RECLAIMING THE EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERHOOD THROUGH SECOND AND THIRD WAVE FEMINIST PUBLICATIONS

By

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To my Mom
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Throughout American history, the role of motherhood has fluctuated between an empowered position which encouraged women’s citizenship and individual satisfaction or a private role for women confined to the domestic space of the home and defined complete maternal devotion. As a result, the idea of what constitutes “good motherhood” becomes a larger social problem in which women are fragmented within society due to the private domestication of parenting as they are held to unfeasible expectations of (un)involvement in a child’s development. On account of the deep-seated beliefs regarding motherhood, women are not presented with the option of negotiating their own identities with motherhood. This thesis seeks to unpack loaded ideologies of motherhood in order to pinpoint the historical moments in which women have recovered their own understanding of the maternal experience through feminism.

Specifically, I analyze examples of empowered motherhood in feminist discourses through Second and Third Wave feminism. The first of these primary sources is MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers, an independent publication circulated by a Second Wave feminist organization which provided support for single mothers. The other is the Third Wave feminist “blog” Viva la Feminista, a personal website journaling the author’s experience with motherhood and feminism. Through the act of self-publishing, I argue MOMMA and Viva la
*Feminista* exemplify the possibility for expanded definitions of motherhood while establishing motherhood to be a fulfilling, personalized aspect of women’s lives. I conclude that on account of the continuing debate regarding women’s lives as mothers, motherhood issues present a vital site of politicization for contemporary feminists.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In American media and literature, motherhood has been framed as an idealized, sometimes empowered, position which posits as nurturers who provide the basis for moral and ethical formation. At the same time, mainstream media presents continually changing advice on how mothers should properly raise their children for fear that deviation will produce criminals or “weaklings.” Women are simultaneously expected to completely devote their attention to the children, while treading carefully so as not to develop neuroses in their children. A contested position for women results from the constant debate on what defines a “good” mother. In the twentieth into the twenty-first century, this debate has been further complicated by feminist achievements in increasing women’s access in business and education. Mothers are now pressured into choosing a domestic life of around the clock childcare or a full-time career as they juggle full-time motherhood.

As a child, I witnessed my own mother’s struggle to balance work with family life. Particularly in elementary school, my mother faced a long commute to work, often leaving the house before I was awake and returning home hours after school had let out. I can recall at times desperately feeling her absence, as I ran off to catch the morning bus with unkempt hair or the collar of my blouse tucked into my jumper- things she would have noticed if she had not already departed on her daily commute. Yet at other times, I can recall her commitment to me and my sister as she carted us around to extracurricular activities, hosted birthday parties, chaperoned field trips, coordinated family vacations, and cared for us late into the night when we were ill. Although I only ever knew her as a loving, devoted mother, I began to dread the fact that someone else might deride her because I had to take the bus home and let myself into the house after school. As I progressed into my own adult life and began looking into my own future after
college, I suddenly doubted my own abilities to own day become a mother. So as I was coming to terms with my desire to have children in spite of the awareness that it could consume my life, I started investigating the contemporary discourse regarding the status of modern motherhood.

In reviewing the recent literature about motherhood, I observed an unresolved conflict between female personal satisfaction and maternal selflessness. In 2001, Ann Crittenden related the issues of motherhood specifically with their effect on women in the workplace in the book *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World is Still the Least Valued*. She discusses the “Mommy Tax,” describing it as “the heavy personal tax levied on people who care for children, or for any other dependent family members” (88). The author argues that those in support of “family values” should fully support family-oriented employee benefits such as one year’s paid leave for both parents to care for a new infant, shorter work weeks, equal pay for the option of part-time work, and cracking down on discrimination against working parents (259-261). Although Crittenden concludes the book with a call to action and suggestions for improving issues for working mothers, she fails to critique the nature of women’s role as mothers and the cultural role of motherhood for American women.

Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels argue in *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined Women* that media images superficially idealize motherhood to the point of unachievable perfection. In their introduction, Douglas and Michaels dub this phenomenon “new Momism,” stating that it “both draws from and repudiates feminism” by giving the illusion of gender equality despite the underlying notion that the honorable choice is to choose full-time motherhood (5). Their cultural critique illustrates the anxiety created for mothers, as they conclude that realistically, women are neither empowered nor satisfied by
media representations of motherhood. Douglas and Michaels conclude that mixed messages only serve to further polarize women in their social roles as mothers.

Another example of “crisis” mommy literature can be found in Judith Warner’s book *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*. She likens Betty Friedan’s 1960s concept the “Feminine Mystique” to the disappointment brought on by the “soul-draining perfectionism” of total motherhood, dubbing it the “Mommy Mystique” (12-13). In doing so, she relates the debilitating position of frustrated housewives to the revival of pathologized, overwhelming motherhood at the end of the twentieth century. She argues that women have been led to believe that child-raising is a private matter, resulting in mothers becoming isolated and frustrated by their inability to resolve their own resentments. Without change, American mothers will be continually subjected to the “psychological violence” that results from the guilt they face over the compromises they have to make between personal ambitions and raising a family (277). Warner calls for action, declaring that the American government should acknowledge the need for socialized child care and advances in parental leave policies.

In *Opting in: Having a Child without Losing Yourself*, Amy Richards addresses motherhood as faced by feminists today. She writes that although modern mothers may have their own goals, they tend to “[prioritize] everyone else’s needs before their own” (249). Richards addresses the tension between stay-at-home moms and working mothers, which creates resentment as others find it improbable that women would actually want to work over spending time raising their children at the same time “that homemaking is still not on par with paid jobs” (34). She self-reflexively admits that it is this anxiety that prevents parents from rejecting the “hyperfeminine” or “[overinflated] masculine behavior” prescribed by societal norms (136).
Richards’ involvement in Third Wave feminism makes hers an important voice to reflect on for a feminist viewpoint on the issue of motherhood.

Much of the contemporary discourse on motherhood focuses on the problems of motherhood without offering strategies for resolution. The authors lament the disadvantages working mothers face in the workplace, the all-consuming devotion demanded in media images of motherhood, and the paranoia of “proper” mothering American women face due to insufficient aid given to mothers. As a result, this idea of “proper motherhood” becomes a larger social problem in which women are fragmented within society due to the private domestication of parenting as they are held to unfeasible expectations of (un)involvement in a child’s development. On account of the deep-seated beliefs regarding motherhood, women are not presented with the option of negotiating their own identities with motherhood. In this thesis, I seek to unpack loaded ideologies of motherhood in order to pinpoint the historical moments in which women have recovered their own understanding of the maternal experience through feminism. To do this, I will turn to specific examples of empowered motherhood in feminist discourses through Second and Third Wave feminism. The first of these primary sources is MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers, an independent publication circulated by a Second Wave feminist organization which provided support for single mothers. The other is the Third Wave feminist “blog” Viva la Feminista, a personal website journaling the author’s experience with motherhood and feminism.

I chose these texts because they are self-published; therefore, the information is edited and disseminated directly from the feminist organization or individual author. Since they are self-published, the content is produced outside of the control of mainstream media. The authors seek to combine personal experience with feminist issues affecting the rights of mothers,
politicizing the terms of motherhood. The content is also not directly focused on the act of child-rearing, instead examining all aspects of mothers’ lives. As a result, these publications exemplify the possibility for expanded definitions of motherhood while establishing motherhood to be a fulfilling, personalized aspect of women’s lives.

To comprehend the possibility of empowered motherhood, it is necessary to recount the fluctuation between idealized and negative views of motherhood through American history. Chapter 1 explores the evolution of the ideology of Republican Motherhood, first visible after the American Revolution. This concept laid the framework for the views of mothers as educators of future American citizens, as well as domestic caretakers. This model of citizenship has often been idealized as an active role for women within American society, yet its placement within patriarchal structures maintained motherhood as a passive, supportive position for women. Emphasis on the characteristics of motherhood, particularly nurturing and maternal love, were used in the nineteenth century both to oppress women into the obsessive mothering in the American Victorian period as well as to empower women to participate in the social reform leading into the Progressive Era. I will also describe the link between motherhood and citizenship during the Second World War, eventually leading to widespread propaganda for women to return to a supportive role as wife and mother to ease the transition of homebound soldiers.

These domestic roles remained a contentious subject into the political turmoil of the mid-twentieth century. Chapter 2 will explore the role that Second Wave Feminism played for mothers during the Women’s Liberation Movement. Through feminist consciousness-raising groups, women banded together with the goal of bringing women’s lives into public discourse. I will examine a publication put out by members of the women’s group MOMMA: The
Organization for Single Women, first founded in 1972. Their newspaper exhibits the Second Wave’s politicization of women’s issues through its focus on the experiences of motherhood, without a restricted focus on the act of child-rearing. In addition, the attention to single motherhood offered a view on an alternative form of motherhood that was separate from the nuclear family structure. The supportive role of the MOMMA collective was expanded through national circulation of the newspaper and served as an example of the Second Wave cooperative action.

Chapter 3 will explore the contradictory views of motherhood that erupted in public discourse through the Mommy Wars of the 1980s and ‘90s, resulting in attempts to redefine modern motherhood by Third Wave feminists. The role of motherhood in women’s “liberated” lives following the Women’s Liberation Movement was subject to an antifeminist “backlash,” in which women who embraced traditional modes of motherhood and domesticity were pitted against working mothers and feminists. Modern motherhood now faced tensions that pulled women in different directions, leading to feelings of guilt at lack of focus on child-rearing or disappointment when women’s lives were consumed by parenting. The media’s role in this conflict further polarized working women from stay-at-home moms, rather than enabling any dialogue between the two groups. However, a new generation of young feminists took up the cause of redefining views of sexuality, race, and femininity as they engaged with new technologies that enabled them to voice their individual opinions on the internet while building online communities with like-minded feminists. By investigating the presence of the internet blog Viva la Feminista, Chapter 3 examines the ways in which Veronica Arreola perceives the intersection of identities with feminism, motherhood, and her Latina heritage. As she combines her personal experiences with her commentary on cultural and political events, Arreola
politicizes motherhood as a site for feminist action as she negotiates the relationship between mothering and her personal ambitions.

Through my analysis, I posit that feminist media outlets allow for a redefinition of women’s lives. In this case, the feminist organization MOMMA and feminist blogger Veronica Arreola reevaluate personal experience to broaden understanding of motherhood outside of mainstream discourses that are hampered by long-standing ideologies of “good motherhood” characterized by domesticity, child-rearing, and heteronormative family ties. In addition, it becomes apparent that the act of self-publishing by feminists removes any mainstream filter from the dissemination of knowledge between women. This sharing of resources, emotional support, and connectivity through common identity allows for a reinterpretation of the terms of motherhood, specifically the friction between individuality and mothering. As a result, these primary sources demonstrate the possibility of creating feminist definitions of empowered motherhood.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICIZING (DIS)EMPOWERED MOTHERHOOD IN THE UNITED STATES

Since the formation of the United States, motherhood has been a strongly idealized, yet dichotomized role for American women. In both the public and private realms, American motherhood has been a vital image to be upheld in shaping national pride and identity. The significance of maternal representations, while rarely determined by women, has oscillated between positive and negative views of motherhood throughout the history of the United States. The role of motherhood has also seen important peaks in its representation of traditional gender roles or female citizenship, although ideologies were framed in the association with white middle-class femininity. Mothers were also subjected to patriarchal idealizations of feminine virtue and the parent-child emotional bond, often invoked to inspire women to patriotic or civic participation. However, these appeals to the notion of motherly love and nurturing were often used as a way of maintaining patriarchal power over political decision-making and coercing women to relegate themselves to the home to tend to domestic upkeep and child-rearing.

