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Developing a Feminist Motherline

Reflections on a Decade of Feminist Parenting

This paper addresses a number of preliminary findings from interviews conducted in the summer of 2005 with ten mothers about the realities of consciously parenting as feminists. Results from these interviews, like the findings from interviews with the same women a decade earlier, re/confirm that feminism for these self-identified feminist mothers living in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada is central to their personal identity, and vital to their philosophies and parenting practices. Feminist mothering remains a conscious political strategy they use to bring about social change in their lives and in the lives of their children. This longitudinal study draws upon the experiences, knowledge/s, and theorizing of feminist mothers over a ten-year period to explore aspects of their feminist parenting they view as successful, and elements of their mothering they may chose to do differently given another chance. What emerges from this study is the need for further research into feminist mothering and the importance of a feminist motherline to carry the voices, wisdom, and wit of feminist mothers which will aid in enriching and enhancing our understanding of feminism and feminist mothering. A feminist motherline will also assist women in re/claiming their feminist mothering authority and providing a foundation for the ongoing political activism of feminist mothers.

> *When I was really young before I had any children—when I thought, "do I want any children or not?"—I saw having children as making a contribution to society in that you're gonna school them in a culture and an orientation. They were going to be people who were maybe different or the same, but they were going to have an impact. It wasn't neutral. It's the next society, the next generation, and how you raise them is gonna have a huge difference on what our future's like. For sure it's political.* (Tammy, 46-year-old mother of three children aged 18, 15 and 7 years)

Between the fall of 1995 and the summer of 1996, I interviewed 16 self-identified feminist mothers living in or close to Winnipeg, Manitoba about the realities of feminist mothering. Feminism is not only central to their personal identity as women; feminism is essential to their philosophies for and practices of parenting. For these women, feminist mothering is a conscious political strategy they use to bring about social change in their lives and in the lives of their children (Green, 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2001; 1999). Over the past decade, I have had the good fortune to remain in touch with a number of participants from the original study, and during the summer months of 2005 I conducted one-on-one interviews with ten of the original sixteen participants.[1]

This paper addresses some of the preliminary findings from these more recent discussions with self-identified feminist mothers about their parenting. More specifically, I explore the challenges feminist mothers face, aspects of their feminist mothering they view as successful, and elements of their mothering they may have done differently. I conclude with a call for more research into feminist mothering and the importance of a feminist motherline to carry the voices, wisdom, and wit of feminist mothers. A feminist motherline assists mothers in re/claiming their feminist mothering authority and grounds them in their knowledge and the knowledge of other feminist mothers. It also strengthens, and provides, for some, a foundation for the ongoing political activism of feminist mothers. This longitudinal study draws upon the experiences, knowledge/s, and theorizing of feminist mothers over a ten-year period, thus, enriching and enhancing our understanding of feminism and feminist mothering.

Self-identified feminist mothers[2]

All of the mothers participating in the 2005 study identify themselves as feminist and are temporarily able-bodied birth mothers between the ages of 44 and 58 years. Two of the women are also mothers of adopted children, with one additionally being the social mother to four adult children of a former male partner. Since the initial interviews in the mid 1990s, one mother has birthed a third child, now seven-years-old, and one mother has recently adopted an infant, making her a mother of four. The 26 children of the ten mothers range in age from 16 months to 36 years. Two women have one child, four women have two children, two women have three children, one woman has four children, and one woman has six children. Eight women identify as heterosexual and two as lesbian. Seven women are single, five are separated or divorced, and three are married or living common law.

The ethnic ancestry of the group is varied. One woman is African and one is Jewish. Two women have Columbian/European heritage, two are of Jewish/European decent and four have mixed European lineage. All mothers have some post-secondary education, and are either self-employed or employed by others. Two women identify themselves as poor, while the other eight see themselves as middle-class.

