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# The Politics of the Mothers' Movement in the United States

## *Possibilities and Pitfalls*

*This article considers what ought to be the goals, strategies, and tactics of the emerging mothers' movement, especially if it is to be compatible with feminism. This movement requires an understanding of motherhood specific enough to sustain collective action and inclusive enough to encompass mothers traditionally marginalized and oppressed on the basis of their social and economic positions. These two requirements mean that the movement's understanding of motherhood will also be contentious. I argue that carefully distinguishing the mothers' movement from maternalist politics helps to clarify the goals and strategies of the mothers' movement and to avoid the pitfalls of maternalist politics. On the basis of this distinction, I argue that six immediate concerns should be at the forefront of the mothers' movement. These concerns include ending 'the mommy wars,' ensuring the inclusivity of the movement, avoiding the deligitimation of any mothers, drawing younger women into the movement, making alliances with other care givers, especially paid care givers, and ensuring that the mothers' movement does not undermine women's reproductive rights. I emphasize the ways in which these concerns can be in conflict with each other in order to recognize the difficulties of the sort of coalition building that the mothers' movement requires. I believe that the mothers' movement will be better and stronger in the long run for taking the time to think through these issues at its inception in order to avoid pitfalls such as false unity and over-reliance on media politics.*

A political movement by and on behalf of mothers seems to be emerging in the U.S., where a variety of concerted efforts to raise awareness about mothers' needs and interests and to work for change on behalf of mothers and families appear to be underway. This development is suggested by the publication and popular reception of works such as Anne Crittenden (2001), Peggy Orenstein (2001), Joan Williams (2001), and Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels

(2004). It is also suggested by the recent founding or reinvigoration of organizations such as MOTHERS (Mothers Ought to Have Equal Rights; [www.mothersoughttohaveequalrights.org](http://www.mothersoughttohaveequalrights.org)), The Mothers Movement Online ([www.mothersmovement.org](http://www.mothersmovement.org)), Mothers and More ([www.mothersandmore.org](http://www.mothersandmore.org)), and the Motherhood Project ([www.motherhoodproject.org](http://www.motherhoodproject.org)), as well as the ongoing work of the National Association of Mothers' Centers ([www.motherscenter.org](http://www.motherscenter.org)) which partnered with Anne Crittenden and Naomi Wolf to launch MOTHERS. A number of recent on-line publications, the best of which are Wilkinson (2005) and Judith Stadtman Tucker (2004), have also argued that a distinct mothers' movement is beginning to emerge.

But what might be the goals of this incipient mothers' movement? What ideological, strategic, and organizational concerns does it face? In this essay I address these questions in connection with another, more difficult, question: what might it mean for this emerging mothers' movement to be in some way feminist? I argue that the emerging mothers' movement ought to begin by taking up six fundamental goals, but I recognize that some of these goals are in tension with each other. So I also suggest that these tensions are exactly where the movement should begin in refining its ideological commitments, formulating its agenda, and developing strategies for change. Those of us engaged in this movement should not expect to resolve these tensions but rather should be prepared to negotiate and renegotiate them precisely as part of our strategies for change. My analysis of the goals I recommend, including their conflicting implications, suggests that the emerging mothers' movement will be precariously grounded unless it can encompass an inclusive but also contentious understanding of motherhood and what it means to be a mother.

The extent to which the emerging mothers' movement in the U.S. is led by and primarily geared toward white, middle-class women in particular suggests the importance of both inclusiveness and a willingness to deal with contention around issues of motherhood. In the U.S., for example, there are motherhood-based groups led by women of color, especially African-American women. These groups, however, tend to focus on different issues than those so far raised by groups like MOTHERS (Mothers Ought to Have Equal Rights) or The Mothers' Movement Online; they are particularly concerned with poverty, welfare reform, public schooling, and the effects of violence, especially gun violence, in predominantly African-American communities. In Philadelphia, for instance, Mothers in Charge, founded by Dorothy Johnson-Speight in 2003, provides support to family members of victims of gun violence, advocates for victims' rights, and does violence prevention programs in schools and for youth and community groups ([www.mothersincharge.org/a-mission.htm](http://www.mothersincharge.org/a-mission.htm)). In Philadelphia and New York, Moms on the Move, a group of primarily African-American women who work on welfare reform and school reform issues, has also been active and to some extent effective on these fronts (Mediratta and Karp, 2003; Featherstone, 2002).

