

Introduction

Delivering Mothering Studies

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For more than thirty years now, there has been growing interest in the subject of mothering. Adrienne Rich's (1976) groundbreaking book *Of Woman Born*, in which she recognized that "We know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood," began a body of work that has intensified in recent years with the rise of the Association for Research on Mothering and the publication of books, both popular and academic, on the subject of motherhood (11). Questions central to *Mothers Who Deliver* came about through a panel organized at the Midwest Modern Language Association in 2005. That panel asked whether mothering was still marginalized and unknown, as Rich postulated, or a topic whose time had come? What new ideas about mothering and new forms of maternal activism have arisen since feminists first began analyzing motherhood? How can these ideas help us understand earlier women's experiences? How do mothers today understand our identities, our work, and our children?

Our meeting at the conference had the hallmarks of the best kind of feminist encounters: we were strengthened through a recognition of our common experiences of mothering and teaching across generations, we found an audience for an exploration of our differences, and we began to plot how we might intervene in scholarly discourse.¹ Our

work in *Mothers Who Deliver*, as it has evolved out of that conference, posits that we are at a point in our collective intellectual history where we can draw from the wealth of knowledge about mothering that has circulated since Rich's first foray into this topic. At the same time, this collection moves us forward into new arguments and new forms of knowledge about mothering.

In short, we believe that mothering studies has come of age. Since the 1970s, feminist scholars have analyzed the history and current conditions of mothering and have documented mothers' difficulties. These works range from psychoanalytic discussions, such as Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and Daphne deMarneffe's *Maternal Desire* (2004), to philosopher Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* (1989) to work on race and mothering by scholars such as Hortense Spillers (in her famous 1987 essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book"), Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* (1991), and Jennifer Morgan's *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (2004), to economic analysis such as Ann Crittenden's *The Price of Motherhood* (2001), to sociological work such as Stephanie Coontz's *The Way We Never Were* (2000), Miriam Peskowitz's *The Truth behind the Mommy Wars* (2005), and Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas's *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage* (2005), to media studies such as *The Mommy Myth* by Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels (2004), just to name a few. Motherhood's dilemmas and ideological contradictions are spelled out, often chillingly, in these texts.

These texts demonstrate the problem motherhood constitutes in our society and in feminism as well. As the aforementioned texts enumerate, traditional notions of good mothers (White, married, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual) relying on a selfless, naturalized, maternal figure are also part of a racist, heterosexist, and classist duality that pathologizes the mothering of women of color (Roberts 1997; Collins 1991, 2007), queer mothers (Rich 1976; Lewin 1993), young mothers (Perales 1999; Berman, Silver, and Wilson 2007), and working-class mothers (Edin and Kefalas 2005). This cultural framework of traditional motherhood, defined by Patrice DiQuinzio (1999) as "essential motherhood," requires that "all women want to be and should be mothers and clearly implies that women who do not manifest the qualities required by mothering and/or refuse mothering are deviant or deficient as women" (xiii). Feminists have quite rightly resisted this inscription into motherhood, as defined for women in male-dominated societies. Feminist theorizing about motherhood, especially during the early years of the second wave, often postulated the act of caring for children rather

than the social construction of motherhood as the originating and primary source of women's oppression.²

What we as coeditors, in concert with the contributors to *Mothers Who Deliver*, seek to redress in this volume are a couple of key issues: (1) the multiple ways in which understandings and practices of mothering are obscured by patriarchal constructions of motherhood as an institution; and (2) that mobilizing and theorizing about motherhood remains unfinished business for feminism. Feminism's difficulty reconciling the practice of mothering with the politics of women's liberation is a complex issue. Scholars argue that the individualized subject of our current discourses on "women's rights" is difficult to reconcile with the intersubjectivity experienced by many mothers.³ Equally important, the intersections of maternal experience with class, race, and sexuality have created a divide between some White middle-class feminists who have historically seen the family as the locus of female oppression and some working-class women and/or women of color who have found refuge and resistance in their maternal praxis (Horn-Miller 2002; Collins 2007; Anderson 2007). As bell hooks (1990) has written, while growing up in her African American community, the work of homemaking was not simply drudgery, "it was about the construction of a safe place where Black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination" (42). This tension between the oppression experienced by mothers and our often simultaneous experience of resistance through our mothering has been difficult to mediate.

