

become socially acceptable includes the African American custom of cultural bearing, “raising children in accordance with the values, beliefs, and customs of traditional African American culture and in particular the values of the funk and ancient properties. In each of these [maternal] tasks—preservation, nurturance, cultural bearing—Morrison is concerned with protecting children from the hurts of a racist and, for daughters, sexist culture, and with teaching children how to protect themselves so they may be empowered to survive and resist the racist and patriarchal culture in which they live and develop a strong and authentic identity as a black person” (29).

Black feminists like myself, who study racial differences between black and white communities and who argue for the political importance of mothering in teaching, are drawn to O’Reilly’s thesis that mothering is a potential site of empowerment. O’Reilly boldly reconfigures hegemonic western notions of motherhood while maintaining dialogues across cultural differences. She disrupts the dominant view of motherhood and values the ancient properties of black womanhood and mothering as a site for social and political emancipation. The urgency and relevance of this maternal theoretical approach is articulated best by O’Reilly: “Morrison in her rendition of mothering as a political and public enterprise, emerges as a social commentator and political theorist who radically, through her maternal philosophy, reworks, rethinks and reconfigures the concerns and strategies of African American, and in particular black women’s emancipation in America” (xi).

### ***Women’s Stories of Divorce at Childbirth: When the Baby Rocks the Cradle***

Hilary Hoge  
Binghamton: Haworth Clinical Practice Press, 2002

#### **Reviewed by Sandra Jarvie**

Hilary Hoge has written a comprehensive analysis of divorce at childbirth. Her book links clinical case studies, which record the lived experiences of women who divorce at childbirth, with a wide variety of research to support her analysis of the impact of divorce on couples, both as individuals and as parents. Hoge explores the emotional and psychological adjustments to pregnancy and birth that contribute to divorce and the ensuing consequences, both short- and long-term, for parents and children. In a concise manner, Hoge bridges research and theory with interpretation and insight.

Hoge divides her book into three parts. Part one explores the causes of

divorce and focuses on the multiple challenges of pregnancy. The transition to parenthood and the transformation of women and men as they either accept or reject parenthood is experienced inwardly and outwardly. Hoge shows that a crisis can occur when a couple cannot adapt as a family of three, and the result is divorce at childbirth.

Part two explores the effects of divorce at childbirth. Hoge's insight and analysis of research on the emotional consequences of divorce are informative. The research on attachment theory and trauma versus grief is particularly insightful in relationship to divorce. The adverse economic realities for divorced mothers and their children are stark and distressing. Two chapters in this section are devoted to the effects of divorce on older children and the effects of divorce on infants. Part three concludes by reporting the results of research undertaken in support of Hoge's study. *Women's Stories of Divorce at Childbirth* will be an invaluable resource for professionals and people who have experienced divorce.

### ***Unbecoming Mothers: The Social Production of Maternal Absence***

Diana Gustafson, ed.  
New York: Haworth Press, 2005

#### **Reviewed by Amy Mullin**

*Unbecoming Mothers: The Social Production of Maternal Absence* is an important contribution to feminist scholarship on mothering. This collection of essays, edited by Diana Gustafson, examines non-residential mothering, specifically the mothering experiences and/or practices of women who do not live with their children, and who therefore violate powerful assumptions about the place of mothers in their children's lives. The title of the book refers simultaneously to the process of becoming other than the resident and fully absorbed mothers of western ideology, and to the "unbecoming" nature of this very role.

This interdisciplinary collection includes contributions written by academics from a diverse array of fields (nursing, social work, history, anthropology, and the performing arts). The volume includes essays written by mothers who are living apart from their children, interviews, narratives, and, to a lesser degree, the voices of children who have grown up apart from their mothers. One poem is also included.

The eleven essays share assumptions about the need to analyze the function of gender (among other variables) in parenting; the role of social, political, and economic forces in shaping the diverse experiences of mothers and children;