Feminism and Motherhood

Issues:

- Whether motherhood is a natural marker of sex difference.
- Whether motherhood is the foremost and natural duty of women.
- Whether women should have the exclusive duty of caring for children.
- Whether motherhood is a problem for women.

The need to distinguish between:

- Biological motherhood: reproduction
- Social motherhood: mothering and nurturance

Ann Oakley (Woman’s Work): Biological motherhood is a myth based on the threefold belief that “all women need to be mothers, all mothers need their children, all children need their mothers.”

Jeffner Allen (“Motherhood: The Annihilation of Women”): “A mother is she whose body is used as a resource to reproduce men and the world of men.”

Shulamith Firestone (The Dialectic of Sex): “Pregnancy is barbaric….Pregnancy is the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species. Moreover, childbirth hurts. And it isn’t good for you.”

Adrienne Rich (Of Woman Born): “Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life we require not only control of our bodies…we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.”