The dilemmas surrounding motherhood have led to frustration within the feminist movement. The contradictions between the devalued nature of child care and women's disproportionate shouldering of that work, on the one hand, and the fact that some women (although not all to be sure) seem to authentically desire to care for children, on the other, have generated, according to Elaine Tuttle Hansen (1997), a "growing sense of impasse" (6). "Feminists have demanded and gained new attention for the previously ignored problems of motherhood, but they have not arrived at consensus about how to redefine the concept or adjust the system" (6). In the midst of this forty-year evolution and debate about the values and dangers of motherhood within feminism and the culture at large, we can find one point of consensus: mothers face significant barriers and obstacles.

Despite the fact that roughly 80 percent of U.S. women will have children at some point during their lifetimes (this statistic leaves out adoptive mothers, so the percentage of women actively caring for children is likely to be higher), issues facing mothers are still seen as the marginal problem of a subgroup (Dye 2008). The problems facing

mothers and families today are numerous and complex. While this volume is intended to look forward to new solutions and new arguments, we feel it is important to note here the current sociopolitical and economic context in which we are writing.

According to the Save the Children's Mothers' Index, which ranks the world's countries according to maternal and child health, as well as economic and education standards, the United States placed 27th in 2008 (Save the Children 2008); the World Economic Forum placed the United States 31st out of 128 countries using similar criteria in 2007 (Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi 2007). The maternal mortality rate is the highest it has been in decades, according to data released by the CDC in August 2007, and is 3.7 times higher for Black women as for Whites (CDC 2007).⁴ While the rates in the United States are still relatively low, in a worldwide perspective, an article about the CDC report, published in the *Washington Post*, states that three separate studies "indicate at least 40 percent of maternal deaths could have been prevented" (Stobbe 2007). In part, therefore, maternal death is just the most extreme consequence of the more widespread problem of the inaccessibility of quality health care in the United States. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, just over half of all Americans carry health insurance through their employer, and 15.4 percent are uninsured. In addition, 10.3 percent of children ages 0 to 18 are uninsured (Kaiser State Health Facts 2007–2008). The implications for these abysmal statistics are clear: mothers and their children are not receiving preventive care, their medical conditions are not being treated, and/or they are going bankrupt to pay for out-of-pocket medical expenses. About half of all families who file for bankruptcy do so after a serious medical problem (Warren 2007).

Not included in the data on maternal deaths are deaths of pregnant women that are the result of violent acts; in fact, domestic violence is the leading cause of death for pregnant women (Curtis 2003; Campbell et al. 2007).⁵ Moreover, women's mother status makes them more vulnerable to domestic violence (Romans et al. 2007), and, among immigrant populations, this status makes them more vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers (Miller et al. 2007).⁶ Not only are mothers more likely to be the victims of crime, but a woman can be prosecuted *because she is pregnant*, typically in cases involving drug use. Among those accused of these "crimes," mothers of color are prosecuted disproportionately to other populations (Roberts 1997)—possibly up to 70 percent of all cases involve mothers of color (National Advocates for Pregnant Women 2008).

Even when disregarding cases of illness, violence, and prosecution, the problems facing mothers in the United States today are wearisome and overwhelming. Among industrialized countries, the United States is the only one that does not require that workers be offered paid leave to care for families (A Better Balance 2009). While some states are correcting for this major gap, the slow progress on this issue indicates that the work that mothers and other caregivers do is simply not valued to the extent that popular discourse about “family values” would suggest. Moreover, the dearth of flexible work arrangements, the rarity of benefits for part-time workers, and the lack of quality, affordable child care make the United States an extremely difficult place to simultaneously raise a family and hold down a job.⁷ In the workplace, being a mother subjects women to a hidden “penalty” that plays out in reduced perceptions of competence and commitment to the workplace and lower pay (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007). Discrimination against those with family responsibilities is not illegal under federal law and is illegal only in Alaska and in a small number of other counties and cities (Work Life Law 2008).⁸ Therefore, although some mothers do “choose” to do unpaid care work full time, as Anne Crittenden (2001) observes, “to most women choice is all about bad options and difficult decisions” (237); moreover, because of this choice, which is made far more by women than by men, “motherhood is the single biggest risk factor for poverty in old age” because of lost wages and lack of retirement savings (6).