It is important to understand how these representations of motherhood changed over time, affected by war, political turmoil, or social change. Although the idealization of motherhood may empower women’s status in society at one time, the next generation of mothers could be exposed to a rash of advice perpetuated through mainstream media instructing women on the “proper” methods of childcare. Starting from the American Revolution, continuing through the urban development in the nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century, women negotiated their identities through the cyclical nature of motherhood ideology that was often dictated outside of their control.
Motherhood in the New Republic

At the formation of the United States, the role of motherhood was being reconsidered as a valuable site for raising a political consciousness in American citizens. In *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, historian Linda Kerber argues that women during the Revolutionary War “began to invent an ideology of citizenship that merged the domestic domain of the preindustrial woman with the new public ideology of individual responsibility and civic virtue” (269). This view of women in the new republic expanded their involvement from within the home. The concept of Republican Motherhood in the formation of a new country was vital for women to gain “a political role through the raising of the child” (282). The Republican Mother’s role as citizen was to care for the domestic life and raise their children to be good citizens while their husbands tended to the business of government. Stephanie Coontz writes in *The Social Origins of Private Life* that “instead of state hierarchies being translated into authority relations within the family, the domestic sphere might translate its harmonious relations of mutual need into the public world” (155). Rather than being subordinate to the men who ran the political aspects of the foundling country, women were held up as the custodians of the domestic realm.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of women’s education both as citizens and as primary educators of their young children, the future leaders and mothers of America. In addition to organizing household activities and upholding the moral integrity of the family, Kerber notes that the Republican Mother was expected to “be an informed and virtuous citizen… to observe the political world with a rational eye, and she was to guide her husband and children in making their way through it” (235). This empowered women to have an awareness of politics and civic affairs, drawing her attention in the public sphere of the developing American society. The concept of a public sphere, through which public dialogue could be transformed into political
action, otherwise excluded women as it was centered through the mainstream media (published by men, typically for a male audience) and the government in which only males participated as politicians. As mothers, American women were depended on for the basic education and religious instruction of their children. With the formation of a new country’s ethics and belief system, mothers were now accountable for the proper education of their children in political matters as well.

An example of esteemed Republican Motherhood is in the case of Eliza Pinckney, wife of a plantation owner in South Carolina. Pinckney had made a “monumental contribution” to the United States exemplified by her two sons, whom she raised alone following her husband’s death (Woloch 52). She felt a deep responsibility to uphold the memory of her deceased spouse. Her sons would go on to serve in the American army during the Revolutionary War, later holding political office and practicing law. On account of George Washington’s great admiration for the patriotic duty she had instilled in her sons, he specifically requested that he be a pallbearer when she died of cancer in 1793 (Woloch 63). Women like Pinckney assumed an idealized role of motherhood, one that promoted women’s right to information about current events and empowered them to take an active role in the upbringing of their children. The achievements of their offspring were viewed as a reflection of their own patriotism. Motherhood became empowered through the connection between domestic and civic duties.

Ultimately, women were only able to remain informed about public affairs, and were never quite able to fully enter the political arena. Pinckney led a relatively independent life through the American Revolution and was held in high regard for the success of her children. However, she herself was never directly involved in the formation of the new country. In keeping with the general aversion to women’s involvement in politics, Kerber notes that a woman’s role at the
beginning of the United States was “a citizen but not really a constituent” (283). This smoothed the way for women to be again relegated to their private roles as mothers once the new republic had an established government and the leadership of male politicians.

**Victorian Motherhood and the Cult of True Womanhood**

The reevaluation of American social structures would result in the depoliticization of women’s citizenship as well as status as mothers. With the rise of Victorian ethics of morality and modesty in nineteenth century America, women were held to a strict definition of appropriate femininity. In the seminal essay “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” Barbara Welter writes that “the attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (152). Accordingly, a “True Woman” was relegated to the domestic sphere in her role within the family: as daughter and sister before marriage, and later as a wife and mother. Unlike the Republican Mother, the True Woman was not considered to function as a citizen and only her service to the family was meritorious. Victorian women were also encouraged to embrace religion rather education. This would ensure their moral integrity and reduce their desire for intellectual pursuits, thereby confining them to the domestic sphere.

Strong cultural themes gave rise to a romanticized vision of marriage and motherhood, ensuring women’s tie to the family home. Literary historian Mary Kelley writes that the trend of female sentimentalist writers in the American Victorian period upheld the belief that a man’s role was to be provide financial support while a woman was to serve as “the architect of the home” in order to revitalize the moral integrity of the traditional family (436). As the domestic caretaker, mothers were characterized by their service to their husband and children. Kelley elaborates that these writers meant to express a “hopeful vision of womanly glory” by constructing “a strong,
commanding, central figure in the home; a supportive and guiding redeemer for husband; a model and teacher of rectitude for children; and a reformer of and servant to an American society judged to be in dire need of regeneration” (436-437). Unlike the respect afforded woman in the idealization of Republican Motherhood, women were held to strict standards of domestic care and excluded from most public affairs outside of charity work through church. However, this link of women to the domestic sphere highlighted women’s dependency on their husbands.

Similarly, Welter notes that Victorian women’s magazines were crucial in reinforcing the values held in women’s domesticity and motherhood. Fictional stories and advice columns emphasized these themes as the True Woman sought only to achieve familial love by “[defining] her rights in the way of the women’s magazines and [insuring] them by the practice of the requisite virtues” (Welter 173). Additionally, these publications emphasized that the True Woman “added another dimension to her usefulness and her prestige” when she became a mother who “naturally loved her children; to suggest otherwise was monstrous” (171). The Victorian ideal romanticized motherhood as the most virtuous role to which a women could aspire. Ellen Plante notes that the emphasis on a male head of the household resulted in “the cult of motherhood” in which “procreation not only empowered the family unit but was thought the height of achievement for the stereotypical middle-class woman” (69). The feminine virtues of piety and modesty created a view of women as asexual beings. As the keepers of the home, mothers were held responsible for the moral education of their children. Coontz writes that “mothers had to teach their sons the class-specific values that would be challenged by some of their associates in the outside world; lest the sons forget, mothers had to teach their daughters how to remind men of those values” (214). Mothers were expected to instill religious values in their husbands and sons. However, they were responsible for the domestic education of their
daughters in preparation for their own roles as wives and mothers. The role of religion on the
Victorian home did not elevate women’s importance in the family, except to confine them to the
private sphere. Rather than empowering women’s civic responsibilities as mothers, the messages
in women’s literature and magazines served to remove women’s citizenship in favor of
privatizing their family obligations.

As a result of the American Victorian era’s preoccupation with proper etiquette, an
abundance of parenting manuals was published. These tomes instructed parents, most
specifically mothers, in proper child-raising techniques. In one such text, *Counsel to Parents on
the Moral Education of Their Children* (1879), Elizabeth Blackwell wrote that married women
were the ultimate proponents of Christian values in their children. Others pathologized the
intimacy between mothers and their children, sentimentalizing an affectionate, yet distant
relationship between them. Welter notes that when “real women often felt they did not live up to
the ideal of True Womanhood” they could attempt to “enlarge the scope of womanhood” (174).
By evoking maternal imagery, some women would attempt to incorporate the virtues of
motherhood into social reform.

**The Maternal Commonwealth and the Progressive Era**

Like the patriotic admiration of educated women that elevated women’s status as citizens
following the American Revolution, women in the Progressive Era of the latter half of the
nineteenth century attempted to incorporate the principles of Republican Motherhood into social
reform organizations. During the Civil War, women were subjected to the power struggles of the
men running the United States. However, in the Reconstruction Era, women found space in the
public sphere to seek social changes for the poor and working classes. The result was the rise of
the Maternal Commonwealth, in which women invoked a sense of motherly, feminine virtues in
order to work towards domestic reform. In *Born for Liberty*, feminist historian Sara Evans notes
that the temperance movement, consisting “predominantly of upper-middle-class, educated, native-born white protestant” women, desired “that maternal values shape public behavior” (129). This movement held these “maternal values” – namely Christian morality, virtue, and purity – in great esteem as the balance for the corruption resulting from male-dominated politics. Within a view of a Maternal Commonwealth, women hoped for an option “that fused public and private concerns, domesticity and politics, as well as the republican mother and the suffragist” (127). Women sought out safe public spaces for themselves outside of traditionally male gathering places. At the same time, the desire for female citizenship within American politics exhibited the understanding that welfare reform was drastically needed. By using their association with domestic care, some women were willing to take on this task personally by expounding on the ideology of Republican Motherhood for an active role in the nation’s wellbeing.

One example of the reform advocated by proponents of the Maternal Commonwealth is the 1889 establishment of the Hull House in Chicago by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr. Located in an urban area mostly populated by immigrants, its founding was representative of “settlement work” through which social reformers set up in impoverished urban areas in order to provide services to the working class (Woloch 253). Specifically, Hull House served as a meeting place for special events and as an educational center for the community. A number of “residents” would occupy its living quarters and shared dining room, and would serve as educators for lectures or special classes offered to families in the area (261). This type of social service went beyond charity work or donating to the poor, as residents and volunteers were firmly established within the community instead of stepping in and out of their lives. As a result, volunteers also relayed white, middle-class morality and lifestyle to the immigrant population in
the surrounding community. Settlement work embraced the goal of the temperance movement by offering a public space for women and children who were excluded from men’s recreation and socializing in saloons. At the same time, it upheld the ideals of Republican Motherhood by offering meaningful social activism for educated women who volunteered to educate the mostly immigrant working class in this area of Chicago.

Social reformers such as Addams and Starr were able to open themselves up to a life outside of domestic confinement, empowering themselves to the role of activist outside of marriage and motherhood. Addams in particular was very vocal about her desire to achieve something with her life outside of the “noble obligation” of raising a family in her memoir *Twenty Years at Hull House* (93). Yet she found a family through the connections and relationships she built through the Hull House. Woloch notes that Addams’ persona bridged the gap between American Victorianism and the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century, “embodying the virtues of Victorian womanhood while simultaneously providing a model of female leadership in public life” (266). Despite her own rejection of marriage and family, Addams work with the Hull House embodied the goals of the Maternal Commonwealth by merging a communal living space for unmarried educated women with a center for community gatherings.

The ideology of a Maternal Commonwealth empowered women by invoking the characteristics of nurturing motherhood, which had previously been used to restrict women to the domestic duties of childcare. However, women used this view of feminine virtue to enter into the public arena through social reform. Activists such as Addams sought to offer assistance to the marginalized poor living in urban decay, while carving out meaningful roles in civic politics that allowed upper- and middle-class women to successfully utilize their educations. In addition,
women were specifically reclaiming the ideals of motherhood for their own purposes. These social reformists used stereotypically female gender roles to legitimize their place in working to improve living conditions for the impoverished. Caring for the poor or sick was viewed as social welfare, but seemed to be the one political field women could enter on account of its tie to charity work. The ideals of motherhood, which had previously been used to immobilize women who were thought to be too sensitive to be active in the public sphere, now empowered women as activists for social justice.

The importance of this historical moment was in women’s reclaiming the values of motherhood to further their own pursuits. Calling upon the valued attribute of maternal nurturing, woman came together to determine their own definition of citizenship and caring for the nation. In the face of the corruption of patriarchal government systems and exclusion from male social gathering places, women sought to take care of the needy and carve out safe public spaces for themselves. Many social reformers would come to identify with the suffragist movement which sought women’s equal participation in civic matters through the right to vote. The desire for civic participation allowed women to create their own ideology of the Maternal Commonwealth and recover the significance of motherhood from male-dominated social structures.

