

the ambiguity in Battered Women Syndrome—that domestic violence is a social problem, not located exclusively in individual pathologies.

Parts four and five are more directly focused on the theoretical and practical implications of motherhood. In part four, “Mothers, Good and Bad: Marginalizing Mothers and Idealizing Children,” the authors show how the rhetoric of child protection agencies in Canada implies that the women referred to as “toxic moms” produce children who end up in the sex trade, and explore the disagreement in public policy over what counts as harm and under what circumstances a mother should be held accountable for making risky choices during pregnancy. The authors of essays in part five, “Protesting Mothers: Politics under the Sign of Motherhood,” argue that motherhood did not afford women a platform from which they could articulate a meaningful critique of the military state during the Gulf War, and that the deployment of the “essential” motherhood discourse during the Million Mom March in 1995 obscured the extent to which “individualism itself defines subjectivity in terms of situations and experiences more typical of men than of women” (229).

All twelve essays “interrupt dominant discourses by deconstructing their logic” (133). *Women and Children First*, a book I highly recommend, offers a set of much needed perspectives on contemporary society.

## **The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars *Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?***

Miriam Peskowitz.  
Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005

### **Reviewed by Jessica Smartt Gullion**

If the media are to be believed, there is an ongoing battle between stay-at-home mothers and working mothers. Which mother is better? Who provides the best environment for her children? Mothers are constantly judging each other in the quest to be declared the best.

In *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars*, Miriam Peskowitz deconstructs the much-hyped Mommy Wars. In truth, writes Peskowitz, mothers cannot be divided into two neat, opposing groups. Many mothers alternate between staying at home full-time, working for pay full-time outside the home, and taking on part-time paid employment, sometimes done at home and sometimes done outside the home. The result of this fragmentation is that mothers divided do not band together and insist on social changes that would benefit all parents. Yet, as Peskowitz demonstrates, social change is needed.

Public discourse has relegated the subject of parenting to the realms of personal choice and private responsibility. Yet the “choice” to parent has

significant public consequences. Parents who opt to either stay out of the paid workforce or work part-time lose social security and other benefits. Employers also lose, particularly when trained employees feel they must leave their jobs because they are not given the options of reduced or flexible work hours. Parents (most often mothers) struggle to “do it all”: to have a career and raise children, to have enough money to support the family and enough time to devote to it. *Mothering in America* is not an isolated task, Peskowitz writes—it is deeply engrained into social, cultural, economic, and political issues. Yet these issues are not fully discussed publicly. For the most part, mothering is featured in the media as yet another style issue.

Peskowitz makes a concerted effort to include the concerns of mothers from diverse backgrounds (with the exception of lesbian mothers). She examines the early feminist movement and the split between the concerns of working-class and middle-class mothers. She also attempts to reframe the problem of work-life balance as a parenting problem, rather than a mothering problem, although she acknowledges that the majority of parenting is done presently by mothers.

Consciousness-raising is a powerful tool for changing systems of oppression. Peskowitz challenges us to move beyond the Mommy Wars to make social structural changes that will benefit all parents. She envisions a “playground revolution”: “Motherhood can feel so private, so isolating. How then do we connect it with building new playgrounds and political activism and changing public policy? This is our challenge, the next feminist challenge, the work left to do.”

## **Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970**

### ***The Maternal Dilemma***

Ann Taylor Allen  
Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

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

In *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970*, history professor Ann Taylor Allen explores the “maternal dilemma” facing women living in western Europe during the twentieth century, namely their ability to be mothers and autonomous individuals. Drawing on her extensive knowledge of women’s history and feminist movements—mainly in Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands—Allen pens an enlightening, if non-academic, examination of how motherhood came to be perceived as freely chosen.