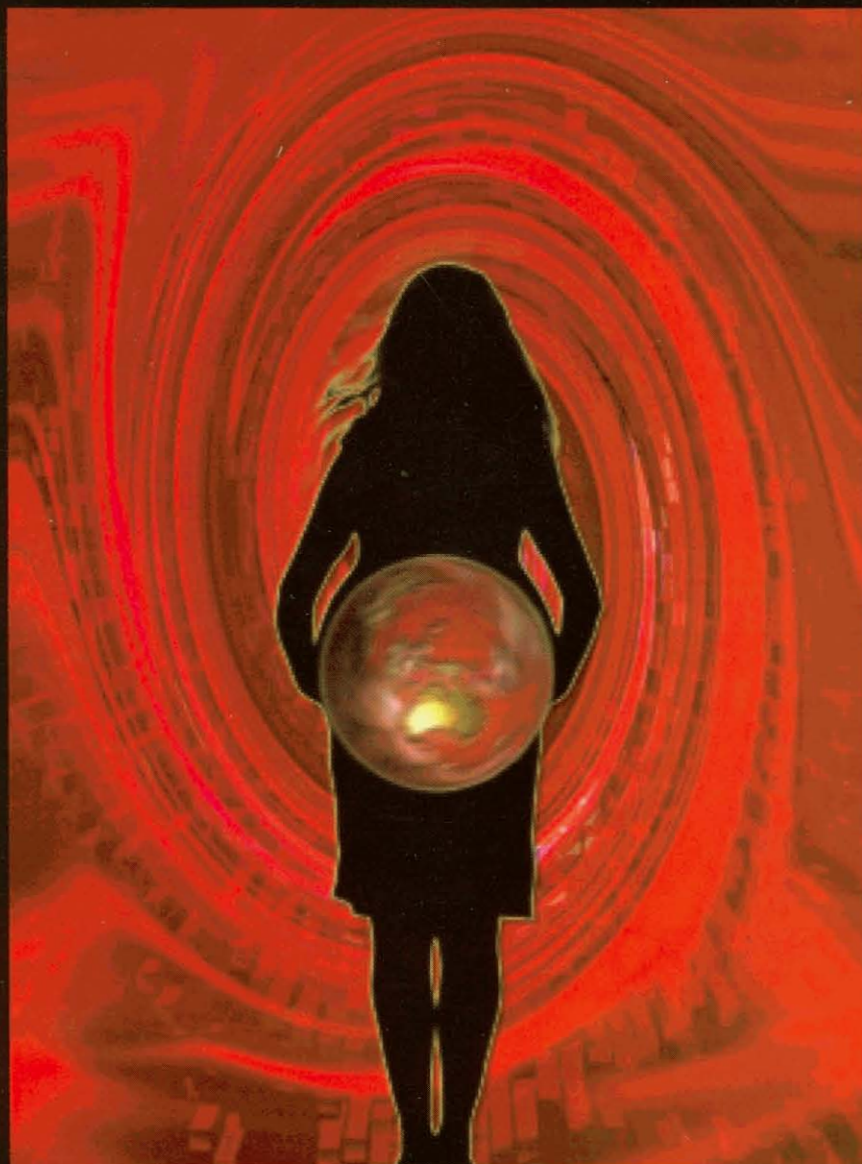


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Featuring articles by Fiona Joy Green, Heather Hewett, Susan Driver, Patrice DiQuinzio, Lorna Turnbull, Cheryl Gosselin, Gina Wong-Wylie, Andrea O'Reilly, Emily Jeremiah, Ivana Brown, Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, and many more...

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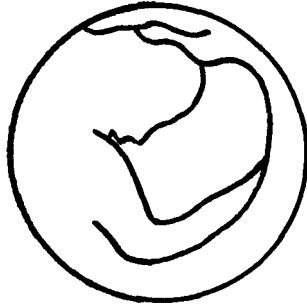
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Fiona Joy Green

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)

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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 mothers²

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.

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

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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 realities 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.

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.

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

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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 my 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

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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

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“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.”

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 you're 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

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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.

¹For 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.

²I 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.

³For 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 Morrison and Motherhood* (2004: 26-35).

⁴I am thankful to Andrea O’Reilly’s discussion of motherline in her opening chapter of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood* (2004: 11-12), which proposes and explores Toni Morrison’s maternal theory in her seven novels.

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Motherhood to Mothering and Beyond *Maternity in Recent Feminist Thought*

This article traces the development of recent feminist thinking about maternity, identifying within it a shift from essentialism to poststructuralism, expressed as a change in terminology from “motherhood” to “mothering.” It draws on the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Adrienne Rich, Sara Ruddick, and Judith Butler, among others. Following Butler, it offers the notion of ‘maternal performativity’ as potentially inspiring. To understand mothering as performative is to conceive of it as an active practice—a notion that is already progressive, given the traditional Western understanding of the mother as passive—that may also be subversive. Maternal performativity also challenges the idea of the mother as origin. However, the notion does have its problems, not least because it fails to acknowledge the relational, ethical aspect of mothering behaviours. I argue, then, for a performative maternal ethics, characterized by relationality and bodiliness. A key site for its performance would be literature; reading and writing may produce new identifications with others and may therefore be viewed as “maternal,” ethical activities. The article ends by calling for further explorations of the link between mothering and artistic practice.

In recent decades, feminist thought about mothering has proliferated, growing ever richer and more complex. In so doing, it has undergone a key shift: from essentialism to poststructuralism.¹ Feminists have long been aware of the constructed nature of gender; such awareness underpins and fuels current debates about maternity. We now talk less of “motherhood” and more of “mothering.” For maternity is no longer seen as a fixed, static state; rather, it is viewed as a set of ideas and behaviours that are mutable, contextual. To talk of “mothering” is to highlight the active nature of maternity: an important move, given the traditional view in western culture of the mother as passive and

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powerless. It is also to pave the way for an understanding of mothers' behaviour as performative (a term that will be discussed later) and potentially subversive. Here, I will argue that the notion of a maternal performativity is both productive and problematic, and contend that for the idea to be effective, it must take ethics into account. By way of introduction, I will trace the transition "from motherhood to mothering,"² before moving on to the questions of performativity, ethics, and, finally, aesthetics—which, I will suggest, offers a key site at which "maternal," ethical practice may take place.

Essentialism to poststructuralism

Feminist thinking about maternity since the early 1960s is often presented as "a drama in three acts," as Elaine Tuttle Hansen notes (1997: 5). The first act is defined as involving "repudiation" of motherhood and mothering, with such early second wave feminists as Simone de Beauvoir (1997), Shulamith Firestone (1979), Kate Millett (1977), and Betty Friedan (1992) being cited as exemplars. The second act is characterized by "recuperation," by attempts to reclaim and revise maternity. Such attempts began in the mid-1970s, and were carried out by feminists as diverse as Adrienne Rich (1986), Nancy Chodorow (1978), Dorothy Dinnerstein (1991) and Sara Ruddick (1989) in America; Mary O'Brien (1981) and Juliet Mitchell (1974) in Great Britain; and Luce Irigaray (1985), Hélène Cixous (1994) and Julia Kristeva (1986) in France. The third act, which is ongoing, is concerned to extend and challenge earlier thought. According to Hansen, it is increasingly characterized by a sense of impasse, explained thus:

Feminists have demanded and gained new attention for the previously ignored problems of motherhood, but they have not arrived at consensus about how to redefine the concept or adjust the system. Many (but by no means all) women wish to refuse motherhood on the old terms without abandoning either the heavy responsibilities or the intense pleasures of bearing and raising children. The fear that no one will take care of our children if we don't makes it difficult to go forward, even as it seems impossible to go willingly back. (1997: 6)

The schema noted above is useful in highlighting key trends in feminist thinking about maternity, but as Hansen herself points out, we must be wary of glossing over differences between feminists. We must also guard against telling stories that result only in an impasse. I propose a different narrative, one that recounts the shift from essentialist accounts of mothering to a more liberating poststructuralist awareness of maternal subjectivities as diverse, multifaceted, and shifting.

Views of maternity as a uniformly and inevitably negative experience, such as those found in the "first act," can be described as resting upon essentialism. Beauvoir (1997) and Firestone (1979) view biology as inherently oppressive for

all women, thereby ignoring differences between women, as well as the complex interaction between corporeality, psychology, and culture. Maternity is presented by these feminists as a set, immutable role, not as a state involving change and exchange. While a feminist like Friedan is aware of femininity as a constructed entity (“the feminine mystique”), she does little to address “the maternal mystique.” She does not propose a new view of maternity, but rather escape from the domestic realm by means of education and employment (Friedan, 1992: 159). In all of these accounts, maternity cannot be revised; it must be sidestepped. Of course, views of maternity as inevitably and wholly *positive* could also be described as essentialist. The point here is to be aware of how the experience of mothering is constructed in ways that can be understood as either “positive” or “negative.”

Adrienne Rich’s 1976 view of motherhood as “experience” and “institution” can thus be viewed as a breakthrough. Rich’s *Of Woman Born* is a blend of academic discourse and autobiography; thus, it rests upon the assumption that “the personal is political.” It highlights the maternal subject as complex, thoughtful, and in dialogue with current ideologies concerning maternity, with what Rich terms the “institution” of motherhood. This institution is, in Rich’s view, shaped by patriarchal conceptions of women. Rich’s account does have its problems, which later feminist thought enables us to recognize. In particular, Rich’s differentiation between “experience” and “institution,” while groundbreaking, tends to obscure the interaction between subject and ideology, and it suggests a pristine kind of maternity that lies beneath patriarchy’s overlay (DiQuinzio, 1999: 215; Jeremiah, 2004: 60). Such a view is common in radical feminist thought, which also relies upon the notion of “patriarchy” as a monolithic entity, a view Rich defends in her 1986 introduction to the text (1986: xv). While this idea does furnish Rich with a powerful conceptual tool, and while it may be regarded as a useful strategy, it ignores the fragmentary, unfixed nature of institutions and ideologies.

Such criticism may also be applied to much feminist psychoanalysis. According to Marianne Hirsch, feminist psychoanalysis has failed to articulate maternal subjectivity adequately (1989: 167). Nancy Chodorow’s (1978) *Reproduction of Mothering*, an important contribution to feminist psychoanalysis, indeed tends towards essentialism. Chodorow’s compelling fusion of psychology and sociology highlights the interaction between maternal subject and ideology. But despite Chodorow’s awareness of the contingent nature of mothering and of the nuclear family, she ultimately presents the mother as originary, as outside of culture, thereby offering a thin account of politics (Doane and Hodges, 1992: 38).³ This is a concern that has also been voiced with regard to the Lacan-inspired theorists Cixous (1994), Irigaray (1985) and Kristeva (1986) who are charged with consigning the mother to a realm outside of culture, rendering her silent and powerless (Daly and Reddy, 1991: 7). Psychoanalysis, then, is often problematic for the theorist of maternity wishing to avoid essentialism and disempowerment. So where to now?

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Having offered a persuasive critique of much feminist psychoanalysis, Hirsch cites positively the work of the philosopher Sara Ruddick. In *Maternal Thinking* (1989), Ruddick defines mothering as a kind of work, involving protection, nurturance, and training, and argues that maternal activity gives rise to a specific mode of cognition. Such thinking is characterized by what Ruddick terms “attentive love” (1995: 119-23). Ruddick offers the most detailed description of mother-child interaction ever advanced in feminist theory, and thus she contributes significantly to the current and growing awareness of mothering as relational, as constituting a complicated, ever-changing relationship. This notion of mothering as relational is also to be found in the work of the psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin. Benjamin challenges traditional psychoanalytic paradigms, which place the mother in the position of object, and posits an “intersubjective” view of child development (1990: 15-24). According to this view, the child develops within and through interaction with the mother, who must also be a desiring subject. The child seeks recognition, and that recognition must be given by someone who is herself an agent.

Both Ruddick and Benjamin, then, conceive the mother as active and relational, and both show an awareness of how mothering is shaped and defined by context. But this awareness is, in both cases, limited, as Christine Everingham (1994) argues. Everingham notes that Benjamin assumes that the mother instinctively “knows” the needs of the child, thereby ignoring the interpretative aspect of caretaking, and suggesting an essentialist view of mothers as naturally caring (1994: 18-19). Everingham also argues that Ruddick should talk of “maternal attitudes” rather than of “maternal thinking,” a term that implies homogeneity and fixity (1994: 32). Everingham, then, is concerned to show mothering as an activity that is contingent upon context. She also fruitfully seeks to redefine the notion of autonomy as a relational concept, as something that “must be actively produced by another in a particular socio-cultural context” (Everingham, 1994: 6; compare Lawler, 2000: 172). In addition, Everingham argues that the particular kind of mothering evoked by Ruddick needs to be theorized as an ethical ideal (1994: 32). We will look further at this idea a little later.

Everingham’s reference to “particular ... context[s]” points to the contingency and constructedness of maternal experience. As has already been suggested, deconstructive methods are now an important feature of feminist examinations of maternity. For example, it has fruitfully been argued that motherhood in Western culture has rested upon a number of binary oppositions, such as man/woman, culture/nature, labour/love (Glenn, 1994: 13). Such oppositions have been challenged by feminists concerned to revise maternal subjectivity.

Recent thinking about maternity has drawn on the work of Judith Butler, who conceives gender as a series of performative acts, as we will shortly see. Viewed in the light of Butler’s work, maternity is a practice, and maternal subjectivity is not static, but rather in process, constantly constructed or

“performed.” One should indeed speak rather of “maternal subjectivities,” critiques of the essentialism of early second wave feminist thought having alerted us to the differences amongst women (Spelman, 1990); and this idea has been central to postmodernist feminism, which insists upon diversity and multiplicity (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 34-35). But what does it mean, to talk of maternal experience as a “construct” or a “performance”? A liberal humanist might find all this talk highfaluting, and might wonder: what about the experience of real mothers in the real world?

Constructivism and performativity

Firstly, the idea that experience is separable from its construction is a fallacy; there is no such thing as a pure, unmediated (“real”) experience. But that does not mean that maternal subjectivity is *only* “constructed.” Judith Butler asserts with regard to sex and discourse: “to claim that sexual differences are indissociable from discursive demarcations is not the same as claiming that discourse causes sexual difference” (1993: 1). To adapt this formulation: to claim that maternal experience is constructed is not the same as claiming that construction causes maternal experience. The term “construction” is problematic, in that it could be understood to denote a complete and closed process, and in that it may suggest the existence of a prediscursive subject,⁴ something I want to avoid. Butler’s idea of “performativity,” “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993: 2) avoids this artificial fixing, and, crucially, it allows for the possibility of interrupting and disrupting this discursive production to effect transformation.

Butler understands gender as “a doing”: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1990: 25). As already suggested, to understand maternity thus is to open up conceptual room for mothering as a practice—a notion which, as stated, is already progressive, given traditional views of the mother as passive. It is also to suggest that mothering behaviour could be transformative, subversive. Mielle Chandler (1998) takes up the idea of performative mothering, stating: “It is my position that ‘mother’ is best understood as a verb, as something one does.” Quoting Butler on gender, she goes on: “To be a mother is to enact mothering” (1998: 273). Mothering behaviours, viewed in this light, contain the potential for a disruption of dominant discourses on maternity, which depend upon their enactment for validity and which, therefore, are vulnerable, open to change. To understand mothering in this way is to make room for the idea of maternal agency. According to Butler, it is variation on the repetition of the practices that make up gender that constitutes “agency.” By restaging the processes that cause the constitution and subjection of the “I,” one can “work the mobilizing power of injury” (Butler, 1993: 123). Thus, to vary the repetition of maternal practices is to exert maternal agency.

Such an understanding of mothering also poses a challenge to the idea of the mother as origin, a notion that was mentioned with regard to feminist psychoanalysis. Just as drag exposes “the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original” (Butler, 1990: 31), so the idea of mothers as performing maternity refutes the normative ideal of the naturally selfless mother, who is imagined as existing prior to culture. This view of maternity as a precultural, prediscursive entity is indeed explicitly challenged by Butler in her reading of the work of Kristeva. Kristeva (1986) takes on the Lacanian notion of “the Symbolic”⁵ and develops the idea of “the semiotic” to argue that the latter is a dimension of language occasioned by the maternal body that acts as a subversive element within the Symbolic, in the form of poetic language. According to Butler, Kristeva “describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself,” and thereby “safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure and delimits maternity as an essentially precultural reality” (1990: 80).

There are problems with the idea of maternal performativity. What about, for example, the (relatively recent, western) idea of mothering as a “choice”? Butler argues that agency is not to be conflated with voluntarism or individualism, and that agency in no way presumes a choosing subject; it is, she asserts, “a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power” (1993: 15). The “I,” in her view, does not exist prior to discourse; gendering, for example, is conceived as the matrix through which the “I” emerges (1993: 7). Maternity, then, can be seen as the matrix through which the maternal “I” emerges. But here the issue of voluntarism does come into play; this emergence of a maternal subject can be the consequence of decision-making on the part of the individual woman, that is, of a decision to become a mother. This is not to lapse into liberal assumptions concerning choice and individual freedom; it is simply to problematize performativity as a way of understanding mothering.

This notion of choice, of will, raises the question of ethics, and the making of moral decisions. Chandler (1998) touches on this issue when she, like Benjamin (1990), Ruddick (1995), and Everingham (1994), stresses the relationality involved in mothering practice; the acts performed by the mother are responses to the needs of another. And Chandler challenges the ideology of individualist freedom that perpetuates the devaluation of “the blatantly encumbered: mothers” (1998: 272; see also Chandler, 1999: 21).⁶ She thereby raises the question of whether performativity as a notion can accommodate the issue of care. While the identities “masculine”/“feminine,” “heterosexual”/“lesbian” might be refused as perpetuating heterosexist binarism, that of “mother” is not so dispensable, surely, given the needs of a screaming child. Butler argues that “the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found ... in the arbitrary relation between such acts [that make up gender], in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity” (1990: 141). But the possibilities of maternal transformation do not generally admit of such a refusal, assuming

that children should be cared for, and that caretakers feel bound “to clean, to mop, to sweep, to keep out of reach, to keep safe, to keep warm, to feed, to take small objects out of mouths, to answer impossible questions” (Chandler, 1998: 274). Chandler advocates “refusing to refuse” as a solution, suggesting that mothers should “embrace motherselfhoods and ... demand social, economic and political respect for mothering practices” (1998: 284).

Performative ethics?

Chandler thus highlights usefully the limits of performativity as far as an understanding of mothering is concerned. Following her, I would suggest that if we are to develop a notion of maternal performativity, it must include the idea of mothering as a form of ethical behaviour, such as the “should” and the “feel bound to” in the above paragraph already suggest. Let us return to Kristeva (1985), and her essay of 1977, “Stabat Mater,” for some suggestions as to how this can be done.

In Kristeva’s essay, the maternal body is figured as a site of splitting and exchange: “a mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh” (1986: 178). Kristeva suggests that the infant’s relationship to the maternal body is manifested and reproduced within “the Symbolic,” in the silent ways in which women connect (1986: 180-81). This “semiotic” communication is described as an “underwater, trans-verbal communication between bodies” (1986: 182). Like Chandler later, Kristeva challenges the idea of individualism, of “singularity”: “it is not natural, hence it is inhuman; the mania smitten with Oneness” (1986: 182). She links her idea of a relational subjectivity and expressivity both to the experience of birthgiving and to ethics, in the following reflection:

Although it concerns every woman’s body, the heterogeneity that cannot be subsumed in the signifier nevertheless explodes violently with pregnancy (the threshold of culture and nature) and the child’s arrival (which extracts woman out of her oneness and gives her the possibility—but not the certainty—of reaching out to the other, the ethical). (1986: 182).

Maternity, then, opens up the possibility of an ethical form of exchange with others (compare Willett, 1995: 8). My reference to Butler’s critique of Kristeva has already indicated the problems with the latter’s account of maternity, but let us hold on to her idea of maternal relationality as an ethical ideal.

The notion is echoed in Chandler’s essay “Queering Maternity”, which argues that “maternal [i.e. relational] forms of selfhood continue to be degraded, mocked and reviled,” while “monadic fraternity” remains as an ideal (1999: 21). Chandler draws interestingly on Chodorow’s ideas concerning mother-infant attachment, reworking them in the light of Butler’s queer

theorizing, and she proposes the following as “both invitations and appeals”:

1. Engagements in maternal practices as, in a sense, ‘queer’: as both the same as and other than the other, as in-relation with and separate from.
2. Desubjugations of maternal forms of subjectivity through engagements in maternal relations regardless of one’s categorical positionality.
3. Proliferations of maternal practices, forms of subjectivity, and ethics, into self-other relations of all kinds (1999: 31).

I find these suggestions extremely provocative and useful, but wish to express a small doubt concerning Chandler’s arguments. Following Chodorow, Chandler suggests that the foundation for maternal qualities “lies dormant in all of us who do not engage in maternal practices, ethics, relations and self-concepts” (1999: 30). The notion of an underlying maternity verges dangerously upon a kind of essentialism, or, at any rate, psychological determinism.

This issue leads us back to the idea of voluntarism, in a sense the opposite of such determinism. Butler’s deployment of the psychoanalytic concept of “identifications” offers suggestions as to how an ethics of care and responsibility might be theorized in terms that avoid simplistic forms both of voluntarism and of determinism. Butler argues that “identifications are never fully and finally made” (1993: 105). Such an idea of attachment allows us also to understand the maternal subject as engaged in a relational process which is never complete and which demands reiteration, that is, as performatively mothering a child or children. This mothering involves what might be termed “choice” or “effort,” what I would prefer to call “ethical constraint,” where that constraint is not to be understood as purely and simply constructed, but as constituted in and codified by discursive and material practices. This “maternal ethics,” then, is not fixed—changing ideas concerning “good enough mothering” (Winnicott, 1964) are enough to alert us to that—but rather contingent upon particular cultural contexts and their particular discursive operations.

Such an ethics would also have to be understood as a bodily one. But unlike Kristeva’s, this type of ethics relies not on the notion of a maternal body as origin, as existing “before” the law, but rather as existing within and through discourses that it can disrupt. In particular, the performative practice of bodily care for an infant involves a challenge to the ideas of individuality identified by Chandler as antithetical to the notion of maternal agency. This is not to suggest that ethical mothering stops when the child no longer needs bodily care; it is, rather, to focus on corporeality as the site where relations of care can and do take place between individual agents. Margrit Shildrick makes a similar point, with regard to medical ethics. She criticizes autonomy and rationality as bases for morality—these, she argues, have formed the lynchpins of the ethics of modernity—and she argues for a new emphasis on embodiment (Shildrick, 1997: 115–20). Shildrick proposes “a more fluid mutual responsibility and care as the distinguishing factors of human morality” (1997: 122).