The continual challenges of mothering

Throughout our conversations, all mothers note how hard it is to parent and are critical of the lack of social acknowledgement about the realities of mothering. These issues were of concern to each feminist mother the first time we spoke about the complexities of mothering almost ten years ago. Today, they critique the mythical standards of motherhood and the social neglect of the real isolation many mothers experience. They all identify and recognize the general lack of social support for mothers and recognize the lack of support for feminist mothers, in particular. Four of the ten women are particularly vocal about the need to expose the challenging conditions associated with the hard work of raising children and call for greater support from feminism.

Lack of social acknowledgement and support for mothers

Tammy, a common-law wife and mother who has two teenaged children, an 18-year-old daughter and 15-year-old son, as well as a seven-year-old son, speaks candidly about negative social attitudes toward mothers and her perception that there is a general lack of social investment in mothers and in children:

> *Everybody treats you like an idiot when you're a mother. But structurally, and more important I think, is the whole business of it's not only unpaid labour; it's the hardest job that you could possibly do. And there's not the supports that are needed; not just economically, but in terms of information, respite, supportive systems for information. There's lots that should be done to help mothers, I think.*
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> *And, you know, the whole "It takes a village to raise a child;" the whole idea that it's somehow an individual family's, and usually the woman's, responsibility to raise her kids is just weird. They're not* mine, *you know. They're just the next generation and they could be anybody's kids, really. This is the next generation and I don't understand* not *investing in it.*

Tammy's frustration is tangible during the interview and sits just below the surface of our conversation. The lack of respect she has been shown over the years as a mother, as well as the attitude that mothers are solely responsible for raising and caring for children is central to Tammy's critique of the inadequate, and often times, non-existent support (be it economic, respite or information) for mothers.

Kim, a 45-year-old married mother of two boys, aged 11 and 13 years, agrees with Tammy's analysis and notes how she personally craves honesty about the realities of child rearing and mothering. She tells me:

> *What I would say is to validate just how hard it is, how isolating it is. Nobody talks like that about mothering. Like, "Ya! They drive you nuts." And, "Ya! It is hard." And kind of validating that part because there's all*

> *this pressure on you to be a great mother all the time and that nothing should bother you and that your kids should come first and there's still all those pressures there.*

Like Adrienne Rich notes in *Of Woman Born* (1986), the mothers I spoke with attested to their deep love for and commitment to their children, while also speaking frankly about the frustrations, tensions and harsh realties of mothering. They spoke about the complex and sometimes seemingly contradictory feelings experienced as mothers toward their child/ren during our initial interviews, and again during our most recent conversations. According to these feminist mothers, this element of mothering must be exposed and validated as typical and ordinary, especially if the work of mothering is to be understood and if mothers and children are to be supported.

Beverly, a 52-year-old mother of two adult daughters, aged 25 and 28 years, who has been in a lesbian partnership for the past five years, is well aware of the pressures that Kim, Tammy and the other mothers mention. Beverly shares her experience of feeling isolated, misunderstood and disrespected when she was a mother of young children, as well as her insights into the complex position of being a feminist mother:

> *I've always sensed that my friends and colleagues who were feminist, who had no children, valued my work in the workplace way more than my work as the mother. So there's that friction there, and it's real and tangible. And particularly for those feminist moms who choose to stay at home for a few years and raise the children without societal supports like day-care and that kind of thing.*
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> *It's a tough one because I think what we're doing, what the feminist movement has done, is to kind of judge women in relationship to men's achievements. And while we applaud men when they get involved with child-rearing, there's an expectation that still, you know, child-rearing is women's work and you're gonna do that if you're a good mom. If you're a super mom, you're gonna do that* on top of, *you know, your education and your work, your paid work. And I think it puts an enormous amount of pressure on feminist mothers that doesn't necessarily have to be there.*

Not only are there social pressures on "good mothers" (Green, 2005) who are expected to be doing "it all," feminist mothers experience additional expectations or pressure to be competent and capable women from feminists who don't have children. Beverly is not the only one to experience this pressure or to express this opinion.

