

# Book Reviews

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## **Mother Power: Discover the Difference That Women Have Made All Over the World**

Jacqueline Horner Plumez  
Niverville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2002

### **Reviewed by Fiona Joy Green**

I was intrigued by the opening of *Mother Power*, which asserts that “[m]aternal women have a depth of love and emotion, a fierce protective instinct, a sense of right and wrong, and a persistence that, when used outside the home, can change the world.” Although I was uncomfortable with claims of “instinct” and the “sense of right and wrong,” I set aside my bias and settled in for what I hoped would be an empowering discussion of women’s power as mothers. As I came to the end of the first page, however, where Plumez declares that “all maternal women have an innate set of skills and abilities, different from traditional male qualities, but equally powerful,” I grew suspicious and skeptical of what was to follow. Was this to be yet another book that romanticizes mothering, that will leave some mothers feeling inept and guilty for not meeting unrealistic standards of motherhood? I sincerely hoped not.

An experienced writer – the author is a freelance journalist – Plumez’s book is well organized and her style is accessible. She successfully uses storytelling techniques to introduce the reader to many inspirational accounts of mothers around the world who undertake outreach and political work. As a psycholo-

gist, Plumez presents scenarios, questions, answers, and suggestions at the end of each chapter, a common feature of self-help books. A limited list of sources at the end of the book consists of articles – mainly from newspapers, popular magazines, and a couple of academic journals – as well as several websites of women’s organizations.

The opening section, “What Mothers Are,” shows how Plumez’s theory of Mother Power has been inspired by the Argentinean mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who, in 1977, began (and, to a lesser extent, continue) risking their lives by publicly protesting against the “junta” who overthrew the government and kidnapped and tortured their children. Plumez claims that these women are the strongest and most effective role models she has ever encountered, and believes that the source of their strength comes from being loving mothers. This strength is central to Plumez’s vision of Mother Power, the power of women to act publicly on their strong maternal convictions to effect change.

The second section, “What Mothers Do,” promotes the maternal moral authority of mothers, which includes ensuring the growth and healing of children through unconditional love, common sense, persistence, and creative mothering. In the final section, “What Mothers Need,” Plumez stresses that powerful mothers must make time for themselves, reach out to others for support, and share their troubles with others as a way of turning personal pain into purposeful action. Throughout, Plumez includes stories and prescriptive suggestions.

I enjoyed the multiple narratives of how mothers across various cultures have become powerful forces for justice and fairness through brave and caring maternal action. I was left feeling, however, that Plumez had resurrected—with a new twist—the familiar, confining script of patriarchal motherhood, that mothers can only be judged worthy and “good” (a quality essential to Mother Power and a term Plumez uses throughout her book) when they bring their “maternal strengths to bear on problems outside the home” and assume the added responsibility of being global peacekeepers. Not only are mothers solely responsible for the emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical, moral, and intellectual development and well being of their children, they must now be responsible for improving the larger social world, as well.

I appreciate the impressive work that many mothers carry out in the public sector, but I am not convinced that there is “a new, but as yet undiscovered, movement around the world,” as Plumez claims. Most mothers struggle to raise their children in a world that systematically undersupports and continually blames them for multiple social failures. I also am disturbed by Plumez’s call for mothers to enhance and employ Mother Power to create social change; by using “natural maternal instincts” and flexing their moral authority, mothers must assume responsibility for dramatically changing the world. This is an unrealistic expectation, one that women will likely fail to meet, just as they continually fail to live up to the current unrealistic and unreasonable standards of patriarchal motherhood.