Groups such as these, however, do not appear to be on the radar screen of

the organizers and leaders of other elements of the emerging mothers' movement. And surely there are some deep-seated differences among these groups as to how they define motherhood, what they see as the significance of mothers organizing for social and political change, and what they think are the best strategies for achieving their goals. Unless these different mothers and their advocates can create a basis for acting together and supporting each other's goals, the mothers' movement will be incomplete at best. The possibility that the emerging mothers' movement will fray or splinter over differences stemming from the different social and economic positions that mothers can occupy is quite real.

Thus these concerns about differences among mothers further suggest the need for an inclusive but also contentious understanding of motherhood. The mothers' movement needs an understanding of motherhood that provides a basis for collective action, but also resist the suggestion that all mothers adopt or conform to an idea of motherhood based on race and class privilege. Such an understanding of motherhood must be able to withstand the effects of differences among mothers; it must unify mothers to whatever extent possible while also allowing for respect for differences. In the absence of such an understanding of motherhood, the emerging mothers' movement will be limited in scope and power. As the mothers' movement grows it will in effect articulate an understanding of motherhood, whether or not it does so consciously. But without conscious consideration of its self-definition, goals, strategies, and tactics, the movement risks reconsolidating ideas about motherhood that have proven to be exclusionary and often not especially empowering in the past. Participants in the emerging mothers' movement must consider carefully and in full recognition of difficult differences among mothers what we understand by motherhood and what conceptions of motherhood we deploy for which purposes. Doing so is the only way to achieve the inclusive but also contentious conception of motherhood most likely to sustain the movement and make it effective.

### **Motherhood and feminism**

Motherhood, as I have argued elsewhere, is the most difficult issue in contemporary, western feminism, because it brings to the forefront feminism's difficulties with respect to the individualist account of subjectivity that undergirds contemporary, western understandings of citizenship. In western, liberal democracies, feminist arguments for women's equality and women's rights require an individualist account of women's subjectivity. For this reason, western feminism in the modern era has tended to ground itself on an insistence that women qualify for full and equal citizenship because they are rational autonomous subjects in the same way that men are. But to the extent that the feminist movement also aims to adequately represent experiences more typical of women than men, such as mothering, it requires a more relational account of subjectivity. As others besides myself have argued, in order to represent

accurately what women experience and feel as mothers and in other care-giving work, feminism requires a theory of the constitution of self in relationships with others (DiQuinzio, 1999).

For these reason it is not surprising that mothering, social and political activism organized in terms of mothering, and the feminist movement are complexly related. To get a handle on these complexities, I begin by distinguishing the emerging mothers' movement from a different kind of social and political activism that historically has been related to motherhood, namely, maternalist politics. Here I argue that the contemporary mothers' movement should strive to avoid the risks or pitfalls that maternalist politics presents, even if that means sacrificing the advantages of maternalism; advantages that may be dubious anyway.

I should say at the outset that my analysis of the possibilities and pitfalls of a politics of motherhood focuses on how its issues and strategies play out in the United States. I recognize that U.S. feminism needs to learn from feminist movements in other parts of the world about how to negotiate feminism's potentially conflicting impulses with respect to women's equal citizenship and feminist analyses and support of mothering. My focus on U.S. feminism reflects the limits of my knowledge, not the significance and value to U.S. feminism of feminist movements in other parts of the world. On the other hand, the issues the emerging mothers' movement needs to address are more pressing in the U.S. given its relatively low levels of social and public support for mothers and families compared to the social welfare policies of many European countries and former commonwealth countries. Moreover, the dominance of individualist ideology in U.S. culture means that the conflicts within feminism raised when the goal of achieving women's equal citizenship encounters the goal of supporting motherhood are especially acute in the U.S. So it is likely the mothers' movement in the U.S. will have certain features and face certain problems that are specific to the U.S. context, and that an analysis of the politics of the mothers' movement in the U.S. is particularly useful to illuminate its tensions.