**Women and Motherhood in the World Wars**

In the twentieth century, mass media outlets maintained a profound influence over the perceptions of American women and motherhood. The American government invested heavily in propaganda to garner support for its involvement in World War I. Maternal imagery was appropriated in order to justify the inevitable deaths of soldiers shipped to Europe. One such example comes in a Red Cross advertisement by artist Alonzo Earl Foringer. In homage to the *pietà*, the image shows a Red Cross nurse cradling a significantly smaller soldier, bandaged and
resting on a stretcher, accompanied by the line, “The Greatest Mother in the World.” Kitch comments that this use of maternal sentimentalism in wartime propaganda “reversed representational norms without challenging them” by presenting “nursing as mothering and mothering as Christian, noble, and selfless” (117). The self-sacrifice often associated with a mother’s surrender to the needs of her child is called upon in the selflessness of women who supported men enlisting in the military.

At this time, advances in contraceptive technology gave rise to the trend towards voluntary motherhood. Kitch writes that despite the remaining influence of the women’s rights movement, advertising in the 1920s still reflected a woman’s new-found “freedom” through her roles as “wife, mother, and shopper” in publications like *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *The Saturday Evening Post* (183). But now that women had the right to choose their own paths in life, domestic life was not an obligation but another option for women. Birth control proponents such as Margaret Sanger advocated the use of contraceptives for married women to reduce the number of children in a family. As a result, Nancy Cott comments that women “more willfully accepted” the responsibilities of motherhood when they were able to plan pregnancies (167). No longer burdened with the task of raising a large family, women were free to become more involved in civic activity or leisure. However, even with fewer children, the nuclear family structure still dictated women’s domestic responsibilities.

A few decades later, mothers did experience a brief moment of empowerment for female workers during World War II who worked to support the American war effort in exchange for their labor effort. Author Elaine Tyler May writes that “more important than resourceful homemaking and careful consuming was parenting during wartime” (74). The patriotic view of motherhood recalled the tie between citizenship and child-rearing in the ideology of Republican
Motherhood. Although many women struggled to take on the role of breadwinner and raise their families alone while husbands were serving in the military, more and more women who had previously served as stay-at-home moms found the opportunity to be productive outside of unpaid domestic work. As a result, some companies saw a benefit in providing child care and other services to facilitate the domestic lives of the working mothers in their factories. Dolores Hayden describes the favorable conditions for women in wartime Vanport City, Oregon. The Kaiser Corporation provided six twenty-four-hour child care facilities with infirmaries so that mothers did not need to miss work when a child was sick, at a rate affordable to the working class (20-21). Historian Susan Hartmann notes that other companies, notably aircraft manufacturers and shipyards, “operated or subsidized day care for their employees’ children” in addition to providing “shopping, laundry and repair services and [providing] meals which workers could purchase to take home to their families” (62). Although this support would be short-lived, the government finally relieved some of the pressures of balancing motherhood and outside pursuits. In a time of national need and patriotic sacrifice, women were finally empowered to be outside of the home in exchange for their cooperation in wartime production.

The Crisis of Motherhood in the Cold War Era

With the growing fear of nuclear technology at the conclusion of World War II, the containment of the United States was reflected in the focus on the nuclear family. As returning soldiers retreated into the security and supposed normalcy of the domestic home, women were pushed back into the kitchen with their baby boomers in tow. May writes that “the vast changes in gender arrangements that some feared and others hoped for never materialized,” noting that the role reversals seen during World War II “underscored women’s tasks as homemakers, consumers, and mothers just as powerfully as it expanded their paid jobs” (140). Women’s financial independence held less precedence than the need to accommodate the influx of
returning soldiers after the war. Jennifer Terry notes that the “ideological valorization” of the nuclear family following World War II was incited to some extent “by a backlash against the relative degree of economic self-sufficiency and social mobility women achieved as a result of well-paid employment in wartime industrial production” (173). This idealization of motherhood within heteronormative marriage necessitated women’s return to the domestic sphere, invoking the Victorian ideology of the True Woman. Although the position of housewife was lauded for “freeing” women from the workplace, financial dependence on the husband resulted in women’s tie to domestic labor and the physical labor of childbirth.

At the same time that women were being seduced back into the domestic sphere, motherhood was being pathologized in mainstream media. Homophobic attitudes blamed motherly affection on homosexuality of their sons, while negligent maternal care led to criminalization. Echoing the instructional literature of the Victorian Era, parenting manuals that were primarily prepared by male “experts” in the field of childcare seemed simultaneously view mothers as overly affectionate and inattentive. May writes that “mothers were praised for doing their jobs well, but if they were not attentive enough or were too attentive, they became the decade’s villains,” as evidenced when Philip Wylie devised the 1942 term “Momism” to describe the phenomenon of men who had been “turned” homosexual by overbearing, overprotective mothers (74). This sentiment was echoed with the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. As she lamented the state of the frustrated, unfulfilled, suburban-dwelling American woman, she was careful to point out that the so-called “bad mothers” being accused of emasculating their sons were none other than those who were “leading the traditional feminine life of housewife and mother” (190). The female role of the mother was used as a scapegoat behind the homophobia that followed the paranoid climate of America during the Cold War.
Authors disparaged the subjugation of women as housekeeper and over-attentive mother, coerced into the domestic sphere with no ambitions of her own.

Whether promoting the Republican Mother as educator and nurturer of new citizens or the True Woman as the moral guardian of the domestic realm, mainstream media images have been fundamental in promoting ideologies of motherhood. From the civic valorization in the early development of the United States to the reaffirmation of women’s traditional domestic roles after the Second World War, idealizations of motherhood were in a constant state of fluctuation. Republican Motherhood allowed women some measure of participation in the foundation of a new country, while women reclaimed the values of motherhood for their own purposes in the ideology of the Maternal Commonwealth. Yet the fear of being labeled deviant mothers pushed women to fully devote themselves to child-rearing at the same time that it made “proper” motherhood unattainable. These oscillating roles for women in the private and public spheres, alternatively celebrated and pathologized, created an inconsistent image of motherhood’s role in American society.

The recurring significance of True Womanhood brought women in post-war America out of civic participation as they were “freed” from the need to work yet relegated to the domestic sphere and family affairs. Growing dissatisfaction with the state of women’s familial roles necessitated a drastic change to the nuclear family in the Cold War Era. As Americans faced drastic social upheaval with the Civil Rights’ Movement and anti-war protests rejecting U.S. involvement in Vietnam, women were growing more disconcerted at their continued marginalization to the domestic sphere. The cyclical nature of women’s confinement within the domestic sphere as wife and mother was reaching a boiling point. Motherhood would soon come
under scrutiny as women moved to reclaim and redefine their roles in society with the emerging women’s movement.
CHAPTER 3
RECLAIMING MOTHERHOOD IN THE WOMEN’S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

The political movements brewing in the Cold War Era led to the upheaval of groups marginalized from the white heteronormative patriarchy of the American mainstream. The resurgence of a highly visible feminist movement attempted to radicalize the way that American women lived and perceived their roles in society. Advocating issues such as women’s access to workplace equity, sexual freedom, and reproductive justice, participants of the Women’s Liberation Movement banded together in support networks and feminist organizations. This movement also served to reevaluate women’s traditional domestic role in the nuclear family as wife and mother. Women in nontraditional modes of motherhood found validation from others in their position through groups that served to aid their constituents physically with childcare or financial opportunities, as well as emotionally through the friendship and cooperation of likeminded women. One such feminist group, MOMMA: The Organization for Single Mothers, was created for this purpose and eventually established its own independent publication, \textit{MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers}. At the same time that MOMMA utilized its newspaper to provide news and valuable resources for its members across the country, the organization’s members demonstrated an effort to more constructively identify with motherhood. \textit{MOMMA} framed empowered motherhood through feminism and exemplified the possibility to (re)conceptualize women’s experiences with motherhood without total self-sacrifice.

\textbf{1960s Politics and the Emerging Women’s Movement}

The 1963 report released by President Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women revealed women’s exclusion from educational and career opportunities in favor of unpaid labor within the home, recommending that provisions be made for childcare in the workplace as well
as more sufficient tax deductions to cover the costs of outside childcare. However, the report failed to recognize the social forces and gender discrimination at the heart of domestic burden being viewed as women’s responsibility (Gatlin 44). That same year, writer Betty Friedan declared in *The Feminine Mystique* that “the only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own” (344). Women’s roles within the private sphere were being questioned in public discourse.

Women’s roles were also being questioned from within the political organizations involved with the Anti-war and Civil Rights movements. Tired of being forced into administrative roles to support their male counterparts, Mary King and Casey Hayden anonymously sent out a position paper detailing their ill-treatment within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In the “SNCC Position Paper, Nov. 1964,” they argued that the women working in the organization were consistently relegated to clerical work while men filled vital leadership roles and maintained unquestioned authority over decision-making (Rosen 107). The following year, King and Hayden circulated a manifesto to their female colleagues again recounting the gender discrimination women faced within male-dominated political communities, citing women’s exclusion from the category of human rights altogether (Brownmiller 14). This document, titled “A Kind of Memo,” became a subject of interest for women attending the conference held by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. Inspired by King and Hayden’s critique of the status of women within these political groups, the National Council of the SDS arranged for a workshop on women’s status within the organization to be attended by both men and women (Echols 34). The discussion quickly dissolved when the male members of the group took offence to the accusations of sex discrimination and the female members eventually broke off to have
their own conversation about the manifesto (34-35). This lack of cooperation from their male counterparts revealed the need for a new community willing to recognize women’s equal value in the movements for social change.

With a greater awareness of the need for equal treatment of the genders, female political activists started breaking from their affiliations with the student groups. In 1965, a group of politicians congregated to discuss their disappointment with the lack of action of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in a series of unofficial meetings. Joined by author Betty Friedan as President, this group officially went public as the National Organization for Women (NOW) in October 1966 (Deckard 329-330). With NOW positioned as the face of a burgeoning movement for women’s rights, feminist organizations began appearing through the United States, including the Redstockings, Bread and Roses, the New York Radical Women.

As they abandoned the political communities of the SDS and the SNCC, women began banding together in favor of working to improve the status of women within the human rights movements. Ethel Klein writes that “group consciousness is a critical precondition to political action” and a “feminist consciousness” grew as women recognized their unequal status in society (2-3). By working together, women presented a united front in the fight for gender equity. However, many “women’s issues” were still considered private. Second Wave feminist Carol Hanisch explained in her seminal essay “The Personal is Political” (1969) that she realized that “personal problems are political problems” that require “collective action for a collective solution” (204). Hanisch identified that women’s tie to the domestic sphere excluded women’s issues from public discourse by the mere presumption that they were irrelevant to public policy, so that women had to work together to bring focus to their needs. The desire to create a public
sphere in American society that incorporated women’s experiences would give rise to consciousness-raising groups.

Author Lynne Olson emphasizes the importance of consciousness-raising groups in the beginning of the Women’s Movement as women congregated “to discuss their personal lives and problems in an atmosphere of support and understanding” (354). The groups allowed women to recognize their common subjugation and marginalization in society. Writer Anita Shreve views “the essentially grass-roots phenomenon of consciousness-raising” as a “process” that is commonly associated with the Women’s Liberation Movement (5). Although she differentiates between these groups and the larger political movement, Shreve notes that the widespread presence of these consciousness-raising organizations made them “one of the largest ever educational and support movements of its kind for women” in the United States (5).