Paula, a self-employed, single, heterosexual mother of three children, aged 13, 17 and 20 years, agrees with Beverly and other feminist mothers who are critical of the lack of support they have experienced from feminism and other feminists. Paula, who lives with her children in a women's housing co-op,

reflects on the isolation and lack of support she has experienced, particularly from feminism:

> *As a mother, I didn't feel supported by feminism. In fact, I felt ghettoized by my motherhood. When the kids were really small, I found it really tough—like every day was really hard for me to get through. I felt very isolated, particularly, I think, being a feminist mother. I didn't want to hang out at the playground; it gives me the willies still. I don't want to hang out with other people who are happy being isolated or not being able to participate fully.*
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> *What helped me most was bringing my children into my life in other ways. So, bringing them to meetings, organizing, combining parenting with the things that I was already doing. And sometimes I was doing that in the face of opposition. Like my first workplace gave me a hassle; didn't want me bringing my baby there. But other places, she was welcome. So, I looked for opportunities where I could incorporate parenting into my life, and they weren't that easy to find. I think we need to adapt society more to tolerate children.*

Paula finds that mothering has become easier in the past year, now that two of her children have become teenagers and one is a young adult. Yet, there are times when she is still unsure of her mothering, as her motherwork has shifted in focus to providing appropriate emotional and physical support for each of her unique children without creating dependency.[3] In striving to provide balance to the fluidity of their ever-changing needs, Paula feels like she is constantly "navigating" the tension between supporting her children's needs and encouraging their independence rather than dependency. She still finds herself not always knowing when she has given enough support to her children.

Like the other mothers in the study, Paula has a small, yet committed, support system. Close friends and the women and children living in the housing co-op is where Paula finds strength and understanding for her current work as a feminist mother. For Paula, collective action with feminists is an effective strategy for social change. She tells me, "When I think about women being liberated I think women have been brought into the patriarchal cage." Feminists and mothers need to "learn to work together" in order to dismantle and get out of the patriarchal cage. Living in a feminist co-op is a step toward this end for Paula.

The ten feminist mothers in this study long for, and work toward, the acknowledgement and validation of the systemic challenges and difficulties facing all mothers. They believe the ongoing myths about mothering and the constant and complex social barriers that undermine their motherwork need to be uncovered and eradicated. For these women, feminist mothering is an essential strategy for contributing to positive political social change. Through contesting notions of motherhood and practices of mothering, by engaging in

honest and sometimes challenging relationships with their children, as well as raising children to be critical thinkers who are able to articulate and challenge perspectives that do not necessarily confer with the status quo, feminist mothers believe they are continuing, and reaping the benefits of, the political activist work they began a decade or more ago as mothers. They believe, with the support and assistance of feminists, the feminist work of mothering can be successfully done. As May, the mother of two adult daughters, notes:

> *It is hopefully true that the strategy of feminist mothering can bring about social change because it just takes one person to start something. It is a political act, because the personal is political, that's the thing.*

Aspects of feminist mothering that have gone well

In our conversations about their feminist mothering over the past decade, I asked participants to reflect upon aspects of their parenting they thought had gone well. Participants in the initial study told me they valued relationships with their children that are not intimidating or domineering and that they were committed to relating to their children in ways that are not based on the use or abuse of their authority and power as adults and mothers (Green, 2005: 93; Green 1999: 103). Upon reflection, many of the women in the smaller, more recent research group thought they had succeeded in this aspect of their mothering. Rather than exercise power over children, they strived for relationships based on respect, responsibility and accountability. They encouraged their children to think critically about their own and their mother's ideas. They also acknowledged the experiences and knowledge of their children and encouraged them to talk about their own understandings and experiences with them in respectful dialogue.

Honest communication through trusting relationships:

Carol, a 58-year-old heterosexual, single mother of her biological 19-year-old son, an adoptive mother of her 24-year-old niece, and the social mother to four adult children of a previous male partner, told me that "the talking, with everything out in the open" is what has gone well with her parenting.

