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Mothering in the Context of Child Welfare

The predominant definition of motherhood in Canada, and Western society, reflects the notion of intensive mothering, whereby mothers are expected to manage their responsibilities as the primary caregiver of their children and household while maintaining employment outside of the home. This notion, which is based on a middle-class and Eurocentric construct, leaves little consideration for the experiences of mothers from diverse socioeconomic and ethno-racial backgrounds. Mothers involved in child welfare for allegations of abuse are challenged with identifying with this definition of motherhood, as they face stigmatization by their communities and shame for how they care of their children. Research affirms that mothers in child welfare are disproportionately younger and have a lower-economic status compared to the general population, in addition to having higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, and mental health concerns. Our research sought to answer the following question: How do the narratives of mothers with child welfare involvement challenge good mothering ideology? Our qualitative, exploratory study collaborates with three mothers in Calgary, Alberta, who over the course of a series on in-depth interviews shared stories of the mothering they experienced in childhood, the challenges in their own mothering, which resulted in having their children apprehended by the state, and finally their journey to regaining custody of their children. These women's narratives highlighted their resiliency in reclaiming their identities as good mothers while challenging socially constructed beliefs about women and mothering. Our intention is that the women's stories can inform child welfare policies and procedures to best support diverse families involved in the child welfare system.

Introduction

Feminist scholars Andrea O'Reilly, Sara Ruddick, and Patricia Hill Collins, among others, have asserted the importance of motherhood within public policy, sexuality, culture, race, globalization, and caregiving. In Western

society, motherhood is often portrayed as intensive mothering, whereby the mother assumes the role of the primary caregiver for the children and family unit while maintaining a lifestyle beyond the household (Wells 439). This construct minimizes the real experiences of women who are single mothers, low-income mothers, and working mothers. Sharon Hays has defined "intensive mothering" in contemporary Western society's mothering culture as the "centre of the familial attention but is also the person who guides the process of 'childrearing'" (57). Intensive mothering necessitates an abundance of resources and is founded on the premise that the woman has a moderate income or higher, in addition to the financial reliability of a partner (Butler et al. 249). Therefore, the demands of intensive mothering present challenges for many women who struggle to meet its physical, financial, and timely demands. A feminist Intersectional approach highlights how these interlocking systems of oppression impact a mother's social location and may position them as culturally, economically, and politically marginalized based on race, class, or sexuality (Shin et al. 212). Consequently, many mothers must overcome significant obstacles to achieve the rigid demands of intensive mothering (Collins). In this chapter, we draw upon three narratives from our qualitative, exploratory study in which we collaborated with mothers in Calgary, Alberta, who over the course of a series of in-depth interviews shared stories of the mothering they experienced in childhood, the challenges in their own mothering, which resulted in having their children apprehended by the state, and finally their journey to regaining custody of their children. These women's narratives highlighted their resiliency in reclaiming their identities as good mothers while challenging socially constructed beliefs about women and mothering. Our intention was that these women's stories would inform child welfare policies and procedures to best support diverse families involved in the child welfare system.

Good mothering ideology is the socially constructed perception of what a society deems to be acceptable mothering practices and behaviours rather than a natural or universal set of behaviours (Dewi 210). Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky have defined "good mothering" in Western society as being a mother who is "self-abnegating, domestic, preternaturally attuned to her children's needs" (6). Failure to meet these demands may cause some mothers to feel shame, as they question their ability as good mothers and assume positive mothering identities.

Mothers involved with the child welfare system may face conflict with the societal expectations of good mothering; many are disproportionately from diverse ethnic backgrounds and have a lower-economic status compared to the general population (Trocmé et al. 103). In addition to the shame and stigmatization experienced by mothers because of their child welfare involvement, current child welfare practices maintain and reinforce the social

construction of good mothering identities, as mothers can experience extreme pressure to comply with multiple objectives and rigid expectations (Butler et al. 249). Both factors can impact a woman's ability to develop a positive mothering identity and further solidifies their belief that they failed within this role (Wells 440; Schofield et al. 77).