As if the decision about whether or not to work outside of the home is not difficult enough, as Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels (2004) argue, “both working mothers *and* stay-at-home mothers get to be failures. The ethos of intensive mothering has lower status in our culture (‘stay-at-home mothers are boring’), but occupies a higher moral ground (‘working mothers are neglectful’)” (12). The media seized on this contradiction and reflected it back on mothers, making the case that the “war” was not between mothers and harmful ideologues but among mothers themselves (Douglas and Michaels 2004).

Our work in this volume would be impossible without the work of researchers, scholars, and analysts who have helped us name and understand the context in which we mother. Peskowitz (2005) explains the difficulties faced by all who seek to improve this context for mothers: “It’s hard to know who or what to blame when the problem’s so big and broad” and when solutions “would lead into every other social issue imaginable” (170). Nevertheless, *Mothers Who Deliver* goes beyond a recitation of the problems facing mothers to an activist agenda of reclaiming a past history of mothers with agency and looking

forward to solutions to contemporary problems. While frequently critical texts end with a gesture toward solutions, our panel raised the question, and our contributors explore here, of how to go beyond an analysis of the often difficult conditions of mothering toward new thinking on the subject.

The evolution that our project has undergone suggests at least two important, and related, points: first, the need for women's studies in general, and mothering studies in particular, to move beyond critique and into other productive forms of analysis, and, second, the need for feminists, both inside and outside of the academy, to identify those innovative, forward-looking practices from which we can better understand the knowledge inherent in mothering. In doing so we join a new movement in feminist studies calling for a reconnection of the personal and the political with agendas for social change.

Under the heading "Feminist Criticism Today" in the October 2006 issue of *PMLA*, a consensus seemed to have been reached by the diverse contributors: the "disconnection between inside and outside" the academy, as Susan Gubar (2006) put it, has threatened feminism's relevance to both communities (1714). Toril Moi (2006) notes "an ever-escalating number of articles on how hard it is for women to combine work and motherhood" without an attendant feminist analysis of the situation (1739). Instead, we get self-help books. Moi challenges us to "analyze our own world" and to produce "a feminist analysis of women's lives [that] can make a real difference to those who take it seriously" (1739).

Mothers Who Deliver provides just such an analysis of the conditions of mothering and motherhood in a variety of contexts. It is a collection of essays that focuses on mothering as an intelligent practice, deliberately reinvented and rearticulated by women. The chapters focus on women as *agents* of discourse and of cultural production. Following Andrea O'Reilly following Adrienne Rich, we identify mothering as a potentially empowered practice and experience that is different from the institution of motherhood, which is often oppressive to women in many cultures (O'Reilly 2006). "Mothering," as used in *Mothers Who Deliver*, encompasses intentional acts of nurturing children as done by men or women. This is a rejection of compulsory heterosexuality, of biological motherhood as the epitome of the parent-child relationship, and of motherhood as self-abasement "to make possible other more empowered practices of mothering," as Andrea O'Reilly puts it (2006, 12).

The chapters that follow share a common starting point in viewing mothers as subjects rather than as objects of research, but beyond this

methodology our contributors speak from a variety of disciplinary and ideological standpoints. In doing so, we feel that this text delivers on a vision for the future of feminist theory, which will not reveal a unitary theory of mothering practice and subjectivity but, rather, a multiplicity of perspectives:

Feminist theorists must recognize that, given the hegemony of individualism and essential motherhood, accounts of mothering will inevitably be characterized by inconsistencies and contradictions, and feminist theory will inevitably include multiple accounts of mothering that will contradict each other and nonetheless contribute something important to our understanding of mothering. (DiQuinzio 1999, 247)

Thus *Mothers Who Deliver* distinguishes itself from much writing about mothering today in that it focuses on forward-looking arguments, new forms of knowledge about the practice of mothering, instead of remaining solely within the realm of critique of current ideologies and policies that are detrimental to mothers.

DELIVERY

The concept of “delivery” in our title plays on the physical process of childbirth. Etymologically, the word “delivery” to signify childbirth has been used concurrently with the same word used to signify the act of setting free or rescuing someone. The second definition also inflects our use of the word “delivery” here, through the feeling of being liberated from old ideologies, old arguments about mothering, and moving forward into new understandings of mothers and mothering. Highlighting the delivery of arguments about mothering enables us to foreground women as actors in a scene characterized by the movement of discourse about mothering: mothers are the agents of discourse, responsible for its delivery, rather than the passive recipients of received wisdom.

