

What Happened to the Sisterhood?

Emily Navarro

Colorado College

### Abstract

Ever since the feminist movement sought to expand their womanly role outside of the domestic sphere and prove themselves as worthy of being part of the workforce alongside of men, many feminists have created a divide in the movement by separating themselves from women who have chosen to be full-time mothers. Women have become alienated by the feminist community because they believe that choosing to stay home and raise children rather than working and becoming financially independent equates to forgetting about feminist hopes and dreams for the future. However, many feminist, financially-independent women do not understand what being a full-time mother entails or what it contributes to society. In order to further advance the feminist movement as well as eliminate gender discrimination, feminists must stop alienating themselves from each other and acknowledge the price of their segregation; future generations will suffer as will the movement itself.

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I know from personal experience how terrifying it is to realize that you are part of the problem that you are trying to solve. For example, when I was younger, despite being a child of divorce, I looked at the couples who had chosen not to have children and I found myself wondering *but why?* Then, I started to wonder how people with children were even contributing to society. More recently, I started to think more critically about my opinions of mothers, those who stay-at-home, and realized that I could easily be placed in the category of “motherist,” which is defined by Francesca Richards-Spiller from Huffington Post as a person having “negative attitudes towards women who stay at home in order to raise their children” (Are You a Motherist?). The problem with this ideology is that some feminists are stalling the advancement of the movement because they are segregating themselves from the women who choose to stay home and raise their children. This is antithetical to the “Redstockings Manifesto” which called on all women to unite in sisterhood. The influence which “motherists” have on stay-at-home mothers results in counter productivity for the feminist movement due to my radical feminists’ belief that bringing children is a crime against feminism, when in reality, many would argue that discriminating against those who do is a crime against the women’s movement as well as humanity in general.

This concern of there being a divide between financially independent, working women and full-time mothers reveals a central issue within gender discrimination of people making assumptions and having expectations of how women should live their lives. For instance, many believe that if a woman has kids, she is wasting her talent and education and if she does not have kids and chooses a life spent moving up the ladder in her profession, she is accused of being a ‘workaholic’ who lacks a personal life and who is failing to fulfill her ‘womanly role.’ This is

how feminists are actually the main perpetrators in stalling the movement's progression and encouraging the controlling, dominating nature of a patriarchal society. They are the ones responsible for restricting their own gender from being free of the judgments and expectations society holds for them. In "Join Us! The Motherhood Revolution" by Cheryl Lindsey Seelhoff, the author confesses to her audience her initial inability to relate to stay-at-home mothers. She writes, "When I succumb to the temptation to read (an article in which yet another feminist announces she is leaving the work force to become a 'stay-at-home mom'), it takes me weeks sometimes to recover, because of the intense frustrations I feel over the apparently forgotten feminist hopes and dreams for revolution, for the building of a radically woman friendly, mother friendly, child friendly world." However, it is important to ask the question of why does being a stay-at-home mom have to mean giving up feminist hopes and dreams for the future? As expressed by Cheryl Seelhoff, there is no clear solution to this issue as it requires feminists to accept that the world can't exist so that "everyone's needs could be met, only useful and healthful work would be done, and everyone would have time to live" and accept that forcing their way of life onto others is not an effective method in advancing the feminist movement.

Part of the reason for this rift between feminist, working women and stay-at-home mothers is society's perception of what an "empowered woman" is. In her article, Cheryl Seelhoff shares a few important points regarding the division between two types of women from a keynote presentation made by Rebecca Walker, an author of several feminist books and founder of the Third Wave Foundation. Walker says, "Look at the women who are seen as embodying empowerment. Some of them have broken personal lives, and the feminists who admire them haven't critiqued that." She continues to say, "There are problems with our model of success. Our community must create successful family models." It is important to recognize

“our unwillingness to look at the unhealthy aspects of our ideal feminist” because it is causing an unfortunate division in the feminist movement. Rebecca Walker is the daughter of radical feminist and cultural icon, Alice Walker. Their opposing ideologies concerning feminism and what it means to be an “empowered woman” are the root of their destructive mother-daughter relationship. In one of her articles appearing on Daily Mail titled, “How my mother’s fanatical feminist views tore us apart,” Rebecca writes, “The truth is that I very nearly missed out on becoming a mother - thanks to being brought up by a rabid feminist who thought motherhood was about the worst thing that could happen to a woman. You see, my mum taught me that children enslave women.” Due to her mother’s one-sided thinking about motherhood, Rebecca spent most of her early life thinking that a happy marriage and family existed only in fairytales. Walker continues to discuss her troubling relationship with her mother which only became more destructive as she grew older and began to gravitate toward a life of motherhood, causing her mother much pain and aggravation. The feminist community glorified Alice Walker because of her ability to bounce back from having a child, which she viewed as an obstruction to her success, and assert her independence and intelligence in the workplace. However, feminists like Alice Walker who perceive motherhood as an impediment are responsible for betraying “an entire generation of women into childlessness” (How my mother’s fanatical feminist views tore us apart). They pressure stay-at-home mothers into thinking they are pathetic and anti-feminist simply by choosing to have children. This is problematic because there are many women who have allowed these radical views to dictate whether or not they have children and by the time they realize they want to be mothers, their biological clock have run out. Thus, society suffers, as does the feminist movement because of the growing divide between mothers like Rebecca Walker and radical feminists like Alice Walker.

Another contributor to the growing divide among women in the feminist movement is the inability of many working feminist women to understand what being a full-time mother is worth to society. In an article by Colette Moran, published on National Review, entitled “A Well-Known Hipster Defends the Value of Motherhood,” the author discusses the controversial comments made by Gavin McInnes on Huffington Post which he felt were “emboldening women to feel good about choosing motherhood.” In one of his comments he explains the idea that many feminists are solely supportive of women who put career over family and by enforcing this as the norm, they are subconsciously controlling women’s life choices and perceptions of an “empowered woman.” He also makes a great point when he comments, “That’s where feminism has brought us. To defend the homemaker and say her life shouldn’t be trivialized is to demean women.” He is simply stating the absurdity of the growing prejudice of stay-at-home mothers whose lives are no less empowered or valuable than a working woman’s. Motherhood is an absolute vital part of the economy that goes unnoticed by all. If we fail to realize the necessity of motherhood, there is no doubt that future generations will suffer.

The feminist movement was created in the 1960s and 70s by women who sought to free themselves from the societal standards and judgments pushed onto them by a patriarchal society. It seems that women are trying so hard to excel in the workplace in order to prove themselves as worthy competitors amidst male dominance. However, why should all women feel pressured to spend their lives proving themselves to men just to feel accepted by the feminist community? Motherists should reconsider their perception of stay-at-home mothers because, in reality, all these women want to do is live their life by their own standards, and no one else’s. This seems much more liberating and empowering than working hard day and night to prove one’s worthiness to a group of men. Regardless, society needs both types of women to function. By

eliminating prejudice against full-time mothers, the feminist movement will regain its unity and sisterhood, thus paving the way to greater successes in the future.

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