To understand maternity as performativity is not to conceive of it purely in discursive terms, as I hope became clear through the earlier claim that maternal experience and its constructedness are indissoluble. The materiality of maternity is bound up with its discursive operations; as Butler notes, “language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different” (1993: 69). That is, the material practices of maternity, those actions performed by mothers that Ruddick and others have pointed out, cannot constitute the ground on which a theory of maternity is constructed. Materiality, according to Butler, is itself constructed, and it cannot be separated from signifying practices, since “language both is and refers to that which is material” (1993: 68). To argue for a maternal performativity is not, therefore, to ignore “the material”; it is, rather, to pave the way for a discursive (hopefully performative) reassessment of the material operations of motherhood and maternity. One way in which such a revision can be performed is through literature.

Ethics and aesthetics

Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy (1991) put forward a post-modernist aesthetic as central to an understanding of maternal writing, asserting that “since Oedipal narratives silence the voices of mothers, we must listen for maternal stories in postmodern plots where selfhood is constructed, or reconstructed, in more complex patterns” (1991: 12). Daly and Reddy cite Benjamin as important for an understanding of such “reconstructions” of maternal subjectivity as relational and in process. Such ideas have been linked to postmodernism by Patricia Waugh. Considering the question of a postmodern feminist literature, Waugh examines psychoanalytic accounts of subjectivity, to relate them to recent women’s writing, much of which, according to her, has “explored modes of relational identity” (1996: 339). I find such ideas interesting, but, like Hirsch (1989), Daly and Reddy (1991), I am wary of relying upon an interpretative framework that has traditionally silenced mothers.

I would argue instead for a performative and ethical maternal aesthetics. Aesthetic practice involves relationality since it constitutes participation in a particular culture. The experiences of writing and reading also promote non-hierarchical, fluid sets of identifications. Butler notes: “what is called agency can never be understood as a controlling or original authorship over [a] signifying chain” (1993: 219). Traditional ideas of authorial autonomy and authority having been discredited, the way is open for an idea of aesthetic performativity:

Agency would then be the double-movement of being constituted in and by a signifier, where ‘to be constituted’ means ‘to be compelled to cite or repeat or mime’ the signifier itself. Enabled by the very signifier that depends for its continuation on the future of that citational chain, agency is the hiatus in iterability, the compulsion to install an identity

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through repetition, which requires the very contingency, the undetermined interval, that identity seeks insistently to foreclose (Butler, 1993: 220).

Such a performativity can produce new “identifications,” and may therefore be understood as a maternal, ethical act (see also Jeremiah, 2002). This act involves among other things a challenge to traditional masculinist notions of knowledge production, which have rested on a conception of the self as contained and rational, and on a hierarchical subject/object distinction; reading and writing, as empathic acts, expose subjectivity as relational and meaning as dialogic.

A recent book by the British academic John Carey (2005) asks *What Good Are The Arts?* Carey considers the work of Ellen Dissanayake, an American scholar who advocates the making of art as a solution to the feelings of disaffection and depression suffered by teenagers in the United States: problems she identifies as symptoms of a highly technologized, consumerist society. Dissanayake (2000) traces the origins of art to mother-and-baby interaction, to the sounds, play, expressions, and gestures that occur between mother (or: parent? caregiver?) and child. Carey observes:

Few will question Dissanayake’s belief in the importance of mother-infant mutuality, or doubt her claim that it influences the child’s and later the adult’s capacities for love, for belonging to a social group, for finding and making meaning, and for acquiring a sense of competence through handling and elaborating. True, its connection with art is hard to test. It would be interesting to know whether individuals who were deprived, in babyhood, of the mothering attentions [Dissanayake] specifies turn out to be artistically incompetent as well as limited in other ways (2005: 154).

It would be interesting indeed if other thinkers were to take up this line of enquiry, and explore further the links between mothering and artistic practice. Such a project would entail a reappraisal of the status of both mothering and art in contemporary culture: an urgent and compelling task.

Note: This article arises from and in part reproduces the author’s book Troubling Maternity: Mothering, Agency, and Ethics in Women’s Writing in German of the 1970s and 1980s.

¹“Essentialism” involves the belief that human beings are reducible to a single defining characteristic or set of characteristics, and is a frequent feature of what is known as liberal humanism. “Essentialism” is often set in opposition to “constructivism” or “constructionism” (see here Fuss, 1989: 1), which sees the subject as constructed by external forces. I refer here to “poststructuralism,”

which largely endorses such a constructivist view, understanding subjectivity as a process, shaped and supported by discourses (Weedon, 1987: 33).

²*From Motherhood to Mothering* is the title of a recent volume of essays edited by Andrea O'Reilly (2004).

³See also Patrice DiQuinzio's useful critique of Chodorow (1999: 177-79).

⁴Critics of constructivism point out a pitfall of the theory: the notion that the subject is entirely constructed from without, as it were, implies that "before" this process occurs, there exists a pure, untarnished subject. Thus constructivism involves essentialism, though as noted above, the two are often seen as opposites (see also Fuss, 1989: 6)

⁵According to Lacan, the Symbolic is rendered possible by means of the repression of primary libidinal drives, including the child's dependence on the maternal body. The Symbolic is the structuring of all signification under the paternal law.

⁶Patrice DiQuinzio points out that "mothering is an important site at which the individualist ideological formation is elaborated and imposed, but it is also the site at which this ideological formation can be contested and reworked" (1999: xv).

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Talkin' Bout a Revolution *Building a Mothers' Movement in the Third Wave*

This article examines how activists, advocacy groups, and writers are positioning the emerging mothers' movement vis-à-vis feminism. I explore the negotiations and self-naming strategies of various mothers' advocacy groups and how they reveal both ambivalence and allegiance toward feminism, arguing that we should understand the mothers' movement within the broader frame of feminism, and specifically within the context of the third wave and the ongoing project of redefining and expanding feminism. Moreover, I argue that it may benefit mothers' advocates to engage more fully with feminist theories and practice. Feminist frameworks can help to suggest possibilities for increased interchange and alliance-building across the boundaries of difference—work that, I believe, remains fundamental to the formation of a truly inclusive mothers' and caregivers' movement.

Is a mothers' movement emerging in the U.S. and Canada? Over the past several years, the question has increasingly come up on panel discussions, in journalism articles, and on the Internet. Those who discuss the possibility of a mothers' movement—a broad-based social movement based on a platform of mothers' rights, family-friendly policies, and guidelines for truly valuing the work of caregiving—tend to point to an increase in, and a heightened visibility of, public and private discussions about the many issues facing mothers, fathers, and caregivers. They also point to an increase in the numbers of mothers' advocacy groups and political activism surrounding motherhood. Unlike mothers who have organized around single issues in the past, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Million Mom March, the wave of recent political activity is characterized by a wide-ranging agenda put forth by a variety of grassroots and national organizations in both the U.S. and Canada that focuses on the well-being and empowerment of mothers and their families.

Finally, they point to an increase in cultural productions and literary output by mothers, which encompasses a growing number of local, national, and cyber communities based on the various issues surrounding motherhood and parenting; an explosion of autobiographical writing about motherhood, in print and on the Internet; the emergence in the publishing world of the category of “mommy lit”; and finally, a series of nonfiction books about motherhood that have both attracted a fair amount of media attention and informed public discussions about motherhood to varying degrees.

Of course, the question of whether all this activity will translate into an organized, broad-based movement with the power to agitate for political change is something we can't answer definitively. Furthermore, while some individuals and advocacy groups have articulated agendas, we don't yet know what visions a broader movement would proffer. Multiple questions remain unanswered. Journalists Judith Stadtman Tucker (of the Mothers Movement Online) and Stephanie Wilkinson (of *Brain, Child* magazine) have asked many of them: What would the goals of a mothers' movement be—to improve the situation of mothers, of all caregivers, and/or of children? To advocate for mothers' equality, or mothers' empowerment? Would it build on the various agendas of existing grassroots, national, and transnational groups, and if so, how? How would it negotiate differences in priorities and agendas? Would divergent philosophies threaten to tear it apart? Who would be its leaders (see Tucker, 2006; Wilkinson, 2005)?

Furthermore, we don't yet know to what extent a mothers' movement will claim itself as an heir to feminism or even consider itself part of the feminist movement. Indeed, several advocates and organizations seem to have distanced themselves from feminism. Some of the reasons may stem from feminism's image problem within mainstream culture. Critiques of feminism lobbied by cultural and religious conservatives as well as those who position themselves as “postfeminist” often contribute to the perception that feminism is hostile to “family values,” and that feminism somehow is to blame for the exhausted state many mothers find themselves in from having to do it all—paid work *and* mothering *and* the second shift.¹ Thus organizations wishing to attract mothers who might not necessarily identify themselves as feminist may attempt to distance themselves from feminism and feminist groups. Moreover, as Ann Crittenden points out, the concerns of mothers and families have not always been a priority on the agendas of feminist organizations (2001: 253-5).

Historically, the reasons are complex; and in any attempt to understand them, however cursory, we should heed Patrice DiQuinzio's reminder, who observes that U.S. feminism “has never been characterized by a monolithic position on mothering” (1999: ix). Nonetheless, as DiQuinzio adds, mothering has frequently presented itself as a “contentious issue” within U.S. feminism (ix). Certainly the different threads comprising feminism—namely, equal rights feminism (with its focus on justice and women's individual rights) and maternalism (with its focus on women's different and unique ability to provide

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care and nurture) have at times been in conflict.² Lauri Umansky furthermore suggests that in the emerging feminist movement of the late 1960s, negative critiques of motherhood “achieved an exaggerated reputation,” despite the fact that quite a few feminists (many of whom were mothers themselves) worked to support the work of mothering and articulated a vision of social responsibility for child rearing while they critiqued the institution of motherhood (1996: 16).³ Much of the history of feminist mothering has largely been forgotten or misunderstood, and as a consequence “feminist” has come to signify a woman who seeks individual liberation and self-determination through equality in the workplace, and not through caregiving—a definition that simplifies and distorts feminism, but which has unfortunately alienated many women, including some mothers. This troubled and complex history presents a challenging terrain for the emerging mothers’ movement.

As a scholar of literary and cultural narratives, I’m interested in how activists, advocacy groups, and writers are positioning the mothers’ movement vis-à-vis feminism. Building on Tucker’s cogent examination of the political frameworks underlying the rhetoric of four of the major mothers’ organizations, I explore the negotiations and self-naming strategies of various mothers’ advocacy groups and how they reveal both ambivalence and allegiance toward feminism (see Tucker, 2006).⁴ Although I fully support their attempts to develop agendas that place caregiving at the center of a vision for social and political change, I argue that we should understand the mothers’ movement within the broader frame of feminism, and specifically within the context of the third wave and the ongoing project of redefining and expanding feminism. Moreover, I argue that it may benefit mothers’ advocates to engage more fully with feminist theories and practice. Feminist frameworks can help to suggest possibilities for increased interchange and alliance-building across the boundaries that separate mothers and other caregivers—work that, I believe, remains fundamental to the formation of a truly inclusive mothers’ and caregivers’ movement.

What’s in a name? The labeling of a mothers’ movement

When journalist Ann Crittenden published *The Price of Motherhood* in 2001, she reinvigorated a public conversation about the economics of motherhood and motherwork. While many researchers had been studying the issues surrounding work and family for years, and excellent books by feminist scholars such as Nancy Folbre and Joan Williams were published around the same time as Crittenden’s, *The Price of Motherhood* was particularly successful in framing the issues in an accessible, provocative, and compelling manner for a large audience.⁵ Drawing on the work of many social scientists and using a language of equal rights feminism and economic justice, Crittenden argues that while feminism may have liberated women, it hadn’t changed institutions radically enough to improve the situation of mothers. Women still do most of the work of caring for children—work that is penalized by a “mommy tax,” an increased

risk of poverty, and other financial hardships. Because of an historical focus on other issues, the “disproportionate vulnerability of mothers is not seen as a major feminist issue” (2001: 255). Moreover, Crittenden argues, the “standard feminist response” to the marginalization of mothers and caregiving—to call for a redefinition of labor within the family, and to urge men to do more—is not working, suggesting the need for a “fresh strategy” (7). Crittenden crafts her book in such a way to raise the consciousness of her readers, to demonstrate the political nature of the personal, and to suggest concrete steps toward effecting change.

While Crittenden does not use the phrase “mothers’ movement” in her book—she speaks of “mothers’ potential strength” as remaining “dormant” (2001: 250)—such a political vision accurately describes her goal of encouraging grassroots activism and promoting social change surrounding motherhood and caregiving. This became even clearer a year later, when Crittenden co-founded the organization Mothers Ought to Have Equal Rights (MOTHERS) with writer Naomi Wolf and the National Association of Mothers’ Centers (NAMC). As a “grassroots initiative seeking to improve caregivers’ economic status by calling attention to their essential contribution to the economy and to society,” MOTHERS squarely places itself within a feminist tradition (see “About Us”). Its web site situates the organization’s mission within a feminist framework: “We believe that correcting the economic disadvantages facing caregivers is the big unfinished business of the women’s movement” (see “About Us”). Two of the nine “Frequently Asked Questions” explain how mothers’ issues are, in fact, not at odds with the women’s movement.⁶ These answers simultaneously make an implicit argument to feminists and feminist organizations about the importance of motherhood at the same time that they reach out to mothers who may not necessarily identify themselves as feminist or activist. (Evidence of the latter can be seen in the inclusion of consciousness-raising activities such as the “MOTHERS Book Bag.”) In fact, the success of MOTHERS (in addition to that of other mothers’ advocates) may well be one of the reasons that the National Organization for Women (NOW) adopted a resolution supporting mothers’ and caregivers’ economic rights in 2005.⁷

Throughout its material, then, MOTHERS carefully positions itself in relationship to feminism, placing itself as an heir to the women’s movement but focusing on the needs of mothers. This careful self-positioning is a common practice among many mothers’ advocacy groups, and it often reveals a desire to redefine feminism and articulate new agendas. For example, the organization MomsRising, recently founded by Kristen Rowe-Finkbeiner and Joan Blades, uses the symbol of Rosie the Riveter, now cradling a child in her muscular arms, to simultaneously invoke and revise the feminism of previous generations.⁸ Such an image suggests the hidden strength of mothers: not only can they break down cultural barriers to exert their economic power, but they can also make the invisible work of care visible by refusing to hide their babies. Yet despite its

deployment of this powerful feminist icon, MomsRising does not use the word “feminist” to describe its mission. Rather, it claims a feminist heritage implicitly instead of overtly, with the hope of “reach[ing] millions of women who have not previously been active.”⁹

While some mothers’ organizations and advocates overtly identify themselves as feminist—including Mother Outlaws and Mothers are Women/Mères et Femmes [MAW], and Ariel Gore of *Hip Mama*—others seem to betray more of an unresolved ambivalence toward feminism.¹⁰ This ambivalence reveals itself in various ways: in groups placing themselves in opposition to the feminist movement, or eschewing any identification with feminism altogether. For example, the support and advocacy organization Mothers & More declares that it has been “on the forefront of a ‘mothers’ movement since the ‘80s,” but makes no reference to feminism or the feminist movement.¹¹ By contrast, Crittenden’s partner Naomi Wolf has been openly critical of feminism. The same year Crittenden’s book came out, Wolf published *Misconceptions: Truth, Lies, and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood* (2001), which is positioned much like Crittenden’s (2001), in a tradition of feminist critique designed to raise consciousness (though arguably much less successfully).¹² In one of the first contemporary uses of the phrase “mothers’ movement,” Wolf calls alternatively for both a “motherhood feminism” and a “mothers’ movement” in the final chapter. The category of “motherhood feminism” emerges from the author’s own critique of second-wave “victim” feminism that she developed in *Fire with Fire*.¹³ Wolf’s “motherhood feminism” represents her attempt to define what she calls a “power feminism” for mothers, though this occasionally slides into what DiQuinzio terms “essential motherhood,” or the ideological formation of mothering as “a function of women’s essentially female nature, women’s biological reproductive capacities, and/or human evolutionary development” that makes motherhood both “natural and inevitable” (1999: xiii).

Tucker argues that concepts of essential motherhood provide a problematic underpinning for “maternalist” frameworks, revealing “critical points of divergence” in an articulation of a mothers’ movement agenda (2006: 189). In contrast to the liberal feminist framework of MOTHERS, “classically maternalist” rhetoric provides the underlying framework for “A Call to a Motherhood Movement,” the manifesto issued by The Mothers’ Council of The Motherhood Project at a conference on maternal feminism in October 2002 (Tucker, 2006: 192).¹⁴ The “Call” firmly situates a *motherhood* (not a mothers’) movement within the tradition of nineteenth-century maternalism. It calls for a “calming of tensions” between maternal feminists and equal rights feminists, citing previous alliances and calling for “the full support of the women’s movement” in the contemporary struggle by mothers.¹⁵ Embedded in this manifesto is a new vision: to “reject the false dichotomy” between the “concerns of mothers” and the “gains of feminism” and “to build ... on the advances of the women’s movement.”¹⁶ At the same time, the “Call” carefully

distances itself from feminism; as Tucker puts it, the organization “situates the ‘Motherhood Movement’ as parallel to, rather than part of, the ongoing struggle for women’s equality” (2006: 192). Indeed, aside from its use of “motherhood” movement in its overtly activist “Call,” The Motherhood Project tends to use “mothers’ renaissance,” a less politically-oriented phrase with neither “feminist” nor “movement,” defined to include “fresh thinking, discussion, and activism by mothers about motherhood and mothering.”¹⁷ (Significantly, however, “renaissance” was inspired by the Harlem Renaissance, a point to which I will return later.¹⁸)

As an alternative to the unquestioned essentialism of maternalist ideas (in addition to the limits of liberal feminism’s individualistic focus), Tucker (2006) argues for feminist care theory as the most promising framework with which to build a mothers’ movement. Coming out of the work of scholars such as Eva Feder Kittay (1999) and Joan Tronto (1993), feminist care theory “introduces the language of care as a public good and supports the definition of care as labor,” but does so in such a way that it understands caregiving “as a social responsibility rather than an exclusively maternal duty” (Tucker, 2006: 189). Thus it “reinvent[s] motherhood” in order to “relocate care as the central concern of human life” and “emancipate care-giving from its secondary status as women’s work” (Tucker, 2006: 198).

The evidence of feminist care theory can be seen in Tucker’s own website, the Mothers Movement Online (MMO), which has been a major force in popularizing the phrase “mothers’ movement” since its founding in 2003. MMO is firmly positioned within a feminist tradition; and though it frequently includes articles examining motherhood-related issues within the context of feminism, it more frequently uses the lens of an emerging mothers’ movement. Feminist care theory informs Tucker’s own position as well as the website’s signature tag line: to provide “resources and reporting for mothers and others who think about social change.”¹⁹ On the one hand, the use of “mothers” reflects reality (women continue to perform most of the world’s motherwork and carework) as well as a *realpolitik* strategy of identity politics. Like other mothers’ advocacy groups, MMO demonstrates an attempt to attract mothers who may not identify as feminist or see their own lives within a larger, systemic context, but who may (with the help of some consciousness-raising) mobilize around a set of issues concerning families and children. On the other hand, the use of “others” denotes the many individuals who parent—fathers, non-biological lesbian mothers, transsexual parents, extended family members, paid caregivers, and “fictive kin” (Collins, 2000: 179). This approach parallels that of other groups, notably Mothers Acting Up (which uses an asterisk to define “mothers” to include “mothers and others, on stilts and off, who exercise protective care over someone smaller”) and also MOTHERS, which frequently includes “caregivers” in addition to “mothers.”²⁰

Other advocates and writers have attempted to broaden the inclusiveness of a mothers’ movement by creating entirely different names. Scholar Miriam

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Peskowitz (2005a), for example, has coined the playful and nongendered “playground revolution,” which captures the inherently local nature of caregiving-related activism, an important dimension lost with the use of the word “movement” and its invocation of masses of people.²¹ Citing multiple instances around the U.S. and Canada that, Peskowitz argues, constitute playground revolutions—such as the work of the Montana nonprofit Working for Equity and Economic Liberation (WEEL) to help poor mothers stay at home with their children instead of going on welfare/work, or the success of MAW to convince the Canadian government to include unpaid caregiving labor in the census—the author asks us to consider the many instances of grassroots activity that may get overlooked or forgotten in a focus on a national political movement. In this manner, Peskowitz attempts to provide parents with multiple models of local, community-based activism.

The notion of a playground revolution parallels MAW’s “kitchen table revolution,” another term that captures the local dimension of mothers’ and other caregivers’ activism: with its location in the home, in a room that often signifies an open, informal gathering space (not to mention its function as the site of much unpaid labor), “kitchen table” suggests a more private space in which consciousness-raising and activism can cook. “Revolution,” on the other hand, lends it a more radical cast, much like Gore’s “maternal feminist revolution” or the social justice collective Mothers Alliance for Militant Action (M*A*M*A) in New York City, which calls for sweeping change: “our ultimate, long-term goal is not to reform the system but to end imperialism, capitalism and all forms of oppression.”²² In these cases, the use of “revolution” and “militant action” in lieu of “mothers’ movement” suggests a very deliberate self-positioning, in a tradition of radical and anarchist feminism that stands apart from mainstream feminist politics.