Delivery as a guiding metaphor in this book also implies delivery as one of the five canons of classical rhetoric. The canons are the five stages of the process of composing discourse.⁹ The study of delivery in classical rhetoric deals primarily with the physical performance of discourse, especially in an era when written texts were very uncommon and orators spoke to an audience that was physically present. To study delivery meant to study gesture, facial expression, and vocal

management. Today, however, delivery can be extended to a consideration of all means of circulating discourse, and in our multimedia world, the available modes of delivery are vast, if not equally accessible to all.

Therefore, the metaphor of delivery here calls attention to the audience we imagine for our work. It is worth remembering that this book began at a conference, when the enthusiasm of the audience who was physically present and its appreciation for the questions we were raising inspired us to take this project farther. As the collection developed, our audience was sometimes almost eerily present with us, as we imagined the people with whom we were speaking. The concept of delivery here compels us to consider carefully who our audience is, to whom we are speaking, and the most effective way to reach this particular audience. Because the book is focused on moving beyond the critiques of current ideologies surrounding mothering, and moving forward into new arguments about who mothers are and what they do, we envision an audience who is ready for this next step. While we certainly do not assume that our audience is familiar with the entire body of work that has so usefully provided these critiques, we do assume that what will be most persuasive for our readers at this point in history is a collection of arguments that envisions mothers as intelligent agents of the practice of mothering.

Finally, considering delivery in the context of this book raises the issue of the relationship between performance and identity. Perhaps most apparent during political campaigns, delivering a speech is a performance; some people are better at it than others.¹⁰ A politician—any speaker or writer, in fact—must *perform* being a good person in order to persuade her listeners that she *is* a good person. Ever since ancient Greece, the extent to which such a performance could actually change a person's identity has been debated. Feminist theory, especially the work of Judith Butler (1993), provides further insight into the relationship between performance and identity. There is no preexisting social subject outside of discourse, Butler argues, and so identity is produced through the performance of cultural norms of gender, race, sexuality, and so on. Agency is found through the variations of the repetitions of already constituted identity categories (220). The possibilities for radical mothering opened up by Butler's notions of performativity have been recognized by mothering scholars such as Emily Jeremiah (2006), who writes:

Mothering behaviours, viewed in this light, contain the potential for a disruption of dominant discourses on maternity, which depend upon their enactment for validity and which, therefore,

are vulnerable and open to change. . . . Thus, to vary the repetition of mothering practices is to exert maternal agency. (25)

The metaphor of delivery in our collection, to the extent that it takes into account the relationship between performance and identity, calls attention to the ways in which our contributors, by the very act of circulating their new arguments about mothering, are at the same time enacting new identities as mothers and potentially “disrupt[ing] the dominant discourses on maternity.”

The relationship between performance and identity speaks to us as editors as well. The metaphor of delivery in our title highlights for us the fact that putting together this book about mothers as agents, as intelligent practitioners, has enabled us to enact some of the arguments ourselves. The collaborative process, the shared stories about our children that were braided into our conversations about the book, the activities of writing the book and seeing it through to publication—the work of delivering this book to our audience—these have become a part of who we are as scholars and as mothers. The fact that, during this process, our mothering did not exist in a sphere that was distinct from our scholarship has helped us understand in a very immediate, almost visceral, way the arguments that our wonderful contributors have shared with us.

FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Our collection is divided into two parts: the first part of this book focuses on arguments about mothering that are circulated via some medium other than interpersonal contact, through technology such as the cell phone and the Internet, as in the chapters by Shelley Park and Lisa Hammond; film in Nan Ma’s chapter; children’s picture books in Gretchen Papazian’s chapter; essays and newspaper columns in Lee Behlman’s chapter; and sound performances in Andra McCartney’s chapter. In the chapters by Ma and Papazian, the issue of access to arenas such as the film industry and book publishing is an important consideration as mothers attempt to act as agents of the discourse on mothering; in the other chapters, the authors consider how mothers can refigure these media and technology to better serve mothers and their families.

In “Contrapuntal Delivery and Reception of Hildegard Westerkamp’s Electrovoical Performance Work on Mothering, *Moments of Laughter*,” McCartney explores the arguments about mothering made by Westerkamp in *Moments of Laughter*. She understands the delivery of these

arguments to be quite complicated, and she studies the piece from a variety of perspectives: from her own response to a performance of the piece, from her own experience as mother involved in a custody dispute, from feminist studies, from performer, and from other listeners through a reception analysis of listener responses. The multiple, complex set of perspectives enables McCartney to appreciate what she calls the “transgressive power” of the piece to challenge “problematic cultural stereotypes of motherhood.”

