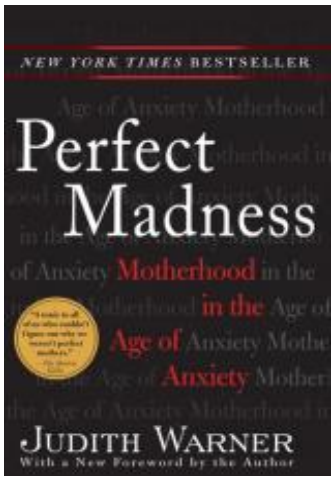
Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety

by Judith Warner



About the Book

Judith Warner became a mother while living abroad. Returning to the United States from France several years later with her two young children, she was shocked to discover the differences between the two cultures in regard to motherhood-with the U.S. coming up short. What she found here in the U.S. are mothers living lives of quiet desperation as they struggle to parent in an age of anxiety.

Regardless of race, cultural background, geographic location, or working versus stay-at-home moms, the mothering concerns of American mothers are largely the same. Warner, a writer and journalist, examines how we've gotten to this state of perfect madness-and where we're headed. She draws on her own experiences as both a stay-at-home and working mother, along with interviews with more than 150 women nationwide. She also evaluates the influences that popular culture, economics, politics, and psychology have had in shaping society's perceptions of mothers and motherhood.

Intelligent, frank, and entertaining, **Perfect Madness** is an insightful look at modern motherhood, an illuminating history of a century of American culture, and an urgent wake-up call for the future of the American family.

Discussion Guide

1. What is your overall impression of **Perfect Madness**? Of the ideas, arguments, and facts the author presents in this book, what stood out the most for you?

2. When you began reading this book, did you agree with the author's assertion on page 7 that "the climate in which we now mother is, in many ways, just plain crazy"? What was your opinion by the time you reached the last page?

3. Many of Judith Warner's points are made in reference to her experiences as a new mother in France before returning to the United States. What are the differences in the ways the two cultures approach motherhood, as well as their

attitudes toward mothers in general? What would you say is the biggest difference?

4. Discuss the ways in which the media has influenced society's view of motherhood, from television shows to magazines to your local newspaper.

5. What other external influences over the last several decades-including politics, feminism, scientific studies, publications such as Dr. Spock's child care guides, and product manufacturers-have contributed to this "age of anxiety"?

6. Does it surprise you that in her research Warner found that the women she interviewed "were strikingly similar in their attitudes toward motherhood, whatever their race, cultural background, or geographic location in America"? How about the fact that, as Warner says, "on the big issues there were no real differences between working and non-working mothers" (21)?

7. Warner states, "The Mommy Mystique isn't the work of any kind of 'right-wing conspiracy.' It isn't even, exclusively, a matter of our trying to fit into unrealistic, unnatural ideals imposed on us by the media or by that nebulous thing, 'society.' After all, like men, we now shape the media. We are fully part of society, not marginal to it. The demon images of perfect motherhood that haunt us are very largely of our own creation. They are not just a matter of what we think and what we do. They are part and parcel of who we are. And of how we were brought up-in a certain time, a certain place, and under the sway of a certain kind of politics" (44). How much do you think women are responsible for the state of motherhood today? Is this, for women, difficult to accept?

8. What effects will today's "touchy-feely form of mothering" (82) have on our children? How much do you think *your* mother's parenting style has influenced your own?

9. What would you most like to see change in your life in regard to motherhood? How about in society? What role do you think the government should play in providing additional benefits to American families, such as national daycare?

10. Are there any solutions to alleviating the age of anxiety that accompanies modern motherhood? Did you gain any practical advice from **Perfect Madness**?

Author Bio

Judith Warner is the author of a range of nonfiction books, among them **You Have the Power: How to Take Back Our Country and Restore Democracy in America** (with Howard Dean) and the bestselling biography **Hillary Clinton: The Inside Story**. A former special correspondent for *Newsweek* in Paris, she reviews books for *The Washington Post* and has written about politics and women?s issues for magazines including *The New Republic* and *Elle*. She lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband and their children.

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