Literature Review

Mothers involved with the child welfare system are a vulnerable group who are more likely to face multiple social disadvantages compared to the general population (Trocmé et al. 103). High rates of mental health issues, substance use disorders, lack of supportive network, and social isolation are some of the challenges identified by mothers that may lead to having child welfare involvement (Schofield et al. 77; Virokannas 336). It is the culmination of such social disadvantages that lead some mothers to require additional supportive services, such as child welfare services. However, at times, rather than being seen as an area requiring additional support, substance use among mothers is frequently attributed to personal failings, which creates further barriers to receiving supportive services (Schofield et al. 77). These social disadvantages may impact their ability to conform to intensive mothering expectations and thus erode their ability to identify as good mothers. Additionally, the social stigma single mothers can face, as their family unit challenges notions of the traditional nuclear family (Collins), adds to the erosion of their identities as good mothers (Virokannas 329). These social disadvantages may impact their ability to conform to intensive mothering expectations and thus impact their ability to identify as good mothers.

Neglect, defined by the Government of Alberta Human Services as "failing to provide age appropriate basic care such as food, clothing, shelter, love and affection, medical and dental care, education, and protection from harm" (1), is deeply interwoven with a mother's financial struggles and often arises from unintentional and, at times, unavoidable social circumstances. Stigmatization against mothers involved in the child welfare system, particularly for reasons of neglect, negate the idea that poverty is a systemic issue requiring social change. Stigma also contributes to feelings of shame and can create additional barriers to services for these mothers who may be embarrassed or ashamed to ask for assistance and support.

Additionally, mothers who have not been provided with sufficient opportunities to develop the skills necessary to navigate such complex systems and learn to advocate for themselves may misunderstand essential information—such as the role of their caseworker, the nature of their involvement, and maternal rights—which increases the potential risk of prolonged involvement, further surveillance, and permanent loss of custody of their children (Schofield

et al. 74l; Wells 439). Therefore, women commonly feel uncertain of their own parental capacity and struggle with identifying as a good enough mother (Schofield et al. 74).

Research Design

In recognizing the unsettled debate between ideologies of intensive mothering and good mothering for women involved in child welfare—particularly for those who have lost and regained custody of their child in the context of child welfare, homelessness, and poverty—this research study sought to use maternal narratives to challenge societal constructs of good mothering ideology. We chose a narrative inquiry approach as the research study design for its utility in exploring stories about women's lives. Narrative inquiry supports a holistic approach to analysis, which is best used with longer duration and longer sequence of events; it is therefore not designed for explicating short-term experiences (Webster and Mertova 2). This style of inquiry seeks to organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole (Livholts and Tamboukou 94). Although our study explored narratives of the experiences of mothers' involvement in child welfare, it is important to consider that these stories present a story within a story that is woven in the way that women understand, construct, and share their lives as mothers. Following ethics approval, we used purposive sampling to recruit three women who had lost and regained custody of their children in the context of child welfare and were willing to share their stories for the purposes of research.

Each woman provided informed written consent prior to participation and the study received institutional approval. We used nondirective, informal, and conversational styles to conduct a series of in-depth interviews in their homes, lasting from forty to ninety minutes, with each woman (approximately three interviews, each). The interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist to allow for more efficient data analysis. All women chose to be identified with their real first name, and further identification of the participants was reduced by omitting some identifying data from the findings.

Findings

Disrupted Mothering

The stories of each of these women highlighted some of the early-life challenges common to many women long before entering child welfare services and their ability to present strength and resiliency in the face of such adversities. Thus, these women provided a powerful tool to challenge Western notions of good

mothering. Among these challenges, it was, in part, their relationships with their mothers that determined the trajectory of these women's developmental years. They also described poor financial means and an inaccessibility to family resources as further shaping this separation. Lisa grew up under the care of her mother and stepfather, both of whom she reported struggled with alcohol use. She recalled her stepfather as an authoritative figure who maintained control over multiple aspects of functioning in the home, including who Lisa befriended and her choice of music. As she recounted: "I wasn't allowed to play music because it always had to be his way unless he wasn't there. Then my mom kinda' allowed us to, to be more ourselves I guess." Regarding her mother's and stepfather's alcohol use, she commented, "They would drink and at the end of their days and everything like that … that's when their arguments kinda came out about things." As a result of these conflicts, Lisa avoided going home as an adolescent.

