

Book Reviews

Academic Motherhood in a Post-Second Wave Context: Challenges, Strategies and Possibilities

D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Andrea O'Reilly, eds.
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Kristen Abatsis

This edited volume by Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Andrea O'Reilly makes an important contribution to the burgeoning scholarship on motherhood and academe. *Academic Motherhood in a Post-Second Wave Context: Challenges, Strategies and Possibilities* is an insightful collection of essays that argues academic motherhood must be understood in temporal and conceptual relation to the Second Wave. Post-Second Wave academic mothering is challenging, in part due to cultural understandings of motherhood and womanhood. In the post-Second Wave context, working mothers are expected to successfully “have it all.”

In light of the explosive rhetoric of “intensive mothering” in current media coverage, this collection is unique. The discourses of “intensive mothering” and “new momism” shape the ways academic women are mothering and performing at their jobs. In the post-Second Wave, mothers in the academy face many challenges and this volume interrogates the reasons for these challenges—how we think about motherhood and academe—and offers coping strategies. The collection adds to previous work on mothering in academe, such as *Mama, PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life*, and *Parenting and Professing: Balancing Family Work with an Academic Career*.

The editors gather an array of voices and perspectives on motherhood in academe while critically analyzing the institution of motherhood around specific themes of challenges, strategies, and possibilities. Several essays stand out as exceptional in their critique of the academy, such as “We Shoot Our

Wounded” by Kearney and Bailey, “I Should Have Married Another Man” by O’Reilly, “Being and Thinking Between Second and Third Wave Feminisms” by Hallstein, and “Liberalism’s Leaky Legacy” by Huff, Hampson, and Tagliarina. These essays critique academia’s reputation for being a flexible and accommodating work place for mothers and expose this perception as false. Often, the essays cite quantitative and qualitative data to show how the academy is highly oppressive to mothers. For example, discrepancies in hours of work, salary, tenure, discrimination, and publication record are evidence of disparities between women and men in the work place, but also between mothers and childless academics. In addition, the cultural understanding of good mothering or “new momism” actually serves to hinder mothers in the work place and function as a form of feminist backlash.

This book will interest scholars working on women’s employment issues, unpaid labour, and feminist parenting. More importantly, it models the scholarly application of feminist methodologies. Feminist research methods, such as semi-structured qualitative interviews and ethnography, are articulated and applied in each chapter. The volume is also feminist in its attempt to investigate problems of cultural status, identity, and oppression associated with academic motherhood.

Confronting Postmaternal Thinking: Feminism, Memory and Care

Julie Stephens.

New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Reviewed by Jessica Jennrich

In *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking*, author Julie Stephens deploys a feminism that relies upon the personal experiences of mothers and localizes care at the centre of mothering politics. Stephens carefully guides her readers through historical understandings of motherhood as linked to social and political communal identities dependent on national ideas of individualism. As Stephens uncovers, this maternal discourse has served to pit motherhood against professional success as uneasy foes within feminism.

Stephens advocates for memory studies as “an active practice of remembering the maternal (and maternalism) as a paradigm of nurture and care applicable to other social relations” (12). This revolutionary notion pays homage to “the personal is political” ideology at the heart of feminism, but also makes room for care and nurturing.