

While most of the chapters work together to build a cohesive whole, the chapter on filmmaker Ngozi Onwurah struggles to fit in. The disjuncture between still and filmic representations seems marked here, and the verbal descriptions of scenes from the film prove difficult to follow or visualize.

A unique strength of the book is the way in which Liss weaves personal narrative into scholarly prose. The short “interlude” on the maternal care given by her ten-year-old son during her battle with breast cancer is particularly compelling. The transitions between the two voices are not always seamless, but this blend of the personal and the political, so to speak, will make her art historical discussions accessible even to lay readers.

## **In the Other Room: Entering the Culture of Motherhood**

Fiona Nelson.

Black Point, NS: Fernwood, 2009.

### **Reviewed by Sonja Boon**

Fiona Nelson begins this new book on mothering by referencing the insights of noted writer Ursula LeGuin, who argues evocatively for an understanding of sexual difference that celebrates women’s unique experiences, understandings, and ways of knowing within a broader patriarchal culture that historically has devalued women. This, too, is the nature of Nelson’s work: her “other room” is the cultural space of the new mother who struggles to articulate and claim a maternal identity within a broader social environment that still does not fully value the act of mothering.

Nelson’s study, undertaken in the early 2000s, involved in-depth interviews with 53 Alberta-based mothers, all of whom were either pregnant or relatively new mothers; novitiates, in other words, in the “mommy club.” Central to her work is the desire to explore and map what she terms the culture of motherhood: the symbols, rituals, stories, norms, values, and initiation rites that mark the cultural space of the mother. Significantly, these characteristics are not externally-defined, but rather, self-defined: articulated and experienced by mothers themselves in a process of meaning-making that Nelson considers essential to shaping mothers’ conceptual identities. Indeed, Nelson’s work suggests that the culture of motherhood is a necessary space for affirmation and celebration and integral to women’s understandings of themselves as mothers. At the same time, however, her research also illustrates tensions, fractures, and exclusions. While Nelson’s interviewees were able to identify the parameters of the culture of motherhood, less than half claimed this culture as a “room of their own” (98). Mothers reported judgement, stigmatization, and conflict on a variety of issues. Such tensions demonstrate that even

as the culture of motherhood enables women to articulate otherwise silenced stories, it also engages in a silencing process of its own, marginalizing and devaluing mothering stories that deviate from assumed ideals. Troublingly, this struggle exists within the mother herself, who, according to Nelson, *needs* the affirmation of the culture of motherhood—that space that “gives language, meaning, and affirmation to what would otherwise be unarticulated or inaccurately represented mothering experiences” (106)—even as she resists allying herself with that space.

By examining the culture of motherhood, *In the Other Room* offers beneficial insights into the complexities and contradictions of maternal identity. However, I also found myself wanting more. I would have liked to read a more nuanced examination of the relationships between the “culture of motherhood” and the “mothers’ club,” terms that Nelson uses interchangeably, but which would appear, from the interview excerpts included in the text, to have very different meanings. There were also some curious omissions. In particular, I was surprised to find no reference at all to the December 2000 Canadian parental leave legislation which guarantees a minimum of 35 weeks of paid parental benefits through the Employment Insurance system. While this legislation is undeniably fraught with problems, it has nevertheless opened up the possibility of transforming the “other room”—not only by bringing mothering into the public eye, but also by offering the potential to broaden the membership base of the culture of motherhood to more formally recognize fathers as well as mothers. Given the anecdotal impact of this legislation (as witnessed through the Vancouver Public Library’s *Man in the Moon* program for fathers and their young children, for example), it seems curious that Nelson’s work makes no mention of it at all.

## **Survival Notes for New Parents: An Inspiration for an Amazing Journey**

Robert Stofel.

Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009.

### **Reviewed by Sarai (“Sadie”) Harris Conway**

*Survival Notes for New Parents* is one of the latest entries into the vast market of books for parents of newborns. The book is organized into 100 entries, each of which includes a few paragraphs on parenting, an inspirational quotation, and a bible verse. Each item is self-contained within a pair of opposing pages. Because of its format, the book does not require sequential reading.

Each of the brief sections defines a scenario and provides suggestions for managing the particular situation. The guide tackles a variety of topics, from