### **Maternalist politics**

By "maternalist politics" I mean political activism and political movements that invoke motherhood as the basis of women's political agency. Many scholars have traced the history of maternalist political movements in the U.S. and Europe. Historical examples of maternalist politics include the appeal to women's motherhood in the U.S. suffrage movement and in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century progressive politics, such as the 'social housekeeping' movement (Lemons, 1973). The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mothers' movements in Europe that worked for state organized support of mothers and families (Offen, 2000; Koven and Michel, 1993; Allen, 1991; Bock and Thane, 1991) can be considered instances of maternalist politics, as can some instances of women's peace activism and anti-nuclear weapons

activism (Vellacott, 2001; 1993; Swerdlow, 1993). The Argentinian Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, who organized to demand information about the approximately 3,000 people who were 'disappeared' in Argentina during the military rule of the mid-1970s to 1983, are an often-mentioned exemplar of maternalist politics (Taylor, 1997; but see also Snitow, 1989). Contemporary examples of maternalist social and political activism in the U.S. include organizations and events such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Million Mom March, as well as many smaller, more local organizations such as Mothers in Charge and Moms on the Move.

Contemporary versions of maternalist politics are often understood as applications of feminist analyses of motherhood, especially Sara Ruddick's work on maternal thinking and practice (Ruddick, 1997, 1989, 1984). I find in Ruddick's work an extremely compelling analysis of mothering as a practice that gives rise to distinctive modes of thought, feeling, and action among those who embrace and strive to meet its goals. I also very much want to share her optimism that models of political action on behalf of peace making and a progressive political agenda can be found in the thought and practice of mothers (Ruddick, 1997). But I believe that some advocates of maternalist politics have overlooked the complexities of applying feminist analyses of mothering to politics, complexities that Ruddick's work itself carefully explores. Without sufficient attention to these complexities we risk flattening out analyses of mothering such as Ruddick's and thus risk returning maternalist discourses to traditional, sentimental representations of mothering. It is these traditional representations of mothering that I see at work to one extent or another in those instances of maternalist politics that I have considered most carefully. And it is these traditional representations of mothering that I think present certain risks or pitfalls in relationship to a feminist politics of mothering appropriate for the emerging mothers' movement.

Advocates of maternalist politics tend to offer several arguments on its behalf. First, they argue, women's work as mothers and other care-givers shapes their political identities and perspectives. That is, this work shapes women's perspective as to what are the most pressing problems requiring political solutions, what are the most clear and convincing terms in which to articulate these problems, and what are the best strategies for developing and implementing solutions. Furthermore, the attitudes and skills required by mothering work are applicable or transferable to political activism. Advocates of maternalist politics also argue that motherhood is the basis on which many women first come to be and understand themselves as political agents. These women come to see the transferability of mothering attitudes and skills and to see that their concern to raise healthy, well-developed children is very much affected by law and by public policy, and by how law and policy are administered and enforced. Maternalist politics also appears to be a relatively safe and easy way for women who have not previously been political activists, or activists for social change, to take the first steps in this direction. The vision here is something like this:

mothers often first get involved in social or political activism by working on a local level on issues or problems related to motherhood, for example, lobbying local authorities for a traffic light at a school crossing or organizing community effort to build a playground. These experiences then motivate and prepare them to take the next steps in organizing and working for social change on a larger and more comprehensive scale. Finally, some advocates of maternalist politics argue that in contemporary political contexts where deployment of media representations of a movement's participants and goals is crucial for its success, their representations of motherhood are powerful. Legislators, policy makers, and local, state, and national executives are unlikely to ignore or alienate a constituency defined as 'mothers.' Political activism based on maternal identities is thus more likely at least to get women a hearing and mass media coverage of women's political activities articulated in terms of motherhood is more likely to be positive and friendly.