Ma, in “The Empty Mirror No More: Mother-Daughter Relationship and Film Spectatorship in Patricia Cardoso’s *Real Women Have Curves*,” takes up feminist film theorist E. Ann Kaplan’s challenge to analyze film from the perspective of mothers. Studying the relationship between the mother and daughter in the film, Ma argues that the character of the mother, Carmen, delivers a “new argument about mothering that goes beyond the binary constructions of the mother as either a mouth piece for patriarchal values from whom the daughter wishes to dissociate herself, or as a victim of patriarchal ideologies.” She locates her argument at the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, and class, and she situates the film and its characters within the larger context of mainstream portrayals of Latinos in film. Ma also studies viewers’ responses to the films by reading online discussions of the film and its characters, thus taking seriously the role of audience in the delivery of new arguments about mothering.

Located at the intersection of feminist, postmodernist, and queer scholarship, as well as her own lived experience as the mother of two daughters, Park’s chapter, “Cyborg Mothering,” argues that technology has the potential to “open spaces of critical self-reflection that are necessary to non-self-sacrificing maternal love.” “Cyborg Mothering” is a fresh look at technology as part of a purposeful strategy of mothering. Park understands her work as opposing discourses that either do not recognize mothers as users of technology or that repeat tired ideas of the divisiveness of technology in human relationships. She calls technologies such as the cell phone, e-mail, and social networking sites on the Internet “technologies of co-presence.” Rather than getting in the way of true intimacy, as some critics contend, Park argues that these technologies “queer time and space” in ways that can transform in positive ways our experiences of intimacy by enhancing our “response-ability,” or our ability to respond and receive response from loved ones.

Like Park, Hammond turns to new communication technologies for new arguments about mothering. Specifically, in her chapter “‘Mommyblogging Is a Radical Act’: Weblog Communities and the Construction of Maternal Identities,” Hammond studies blogging as a site for the circulation of alternative representations and arguments

about mothering. Bloggers, she argues, “contribute to the multiplicity of voices developing new cultural definitions of motherhood, definitions that are both individual and distinct, but also communal in nature, a collective memory through which women rewrite the roles of mothering in contemporary culture.” Thus new arguments about mothering are being constructed and delivered at the same time: the very act of writing and reading blogs, and the development of community that ensues, creates new definitions of mothering, enabling new practices and new understandings.

Even though there is a 100-year span between the topic of Hammond’s chapter and that of the following chapter by Lee Behlman, the two authors make similar arguments about mothers as writers. In “‘The Pencilling Mamma’: Public Motherhood in Alice Meynell’s *Essays on Children*,” Behlman discusses the career of Meynell (1847–1922), who was an influential English poet and essayist at the turn of the century. Behlman argues that especially in her essays, which were published in popular newspapers, Meynell “presents public, journalistic writing unproblematically and without compromise as a career for mothers and not as an obstacle to proper motherhood that must somehow be effaced.” Behlman also studies Meynell’s poems, which, he argues, present “a more directly critical approach to popular notions of ‘essential,’ sentimental motherhood,” critiques that are still relevant today.

Gretchen Papazian’s chapter, “Picturing Mom: Mythic and Real Mothers in Children’s Picture Books,” begins with the argument that books aimed at preschool children are geared toward their mothers too, containing instructions on how to mother. Unfortunately, these instructions are often unrealistic and demeaning to readers. However, as Papazian demonstrates, the picture book itself as the mode of delivery does have the potential to offer alternative, empowering visions of mothering. She illustrates her point by turning to several picture books written by or for African Americans, and she calls for both greater circulation of such books and greater attention to them.

FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS IN INTERPERSONAL DISCOURSE

The second part of this book focuses on the delivery of new arguments about mothering in settings where the mothers are face-to-face with each other or with other audiences. In this context, the content of one’s argument—no matter how “truthful”—cannot be isolated from the performance of the argument. Delivery is the embodiment of the message. In this section, the chapters contain discussions about women who

embody their arguments, their new ideas about mothering, in a variety of interpersonal ways. Meghan Gibbons and Natalie Wilson discuss traditional forms of activism; Janet Peukert and Jillian Duquaine-Watson write about support groups; Lynn Kuechle talks about finding a language to speak about mothering in public dramatic performances; and Jocelyn Fenton Stitt argues for academics to serve as role models on work/life integration for students.