I met with Carol one afternoon in late August at her home, where she was having some minor renovations done to her basement. We sat together in her living room drinking iced tea while repairs were being done downstairs and her teen-aged son slept upstairs after working a late shift. Eager to talk, Carol started our conversation by saying, "I just wanted to tell you this one thing 'cause the whole premise is feminist and this happened because of their feminist upbringing."

Carol anxiously relayed an alarming incident that occurred seven years before, when her adopted daughter, then 17 years old, told Carol the man Carole had been dating for four years, and living with for some time in their home, had initiated a sexual relationship with her by secretly giving her money

and writing her a note. Carol credits her feminist mothering practice of talking directly with her children since they were very young—especially about issues of safety and inappropriate behaviour—with her daughter's ability to tell Carol about the situation as quickly as she did and without shame. Together they had participated in many open and frank talks about inappropriate behaviour, with Carol often telling her children "if anything happens, you tell Mum, especially if they say, 'don't tell'."

Carol believes practicing honest and open communication and having trusting relationships with her children ensured that her daughter "trusted me enough to say something the first time she felt uncomfortable about the way my boyfriend took a run at her." The practice of not keeping secrets meant that as soon as Carol learned about the incident she confronted the man about his behaviour and told him to "pack his things and get out," which he immediately did. According to Carol, "He's gone, that man, never to be seen again. It was just one minute he was there and one minute he was not."

The effects of the situation have been very hard on Carol who sought six years of counselling to deal with feeling responsible and guilty for what happened. She has only recently been able to forgive herself for putting her children in a vulnerable situation. Carol told me "I am just now able to poke by nose out 'cause that really devastated me." She feels "like a statistic instead of someone who has nobly marched on" and while she wasn't sure "feminism helps you choose men, it certainly helps your children tell."

Carol believes her feminism—which values good communication, openness and honesty, even when it is painful—ensured her daughter's ability to both analyse what was going on and instantly confide in Carol. Essential to good communication and respectful relationships is trust. Carol unequivocally accepted what her daughter said; she didn't question or doubt her daughter's experience or knowledge. Knowing that her mother would believe her without hesitation, and without dispute, demonstrates the depth of the relationship Carol and her daughter share. The strength of their communication and their solid relationship, Carol believes, is underpinned by strong feminist principles of trust and respect.

May, the 49-year-old, divorced mother of two daughters, aged 22 and 24 years, believes the most rewarding aspect of being a feminist mother is the way she and her adult children can "talk, and share, and have a kind of real understanding of one another." May told me,

> *I always imagined what kind of conversations would happen with my children when they became older, when we could really talk, and I am not disappointed. They are beginning to understand the role of a woman, the role of a mother. When they look at themselves and the world there's so much we can talk about. And we do.*

May and her recently married, eldest daughter are building upon their long

history of talking and confiding in one another—a practice May has shared with both of her daughters and the sisters have shared with each other. At present, May and her first-born are speaking about "some of the social structures that influence the roles of women and wife"; roles that May's daughter had not understood in the same way before her marriage. In fact, it is May's daughter who is introducing topics specific to married relationships. Lately, she has wanted to talk about "equality in relationships," including "the division of domestic labour, and the role of money and the ways in which it can be used as a way of gaining more power in relationships."

While May has always encouraged her daughters to be "free in their thinking and to always question things, like racism, they heard outside [the family]," her daughters are currently coming to understand, through their own adult experiences and their honest discussions with their each other and their mother, "how society is structured, and how it influences women to become the way we are." Without the solid base of communication and the long established practice of speaking with each other over the years, May believes that she and her daughters would not be able to talk as openly and as freely as they do about their lives today. For May, this is a dream come true.

Autonomy and self-governance:

Shar, a 58-year-old retired teacher values communication and fosters respectful relationships with her four children, her two grandchildren, and the dozen children she cares for in her home-based childcare. According to Shar, her work as a mother, teacher, grandmother and childcare provider has always encompassed lessons about how to create respectful relationships because "it's something that is really not taught; parents take it for granted and teachers don't teach it." Shar tries to instil good communication skills and respect in the daily inter-personal interactions she and the children in her care engage in. She does this by ensuring that she and all of the children acknowledge each other when they speak. For Shar, "that's part of the respect thing—trying to teach them to respect the other person that they're with and that you have to respond to the person you're with when they speak."

