

*South Asian Mothering: Negotiating Culture, Family and Selfhood* offers rare insight into the experience of South Asian mothers. It should be requisite reading for all mothers, psychologists, activists, academics, sociologists, policy makers, and health professionals.

## **Mommyblogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood**

May Friedman.

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REVIEWED BY KATE WILLIAMS

In *Mommyblogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood*, author May Friedman takes a poststructural theoretical approach to the digital phenomenon of mommyblogs. She relies on the three key terms of hybrid, cyborg, and queer to explore the voices of mommyblogs and to “help elucidate more fully the complexities of agency, power, identity, and subjectivity of motherhood” (22). Friedman contends that mommyblogs should be read as “innovative forms of maternal life writing that, taken collectively, begin to shift understandings of maternal subjectivity by presenting a public and multitudinous account of many mothers’ practices” (27).

The first two chapters, “Introduction” and “A Short History of the Mamasphere and the Discursive Construction of Motherhood,” offer historical and background information about mommyblogs and place mommyblogs within the canon of motherhood theory. In her introduction, Friedman grounds the genre of the mommyblog in earlier motherhood theory, citing Adrienne Rich’s and Alice Walker’s texts that argue for the significance of reading mothers’ stories. Friedman also engages with Judith Butler’s discussion of performance when she writes about the authenticity of mommyblogs and argues that “[i]n following Butler’s notions of performativity, I consider ‘women’ and ‘mothers’ as constructed rather than biologically created, and as unstable, incoherent subjects” (21). Chapter two offers an historical perspective on the development of blogs and mommyblogs. Here, Friedman tells readers how she selected the blogs under consideration in this book and her methodology for reading and analyzing her chosen blogs.

Chapters three to five focus on the three theoretical terms previously mentioned: hybrid, cyborg, and queer. In Chapter three, “On Hybridity: The Diversity and Multiplicity of the Mamasphere,” Friedman is less interest-

ed in the stereotypical middle-class white women writing blogs and more concerned with the non-mainstream bloggers, from the Gaza mother, to the young, unmarried black mother, to “the dominatrix next door” (55). This chapter explores the “complex relationship” between the identifying marker of “mother” and any other marker in regard to race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, nationality, occupation, etc. Friedman acknowledges that mommyblogs do not give rise to fixed identities, that “[t]he hallmark of the mamasphere is instability” (74). This instability, though, is what makes the mamasphere so interesting as a study. Friedman further writes, “To understand mothers that instability must be embraced” (74).

Chapter four, “On the Cyborg: Dialogism and Collective Stories,” relies on Donna Haraway’s theory of the cyborg to argue that the “collective maternal subject” created by the intersection of technology and human writers “is fundamentally cyborg” (76). Friedman reads the cyborg mother through three distinct characteristics of rationality, temporality, and collectivity, which are all concerned with the connection, and disconnect, between the mothers writing blogs and the audience reading them.

Chapter five, “On Queer: A Liminal and Unfixed Motherhood,” argues that mommyblogs expose the queer side of motherhood as an institution. Friedman defines the word queer politically and opens the chapter with a brief history of Queer Theory. She emphasizes that “[u]nlike other reclaimed identity markers, queer, defined as odd or unusual, is notable for its lack of description. Someone who is queer is someone who is outside the norm, rather than a person who is described in his or her own right” (113). This distinction between queer as synonymous with homosexual and queer as “outside the norm” is fundamental to understanding Friedman’s argument that motherhood should be understood as queer. Mommyblogs queer motherhood by exposing non-normative parenting styles and issues. Like the subjects of queer theory, the subjects of mommyblogs are destabilized.

Chapter six, titled simply “Conclusion,” brings together the three concepts of hybrid, cyborg, and queer to argue that “Mommyblogging can thus be seen as more than simply a new tool or a new genre—it is a different way of conceiving of the self” (147). Friedman also uses this chapter to introduce a few new concepts, such as the monetization of mommyblogs and the growing popularity of social media sites like Facebook. Ultimately, Friedman argues that mommyblogs should be read not only because they are insightful and entertaining to readers, but because they present a new and immediate way for women to write and re-write what it means to be a mother through the poststructuralist ideas of hybrid, cyborg, and queer.