

## **Mothers Unite: Organizing for Workplace Flexibility and the Transformation of Family Life**

Jocelyn Crowley.

New York: Cornell University Press, 2013.

REVIEWED BY REBECCA REES

In *Mothers Unite*, Jocelyn Crowley takes the reader into the world of mother's groups to explore their potential role in advocating for greater workplace flexibility. For Crowley, workplace flexibility is cast as a significant issue to mothers that forms part of the popular conversation and media hype branded the 'mommy wars.' Whether to work or not and how, she argues, is both personal and public. As a result, this decision-making is a significant source of guilt internally and externally regardless of the direction a mother takes.

Although *Mothers Unite* contains themes that are relevant beyond the United States of America it is also a very American exploration. The lack of workplace flexibility outlined by Crowley was more disturbing than the Australian experience that I am situated in. Whilst this was the case, managing the competing demands of work and family is a pervasive problem that extends far beyond the USA and in this respect this book will be of interest to many.

Crowley focuses on workplace flexibility from the perspective of women. She argues that because women are biologically more involved in childrearing, they experience more of the conflict between work and family and as a result are more likely to proactively advocate for change. As a consequence of this focus, the book only occasionally touched on how men fit into the picture; a theme that could have enriched and provided greater depth to the study. Despite this limitation the book nonetheless takes the reader on a fascinating journey into the lives of women involved in five very different mothers groups and how they perceive workplace flexibility.

Educated, resourced and mainly white women dominated the five mothers groups investigated. Mocha Moms were the only exception to this with its focus on women of color. The groups were predominately left and democrat leaning with the exception of Mothers of Preschoolers a Christian-based organization with a younger and less educated membership who were more likely to be stay at home mothers. Around half of Mothers & More, the National Association of Mother's Centers and Mocha Moms were in paid employment. The mainly online organization, MomsRising, was dominated by working mothers and had the greatest established interest in advocating for workplace flexibility.

Crowley describes why mother become members of mother's organizations as primarily for emotional support, friendship and parenting resources. Political advocacy, whilst an interest, was not the primary reason for joining with the exception of MomsRising. Crowley expresses puzzlement by this and explores whether a reluctance to be seen to be engaging with the 'mommy wars' could be a factor. She finds that the majority of members are not concerned with the judgment of others or themselves and argues that the perceived 'mommy wars' need not be a deterrent for these groups advocating for workplace reform. Nonetheless the 'mommy wars' remains a factor as members actively avoid conversations that might enter this territory. As a result Crowley recommends that organizations need to carefully understand their membership before advocating for change—to tread carefully.

The take-home message from Crowley's book is that women in mother's organizations desire workplace flexibility and that this may be a unifying theme for a mother's movement involving a significant number of members. While mothers agreed on flexibility, there was much less consensus on the role of government in bringing about change with strong support for government to educate business but not for mandating provisions. Crowley concludes with her five-step call to arms for the leaders of mother's organization to mobilize their membership and advocate for change.

## **Moms Gone Mad: Motherhood and Madness, Oppression and Resistance**

Gina Wong, ed.

Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2012.

REVIEWED BY MARYN BELLING

*Moms Gone Mad*, edited by Gina Wong, is at once an embrace to all mothers, a beacon shining from many areas of scholarship, and a call-to-action for all women. The social, medical, and psychiatric constructs that seek to help mothers are also those which pigeon-hole them. Each piece in the text massages the scar-tissue of modern motherhood to expose an incomplete healing—for true healing would make the world a better place for current and future moms.

*Moms Gone Mad* is arranged into three main sections: Motherhood: Madness and Oppression, Motherhood: Resistance and Empowerment, Narrative Voices: Mad Moms. Madness and Oppression introduces us to the ethnographies of institutions that frame madness in motherhood, visiting with contemporary mothers and examining the corpus of historical parenting guides,