What I find most interesting, and potentially problematic, is that in many of these examples, the feminism that many mothers’ groups are positioning themselves within or against is frequently synonymous with an overly simplified version of the feminism of the second wave. It neither reflects the diversity of feminist ideas and actions during the 1960s and ’70s nor the tremendous changes that have taken place within the feminist movement over the past 30 years, during which many women have redefined feminism in multiple ways. Rather, this version of feminism threatens to collapse into the distorted caricature of feminism created by media misrepresentations that have frequently portrayed social justice activists as a bunch of self-centered, power-hungry, man-hating, and anti-family spinsters.²³ Not to understand the complexity of feminism’s history is to shut the emerging mothers’ movement off from important contexts and frameworks for understanding its own activism. Thus I agree with Peskowitz’s observation that

... in the new feminism we are creating as we reflect on our lives as mothers, feminism offers helpful explanations. And it connects

explanation with a history of activism, of many different types, from personal resistance and creative ways to live a life, to local activism, to writing, to large-scale policy and legal change. And that's important. Some of what has been missing is that many of us who are now becoming mothers can barely remember the decades when our society was more activist, and able to imagine great shifts in what it meant to be a woman, or a man. (2005b: 3)

Not to engage with feminist frameworks and history—not to understand its successes as well as its failures—is to run the risk of forgoing the opportunity to learn valuable knowledge and avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Moreover, the very ability of mothers' advocacy organizations to design a political platform based on mothers' economic and social rights depends upon several decades of feminist scholarship that has developed instructive analyses of gender, caregiving, and power. Feminism thus provides important theoretical underpinnings for current activism. Developments in feminist care theory further provide one of the most powerful visions of an emerging mothers' movement: to help develop and promote a "truly inclusive feminism" that brings together the "domains of caring and equality" (Kittay, 1999: 19) and that sees "the rights of the individual and the needs of the society as inextricably intertwined" (Giele, 1995: 185). Mothers' advocates have the opportunity of building on these theories in their work as educators and activists. Perhaps a strategy of consciously linking themselves to the project of continuing and redefining feminism rather than dancing around it, or avoiding it altogether, would not only serve mothers' advocates more effectively, but also help to create bridges to the many feminists who have been working on these very issues for decades.

Understanding and bridging difference

In writing about the second wave, Peskowitz observes that the initial failure of white, middle-class feminists to align themselves and their agendas with those of working-class women and women of color led to an "absence" of the perspectives and voices of large segments of the American population (2005a:141). Some of these women, many of whom were working mothers, wanted "relief from work," but found that their priorities went unheard (141) (see also hooks, 1984). Speaking of the women's movement, Peskowitz observes that "We needed access to work and we needed relief from it. We argued for only one" (141).

This division is one of the reasons why feminists and womanists of color, in addition to working-class and LGBTQ activists, have critiqued the mainstream feminist movement for its inattention to the many interrelated components of identity (race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, religion, disability, age, and so on) and the oppressions built up around them. The fight against the interconnected institutionalization of oppressions has led many marginalized

groups of mothers to develop a complex, multi-issue politics of mothering. For example, Andrea O'Reilly argues that many lesbian, African American, and feminist mothers have developed modes of "empowered mothering" that enable women to resist oppressive stereotypes of the "good" or "sacrificial" mother (2004: 5).²⁴ Likewise, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues that for many black mothers in the U.S., motherhood and family have provided a way to derive self-empowerment and stage resistance against destructive social forces such as slavery, racism, economic disempowerment, and the capitalist division of home and work. Collins, like Stanlie James, views motherhood as an experience that can fuel "social transformation" (James, 1993: 45) and that often "*politicizes* Black women" (Collins, 2000: 194).

For many African American women, the civil rights movement provides a model for motherhood activism. In the anthology *Rise Up Singing: Black Women Writers on Motherhood*, writer and editor Cecelie Berry (2004) invokes both the women's movement and the civil rights movement in her exploration of the multiple challenges black mothers face. Given the history of black women's mothering, which took place within the "hydra of mainstream racism and Black self-hatred," and which was furthermore complicated by the fact that black women frequently had to raise "other people's children as well as their own," Berry views the very act of mothering as revolutionary (2004: 8, 10). To "build with love the home and the family of your dreams is the ultimate revolution," she writes, returning to this theme in another essay, "Home is Where the Revolution Is" (1999: 13).²⁵

Several scholars have studied the activism of black mothers, much of it grassroots-based and focused on a wide range of interconnected issues, including educational, economic, environmental, and reproductive justice. This multi-issue approach is shared by many black feminists, whose approach toward activism often reflects the "notion that race, class, gender, and sexuality are codependent variables," the understanding that political activism must address the interrelationships of oppressions, and an organization style frequently defined by "decentralized mobilization efforts, informal leadership, and flexible structures" (Ransby, 2000: 1218).²⁶ In fact, such practices are shared by a broad range of feminists of color, as well as many working-class, LGBTQ, and third-wave feminists. Interestingly, despite its problematic use of maternalist rhetoric, the Mothers' Council demonstrates a similar understanding of activism. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that its founder, Enola Aird, is African American, or that the use of the phrase "mothers' renaissance" signals how the Mothers' Council places itself within a multiracial history that includes the Harlem Renaissance as a model for a mothers' movement. Furthermore, its philosophy of including a diverse group of mothers' advocates is clearly evident in its structure, which includes a leadership group of "mothers of diverse races, backgrounds, disciplines and perspectives committed to protecting the dignity of childhood and motherhood" who will closely examine and discuss "various issues affecting the institution of mother-

hood and the vocation of mothering" over time.²⁷

The Mothers' Council, then, may provide one model for the "coalition strategy" that Janet Zollinger Giele calls for, which may enable mothers' advocates to appeal to a wide range of mothers (1995: 165). Indeed, many mothers' advocacy groups are attempting such a strategy, particularly those that claim a feminist legacy even as they redefine the meaning(s) of feminism (most notably MOTHERS' assertion that "correcting the economic disadvantages facing caregivers is the big unfinished business of the women's movement," and MomsRising's revisioning of Rosie the Riveter). Such a strategy may involve what DiQuinzio terms a "paradoxical politics of mothering," a politics that "does not require for its foundation a univocal, coherent, and exhaustive position on mothering" (1999: 248). As I have suggested, however, even a "paradoxical" politics needs to tap into feminist thought and activism, particularly as they have expanded and transformed over the last 30 years. Perhaps consciously working across generations, as some of these groups are doing, will help to anchor the mothers' movement in the specific experiences of second-wave feminists as well as the greater history of feminist activism.

Such coalitions across difference have become even more important in a globalized world. As the contributors to the volume *Global Woman* reveal, increasing numbers of Third world/South women migrate in order to find work, often as low-wage caregivers, and they frequently leave their children behind when they migrate (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 17). Given the implications of the feminization of migration, a mothers' movement in the U.S. and Canada must grapple with how to think transnationally about the fates of the women who undertake the work of care. First world/North advocates need to consider how we might address the concerns of immigrant women in motherhood and caregiving agendas—for example, might mothers' advocates forge alliances with paid caregivers, immigrants' rights groups, and/or scholars and activists studying these issues? How might a feminist framework of care develop a "global sense of ethics" that truly addresses the lives of all mothers and caregivers in North America (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 28)?

I am aware that such suggestions would not necessarily lead to a single, unified platform for a mothers' movement. Indeed, they may well lead in the opposite direction. However, this model—numerous advocates working on their own agendas but committed both to seeing their struggles as interconnected and working together as allies—provides a broader, more inclusive base for social change. For this reason, I am inclined to read skeptically the evaluation of the "burgeoning 'motherhood movement'" by journalist Judith Warner in *Perfect Madness*, in which she offers a pessimistic view of the current state of affairs: riddled by "disunity," she observes, it is "utterly corrupted" by politics, feminists, and moralists (2005: 265). While Warner accurately identifies the presence of divisions, she does not explore how "disunity" might instead represent an expanding number of organizations and agendas, or what steps individuals might take toward working together across difference.

Hip mamas and punk parenting: Third-wave feminism and the mama revolution

In addition to situating the mothers' movement within the broad range of feminisms and womanisms, it is important to situate the mothers' movement in the context of third-wave feminism which, as Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake argue, has been greatly influenced by the critique of second-wave feminism by women of color and thus takes as its starting point the understanding that identity is shifting and complex (1997: 9). While "third wave" is, admittedly, a contested term, I find it helpful to signify the generational and political cohort that has come of age in a "postfeminist" world increasingly dominated by global capital, environmental destruction, economic uncertainty, and cynicism (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003: 10).²⁸ Amber Kinser further suggests that we should think of the third wave as "the era of feminism rooted in and shaped by the mid-'80s-new millennium political climate," a moment that requires all feminists to "negotiate a space between second-wave and postfeminist thought" (2004: 132, 135).

Perhaps, then, it should come as no surprise that the mothers' movement shares many parallels with third-wave feminism. After all, many mothers' advocates are members of the same generational and political cohort as third wavers, and many have found themselves coming of age during the same time. Indeed, the struggle of various mothers' organizations to establish the identity of their movement in relationship to, or separate from, second-wave feminism is shared by many third-wave feminists, who have also sought to differentiate themselves from the second wave and to redefine feminism. As Rebecca Walker writes in *The Fire This Time*, "We want to be linked with our foremothers and centuries of women's movement, but we also want to make space for young women to create their own, different brand of revolt, and so we choose the name Third Wave" (2004: xvii). Such a sentiment might speak for many of the mothers' advocates who also wish to tap into the tradition of feminist activism even as they place motherhood at the center of their agendas and their analysis. In both cases, however, such an emphasis on newness may well exaggerate differences while obscuring continuities (see Jervis, 2004).

Furthermore, while not all mothers' advocates identify themselves as members of the third wave, many do. This fact is sometimes overlooked in discussions about the third wave, which is frequently understood as a daughter's movement rebelling against its mothers (Rebecca Walker is, after all, Alice Walker's daughter) and not a movement of daughters who are also, often, mothers. Instead, several theorists have focused on the younger generation's identity as daughters, positing that third-wave cultural productions are frequently positioned as daughters' texts, both rhetorically and psychologically. In her tracing of the "matrophor" (mother-daughter metaphor), for example, Astrid Henry argues that the third wave frequently portrays itself (and is often portrayed) as a "daughter's" movement (2004: 11). Similarly, in her examina-

tion of third-wave rhetorical strategies, Deborah Siegel observes that Rebecca Walker's *To Be Real* is "rhetorically a daughterly text" (Siegel, 1997a: 64). (However, Siegel goes on to argue that intergenerational dialogue "must move beyond narrative scripts in which the second wave necessarily becomes the bad mother and the third wave the bad child" [65].)

Yet increasingly, third-wave daughters have also become mothers, and their texts and cultural productions explore and redefine what it means to parent in the third wave. For example, Allison Abner writes about becoming a mother of a black son in Walker's anthology *To Be Real* (1995), Allison Crews discusses her experience choosing motherhood as a teenager in Barbara Findlen's *Listen Up* (1995), and mothers write about day care and breastfeeding in the webzine *Sexing the Political*. The 1990s punk scene gave birth to several parenting zines, including *The Future Generation* ("a zine for subculture parents, kids, friends, and others") in 1990. In 1993, Ariel Gore founded *Hip Mama* as a "forum for young mothers, single parents, and marginalized voices."²⁹ (In its current form as a glossy zine and web zine, edited with Bee Lavender, it has "grown to represent progressive families of all varieties.") Both of these zines helped to play an important role in inspiring the many mama zines, parenting zines, and perzines (personal zines) now being produced, including such titles as *Punk Parent*, *East Village Inky*, *Zuzu and the Baby Catcher*, *Fertile Ground*, *Miranda*, *Hausfrau*, *Placenta*, and *Rad Dad*, in addition to compilation zines such as *Mamaphiles*, to name only a few—not to mention several anthologies (*Breeder* and *The Essential Hip Mama*), quite a few web zines (including Lavender's *Mamaphonic* and *Girl-Mom*), and a veritable explosion of websites and blogs. From what is generally understood as the beginning of the third wave, then, third-wave mothers—or, more accurately, third-wave *mamas*—have been out in full force.

The name "mama," of course, is significant. "Mama" is to "mother" as "grrl" is to "woman" (and, perhaps, like "third wave" is to "second wave"): it creates an alternative vocabulary that defines itself in opposition to restrictive notions of identity. "Mama" suggests an attempt to redefine motherhood, a political project that begins for many third wavers in the realm of language and culture (see Heywood and Drake, 1997). Likewise, Gore and Lavender reclaim the word "breeder," a word that has been used "to denigrate (lower-class, trashy, slutty) women who procreate," much like the reclamation of words such as "bitch," "slut," and "cunt" (Hewett, 2006: 133). The editors' defiant and celebratory proclamation in the introduction to *Breeder*—"as willing breeders, we refuse to be oppressed by the institution of motherhood"—furthermore suggests how this redefinition of motherhood emerges from third-wave understandings of sexuality (Gore and Lavender, 2001: xiii).

Henry observes that one of the major rhetorical and self-definitional strategies of many third wavers has been to differentiate themselves from their foremothers by embracing the entire spectrum of sexuality and sexual pleasure. "[S]exuality has become the central means by which third-wave feminists have

asserted generational differences,” she writes, even though this has at times meant “ignoring or misrepresenting pro-sex feminisms of the second wave” (Henry, 2004: 14). “Breeder” suggests how “pro-sex feminism” has also extended into the realm of motherhood, so that many mamas claim a pro-pregnancy, pro-childbirth, pro-breastfeeding, and pro-mama position at the same time they claim their right to reproductive justice. Frequently underlying this rhetoric is the implication that some second-wave feminists, while pro-choice, may not have been as pro-mother as they had claimed. It also suggests one of the major rhetorical strategies of many third-wave mama writers: redefining the language of choice and of reproductive rights to include the choice to bear children and mother them.

Certainly not all mama writers identify themselves as pro-choice, or even as third wave (or feminist); but at the risk of simplifying a complex phenomenon, I would say that *Breeder* offers us an instructive example of what characterizes much if not most third-wave writing about motherhood—the claiming and exploring of the personal experience of motherhood in ways that contest cultural ideologies that whitewash and distort uncomfortable realities. “We are sick of silences, so we are telling the truth,” Ariel Gore writes in the introduction to her anthology, and this sentiment is echoed in many other places (2000: xiv) (see Hewett, 2006: 131-32). Of course, *Breeder* provides a particularly defiant and in-your-face example of this impulse, and certainly not all third-wave mama writers share the same aesthetics or style. But whether we are speaking of radical zines, personal blogs, or the outpouring of autobiographical writing since the success of Anne Lamott’s *Operating Instructions* in 1993 (a category that includes memoirs by writers such as Rachel Cusk (2003), Faulkner Fox (2003), Ayun Halliday (2002), and Andrea Buchanan (2003) in addition to magazines such as *Brain, Child*, web zines such as *Literary Mama*, and numerous anthologies), the impulse remains similar.³⁰ At the same time, despite frequent assertions of newness, the project of claiming one’s voice as a mother and exploring maternal experience is indebted to the third wave’s feminist predecessors (including Adrienne Rich [1986], Jane Lazarre [1976, 1977], Toni Morrison [1987], Sharon Olds [1980], and Grace Paley [1995], among others) who laid much of the groundwork for exploring the complexity of maternal subjectivity during the previous decades.

If personal politics emerge as a common thread, third wavers differ from one another in many other aspects. Some writers, for example, dwell almost exclusively on the daily rhythms of childrearing, frequently finding the humor in days spent nursing infants and running after toddlers. Many perzines, for example, are put together by stay-at-home or work-at-home moms (as well as a few dads) who chronicle the everyday adventures and frustrations of domesticity, with some (such as *Edgy-catin’ Mama*) also focusing on particular issues such as homeschooling. Quite a few perzines additionally embrace what might be considered a more traditional understanding of politics by engaging in discussions of what anarchist, radical, and feminist parenting entails, or how to

attend a demonstration safely with children. After all, much (though not all) of the mama writing in zines comes out of the punk, anarchist, and do-it-yourself (DIY) movements of the 1990s, including Riot Grrl. As a result, quite a few mama zinesters directly address the need for social change and grassroots (as well as national) political action surrounding motherhood and parenting. Some have particular niches: *Placenta*, for example, is a "Punk Rock and Vegan Parenting Zine Just For You." Many come out of community mama collectives, such as *Raise High the Roof Beams*. Other zines come out of activist communities and address the concerns of politically active mothers, such as *Don't Leave your Friends Behind*, a manual on "anarcha-feminism & supporting mothers and children," and the compilation zine *Mama Sez No To War*.³¹

Personal politics have come under fire. Some critics have charged that too much emphasis on the personal can cause writers to lose touch with the political; and although I agree that autobiographical writing can sometimes lack "a sustained analysis of how ... personal stories fit into a larger political picture," these zines are examples of the deeply political nature of much third-wave mama writing (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003: 12). While not the organized mainstream political approach of mothers' advocacy groups, zines represent important locations of active resistance. As Alison Piepmeier (2005) argues, feminist zines "perform small interventions into mainstream culture, acting as tiny wedges that exploit fissures in corporate-controlled media conglomerates and in the wall of cynical resignation." This is certainly true of mama zines (as well as much of the autobiographical writing on the Internet), all of which not only performs cultural work that contests dominant ideologies of motherhood but also forms community by sharing personal experiences of mothering. Because of the ideologies of essential motherhood and intensive mothering, this creation of community *is* political (see Hays, 1996; Douglas and Michaels, 2004). And whether or not we agree with Ariel Gore that the "maternal feminist revolution" will take place in cyberspace, community is the first step toward collective action (2000: 220). Many of the lactivist nurse-ins in the U.S. during 2005, for example, were organized on the Internet. Some websites, such as Hip Mama and Girl-Mom, help create community for mamas, including many teenagers, which then fosters political activism. Certainly the web raises important questions of access, of who is able to participate in mothering cybercommunities; but even with these qualifications, the sheer amount of writing on the web cannot be overlooked or underestimated in any discussion about the emergence of a mothers' movement.

Indeed, I am arguing that we must include third-wave writing about motherhood in our understanding of the emerging mothers' movement. Despite the differences among mama writers, not to mention the ideological gaps between an anarchist zine such as *The Future Generation* and an organization such as The Motherhood Project, they all aspire to create a truly caring society. All are necessary for a mothers' movement; after all, when one considers the range of activities during the second wave of the feminist movement, a time

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when many different groups of women advocated for social change in multiple ways, one begins to see how each might play an important part of a bigger picture. Certainly those who formulate public policy agendas and recommendations should not forget the writers who engage in the admittedly messy and complex business of artistic creation. The writerly exploration of the complex mixture of personal desire, pleasure, and love that constitutes mothering and parenting has an essential role to play in affecting cultural constructions of motherhood. Moreover, literary and cultural productions provide access to the many realities of mothers' lives that can help to inform public rhetoric (and perhaps even provide some insights into grassroots organizing). Mothers' advocacy organizations should not forget about the presence and energy of mama writers; indeed, they could perhaps even learn something from the vision of a mama revolution.

Looking forward: Future possibilities for a mothers' movement

As I have tried to suggest, addressing issues of inclusivity and diversity are paramount to creating a truly representative mothers' and caregivers' movement with a transformative vision. We must think about issues across difference, and we must reach out to build alliances with a diverse range of groups. Finally, as we transform a discussion about mothers and mothering into a discussion about parenting and caregiving, we must also include men.

I offer my observations as an academic in the third wave who is also a feminist mother engaged in the project of working toward positive social change. I offer them, too, as a feminist writer who continues to learn from a diverse range of scholars, writers, and activists. This perspective enables me to extend my final observation: that the act of crossing disciplinary and professional boundaries is important for building a mothers' movement. Given the ways in which the mainstream media sets the parameters of public debate about motherhood (with a repetitive cycle of problematic articles such as the "opting out" story), the public sphere needs feminist scholars and researchers who can join writers and activists in redefining the terms of the collective conversation (see Hewett, 2005). There are numerous examples of feminist public intellectuals and academics who have brought their expertise on motherhood and mothering to bear on the public discourse, many of whom I have drawn upon in this essay; and while many of us seek to do this work in the classroom, I argue that we should collectively aim toward making these forays out of the academy a "normal" part of our intellectual and academic culture. Such an understanding could lead to alliances and partnerships that would also help to create a more inclusive mothers' movement.

Deborah Siegel makes this argument about the third wave more generally. In "The Legacy of the Personal," Siegel offers these observations about the multiple intersections between contemporary academic feminists and popular feminist writers:

...I envision the third wave as a moment that asks us as scholars to re-imagine the disparate spaces constructed as 'inside' and 'outside' the academy instead as mutually informing and intersecting spheres of theory and practice.... For the activity of the third wave, I maintain, is quite possibly beginning to resemble that of an earlier period, in which links between feminism, the academy, and grassroots activism were visible and viable. (1997a: 70)

If Siegel accurately describes the contemporary landscape of feminism, we most certainly must place the mothers' movement within this context. Such border-crossing provides an essential element of feminist practice, one that enables us to create a conversation that defies the lines drawn to keep us from talking with one another. If anything, what we need is *more* movement between the various spheres involved in thinking about, and organizing, political action surrounding motherhood and caregiving. Only with more of this kind of movement can a mothers' movement truly gain momentum.

¹For two examinations of the meaning(s) of postfeminism, see Deborah Siegel's "Reading between the Waves" (1997b) and Sarah Gamble's (2001) chapter on "Postfeminism" in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*.

²See, for example, Janet Zollinger Giele's (1995) discussion of the suffrage and temperance movements, especially pp. 23-6.

³Amy Kesselman, email correspondence, 2006. On the distinction between mothering and motherhood, see Adrienne Rich (1986).

⁴Tucker's article, cited here in its 2006 form, first appeared on the Mothers Movement Online website. See Tucker 2004.

⁵Joan Williams's *Unbending Gender* was published in 2000, and Nancy Folbre's *The Invisible Heart* in 2001.

⁶The questions are: "Are you advocating that mothers stay home with their children and not work outside the home? Isn't this a step backward for the women's movement?" and "But by focusing on women's roles as mothers, aren't you undermining the feminist goal of equal treatment for women?"

⁷See <http://www.now.org/organization/conference/resolutions/2005.html>. As NOW points out, its support of mothers' rights reaches back to 1978, which dates the "Homemaker's Bill of Rights: Economic Recognition for Homemakers." However, the goals of this resolution remain "largely unfulfilled in state and national legislation nearly thirty years after its passage."

⁸See <http://www.momsrising.org/>.

⁹See <http://www.momsrising.org/aboutmomsrising>.

¹⁰Both Mother Outlaws and Mothers are Women/Mères et Femmes (MAW) identify their participants as "feminist mothers," and Ariel Gore, who calls for a "maternal feminist revolution" in *The Mother Trip*, frequently positions herself and her activism within a feminist tradition (2000: 218).

¹¹See http://www.mothersandmore.org/Advocacy/advocacy_and_action.shtml.

