physically, mentally, and has many smaller added benefits, motherhood should be seen as a gift for women and encouraged. Women often worry about balancing their careers and children, but having children can benefit women by transforming them into “mompreneurs” and giving them needed skill in multi-tasking. Motherhood carries economic penalties and a great deal of stress; nonetheless, equally shared parenting encourages women to have high-paying careers and share child care with their spouses to ensure balance. Finally, many women look at immigration as a reason to not have children because natural population decline would be replaced. For the majority of industrialized countries, either immigration needs to increase greatly or women within the country need to have more children in order to maintain past standards of living. After weighing all of the advantages and disadvantages of motherhood, only the words of a mother can truly capture the unique gift and benefits of childbearing: “My entire life changed after having children and I wouldn't change any of it. Holidays regained their meaning; I had finally obtained unconditional love... something all the money in the world can't buy” (Heath, Jan).

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