In the essay “Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon,” Second Wave feminist Kathie Sarachild defined consciousness-raising as “studying the whole gamut of women’s lives, starting with the full reality of one’s own” with the intent of raising awareness that will promote people to work towards change (145). She asserted that consciousness-raising became “an essential part of the overall feminist strategy” as it served as “both a method for arriving at the truth and a means for action and organizing” (147). Indeed, the appeal of finding community with other women through these groups brought many women into the Women’s Movement. Serving as “a recruitment device, an initiation rite, and a resocialization process,” participants came to realize the similarity between their lives and the lives of other women (Woloch 516). They connected on issues that had previously isolated them from the public sphere, including exclusion from academic and professional pursuits, marginalization in public policy, domestic abuse, and gender expectations in family life.
Motherhood in the Second Wave

Sharon Howell comments that the call for women’s rights was “a particularly rhetorical movement” organized for “a perceptual change” in constructing “a new female identity” (11). With the reevaluation of white, middle-class women’s roles, motherhood held conflicting meanings for feminists because of the ideological forces that encouraged women to stay in the home and raise a family and discouraging them from participating in public decision-making in politics. Klein states that is was necessary to first reject “women’s traditional self-definition” as mothers in order to include issues like childcare, parental leave in the workplace, and women’s reproductive rights into a feminist agenda (68). However, women’s identity with motherhood was not a focus of discussion. In Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End, Evans attributes this to young women’s rejection of the traditional mother role while older members of feminist organizations had grown children who no longer required childcare (55).

Lauri Umansky, in Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties, writes that “discourse involves not just interaction between minds, but between individuals and groups situated socially” (6). Although feminists were working toward the common goal of gender equality, individuals often had their own beliefs or agendas regarding various feminist issues. NOW’s “Statement of Purpose” called for shared responsibility in marriage and child-rearing, proposing national programs for childcare facilities or opportunities for stay-at-home mothers to reenter the workforce when their children were grown (Rosen 79). However, the lack of personal experience with motherhood caused many young feminists to overlook the issue within the Women’s Movement. In spite of the call for better childcare for working mothers, Marcia Cohen argues that young women in the movement represented “the liberated woman” as “independent, unmarried, and, obviously, childless” (351). Umansky notes that some Second Wave feminists viewed “motherhood as a social mandate, an oppressive institution, a
compromise of a woman’s independence, and a surrender to the half-human destiny that biology supposedly decrees to women” (2). Since the women’s movement was initially focused on “the freeing of libido and the overturning of traditional domesticity,” the idea of motherhood was detrimental to their goals of making contraception readily available, securing abortion rights, and gaining equality in the workplace (29). As a result, public policies that could assist mothers to attain equal treatment as women in the workplace often took a backseat to equal pay and fair hiring practice.

Working class black mothers were often excluded from the goals of the Women’s Liberation Movement because they were distanced from the oppression of white women within suburban domesticity. The findings released by the President’s Commission on the Status of Women were skewed by “neglecting the socio-economic conditions which forced many poorly educated and minority women with young children to seek work” (Gatlin 44). Olson writes that the desire for “personal fulfillment” by white feminists was seen as a luxury to black women from working-class backgrounds who viewed issues like “improved housing and transportation, better health care and nutrition, [and] welfare” as far more pressing (367). While white suburban women resented the lack of personal desires granted to them for the supposed privilege of domestic life, working class black women struggled daily in life as they shouldered both the financial and domestic responsibility to provide for their children.

Race also became an issue moving into the 1970s as black women in particular struggled to find an empowered voice in the wake of the 1965 Moynihan Report, which pathologized matriarchal family groups. However, black single mothers were turning to each other for support when they did not have partners to assist with childrearing. Umansky notes that some feminists held “motherhood minus ‘patriarchy’” as a strengthening force between women (3). She writes
that “the discourse of motherhood within black nationalism, the redefinition of this discourse by black feminists, and the movement toward a parallel analysis by many white feminists [marked] a significant shift within American feminism as a whole toward a more positive valuation of motherhood” (78). Recognizing that mothers faced innumerable, women began to bring maternal issues into feminist discourses.

**MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers**

One consciousness-raising group to emerge out of Los Angeles in 1972 eventually appeared nationwide known as MOMMA: The Organization for Single Mothers. By the end of the year, the organization had pulled together to create an independent periodical called *MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers*. Unlike other mothering magazines of the time, the publication did not focus solely on the act of parenting children. *MOMMA* integrated personal experiences by conducting interviews with single mothers, while including topics regarding the contemporary political climate, issues of child-raising, and recommendations for literature, media, and resources for assistance.

Focused on the status of single mothers and the ways in which they might find empowerment through feminism, *MOMMA: The Organization for Single Mothers* was developed by a two young single mothers named Karol Hope and Nancy Young, who were soon joined by Lisa Connolly and Ann DeWolf (Hartwell 377). The members of the group were primarily divorced or separated women, typically white women of the middle- or working-class, who had felt empowered by the Women’s Movement to leave unhappy marriages for their personal happiness. *MOMMA* President Lin Hartwell (1974-1975), wrote that the organization was created “to achieve an understanding, to create a group of women interested in defining their identities and helping themselves solve the complex problems even [their] mothers knew nothing about” (377). Monthly meetings were held “to provide a place for interested people to become
acquainted with MOMMA’s ideas, and to give the general membership a chance to get together,” along with weekly planning meetings, frequent support group meeting, and occasional committee meetings when necessary (379). The group initially circulated a newsletter to its members with announcements and information on MOMMA meetings. Later on, information such as meeting notes, group events, and advertisements for babysitting, roommates, or goods and services, was disseminated nationally as the organization began publishing *MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers*. In 1974, the group also released a book titled *MOMMA: The Sourcebook for Single Mothers*, which included with the excerpts from the original newspaper, new articles from MOMMA contributors, along with reprinted writings from feminists like Margaret Sanger and Adrienne Rich.

The newspaper was conceptualized by Hope and Connolly, designed by Young, typeset by Gayle Nybakken, and included contributions from Jean Davies, Ginger Duffy, Lin Hartwell, Susan Jacobs, Penny Kiepler, Rozanne Miller, Dorothy O’Connor, Linda Posell, and Paula Tobin (Hope and Young vii). Together, these women formed the *MOMMA* collective. The first issue was published in December 1972, with additional issues being published in January, February, and March 1973. Following a brief lapse in April 1973, subsequent issues were released in May, June, and July of that year, followed six months later with a Spring 1974 issue. These issues were published as standard newspaper format and averaged about twenty pages in length. Following the publication of *MOMMA: The Sourcebook for Single Mothers* in 1976, I found that the lack of documentation left the organization’s later activity or termination unclear. However, the publication of *MOMMA* produced relevant materials that exhibit the organization’s efforts to empower women raising children outside of the roles of the traditional family unit by banding together with other single mothers struggling against negative public perception and the
hardship of being breadwinners. My content analysis of the available issues demonstrates the MOMMA collective’s endeavor to reach out to single mothers by illustrating the personal stories and political issues that affected them.

The MOMMA writers relate to their audience by bringing in personal experiences as well as providing profiles on single mothers and their children. For example, the initial feature story in the first issue of MOMMA released for December 1972 was a piece written by MOMMA co-founder Hope titled “The Single Mother Experience.” An appropriate introduction to the organization’s focus is provided by Hope as she opens her article with the statement, “We are all going through it” (1). The MOMMA Organization’s original establishment as a support group for women struggling as single parents meant that the founders understood and identified with the MOMMA audience. She notes that there were over seven million “divorced, separated, widowed, never-been married mothers in the United States with children under the age of eighteen” (1). But then she specifies that through the “single mother experience” they “[shared] a unique life style” (1). Hope breaks down the common feelings she personally experiences so as to extrapolate them to the lives of the MOMMA readership. She notes her continued feelings of responsibility when her family’s money is tight, her satisfaction when her adolescent daughter confides in her, exhaustion when her is physically drained and still has work to complete, and comfort when her friends show compassion for her situation (1). Introducing these experiences humanizes Hope to the MOMMA audience, reveals the personal nature of the subject of single motherhood, and asserts her as an authority who understands the viewpoints of the MOMMA members.

Hope frequently wrote confessional editorials that describe her experiences as a member of MOMMA or her personal experiences with divorce and adjusting to life as a single mother. In
the February 1973 issue, she writes about a conversation with a frantic caller who had been unable to reach the counselor on the MOMMA staff. Hope reflects on experience and the ways in which she was able to relate to the woman. She concludes that both individually and as a group, single mothers just needed someone who would listen to their frustrations and anxieties (4). She comments that in “listening to each other, exchanging our feelings and our information, we are finding ways in which to carry on our lives more effectively, with more satisfaction” (4). Hope finds the connection between the personal and the political by recognizing the larger implications that this phone call had for her feminism. Hope relates the importance of recognizing the similarities amongst the differences between people in order to create community. In an editorial titled “Taking Care of Ourselves” which was published in the March 1973 issue of MOMMA, Hope writes that she had:

   discovered a truth. I am my own best guide. The point of view that I am developing, from which I make my choices, my decisions, is turning out to be my own creation, from the START. I can see what is going on in my world; I can feel it, know if I like it or don’t like it. My foundations are mine, my values are mine, my choices are mine. (4)

Again, Hope makes the connection between her identity and the goals of women’s emancipation from traditionally feminine roles in the feminist movement. She concludes her editorial by announcing that the newspaper’s “editorial viewpoint” was to present “hard, creative, fresh discovery of ourselves as women, as mothers, as human beings” (4).

The content of MOMMA often exhibited the struggle for single mothers to gain self-awareness by understanding their personal identities. Contributor Sue Griffen’s article “It Ain’t Me Babe” appeared in the March 1973 issue of MOMMA, as a personal piece regarding her own struggle to create a feminist identity as a single mother. She writes of the self-loathing she felt as
a housewife before deciding to divorce her husband when her daughter was not quite two-years old. Griffen’s piece is a prime example of the confessional writing that is seen in *MOMMA*. Although she recounts her uncertainty in declaring independence from her marriage, she acknowledges it was a better alternative to remaining the frustrated housewife straight out of Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (15). At the same time, her description of coming into a feminist consciousness holds a valuable political statement for the members of the MOMMA Organization. She had joined a women’s consciousness-raising group and identified strongly with the “oppression” that initiated the Women’s Movement (12). Describing an illustration of gendered “psyches,” Griffen notes that “female sensibilities” represented as a circle within the larger circle on male sensibilities eventually recognized their containment within a patriarchal structure and desired freedom (12). Her conclusion presents both a personal account of feminist awareness and offers a call to action for women in similar situations.

The *MOMMA* publication also demonstrates the possibility for change in the view of motherhood through the figure of the single mother. Issues included profiles of single mothers as a way of illustrating the experiences of women in the MOMMA organization. An interview with Penny Kiepler, a divorced mother of two daughter and employed as a social worker for children’s issues, was interviewed in the article “Supermom?” appearing in February 1973. Kiepler’s interview directly associates her with the Women’s Movement, as she states that it made her aware that women did not recognize how they could positively affect each other’s lives with “enjoyment, or affection, emotional support” (10). The interview reveals the search for personal fulfillment by many feminists, particularly by those who divorced husbands from unstable marriages. In spite of her new-found feminist consciousness, Kiepler notes that the hardest change she faced was dropping her “role of supermom” (11). Even though she was not
willing to compromise her commitment to raising her children, she admitted to learning to cooperate with them to “problem-solve together” (11). As a balance to obsessive mothering or hands-off parenting, Kiepler learns to interact with her children in a way that allowed them to depend on each other to get through their daily lives.