¹²The reception to *Misconceptions* (Wolf, 2001) was decidedly mixed. See Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels's (2001) scathing review, "The belly politic." Nevertheless, *Misconceptions* recommends a series of thoughtful activist and policy initiatives that fall in line with those of Crittenden and other mothers' advocacy groups.

¹³For an insightful discussion of Wolf's (2001) ideas concerning "victim" and "power" feminism in *Fire with Fire*, see Siegel, 1997b.

¹⁴Interestingly, Tucker finds traces of maternalism mixed in with the liberal feminist rhetoric of groups such as MOTHERS and Mothers & More, often used as a tool of persuasion (see Tucker, 2006: 192).

¹⁵See "Call to a Motherhood Movement" (http://www.watchoutforchildren.org/html/call_to_a_motherhood_movement.html#Call).

¹⁶See "Call to a Motherhood Movement."

¹⁷See <http://www.motherhoodproject.org/>.

¹⁸See "An interview with Enola Aird" on The Mothers Movement Online.

¹⁹See <http://www.mothersmovement.org/site/about.htm>.

²⁰See <http://www.mothersactingup.org/>.

²¹See the last chapter of *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars* and Peskowitz's own website, Playground Revolution (<http://www.playgroundrevolution.com>).

²²The collective states its goals as "creating a child-inclusive culture within the social justice community and beyond" and "increasing free, public family-friendly space." See MAMA's website (<http://mama-nyc.org/>).

²³Still relevant to understanding media misrepresentations of feminism is Susan Faludi's (1991) *Backlash*.

²⁴Also see the essays in *Mother Outlaws* (O'Reilly, 2004) and Laura Kessler (2005).

²⁵Berry's (2004) Salon essay exposes her own deep ambivalence about political revolutionary work outside the home (which she feels pulled toward) and the revolutionary work of mothering inside the home (which she has chosen).

²⁶Also see Kimberly Springer's (1999) work on African American women's activism.

²⁷See http://www.watchoutforchildren.org/html/about_us.html and http://www.watchoutforchildren.org/html/mother_s_council.html.

²⁸For critiques of the third wave, see Lisa Jervis (2004). My understanding of the third wave has been helped in particular by Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier's *Catching a Wave* (2003), Deborah Siegel's "The Legacy of the Personal" (1997a) and Amber Kinser's "Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism" (2004).

²⁹See "About Us" on <http://www.hipmama.com>.

³⁰Consider, for example, anthologies such as Cathi Hanauer's *The Bitch in the House* (2002), Camille Peri and Kate Moses' *Mothers Who Think* (1999), and subsequent *Because I Said So* (2005) (which came out of the Salon department, Mothers Who Think), and most recently, Leslie Morgan Steiner's *Mommy*

Wars (2006), and Lori Leibovitch's *Maybe Baby* (2006).

³¹I am indebted to the expertise and guidance of Jenna Freedman, the Coordinator of Reference Services at Barnard College Library, for her invaluable help in navigating Barnard's rich collection of zines.

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The Politics of the Mothers' Movement in the United States

Possibilities and Pitfalls

This article considers what ought to be the goals, strategies, and tactics of the emerging mothers' movement, especially if it is to be compatible with feminism. This movement requires an understanding of motherhood specific enough to sustain collective action and inclusive enough to encompass mothers traditionally marginalized and oppressed on the basis of their social and economic positions. These two requirements mean that the movement's understanding of motherhood will also be contentious. I argue that carefully distinguishing the mothers' movement from maternalist politics helps to clarify the goals and strategies of the mothers' movement and to avoid the pitfalls of maternalist politics. On the basis of this distinction, I argue that six immediate concerns should be at the forefront of the mothers' movement. These concerns include ending 'the mommy wars,' ensuring the inclusivity of the movement, avoiding the deligitimation of any mothers, drawing younger women into the movement, making alliances with other care givers, especially paid care givers, and ensuring that the mothers' movement does not undermine women's reproductive rights. I emphasize the ways in which these concerns can be in conflict with each other in order to recognize the difficulties of the sort of coalition building that the mothers' movement requires. I believe that the mothers' movement will be better and stronger in the long run for taking the time to think through these issues at its inception in order to avoid pitfalls such as false unity and over-reliance on media politics.

A political movement by and on behalf of mothers seems to be emerging in the U.S., where a variety of concerted efforts to raise awareness about mothers' needs and interests and to work for change on behalf of mothers and families appear to be underway. This development is suggested by the publication and popular reception of works such as Anne Crittenden (2001), Peggy Orenstein (2001), Joan Williams (2001), and Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels

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(2004). It is also suggested by the recent founding or reinvigoration of organizations such as MOTHERS (Mothers Ought to Have Equal Rights; www.mothersoughttohaveequalrights.org), The Mothers Movement Online (www.mothersmovement.org), Mothers and More (www.mothersandmore.org), and the Motherhood Project (www.motherhoodproject.org), as well as the ongoing work of the National Association of Mothers' Centers (www.motherscenter.org) which partnered with Anne Crittenden and Naomi Wolf to launch MOTHERS. A number of recent on-line publications, the best of which are Wilkinson (2005) and Judith Stadtman Tucker (2004), have also argued that a distinct mothers' movement is beginning to emerge.

But what might be the goals of this incipient mothers' movement? What ideological, strategic, and organizational concerns does it face? In this essay I address these questions in connection with another, more difficult, question: what might it mean for this emerging mothers' movement to be in some way feminist? I argue that the emerging mothers' movement ought to begin by taking up six fundamental goals, but I recognize that some of these goals are in tension with each other. So I also suggest that these tensions are exactly where the movement should begin in refining its ideological commitments, formulating its agenda, and developing strategies for change. Those of us engaged in this movement should not expect to resolve these tensions but rather should be prepared to negotiate and renegotiate them precisely as part of our strategies for change. My analysis of the goals I recommend, including their conflicting implications, suggests that the emerging mothers' movement will be precariously grounded unless it can encompass an inclusive but also contentious understanding of motherhood and what it means to be a mother.

The extent to which the emerging mothers' movement in the U.S. is led by and primarily geared toward white, middle-class women in particular suggests the importance of both inclusiveness and a willingness to deal with contention around issues of motherhood. In the U.S., for example, there are motherhood-based groups led by women of color, especially African-American women. These groups, however, tend to focus on different issues than those so far raised by groups like MOTHERS (Mothers Ought to Have Equal Rights) or The Mothers' Movement Online; they are particularly concerned with poverty, welfare reform, public schooling, and the effects of violence, especially gun violence, in predominantly African-American communities. In Philadelphia, for instance, Mothers in Charge, founded by Dorothy Johnson-Speight in 2003, provides support to family members of victims of gun violence, advocates for victims' rights, and does violence prevention programs in schools and for youth and community groups (www.mothersincharge.org/a-mission.htm). In Philadelphia and New York, Moms on the Move, a group of primarily African-American women who work on welfare reform and school reform issues, has also been active and to some extent effective on these fronts (Mediratta and Karp, 2003; Featherstone, 2002).

Groups such as these, however, do not appear to be on the radar screen of

the organizers and leaders of other elements of the emerging mothers' movement. And surely there are some deep-seated differences among these groups as to how they define motherhood, what they see as the significance of mothers organizing for social and political change, and what they think are the best strategies for achieving their goals. Unless these different mothers and their advocates can create a basis for acting together and supporting each other's goals, the mothers' movement will be incomplete at best. The possibility that the emerging mothers' movement will fray or splinter over differences stemming from the different social and economic positions that mothers can occupy is quite real.

Thus these concerns about differences among mothers further suggest the need for an inclusive but also contentious understanding of motherhood. The mothers' movement needs an understanding of motherhood that provides a basis for collective action, but also resist the suggestion that all mothers adopt or conform to an idea of motherhood based on race and class privilege. Such an understanding of motherhood must be able to withstand the effects of differences among mothers; it must unify mothers to whatever extent possible while also allowing for respect for differences. In the absence of such an understanding of motherhood, the emerging mothers' movement will be limited in scope and power. As the mothers' movement grows it will in effect articulate an understanding of motherhood, whether or not it does so consciously. But without conscious consideration of its self-definition, goals, strategies, and tactics, the movement risks reconsolidating ideas about motherhood that have proven to be exclusionary and often not especially empowering in the past. Participants in the emerging mothers' movement must consider carefully and in full recognition of difficult differences among mothers what we understand by motherhood and what conceptions of motherhood we deploy for which purposes. Doing so is the only way to achieve the inclusive but also contentious conception of motherhood most likely to sustain the movement and make it effective.

Motherhood and feminism

Motherhood, as I have argued elsewhere, is the most difficult issue in contemporary, western feminism, because it brings to the forefront feminism's difficulties with respect to the individualist account of subjectivity that undergirds contemporary, western understandings of citizenship. In western, liberal democracies, feminist arguments for women's equality and women's rights require an individualist account of women's subjectivity. For this reason, western feminism in the modern era has tended to ground itself on an insistence that women qualify for full and equal citizenship because they are rational autonomous subjects in the same way that men are. But to the extent that the feminist movement also aims to adequately represent experiences more typical of women than men, such as mothering, it requires a more relational account of subjectivity. As others besides myself have argued, in order to represent

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accurately what women experience and feel as mothers and in other care-giving work, feminism requires a theory of the constitution of self in relationships with others (DiQuinzio, 1999).

For these reason it is not surprising that mothering, social and political activism organized in terms of mothering, and the feminist movement are complexly related. To get a handle on these complexities, I begin by distinguishing the emerging mothers' movement from a different kind of social and political activism that historically has been related to motherhood, namely, maternalist politics. Here I argue that the contemporary mothers' movement should strive to avoid the risks or pitfalls that maternalist politics presents, even if that means sacrificing the advantages of maternalism; advantages that may be dubious anyway.

I should say at the outset that my analysis of the possibilities and pitfalls of a politics of motherhood focuses on how its issues and strategies play out in the United States. I recognize that U.S. feminism needs to learn from feminist movements in other parts of the world about how to negotiate feminism's potentially conflicting impulses with respect to women's equal citizenship and feminist analyses and support of mothering. My focus on U.S. feminism reflects the limits of my knowledge, not the significance and value to U.S. feminism of feminist movements in other parts of the world. On the other hand, the issues the emerging mothers' movement needs to address are more pressing in the U.S. given its relatively low levels of social and public support for mothers and families compared to the social welfare policies of many European countries and former commonwealth countries. Moreover, the dominance of individualist ideology in U.S. culture means that the conflicts within feminism raised when the goal of achieving women's equal citizenship encounters the goal of supporting motherhood are especially acute in the U.S. So it is likely the mothers' movement in the U.S. will have certain features and face certain problems that are specific to the U.S. context, and that an analysis of the politics of the mothers' movement in the U.S. is particularly useful to illuminate its tensions.

Maternalist politics

By "maternalist politics" I mean political activism and political movements that invoke motherhood as the basis of women's political agency. Many scholars have traced the history of maternalist political movements in the U.S. and Europe. Historical examples of maternalist politics include the appeal to women's motherhood in the U.S. suffrage movement and in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century progressive politics, such as the 'social housekeeping' movement (Lemons, 1973). The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mothers' movements in Europe that worked for state organized support of mothers and families (Offen, 2000; Koven and Michel, 1993; Allen, 1991; Bock and Thane, 1991) can be considered instances of maternalist politics, as can some instances of women's peace activism and anti-nuclear weapons

activism (Vellacott, 2001; 1993; Swerdlow, 1993). The Argentinian Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, who organized to demand information about the approximately 3,000 people who were 'disappeared' in Argentina during the military rule of the mid-1970s to 1983, are an often-mentioned exemplar of maternalist politics (Taylor, 1997; but see also Snitow, 1989). Contemporary examples of maternalist social and political activism in the U.S. include organizations and events such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Million Mom March, as well as many smaller, more local organizations such as Mothers in Charge and Moms on the Move.

Contemporary versions of maternalist politics are often understood as applications of feminist analyses of motherhood, especially Sara Ruddick's work on maternal thinking and practice (Ruddick, 1997, 1989, 1984). I find in Ruddick's work an extremely compelling analysis of mothering as a practice that gives rise to distinctive modes of thought, feeling, and action among those who embrace and strive to meet its goals. I also very much want to share her optimism that models of political action on behalf of peace making and a progressive political agenda can be found in the thought and practice of mothers (Ruddick, 1997). But I believe that some advocates of maternalist politics have overlooked the complexities of applying feminist analyses of mothering to politics, complexities that Ruddick's work itself carefully explores. Without sufficient attention to these complexities we risk flattening out analyses of mothering such as Ruddick's and thus risk returning maternalist discourses to traditional, sentimental representations of mothering. It is these traditional representations of mothering that I see at work to one extent or another in those instances of maternalist politics that I have considered most carefully. And it is these traditional representations of mothering that I think present certain risks or pitfalls in relationship to a feminist politics of mothering appropriate for the emerging mothers' movement.

Advocates of maternalist politics tend to offer several arguments on its behalf. First, they argue, women's work as mothers and other care-givers shapes their political identities and perspectives. That is, this work shapes women's perspective as to what are the most pressing problems requiring political solutions, what are the most clear and convincing terms in which to articulate these problems, and what are the best strategies for developing and implementing solutions. Furthermore, the attitudes and skills required by mothering work are applicable or transferable to political activism. Advocates of maternalist politics also argue that motherhood is the basis on which many women first come to be and understand themselves as political agents. These women come to see the transferability of mothering attitudes and skills and to see that their concern to raise healthy, well-developed children is very much affected by law and by public policy, and by how law and policy are administered and enforced. Maternalist politics also appears to be a relatively safe and easy way for women who have not previously been political activists, or activists for social change, to take the first steps in this direction. The vision here is something like this:

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mothers often first get involved in social or political activism by working on a local level on issues or problems related to motherhood, for example, lobbying local authorities for a traffic light at a school crossing or organizing community effort to build a playground. These experiences then motivate and prepare them to take the next steps in organizing and working for social change on a larger and more comprehensive scale. Finally, some advocates of maternalist politics argue that in contemporary political contexts where deployment of media representations of a movement's participants and goals is crucial for its success, their representations of motherhood are powerful. Legislators, policy makers, and local, state, and national executives are unlikely to ignore or alienate a constituency defined as 'mothers.' Political activism based on maternal identities is thus more likely at least to get women a hearing and mass media coverage of women's political activities articulated in terms of motherhood is more likely to be positive and friendly.

Doubters as to the wisdom and efficacy of maternalist politics respond, first, that discourses and images of motherhood are easily manipulated. Mothers and maternal concerns can be positioned on many sides of the same issue and many other movements and groups can claim that mothers support them and that they advance the interests of mothers. More importantly, mothers really can be found on many different sides of the same issue (Jetter, Orleck, and Taylor, 1997). This fact alone suggests that the group 'mothers' is not a monolithic group with a single, unified set of perspectives, interests, and concerns. The diversity of mothers' perspectives, interests, and concerns means that the appeal to motherhood as the basis of a political identity or a position on a particular issue is certain to be contested by some groups of mothers, especially when the mothers movement tends to focus on interests and concerns of white, middle and upper class mothers. Thus maternalist politics can risk a false unity; it can presuppose a unity among mothers that is not really there and that needs to be forged rather than assumed.

Representations of motherhood are also easily co-opted for other political and social purposes. For instance, in the 2004 presidential election in the U.S. both the Bush and Kerry campaigns claimed mothers groups as supporters. Their web sites, Moms for Kerry (<http://www.momsforkerry.com/pages/1/index.htm>) and Security Moms for Bush (<http://www.moms4bush.com>), however, raise doubts as to the origins, members, and supporters of these groups. Neither site lists any individual people, much less individual mothers, as founders, organizers, or members. And to the best of my knowledge, both of these groups were entirely a web presence; they did not include meetings of members nor did they organize real time events. Mainstreet Moms Oppose Bush, which after the election became Mainstreet Moms Operation Blue (www.themmob.com), at least lists some apparently real people as its founders and organizers, though it appears that during the 2004 presidential campaign they also did not organize meetings for members or any other real time events. Consider also the Second Amendment Sisters in the U.S., who support "the

right to keep and bear arms" specified in the second amendment to the U.S. constitution and oppose further laws regulating the sale and ownership of guns. This group has given rise to Armed Informed Mothers (www.saveourguns.com/armed_informed_mothers.htm; see also www.armedfemalesofamerica.com/fewgoodwomen2.htm). In contrast to images of mothers as committed to peace making and non-violent conflict resolution that have dominated some maternalist feminist discourse, these gun rights groups appeal to a different but equally common representation: women and mothers as fierce protectors of their children and families. They use this image of mothers to argue that women and mothers need and want guns in order to protect their children and families and ensure their safety.

The extent to which the state itself can and does manipulate representations of motherhood for its own purposes is also well documented. Of particular concern here is the tendency for government officials and public policy makers to represent mothers and motherhood in terms of the distinction of "good" and "bad" mothers in order to advance their own agendas. This manipulation often results in demonizing those mothers identified as "bad" mothers by this discourse as a justification for state intervention into and control over the lives of some if not all mothers (Meagher and DiQuinzio, 2005; Ladd-Taylor and Umansky, 1998). This distinction of "good" and "bad" mothers also usually operates along the lines of other categories of identity, especially racial or ethnic identity and socio-economic status, thus further solidifying the oppression and state control of all women who are members of these marginalized groups. For instance, social welfare policies in the U.S. that subject mothers in poverty, particularly African American mothers, to state oversight, intervention, and control or that discriminate against lesbian mothers are well-documented (Reich, 2005; Shivas and Charles, 2005; Roberts, 2002; Thompson, 2002; Collins, 1991).

Somewhat more subtly but no less problematically, the appeal of maternalist politics to motherhood as a basis of women's political agency risks limiting not only mothers' but also women's political agency. As a result of what I have called "essential motherhood" (DiQuinzio, 1999), claims about mothers and motherhood in the dominant discourse of individualism easily slip into or become claims about all women. Thus maternalist politics risks representing mothers, and women, as knowledgeable, interested, and entitled to political participation only as mothers and only when they are acting on behalf of children or other dependent persons. Maternalist politics also tends to become a politics of grief, predicating women's political agency on either the pain and suffering of others or on the pain, suffering, and loss they experience as a result of harm or threats to their children or others for whom they care. But this representation of women's political agency in terms of emotion risks the delegitimation of maternalist politics as irrational. As I have argued about the rhetoric of the May 2000 Million Mom March in Washington DC, the appeal to the pain, suffering, and loss of mothers to support their demands for political and social

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change invites a particularly delegitimizing response. This response is the critique that, while their suffering and grief are surely understandable and deserving of relief, their political and social demands are “based on emotions, not facts” and “immune to rational discussion and debate,” and therefore not worthy of serious consideration as political demands. Maternalist politics can also represent women’s political agency as agency on behalf of others to such an extent that women’s own needs, interests, and demands on their own behalf are effectively muted, as is also evident in the rhetoric of the 2000 Million Mom March (DiQuinzio, 2005).

Finally, the deployment of discourses and images of motherhood can operate in place of more effective, if less attention-getting and media-friendly, elements of social and political activism, such as grass-roots organizing and the continued engagement of participants on the local level. The tendency to engage primarily in attention-getting, media friendly activities is certainly not unique to maternalist politics. But the very powerful—almost uniquely powerful—symbolics of motherhood makes this tendency especially tempting in the case of maternalist politics. A brief comparison of the 2000 Million Mom March and the organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving is instructive in this regard. The Million Mom March was a top-down project to organize a national March on Washington, DC, and from its inception it focused almost entirely on mass media coverage. It came into existence as a national organization and then tried to create local chapters and mobilize members to do more than just participate in the 2000 March. But the Million Mom March did not manage to create a stable organization with small, solidly rooted local chapters or to maintain the initial high level of interest and activity on the part of those who participated in the 2000 March. It is hard to point to any specific legislative, public policy or social changes that have resulted primarily from the efforts of the Million Mom March, and even its more recent media outreach efforts have not been particularly well organized or successful.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving, on the other hand, has been a bottom-up, grassroots project, begun by individual mothers in their own communities. MADD has built a strong national organization, but the national organization grew by uniting a number of local groups across the country and developed in response to the needs of local chapters. Much of MADD’s success is a result of the continued activity of local chapters; MADD’s local chapters keep members engaged and actively working on the prevention of drunk driving. For instance, MADD members give presentations on the effects of drunk driving at high schools and other youth organizations and lobby on the local and state as well as federal level for changes in law and policy related to drunk driving. They also advocate for changes in the advertising practices of beer and liquor manufacturers, such as their advertising at and sponsorship of events targeted at young people such as sporting events and concerts. MADD is responsible for or has contributed to significant changes in law, public policy, enforcement, and criminal prosecution and sentencing with respect to drunk driving. MADD

does do media campaigns and does deploy representations of motherhood on behalf of its work. But in my opinion MADD's results have more to do with its origins in grass roots organizations, its members' continued engagement at the local level, and its effective though not always attention getting lobbying and political activism (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004; McCarthy and Wolfson, 1996; Weed 1991).

MADD's success can also be attributed to the fact that they work on one clearly defined issue, prevention of drunk driving, for which there is no public support on the other side. In comparison, the work of the Million Mom March is more complicated because there are arguments to be made against the gun control law and policies the Million Mom March advocates and there is vocal, well organized, and well-financed support for the other side of their positions on gun control. The emerging mothers' movement, to the extent that it has or is on the way to developing an agenda, is more likely to be in a position similar to that of the Million Mom March, advocating positions for which there are arguments and supporters on the other side. Not only will the emerging mothers' movement have credible opponents, but is also likely that there will be significant disagreement about goals and strategies among people who identify themselves as members of the mothers' movement. The likelihood of these difficulties makes it ever more important that the movement not abandon tactics such as grass roots organizing and efforts to keep members engaged and active at the local level in favor of more media friendly tactics based on maternalist images and representations of motherhood. Given the likely diversity of its issues, goals, and tactics, the emerging mothers' movement will have to be some kind of coalition political movement, identifying areas of consensus and moving forward in those areas while respecting differences about other issues. And a movement that relies too heavily on representations of motherhood may be undone by the false unity that the deployment of these representations suggest, an appearance of unity that will actually work against the coalition building the mothers' movement will require.