Doubters as to the wisdom and efficacy of maternalist politics respond, first, that discourses and images of motherhood are easily manipulated. Mothers and maternal concerns can be positioned on many sides of the same issue and many other movements and groups can claim that mothers support them and that they advance the interests of mothers. More importantly, mothers really can be found on many different sides of the same issue (Jetter, Orleck, and Taylor, 1997). This fact alone suggests that the group 'mothers' is not a monolithic group with a single, unified set of perspectives, interests, and concerns. The diversity of mothers' perspectives, interests, and concerns means that the appeal to motherhood as the basis of a political identity or a position on a particular issue is certain to be contested by some groups of mothers, especially when the mothers movement tends to focus on interests and concerns of white, middle and upper class mothers. Thus maternalist politics can risk a false unity; it can presuppose a unity among mothers that is not really there and that needs to be forged rather than assumed.

Representations of motherhood are also easily co-opted for other political and social purposes. For instance, in the 2004 presidential election in the U.S. both the Bush and Kerry campaigns claimed mothers groups as supporters. Their web sites, Moms for Kerry (<http://www.momsforkerry.com/pages/1/index.htm>) and Security Moms for Bush (<http://www.moms4bush.com>), however, raise doubts as to the origins, members, and supporters of these groups. Neither site lists any individual people, much less individual mothers, as founders, organizers, or members. And to the best of my knowledge, both of these groups were entirely a web presence; they did not include meetings of members nor did they organize real time events. Mainstreet Moms Oppose Bush, which after the election became Mainstreet Moms Operation Blue ([www.themmob.com](http://www.themmob.com)), at least lists some apparently real people as its founders and organizers, though it appears that during the 2004 presidential campaign they also did not organize meetings for members or any other real time events. Consider also the Second Amendment Sisters in the U.S., who support "the

right to keep and bear arms” specified in the second amendment to the U.S. constitution and oppose further laws regulating the sale and ownership of guns. This group has given rise to Armed Informed Mothers ([www.saveourguns.com/armed\\_informed\\_mothers.htm](http://www.saveourguns.com/armed_informed_mothers.htm); see also [www.armedfemalesofamerica.com/fewgoodwomen2.htm](http://www.armedfemalesofamerica.com/fewgoodwomen2.htm)). In contrast to images of mothers as committed to peace making and non-violent conflict resolution that have dominated some maternalist feminist discourse, these gun rights groups appeal to a different but equally common representation: women and mothers as fierce protectors of their children and families. They use this image of mothers to argue that women and mothers need and want guns in order to protect their children and families and ensure their safety.

The extent to which the state itself can and does manipulate representations of motherhood for its own purposes is also well documented. Of particular concern here is the tendency for government officials and public policy makers to represent mothers and motherhood in terms of the distinction of “good” and “bad” mothers in order to advance their own agendas. This manipulation often results in demonizing those mothers identified as “bad” mothers by this discourse as a justification for state intervention into and control over the lives of some if not all mothers (Meagher and DiQuinzio, 2005; Ladd-Taylor and Umansky, 1998). This distinction of “good” and “bad” mothers also usually operates along the lines of other categories of identity, especially racial or ethnic identity and socio-economic status, thus further solidifying the oppression and state control of all women who are members of these marginalized groups. For instance, social welfare policies in the U.S. that subject mothers in poverty, particularly African American mothers, to state oversight, intervention, and control or that discriminate against lesbian mothers are well-documented (Reich, 2005; Shivas and Charles, 2005; Roberts, 2002; Thompson, 2002; Collins, 1991).

