

thoughtfully reflects on her researcher relationship with her mother participants as shaped by her own pregnancy and early mothering experiences during her fieldwork. Her sensitivity to mother/child relationships is evident in this study that so beautifully captures the complex parenting strategies used by American mothers to survive and manage their motherloads during these turbulent neoliberal times of heightened fears and insecurities.

Performing Motherhood: Artistic, Activist, and Everyday Enactments

Amber E. Kinser, Kryn Freehling-Burton, and Terri Hawkes, eds.
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2015

REVIEWED BY RACHEL EPP BULLER

In this rich and nuanced volume of essays, the phrase “performing motherhood” takes on layers meaning. Many of the essayists come from performance backgrounds—music, theater, dance, and performance art—and address maternal issues within their own fields. Performance here is broadly defined, as noted in the book’s subtitle, but one consistent interpretation across the essays is the notion of maternal performance as a disruption or an interruption of the status quo. Perhaps most importantly, each essayist considers mothering as an active (and sometimes activist) endeavor: performing motherhood privileges their agency, so that the maternal experience is not simply happening to them. In the introduction the editors highlight this conscious choice, which they made “in the spirit of resisting the persistent narratives of maternal struggle and framing this volume with agency at its core” (4).

The editors worked explicitly to foreground maternal agency even through how they organized the volume. They mix disciplines and arrange the essays into the theatrical structure of Acts I-IV, an inspired reframing of the typical subsection division of edited volumes. In each Act—Performing Space/Location, Performing Intention/In Tension, Performing Identity/Relation, and Performing Presence/Visibility—authors perform political action and resistance and work to make the maternal more visible. Departing from Peggy Phelan’s argument about the power of “unmarked” voices, the editors argue that performing and giving visibility to motherhood grants greater agency than does the subversive power accessible to voices hidden in the shadows.

Several essays stand out as strengths of the book. In “The Invisibility of Motherhood in Toronto Theatre,” Terri Hawkes plays on the typically positive concept of “triple threat” in theatre (i.e., a person who can act, sing,

and dance) to lay out the “triple threat,” or three most detrimental areas, for mother-actors: money, logistics, and body. Hawkes establishes this framing based on her own experiences and those of many fellow actors, but instead of focusing solely on the oppression of mothers, Hawkes turns instead to maternal agency and suggests a long list of possible structural changes to relieve the triple threat and change the situation for performing mothers. Addressing an altogether different type of performance, Kelly Dorgan offers a powerful example of how a mother of a special-needs child must learn to produce and perform a maternal narrative, when she as an adoptive mother is so often blamed for her son’s problems, both by her son and by the many professionals involved in their lives. Dorgan’s essay is a companion piece to an essay she published in Amber Kinser’s earlier volume, *Mothering in the Third Wave*, in which she detailed the early behavioral challenges in her foster-to-adopt situation. Picking up the story again at this later stage, Dorgan weaves together personal narrative and feminist critical inquiry to expose “how producing and performing my special-mothering story is enabling me to learn how to control my own voice” (133).

In “Maternal Ecologies,” Natalie Loveless details a three-year daily performance done in conjunction with her son and, sometimes, with other mothers and children. While Loveless’ art and writing integrate her identities as mother, artist, and theorist, she beautifully acknowledges the challenges inherent in such blurred boundaries, seeing herself as “someone who can never tell when she is being an artist and when she is being a scholar and when she is being a mother, or when she is being too little or too much of each” (165).

Other highlights of the volume include Courtney Brooks’ contribution on Appalachian maternalist protest songs, and Lisa Sandlos’ essay on the maternal performance of competitive dance moms, not only evaluating the norm but also suggesting alternative ways forward. Although a few of the book’s contributions seem unfinished simply because they are so short, overall the essays of *Performing Motherhood* offer distinctive and thought-provoking paths to maternal agency through all manner of performance.

Making Modern Mothers

Rachael Thomson, Mary Jane Kehily, Lucy Hadfield and Sue Sharpe
Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2011

REVIEWED BY PATTY DOUGLAS

Making Modern Mothers pursues a critical question with contemporary cur-