

The Mommy Wars

Ann Crittenden, from *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World Is Still the Least Valued*:

"Being a good-enough mother, I found, took more patience and inner strength—not to mention intelligence, skill, wisdom, and love—than my previous life had ever demanded. Nurturing and guiding an ever-changing child was not like housework, a checklist of domestic chores, but highly skilled labor, informed by the same spirit that inspires the best teachers, ministers, counselors, and therapists.

"The second surprise came when I realized how little my former world seemed to understand, or care, about the complex reality I was discovering. The dominant culture of which I had been a part considered child-rearing unskilled labor, if it considered child-rearing at all. And no one was stating the obvious: if human abilities are the ultimate fount of economic progress, as many economists now agree, and if those abilities are nurtured (or stunted) in the early years, then mothers and other caregivers of the young are the most important producers in the economy. They do have, literally, the most important job in the world.

"I'll never forget the moment I realized that almost no one else agreed. It was at a Washington, D.C., cocktail party, when someone asked, 'What do you do?' I replied that I was a new mother, and they promptly vanished. I was the same person this stranger might have found worthwhile had I said I was a foreign correspondent for *Newsweek*, a financial reporter for the *New York Times*, or a Pulitzer prize nominee, all of which had been true. But as a mother, I had shed status like the skin off a snake.

"I gradually realized that mothers—and everyone else who spends much time with children—were still in the same boat that women had been in only a few years earlier. After fighting hard to win respect in the workplace, women had yet to win respect for their work at home.

"But the moment of truth came a few years after I had resigned from the *New York Times*, in order to have more time for my infant son. I ran into someone who asked, 'Didn't you used to be Ann Crittenden?'

"That's when I knew I had to write this book."¹

¹ Ann Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood* (New York: Henry Holt), 2001, pp. 11-12

I. Outsourcing Parenting

The impact of the “get to work” message on parenting and the loss of the “team” concept. From Linda Hirshman’s *Get to Work* book (with apologies for the slang):

“I got a letter from a doctor. He thought my article was crap. His wife was leading the moral life, he claimed, and only his weak character made him so greedy he went on practicing medicine rather than spending more time with their children. I figured he was doing face-lifts or something. I wrote him back asking him to tell me more. As he described his and his wife’s deal, it sounded pretty good. She’s a highly educated physician who works half time at a family practice, which enables her to spend time with their children and do most of the errands and housework as well as volunteering at the local soup kitchen. He practices medicine full time. Only when I pressed him on why he worked such long hours and neglected his children, by his lights, did it emerge what he is doing. He’s doing research on children’s cancer. So there it is. He probably won’t, but he just may, find a cure for cancer. And she never will.”

But maybe *together they* will make scientific contributions, raise a family, make a home, and care for many others.

- Paying others to parent your children: somebody’s got to do it.
- What does it cost when Titus 2 mentors can’t be found? According to a chart compiled by *The Washington Post* this month:
 - ☞ Potty training coach: \$250 for initial consultation and \$175 per follow-up visit
 - ☞ Sleep trainer: \$250 to \$500 per consultation
 - ☞ Meal preparation service: \$30 for a four-person meal
 - ☞ Personal shopper: \$30 for a single item, \$15 per additional item
 - ☞ Lactation consultant: \$85 per hour for in-person visit
 - ☞ Night nurse: \$20 to \$30 per hour
 - ☞ Nanny tax accountant: \$475 to \$800 annually
 - ☞ Educational consultant: \$1,500 to \$3,000 for help choosing schools, completing applications, arranging testing and other services
 - ☞ Professional home baby-proofer: \$50 to \$150 per consultation plus \$500 per 1,000 square feet for products and installation²

² “Beyond Bottles and Diapers,” *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2008.

II. A Brief History of Children

- The Bible clearly esteems children—even Jesus gave children special favor. Hebrews were always known for their pro-child stance (see the birth of Moses).
- The historical contribution of children to the family contribution and the need for child-labor laws during the Industrial Revolution.
- The pro-life stance of 19th-century feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She called abortion infanticide and wrote, “When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit.”

III. Margaret Sanger’s Influence

- The way feminists view Margaret Sanger’s influence and contributions:

“Margaret Sanger devoted her life to the cause of ‘birth control,’ a term she coined in 1916. Raised in a large Irish American family, she had trained as a nurse and married before she became involved in socialist and labor movements in New York City. In defiance of a U.S. law banning the circulation of contraceptive information, Sanger published pamphlets and then a newspaper, *The Woman Rebel*, advocating access to birth control. In 1916, she opened the first birth control clinic and went to jail when it was raided. After World War 1, Sanger turned away from radical politics and courted the medical profession and middle-class supporters through the American Birth Control League. Her views on the elimination of the ‘unfit’ as a solution to social problems reflected the eugenics theories of human betterment that Sanger embraced. During the ‘30s and ‘40s, when Planned Parenthood clinics increasingly made birth control accessible, Sanger supported both population control in the developing world and the medical research that led to the development of oral contraceptives.”

- Sanger refers to women “with staggering rapidity” breeding “those numberless, undesired children who become the clogs and the destroyers of civilization.”
- “Reproductive rights” in the 20th century and the denigration of parenting.
 - ☞ Abortion
 - ☞ Donor babies
 - ☞ Deadbeat dads
 - ☞ Family murders
 - ☞ Genetics counseling

IV. A New Definition of Family?

- “Second-wave feminists focused on the perceived inequalities in the traditional family.
- Third-wave feminists are dismantling that concept altogether.

Take, for example, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards. They are the authors of a leading third-wave feminist book, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. They were born in 1970, became editors at *Ms.* magazine, and consider themselves the daughters of second-wave feminists, both literally and philosophically. When asked about marriage a few years ago, Richards outlined the third wave’s goals of first eliminating the institution of marriage and then eliminating biology from the definition of family.

“I think that marriage first has to be available to all—same sex couples—and the respect of marriage has to be afforded to committed relationships before we can consider eliminating marriage. I think the family should not be eliminated but redefined. We have done a good job of ‘adding’ to family—making it about ‘more than biology’—however, we haven’t yet eliminated biology from that definition and, personally, I think that family should be an emotional bond, not a biological one. Hopefully we will begin to consider this in greater detail as more people use technology to have children,” she writes.³

V. In Christian Circles

- The “quiver-full” controversy
- Parenting as discipleship or shepherding
- The orphans movement
- The burdens of infertility or unwanted childlessness
- The community witness: “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4).

³ As written in the “Ask Amy” column on Feminist.com, May 2003, http://www.feminist.com/askamy/feminism/503_fem8.html.