Self-governance and self-respect coincide with effective and respectful communication. Children in Shar's care quickly learn to ask for what they need and want, and that physical force is not an acceptable way to do so. Shar tells me, "on the one hand I am gentle to the extreme, but on the other hand, very clear about what I want and what I don't want." One of the rules in Shar's home is, "you don't put your hands on somebody else's body unless you have their permission." Rather than saying, "don't hit them", Shar uses loving examples such as, "if you want to hug somebody, you ask them if they would like a hug." When children bump into each other too hard—as children are apt to do at times—Shar will ask them if it was an accident. She instructs the children to immediately say "I'm sorry, are you ok?" When children don't want to apologize, Shar will role model for them by putting her arms around both

children and saying, "Oh, we're so sorry that this happened. What were you doing before you had this accident?"

By highlighting the fun and personal connection children shared before the clash/crash, Shar reminds them that they are friends and not enemies. Central to Shar's teachings is a willingness to accept that people are "flawed individuals and you don't dismiss them just because of their flaws or because of their gender or because of their mistakes." She believes it takes a long time for people to learn that "this other walking set of bones and skin is like them." And because Shar is patient in "teaching them to be really gentle" with each other and with themselves, the end result is children learn to engage in respectful relationships with Shar and with each other.

Shar has seen evidence of this lesson in the older children she has cared for over the past 15 years in her childcare, as well as in her own three 30-something-year-old children, who, she believes, are well-adjusted autonomous people doing meaningful work they enjoy. Shar tells me her 31-year-old daughter, the youngest of her adult children, "has always been assertive in her relationships with men" often telling them directly, "I don't like that, don't do that." Shar believes that her daughter learned very early on to be assertive because she learned to respect herself and "to take for granted her right to ask for the same in return."

Shar shares an example of her daughter's assertiveness based on self-respect, stating, "In fact, before she would have sexual relationships with anyone, she would tell them that they'd have to go to the doctor and get a certificate clearing them of any AIDS or HIV." Shar believes her children are "much more assertive" than she was at their age, and possibly even now, because as children they learned they have the right to be treated with respect. Helping children develop into autonomous individuals who are respectful of others, and are competent and confident in self-governance, are positive outcomes of Shar's feminist mothering.

Deb, the 43-year-old single, heterosexual mother of a 16-year-old son, tells me about the way she and her son communicate, in particular when they have differing opinions. Throughout her mothering, Deb has always acknowledged that her son "has his own path and his own experience." She has also been open about her "standpoint feminism" which is one way she is able to identify for him where she is coming from. At times, discussions between Deb and her teenaged son become heated because, as she says, "when two intelligent people really go at it, the swords are out (laughter)."

During these exchanges, Deb is vigilant in ensuring the interactions are respectful. In particular, she and her son are watchful for condescending or other negative behaviour; "We talk about when we feel the power shift in the room and when we feel disrespected. While we aren't always able to mediate those things in the moment, we do come back to a whole process that we are both engaged in." Deb notes it's "bloody amazing" that they are able to have contested discussions where her son "won't let go of his power," where she

"doesn't lose hers" and where they come to an understanding that while they may not agree, they continue to respect each other.

Not only is open and respectful communication between mothers and their children an aspect of feminist mothering that is valued and has been successful, so is thinking critically about the world and one's place within it.

Critical analysis

Jody, the 43-year-old separated, mother of a nine-year-old daughter and an eleven-year-old son, believes she has done well teaching her children to think critically and to challenge ideas they are unsure of. Jody understands that once children enter the school system, they are introduced to multiple ideas and perspectives that may not coincide with those of their parents. She is aware her control and influence in the lives of her children decreases when they are in school and she must "let go of that and realize all you can do is give a little bit of direction to what they hear."