Broadening the range of Americans facing the difficulties of raising children alone reinforced what had initially been viewed as an issue of women’s poverty. The focus of the May 1973 issue of MOMMA attempts to shed light on the experience of single fathers who served as the primary caregivers to their children. Most of the mothers represented in the in-depth personal interviews in each MOMMA issue had similar situations- divorced and adjusting to life as breadwinner and nurturer of a single-parent family. However, the brief stories of single fathers showed a wider range of living situations and backgrounds for the father’s single status. Men such as Chuck Rollins and Bob Goldman were readjusting to life after their wives left them as the primary parents of their children (6). Ben Cannon found himself raising a child alone after his wife died from complications during childbirth and faced the same dilemmas as single mothers when the Nixon administration made cuts to financial assistance programs (6-7). Yet another, a professor at UCLA named Tom Robinson, had weekend visitation rights with his children, but struggled with the issue of trying to raise them with gender neutral attitudes (7). Many of the political issues, including childcare access and welfare, were not just women’s issues but single parent family concerns.

These profiles served two very important functions for the goals of the MOMMA organization. First, these profiles specifically showed the realities of single mothers living in the 1970s. While they did face financial hardships in balancing the various areas of their lives without much help, these profiles also showed the ways in which divorced women could make
motherhood work outside of the traditional nuclear family. In addition to this, the interviews informed the MOMMA readers that they were not alone. The descriptions of frustration or loneliness described by the women profiled normalized these feelings, rather than making female readers into distressed or unfit mothers. Both of these roles created a sense of community within the MOMMA audience.

Features in MOMMA were significant on a broader scale as they focused on bringing awareness to political issues or current events relevant to single mothers. The front page of the February 1973 issue ran the article “Child Care at Joshua Tree” by Dorothy O’Connor. The story focused on the development of a comprehensive child care facility that had been attached to the manufacturing plant of the Joshua Tree clothing company. President Bernard Grenell viewed the center as a necessity in maintaining “a stabilized, loyal, responsible work force,” who in turn reaped the benefits of a convenient and affordable child care program (2). Despite the bureaucratic hurdles required to get the facility up to state-mandated requirements, the program known as Joshua Twee reduced the “high rate of turnover and absenteeism, due for the most part to baby-sitting problems and children’s illnesses” (2). Photographs accompanying the article juxtaposed happy children playing in the play-yard or reading with the teachers, while their mothers were pictured hard at work in the factory next door.

In addition to describing the child care center and getting background on its development from Grenell, O’Connor also interviews the employees and their children. An employee named Frances Roco, for example, expressed her relief that she no longer struggled with a “horrible sense of guilt” for leaving her children in daycare facilities (4). Her comment is illustrative of a common theme of mother’s guilt: the need to work in spite of the pressure to constantly nurture a child. At the same time, newly separated Linda Hahn discovered her pregnancy early in her
employment with Joshua Tree. After being granted a maternity leave of absence, Hahn returned to pursue an administrative career with the company as well as take advantage of the child care facilities that she preferred (4). One of the Joshua Twee administrators commented that although “the children are surrounded with a great deal of love, warmth and security,” it was obvious that “a great part of this security comes from the knowledge that their mothers will be ‘dropping in’ on them during coffee breaks and lunch hours” (2). The ability of the Joshua Tree working mothers to have day care facilities for their children without spending an exorbitant amount of their salaries or having to go far out of the way to drop them off exemplified the feminist demand for proper child care availability in order for women to work.

The front page feature of the May 1973 issues, however, was explicitly political. In the article “Health, Education, and Welfare?,” feature writer Dorothy O’Connor described the controversy behind the Nixon administration’s proposed revisions to the Social Security Act. She explains that the “regulations dealt primarily with eligibility for services which would have the effect of disqualifying most working mothers presently using federally funded day care centers” (1). Blazoned on the front of the issue was a letter sent from the MOMMA organization to high-ranking politicians involved with the proposal, including President Nixon and Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Caspar Weinberger. O’Connor clarifies that the reforms “would force many mothers back onto the welfare rolls and would eliminate the opportunity of many to become self-dependent and productive, working citizens” (2). The concern with a single mother’s ability to finance her family’s needs without government assistance is relevant to MOMMA’s feminist roots. By openly decrying these political changes, the organization is acknowledging the importance of mothers’ empowerment through financial self-sufficiency.
The newspaper served as a site of empowerment for women through knowledge dissemination. One of the important resources provided by MOMMA was an explanatory feature that made political terminology accessible to women receiving welfare. Featured in the February 1973 issue, the “Welfare Dictionary” demystified the “words, initials, and euphemisms used by the bureaucracy and designed to confuse, frustrate and drive [women] away” (6). The article explained the meanings behind the paperwork, actions, and agents involved in the process of applying for and receiving welfare payments to supplement low income families. For example, a “warrant” was simply defined as the “welfare check” (6). A sarcastic tone made light of the fact that women in need of assistance could be disempowered by a system they did not comprehend when the term “computer” was described as:

the thing the agency blames if you don’t get your warrant on time. If you’re kids say they’re hungry and your landlord threatens to evict you, refer them to the computer. Maybe they can sue IBM. (6)

This article made the information accessible enough for women to gain a better understanding of the welfare program they were participating in. By arming women with this knowledge, they could better navigate the bureaucratic hurdles without feeling that they were receiving a handout from the government.

The MOMMA publication also featured a specific section titled “MOMMA Recommends” in each issue. The sections offer ideas ranging from personal improvement, to child care activities, to non-profit organizations available to aid single mother families. Feminist reading material was often suggested, including The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir, radical feminist Shulamith Firestone’s Dialectic of Sex, and critical texts by Susan Sontag. Multiple issues mention the release of Our Bodies, Ourselves, a comprehensive collection of women’s
health care information published by the feminist group the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective. The section also provided personal advice to aid in the everyday stresses of single parenthood. The February 1973 issue of MOMMA related the advice for women to take outings on their own without children or a date, at the same time that it recommended civility when parents who were being comforted by friends with the idea that the single mother would soon “find a new husband” (8). In the May 1973 issue, the first item simply recommended “cooperation, collectivization, association” (12). Another suggestion seen in the March 1973 issue called for better birth control options, as opposed to “diaphragms, or loops that sometimes don’t work, or pills that sometimes clot the blood, or abstinence, which is no fun at all” (9).

As a consciousness-raising group, providing resources relevant to single mothers was vital to the overall mission of the MOMMA organization. In 1974, Hope and Young published _MOMMA Resources_ by elaborating on the “MOMMA Recommends” portion of their publication. Combining the published advice with the contact information for various assistance organizations, the book is a well-planned guide for single mothers. The information is categorized by topics such as “birth control,” “consumer protection,” “health,” “welfare,” making the information easy to reference. The accumulation of the information previously published in _MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers_ shows the wide range of topics that affected women’s lives as mothers.

Just as the Women’s Movement created spaces for women to come together to carve out new roles in society, feminist publications provided alternatives to mainstream magazines such as _Ladies’ Home Journal_ or _Good Housekeeping_. The members of MOMMA: The Organization for Single Mothers initially created a group aimed at raising awareness of the status of unmarried or divorced mothers raising young children. They encouraged collectivity among their members
in the hopes that women with limited resources might enable one another through sharing the difficulties facing single mothers. When they finally began publishing a nationally circulated publication, they branched out in their connection to single mothers and feminists alike.

Most importantly, *MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers* presented a publication for mothers that did not focus solely on the task of child-rearing. Rather, its target audience were single mothers interested in women’s issues, particularly from a feminist perspective. By acknowledging that raising a child is only one aspect of women’s lives, the publication recognized the complexity of women’s self image. MOMMA members sharply felt the tension between traditional female gender roles and the new spaces made available to women through the feminist movement.

The topics featured in *MOMMA* articles represent a desire for balance between women’s public and private lives. Even before the push for gender equity in the workplace, single mothers were already facing the task of serving as both breadwinner and nurturer. *MOMMA* presents a comprehensive view into women’s lives by presenting information about work, health, and relationships, in addition to child-rearing. The legal information provided on issues like divorce, child support, and welfare empowered single women to be independent in their life choices. Being informed on terminology and legal rights gave women power over the outcomes they faced in court, and allowed them the ability to ask intelligent questions to lawyers and social workers. Presenting readers with MOMMA’s political activism, as seen in the May 1973 feature regarding the proposed Social Security Act revisions, similarly serves to raise awareness on women’s issues that could directly affect its audience. As a result, MOMMA successfully enacted its feminist goals through consciousness-raising and providing women with access to information.
Another uniting element for MOMMA readers was the emotional tone most often featured in editorials and interviews. The contributors often acknowledged the overwhelming anxieties of being a single parent, without pathologizing or dismissing these feelings. As writers recounted their own feelings of isolation and the constraints placed on them by the need for childcare, readers could connect from their own troubles and know they were not alone in negative feelings because of their status as single mothers. Hope confesses in the February 1973 issue that by “listening to each other, exchanging our feelings and our information, [single mothers] are finding ways in which to carry on our lives more effectively, with more satisfaction” (4). In representing the financial, emotional, and even mental difficulties faced by single women raising children alone, MOMMA represented the feminist notion that “the personal is political” in the stance to improve conditions for single mothers.

MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers is an example of the independent publishing that became popular with the social and political movements in the 1960s as a method of distributing their views outside of the mainstream press. In “The Quadruple ‘A’: Media Strategies of Protest Movements Since the 1960s,” Dieter Rucht describes “alternative” media reactions as “[attempts] by social movements to create their own and independent media (or public forums of communication) in order to compensate for a lack of interest, or bias, on the part of the established media” (32). Alternative, or underground, media flourished in the political turmoil throughout the 1960s and 1970s as marginalized groups struggled to have their viewpoints enter into the mainstream. Feminist organizations that desired to reach their target audience, but were particularly disparaged through untruthful media fabrications, often participated in the underground press movement in order to distribute news to their constituents and spread information about their cause. In this way, the organizations
actively participated in the knowledge production and dissemination through these independent publications.

The image of motherhood presented by *MOMMA* is one based on the group-cooperation of the Women’s Movement. For the members of MOMMA, feminism served as a way to bolster their independence and balance the role of motherhood in their lives. Although their identities as “single mothers” always aligned them with motherhood, many of the members questioned how they performed their feminism through the group’s activities. They still felt distanced from the Women’s Movement although they were not tied to the domestic role of wife within the nuclear family. In MOMMA’s sourcebook, Hartwell reveals an incident that may have foreshadowed the ultimate disbanding of MOMMA: The Organization for Single Mothers. In the midst of turmoil over the leadership of the newspaper’s publication, the contributing members of the *MOMMA* newspaper formed a collective in which every member had equal responsibility to the publication (383). In the June 1973 issue, the MOMMA contributors hashed out their feelings to collectivizing in the wake of the conflict. While Connolly revealed a sense of security in opening up about “withheld resentments” in the leadership structure, Hope expressed frustrations at sharing responsibilities amongst such a large group of people, while contributing writer O’Connor announced that she was “resigning” altogether because of the her belief that a monthly publication could not be produced without some sort of hierarchy (1). Hartwell writes that after the June 1973 issue was published the MOMMA organization finally split into two groups with “most of the original board people [staying] with the newspaper” while “a new board of directors” of the MOMMA organization was formed (384). The last documented issue of *MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers* was published in the spring of 1974.
In spite of its ultimate disappearance, MOMMA represents an important example of feminists reclaiming the terms of motherhood, in this case focusing the non-traditional mode of single motherhood. Members recognized their common struggles to nurture children while staying employed and shaping out a personal identity. Shared housing and “babysitting co-ops” are frequently identified as ways that single mothers could support each other. By functioning as a group, the women were hopeful that they could thrive, instead of just surviving. *MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers* represents the epitome of feminist consciousness-raising: empowering its own members while presenting their personal stories to national attention as examples of the need for improvements of women’s social status. Presenting a discourse of motherhood through the lens of feminism could have had major implications for the view of traditional gender roles of women. The changes that were enabled by the women’s movement were indebted to the visibility of women’s issues on the part of consciousness-raising groups such as MOMMA.
CHAPTER 4
REDEFINING FEMINISM AND MOTHERHOOD IN THE THIRD WAVE

As the 1970s came to a close, women saw legitimate gains made by Second Wave feminism in improved access to professional and educational opportunities, as well as the possibility of personal choices available to women in how they lived. However, this new empowerment in women’s lives also served as a source of conflict with family life, marriage, or child-rearing. As conservative groups vilified the feminist movement’s role in rejecting the “norm” of the nuclear family and the supposed “breakdown” of traditional family values, women struggled with a feminist identity. As young women redefined their concerns in a new feminist movement, they also sought to reclaim conventionally feminine roles such as motherhood in order to reconcile them with strives made by the Women’s liberation Movement. With new internet technologies that enabled mass publication of personal websites, feminists found a new platform to promote diverse conceptions of women’s roles into the new millennium as they connected with other individuals and feminist organizations with an online presence. Emerging from personal online accounts known as “mommy blogs,” feminist blogger Veronica Arreola uses her blog Viva la Feminista to explore the connection between feminism, her Latina ethnicity, and her understanding of motherhood. At the same time, she reveals the possibility to establish a contemporary empowered motherhood through women’s continued identification with feminism.