Somewhat more subtly but no less problematically, the appeal of maternalist politics to motherhood as a basis of women’s political agency risks limiting not only mothers’ but also women’s political agency. As a result of what I have called “essential motherhood” (DiQuinzio, 1999), claims about mothers and motherhood in the dominant discourse of individualism easily slip into or become claims about all women. Thus maternalist politics risks representing mothers, and women, as knowledgeable, interested, and entitled to political participation only as mothers and only when they are acting on behalf of children or other dependent persons. Maternalist politics also tends to become a politics of grief, predicating women’s political agency on either the pain and suffering of others or on the pain, suffering, and loss they experience as a result of harm or threats to their children or others for whom they care. But this representation of women’s political agency in terms of emotion risks the delegitimation of maternalist politics as irrational. As I have argued about the rhetoric of the May 2000 Million Mom March in Washington DC, the appeal to the pain, suffering, and loss of mothers to support their demands for political and social

change invites a particularly delegitimizing response. This response is the critique that, while their suffering and grief are surely understandable and deserving of relief, their political and social demands are “based on emotions, not facts” and “immune to rational discussion and debate,” and therefore not worthy of serious consideration as political demands. Maternalist politics can also represent women’s political agency as agency on behalf of others to such an extent that women’s own needs, interests, and demands on their own behalf are effectively muted, as is also evident in the rhetoric of the 2000 Million Mom March (DiQuinzio, 2005).

Finally, the deployment of discourses and images of motherhood can operate in place of more effective, if less attention-getting and media-friendly, elements of social and political activism, such as grass-roots organizing and the continued engagement of participants on the local level. The tendency to engage primarily in attention-getting, media friendly activities is certainly not unique to maternalist politics. But the very powerful—almost uniquely powerful—symbolics of motherhood makes this tendency especially tempting in the case of maternalist politics. A brief comparison of the 2000 Million Mom March and the organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving is instructive in this regard. The Million Mom March was a top-down project to organize a national March on Washington, DC, and from its inception it focused almost entirely on mass media coverage. It came into existence as a national organization and then tried to create local chapters and mobilize members to do more than just participate in the 2000 March. But the Million Mom March did not manage to create a stable organization with small, solidly rooted local chapters or to maintain the initial high level of interest and activity on the part of those who participated in the 2000 March. It is hard to point to any specific legislative, public policy or social changes that have resulted primarily from the efforts of the Million Mom March, and even its more recent media outreach efforts have not been particularly well organized or successful.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving, on the other hand, has been a bottom-up, grassroots project, begun by individual mothers in their own communities. MADD has built a strong national organization, but the national organization grew by uniting a number of local groups across the country and developed in response to the needs of local chapters. Much of MADD’s success is a result of the continued activity of local chapters; MADD’s local chapters keep members engaged and actively working on the prevention of drunk driving. For instance, MADD members give presentations on the effects of drunk driving at high schools and other youth organizations and lobby on the local and state as well as federal level for changes in law and policy related to drunk driving. They also advocate for changes in the advertising practices of beer and liquor manufacturers, such as their advertising at and sponsorship of events targeted at young people such as sporting events and concerts. MADD is responsible for or has contributed to significant changes in law, public policy, enforcement, and criminal prosecution and sentencing with respect to drunk driving. MADD



does do media campaigns and does deploy representations of motherhood on behalf of its work. But in my opinion MADD's results have more to do with its origins in grass roots organizations, its members' continued engagement at the local level, and its effective though not always attention getting lobbying and political activism (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004; McCarthy and Wolfson, 1996; Weed 1991).

MADD's success can also be attributed to the fact that they work on one clearly defined issue, prevention of drunk driving, for which there is no public support on the other side. In comparison, the work of the Million Mom March is more complicated because there are arguments to be made against the gun control law and policies the Million Mom March advocates and there is vocal, well organized, and well-financed support for the other side of their positions on gun control. The emerging mothers' movement, to the extent that it has or is on the way to developing an agenda, is more likely to be in a position similar to that of the Million Mom March, advocating positions for which there are arguments and supporters on the other side. Not only will the emerging mothers' movement have credible opponents, but is also likely that there will be significant disagreement about goals and strategies among people who identify themselves as members of the mothers' movement. The likelihood of these difficulties makes it ever more important that the movement not abandon tactics such as grass roots organizing and efforts to keep members engaged and active at the local level in favor of more media friendly tactics based on maternalist images and representations of motherhood. Given the likely diversity of its issues, goals, and tactics, the emerging mothers' movement will have to be some kind of coalition political movement, identifying areas of consensus and moving forward in those areas while respecting differences about other issues. And a movement that relies too heavily on representations of motherhood may be undone by the false unity that the deployment of these representations suggest, an appearance of unity that will actually work against the coalition building the mothers' movement will require.