In "More than Talk: Single Mothers Claiming Space and Subjectivity on the University Campus," Duquaine-Watson notes that although we live in a world dominated by technologies to enhance communication, the single mothers support group on the University of Iowa campus demonstrates the importance of face-to-face meetings. Using participant observation, Duquaine-Watson spent two years meeting with "S.M.A.R.T.: Single Mothers Achieving and Reflecting Together," as well as analyzing data from archives and interviews. She concludes that the work of this group constitutes "more than talk." She argues that "in the tradition of feminist consciousness-raising, S.M.A.R.T. constitutes a political space in which single mothers use language as a multifaceted tool of engagement, a way to deliver support, ideas, and a sense of community that . . . are important to their well-being and that of their children." It is, in fact, a political act for these women to meet and claim space for themselves as mothers and students in higher education, where they are often marginalized.

Stitt's chapter also focuses on mothers in higher education. Faculty mothers are often told to keep their identities as mothers under wraps because of cultural notions that mothers are incompetent and unprofessional. While much has been written about the elaborate games of hiding and disclosure that many faculty mothers feel compelled to participate in, there is little research on the benefit for students in seeing faculty members model integrated professional and personal identities in the classroom. Stitt argues for "the value for ourselves and our students when we allow our teaching identities to reflect our experiences as mothers." She does so by discussing her own experiences as a professor/mother and giving concrete examples of ways to bring mothering experiences and knowledge into the classroom. She also discusses her pilot study of her students' reactions to seeing her mother and teach in the same classroom space.

In "Constrained Agency: British Heterosexual Mothers of Homosexual Sons," Peukert takes an innovative approach to the study of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered) identity. Positing the heteronormativity of family life within Britain, Peukert investigates the effects of a son's claiming a gay identity on his mother. She performed one-on-one

interviews with twenty-five mothers who were members of the organization Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG) in the United Kingdom. Peukert's own identity as a mother of a gay son facilitated her research, allowing her both to establish rapport with her interviewees and to see the cultural contradictions in their narratives about their mothering their gay sons. She writes, "I was located in a society where heterosexuality is the expected outcome of 'successful' mothering and a homosexual child points to a fault with the mother." Peukert concludes that although these mothers' openness about their sons' sexuality is progressive, by claiming that they are not at fault for their sons' "gayness," they continue to hold an allegiance to the heterosexual nuclear family. In addition, many of the mothers interviewed constructed a normative gay identity for their son, which included hopes for a "romantic coupling" for their son along the lines of heterosexual marriage. She concludes by noting the "emotional work" performed by her interviewees and herself to reconcile heterosexist assumptions with their sons' gay identities.

We turn in Kuechle's chapter from support groups to the use of public performance to deliver new language about the experience of mothering. "Writing the Script: Finding a Language for Mothering" explores Kuechle's journey from a stay-at-home mother, to a graduate student in communication studies, to her creation of a scripted public performance. Kuechle interviewed five women who varied in age and mothering experiences. Text from these interviews was combined with Kuechle's own observations and the writings of feminist theorists of mothering to create the performance "Extraordinary Ordinary: Mothering in the Face of Unattainable Social Norms." Noting that "we have a limited vocabulary . . . to talk about motherhood" in all of its realities, Kuechle uses this observation as a platform to create that language through the performance itself. "Extraordinary Ordinary" has been performed in a variety of venues, including Kuechle's home university and other local colleges, on the radio, at the 2007 National Communication Association Conference, and at the 2008 Mamapalooza festival in New York, sponsored by the Association for Research on Mothering.

While Kuechle's work involves new ways to talk about the experience of mothering, Wilson's chapter theorizes new ways to discuss and name the activism of mothers. Both chapters point to the silences around the activities and subjectivities of mothers, especially in the public sphere. Wilson looks at the maternal activism of two American women in "From Gestation to Delivery: The Embodied Activist Mothering of Cindy Sheehan and Jennifer Schumaker." The anti-war activism of Sheehan and Schumaker's LGBTQ and disability rights work carried out

during the period 2003–2008 deployed three key modes of delivery, according to Wilson. Both women performed an “evermom” public identity, which allowed them to simultaneously occupy the position of “mother outlaw,” as defined by Andrea O’Reilly (2004); they used personal experience to redefine the relationship of the mother figure in relationship to citizenship and the state, and they put into practice what Wilson calls “embodied activism,” which is “a form of activism that resolutely refuses ‘abstract rationalism’ and instead foregrounded the ways in which national and international policies and institutions affect mothers and their families.” In this chapter, Wilson traces a change from an essentialized maternalist activism used by women in the early twentieth century to a new form of delivery: embodied activist mothering.