In short, I believe that versions or instances of maternalist politics based on traditional, sentimental representations of motherhood present significant risks and pitfalls for the emerging mothers' movement. Sociologist Lisa Brush puts it succinctly when she writes, "maternalism is feminism for hard times" (1996: 431). I take her to mean that maternalism is the feminism we resort to when we can't do any better on behalf of women. In a social and political climate such as that in the United States in which feminism is demonized by its opponents and rejected as no longer necessary by younger women, feminists can't argue explicitly for women's equality, women's rights, women's freedoms, and women's empowerment. So we have to sneak these issues in through the backdoor with rhetoric that "it's all about the children" or "it's good for families." The positions advocated by maternalist groups such as some women's peace activists or by groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Million Mom March *are* good for children and families. But

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a mothers' movement that relies on images and rhetoric that might undermine or delegitimize women's claims on their own behalf can't be a feminist movement.

The politics of the mothers' movement

If my analysis of possibly problematic implications and effects of maternalist politics is convincing, then the articulation of the politics of the emerging mothers' movement should proceed with these concerns in mind. My initial distinction of maternalist politics from the politics of the mothers' movement defines the mothers' movement as activism by mothers and by other people directly on behalf of mothers and indirectly on behalf of children. This activism focuses on improving women's choices with respect to motherhood, improving the conditions in which women and "maternal practitioners" do their work, deprivatizing the work of raising children and caring for dependent persons, and garnering public support for it. With a focus along these lines, the issues that come to the forefront are the (all too familiar) issues such as reproductive choice, prenatal and childhood health care, childcare, and workplace policies on families. This focus also highlights the economic insecurity of mothers; the economic insecurity of mothers who do not earn an income of their own, divorced mothers, single mothers, and mothers living in poverty. The economic costs of motherhood as currently organized, especially its costs to mothers but also to society at large (Crittenden, 2001; Williams, 2001), are also primary concerns of the mothers' movement.

Mobilizing this sort of a politics of motherhood, however, is going to require that mothers make demands in their own right, on their own behalf—in other words as individualist subjects and thereby as political agents. So the mothers' movement will have to at least reconcile the political discourse of individualist subjectivity and the discourse of mothers acting primarily on behalf of others, usually helpless or dependent others. The theoretical underpinnings of the mothers' movement will have to surface those aspects of feminist analyses of mothering that are most consistent with women's individualist subjectivity and agency. At the very least the mothers' movement should avoid representations of mothering and mothers that might seriously compromise the individualist subjectivity of mothers.

As a step in the direction of formulating a discourse and a politics that will move the mothers' movement forward without sacrificing mothers' individualist subjectivity and political agency, I suggest tackling six major concerns. If the emerging mothers' movement is to be a political movement of, by, and for mothers, then addressing these concerns along the lines that I suggest seems to me to be the most promising starting point for this movement. First, to the extent that there really has been something like the "the mommy wars" going on, this battle must end and the mothers' movement must resist the mass media tendency to divide women and mothers with this stereotype of relationships among mothers. Both Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) and

Miriam Peskowitz (2005) compellingly argue that the belief that different groups of mothers are in serious conflict is largely a mass media creation, and for Mothers' Day 2006 MOTHERS (Mothers Ought to Have Equal Rights) organized a "Mommy Wars Ceasefire." But the persistence of this belief leaves mothers with suspicions of each other and provides a convenient leverage for dividing and conquering the emerging mothers' movement itself. Resisting this belief does not require that we deny all differences among mothers, or among women. Instead it requires, first, that we recognize and analyze these differences ourselves rather than letting the mass media and policy makers define them for us. Then it requires that we do the hard work of coalition politics, finding those concerns and issues on which we can agree or get consensus and work on together and not letting areas of disagreement divide those who could be working effectively together on their shared concerns.

Second, we must ensure a place for every kind of mother in this movement, especially those mothers who are perceived to deviate in some way from the idealization of motherhood that is sometimes at work in maternalist politics. These, of course, are poor mothers, mothers in racially or ethnically marginalized groups, single mothers, teenaged mothers, lesbian mothers, step-mothers, adoptive mothers, grandmothers, and other-mothers. In connection with this goal, the possibilities and pitfalls of relying heavily on the internet in building and organizing a mothers' movement must be carefully considered. The appeal of the internet as a means for mothers to connect with other mothers and to organize efforts at social and political change is clear. For mothers who might otherwise be isolated as a result of where they live or because they aren't able to get out of their homes to meet with other mothers, connections via the internet can be extremely valuable. The internet also makes it easier to exchange information and news much more widely and more quickly than other means of communication. Even reading one of the many mothers' or motherhood-oriented blogs (such as www.mothershock.com/blog/, www.desperate.mom.blogspot.com/, and <http://roughdraft.typepad.com/dotmoms/>) on the net can help mothers who are more geographically or physically isolated to become part of a larger network of others who share their concerns and thus could be politically mobilizing. But the mothers and other caregivers who are least likely to have internet access are precisely those who are most likely to be or to feel excluded from a mothers' movement on the basis of their social identities. The women's movement is quite familiar with the difficulties of organizing political activism across racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual divisions and with the history of exclusion these differences can entail. Heavy reliance on on-line organizing risks repeating in the mothers' movement the exclusionary tendencies with which feminism has long had to struggle.

Third, the mothers' movement must refuse the demonization of any mothers and strenuously resist the tendency of both mass media and public policy making to divide women and mothers along the lines of "good" and "bad" mothers. That many mothers in the U.S. today feel unappreciated and

embattled is undeniable. In these circumstances, it is understandable that mothers want to promote the social importance and value of what they do and that some mothers do so in terms of the discourse of good motherhood. But it is also true that the resurgence of political conservatism in the U.S. since 1980 has operated in part to divide and conquer groups of women and mothers who might otherwise find common cause in resisting the conservative social agenda. In addition, conservative political discourse in the U.S. is a major factor in the demonization of poor mothers, single mothers, lesbian mothers, and minority group mothers and the conservative social agenda has harmed these mothers much more than it has benefited those mothers that it is so quick to valorize. Clearly the mothers' movement will have to deploy images and discourses of motherhood that make clear the importance and social value of good mothering. But it must also ensure that these representations of mothering do not also, if unintentionally, suggest that mothers who do not, or are not in a position to, conform to these images of good mothering deserve only blame and condemnation for their less than ideal mothering. The representations of good mothering deployed by the mothers' movement should highlight the economic, social, and political supports that good mothering requires, thereby showing that all mothers should have such support and that such support could prevent many of the failures of mothering for which mothers themselves are usually blamed.

Fourth, the movement must reach out to younger women, help them learn about the contemporary realities of motherhood, and encourage them to work for the conditions they want to experience if and when they are mothers in the future. As an educator in the U.S. teaching mostly women students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, I am particularly aware of their interest in and need for more information about the realities of contemporary mothering. At present, among young, middle-class women in the U.S., the 1990s myth that women no longer need feminism because they have achieved equality and now can "have it all" seems to have been replaced by the myth of the 'Opt-Out Revolution' (Belkin, 2003; Story, 2005). This is the myth that women can't have both motherhood and a paid job or career—that they can't do both well—and so they have to be prepared to take significant time off from paid work if they have children. Implicit in this myth is the view that the attempts of the women's movement to make the paid work place more accommodating to women and to men who also want to be significantly contributing family members have failed, if they weren't misguided in the first place. Further embedded in this myth is the view that women can't really be happy without being mothers and that the women's movement has betrayed women by encouraging them to choose careers and lifestyles that aren't and can't be made compatible with significant involvement in care giving work. According to this myth, then, there's no reason to persist in trying to make the paid work place more family friendly whether by lobbying employers directly or by working for new laws and public policies that would require employers to do so. In the face

of this myth it is crucial that the emerging mothers' movement bring young women into the movement so that they at least see that there are alternatives to those implicit in the myth of the opt out revolution. Young women need to know the realities of contemporary motherhood, not only so that they can make informed choices about motherhood for themselves, but also so that they join in the work of creating more and better options for mothers.

Fifth, the mothers' movement should make alliances with others engaged in care-work whether paid or unpaid. Rather than valorize motherhood as an activity or practice unlike any other, the mothers' movement should understand and represent mothering as one among different kinds of care work. Such an understanding of mothering will allow the mothers' movement to argue for the economic and social value of all care giving work, along the lines that Anne Crittenden (2001) has done in her analysis of the contribution of care giving work to the development of human capital. Drawing other care givers, such as day care and child care workers, nurses, home health aids, other medical professionals, and teachers—many of whom of course are also mothers—into a movement on behalf of the social, political, and economic support of all care work will allow the mothers' movement to expand its base. Bringing together mothers and other caregivers is also one way to resist the media image of “the mommy wars.” This media image will otherwise represent, for example, mothers struggling to pay for child care as pitted against childcare workers struggling for better wages and working conditions. In addition, in the U.S. some of the best organizing for greater public recognition and support of the value of care work is happening among nurses, home health care workers, and teachers in unions and professional organizations. The mothers' movement could learn a lot about grass roots organizing from these organizations and could benefit from alliances with them.

Sixth, the mothers' movement must articulate a political agenda of and on behalf of mothers that is consistent with support for women's reproductive rights, including the right to abortion. This goal may be the most challenging for a feminist mothers' movement, especially in the U.S., where reproductive rights activists and women exercising their legally, if precariously, guaranteed right to an abortion are routinely demonized by the U.S. right wing as “baby killers” and often portrayed unsympathetically in mainstream media. The issue of reproductive rights may be the issue that is most seriously jeopardized by discourses of maternalism. It is hard to see how we can argue both that mothers are self-sacrificing care givers whose political agency is dedicated primarily to advancing the interests of others and that women and mothers are entitled to self-determination including the right to end a pregnancy. At some point, the defense of the right to abortion requires the clear and unequivocal argument that the moral status and the legal rights of women outweigh those of fetuses. And the best way to make this argument is to represent women as fully individualist subjects of political agency and entitlement. The rhetoric of choice in the reproductive rights movement is not without its own problems (Solinger,

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2001). But maternalist rhetoric moves even farther from the discourse of mothers' entitlement that I think not only the mothers' movement but also the reproductive rights movement ultimately require. The difficulty of articulating a political discourse of mothers' rights shouldn't be compounded by maternalist rhetoric that undermines the representation of women's equal subjectivity on which women and mothers' rights claims depend.

I can't claim to know with much certainty how the mothers' movement would continue to develop were it to take up these six issues as I suggest. It's clear, though, that proceeding along these lines would most likely surface significant tensions among the movement's participants and make for some very difficult conversations among us. There are great variety of different kinds of mothers and different ways of mothering that the mothers' movement must recognize and support, and a great variety of interests among these different groups of mothers that the mothers' movement must negotiate. Many of these differences are a function of different social and economic positions that mothers occupy and thus they are already fraught with the significance of racial, ethnic, and class differences. For these reasons the very meaning of "mother" and "mothering" in the mothers' movement will have to be fluid and shifting in a way that won't provide any comfortable certainties for us to invoke or clear cut absolutes for us to advocate. Such developments could hamper the progress of the mothers' movement and might even risk fragmenting the movement before it has even really coalesced. But I think these risks are preferable to the risks posed by the temptations of false unity and media politics represented by a maternalist politics that relies on traditional, sentimental images and discourses of motherhood. Articulating and acting on a politics of motherhood certainly won't be any easier than maternalist politics; it will most likely be harder and differently challenging. But when was any aspect of motherhood ever easy?

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Amy Middleton

Mothering Under Duress ***Examining the Inclusiveness of Feminist*** ***Mothering Theory***

“Empowered mothers seek to fashion a mode of mothering that affords and affirms maternal agency, authority, autonomy and authenticity and which confers and confirms power to and for mothers” (O’Reilly, 2004: 15). This paper will apply this definition of empowered mothering to a series of publications to illustrate how many feminist mothering theorists are describing educated, financially secure women with substantial access to supports and resources as examples of feminist mothers. It will argue that while these cases are integral to feminist mothering literature, they produce frameworks for engaging in feminist mothering that are extremely difficult for many women to apply to their lives. Mothers who live in difficult social, financial, and relational circumstances are restricted in achieving states of agency, authority, autonomy and authenticity and thus in engaging in practices of feminist mothering as defined and illustrated by many feminist theorists. This paper does not claim that it is impossible for women under duress to mother in feminist ways; rather it asserts that feminist theorists have in many ways neglected this population of women in our theorizing of feminist mothering. To this end, we must extend our theories of feminist mothering to explore how mothers who are living under various circumstances of duress and those subject to “the gaze” of social support systems can mother in feminist ways. This must include extending our interrogation and analyses from the individual woman or single home, to the institutions that are regulating mothers and restricting them from engaging in feminist mothering.

Feminist mothering theorists argue that dominant ideologies of mothering in North American culture, the paradigm of motherhood by which mothers are judged and regulated, are unobtainable and unrealistic. For instance, “good mothers” are socially constructed as:

white, heterosexual, able-bodied, married and in a nuclear family. ... [They are] altruistic, patient, loving, selfless, devoted, nurturing, cheerful ... Good mothers put the needs of their children before their own ... [and] are the primary caregivers of their children ... And of course, mothers are not sexual! (O'Reilly, 2004: 4)

These dominant ideologies of mothering and motherhood are critiqued by feminist mothering theorists as disempowering and restrictive to women. Susan Maushart (2000) asserts that women hide behind a "mask of motherhood" which further perpetuates this construction of natural maternal ease and enjoyment by "keep[ing] women from speaking clearly what they know, and from hearing truths too threatening to face" (7). That is, by not openly acknowledging and discussing the difficulties of mothering, any concerns, worries, struggles, and fears that mothers have are not given a voice, further isolating mothers from each other and perpetuating the ideology that mothering is natural, enjoyable, and easy.

Sara Ruddick (2002) argues that this silence and subsequent perpetuation of societal assumptions of motherhood culminates in a loss of power and authority, which, in turn, necessarily results in a mother's loss of confidence, feelings of blame and guilt, and conflicted thinking. "Relinquishing authority to others, they lose confidence in their own values and in their perception of their children's needs" (Ruddick, 2002: 111) so that their "best often, in the long run, does not seem quite 'good enough'" (Ruddick, 2002: 30). Because this ideology of a "good mother" being always self-sacrificing, cheerful, and loving is unobtainable for most, and because the "mask of motherhood" isolates and silences women, mothers are often in a state of internal conflict in which they lack confidence in their own thoughts and actions by comparing them to those of a "good mother." "The gap between image and reality, between what we show and what we feel, has resulted in a peculiar cultural schizophrenia about motherhood" (Maushart, 2000: 7). In other words, this ideology of a "good mother" creates a constant internal tension between how a mother *does* feel and behave and how she is told she *should* feel and behave, causing feelings of blame, guilt and inadequacy.

Andrea O'Reilly (2004) offers a counter narrative to this social construction of "good mothers," namely empowered mothers, who "seek to fashion a mode of mothering that affords and affirms maternal agency, authority, autonomy and authenticity and which confers and confirms power to and for mothers" (15). Rather than lacking agency, authority and confidence to make their own decisions about the well-being of themselves and their children, these mothers are empowered to provide safe and healthy environments of learning and growth for their children. Fiona Green (2004), Erika Horowitz (2004) and Juanita Ross Epp and Sharon Cook (2004) provide important descriptions of women who practice mothering with agency, authority, autonomy and authenticity; yet, the feminist mothers described in these works appear to be educated,

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middle to upper-class women with access to financial and human resources to assist in raising their children. This article will outline how engaging in feminist mothering, as described by these theorists, is extremely difficult and in some cases impossible for many women. Mothers who do not have access to resources such as substantial finances and good childcare, or women who are mothering under other difficult circumstances,¹ such as an abusive relationship, illness or addiction problems, are likely to find it difficult to achieve agency, authority, autonomy and authenticity as described by these feminist mothering theorists. Further, women mothering under duress are often subject to the gaze of social support systems who monitor and regulate their mothering, which presents challenges for engaging in feminist mothering. To this end, we must broaden our scope of analyses to incorporate feminist and empowered mothering theories and practices that are applicable to a wider spectrum of mothers and that take into account the influence of the societal institutions that monitor and regulate the lives of many women.

Agency

According to feminist mothering theorists, practicing agency, or being in control of one's life and having the ability to make choices and changes within one's life, is a condition of feminist motherhood. Within the patriarchal institution of motherhood "there is room for women to practice agency, resistance, invention and renewal" (Green, 2004: 35). Empowered mothers, such as those interviewed by Green (2004) "can, and do find opportunities within motherhood to explore and cultivate their own agency" (O'Reilly, 2004: 16). The women in Green's (2004) study are asserting their agency by "consciously resisting the restrictions placed on them by patriarchal motherhood" (36). One strategy of asserting agency is described in the case of Willow who consciously chose to birth and raise a child alone without any connection to a man. Other mothers choose to disregard housekeeping, allow their young children to choose their own mismatching outfits or teach their children to wash their own clothes and ignore the dirty or wrinkled clothes they wear (Ross, 1995). These are mothers who can face and resist the pressure of other people policing their mothering, and, in fact, gain confidence by doing so. Horowitz's (2004) account of empowered mothering asserts the importance of agency in the development of one's self-concept, namely that "seeing themselves as agents rather than victims led (the women) to experience a positive view of themselves as mothers and women" (55).

Autonomy

Closely related to agency is autonomy, or self-sufficiency. In addition to having the agency to be in control of and make decisions in one's life, empowered mothers are autonomous or self-sufficient to do so. In the case of the feminist mothers described by Horowitz (2004), Green (2004), and Epp and Cook (2004), this most often presupposes access to sufficient financial

resources, resulting from the mother working or having a partner that works. In either case, the empowered mother has enough financial resources to raise her children herself, or hire someone to assist her with childcare and/ or housework while she working outside the home. Thus, an empowered mother's autonomy does not necessarily translate into caring for her children on her own. Being self-sufficient, however, does mean that the mother has the means—financial or otherwise—to exert her agency by choosing to stay at home to raise her children (because she has the financial means to do), or by choosing to work outside the home (because she either has a partner that stays at home with the children or she has the financial means to hire someone to care for them).

Authenticity

Authenticity is the ability to be truthful and true to oneself, and involves mothers asserting and meeting their own needs and interests outside of mothering. Horowitz (2004) derived themes of authenticity from her interviews with empowered mothers who expressed that contrary to the dominant discourse of mothering that dictates that women only ever feel love towards their children, they don't feel loving to their children all the time. Furthermore, they felt that they were "unmasked" (Maushart, 2000) and breaking the silence about the negative aspects of motherhood. The women were also meeting their own needs and pursuing their own interests, recognizing that they need experiences outside motherhood to feel fulfilled. Again, these notions challenge the dominant discourse of motherhood that advocates sacrificial motherhood and asserts that women are fulfilled solely by motherhood.

Authority

Having authority means having confidence that one's own voice will be listened to. This involves having authority within the family while interacting with or disciplining children, and outside the family when dealing with institutions such as schools, doctors, and community organizations. Authority presupposes that if a spouse or partner is involved in the family, the power and voice of the mother is recognized. In fact, some of the literature on feminist mothering both assumes that a father is involved and expresses the benefits of such. For instance, both Ellen Ross (1995) and Nancy Chodorow advocate for equal parenting, with the father participating in childcare, as the way to escape the oppressiveness of patriarchal motherhood and gendered social arrangements (Lawler, 2000). Furthermore, Epp & Cook's (2004) account of their own feminist mothering espoused the benefits of an "egalitarian partnership" with one's husband who is an "integrated parent," sharing housework and childcare. The authors assert that this egalitarian relationship permits feminist mothering to take place, and that paternal involvement results in children with stronger intellectual performance and an increased interest in other adults.

Empowered mothers often espouse the benefits of democratic mothering as a means of disciplining the children. That is, rather than using an authori-

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tarian model of discipline, the mother “consciously shares the power she has as an adult and a mother with her (children)” (Green, 2004: 39). Epp & Cook (2004) assert that as feminist mothers they used “reasoned conversation” when interacting with their sons, and one mother interviewed by Green (2004) expressed that she created a world within her home where competition does not exist; she says, “(the children) have always known that they have the right to express themselves, that they have the right to say no, and that we could engage in a dialogue about the issue as opposed to me wielding power over them” (40).

Education

Additionally, I would argue that the four conditions of empowered or feminist mothering rely upon access to education. When educated, women are more easily able to achieve autonomy, agency, authenticity, and authority in their lives. Green (2004) describes feminist mothers who

actively engage their children in critical thinking. For example, they use watching television, going to movies and seeing plays as forums to look at and discuss the power dynamics of the larger world. They also use situations in the media and in the lives of friends and acquaintances. (40)

Activities such as these require a level of education to be able to recognize and critique existing power dynamics within our society. Further, Horowitz (2004) describes feminist mothers as those who do “ideological work” by questioning the societal expectations placed upon them. This same point is expanded upon by Green (2004) in explaining that an interviewee

recognizes that to be able to subvert motherhood she needs to be aware of what patriarchy expects from her as a mother and to have an understanding of how she can effectively manipulate and challenge those same expectations to her advantage (38).

Thinking critically so as to recognize the need and desire to resist the dominant discourse in the way described by these feminist mothering theorists does not necessarily require that mothers are highly educated, yet it does presuppose an awareness that is heightened and enhanced by education, making the required “ideological work” of feminist mothering easier for educated women.

Women mothering under duress

When framed in terms of feminist mothering, as the aforementioned authors do, the four conditions of empowered mothering are difficult to achieve for women mothering under duress. That is, mothers living lives that are not deemed acceptable by society, such as women who are of a lower class, women who have substance abuse issues or are in need of financial assistance from the

state, women in abusive relationships or with mental illness, would find it much more difficult to acquire states of authenticity, agency, autonomy and authority, as described by many feminist mothering theorists, than most educated mothers with access to needed resources.

Lack of autonomy

For instance, these women living under duress are often involved with or receiving assistance from external agencies in order to ensure the well-being of their family. As a result, they are under the scrutiny or gaze of these external bodies which often view them as cases.

The mothers (are) subjected to a unifying, bureaucratic gaze that typifie(s) rather than individualize(s), reducing and simplifying the women and their lives... The problem with being a case is that it limits one's ability to be seen as a mother or an autonomous individual. (Greaves *et al.*, 2002: 100)

The autonomy of women mothering in difficult circumstances is constantly negated by the systems with which they are associated, as they scrutinize the women's lives and deem them to be cases rather than autonomous individuals. For these women then, the autonomy asserted by empowered and feminist mothers is much more difficult to achieve.