In short, I believe that versions or instances of maternalist politics based on traditional, sentimental representations of motherhood present significant risks and pitfalls for the emerging mothers' movement. Sociologist Lisa Brush puts it succinctly when she writes, "maternalism is feminism for hard times" (1996: 431). I take her to mean that maternalism is the feminism we resort to when we can't do any better on behalf of women. In a social and political climate such as that in the United States in which feminism is demonized by its opponents and rejected as no longer necessary by younger women, feminists can't argue explicitly for women's equality, women's rights, women's freedoms, and women's empowerment. So we have to sneak these issues in through the backdoor with rhetoric that "it's all about the children" or "it's good for families." The positions advocated by maternalist groups such as some women's peace activists or by groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Million Mom March *are* good for children and families. But

a mothers' movement that relies on images and rhetoric that might undermine or delegitimize women's claims on their own behalf can't be a feminist movement.

### **The politics of the mothers' movement**

If my analysis of possibly problematic implications and effects of maternalist politics is convincing, then the articulation of the politics of the emerging mothers' movement should proceed with these concerns in mind. My initial distinction of maternalist politics from the politics of the mothers' movement defines the mothers' movement as activism by mothers and by other people directly on behalf of mothers and indirectly on behalf of children. This activism focuses on improving women's choices with respect to motherhood, improving the conditions in which women and "maternal practitioners" do their work, deprivatizing the work of raising children and caring for dependent persons, and garnering public support for it. With a focus along these lines, the issues that come to the forefront are the (all too familiar) issues such as reproductive choice, prenatal and childhood health care, childcare, and workplace policies on families. This focus also highlights the economic insecurity of mothers; the economic insecurity of mothers who do not earn an income of their own, divorced mothers, single mothers, and mothers living in poverty. The economic costs of motherhood as currently organized, especially its costs to mothers but also to society at large (Crittenden, 2001; Williams, 2001), are also primary concerns of the mothers' movement.

Mobilizing this sort of a politics of motherhood, however, is going to require that mothers make demands in their own right, on their own behalf—in other words as individualist subjects and thereby as political agents. So the mothers' movement will have to at least reconcile the political discourse of individualist subjectivity and the discourse of mothers acting primarily on behalf of others, usually helpless or dependent others. The theoretical underpinnings of the mothers' movement will have to surface those aspects of feminist analyses of mothering that are most consistent with women's individualist subjectivity and agency. At the very least the mothers' movement should avoid representations of mothering and mothers that might seriously compromise the individualist subjectivity of mothers.

As a step in the direction of formulating a discourse and a politics that will move the mothers' movement forward without sacrificing mothers' individualist subjectivity and political agency, I suggest tackling six major concerns. If the emerging mothers' movement is to be a political movement of, by, and for mothers, then addressing these concerns along the lines that I suggest seems to me to be the most promising starting point for this movement. First, to the extent that there really has been something like the "the mommy wars" going on, this battle must end and the mothers' movement must resist the mass media tendency to divide women and mothers with this stereotype of relationships among mothers. Both Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) and

Miriam Peskowitz (2005) compellingly argue that the belief that different groups of mothers are in serious conflict is largely a mass media creation, and for Mothers' Day 2006 MOTHERS (Mothers Ought to Have Equal Rights) organized a "Mommy Wars Ceasefire." But the persistence of this belief leaves mothers with suspicions of each other and provides a convenient leverage for dividing and conquering the emerging mothers' movement itself. Resisting this belief does not require that we deny all differences among mothers, or among women. Instead it requires, first, that we recognize and analyze these differences ourselves rather than letting the mass media and policy makers define them for us. Then it requires that we do the hard work of coalition politics, finding those concerns and issues on which we can agree or get consensus and work on together and not letting areas of disagreement divide those who could be working effectively together on their shared concerns.

