

# Every Mother is a Working Mother

As feminists, we all need to believe that “every mother is a working mother” especially if we expect the same from the rest of the world. Yet we accept, and sometimes use, the term “working mother” to differentiate from those mothers who are “working” at home.

When I learned about the conference “Mothers and Sons: Challenges and Possibilities” (held at York University in September 1998), it was heartening to know that the academic world took the subject of mothering seriously enough to sponsor an entire weekend to study this topic. Yet, I was disappointed to hear the term “working mother” used in a number of different sessions and discover there is little feminist support for women who have chosen to be their children’s primary caregiver for some period of time.

In one of the presentations at the conference, one of the speakers found there is still “feminist resistance to achieving a new ‘feminist’ mode of mothering.” She was primarily referring to the fact that we may not give our sons the same freedoms in their actions and behaviour as we give our daughters. She went on to say that if we adopt the feminist “mantra” of “the personal is political and the political is personal,” then we have to realize that this statement affects and influences everything we say and do. She noted that challenges and contradictions are to be expected in certain segments of society, but that it was frustrating to note that the feminist community is not totally supportive of other women’s choices. This refers to their parenting style, and I might add, their child care choices, including the choice to raise their children at home.

I suppose we have become so used to the term “working mother” that we say it without thinking and we do not see how it devalues women who have chosen to stay at home, working, with children.

Women working against each other, or appearing to work against each

other, has long been a dilemma for feminists. At heart, we no doubt support each other's choices. We support each other to ensure our reproductive freedoms, health choices, and educational, political, and business opportunities. Yet when it comes to child care choices, we are pitted against each other: the "working mom" vs. the "stay-at-home mom." This has been perpetuated in the popular media, but it is also still debated in the feminist community.

When we speak to young women, we talk of career choices, but do we include the career of "mother"? Do we give it value? We need to be very clear on one idea: *every mother is a working mother!*

We need to start referring to women with children as mothers who work in the home, or as mothers who work outside of the home, but who are still "full-time moms." They just have a paid job in addition to their unpaid work of mothering.

For many women, continuing with a paid job not only pays the bills, but also gives them a sense of satisfaction in pursuing goals they may have set for themselves which they may not be able to do if they stay at home. I respect their choices, and, in turn, they should respect mine, as well as those of all the other mothers who choose to raise their children at home.

Staying home with children comes at a cost, apart from the obvious one of not having a salary. Parents, mostly mothers, working at home are not able to contribute to any type of pension plan, including an RRSP. Although, the "working" spouse / partner can contribute to an RRSP on their behalf, there are more limits to this type of contribution. This is detrimental to women, as they will not be eligible for as full a pension as they deserve. They are not allowed to claim any child care deductions for any period of time as a child's primary caregiver, which usually amounts to several years. So they get hit twice: once by not being able to reduce taxable income, therefore paying more tax, and second, by not having pensionable earnings for several years.

Being at home can also wear at one's self-esteem, especially when women really start believing that they don't "do" anything. It is particularly difficult when this attitude comes from other women, and devastating when it comes from feminists—the one group whom you should be able to count on to support the choices of all women. Isn't that the essence of feminism: to strive towards political, economic, and social equality? That social and economic equality has to include all mothers, at home, and in the paid work force. Many women who are at home with their children also do some type of paid work, yet it is only the paid work that is given value by society.

As much as I don't like the term "working mother," I'll use it—for now. I tell people I am a working mother at home, supporting my husband and kids who support me in my paid work. My business card says: "mother-writer-editor-researcher" to show that I give as much value to my "motherwork" as I do to my other work.

We have been socialized to value a woman's role as mother and homemaker as secondary to any paid work outside of the home that she may choose

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to pursue. I am not suggesting that we encourage women to stay home with her children. It's every one's right to choose that option, however, if that is what she wants. It's up to the rest of us to respect and value a woman's work at home, if that is where she chooses to be. One woman at a time, we can change the world, because every woman is a working woman, and every mother is a working mother.