Jody shares a self-described "good story" with me to illustrate this understanding and the success of her feminist teaching as a mother:

> *My daughter came to me one day, but she said—before she even started—"Mom, would you be offended if I told you a joke about a native person?" That's what she said to me. And I went, "What? Is this a joke?" is what I said. She proceeded to tell me an extremely racist joke that she had heard on the bus, from some kids. And I said, "Yes, that offends me very much."*
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> *But the fact that she even had that consciousness to think this might offend, I thought, "That's right. Oh my god! Something did get through!" (Laughter). And then we had a big discussion about it; about what this joke said and how would she feel if it had been* her *culture that was put in this place and what did that really mean when they said those things. I mean, I was* horrified, *horrified that this joke is out there. But, at the same time, she had the sense to think there's something wrong with this. I'm like, "Wow!"*

Clearly, Jody's daughter had learned from previous discussions with her mother that placing people at the brunt of so-called jokes is hurtful and offensive. Like Carol's daughter, Jody's daughter trusted her mother would be open to her questions and, in this case, help her further understand how and why a joke was racist. Together through their discussion, Jody was able to honestly discuss the hurtful consequences of racism with her daughter and provide her with a deeper understanding beyond simply sensing there was something wrong with what she had heard. It also gave Jody the occasion to validate her daughter's "sense that something was wrong" and to provide her the chance to engage in critical analysis of the situation.

Ten years ago, each woman I interviewed spoke about the significance of introducing her child/ren to a feminist analysis of the world (Green 2005;

2004a; 2004b; 2001; 1999). All of the mothers I revisited reconfirmed their commitment to parenting from this standpoint and believe their children (are learning to) view and understand that the world is constructed in ways that privilege some people over others. Feminist mothers believe they have successfully developed relationships with their children that foster closeness and the sharing of ideas through respectful and honest communication. While these topics of discussion can, at times, be controversial and painful, they nevertheless cultivate space where mothers and children openly and honestly discuss various attitudes, beliefs and ideas. Being forthright about each other's ideas, and the ideas of others, continues to work well for feminist mothers.

While the women I spoke with are proud of elements of their parenting, they also identified some aspects of their mothering that they might do differently if they had another chance to do so.

What feminist mothers would do differently

I asked each woman if she would do anything differently as a mother, now that she has the 20/20 hindsight of the past ten—or more—years of parenting. Several mothers told me they would tweak the limitations, rights and conditions of behaviour they set for and engage in with their children. In particular, they spoke of the need to balance providing more guidance for their children with respecting their children's autonomy and self-governance.

Provide more guidance

Tammy, the 46-year-old, heterosexual, common-law mother of three children, aged 7, 15 and 18 years, realizes she can be "negotiated out" of the limitations she sets. Tammy believes this has been detrimental to her daughter who is "a very strong personality" and "a bit of a powerhouse." As a younger mother, Tammy thought when "you showed somebody respect, they would reciprocate by understanding that things were negotiable." Since then, she has discovered this strategy has not been good for her eldest child because "she pushed and pushed and now she's a person who feels that that's one way of getting, of achieving, what she wants, by pushing." While Tammy believes negotiating worked well with her other two children, in retrospect she thinks she shouldn't have negotiated as much as she did with her eldest saying, "With her personality, it was a misjudgement."

Willow, a 45 year-old single lesbian mother of an 18 year-old daughter reflected on feeling uncertain about decisions she made as a young mother:

> *There were certain things I was unsure about. I didn't know how far to push my authority or how much I had a right to it. But I'm much more sure about where you're allowed to make your own decisions and where your not, much more sure. When you're authoritarian, it doesn't mean that you're abusive. That means you're authoritative, you're confident, you're absolutely clear about what's needed here and you make sure that the child trusts you to make*

> *the right decision for them. So, it's a leadership issue, that's all. When do you set limits and when do you not. I think I'm more clear about that than I used to be.*