Antifeminist Backlash and the Guilt of Motherhood

The advancement of women through the Women’s Liberation Movement created new spaces for women in the workplace as women’s traditional familial roles were being reevaluated. However, as feminist issues became more integrated into the mainstream, women’s roles also became subject to attack from the emerging New Right during the Reagan administration. Susan
Faludi argues that in the 1980s, an antifeminist backlash emerged as a misogynistic response to the increased public presence as the result of women’s progress. She states that “identifying feminism as women’s enemy only furthers the ends of a backlash against women’s equality, simultaneously deflecting attention from the backlash’s central role and recruiting women to attack their own cause” (xviii). This antifeminist attack was detrimental to women’s advancement by reverting American sentiment to a glorification of traditionally subjugating female roles under the pretense of upholding family values. Women who benefitted from the Second Wave’s progress were now reviled for abandoning their domestic duties. Citing working women who put off pregnancy or outright rejected having children, conservative antifeminists argued that housewives were similarly criticized for not being liberated like the feminists. This emerging debate between the value of working mothers and stay-at-home moms would later be dubbed “The Mommy Wars.”

Beginning in the 1980s, popular media sources began to take notice of this contention between feminists and the antifeminist conservatives. The media presence created a public discourse that would come to be known as the “Mommy Wars,” regarding a tension between stay-at-home moms “opting out” of the workplace versus working mothers “opting in” to both a career and family. Andrea O’Reilly comments in Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Feminism, Motherhood, and the Possibility of Empowered Motherhood that the reemergence of intensive mothering in the late 1980s stressed the aspect of “quality time” between the mother and child (39-40). Similar to the recognition of the need for empowerment of women’s domestic expectations in the Cold War era, women were recognizing a need for broadening the socially acceptable roles for women. She argues that this extreme focus on motherhood lacks “agency, autonomy, authenticity, and authority” in the ideals that motherhood be self-sacrificing, informed
by expert advice, incessant, and most importantly, fulfilling to a woman’s need for personal satisfaction (43). These personal sacrifices were faced by both stay-at-home moms whose entire existence became consumed by coordinating their children’s lives and by working mothers who were expected to overcompensate in their involvement with their children once they had returned home from work. Yet instead of opening a dialogue for women to debate the differences in their opinions on motherhood, the media frenzy served to widen the rift between the two factions.

In a 1982 *Ladies Home Journal* article titled “Women Vs. Women: The New Cold War Between Housewives and Working Mothers,” Nancy Rubin argued that a “lack of communication” between stay-at-home moms and mothers who were employed outside of the home was the root of “the bitterness, suspicion, and misconception” at the heart of the problem (101). Rubin contrasts the resentments and negative views each had for the opposite group in a series of interviews, making sure to note that neither side ever seemed to discuss this with the other. One of the working mothers interviewed states that she could not imagine having to solely devote herself to domestic work and childcare, although she was “certainly not a feminist” (100). She also takes note of similar feelings between the two groups of mothers, noting at the time that “the potential for female unity depends upon flexibility of a special sort, the kind that capitalizes upon our strengths as women, that extols rather than denigrates” (102). By relating her personal experiences with a stay-at-home friend who had revealed her resentment towards her for being a working mother, Rubin expresses the healing effect that it had on her views of the two groups. She comments on “the potential for true sisterhood” in the mutual “social fragmentation” women experience as they struggled to link themselves “to the mainstream and work” without outright rejecting marriage and motherhood (102). Yet the concept of feminism as a uniting force between mothers is left out of her call for action.
The Mommy Wars debates were most commonly related to the decision of business women to choose motherhood over their high-ranking corporate positions. Alex Taylor and Barbara Hetzer elaborated in a 1986 *Fortune* article “Why Women Managers are Bailing Out” on what appeared to be a mass exodus of business women sacrificing power positions in the workforce in order to stay home with their children. They argued that the American economy was far ahead “of its allies and competitors in at last beginning to admit women to positions of real power and decision-making” (19). However, Taylor and Hetzer note that statistics were suddenly changing as motherhood became an appealing option as business women gained more power. They stated that disturbingly high number of these “dropouts” were “the pioneering women who had struggled so hard, often in the face of prejudice and economic adversity, to earn the valued passport to high executive rank in corporate America, the Master of Business Administration degree” (20). Yet the authors failed to recognize that women in power positions may have chosen part-time work because they had finally reached a level of power in which part-time work could still be fulfilling and compensate well. Similarly, the article blames the desire for motherhood on women’s exclusion from the very top positions in corporations, as opposed to recognizing that women may have finally hit the “glass ceiling” again and were simply not considered leadership material. Interestingly, the article opens with the statement that “the most important social development” in the United States at the end of the twentieth century was seemingly “revolutionary change” of women being promoted to prominent managerial positions in powerful companies (16). However, the relevance of the Women’s Movement is never positively mentioned as having opened those doors for women to enter the ranks of management.

Others considered the need for restructuring of workplace policies to prevent the need for working mothers to interrupt their work for childcare. Felice Schwartz offered an alternative
stance on working women and motherhood in a 1989 issue of the *Harvard Business Review*. The author acknowledged that women “have a greater tendency to plateau or to interrupt their careers in ways that limit their growth and development” (65). Like Taylor and Hetzer, she also noted that the added expense and possibility of women’s absence from their positions may contribute from their absence in top-ranking executive positions (65). However, Schwartz called for recognition that innate differences between men and women require a reevaluation of workplace policies. Working mothers faced the decision of vacating their positions in order to raise their children, or taking on less responsibilities or hours in order to accommodate the demand of childcare. As a result, they were perceived as less dedicated than their male counterparts. Instead, Schwartz argued that male-dominated workplace policies were restraining on female employees who became pregnant and later shouldered the majority of responsibility for childcare (66).

Unlike Taylor and Hetzer, the author recognized the underlying social aspect of gendered expectations in a heteronormative view on family obligations. She differentiated between the assumed value of “career-primary” versus “career-and-family” employees in a “male corporate culture” (68). Schwartz identified the need for women seeking executive positions to receive the same mentoring and opportunities as their male counterparts in a non-sexist environment, while those seeking to balance their careers with family deserve flexible career opportunities such as family-friendly leave benefits, alternative work schedules, or part-time work (70, 72-73). She concluded that only a reassessment of corporate culture itself can enable women to balance managerial duties with their family obligations, rather than a criticism of women’s commitment to work.

The debates also considered the negative affect that traditional gender roles had on working women and motherhood. Shortly after Schwartz’s article was published, a piece titled
“Advocating a ‘Mommy Track’” appeared in Newsweek. Contributors Barbara Kantrowitz, Pat Wingert, and Kate Robins responded to Schwartz by noting the diverging views on her proposal, which they dub “the Mommy Track” for working women. The authors noted negative responses rejected it as a way of reinforcing sexist stereotypes that made women seem like unreliable employees depending on their unpredictable commitment to motherhood (45). Some business women also feared the repercussions it would have on women in the workplace if they were seen as liabilities to management. If women who were motivated at the beginning of their careers had the potential to vacate their positions within a decade for motherhood, then companies would be less likely to hire women and may seek to reinstitute subtly discriminating hiring policies (45). The piece only served to reinforce the need for revision of gender roles within the family. Yet the debate continued to focus on the divisions between career women, working mothers, and stay-at-home moms, rather than initiating solutions to these rifts.

The presence of these articles in popular women’s magazines, mainstream news periodicals, and business publications exhibits the pervasiveness of the “Mommy Wars” conflict in the media of the 1980s. They reveal distress that the newly liberated and empowered business women were no longer satisfied with the advances they had gained in the 1970s. However, the debate also polarized women on both sides, rather than creating a channel of communication in which women could examine their traditional gender roles. Instead media outlets presented the debate as a situation in which one had to take sides. Commonality or shared struggle, which had previously united women in the Second Wave, went unrecognized as each side clamored for authority. However, issues of femininity would soon be reevaluated and reclaimed by a budding movement of young feminists.
Emergence of the Third Wave

The recognition for a new feminist consciousness partially rose out of the contested views on self-identity and femininity in the Mommy Wars. Young women were now facing the difficult decision of taking advantage of the opportunities that their mothers had fought for in the Women’s Movement, while conservative notions of family and motherhood were pushed by an antifeminist agenda. A burgeoning awareness of the desire for individual choice (in this case the choice for career, domestic childcare, or a balance of the two) and the continuous double standards between the sexes was beginning to bring young women together to declare their own views on the contentious issues they faced.

Young feminists were becoming cognizant of the continued need for feminist collectivity in a sexist society. Writing in response to the scrutiny of implied sexual harassment brought against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas by his former employee Anita Hill, Rebecca Walker (daughter of prominent author Alice Walker) was troubled by the nature of visible gender discrimination even after the Women’s Movement. Writing as a contributing editor in a 1992 issue of Ms. magazine, Walker stated that watching the spectacle of the case unfold “radicalized” her as she witnessed a persistent patriarchal effort “to restrict the boundaries of women’s personal and political power” (39). Walker does not express sadness for the current status of women; she was angered as she realized she was still surrounded by sexism and derogatory male attitudes toward women. She decides that she must act on these feelings and politicize. She resolves “to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment” into her daily life, while committing “to search for personal clarity in the midst of systemic destruction, to join in sisterhood with women when often we are divided, to understand power structures with the intention of challenging them” (41). She concludes by rejecting the conservative label of “postfeminism feminist,” instead declaring “I am the Third Wave” (41). With that statement,
Walker identified the need for sustained feminist consciousness in spite of a perceived progress in women’s roles.

The recognition of a new “Third Wave” of feminist action mobilized young women, many the daughters of Second Wave feminists, to recreate their need for feminism in a society supposedly liberating for women. In the introduction of the anthology Third Wave Agenda, editors Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake describe Third Wave feminism as retaining Second Wave feminism’s “critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures” (3). Third Wave feminism emerged in response to the antifeminist backlash against women’s position in social institutions such as business, politics, and the workplace. Instead of the struggle for gender equity in the public domain, young women were already increasingly present in this space. Media-savvy Third Wave feminists were also aware of the possibilities of gender critique within the area of popular culture and artistic construction. Heywood and Drake explain that Third Wave feminists viewed “cultural production and sexual politics as key sites of struggle, seeking to use desire and pleasure as well as anger to fuel struggles for justice” (4). As a result, reexamination of traditional roles became more integrated into the everyday lives of young feminists.