Second, we must ensure a place for every kind of mother in this movement, especially those mothers who are perceived to deviate in some way from the idealization of motherhood that is sometimes at work in maternalist politics. These, of course, are poor mothers, mothers in racially or ethnically marginalized groups, single mothers, teenaged mothers, lesbian mothers, step-mothers, adoptive mothers, grandmothers, and other-mothers. In connection with this goal, the possibilities and pitfalls of relying heavily on the internet in building and organizing a mothers' movement must be carefully considered. The appeal of the internet as a means for mothers to connect with other mothers and to organize efforts at social and political change is clear. For mothers who might otherwise be isolated as a result of where they live or because they aren't able to get out of their homes to meet with other mothers, connections via the internet can be extremely valuable. The internet also makes it easier to exchange information and news much more widely and more quickly than other means of communication. Even reading one of the many mothers' or motherhood-oriented blogs (such as [www.mothershock.com/blog/](http://www.mothershock.com/blog/), [www.desperate.mom.blogspot.com/](http://www.desperate.mom.blogspot.com/), and <http://roughdraft.typepad.com/dotmoms/>) on the net can help mothers who are more geographically or physically isolated to become part of a larger network of others who share their concerns and thus could be politically mobilizing. But the mothers and other caregivers who are least likely to have internet access are precisely those who are most likely to be or to feel excluded from a mothers' movement on the basis of their social identities. The women's movement is quite familiar with the difficulties of organizing political activism across racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual divisions and with the history of exclusion these differences can entail. Heavy reliance on on-line organizing risks repeating in the mothers' movement the exclusionary tendencies with which feminism has long had to struggle.

Third, the mothers' movement must refuse the demonization of any mothers and strenuously resist the tendency of both mass media and public policy making to divide women and mothers along the lines of "good" and "bad" mothers. That many mothers in the U.S. today feel unappreciated and

embattled is undeniable. In these circumstances, it is understandable that mothers want to promote the social importance and value of what they do and that some mothers do so in terms of the discourse of good motherhood. But it is also true that the resurgence of political conservatism in the U.S. since 1980 has operated in part to divide and conquer groups of women and mothers who might otherwise find common cause in resisting the conservative social agenda. In addition, conservative political discourse in the U.S. is a major factor in the demonization of poor mothers, single mothers, lesbian mothers, and minority group mothers and the conservative social agenda has harmed these mothers much more than it has benefited those mothers that it is so quick to valorize. Clearly the mothers' movement will have to deploy images and discourses of motherhood that make clear the importance and social value of good mothering. But it must also ensure that these representations of mothering do not also, if unintentionally, suggest that mothers who do not, or are not in a position to, conform to these images of good mothering deserve only blame and condemnation for their less than ideal mothering. The representations of good mothering deployed by the mothers' movement should highlight the economic, social, and political supports that good mothering requires, thereby showing that all mothers should have such support and that such support could prevent many of the failures of mothering for which mothers themselves are usually blamed.

Fourth, the movement must reach out to younger women, help them learn about the contemporary realities of motherhood, and encourage them to work for the conditions they want to experience if and when they are mothers in the future. As an educator in the U.S. teaching mostly women students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, I am particularly aware of their interest in and need for more information about the realities of contemporary mothering. At present, among young, middle-class women in the U.S., the 1990s myth that women no longer need feminism because they have achieved equality and now can "have it all" seems to have been replaced by the myth of the 'Opt-Out Revolution' (Belkin, 2003; Story, 2005). This is the myth that women can't have both motherhood and a paid job or career—that they can't do both well—and so they have to be prepared to take significant time off from paid work if they have children. Implicit in this myth is the view that the attempts of the women's movement to make the paid work place more accommodating to women and to men who also want to be significantly contributing family members have failed, if they weren't misguided in the first place. Further embedded in this myth is the view that women can't really be happy without being mothers and that the women's movement has betrayed women by encouraging them to choose careers and lifestyles that aren't and can't be made compatible with significant involvement in care giving work. According to this myth, then, there's no reason to persist in trying to make the paid work place more family friendly whether by lobbying employers directly or by working for new laws and public policies that would require employers to do so. In the face

of this myth it is crucial that the emerging mothers' movement bring young women into the movement so that they at least see that there are alternatives to those implicit in the myth of the opt out revolution. Young women need to know the realities of contemporary motherhood, not only so that they can make informed choices about motherhood for themselves, but also so that they join in the work of creating more and better options for mothers.