Gibbons’s chapter, “Political Motherhood in the United States and Argentina,” continues this discussion of mothers’ public identities and activism by looking at two activist groups: *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (mothers of the Plaza de Mayo), which protested the Argentinean military dictatorship during the period 1976–1983, and the U.S. group Another Mother for Peace, which acted in opposition to the Vietnam War during the late 1960s and early 1970s. While foregrounding their identities as mothers made their public activism suspect, Gibbons notes that “by privileging their identities as mothers, both groups had profound impacts on national discourse around their respective issues.” The *madres’* protests shone an international spotlight on Argentinean human rights abuses, and the Another Mother for Peace brought “hundreds of thousands” of U.S. women into an ultimately successful political movement to end the Vietnam War, Gibbons argues. Gibbons ends her chapter with suggestions about the ways in which these earlier activist groups’ use of strategic essentialism might be useful for contemporary maternal activism.

All of the chapters point the way forward by naming the specific interventions necessary in order to make more productive representations of mothering more widely accessible. They not only showcase new ideas and arguments about mothering but allow us to contemplate new ways of delivering that knowledge to the wider world. None do this more urgently than the concluding chapter of the book by *Mothers Movement Online* editor and publisher Judith Stadtman Tucker. In her epilogue, “Power in a Movement,” she describes her activist work to raise awareness of issues facing mothers. The chapter is not a discussion of past activist practices but instead details her impatience to go beyond analysis toward action. Tucker writes, “I’m tired of dissecting the relationship among motherhood ideology, conflicts in feminism, and the politics of organizing mothers for change.” Asserting that she is

“moving on to the next stage,” Tucker goes on to outline steps at both the political and organizational level for taking action: in our families, neighborhoods, communities, and nation. Her chapter encapsulates our hopes that this book can bring us closer to real social change.

NOTES

1. We would like to acknowledge and thank Jennifer Ahern-Dodson and Carol Poston, our co-panelists at the conference, for being a part of the early conversations that led to this book.
2. See Snitow (1992) for an overview of the relationship between different waves of feminism in the United States and feminist theory about motherhood. Snitow traces the rise of early “demon” texts (34) that sought to reject motherhood (1963–1975) to critiques and explorations of motherhood within second-wave feminism (1976–1979), as well as later attempts (1980–1990) to look at motherhood more complexly, asking not just what motherhood is but “what women actually *do* when they mother” (39, emphasis in original).
3. Patrice DiQuinzio (1999) writes: “Feminism has to rely on individualism in order to articulate its claims that women are equal human subjects of social and political agency and entitlement. But, I argue, feminism has found it impossible to theorize mothering adequately in terms of an individualist theory of subjectivity” (xii).
4. As a point of comparison, the maternal mortality rate in the United States is 14 deaths per 100,000 live births, with European Union countries such as Spain having 5 deaths per 100,000 and Sweden having 8 per 100,000 (Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi 2007).
5. Campbell and colleagues (2007) note that “Pregnancy-associated homicide has emerged as a leading cause of maternal mortality. . . . Two studies concluded that pregnant and recently pregnant women are at 2 to 3 times the risk of homicide compared to non-pregnant women” (258).
6. Miller and colleagues (2007) cite the case of a Guatemalan woman resident in Massachusetts who paid more than \$10,000 to be trafficked into the United States. Her “coyotes” would call her and threaten to hurt her children if she did not repay them. Threats to immigrant women can come from traffickers as well as family members who can use undocumented status as a means of control.
7. See Rosanna Hertz’s (2004) review essay “The Contemporary Myth of Choice” for an excellent overview of recent scholarship on the lack of choice facing working families.
8. The Work Life Law Web site notes that Cook County (Illinois), Atlanta, Milwaukee, and Tampa have outlawed family responsibilities discrimination (see <http://www.worklifelaw.org/FRDFAQ.html> 2008).
9. The other four canons are invention, arrangement, style, and memory.

10. The Greek word for delivery comes from the verb that describes what an actor does.

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