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SP.601J / 17.006J / 17.007J / 24.237J Feminist Theory  
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**Discussion 8: Gender and Parenting**

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**Discussion of Final Paper Topics**

**General Reactions to the Readings:**

- What did you think of the readings?
- Which pieces were your favorite? Least favorite?

**Refer to Lisa Dodson's book, Don't Call Us Out of Name:**

- What are the principal themes of this chapter?
- What options do these young women have?
- What futures do they envision? How does the understanding of one's options/opportunities/capabilities affect a young woman's decision whether to keep a baby?
- What is Dodson writing against? What ideas is she trying to disprove in this chapter?
- How does Dodson represent these women?
- Do you get the impression that those young mothers want to go on welfare? Why? Why not?
- Is welfare a "livable wage"?
- What issues did the women have to sift through when making the decision whether to keep a fetus?
- Did the young women know right away that they would keep the baby?
- What familial values instilled in these women led them to consider motherhood as a positive option?
- Do the ideas of "mamacita" (little mother) affect many of these young women? How and why? If not, what do you see as the dominant identities of the young mothers discussed in the chapter?
- Consider the theory of the so-called "black matriarch." How does the idea of the mother as the central, authoritative figure of the household factor into a young woman's decision to keep a baby?
- Do teenagers who become pregnant see childrearing as one potential area in their lives where they could succeed? If so, what factors beyond "mamacita" and black matriarchy encourage this idea?
- How does identifying as a "little mother" and/or a part of the black matriarchy differ from and/or mirror an identity that is focused on paid wages outside the home?
- Did the women choose motherhood out of desperation?
- Did the mothers express regret?
- Do the young women speak of familial pressure to be productive in the workforce?
- Does the white, middle-class idea that one must raise children to be productive, wage-earning members of society differ from how these mothers speak of their own childhoods?
- Are these women able to rely on family? Friends? A boyfriend? The father of the child?
- Do these young women speak of a strong support network if they become pregnant?

- Do they expect much? Do low expectations of the father perpetuate stereotypes and assumptions that a father does not need to be as responsible, as central in the life of the child, as the mother?

**Refer to the chapters from Ann Crittenden's, The Price of Motherhood:**

- What is she arguing about?
- What has historically been considered qualified work?
- How does the equal/difference argument come into play when one questions how to properly value work both in and outside the home?
- Are women likely to be in a submissive position whether they work primarily inside or outside of the house? If so, why?
- How is the traditional "wife"/"mother" devalued in the home?
- Who does American culture typically consider dependent, the wife or the husband? (Consider Crittenden's description of the wife as one of the best bargains a man could hope for)
- What labour does a husband receive from a wife? How is she compensated?
- Is the idea of an ornamental woman a fiction? Why and to whom would this idea be attractive?
- Why does a child need to be a "project"? What is the expectation of his/her contribution to society? Who is responsible for that contribution?
- Do some mothers live through their children? How is this dangerous?
- What is your opinion of Clarence Thomson? How did he get ahead?
- What did he sacrifice? Do you think he thought of his actions as a sacrifice? Why? Why not?
- How does his advancement connect to his sister?

**Refer to Sara Ruddick's article, "Notes Towards a Feminist Maternal Peace Politics":**

- What is Ruddick trying to argue in this piece?
- Does her argument work?
- Would she be better served dividing the piece into two separate essays? If so, how would you divide it?
- In what way does Ruddick object to the notion that all women are fated to be mothers?
- Do you think that men can be "mothers"?
- If a man can be considered "maternal," then what does paternal mean?
- Can one be a feminist, a mother, and not inherently pro-peace? What about women who work in the arms industry yet consider themselves feminists?
- What do you think of Ruddick's implication that the nature of being a mother should make one oppose militarism?
- How do the mothers of Plaza de Mayo break from the traditional mothering role? Does such a public show of unity and maternal love dissent from the traditional idea of mothering?