

**Denise Bauer and Ellen M. Gil-Gomez**

## **The Newly Formed “Feminist Mothers and their Allies Task Force” of the NWSA**

It seems hard to believe that a 20-year-old national feminist organization like The National Women’s Studies Association (nWSA) would not have any organizational structures addressing mothering and childcare. That’s why a group of mothers, frustrated by the lack of adequate childcare at national conferences, organized together to form the “Feminist Mothers and Their Allies Task Force” at the June, 1998 conference in Oswego, New York.

Historically, child care at NWSA conferences has only inconsistently been made available. At Oswego, excellent child care was provided, but was not communicated clearly in advance of the conference and was not mentioned in the program book at the conference. In addition, the childcare center was located on the periphery of campus, a 20-minute walk (each way!) from the sessions, a serious problem for breastfeeding mothers and a time consuming inconvenience for all mothers. In addition, the two panel discussions on feminist mothering were scheduled at the same time, again pointing to a systemic lack of awareness and attention paid to these issues.

Interestingly, the two panel discussions, “Motherhood and Families Reconceived” and “Feminist Motherhood Roundtable: The Move from Individual Suffering to Social Activism” fell along the lines of “theory” and “practice.” Instead of remaining apart and forcing conference participants to choose between the two panels, the panelists agreed to join together in one room to share our thinking and among other things, combine our efforts to visualize how we might address feminist mothering within NWSA. A core group began the formal process of establishing a new NWSA Task Force. We chose the title “Feminist Mothers and Their Allies” to include the women who share our concern with mothering but who might not themselves be mothers.

We are happy to report that for the NWSA 1999 conference in Albuquerque

New Mexico the “Feminist Mothers and their Allies Task Force” has organized a series of compelling panel discussions and roundtables. Topics range from the politics of breastfeeding to breastfeeding across cultures, the place of mothering in Women’s Studies, and to a case history of a struggle to establish daycare at a public university and its impact on women at the university. We have also planned a social event with an open reading of creative works on mothering and a book signing with editors Andrea O’Reilly and Sharon Abbey for their newest anthology on feminist mothering. We are also in the process of locating a gallery space in Albuquerque for an exhibition of photography by four women representing families from a feminist perspective. Childcare arrangements are still being finalized for this year’s conference, but this year the process is being supported and paid attention to by the new Task Force.

Some of the Task Force’s long range goals for future conferences are a plenary session on both the theoretical and practical issues of feminist mothering, a writers series featuring some of the extensive feminist writing on mothering and motherhood, centrally located (particularly to accommodate nursing mothers) and continuously available child care for the entire span of the conference, as well as the development of a feminist children’s program to address the hypocrisy of talking feminism while our children play with sexist toys and videos that are the norm in most daycare centers.

We invite other concerned academics to join us in furthering these goals and helping to establish mothering as an important issue in Women’s Studies. For further information contact one of the following people or see our information on the NWSA Web Page at [www.nwsa.org](http://www.nwsa.org) and click on the link for caucuses and task forces; we’re under task forces.