When describing her relationship with her mother growing up, Jenn voiced her perspective of her mother's unplanned entry into parenthood and the tension this brought to their mother-child relationship: "I found out later in life that my mom really didn't really want to be pregnant with me when she got pregnant." Jenn also clarified that her father was institutionalized for mental health problems during her childhood, leaving Jenn in the sole care of her mother, without any explanation provided to her. While her father was admitted into the mental health facility, Jenn's unresolved grief remained relatively unnoticed by her mother and others. Supportive services for grief, psychoeducation, or family counselling were not provided at this time, leaving Jenn and her mother with a lack of resources or skills to manage this difficult life transition. Jenn and her mother's relationship continued to deteriorate, creating a greater impetus for Jenn to engage in high-risk behaviours in adolescence. In the following quote, Jenn described her mother's decision to resign custody of Jenn over to child welfare: "We moved to [the city]. I was running away and experimenting with drugs, and I wouldn't have nothing to do with her. She hit me once, and I beat her up, and she called social services and signed me over."

Toni, a First Nations woman, was removed from her biological family's care to a foster-care home, which was a considerable distance from her home reservation and in a different province. Throughout her narrative, she discussed the impact this had on her cultural knowledge and familial connections. Toni was apprehended during the Sixties Scoop, which occurred between the 1950s and 1990s during which thousands of Indigenous children in Canada were taken from their homes by child welfare service workers and placed within mostly non-Indigenous families (Sinclair 66). This systemic practice, and an example of cultural genocide, continues within Canada today; the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system has been the

subject of ongoing demands for practice and policies change (Blackstock 187).

Toni faced prejudice from her own family because of her early apprehension from her family's care: "I don't know my family. I've met a little bit of them, but they are the ones that are on the reserve or very closed off even if you are from the reserve. If you didn't grow up on the reserve, then you're just an 'apple' [a derogatory term for an Indigenous person who acts or is perceived to be white]."

Lisa, Jenn, and Toni recalled their childhoods as turbulent and generally unpredictable. Narratives of complex family structures and intergenerational trauma in their young lives set the stage for long-term hardships and, in particular, in relation to their own mothering.

Adversities in Motherhood

It is widely acknowledged that healthy childhood development is an important component for later life functioning, and early childhood experiences have considerable influence on who we become as adults. However, this broader history is rarely considered in the context of understanding good mothering and as mothers seek support while engaged in the child welfare system. Lisa reflected on this early period of her life by first sharing her initial reasons for being involved in abusive relationships: "[I] started getting into abusive relationships and thinking that was love and stuff like that." This relationship began with her moving across the country, where Lisa was in a violent relationship and completely isolated without support. At that time, she recalled: "So, I pretty much just left with him, and I moved. And about a month after that he beat me." She was able to leave this relationship with the help of a friend, and soon after met the man who would become the father of her first child. This relationship with her son's father was brief, and she eventually returned to her home province with her first son. When her son's father threatened to charge her with kidnapping, she became frightened and sent her son back to his father without pursuing her rights as a mother: "It was really, really hard because I felt like I didn't have the support from anybody out here [in the city] to say 'no.' So, I could actually keep my son here with me." Lisa described that her history of becoming involved with unreliable and abusive partners led to the deterioration of her mental health and ultimate child welfare involvement: "It got to the point where my mental health wasn't there. And so, the school called child welfare because my daughter wasn't attending school for grade one." Lisa portrayed her life at that time as functioning as a highly isolated, single mother without social or familiar support for most of her motherhood.

Jenn recalled leaving the care of her mother, which she described as hostile, to enter the care of child welfare, where she was subsequently placed in numerous foster homes and residential facilities. Jenn eventually married and had two sons; soon after, her husband passed away from a drug overdose. Jenn

reflected on her role as a single mother: "Well 'cuz I have to be both, I have to be mom and dad right, and there is no break for me." After her husband's death, Jenn found herself as the sole provider for her family and with the sudden responsibility of obtaining employment managing a household and mothering her two sons as well. Jenn described struggling to secure a reliable source of income and resorted to dealing drugs to support her family's needs: "Until that point in my life, I had no job skills. Like my mom threw me out when I was ten, and I grew up on the streets and in and out of foster care, in and out of the young offenders' centre and [residential home settings] and secure treatments. So you know, by twenty-five, my resume was car thief and shop thief."

Toni spent most of her early adulthood homeless and struggling with drug addictions, becoming pregnant for the first time while homeless. Toni reflected on the consequences of her childhood experiences on her everyday life at that time: "Like all this stuff, like all these things that people know when they grow up … you know … you wake up, you go to school, you're done school, you get a job, you know, you get a place. None of that stuff I knew. Like even three years into my sobriety, I still didn't know what kind of underwear I liked. I didn't know what kind of a pillow I wanted to sleep on."