Willow has been able to put this assessment into practice with the children she cares for in the home-based childcare she has been operating for the past three years. She tells me,

> *I think I am a better mother now than I was 18 years ago. And I think the parents who are paying me to do this are getting the benefit of that. I think I'm more honed at it in some ways. I love my little boys, and I've got lots of them. And I'm parenting them to love themselves unshakably and to know who they are.*

Like Tammy, Willow notes she has learned her "expectations are really tethered heavily to the circumstances particular to the child." She has also discovered that consistency is essential to good parenting, stating; "I'm here every day, and I am consistent in my parenting of them. So they know what to expect and they know what's going on here, and they know who I am."

Willow thinks she is "probably more authoritarian now" than she was when her daughter was young, and suggests if she had been more sure of herself as a younger mother, her daughter "may have benefited from greater clarity because she didn't always make the right decisions." Today, Willow believes she is much more clear about decisions she makes in her life, especially those as a parent to her own daughter and to the children in her home care where she encourages them to be true to themselves.

Where to go from here: Developing a feminist motherline

Reflecting upon the experiences revealed by feminist mothers through the course of these and the previous interviews, I am struck by the need to continue sharing and recording feminist motherline stories to ensure that the difficult, yet rewarding work of feminist mothering remains a communal and political endeavour.[4]

A feminist motherline acknowledges the many struggles that accompany the embodied experiences and knowledge/s of feminist mothering. It provides space and a place for feminist mothers to record and pass on their own life-cycle perspectives of feminist mothering and to connect with those of other feminist mothers. Additionally, a motherline ensures that feminist mothers have a connection with a worldview that is centred and draws upon feminism's crucial gender based analysis of the world—including parenting. It also promises a legacy of feminist mothering and motherwork for others.

Motherline stories contain invaluable lessons and memories of feminist mothering, as well as support for mothers. The authenticity and authority that Willow and Tammy continue to search for, and are able to practice at times, is

likely to be solidified when they are consciously connected with their own path and the path of other feminist mothers through a feminist motherline.

I admire and respect the feminist mothers who have allowed me to get to know them a little bit over the past ten years. In sharing their experiences, knowledge/s and wisdom with me, and with others, they are engaging in the practice of "cultural bearing" (O'Reilly, 2004: 37); the act of passing on important life lessons regarding the realities of feminist mothering that challenge the myths around mothering and provide models of feminist mothering that honour social activism through the personal self-governance of mothers and children alike. This is a courageous act and one that needs to be supported and repeated, time and time again. Through developing a feminist motherline, with feminist mothers being the cultural bearers of feminism in their daily lives, empowerment for mothers and children is surely to follow.

[1]For the second round of interviews in 2005, I contacted as many of the original sixteen participants involved in the 1996 study as possible by telephone or email, and asked each woman if she would be interested in speaking with me about her experiences of feminist mothering during the ten years since our previous interview. Eleven women agreed; I was unable to reach four of the original participants (two had left the province) and, sadly, one woman died of cancer a number of years ago. At the time of publication one interview was pending. Using Grounded Theory (see Dick, 2005; Glaser, 1998), I draw on common experiences and reflections arising from these most recent interviews.
[2]I originally located participants by canvassing groups, organizations and facilities supportive of feminists and mothers. I also placed announcements in local feminist newspapers, on bulletin boards in a number of women's organizations and health clinics asking for interested women who identified as feminist mothers to contact me. I interviewed 16 participants over a period of two years about the realities of feminist mothering. See Green 2001 for further discussion on the research methods and results of the initial research.
[3]For an excellent discussion on the concept and practice of motherwork, see the chapter, "A Politics of the Heart," in Andrea O'Reilly's book, *Toni Morison and Motherhood* (2004: 26-35).
[4]I am thankful to Andrea O'Reilly's discussion of motherline in her opening chapter of *Toni Morison and Motherhood* (2004: 11-12), which proposes and explores Toni Morrison's maternal theory in her seven novels.

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