

Remarks:**Mothers '08 Conference National Mothers' Organizations Showcase**

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The Mothers Movement Online

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I launched the Mothers Movement Online in April 2003 as an open source for resources and reporting for "mothers and others who think about social change." The original concept for the site was simple. In my work with the Mothers & More Advocacy team between 1999 and late 2002, we devoted considerable energy to identifying and articulating what I now call the "motherhood problem" in the United States. But most of our references were anecdotal -- before Ann Crittenden's *The Price of Motherhood* was published in 2001, there were few popular sources for factual information about social and economic factors that constrain mothers work opportunities and reinforce gender inequality in families with children. At the time, we sensed that we were moving through uncharted territory, and felt that the links between motherhood ideology, workplace practices, public policy, and the treatment of caregiving as a subsidiary activity had not been sufficiently acknowledged by earlier generations of activists.

Because I'm too insecure to enter a public debate without having hard evidence to back up my claims, I took on the job of locating reliable sources that document the social, economic, and personal consequences of becoming a mother in today's society. Once I started digging, I discovered an untapped reservoir of relevant information, including thirty-plus years of social research and feminist analysis describing the source of mothers' vulnerability and discontents. Moreover, a number of progressive research groups are actively producing studies on women, work, family, social policy, and durable patterns of inequality in the U.S. Fortunately, many of these reports and other authoritative resources are available on the internet and free to the public. But they aren't all in one place, or in places where less experienced activists might think to look for them.

I envisioned the Mothers Movement Online as a site for cataloging and summarizing relevant research and resources to support rebel mothers and

others committed to improving social conditions for women and working families. As the project quickly evolved, the MMO gained a reputation as an outlet where mothers could share frank, first-hand accounts of navigating the motherhood problem at home, in the workplace, and in their communities, always with an emphasis on the importance of connecting our personal experiences and setbacks to the big political picture.

The guiding philosophy of the Mothers Movement Online is my own philosophy, meaning that the editorial direction of the site is change-oriented, deeply informed by feminist, anti-racist, inclusionist principles, and centered on the idea that mothering and motherhood are socially significant issues and worthy of serious investigation and discussion. And of course, I'm constantly pounding the drum that social change to improve conditions for mothers and families is necessary and possible -- and that anyone, including you, can be part of it. The tone of the MMO is often described as "academic" --which is unfortunate, but I believe this reflects the fact that mainstream media continue to treat motherhood and parenting primarily as lifestyle and consumer topics, and the notion that a rigorous or political approach to motherhood reporting could have widespread appeal defies conventional wisdom about who mothers are and what they like to think and read about.

I should mention some examples of other change work that publishing the Mothers Movement Online has made possible for me. First of all, my work on the MMO has opened the door for continuing collaboration with other organizations, including the National Association of Mothers Centers, Mothers & More, the Association for Research on Mothering, and the National Organization for Women. It's also allowed me to develop working relationships with members of the work-life scholarship and the feminist media communities. Through my involvement in the feminist media community, I've had an opportunity to connect and work with writers and journalists such as EJ Graff and Ruth Rosen, and to offer encouragement and support to younger writers like Kara Jessela and Jeanine Plant, who've written and published articles about the mothers' movement. I've also had an opportunity to publish my own essays and

commentaries on women, work, family, and public policy in media outlets as diverse as the feminist periodical *Off Our Backs* and the Huffington Post. The recent project of which I am most proud is contributing a chapter on advocating for the workplace rights for pregnant and parenting women to the new *Our Bodies, Ourselves: Pregnancy and Birth Book*.

In the past three years, I've also authored formal writing on motherhood, feminism, the ethics of care, mothering in the digital age, and the emergence and political grounding of the twenty-first century mothers' movement -- essays which have appeared, or will soon appear, in a handful of scholarly anthologies. This is deadly dull stuff for ordinary readers, but it's an important part of recording the history and conflicts of what's happening here and now -- years from now, some poor graduate student who's writing a paper on how the mothers' movement gained popular momentum (or why it never did) will be able to find out what we were thinking and writing during the movement's formative period.

But the most rewarding and exciting aspect of the MMO project has been working one-on-one with mothers who want to jump into the stream of making change. In my editorial capacity, I work with developing and new writers who have something vital to say about the complexity of maternal experience, but need a bit of technical help to bring out the full power of their voices. I also get emails and calls from individual moms who are ready to step up for change and want to know how to get started, and I try to cultivate their passion for action and connect them to potential mentors, partners, and resources that can help them make a difference. This is definitely the coolest part of my job, and has taught me a lot about the challenges of grassroots organizing.

In the MMO tradition of raising controversial and uncomfortable questions, in closing I want to share some observations about a recent email blunder on my part -- which turned out to be fortuitous, because I received dozens of comments from readers who had something to say about the appropriate level of political engagement for leaders of a "mothers' movement." Of particular concern to me were writers who insisted that the mothers' movement agenda should not only be non-partisan, but be entirely apolitical. This makes me wonder whether it's time

for stakeholders in the movement to openly acknowledge its progressive heritage, values, and goals. The other thing that surprised me about this episode was how many readers wrote to applaud my courage for living my convictions. In the field of social change, living your values -- not just with your friends and family, but out loud, in the public sphere -- is what it's all about. And I invite you, with all my heart, to join me, and to become part of the change you want to see.

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