Lisa, Jenn, and Toni spent their early adulthood becoming aware of and resolving many of the issues created in their early childhoods. However, as their stories unfolded, it was clear that the impacts of these adversities carried into their early years as young adults and as new mothers.

Good Mothering While Facing Challenges

For these three women, their early years of motherhood was characterized by adversities. In creating their identities as mothers, however, they learned to manage and indeed overcome these challenges.

After Lisa's first involvement with child welfare, there was a notable change in priorities as she shared in her narrative. During this time, Lisa began to seek and accept help. Lisa identified that she embraced the interventions she received from child welfare, which she described as helpful: "I had a choice. Like my worker gave me a choice of doing a temporary custody agreement. She could have come in and threw an apprehension at me." She also noted her more recent shift in her desire to seek more independence and autonomy in being discharged from child welfare service.

In contrast, Jenn's narrative focusses almost exclusively on overcoming the difficulties she faced in child welfare in regaining custody of her children. Her account also speaks to areas that she believes require improvement in child welfare interventions. Regarding her caseworker, Jenn expressed: "Because all you wanna' do is do what they want you to do to get your kids back. You're not thinking about yourself. You're not. You're thinking about whatever they

want, whatever they are expecting of you to do, so you can get your kids back that is what you are there to do." Jenn noted that caseworkers should "acknowledge that we are the experts in our own lives and that you are here to help us with some bumps in the road." Jenn also expressed frustration with a general lack of knowledge with her own rights as a mother while involved in child welfare and the lack of transparency with the case plan in the following statement: "What I learned later on is that you have the right to ask questions."

As a consequence of her early development, Toni, similar to Jenn, did not have sufficient skills to obtain employment and, as such, turned to survival sex work. Toni reflected on the role of the Creator in her becoming a mother: "Not everybody can get pregnant so why would Creator give me, this homeless, junkie, prostitute, a baby? So I had no right to kill that baby, and Creator knew, and he was gonna' walk with me through this, and I knew that baby was not my baby." Ensuring that her children were provided with the best quality of care and love was Toni's priority as a good mother and led to her decision to place her daughter in care. Toni shared that she was informed that her daughter was sexually abused while in care and remained in the foster home of the perpetrator, who was also in the process of trying to adopt her. Toni expressed that both she and her daughter had been severely failed by the child welfare system and described feeling hopeless as a consequence. Toni reported that she was finally set up with effective workers and a case plan that adequately met her needs. This, she shared, provided her with the opportunity to focus on her treatment: "I had to be very selfish for the first three years at least of my recovery. So I couldn't even think about. I couldn't think about my other children. I couldn't think about anything other than myself."

Each of these women described their dedication to becoming good mothers; these narratives, from this particular time in their lives, begin to redefine mothering identities and challenge societal norms of good mothering expectations.

Reclaiming Motherhood

In this final stage of their journeys to reclaiming motherhood, Lisa, Jenn, and Toni articulate what it is like to gain acceptance of their mothering and illustrate where they are now on that journey. Each woman shared her experience with resolving past adversities, finding peace with losses, and most importantly, translating the knowledge gained from her past experiences in rearing their children while finally reclaiming their identities as good mothers.

For Lisa, a part of finding peace with her mothering was to take up supportive services. Although Lisa expressed a desire to have more independence, she recognized that accepting help was an important aspect of reclaiming her mothering identity at present: "I wish I would. I wish sometimes I could be more independent.… I have to like rely on the systems and everything like

that … [to] keep us getting by."

For Jenn, reclaiming her mothering identity involved demonstrating her dedication to her case plan with child welfare. Additionally, she also reestablished her mothering identity by using her own childhood experiences to inform her approach to mothering: "A good parent means that when [my child] is thinking about maybe smoking pot that he thinks enough of me to come in here and sit down and have a conversation like family or an adult would and for us to have that conversation about it."