Women’s reproductive rights continued to be a fundamental concern in the feminist movement. In their 2000 work Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future, feminist activists Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards propose the Third Wave goal of protecting “a women’s right to bear or not to bear a child, regardless of circumstances including women who are younger then eighteen or impoverished” and “to protect this right throughout her life” (279). Although this statement refers more specifically to the topic of abortion, it recognizes that the
divides created by feminist debates like the Mommy Wars only served to alienate women from each other and sabotage the possibility of political mobilization for the benefits of maternal and reproductive freedom. As women struggled to negotiate the feminine ideal of motherhood with the denigration of feminist identity, some grew apprehensive about how to proceed with their own lives and feminist goals. In her 2001 book *Misconceptions: Truth, Lies, and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood*, Third Wave feminist author Naomi Wolf argues that feminism’s rejection of pregnancy as a “disability” and guilt over requiring “special treatment” had prevented women from demanding maternity rights from their employers (229). This disconnect between feminist activism and issues dealing with motherhood exemplifies why Third Wave feminism is often criticized as lacking a clearly stated goal or mobilizing collective.

Critical of the renewed endorsement of “total motherhood,” Third Wave feminists were beginning to question the prospect of feminist mothering as new technologies emerged to connect them through the World Wide Web. Coinciding with the revitalization of feminism through the Third Wave Movement, innovations in internet communications became available in their earliest form in the mid-1990s, broadening the audience with whom feminists could engage in a discourse on motherhood. In the summer of 1999, “specialized weblog management tools” (also known as “blogs”) were released which enabled people to create internet postings without advanced programming knowledge (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan 10). This democratization of technology allowed anyone the chance to present their opinions with the potential to reach a global audience. Stephen Coleman defines a blog as “a web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal (or log) for an individual,” noting that the blog became “an ongoing experiment in the social production of reflection and knowledge” (274). Media coverage of the growing “blogosphere” in 2001 only served to bring public awareness and further increase the
number of bloggers on the internet (Bausch, Haughey, and Hourihan 11). This growth included an increasingly accessible online network of feminists.

In the Summer 2009 issue, Ms. magazine published an article titled “Cyberhood is Powerful” regarding the surge of “mommy blogs” in past few years. Writer Kara Jesella notes that in sharing their personal experiences with motherhood within an online community, mommy bloggers are participating in “a virtual version of feminist consciousness-raising” (27). Blogging can provide an online community for those who are unable to reach out to special interest or activist groups in their local community. At the same time, blogs allow for individual voices to emerge. In comparison to independent publications such as MOMMA’s newspaper, a blog provides an easily accessible space for those who desire to disseminate information or opinions with immediate distribution and little to no expense. Although many mommy blogs focus on the everyday activities surrounding childcare, Jesella writes that many of these bloggers are “overtly feminist and proudly activist” and use their online space to critique legislation and current events that affect children and mothers (27). Politicized mommy blogs include individual bloggers such as Pundit Mom and blogs with multiple contributors like MomsRising, which also serves as an activist organization. These blogs are created by mothers who focus on political commentary or crusade to improve issues regarding motherhood. However, while many of the activist mommy blogs are overtly political, they do not identify as feminist (even if they advocate for traditionally feminist issues).

**Blogging Motherhood in Viva la Feminista**

One of the bloggers mentioned in Jesella’s article, Veronica Arreola, is a self-identified feminist who utilizes the internet to reflect on the intersection between feminism and mothering as well as her Latina heritage. I chose her blog for analysis because, unlike other political mommy blogs, she explicitly affiliates her politics with feminism and identifies as a feminist.
mom. Veronica Arreola notes that she initially ventured into the blogosphere to chronicle her disappointment with the results of the 2000 Presidential election (“About Viva la Feminista”). She writes that like “so many mommy bloggers started blogging to find community or reassurance of their lives and decisions as moms,” she eventually began blogging about the impending birth of her child and joined “a mommy collaborative blog” known as the Chicago Moms Blog (“Where I’ve Been!”). Her Viva la Feminista blog was initiated on July 10, 2007, with an entry in which Arreola announced that the site would mostly focus on “feminism, raising a feminist, and books” (“Welcome!”). The website is hosted by the popular weblog site Blogger.com, a subsidiary of Google. Arreola’s entries on her blog Viva la Feminista focus on her ethnic identity, involvement with feminist organizations like the National Organization of Women, critiques about political issues, media influence in child-raising, and reviews of feminist literature. A veteran blogger, she has constructed a feminist mother identity on the site by balancing her personal experiences with political or cultural commentary, awareness of activist issues, and reviews on texts about feminism and motherhood. Common tags for her posts include “abortion,” “blogging,” “body image,” “events,” “feminism,” “health,” “latina,” “media,” “politics,” and “work.” For the purposes of this content analysis, I only reviewed entries that were assigned the tag “motherhood.” Through her writing, the Viva la Feminista blog brings awareness to women’s issues in current events while providing a community forum for feminists and mothers to communicate.

As a mommy blog, Arreola’s writing often includes her feminist struggle in raising her young daughter. She writes of the importance of instilling a sense of citizenship and political involvement in her daughter’s life. In an entry posted during the 2008 presidential campaign, she notes her disappointment that she had not had time to take her daughter into the community to
canvass for her preferred political candidates, something she had involved her daughter in since she was only three (“Thoughts”). Arreola also utilizes Viva la Feminista as a space to comment on the influence of popular culture on her daughter’s life. In one post, Arreola blogged about the guilt she feels based on the choices that she and her husband make as to what merchandise and media is age-appropriate for their daughter. After deciding against allowing her daughter to buy clothes or accessories based on Disney’s High School Musical franchise, she notes that her daughter still wanted to participate in this trend (“Feminist Mom Guilt”). Although she typically supports her daughter’s decisions, for example choosing to play soccer or dress up as Princess Leia from the Star Wars franchise, she is conflicted over her decision that this trend was too mature for her five-year old. These situations exemplify Arreola’s desire to raise her daughter in a gender neutral environment and identify strong female characters to whom she relate without suppressing her interests.

Arreola also faces difficulties in finding positive female role models for her daughter to identify with as a Latina. Entries on Viva la Feminista exhibit early support for the Nickelodeon children’s cartoon Dora the Explorer. The cartoon is an interactive show featuring a young Latina protagonist who explores the world, always willing to help others by problem solving with the help of her friends, Backpack, Map and a monkey named Boots. Arreola viewed the show positively as one of the rare instances of a popular television show that provided an intelligent female character for her young daughter. In a post titled “Why Mattel & Nick have it wrong,” Arreola became upset about the companies’ decision to make the character of Dora older in order to keep up with the ages of its audience. However, she was offended by the fact that the character was redesigned to be more feminine, trading in her childhood companions for a group of girlfriends and wearing trendy clothing instead of her rough-and-tumble travel gear. She
followed up on this post by critiquing the decision to move the character’s family into the city as Dora moved into middle school (“And Coquí points the way”). Arreola’s struggle to find suitable entertainment and toys for her daughter reflects maternal anxiety to provide positive influence in her hopes that a feminist identity will empower her daughter in the future.

Arreola observes motherhood as a central theme within the 2008 presidential campaign through the figures of Michelle Obama and Sarah Palin. While Hilary Clinton’s campaign was not hindered by her role as a mother because her daughter had already grown up in the public eye, both Obama and Palin were the mothers of young children. In an entry titled “Michelle Obama: Mother or Career Woman?,” Arreola addresses Obama’s identification as the mother of two and wife of the President following Barack Obama’s election. She writes that despite her previous positions as a lawyer and public servant, Obama was not simply taking a backseat to her husband’s role as President. As First Lady, she was stepping into a role that requires balance in her family life and public work.

Although Sarah Palin served as a polarizing figure for feminists, Arreola found a positive outlook on reproductive justice in spite of Palin’s staunch “pro-life” stance. Before becoming John McCain’s running mate, Palin chose to go through with a pregnancy after the fetus was confirmed to have Down’s syndrome and to take a ten-hour flight back to her doctor in Alaska after she began leaking amniotic fluid around the time of her due date. In spite of Palin’s firm anti-abortion stance, Arreola defends the decisions that the vice presidential candidate made surrounding her pregnancy by seeing a “connection between Palin’s actions and reproductive justice” (“How Sarah Palin”). Arreola states that Palin’s personal choices during her pregnancy are just as important as upholding a woman’s right to choose an abortion under the terms of Roe vs. Wade.
However, Arreola was critical of the cultural image of motherhood that Palin employed in order to relate to the general public. Palin self-identified as a “hockey mom” in order to convey herself as an “authentic” middle-class American. Arreola noted that her own daughter was involved in soccer and took it upon herself to evaluate the cost invested in outfitting a child for either sport. In the end, Arreola concluded that Palin’s title in fact reflected her own privilege, as hockey was a much more expensive sport to fund than soccer (“Hockey Mom”). At the same time that Palin accepted the nomination for Vice President at the Republican National Convention, her teenage daughter Bristol was revealed to be pregnant and planning to marry the father of her child. A few months after Obama was sworn into office, however, Palin announced that Bristol had broken off her engagement and was planning to raise her son in their family home. In the entry “What Should Sarah Palin Do?,” Arreola questions Palin’s motives in broadcasting her daughter’s personal life in press conferences instead of allowing Bristol to speak for herself or not speak to the press at all. She also called into question is whether Bristol would still have broken off her relationship to her son’s father if Sarah Palin had been sworn into the office of Vice President in January. Unlike the criticisms of Michelle Obama’s decision to focus on her family life as the wife of a politician, Sarah Palin’s motherhood was questioned because she actively sought political office and brought her children into the public eye.

Similarly, Arreola’s response to a story regarding the pregnancy of Democratic congresswoman in California highlights the double standard faced by women working in politics. Despite the fact that Congresswoman Linda Sanchez had planned the pregnancy with her fiancé, a writer for the Latino Politics Blog insisted that Sanchez was setting a bad example for the Latino community by becoming pregnant before getting married (“Rep. Linda Sanchez”). Arreola took issue with this, stating that as a thirty-nine-year-old working women Sanchez had a
right to choose motherhood outside of marriage without being criticized on account of her role as an elected official (“Is Linda Sanchez a Bad Role Model?”). She chooses to comment on the issue of becoming a mother outside of societal expectations, seeing it as a feminist act rather than a failure in moral standards. In addition, Arreola offered some alternative methods for reducing pregnancies among teenagers in the Latino community by promoting safe sex instead of making Sanchez a scapegoat for the issue (“Is Linda Sanchez a Bad Role Model?”). She chooses to defend Sanchez’s decision against as a responsible and personal act despite her marital status at the time of the announcement.

*Viva la Feminista* features information on activist organizations, bringing them to the attention of Arreola’s audience. After the destruction of their Chicago-based headquarters following a fire, she posted a request for donations on behalf of the New Moms organization (“New Moms”). In return, the organization invited her to tour their facilities a few months later. Arreola praised the mission of the group, offering statistics about their targeted population of homeless teenage mothers and their children. She noted that despite a reporting of no homeless youth in Chicago the previous year, the New Moms organization shelters up to fifty young mothers at a time, offering extended refuge in addition to day care facilities for those seeking educational assistance and vocational placement (“Site Visit”).