Fifth, the mothers' movement should make alliances with others engaged in care-work whether paid or unpaid. Rather than valorize motherhood as an activity or practice unlike any other, the mothers' movement should understand and represent mothering as one among different kinds of care work. Such an understanding of mothering will allow the mothers' movement to argue for the economic and social value of all care giving work, along the lines that Anne Crittenden (2001) has done in her analysis of the contribution of care giving work to the development of human capital. Drawing other care givers, such as day care and child care workers, nurses, home health aids, other medical professionals, and teachers—many of whom of course are also mothers—into a movement on behalf of the social, political, and economic support of all care work will allow the mothers' movement to expand its base. Bringing together mothers and other caregivers is also one way to resist the media image of “the mommy wars.” This media image will otherwise represent, for example, mothers struggling to pay for child care as pitted against childcare workers struggling for better wages and working conditions. In addition, in the U.S. some of the best organizing for greater public recognition and support of the value of care work is happening among nurses, home health care workers, and teachers in unions and professional organizations. The mothers' movement could learn a lot about grass roots organizing from these organizations and could benefit from alliances with them.

Sixth, the mothers' movement must articulate a political agenda of and on behalf of mothers that is consistent with support for women's reproductive rights, including the right to abortion. This goal may be the most challenging for a feminist mothers' movement, especially in the U.S., where reproductive rights activists and women exercising their legally, if precariously, guaranteed right to an abortion are routinely demonized by the U.S. right wing as “baby killers” and often portrayed unsympathetically in mainstream media. The issue of reproductive rights may be the issue that is most seriously jeopardized by discourses of maternalism. It is hard to see how we can argue both that mothers are self-sacrificing care givers whose political agency is dedicated primarily to advancing the interests of others and that women and mothers are entitled to self-determination including the right to end a pregnancy. At some point, the defense of the right to abortion requires the clear and unequivocal argument that the moral status and the legal rights of women outweigh those of fetuses. And the best way to make this argument is to represent women as fully individualist subjects of political agency and entitlement. The rhetoric of choice in the reproductive rights movement is not without its own problems (Solinger,

2001). But maternalist rhetoric moves even farther from the discourse of mothers' entitlement that I think not only the mothers' movement but also the reproductive rights movement ultimately require. The difficulty of articulating a political discourse of mothers' rights shouldn't be compounded by maternalist rhetoric that undermines the representation of women's equal subjectivity on which women and mothers' rights claims depend.

I can't claim to know with much certainty how the mothers' movement would continue to develop were it to take up these six issues as I suggest. It's clear, though, that proceeding along these lines would most likely surface significant tensions among the movement's participants and make for some very difficult conversations among us. There are great variety of different kinds of mothers and different ways of mothering that the mothers' movement must recognize and support, and a great variety of interests among these different groups of mothers that the mothers' movement must negotiate. Many of these differences are a function of different social and economic positions that mothers occupy and thus they are already fraught with the significance of racial, ethnic, and class differences. For these reasons the very meaning of "mother" and "mothering" in the mothers' movement will have to be fluid and shifting in a way that won't provide any comfortable certainties for us to invoke or clear cut absolutes for us to advocate. Such developments could hamper the progress of the mothers' movement and might even risk fragmenting the movement before it has even really coalesced. But I think these risks are preferable to the risks posed by the temptations of false unity and media politics represented by a maternalist politics that relies on traditional, sentimental images and discourses of motherhood. Articulating and acting on a politics of motherhood certainly won't be any easier than maternalist politics; it will most likely be harder and differently challenging. But when was any aspect of motherhood ever easy?

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