Toni noted honesty as a value in her mothering identity as well. She articulated that her alignment with good mothering ideology arose because of the following reason: "I know what it feels like to hurt, and I know what it feels like to be lied to, and I know what it feels like to be nobody … because I don't ever want my daughter to feel that…. Well, I try my best to be supportive to what she needs or wants. And just be just, I'm really honest with her." Toni's reclamation of her mothering identity also included regaining connections to her culture, spirituality, and her family of origin: "So that's how I mother my daughter because I tell her like for one. For me, when I was growing up, being Aboriginal was a negative thing. So one of the very first things that I instilled in my daughter [was] 'Well you're Native, and you're proud. You're proud to be Aboriginal. You walk with your head high.'" Toni described that although her connection to her family and First Nations community remains problematic, she has developed her own sense of culture to support the reclamation of her mothering identity. She further explained the role her spirituality played in forgiving her biological mother, who is deceased, and in finding peace with her childhood adversities: "Because [my mom's] around, she's around … because she's up there [with the Creator] feeling guilty. She was not feeling great … because she couldn't be a mother to her kids. So with me down here healing and doing ceremony and praying, that's going up there and healing her spirit."

Discussion

The mothers' narratives shared throughout the study identify with many characteristics of good mothering endorsed by Western society. Rather than a complete rejection of this construct based on the various and many adversities in their own lives being mothered and in their own mothering, these women challenge the singular depiction of intensive mothering. The stigma that arises from good mothering ideologies reinforces the assumptions that women are required to constantly display a perfectionist approach to motherhood in order to secure the wellbeing of their children at seemingly any cost to themselves.

With the hegemony of the singular notion of good mothering, journeys that differ from this discourse are denied, muted, and thus rendered invisible.

Social systems, including the child welfare system, are reminders of differing identities as mothers, thereby fostering shame. The narratives of mothers in this study eloquently refute these claims by articulating the multiple yet often troubled routes they travelled to create and affirm their lives as good mothers in the face of multiple socioeconomic and societal barriers. It is these intersections of oppression that must be acknowledged to assist mothers seeming challenged by good mothering ideologies.

For Lisa, Jenn, and Toni, their entry into the child welfare system was the culmination of a process seeded in childhood and grew to fruition over the course of their lives. Each woman's journey towards mothering—one characterized by adversities, losses, and ultimately in the reclamation of her mothering identity—starts with stories embedded in her relationship with her own mother while growing up.

Following the description of their experiences with disrupted mothering in childhood, the women shared the impact of their early life adversities on their later motherhood and the development of their own identity as mothers. Study participants identified multiple social disadvantages immediately prior to their child welfare involvement as mothers, including poverty, mental health, domestic violence, and social isolation. Similarly, according to the literature, mothers in the child welfare system often have had multiple social disadvantages before entering the system (Trocmé et al. 103).

Neglect, the leading concern among child maltreatment cases in Canada, most frequently stems from a family's financial struggles (Bundy et al. 251; Trocmé et al. 103). Indeed, neglect is a complex phenomenon, which manifests in contexts of family poverty, inadequate parental knowledge and skill regarding child development and caregiving, social isolation of parents, disruptions in parent-child relationships, compromised parental psychological functioning, and concrete issues that affect parenting (Bundy et al. 251). Poverty was a significant and recurring theme for all three of the mothers in this study. The role of poverty in hampering the women's journeys to successful motherhood highlights the inadvertent and unescapable circumstances that led, together with other factors, to each woman's involvement in the child welfare system. The narratives in this study highlight poverty as a systemic issue and the importance of recognizing financial stress as a significant factor for women's involvement in child welfare. Some research advances the need for increased services for financial support in providing some relief for families experiencing neglect stemming from poverty (Damman 35), when applied in conjunction with other preventative services.

The accounts of women in this study also underscore the ways in which their involvement with child welfare during this critical juncture played an important role in the development of their mothering identities. They speak to the negative encounters that are similar to those reported in the literature.

Some literature emphasizes parents' negative experiences with child welfare (Bundy-Fazioli and Hamilton 259), including child welfare's enforcement of the notion of intensive mothering (Butler et al. 249). Similarly, the ideology of intensive mothering was reinforced through the accounts of women in the study of the various mechanisms by which child welfare perpetuates intensive mothering ideology; thus, highlighted in these storylines is the need for more individualized interventions.

The mothers in the study concluded their stories by summarizing their perceptions of their current mothering identities. Each mother assigned value to integrating and embracing her journey as one that—although it had its roots in the disrupted mothering they experienced in their early childhood and the ensuing negative impacts on their lives including child welfare involvement—culminated in the fulfillment of their hopes and desires as a good mother in reclaiming their child and their mothering identity.