Lack of agency

Additionally, agency is a difficult state to achieve for these mothers since they are often dependent upon external agencies or governmental bodies to assist them in raising their children. Thus, they have much less control over their lives, and the decisions within them, than women who have the means and resources to mother without governmental assistance. For example, women who are in abusive relationships "are increasingly held responsible by child protection authorities for putting their children at risk by remaining in abusive relationships where their children may witness violence" (Greaves *et al.*, 2002: 7). As a result, the agency required to make choices about where mothers and/or their children live is given to child protection authorities. In these cases, they then end up developing

a passive or even subservient response in the face of such power over the future of their relationships with their children. The women (come) to see that in order to maintain the bond with their child(ren), they would have to act in a particular way to maximize their chances of keeping or re-acquiring their child(ren). (Greaves *et al.*, 2002: 72)

This relationship with social service organizations clearly does not create an environment that cultivates agency.

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Not only are women who are mothering under duress highly scrutinized and having their decisions made for them, they are also subject to a heightened degree of pathology than other mothers. Certainly all women are expected to mother as the patriarchal institution of motherhood dictates; but without the constant scrutiny and evaluation that mothers under duress receive, other women are able to “fly under the radar,” and by exerting their agency, engage in feminist or empowered mothering. For example, Green’s (2004) theory of subversive resistance outlines how women who appear to be “good mothers” by society’s standards, such as a woman in a monogamous, long-term relationship with the father of her children, can subversively enact strategies of feminist mothering. One woman stated,

someone can look at me on the surface and go, ‘O.K. There’s a woman who’s chosen to be a mother. Good, patriarchy likes that- Good, good.’ They don’t have a clue. I have the ability to transform what I perceive the role to be, to take it on, to claim it, and to just create it (Green, 2004: 38).

Yet, mothers on social assistance or mothers who are mentally ill, for instance, would not be deemed “good” for choosing to be a mother as in the case of the mother quoted above. For these and other women, “reproduction is stigmatized ... because it is considered morally irresponsible to have children at the public’s expense” (Roberts, 1995: 148). Thus, women mothering under duress are much less likely to be able to pass as a “good mother” while engaging in feminist mothering.

Lack of authenticity

As a result, many women must deal with the label of “bad mother” far more intensely since they are overtly mothering against the societal standard of “good mother.” Their circumstances are positioned as “other,” pathologizing behaviours observed in these women and their children that would otherwise be seen as “normal” among other mothers and children. This constitution as “other” is often internalized by the mothers, making a state of authenticity very difficult to achieve. For example, being labeled “poor,” “addicted,” “abused,” or “ill” is not simply an objective position which one occupies, but becomes configured into the self (Lawler, 2000), so that the self becomes pathologized as lacking, wrong, or bad. Thus, rather than problematizing social systems of inequality, these women are blamed by the institutions by which they should be supported, and, in turn, blame themselves for their mothering and life circumstances. As a result, achieving a state of authenticity in which one feels true to oneself and at peace with one’s decisions is extremely difficult to achieve under these circumstances.

In addition, women mothering under duress are usually dependent upon the assistance of the very institutions that create the standard of a “good

mother.”

Societal attitudes and assumptions about “normal mothering” become crystallized in policy discourses that, in turn, structure women’s experiences of mothering under duress. Social, medical, and legal processes that define acceptable behaviour and label some mothers more adequate than others mediate women’s experiences. (Greaves, *et al.*, 2002: 61)

Women mothering under duress are often criticized by the institutions that are monitoring them if they are seen as putting their interests ahead of their children’s needs. Unlike the autonomous and authentic feminist mothers described by feminist mothering theorists, these women are required to comply with the standard of a “good mother” in order to ensure the survival of their family by means of receiving assistance, be it treatment, protection or financial resources. The consequences of not complying with the standard are dire; for instance, women may lose their children, be incarcerated, or refused treatment or financial assistance.

Further, the stigma and blame attached to women mothering under duress often prevents them from seeking assistance from the institutions that are labeling them as “other.” Felt stigma is associated with low self-esteem, poor physical and emotional health, limited social interaction, and lower quality of life (Fulford & Ford-Gilboe, 2004) and “has also been found to negatively affect health promoting behaviours, such as seeking preventive health care or screening, due to fear of harm or labeling by health professionals” (Fulford & Ford-Gilboe, 2004: 51). For example,

the public discourse on women as mothers as users of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco has been fundamentally judgmental, blaming and unsympathetic.... As a result, women often do not seek the care they need and deserve, with negative implications for their health and the health of their children (Greaves, *et al.*, 2002: 6).

What results is a self-perpetuating cycle of mothering deemed to be problematic, an internalized sense of blame and lack, a resulting reluctance to seek necessary help, and further pathologization of the mother and her mothering. In these cases, mothering against the institution of motherhood by not complying with the standard or by not seeking assistance is highly dangerous for these women.

Lack of authority

With the lack of autonomy, agency, and authenticity afforded to mothers living under duress, it follows that these women would have little authority in their lives. They must often relinquish their authority to those institutions

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which are providing them with assistance. As a result, their children are controlled by external regulations of societal norms and expectations of “good” behaviour and “good” mothering, rather than internal regulations authentically chosen by the mother. Women must demonstrate to social workers, courts and other social support services that they are a “good mother,” as defined not by the mother, but by the social institutions from which they are seeking assistance. Abdicating one’s maternal power over a child like the feminist mothers described above who espouse the benefits of a democratic mode of mothering, presupposes that one has the authority mentioned above to in fact abdicate.

Furthermore, given the prominent influence of power and regulation in their lives, the “democratic” practices of empowered mothering described by feminist mothering theorists may not be relevant or meaningful for many women mothering under duress (Lawler, 2000). Additionally, the feminist mothering theorists mentioned above discuss democratic parenting and relinquishing authority over their children in partnership with a spouse. Yet listing egalitarian partnerships, equal parenting, shared authority and shared parenting as a requirement of feminist mothering means little to many women who are single mothers or in relationships that are abusive or not long-term.

Conclusion

Mothers who are living in difficult social, financial, and relational circumstances are at a disadvantage in achieving states of authenticity, autonomy, agency, and authority as described by Horowitz (2004), Green (2004), and Epp and Cook (2004) and thus in engaging in practices of feminist mothering as defined by the authors. I am not asserting that it is impossible for women under duress to mother in feminist ways; I simply feel that feminist theorists and academics have in many ways neglected this population of women in our theorizing of feminist mothering. We must extend our theories of feminist mothering to explore how mothers who are living under various circumstances of duress can mother in feminist ways. This must include extending our interrogation and analyses from the individual woman or single home, to the institutions that are regulating and largely preventing these women from freely engaging in feminist mothering.

The theorizing of lesbian and African-American empowered mothering has tended to explore ways in which women from lower socioeconomic groups and women in different familial structures are empowered mothers, but these women do not necessarily define themselves as feminist mothers. Additionally, third wave feminists such as those who told their stories in Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender’s *Breeder: Real-Life Stories From the New Generation of Mothers* (2001) are theorizing about ways to be feminist mothers that are perhaps much different than the feminist mothers of the second wave and seem to include women mothering under duress. For example, among others, the narratives in *Breeder* describe adolescent, student, and single mothers, mothers on social

assistance, mothers living with other mothers, and even a mother living out of a tent and traveling van. These are situations and circumstances which are very different from those in which the feminist mothers described by Erika Horowitz (2004), Fiona Green (2004), and Juanita Ross Epp and Sharon Cook (2004) are living. In conclusion, I assert that it would be of much value to further our exploration and theorizing of feminist mothering to explore how women in *all* life circumstances can engage in feminist mothering, recognizing the practices will vary, and perhaps be adapted and limited, yet will nonetheless be effective in challenging the institution of motherhood and its dominant ideologies of “good” mothers .

¹While many of these women may not label themselves as “under duress” or “mothering under difficult circumstances,” given the limited scope of this article I will use these terms, recognizing that they are generalizations and do not accurately reflect the complexity of their life circumstances.

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Bridging Attachment Theory and Attachment Parenting with Feminist Methods of Inquiry

Attachment theory has a rich theoretical and empirical history in developmental psychology. Attachment parenting, while becoming increasingly more popular, has little empirical data to support the claims that its proponents make. Although one could argue that adopting certain attachment parenting techniques could help foster the same kind of maternal sensitivity associated with secure infant attachment, no empirical data have been reported relating attachment parenting techniques to the development of attachment in infants. Furthermore, developmental outcomes of parents choosing to attachment parent have been ignored. Given the limitations of both attachment theory and attachment parenting to provide universal trajectories for optimal child and adult development, perhaps it is time to explore feminist methods of inquiry in our attempts to relate attachment parenting practices with the development of infant-caregiver attachment and its sequelae. In this paper, I review attachment theory and feminist critiques while pointing out the limitations in empirical findings supporting attachment parenting behaviors. I suggest that some of the measures used in the study of adult attachment could be considered feminist, and that perhaps feminist inquiry into what motivates individuals to engage in attachment parenting could be beneficial to our understanding of human development.

“Attachment theory” per se has a rich history in developmental psychology and refers to the body of theory and research rooted in the works of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Bowlby (1969; 1988) posited that infants develop attachments to caregivers—primarily mothers—in order to ensure infant survival. Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth and Wittig, 1969; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall, 1978) provided a basis for demonstrating empirical differences in the quality of infant attachment relationships to mothers. Since the mid-1980s, attachment theory has spurred a tremendous

amount of research in developmental psychology, and its clinical (e.g., Belsky and Nezworski, 1988; Orbach, 1999) and social policy implications (Rutter and O'Conner, 1999) have been recognized. Despite critiques both from developmentalist (Kagan, 1998; Lamb, Thompson, Gardner and Charnov, 1985) and feminist (e.g., Birns, 1999; Bliwise, 1999; Contratto, 2002; Eyer, 1992; and Franzblau, 1999, 2002) circles, investigation of the development of attachment from prenatal to adult periods of development has continued to flourish (e.g., Cassidy and Shaver, 1999; Fonagy, Steele, and Steele, 1991; Kerns and Richardson, 2005; Simpson and Rholes, 1998; and West and Sheldon-Keller, 1994).

“Attachment parenting” refers to a relatively recently identified parental style which includes a cluster of parenting behaviors which are intended to emphasize and foster emotional responsiveness to infants and young children. Although one could argue that adopting certain attachment parenting techniques (e.g., breastfeeding on demand, keeping an infant in close physical proximity) might be akin to fostering the same kind of maternal sensitivity that Ainsworth and her colleagues (and multiple investigators following them) documented in securely attached infant-mother dyads, no empirical data have been reported relating attachment parenting techniques to the development of attachment in infants. In fact, while the claims of attachment parenting Internet websites are grand, little empirical research focuses on the developmental outcomes of children raised in attachment parenthood households. Furthermore, developmental outcomes (e.g., indices of mental health, self-efficacy, autonomy, etc.) of parents choosing to “attachment parent” have been ignored. Given the limitations of both attachment theory and attachment parenting to outline a universal trajectory of optimal development, perhaps it is time to explore feminist methods of inquiry in attempts to relate attachment parenting practices with the development of infant-caregiver attachment and its sequelae.

Attachment theory and feminist critiques

The infant's attachment to the primary caregiver—usually the mother—is a major milestone of social and emotional development at the end of the infant's first year. John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth both referred to the secure base behavior of infants at this age. The negotiation of the toddler's exploratory needs with the need for felt security is the focus of much of the toddler's emotional energy (Bretherton, 1985, 1992). Whereas Bowlby attempted to offer a universal theory of attachment based on clinical observations, Ainsworth and her colleagues sought out to document empirical differences in the quality of attachment, or the felt security infants experience.

Ainsworth argued for an understanding of the infant's organization of attachment behaviors (e.g., cooing, smiling, crying, following, clinging) in behavioral context. Instead of focusing on discrete behaviors of mothers and their infants, such as in smiling or mutual eye contact, she sought to develop an

ecologically valid laboratory procedure that would mimic the casual comings and goings that infants and their primary caregiving mothers experienced on a daily basis. In the Strange Situation (Ainsworth and Wittig, 1969; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978), mothers and their 12 or 18 month-old infants go through a series of brief separations and reunions over a 21-minute period of time. Infant behavior during the two reunions is recorded and coded, and infants are typically classified into one of 3 categories, although a 4th category is often now utilized (Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, and Carlson, 1999). Although some researchers have developed other measures of infant attachment (e.g., Waters and Deane, 1985), the Strange Situation continues to be the standard measure of infant attachment.

The majority of infants observed in the Strange Situation are coded as securely attached. (Note that this is true even in samples from multiple cultures. See Van IJzendoorn and Sagi [1999].) These infants may or may not show distress at separation but actively greet the caregiver and show attempts to reconnect emotionally at the reunions. Infants who show little or no distress at the separations and conspicuously ignore the mother and her overtures for interaction during the reunion episodes are coded as insecure-avoidant. Infants who seem completely distressed by the separations and preoccupied with the mother's whereabouts to the extent that they cannot actively explore their environment are coded as insecure-resistant/ambivalent. Infants who do not fit the patterns described thus far, who show contradictory behaviors, such as approaching while avoiding the mother (e.g., walking toward while looking down or away) are coded as having a disorganized-disoriented attachment (Main and Solomon, 1990). This category is rare in "normative" samples, but can be high in clinical samples, as in families experiencing trauma and abuse (Spieker and Booth, 1988, Van IJzendoorn, Schuengel, and Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1999). While cultural context has been an important point of debate (Harwood, Miller, and Irizarry, 1995; Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, and Morelli, 2000), Marinus Van IJzendoorn and Abraham Sagi (1999) suggest that the universality of infant attachment might lie in a "...general cultural pressure toward selection of the secure attachment pattern in the majority of children, and the preference for the secure child in parents across cultures" (730). What is defined as optimal or secure may nonetheless vary culture to culture (Bliwise, 1999; Bolen, 2000; Rothbaum *et al.*, 2000).

At the time Ainsworth identified the three original patterns of attachment behaviors, she also observed and recorded maternal behavior toward infants in the home. Infants who were coded as securely attached in the Strange Situation were more likely to have mothers who typically displayed sensitive and responsive care to infant bids for interaction than infants who were coded as insecure-avoidant or insecure-resistant/ambivalent. Infants coded as insecure-avoidant often received indifferent, intrusive or rejecting care from their mothers; infants coded as insecure-resistant/ambivalent had mothers who were inconsistently sensitive to their bids for interaction. Multiple investigators

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(e.g., Belsky and Isabella, 1988; see de Wolff and Van IJzendoorn, 1997) have replicated these findings and have demonstrated that sensitive caregiving—be it from a mother, father, grandmother, or daycare provider—is associated with infant attachment to that particular caregiver. Hence, infant attachment is not conceptualized as a trait or characteristic of the infant, but instead as the infant’s representation of the history with a particular caregiver. Infants can and do have different Strange Situation attachment codings with multiple attachment figures (Sroufe, 1985). However, the majority of investigations documenting the construct and predictive validity of infant attachment as assessed in the Strange Situation has focused on infant-mother attachment. Clearly, this is a limitation in understanding the usefulness of attachment theory as applied to children’s development, as children are greatly influenced by others in their social worlds (e.g., extended kin, fathers, siblings, peers, etc.). Investigations of the development of attachment in children and their parents must be considered in a greater family and social context (Cummings and Graham, 2002; Bliwise, 1999).

Bowlby’s notion of the internal working model of the attachment relationship is a central tenet of attachment theory. Infant behavior in the Strange Situation is understood by attachment theorists and researchers to represent the infant’s internal working model, or mental representation, of the attachment relationship with the caregiver (Bretherton, 1985). Other measures, such as the Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, and Main, 1985), the Parent Attachment Interview (Bretherton, Biringen, and Ridgeway, 1989), and the Working Model of the Child Interview (Zeanah, Benoit, and Barton, 1986) attempt to measure an adult’s internal working model of attachment or “state of mind” with respect to attachment issues. These more open-ended, qualitative measures—when used in diverse samples—might provide richer and more accurate data for researchers attempting to understand parents’ experience of attachment in a social context (consider Hays’ 1998 critique of Bradley *et al.*, 1997).

Feminist critiques of attachment theory as a universal theory of development have focused on Bowlby’s propositions and the studies of infant-mother attachment supporting them. Valid criticisms have been raised with respect to the historical and cultural context in which the theory was developed, the potential for mother-blaming, the questionable validity of attachment measures, the emphasis on early versus later life influences, and the potential problem with making ethical judgments by scrutinizing mothering.

Beverly Birns (1999), Sharon Hays (1998), Susan Franzblau (1999, 2002), and Susie Orbach (1999) all question the post World War II paternalistic practices at the time that Bowlby was developing his ideas about “maternal deprivation” and the infant’s need for attachment. Orbach (1999) offers a historical perspective from the views of clinicians and remarks that although feminist clinicians noted the effects of “unattuned” mother-child relationships, astute clinicians also noted the rage and depression mothers experienced, which

may have been related to their social position. (Consider the increased rate of maternal depression among mothers of young children in recent samples as reported in Lyons-Ruth, Wolfe, Lyubchik, and Steingard, 2002.) Orbach (1999) remarks, “to talk of what children needed from mothers without understanding the social position of women was, from a feminist perspective, to miss the point” (77).

Franzblau (1999, 2002) argues that attachment theory acts as the overarching paradigm that scrutinizes women to be “good enough” mothers or pathologizes women who choose not to mother. Jordan (1997) suggests that by focusing on maternal sensitivity, developmental researchers and clinicians are failing to examine the infant-mother relationship in its relation to other relationships and social formations. She, like Hays (1998), raises concern about the lack of acknowledgement of “normal maternal ambivalence and hate” (Winnicott, 1947, as cited by Jordan, 1997) and the idealized view of motherhood that then gets promoted. The romanticizing of woman as mother (Franzblau, 1999, 2002) on the one hand, and the blaming of mother on the other, might appear problematic for attachment theory. Jordan urges us to develop a more complex theory of mothering, one that recognizes power dynamics and complicated ambivalent feelings towards infants as an alternative to romantic notions of “natural” mother-infant relationships. Yet, investigators of attachment across generations are beginning to consider and document mother-child relationships in interpersonal and social contexts. In studies utilizing qualitative measures of parental perspectives of attachment, those parents who can integrate the negative and positive aspects of parenting in a cohesive narrative are those who seem to be able to provide the sensitive care that fosters secure infant attachment (e.g., see Sokolowski, Hans, Bernstein, and Cox, 2005 for examination of these variables in a high-risk sample). Granted, additional studies with these foci are needed in samples other than Western, Caucasian, middle-class, heterosexual samples, but a contextualizing of parenting experiences can be better documented by qualitative measures.

In regard to mother-blaming, it is important to point out that even 20 years ago, Jay Belsky (1984) and Alan Sroufe (1988) both acknowledged that the quality of care a mother can provide her infant is directly related to factors like social support, her own childhood history, preparation for motherhood, work and family factors. Hence, to blame a mother for a child’s outcome would be akin to blaming her mother and her mother before her. Applying such blame would be as inappropriate as blaming a child (Sroufe, 1988). If we accept the notion of the internal working model as critical to our understanding of the intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns, then it is easier to understand that adult individuals can “work through” models of experienced insensitive caregiving so as to develop secure and autonomous “states of mind” with respect to attachment issues by considering the context in which they received such care. We can further eliminate maternal blame if we encourage social movements and interventions (e.g., health care, social services; see

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Behnke and Hans, 2002; Erickson and Kurz-Reimer, 2002) that might aid in that “reworking” of mental representations of attachment relationships.

Attachment parenting effects: Fact or fiction?

The term “attachment parenting” is credited to William and Martha Sears who coined it in the late 1980s (Bobel, 2002). However, their current website (<http://www.askdrsears.com/html/10/T130400.asp>) suggests that attachment parenting is nothing new, as it is rooted in what comes “naturally” to a parent when we parent without books from “childcare advisors.” Both Chris Bobel (2002) and Petra Buskens (2004) challenge what’s considered “natural” by examining the social structures in which mothering takes place. Sears and Sears (2003) refer to Ainsworth’s work on maternal sensitivity and infant attachment, but how that gets translated to prescriptions for baby-wearing is unclear. On the Sears’ website mothers are warned to “put balance in one’s parenting” so as not to neglect oneself or marriage (*sic*), yet researchers have not examined the range of attachment parenting techniques that have implications for child and adult development.

Although some students of developmental psychology are being asked to critique claims made by advocates of attachment parenting (e.g., see Sy, Brown, Amsterlaw and Myers, 2005), readers of the mainstream and alternative parenting press may not be thinking so critically. Indeed, attachment parenting has not been critiqued from a scientific point of view that would examine longitudinally the claims made by proponents on effects on children’s (and parents’) development. At first glance at its representation in what is now the mainstream literature, attachment parenting might be reminiscent of male authority prescription to mothers of what is in the best interest of babies. Websites on the Internet cite what is referred to as “evidence” of the efficacy of attachment parenting, but even this information is taken out of context. For example, multiple studies have been replicated that report on parental behavior (e.g., maternal sensitivity to infant cues) and its effect on the development of infant attachment quality, but no researchers to date have reported on sensitivity that might or might not be related to the range of parenting behaviors identified as attachment parenting. In William Sears and Martha Sears’ (2003), *The Baby Book*, Ainsworth’s attachment studies are referred to as a justification of why a mother might want to bedshare, use a soft baby carrier, and breastfeed, but the fact that Ainsworth did not include such variables in her study is not mentioned. It is entirely feasible that a mother who does not sleep with her infant, hold her infant in a sling, or breastfeed can nonetheless provide that same infant sensitive care that can foster secure attachment and emotional connection. Some of the practices associated with attachment parenting could nonetheless help teach mothers—as well as other caregivers—to tune into the infant’s emotional cues. But to ignore the vast range of parenting behaviors whereby sensitive caregiving can get expressed by prescribing attachment parenting is reductionistic.

When we consider the writings of those who have attempted to put parenting practices into a biopsychosocial and cultural context (e.g., de Marneffe, 2004; Hrdy, 1999; Liedloff, 1985; McKenna, 2000; Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Small, 1998), some of the practices of what constitutes attachment parenting don't seem so outlandish. For example, McKenna's findings on mother-infant synchronicity in sleep cycles in bed-sharing mother-infant dyads and their implication for reduced sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) has renewed interest given the recent American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation against co-sleeping (see AAP, 2005; Sears, 2005; McKenna and McDade, 2005). To embrace and promote all attachment parenting techniques as a general rule of thumb is nonetheless limiting. What is necessary is a social transformation so as to encourage parents to find the way to self-efficacy and confidence in their own parenting. Parents will choose to parent in ways that they deem are valued by their culture. But supporting their choices and efforts can have lasting effects. Meredith Small's (1998) enthusiasm for ethnopediatrics needs to be complemented by a renewed focus on parental mental health—and maternal mental health in particular. Such support can facilitate the emotional growth of infants and their parents alike.