On May 12, 2009, an article appeared in the left-leaning *The Nation* in which Nona Aronowitz speculated about the disengagement of mommy blogs from modern feminism (“Raising the Baby Question”). While other bloggers bristled at what they felt was a dismissive view of their feminist participation, a posting on *Viva la Feminista* reinforced the comment. Arreola, who was interviewed by Aronowitz for the original article, agreed that mommy bloggers were mostly apolitical despite her own role within this community. Rather, she writes
that many feminist bloggers simply reject the term “mom blogger” because they fail to recognize the politicization behind it ("Feminist | Mom"). Her response to the backlash to Aronowitz’s article stated that her statements were in response to the question of why “young feminists [are not] connected to mother issues and vice versa” ("About That Nation Article"). She backed up her statement by noting the attention on mommy blogs on the previous Mother’s Day, pointing out that the “corporate media” outlets that compiled these lists failed to include activist blogs ("About That Nation Article"). Despite their recognition within the mommy blog community, these political blogs were not being represented to unaffiliated audiences.

In spite of the role of mother and activist that Arreola has filled, she is not blind to the fact that most mommy blogs are not created with policy change in mind. A few days after the article was published in The Nation, Arreola posted an entry lamenting the disconnect she felt in her own life between feminism and motherhood issues. She writes that when she “tried to bring in mom issues to feminist conversations,” she was met with “blank stares”; while, when trying to discuss feminism with other moms, she would “get silence or even thrown out” ("Fem 2.0"). Twenty-five years after Susan Griffen wrote about the lack of feminist material on motherhood in MOMMA: The Sourcebook for Single Mothers, Arreola echoes the same frustrations that this rift causes in her own life. This self-awareness could be interpreted as a call to action for feminists and mommy bloggers to band together in order recognize the potential rallying power in implementing legislative change for mothers’ benefits in addition to reproductive technology and abortion rights.

When the Summer 2009 issue of Ms. went into circulation, Arreola proudly wrote about the attention that Jesella’s article brought to the politicization of mommy blogging ("Blogging Moms"). An important aspect of community-building exists within the promotion of a blogger’s
colleagues. Arreola moves within the “mommy blogger” community, and her endorsement of various special interest blogs exposes her audience to a wider variety of opinions and feminist topics. With its worldwide reach, the internet has the ability to connect and mobilize people living on opposite sides of the world. Therefore, blogs serve as a tool to empower feminist community by linking women with common goals even when they cannot physically gather together. After appearing on a Santa Fe-based radio show to discuss the topic of health care reform, Arreola took the time to post links to various mommy blog entries on the topic, including a post from the women’s activist group MomsRising and numerous posts from the MOMocrats blog (“Welcome Diego”). This demonstrates her recognition of the need for feminists with internet presence to support and bring awareness to their common goals.

Arreola critiques the dismissal of mommy bloggers’ potential for employment within the blogosphere as authorities on parenting. She considers the criticisms of mommy blogs as they started gaining popularity, and with that, corporate sponsorships. Rather than outright rejecting the idea of selling out, she states that she did not give in to pressure to promote products that she received as “swag” (“The problem”). Instead, Arreola criticized the inability to accept mothers as legitimate sources of knowledge, worthy of being paid salaries for their work in blogging (rather than receiving lump sum payments or free giveaways for their work). Perhaps this idea is one of the important ways of reconciling women’s roles in and out of the home. As mothers, home-based work allows them the freedom to attend to children without giving up or compromising their career goals. However, this debate remains unresolved as mothers who work from the home are often still viewed as full-time stay-at home moms.

Arreola’s blogging illustrates the possibilities of internet technology as a way of bringing women’s voices to the forefront of conceptions of motherhood. Coleman argues that blogs “are
fast becoming sophisticated listening posts of modern democracy,” providing a “source of nourishment for a kind of democracy in which everyone’s account counts” (274). Arreola avoids the collectivity that proved to be problematic for the MOMMA editors through her individualistic publishing of Viva la Feminista using user-friendly internet technology. Understanding the political capacity of mommy blogs, which represent individual’s motherhood experiences with race, sexual orientation, age, single parenthood, surrogacy, adoption, non-traditional families, could prove vital in mother’s reclamation of choice. However, her ties to various internet communities places her in dialogue with others mothers. Lori Kido Lopez argues that mommy bloggers gain “social support” through their virtual community, noting that “instead of learning about parenting from experts or institutions, this generation of parents prefers to garner wisdom from those who are striving alongside them” (743). Connecting feminists and mothers could resolve the ongoing absence of cooperation in empowering women’s experiences with motherhood.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

American motherhood has been subject to a wide range of views regarding what constitutes a “good mother.” Particularly in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, media images of motherhood have been framed within a conflict between women’s individual satisfaction and complete maternal devotion. Idealizations of motherhood have opened it up as a valued role for women, but a focus on obsessive mothering has both pathologized the mother’s role in child development and subjugated women into a domestic role.

Historically, motherhood has been the default profession for women. The role of motherhood has fluctuated between an empowered position which encouraged women’s citizenship or a private role for women confined to the domestic space of the home. The ideology of Republican Motherhood, emerging during in the early American Republic, established a tenuous relationship between citizenship and domesticity. The praise of feminine virtue in the Victorian Era relegated women to a romanticized ideal of motherhood. However, the tender bond between mother and child displayed in sentimental artwork of the time was rarely achievable in the wake of the scrutiny of “proper” mothering through mainstream women’s magazines. Women regained some agency in the welfare reform of the Progressive Era and reclaimed characteristics associated with motherhood thorough the notion of the Maternal Commonwealth. Yet when women entered the workforce en masse during World War II, they were pushed back into the domestic sphere at the end of the wartime conflict. As a result, women’s citizenship has been directly linked to the meritorious or privatized view of child-rearing.

The radical changes in the political movements of the 1960s initially allowed feminists to redefine traditional modes of motherhood through the Women’s Liberation Movement. The feminist discourse published in MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers
represents the Second Wave focus on women’s lives and understanding their identity within traditionally female gender roles. Produced by the women’s consciousness-raising group MOMMA: The Organization for Single Mothers, the publication is characteristic of the collective focus of feminism during the Second Wave. The collective effort in publishing *MOMMA* sought to empower single mothers through its comprehensive view of women’s lives as mothers, their personal relationships, experiences with work, individual struggles as singles moms, all in addition child-raising. Representing motherhood in this way removes the fixation on “proper” mothering in favor of developing a realistic view of motherhood, which empowered women by acknowledging both positive and negative experiences. The result was a portrayal of motherhood for women, by women who sincerely understood the struggles faced by mothers who sought personal realization through the women’s movement.

In addition, the backlash against feminism in the 1980s and emergence of the Third Wave feminist movement in the 1990s once again pushed for a redefinition of motherhood. The young feminists involved in Third Wave feminism were already influenced by the changes accomplished by the Women’s Liberation Movement, but still coming to terms with how feminism affected their personal identities. Rather than pushing for recognition of women’s experiences, Third Wave feminists sought to reclaim femininity in addition to seeking women’s rights. They worked towards defining an empowered motherhood by refocusing the gendered role of the mother in order to acknowledge feminist individualism. The blog *Viva la Feminista* illustrates the aspects of feminism in Veronica Arreola’s life, including her ethnicity, her activism, her career, as well as how she identifies as a mother. Her attempt to re-politicize motherhood sets it apart from other mommy blogs, which are typically personal without being political, or political without being overtly feminist.
MOMMA and Viva la Feminista discourses demonstrate the ways in which feminist publishing technologies can enable a shift in the discourse of motherhood. The publications exemplify the possibility for expanded definitions of motherhood while establishing the role to be a fulfilling, personalized aspect of women’s lives. The publication of MOMMA: The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers was a collective effort that embodied the cooperative effort of Second Wave feminism. The independent publication of the newspaper was representative of the underground organization of feminist groups’ radical departure from mainstream representations of motherhood. In contrast, the emergence of mommy blogs allowed for individual voices to construct varied definitions of motherhood. Although a relatively recent technology, contemporary notions of motherhood justify the use of blogging to understand modern feminist discourses. While some blogs exhibited personal experiences with motherhood issues, the Viva la Feminista blog is truly representative of a Third Wave notion of personal choice. The single authorship of the blog is aligned with the individual nature of Third Wave identities, although bloggers can then connect through virtual communities. Arreola’s connection with other bloggers and to online political groups represents the possibility for politicized associations utilizing internet technology.

From this analysis, the importance of feminist self-publishing becomes evident in reclaiming and redefining the term(s) of motherhood. Producing and distributing materials outside of mainstream publishing without any filter allows the direct transmission of feminist points-of-view. Neither the MOMMA publication nor the Viva la Feminista blog focus solely on childcare, representing motherhood as a multifaceted experience for women. In addition, the editors of MOMMA and blogger Veronica Arreola participate in producing information by women, for women. The personal experiences are vital to the empowerment and politicization of
everyday experience in recovering motherhood from its loaded ideologies. The editors of *MOMMA* lamented the dilemmas accompanying the collective act of publishing an underground newspaper. However, Arreola’s individualistic self-publishing exhibits the independence to be gained through technological advancement as her blogging is independent and democratizing through the free access to user-friendly software available online. With her work published on the internet, *Viva la Feminista* also has the potential to reach a globalized virtual community of mothers. Self-publishing through blogging can therefore enable widespread action for women’s redefinitions of motherhood.

Motherhood continues to be a site for political contestation, for example in the contemporary debate over a nationalized health care system. On September 25, 2009, Republican senator Jon Kyl addressed the Senate Finance Committee to recommend an amendment to the proposed health care bill that would eliminate maternity coverage on the basis that as a man, he would face higher insurance rates for unnecessary care. In response to his assertion that he did not require maternity benefits, Democratic senator Debbie Stabenow announced, “I think your mom probably did” (Shapiro). The amendment was ultimately rejected. The continued deprecation of the status of women as mothers is contrary to the typically conservative idealization of the nuclear family. It would be more logical to enable women to spend time nurturing children without forcing them to choose between loss of income or the label of a “selfish” mother.

In light of the ongoing debate about what constitutes “proper” motherhood, I view motherhood as a uniting source of feminist action. Issues like maternity benefits or improved family leave plans should be a uniting force for feminist activists. Yet, there has been no organized feminist movement to demand political action that would enable freedom for mothers
to succeed in the workplace. Instead, workplace policies penalize mothers who could benefit from flexible work schedules, on-site day care, or paid sick days when they need to stay home to care for a sick child. No matter what background women approach it from, motherhood is still problematic. Maternity leave, improved reproductive health coverage for women, easily accessible childcare support could prevent women from becoming totally consumed by the responsibilities of motherhood. Rejecting the “liberal versus conservative” debates about “traditional” family values could empower women to explore alternative sources of maternal benefits.

Stay-at-home moms and working mothers were pitted against each other through the media’s portrayal of the Mommy Wars. However, both groups (regardless of age, race, religion, socioeconomic status) could benefit from a redefinition of modern motherhood. This goal presents a uniting force for women to reconvene in order to achieve a wide range of identities of motherhood, accepted as a mother’s personal definition and experience. Reclaiming motherhood could genuinely empower women to make informed choices, whether they are able to devote themselves to staying home with their children or decide to pursue careers without giving up family obligations.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Austin graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in communication from the University of South Florida in May 2007. Her Honors College undergraduate thesis titled “Motivating Social Action through a Campus Safety Student Organization” chronicled the establishment of the N.I.T.E. Organization, a student organization aimed at peer education promoting campus safety and student health. As a student with the University of Florida’s Center for Women’s Studies and Gender Research, she serves as co-founder and vice-president of the Women’s and Gender Studies Student Organization. She is currently a member of the National Women’s Studies Association. Her research interests include representations of gender in media and popular culture, motherhood studies, communication in women’s health, and activism in sexual assault awareness. After graduating from UF with her Master of Arts in women’s studies, she plans to continue her research interests by pursuing doctoral studies.