Toni's narrative highlights a particularly important finding and recommendation regarding Indigenous women and families who have historically been, and continue to remain, disproportionately represented in the child welfare system (Sinha et al. 828). Toni's journey with losing and reclaiming her mothering identity was constructed alongside her journey with losing and reclaiming her cultural identity as an Indigenous girl, woman, and mother. Toni's connection to her community—and thus her ability to reach into her cultural knowledge and family supports as part of her mothering—was unconscionably stripped from her life as recounted in her mothering narrative. Despite the many barriers that Toni faced, she nevertheless created a connection to her culture in a way that was meaningful for her daughter and herself as part of reclaiming her mothering identity.

The disproportionate representation of Indigenous children and families in the child welfare system is rooted in Canada's residential school system, in which First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were apprehended from their families and communities as part of a cultural genocide (Sinha et al. 822). This system ultimately resulted in generations of individuals severed from their families and cultures. Monique Auger states that culture "cannot be defined as a ceremony or a tradition but rather a way of life" (40). For Toni, her culture was stripped away from her as an infant and remained throughout her life a fundamental part of her identity, which she reclaimed one piece at a time. Although the objective of this study is not to produce findings that are generalizable, Toni's narrative is all too common among First Nations and other Indigenous mothers in the context of child welfare. The loss of culture, access to teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and the support of the community in which their heritage belongs is a significant risk factor too commonly reported among Indigenous mothers in child welfare. Although the child welfare system neglected to provide Toni with opportunities or

abilities to reconnect with her community of origin, as a child or as a mother, Toni's narrative demonstrates her power of survivance (Vizenor 1) in reclaiming her own sense of cultural connection. This exemplifies the impact of cultural disconnection as well as the power of a mother's self-determination with reclaiming her cultural identity, which was forcibly taken from her.

Recommendations

The narratives shared by women in this study offer important recommendations and directions for changes that are needed within current child welfare practices. Fundamentally, changes in policies and procedures are needed in order to recognize the inherent power of mothers to reclaim custody of their children when provided with the opportunity to create for themselves a path to reclaiming their identities within this broadened definition of good mothers. A need also exists to explore best practices to support the grief and loss process of mothers who have lost custody of their children while involved in child welfare (Schofield et al. 89) as well as to ensure that any child welfare involvement is predicated on limiting the cycle of trauma and victimization of these women. One such method is moving towards parental engagement, whereby the mother works collaboratively with the caseworker to accurately identify and advocate for the needs of herself and her family (Platt 115). Services must begin to prioritize the voices of these women in the development of intervention strategies to best understand the needs of these women and to provide adequate services as directly identified by this population.

It is widely acknowledged that Indigenous children are overrepresented in the child welfare system (Sinha et al., 821). Despite these alarming numbers, inequitable funding, as well as insufficient social services for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, is an ongoing issue at the forefront of human rights issues currently being debated in Canada (Blackstock 187). The literature has recognized that this lack of funding and the inadequate social support for Indigenous families contribute to the higher rates of neglect and, thus, to the disproportionate rate of Indigenous children in the child welfare system (Sinha et al. 821).

Although the child welfare system failed to provide Toni with opportunities or abilities to reconnect with her community of origin, Toni's narrative demonstrates the power of survivance in order to reclaim her own sense of cultural connection (Vizenor vii). Toni's story exemplifies the impact of cultural disconnection as well as the power of a mother's self-determination with reclaiming her cultural identity, which was forcibly taken from her.

Conclusion

These unique yet unfortunately common stories provide a greater understanding of the plethora of mothering lives that are not often portrayed as examples of good mothering. Most importantly, these narratives provide insight into the impact of these women's intersections of oppression and their journeys with merging their identities to create multiple paths to achieving good mothering ideologies. Although we had initially set out to develop differing conceptualizations of the good mother, we have instead broadened its definition to one that is more inclusive of mothers from diverse backgrounds who have faced multiple intersections of marginalization, leading up to their involvement with child welfare. In the stories shared here, these mothers overcame these difficulties to ultimately reclaim their identities as good mothers. In this way, these women challenge the rigidity of intensive mothering as well as the structural and societal stigmas created by its previously singular definition. With these narratives, these women give a voice to those mothers whose journeys to reclaiming their identities as good mothers differ from what society says good mothering identity should be.

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