A call for feminist methods of inquiry

One avenue for feminist, qualitative exploration of attachment parenting attitudes and behaviors might lie in the methods of investigating attachment in adults (for general discussions of feminist methods in social science research, see Margrit Eichler [1988] and Shulamit Reinharz [1992]). While the historical roots of attachment theory and their implications for social prescriptions for women need to be kept in mind, Bowlby's notion of the "internal working model" can nonetheless prove useful in attempts to understand how meaningful attachment relationships can get reproduced across one's life-span and across generations. Feminist theory can help guide the questions and can shed light on the interpretation of findings in investigations of parent-child relationships. Exploratory qualitative interviews with ethnically diverse parents who choose to attachment parent will help us to shape the kinds of research questions, interventions, and social change that can help foster optimal child and adult development.

As noted above, methods used to study attachment in adults—both from the filial and parental perspective—have included more qualitative, semi-structured interviews (Bretherton *et al.*, 1989; George *et al.*, 1996; Zeanah *et al.*, 1986). These interviews are designed to access and assess one's internal working model of attachment relationships. The interviews provide respondents the opportunity to report on one's history or current experience of attachment relationships within the context of one's life. In the Working Model of the Child Interview (Zeanah *et al.*, 1986) or the Parent Attachment Interview (Bretherton *et al.*, 1989), parents are questioned about how specific emotions are expressed and exchanged between a parent and a toddler on a daily basis. In

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such an interview, a mother can express and elaborate on her feelings of ambivalence toward her child and/or motherhood. Yet, those same feelings of ambivalence (which are often rooted in the emotional frustrations of living with and caring for a an emotionally and physically demanding toddler) can be described in a coherent narrative that expresses a valuing of relationships and emotional connection. That same ambivalence—when contextualized in a rich narrative of a dynamic and ever-changing mother-child relationship—can nonetheless be related to responsivity to children’s cues and secure infant attachment. The single mother living in an impoverished urban environment who expresses maternal ambivalence, yet fosters secure attachment in her infant, and who can tell her story in an interview to a feminist researcher, has much to offer those interested in the development of attachment.

At the other extreme of maternal ambivalence lies maternal desire. Daphne de Marneffe (2004) calls for consideration of mutual mother-child relationships in our understanding of the motivation that leads mothers to desire to care for their children. Citing cases from her own clinical practice, as well as findings from studies on infant-mother attachment (in addition to reflections on her own experiences of mothering), de Marneffe argues that “...feminist writing has cast a skeptical eye on the meaning to mothers themselves of taking care of children” (2004: 316). Proponents of attachment parenting often assume that mothers do indeed want to take care of their children—at all costs. Examining qualitative differences in attachment parenting choices and patterns of attachment behaviors can elucidate the ways in which attachment is experienced and reproduced. Our inquiry must indeed include mothers with conscious desires to care for their children. But a comprehensive inquiry into parenting choices and behavior—and their influences on the development of attachment experienced by children and parents—needs to extend beyond maternal desire. It must also include the desire of co-parents in egalitarian households or extended kinship of single parents who share a desire to care for children, for examples. Considering attachment from both the child’s and parent’s perspective can assist our understanding of the factors that enhance and limit the choices one makes in parenting. Utilizing qualitative interviews that include appropriate probes and follow-up questions encourage a respondent to explain how such factors influence her/his particular choices.

A multitude of questions can arise from exploratory methods of inquiry into attachment parenting and the development of infant-parent relationships. For example, we might ask how does one’s views of one’s own attachment history influence one’s decision to attachment parent? Would parents with secure and autonomous outlooks with respect to attachment relationships be more or less likely to engage in attachment parenting? Do socioeconomic and/or cultural differences yield selection of some but not other attachment parenting behaviors, such as in extended breastfeeding or bed-sharing? Do factors such as age, locus of control, sexual orientation, commitment to egalitarian co-parenting, social support, employment, or self-esteem influence

parents' decisions to engage in attachment parenting? Do such factors as social support and social class override attachment history in empowering parents to make alternative choices in parenting? Is it more difficult to go against mainstream parenting advice without a secure attachment history or social support? (Clearly, La Leche League is one social support mechanism in place that helps facilitate extended breastfeeding in a North American society that does not promote this practice.) How can flex-time and family leave work policies shape one's commitment to engage in attachment parenting?

When considering and examining attachment theory as a possible avenue for documenting attachment parenting behaviors, it is important that we don't throw that proverbial baby out with the bathwater. Attachment theory has a place in feminist developmental psychology. Feminist methods that allow us to examine mutual attachment relationships in a social context can elucidate our understanding of the contributions of attachment theory and attachment parenting to human development across the life-span.

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Conceiving Intensive Mothering

*Key academically informed feminist approaches to intensive mothering continue to separate the ideological and psychological in the analysis of intensive mothering. In this essay, I argue that my analysis of *The Mommy Myth* and *Maternal Desire* reveals the vestiges of a lingering fear of the ideal "Mother" subject position within both texts that perpetuate this split approach and will ultimately lead to feminisms' inability to theorize fully intensive mothering. I also suggest that, as a result, feminisms will be unable to theorize women's current split subjectivity and agency between the old "ideal" Mother subject position and a new feminist mothering subject position unless both institutional and psychological approaches are integrated.*

I try to distinguish two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control. (Rich, 1986: 13, italics in original)

There is no doubt about it: maternity—both the institution of motherhood and everyday experiences of mothering—has come out of the closet for many contemporary feminist writers. Indeed, motherhood and mothering are "hot" topics in the popular press, with a diverse range of issues covered: the ways that legal institutions penalize women as mothers is addressed in *Unbending Gender* (Williams, 2000); the anger, frustration, and confusion many women feel once they become mothers are central concerns in *The Bitch in the House* (Hanauer, 2002); how women can achieve both a family and a career given the structure of professional institutions is the topic of *Creating a Life* (Hewlett, 2003) and, finally, the economic costs women pay as a result of being the

primary parent in most families is the focus of *The Price of Motherhood* (Crittenden, 2001).

One central, defining topic embedded in these public conversations is, what Sharon Hays (1996) first named as, “intensive mothering.” Intensive mothering has three key tenets. First, it demands that women continue to be the primary, central caregivers of children. As Hays (1996) argues: “there is an underlying assumption that the child absolutely requires consistent nurture by a single primary caretaker and that the mother is the best person for the job. When the mother is unavailable, it is other women who should serve as temporary substitutes” (8). Second, intensive mothering requires mothers to lavish copious amounts of time and energy on their children. Indeed, Hays argues, intensive mothering is “construed as *child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive*” (8, italics in the text). Third, intensive mothering takes a logic that separates mothering from professional paid work, which supports the notion that children and the work of mothering are completely outside the scope of market valuation because children are now considered innocent, pure, and “priceless,” deserving special treatment due to their special value within the private sphere of the family (122-129). Thus, Hays argues intensive mothering continues to position all women in the subject position of the all-caring, self-sacrificing ideal “Mother,” with limited and constrained agency in the public, professional realm and, importantly, is the *proper* ideology of contemporary mothering for women across race and class lines, even if not all women actually practice it (9, 86).¹

Even though Hays (1996) focuses almost all of her attention on the ideological and structural components of intensive mothering, she does recognize that it is also important to explore the psychological dimensions of intensive mothering. According to Hays, doing so is important because, even when asked directly what role nature, nurture, genetics, and/or tradition play in positioning them as the primary parent, many of the women she interviewed “also know that they feel a deep commitment to their children and they do not experience this feeling as something men impose on them” (107). Moreover, when addressing the complexity of nurturant love in intensive mothering, Hays also argues that it cannot simply be dismissed in the analysis of intensive mothering because this love is so central to and important for the mothers she interviewed. Thus, Hays argues that understanding the ideology or cultural logic that transforms this deep commitment and love into the practices associated with intensive mothering is important for a fuller, richer understanding of contemporary maternity.

Unfortunately, beyond this call, Hays (1996) goes no further with this important insight to integrate both an ideological/institutional and psychological perspective in her understanding of intensive mothering, as do other contemporary academically informed feminist writers (de Marneffe, 2004; Douglas and Michaels, 2004). That key texts in academic understandings of

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intensive mothering fail to integrate both is particularly problematic because many women writers (Crittenden, 2001; Edelman, 2002; Hanauer, 2002; Hewett, 2003) explore how the desire to have and subsequent love for children can be understood in relation to the ways institutionalized motherhood continues to negatively impact women's lives and challenge second-wave feminisms' gains for women.

Unpacking how and why two key academically informed feminist approaches to intensive mothering continue to separate the ideological and psychological is important, then, to learn more about how contemporary feminist approaches to intensive mothering are being conceived. Moreover, given that much of this feminist analysis is also crossing into popular forums and many mothers have actually read them, these texts have tangible affects on women as they come to understand their own subjectivity and agency as both women and mothers; the texts have real influence on mothers as they go about the business of living and understanding their lives as women and mothers. Thus, I explore two theoretical questions in this essay: Why does this pattern of separating or splitting the institutional and psychological emerge in academically informed feminist writers exploring intensive mothering? And, what are the implications of this approach for feminist understandings of contemporary maternity?

To explore these questions, I do a case study of Susan J. Douglas and Meredith Michaels' *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women* (2004) and Daphne de Marneffe's *Maternal Desire: On Children, Love, and the Inner Life* (2004). These two texts are particularly appropriate for this analysis because, even though both texts draw extensively on academic theories and ideas, both were written in more popular, accessible language, were widely distributed in popular rather than just in academic publishing outlets, were widely read, and received an enormous amount of popular media attention.² Finally, in terms of feminism, the rhetorical exigencies and contexts of the texts are similar: both books were published in 2004, the authors are self-professed feminists who argue that the primary motive for writing the texts is to benefit both feminisms and women's daily lives and, at the core, both explore contemporary intensive mothering.³ Thus, in many ways, these two texts are both central to and representative of the discussion occurring by academically informed feminists about intensive mothering that is crossing into the public realm.

In the remainder of the essay, I argue that my analysis of *The Mommy Myth* (Douglas and Michaels, 2004) and *Maternal Desire* (de Marneffe, 2004) reveals the vestiges of a lingering matrophobia—the fear of the ideal “Mother” subject position—which results in the split approach between the psychological and institutional. I also suggest that, ultimately, this leads to feminisms' inability to theorize fully intensive mothering and women's current split subjectivity and agency between the contemporary “ideal” Mother subject position and a new empowered feminist mothering subject position. Unpacking these arguments,

then, requires more detailed analysis and a brief overview of the core arguments in both books.

The institutional and the psychological assessments of intensive mothering

Given that both *The Mommy Myth* (Douglas and Michaels, 2004) and *Maternal Desire* (de Marneffe, 2004) draw on Adrienne Rich's ideas in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986), it is appropriate to view the texts within Rich's work. Rich was the first feminist to make a distinction between motherhood as an institution and the actual potentially empowering practices of mothering. In doing so, Rich argued that feminists must explore and understand how both impact and shape women's lives under patriarchy. As she argued, "I try to distinguish two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (Rich, 1986: 13, italics in original). Consequently, Rich's all-important distinction offers a conceptual frame for viewing how contemporary feminist writers explore maternity, which I use below in my analysis of the texts.

The institutional approach: The mommy myth

As self-professed feminists, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) have a very specific agenda in terms of feminism: they hope that their book is a "call to arms" to re-invigorate or "re-birth" a feminist movement for women (26). In doing so, they utilize Rich's (1986) work specifically and reveal their own focus on the institution of motherhood when they write that Rich "saw motherhood as a patriarchal institution imposed on women 'which aims at ensuring ... all women shall remain under male control'" (Douglas and Michaels, 2004: 50). They do not, however, articulate her all-important distinction about motherhood as both an institution and a potential relationship.

With these rhetorical exigencies as their framework and grounded in what they call the "new momism," Douglas and Michaels' basic argument is that media have harnessed feminist gains and reshaped them to support intensive mothering so that women, as mothers, are positioned in an ever-demanding, constantly failing "ideal" Mother subjectivity that constrains and confines women's agency primarily within the private realm of the family and outside of the public realm. As such, Douglas and Michaels' analysis is an extension of Hays (1996) work, which they cite specifically in their book (2004: 5).

Douglas and Michaels' argue that media do so primarily through fear tactics, guilt, and celebrity mom profiles. Television news, for example, repeatedly caution women about the "threats from without" to their children: Satanism, abduction, consumer-safety problems with car seats, toys, cribs, and, of course, food allergies from peanuts (2004: 85). "Celebrity mom" profiles, on

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the other hand, begun in the 1980s and well established by the 1990s, primarily work to encourage guilt and failure in mothers because these profiles always show celebrity moms juggling it all—work, family, and mothering—with a smile on their face and in glowing pictures with their healthy, well-behaved children. In short, celebrity moms and other media strategies have the effect of creating and supporting an intensive ideology that works to keep mothers constantly striving for perfection, an all-consuming vigilance, and failure; it is an institutionalized perspective that exhausts and controls women and keeps them “in their place” under patriarchy.

Although their assessment of intensive mothering is almost entirely negative, similar to Hays, Douglas and Michaels do acknowledge that love and desire to mother well are vital components of contemporary maternity. In their limited attention to both, they frame the issue around women's desire to both work and mother well. They articulate this as: “many of us want to be both women: successful at work, successful as mothers” (2004: els 12). In the end, to use Rich's language, even though the potential relationship women have with their children separate from patriarchy is acknowledged, Douglas and Michaels' analysis of contemporary maternity focuses almost exclusively on the *institution of motherhood* and reveals how media continue to ensconce a maternal ideology that co-opts feminism and twists it to control women and position them as failures in both their mothering and the public realm. In other words, Douglas and Michaels show how the cultural changes brought about by feminisms, which recognize that women can and do have more agency in their lives, is being harnessed and utilized by media, then, twisted and repackaged as a new form of the “ideal” Mother subject position that works to constrain and limit women's agency through the ongoing patriarchal institution of motherhood.

The psychological approach: Maternal desire

Also a self-professed feminist, Daphne de Marneffe is a psychoanalytic scholar and therapist who is interested in theorizing maternal desire from within a feminist framework (2004: xiii). Unlike Douglas and Michaels (2004) who hope to “rebirth” feminism, de Marneffe's feminist agenda is to “revise” feminism because she believes that second-wave feminism failed to articulate a desire to have children, “almost as if it were politically suspect or theoretically inconvenient” (2004: 64). Thus, de Marneffe also argues: “in a strange way, in our effort to free women by bringing to light the oppressive aspects of maternal experience, we have to some extent mischaracterized its opportunities for enjoyment” (2004: 141).

In her revision, then, similar to Douglas and Michaels (2004), de Marneffe also employs Rich's (1986) writing in *Of Woman Born*. Unlike them, de Marneffe does acknowledge Rich's distinction between motherhood as an institution and what she calls “an embodied field of relating” between persons (2004: 30). Moreover, de Marneffe argues that it was “Adrienne Rich who took

the crucial step of teasing apart the pleasures offered by mothering and its oppressive aspect” (30). De Marneffe argues, however, that Rich’s work was incomplete because it failed to theorize a mother’s desire for and delight at being present with her child (31). Consequently, de Marneffe revises feminism by extending Rich’s work.

With these rhetorical exigencies as her framework, de Marneffe (2004) theorizes maternal desire by significantly revising how women’s subjectivity, agency, and desire to care for children are understood within both psychoanalysis and feminism. Primarily by reworking Nancy Chodorow’s (1978) and Jessica Benjamin’s (1988) classic feminist works, which viewed the mother-infant relationship as primarily one of merger, de Marneffe’s core argument is that the mother-infant and later mother-child relationship is best thought of as mutually responsive. De Marneffe makes this argument by suggesting that recent “mother-infant research has shown that the infant expresses his or her agency in encounters with the caregiver, and that the caregiver and baby are extraordinarily attuned to their unique interaction from very early on” (2004: 66). As a result, even within the demanding first six months of an infant’s life, the dynamic between mother and child is best thought of as mutually responsive, a mutually responsive pattern of attentiveness. When the relationship is viewed as mutually responsive, then, genuine relating is at the core of the relationship and the interaction between a mother and baby gives both parties “a great deal more individuality than the somewhat swampy metaphor of merger evokes” (de Marneffe, 2004: 68).

Moreover, de Marneffe (2004) also suggests that viewing the relationship as mutually responsive fundamentally alters what counts as psychologically “healthy” interaction between a mother and her child and contemporary understandings of women’s subjectivity and agency as mothers. Drawing on recent attachment literature and, again, more current mother-infant research, de Marneffe argues that instead of physical separation as a sign of a mother’s “health,” which is Benjamin’s view, a caregiver’s self-reflective responsiveness to a child is far more important. Indeed, a mother’s ability to reflect on and communicate about her own childhood experiences and with her child is, according to de Marneffe, a sign of the mother’s own healthy sense of self and agency and is more crucial to a child’s ability to develop both an independent sense of self and recognition of her own individual subjectivity and agency. In other words, a mother’s own internal or inner life and her ability to communicate that to and in relationship with her child is far more important to healthy mutual recognition of agency and connection for *both* the mother and child.

Thus, rather than view a woman’s desire to mother and care for children as potential signs of her internalization of the oppressive “ideal” Mother position or as a sign of “bad” health, de Marneffe argues for a psychological perspective that sees both as signs of the ongoing challenge mothers face to “integrate love and loss, togetherness and separateness, and connectedness and autonomy in ourselves and in our relationships with children” (2004: 83). In the

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end, then, to invoke Rich, de Marneffe's work reveals how the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children contain a maternal desire that represents a potentially empowering and different mothering subject position and agency that accounts for the very real changes in women's lives brought about by feminism and introduces an empowered feminist desire to mother well.

When *The Mommy Myth* (Douglas and Michaels, 2004) and *Maternal Desire* (de Marneffe, 2004) are viewed together, it becomes clear that both texts revise and update current understandings of intensive mothering in important and meaningful ways. Both texts, however, neither explore intensive mothering nor utilize Rich's (1986) work fully. Grounded only in Rich's understanding of motherhood as a patriarchal institution, *The Mommy Myth* articulates clearly and persuasively contemporary, institutionalized intensive mothering, while almost completely ignoring any full understanding of a potentially empowered mothering or maternal desire. Grounded in Rich's understanding of the potential empowered relationship between mothers and their children, de Marneffe, on the other hand, articulates clearly and persuasively an empowered maternal desire within intensive mothering, while she ignores the very real ways that the ideology of intensive mothering does, in fact, work to control and constrain women's lives through the institution of motherhood.

One important avenue for making sense of this split approach between the two texts is to view them within the larger history of feminist writing on maternity. Indeed, although their intellectual trainings are different—Douglas is a communication media scholar, Michaels is a philosopher, and de Marneffe is trained in psychoanalysis—I argue below that the issue that drives this split approach between the texts is related to the overarching similarity between them: feminism. In other words, I suggest that feminism and the historical legacy around the relationship between feminism and maternity is what bonds the authors, separates them, and underlies the split approach to understanding intensive mothering in the texts.

Feminisms and mothering: The continued legacy of the early matrophobia

When viewed together, the texts seem to mirror the legacy of feminist subject positions on maternity, which have shifted from a "Sisterly" perspective to a "Daughterly" perspective. According to Marianne Hirsch (1997), the subject position of "Sisters" was embraced in feminist theorizing in the early second wave because feminists rejected mothering entirely. Hirsch argues that this was the case because feminism of that time suffered from, what Rich (1986) first named as, "matrophobia." Citing Rich explicitly, Hirsch argues that matrophobia is "not the fear of our mothers, but the fear of becoming like our mothers" (1997: 357). Indeed, for most participants in the feminist movement, even those who actually had children, Hirsch argues, as do Diane Taylor (1997) and Judith Stadtman Tucker (2004), that motherhood and the social roles and

responsibilities associated with it were viewed as confining and constraining patriarchal traps for women.

A “sisterly” subject position on mothering, then, resulted because, as Hirsch argues retrospectively, sisterhood, provided:

the possibility of mutuality and reciprocity. The metaphor of sisterhood, though still familial, can describe a feminine model of relation, an ideal and alternative within patriarchy. It could help women envision a life and a set of affiliations outside of the paradigm of mother/child relations and the compromises with men that motherhood seems to necessitate. It can liberate feminist women from our anatomy and from the difficult stories of our own mothers’ accommodation, adjustment and resignation. “Sisterhood” can free us, as we were fond of saying, “to give birth to ourselves.” (1997: 356)

Clearly, *The Mommy Myth* emerges out the legacy of the “sisterly” paradigm, even though Douglas and Michaels (2004) are not taking up the same sisterly perspective that drove the early second wave. They are quite clear about distancing themselves from the essentializing and elitist understandings that emerged in much of that work.⁴ Also, in updating Rich’s (1986) notion of institutionalized motherhood to fit with contemporary culture and briefly acknowledging mothering, *The Mommy Myth* is an important step toward including mothering in a sisterly perspective, as they “rebirth” a contemporary feminist movement that challenges patriarchal motherhood.

Even with these important advances within the sisterly paradigm, like the sisters of the early second wave, Douglas and Michaels’ (2004) perspective keeps its distance from maternal desire. In fact, their work is quite resistant to women embracing maternal desire; maternal desire is only acknowledged superficially in their institutional approach. Moreover, the perspective fails to operationalize and fully recognize the importance of the potential relationship a woman has to mothering that was so important to Rich’s (1986) work. By so clearly ignoring a legitimate maternal desire and only recognizing it through a sisterly feminist position, then, like the sisters of the early second wave, the feminism found in *The Mommy Myth* continues to be fearful of “becoming like our ideal Mother.” Thus, even as a more contemporary, anti-essentialist feminist perspective, Douglas and Michaels’ analysis of intensive mothering in *The Mommy Myth* continues to be linked to and perpetuate a more contemporary form of matrophobia.

