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Modern Motherhood: Developments and Trends in Motherhood in Contemporary France

Despite feminist movements and historical developments in several countries, societal expectations surrounding women and motherhood continue to transcend time and space in France. In May 2020, French author Claire Legendre acknowledged that, “in the eyes of society, it is as if one can only be fulfilled after having experienced pregnancy and motherhood, as if a woman’s life is not already a complete experience in itself.” Even with developments like maternity leave, an increased focus on the role of the father, and new attitudes that women have a choice whether or not to have children, women who choose not to reproduce are still asked to justify their “non-participation.” With society’s constant expectations, pressures, and guilt imposed on women, this topic begs the question: do women really have a choice? What are the consequences of these pressures and expectations? What impact will this have on the future of France? The choice not to have children by many young French women has since resulted in the lowest birth rate in France since 1982. In order to examine why young women are increasingly choosing not to have children and why Millennials and Gen Z individuals in France make different decisions than their parents, I created a questionnaire asking young adults and current parents about their own experiences and opinions. Examining the complexities of motherhood and its inextricable link to femininity, this thesis and poster explores cultural views, attitudes, and contemporary trends in motherhood in France, and how these trends materialize through contemporary French film.

Born and raised in Chicago, Francesca is a junior at Chapman University pursuing her degree in Documentary Film and Broadcast Journalism, while also receiving a BA in French and Interdisciplinary Studies minor within Chapman’s Honors Program.