Maternal Desire, on the other hand, clearly emerges out of the legacy of the “Daughterly” perspective that developed in response to both this sisterly perspective and difference feminism. According to Hirsch (1997), as opposed to the “equality” feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s that drew on the sisterly position, difference feminisms explored the specificity of women as different from men by drawing heavily on psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives

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and focusing on the mother-daughter relationship. Specifically, difference feminism explored the long-term psychological impact of the different early gendered relationship between mothers and sons and mothers and daughters. As a result, mothering was, at best, secondary to this daughterly feminist subject position because it focused almost exclusively on the perspective of daughters, while ignoring mothers. Thus, Hirsch argues that the daughterly subject position was still steeped in matrophobia in its fear of fully acknowledging mothering in its own right.

Similar to Douglas and Michaels (2004), de Marneffe (2004) enlarges the daughterly feminist subject position in important ways. First, she articulates a daughterly perspective that includes the mother's side of the all-important first relationship that drives the psychoanalytic perspective. Indeed, she finally accounts for and articulates a feminist maternal desire. Thus, in this way, de Marneffe is unlike Douglas and Michaels because she faces the matrophobia within feminisms and attempts to grapple with the desire to mother without the fear of becoming wholly like the "ideal" Mother; she theorizes a mother subject position in feminist ways.

Even with these advances in the daughterly paradigm, because de Marneffe only focuses on revising feminism and ignores the very real and ongoing need to grapple with and challenge the institution of motherhood; she theorizes a perspective that is more "fearful" of feminism than of patriarchy. As such, de Marneffe's daughterly perspective also reveals a lingering matrophobia. In an interesting and new twist on it, however, de Marneffe's matrophobia is the "fear of becoming like our Sisters." In other words, rather than ignoring our mothers, de Marneffe ignores her feminist sisters. Thus, de Marneffe's new version of matrophobia is her fear of becoming like her sisterly feminist mother rather than the 1950s patriarchal "ideal" Mother.

The analysis of *The Mommy Myth* and *Maternal Desire* and the subsequent feminist approaches to contemporary maternity revealed, then, suggest that the early matrophobia that drove feminism in the second wave continues to impact the current relationship between feminism and contemporary maternity. Thus, even though this matrophobia was important and probably necessary in the early second wave so that women could imagine an alternative to the all-consuming, patriarchal "ideal Mother" subject position, it is now time to imagine a feminist subject position on maternity that eschews that matrophobia and its lingering vestiges. What I am suggesting here is that if academically informed feminists are truly coming out of the closet about mothering, then, we must recognize our own internalized matrophobia in the same way that gays and lesbians have worked on purging their own internalized homophobia (or, as another example, as many Blacks have made attempts to move away from their own internalized racism). We also must do so in order to integrate, finally, the institution of motherhood and the potential relationship that both exist within contemporary maternity and that Rich so aptly suggested over 30 years ago.

Conclusions

One intriguing route for feminism to begin to recognize and move past the lingering matrophobia and the split approach to analyzing intensive mothering is also revealed by my analysis. To extend Hirsch (1997), we require neither *only* daughters nor sisters and, instead, we need *both* daughters and sisters. In short, contemporary feminism needs a feminist subject position on maternity that is best thought of as a “daughters-and-sisters” subject position that fully turns into and then theorizes a new feminist subjectivity on maternity that is free from contemporary forms of matrophobia, embraces a feminist maternal desire to care for children, and resists contemporary institutionalized motherhood, which continues to constrain and control women’s lives. Or, to put it another way: the analysis of *The Mommy Myth* and *Maternal Desire* suggests the possibility of conceiving or a “giving birth” to a feminist position on maternity that is grounded in both mutuality and reciprocity between daughters and sisters as the next step for feminism.

While this work will be difficult and complex, one reason why this “daughters-and-sisters” feminist subject position must be written is so that feminist analysis of contemporary maternity can actually speak to contemporary American mothers’ lives, which are, as Julia Wood (2001) argues, in a “transitional time” between new roles and expectations and persisting and deeply held traditional gender values and roles (17). Or, to put it another way, contemporary American mothers’ lives are split between second-wave gains and lingering patriarchal forms, including those associated with mothering and motherhood. In fact, this split subjectivity is at the heart much of the popular conversations about contemporary maternity mentioned here. As the beneficiaries of second-wave feminism *and* as mothers, these women recognize that they are grappling and living with a mothering that is not their mothers’ maternity, and they recognize that their feminist issues are different because they are caught between an old patriarchal institution and new forms of empowered feminist mothering.

Conceiving of the next step in feminist analysis as a daughters-*and*-sisters subject position on maternity, thus, is also important rhetorically for two reasons. First, doing so allows us to understand fully and “Richly” both an institutional and relational empowered perspective on contemporary maternity that, *finally*, also eschews feminism’s lingering matrophobia. Second, conceiving a daughters-and-sisters subject position also encourages us to self-reflexively respond to and resist what some feminist scholars (Gillis, Howie and Munford, 2004; Henry, 2004) argue is an erroneous and problematic description of the differences between so-called second and third-wave feminisms as a generational, familial, and I believe matrophobic, dispute between second-wave mothers and third-wave daughters. Thus, if feminists are serious about fully understanding contemporary maternity, then, we must conceive a daughters-and-sisters subject position that faces the lingering matrophobia in feminisms, resists entrenching a generational dispute, and explores both

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institutionalized motherhood and a relational empowered mothering, which both continue to be part and parcel of contemporary maternity for *all* feminist mothers.

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¹Even though all women are disciplined by the ideology of intensive mothering, it is important to note that other maternal scholars (Collins, 1991; Edwards, 2004; O'Reilly, 2004; James, 1993; Thomas, 2004) argue that intensive mothering is Eurocentric and privileges white, upper middle-class women. Black feminist scholars (Collins, 1991; Edwards, 2004; Thomas, 2004; James, 1993) have also shown how African-American mothers have traditionally and continue to utilize empowered mothering practices that are non-normative within the intensive mothering ideology. African-American mothers engage in othermothering—the practice of accepting responsibility “for a child that is not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal”—and community mothering—the practice of supporting and sustaining the larger community (James, 1993: 45). Unfortunately, however, both are considered “dysfunctional” and “deviant” practices because they challenge the key tenets of intensive mothering that support biological or bloodmothers caring for their own children within the confines of a nuclear family.

²Both books were reviewed extensively in print and in online forums, and the authors received much media attention in a variety of U.S. newspapers, magazines, and online.

³Rather than use the language of intensive mothering, de Marneffe describes contemporary mothering as driven by the “super-mom” ideal (2004: 10). De Marneffe argues “this cultural ideal pressures mothers to perform excellently on all fronts, in a job, with their children, with their partner, at the gym, and in the kitchen, making those fifteen-minute meals” (10). That this super-mom ideal is part and parcel of intensive mothering is clear in Hays’ analysis of intensive mothering (132).

⁴Douglas and Michaels are unambiguous about their anti-essentialism: they repeatedly situate their analysis in terms of race, class, and sexual orientation. Douglas and Michaels, for example, argue that media always create mothering heroes as white middle-class women and mothering villains as almost always African-American working-class women (2004: 20).

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Reading Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* as a Queer Feminist Daughter

*This article develops a process of reading Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, three decades after its conception, from the perspective of a queer feminist daughter. I show how contemporary queer theories tend to reify the maternal by failing to engage with the nuances of desire and embodiment in the feminist texts on motherhood. To overcome such blind spots I reread *Of Woman Born* as a process of dialogue across generational and theoretical differences. Adopting a close textual and reflexive process of interpretation, I unfold moments within *Of Woman Born* in which the body exceeds binary and universal norms, evoking a more specific mode of corporeality that criss-crosses acts of feeling, desiring and thinking.*

My attempt to engage with and revalue Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1986b) almost three decades after its publication, involves a tricky process of thinking across time, becoming immersed in the sufferings and insights of past lives though the uncertainties of the present. Simultaneously intimate and distant, familiar and strange, words inscribed in the fray of particular struggles for self-representation and collective resistance are always already lost to transparent reclamation. *Of Woman Born* evokes powerful associations and multiple metaphors beyond its bounded pages, gaining monumental symbolic authority as a mother text of feminism while at the same time tracing transient details, memories and fragmented narratives of mothering experiences that refuse to be frozen in time. It becomes important to work against attempts to either uphold its truths or discount its partiality, working to open up spaces for rediscovery: carrying forth meaning-making as ongoing intergenerational encounters and translations of differences from respective times and places of their occurrences. Rather than treat *Of Woman Born* as an established text to be rediscovered, it's practice of questioning and conversing with others needs to

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be fostered. In this spirit, Audre Lorde approaches Adrienne Rich's writings as a loving and responsive interlocutor mobilizing an exchange of voices spoken through differences of race:

Adrienne, in my journals I have a lot of pieces of conversations that I'm having with you in my head. I'll be having a conversation with you and I'll put it in my journal because stereotypically or symbolically these conversations occur in a space of Black woman/white woman where it's beyond the Adrienne and Audre, almost as if we're two voices. (1984: 103)

Lorde responds to Rich in ways that promote further engagements between readers, texts and contexts, suggesting chances to trace links without having to reach conclusions, beginning over and over again from new locations, desires and identifications, raising many questions: How do diverse positions constitute the contemporary relevance of Rich's *Of Woman Born*? What ways of reading enable permeable and ethical criss-crossings between the historical specificity of Rich's text and the urgency of future rearticulations?

Attentive to my location as a white queer feminist daughter writing through and for the "here and now," I find myself having to contend with gaps and tensions separating radical cultural feminism and queer postmodernism. I write out of the perplexities of forging a retrospective and anticipatory vantage point, looking back and forth between the historical recovery of maternal genealogies and the playful forgetting that spurs queer self-fabrication. Both moments are crucial for configuring an integrated feminist perspective that keeps desires open and unpredictable while being responsibly connected to everyday worlds of mothering. Yet dynamic doubleness often gives way to oppositional inertia, motherhood has become a locus of division between feminist valorizations of women's reproductive powers and pro-sexual transgressions of maternalist norms. Such splitting suggests and reinforces an historical amnesia, a forgetting of those historically ambiguous subjects that scramble binary logics and blur clear-cut boundaries. In contrast, Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1986b) strikes me as a deeply ambivalent text that defies either/or categorizations, combining contradictory elements of subjective introspection, fictional invention and institutional analysis. There is a unique interweaving of languages that invite readers into the text to follow up overlapping possibilities of being and thinking, to imagine maternity as a paradoxical locus of social control, creative labour and corporeal pleasure. This speaks to my own predilections for both/and relations, of embracing the indeterminate performativity of queerness along with grounded narratives of maternal experiences. And it is precisely Rich's reflexive open-ended process of experiential writing that solicits participatory readings that do not reify any single discursive form or content but rather propel further analysis, storytelling and shared learning. I return to Rich's text through theoretical detours of postmodern

queer feminist theories in order to reclaim mothering relations as fluidly signifying embodied practices. I use Teresa de Lauretis' (1984, 1987, 1994) expansive notion of experience as a dynamic activity of self-representation to highlight those moments in *Of Woman Born* that welcome and provoke a futurity of readings out of the past.

Queer blind spots: Overlooking maternal specificities

Despite the theoretical lead taken by exponents of the new Queer Theory in deconstructing gender, the question of reproduction has largely been ignored. Partly, no doubt, this is due to the more distant relationship which the queer constituency—lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgenders—have to pregnancy and childbirth. I suspect, however, that it is also due to the difficulty of fitting the business of reproduction into the performative model of gender.... Had someone whispered into my ear while I was in the swearing stage of labour (the stage that lasts right the way through) that I was putting on a really convincing gender performance I think I'd have queerly bitten off their head. (Wilton, 1997: 73)

Postmodern feminist and queer theorists have confronted the limitations of heteronormative reproductive relations, analyzing sexual powers and desires as important elements of social and discursive formations of gender. My reading will attempt to negotiate between complex performative identities and desires, while also indicating blind spots where maternal subjects get read in abstract and negative opposition to subversive sexualities or else become completely left out of criticism. The innovative turn of contemporary queer feminist thinking promotes “projects precisely of *nonce* taxonomy, of the making and unmaking and remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world” (Sedgwick, 1990: 23). Such daring propositions work towards confronting normalizing and essentializing veins of feminism, making room for relations and languages that might supplement and disturb them. At the same time, queer revisionism often completely ignores or else forecloses the ways maternal subjects might elaborate their own subversive scenarios of embodied experience. While there does not seem to be a single reason why “the Mother” represents a static figure of sex/gender/sexual conformity across a range of contemporary texts designed to shake up the status quo, there exists a common tendency to overlook ambiguous corporeal and speech activities of maternal subjectivity. Reliance on symbolic abstractions of desire from specific histories reinforces binary divisions within queer theories between erotic and maternal subjects.

Although the goal is to democratize and pluralize sexual representations, maternal subjects continue to be invisible or marginalized within theoretical

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movements privileging sexually transgressive subjects. In particular, queer theorists end up challenging moralistic tendencies within feminist maternalism without offering alternative representations of actively desiring maternal subjects. It is a tendency to rely upon unified feminine-maternal figures as the negative background of hip sexy queer alternatives that feminist critics have begun to question. Bidy Martin argues that not only do many queer texts underemphasize gender as changing historical relations, but they tend to generalize gender as an obstacle to transformative forces of desire. Martin writes that embodiments of gender are often seen as coincident with “the feminine” as “a capitulation, a swamp, something maternal, ensnared and ensnaring” (1994: 105), in contrast to which sexuality signifies playful excess and mobility. It is disturbing that maternal embodiment continues to be negatively associated with heterosexist and gender essentializing norms within those texts that explore psychosexual transformations. Julia Creet falls prey to such dichotomous thinking when she reinscribes the fantasies and practices of lesbian sex radicals against a backdrop of feminist maternal prescriptions, writing: “We no longer call it ‘maternal feminism,’ but it lives on in a combination of morality and maternalism that is now directed toward other women as much as toward men, and where the feminist mother figure represents the source of sexual prohibitions, especially for women” (1991: 140). Such alignments of feminism and motherhood which foreground one-sided powers of control and prohibition against sexual risk-taking daughters tend to rely on prescriptive representations at the expense of contextualizations. This discounts maternal relations working to deconstruct and resist normalizing gender categories, overlooking precarious, “perverse,” and rebellious maternal desires lived in the gaps and margins of restrictive maternal moralities. Critiques of feminist maternalism often end up reproducing totalizing ideological formations at the expense of seeking out subjects who contest conservative conjugal ideals of mothering.

While sexual heterogeneity is valued, gender specificity gets overlooked in many postmodern and queer theorizations. They end up reifying motherhood within an identity-difference structure, leaving little room to consider those struggling against interlocking oppressions and negotiating multiple identities. In many ways, resistance to theorizing ambiguous genders and sexualities is indicative of the ways specific combinations of desires and identifications are obscured within generalizing conceptual methods. Any attempt to proliferate and complicate women’s subjectivities raises critical problems as to how to represent differences as located embodied social/discursive relations rather than dichotomous and a priori categories. As Shane Phelan argues:

Heterogeneity urges us toward specificity, its crucial element; without specificity, “heterogeneity” becomes such another word for difference. The focus on specifics aims at destroying white bourgeois hege-

mony by making it manifest...an emphasis on specificity in our analyses and practices aims at disrupting hegemonies, calling out differences for question, and rendering all people accountable for their positions and actions...Specificity demands the simultaneous exploration of categories of social marks and orders and attention to the unique individual. Specificity is the methodological guide to finding individuality in community. (1994: 8)

In order to address the gaps and closures within and between feminist theories of motherhood that fall prey to normativity and queer abstractions of desire from women's embodied relations, I seek out experiential languages of specificity. It is significant that Phelan (1994) refers to Adrienne Rich's article "Notes on the Politics of Location" (1986a) as a starting point of a difficult and ongoing elaboration and bridging of women's differences. With regard to mothering as specific bodily and social locations of address, Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1986b) bears valuable insights of a reflexive experiential text that refuses the simplifications of binary symbolic conventions. What seems forgotten in many postmodern feminist queer treatments of motherhood are precisely those multi-layered and ambivalent inscriptions of daily experience explored within Rich's texts which defy charges of essentialism or moral conformity.

Before turning to Rich's book with an interest in exploring how it unfolds nuanced ways of thinking through embodied desiring maternal relations, I want to sketch Teresa de Lauretis' social semiotic notion of experience as providing a transitional space between poststructuralist preoccupations with textual disruptions and the dynamic material worlds, affects, perceptions, habits and interpretations of everyday life. De Lauretis calls attention to how ideological systems interlock objectified sexual and maternal images of "Woman" while she also searches for ways to "resist confinement in that symbolic space by disturbing it, perverting it, making trouble, seeking to exceed the boundary" (1984: 139). Through a notion of "semiosis of experience," she affirms resistance and subversion at the level of women's relational praxis, and symbolic creativity in women's ordinary life worlds and languages. This involves an elaboration of Charles Peirce's efforts "to account for the subjective and social aspects of meaning production, or whether indeed it can be said to mediate between them, will determine its usefulness in mapping the relations of meaning to what I have proposed to call experience" (de Lauretis, 1984: 168). De Lauretis goes on to construct a feminist theory of "experience" away from appeals to empirical transparency toward a vision of subjectivity as an "ongoing construction." Sign activity is presented as inseparable from located corporeal/imaginative/theoretical activities, such that both subject and object are seen to be reciprocally transitive, and it is this entwining of mobile signifying activities and sensuous social experiences that presents some interesting alternatives for reading situated subjective knowledges. De Lauretis highlights "the weight of the object in semiosis, an overdetermination wrought into the work of the sign

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by the real, or what we take as reality, even if it is itself already an interpretant” (1987: 41-42). She reclaims the status of “the object” not as a given factual reality but as a “dynamic object” which engages physical bodies, emotive responses and signifying practices. Peirce’s work becomes useful in its consideration of various modes of interpretants (interlacing sign, object and meaning), including an action oriented “habit-change” and collectively engaged interpretations of oppression and transformation.

According to de Lauretis, subjects of experience involve socially embedded, discursively mediated and collectively negotiated interactions between self, others and the world, shifting back and forth between hegemonic and reflexive modes of consciousness and cultural representations. Unique aspects of this process include a continual reworking of discourses by feeling, thinking, imagining and desiring subjects, allowing for multiple perspectives of how selves are shaped through the socio-ideological contexts they are immersed in while also seeking to change them. This resonates with Miriam Hansen’s call for “a concept of *experience* which is not the opposite of socially constructed signs and systems of representation, but rather mediates between individual perceptions and social determinations and emphatically entails memory and an awareness of its historical diminishment” (qtd. in Bergstrom and Doane, 1990: 172). Recognizing forces of “contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy” both within and between women’s experiences becomes a basis for moving beyond hegemonic knowledges so as to elaborate “a view from ‘elsewhere.’” De Lauretis goes on to writes:

that “elsewhere” is not some mythic distant past or some utopian feminist future history: it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations ... in the micropractices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments ... that movement in and out of ideology, that crossing back and forth of the boundaries—and of the limits—of sexual difference(s). (1987: 23)

De Lauretis offers a point of departure for thinking about “experience” as neither empirically transparent nor abstractly discursive, but as a perpetual struggle of living within and against (inside/out) ideological formations through intimate and dialogically honed acts of self-representation.

It is by tracing the tensions between and across experiences of maternity, listening to desires and pleasures voiced in defiance of domestication and normalization that maternal views from “elsewhere” emerge. What becomes striking are a myriad of mothering languages and relations exceeding the boundaries of (hetero)normalization articulated against ideological definitions. So that while dominant codes and categories of motherhood deny women powers and pleasures of desire, experiential representations of mothering can be understood as eliciting sexual contradictions. In Shari Stone-

Mediatore's words, "narratives that reckon with these tensions do not report spontaneous consciousness but create images and narrative forms for rearticulating experience in such a way that the narrated images enable the writer to confront those experienced tensions more constructively" (1998: 128). According to this view, experience becomes a locus of a participatory questioning and rewriting rather than the discovery and expression of self-evident individual truths. Such experiential languages do not stabilize subjectivity but activate and explore the conditions and contours of sensual living, enabling a coexistence and interplay of relations institutionally separated or glossed over. They provide a basis for theorizing mothering as enacted, imagined and represented by subjects of experience in realms of family, work, love, sexuality and politics, undercutting mutually exclusive and prescriptive maternal identities by paying attention to multifaceted speech acts.

De Lauretis (1994) explores how experiential knowledges are capable of inciting inter(con)textualizations, making it possible to think about subjugated relations of mothering across times and places. This allows for understandings of individual idiosyncrasies poised towards new communal meanings in their invitation to include alternative languages of personal and political maternal expressions. Such possibilities mark an exciting departure point for rereading *Of Woman Born*, as a semiosis of experience that displays its historical contingency and embodied vulnerability as part of broader feminist conversations and coalitions. I become attuned to my fascination with the tellings of a feminist mother whose narratives encompass much more than a repressive foundation against which I might define my queer daughterly differences. On the contrary, they transmit unruly passionate tendencies I have claimed as a driving force of my desire for alternative connections. That maternal experiential knowledges might offer surprises, transgress expectations of reproductive sameness, is a message that compels me to read *Of Woman Born* by understanding what I bring to this text—what I notice, elide, select and resist—as part of how I evaluate what is already there in glimpsing an elsewhere.

Adrienne Rich's dialogical and reflexive semiosis of maternal experience

I am intrigued by the way *Of Woman Born* brings together manifold maternal discourses which are not assimilated into a closed system of thought but are creatively and reflexively articulated by Adrienne Rich. This is marvelously in keeping with contemporary innovations such as Della Pollack's attempts to "invite the reader into a double-play: into performing the book and the stories it conveys inside out, participating in the conversational dynamics the book replays and taking them again, into a heightened, amplified, expanding alchemy of birth/body stories" (1999: 23). Similarly, Rich transcribes her own experiential stories in relation with those of others, exploring various aspects of mothering as a "continually changing dialogue." Rather than focus on the metanarrative dimensions of Rich's argument I am more interested in her

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engagement in a collaborative interpretive process which attempts to read a self mediated through shared and contested historical texts and institutions. Rich's method and style works to interplay commonalities and differences between maternal subjects alongside the often discordant perspectives of daughters. And as a daughter unsure of how I fit into this process, I feel encouraged by an intermingling of voices throughout Rich's book, allowing doubts and uncertainties to coincide with more confident exegesis. Rich's text is open to multiple narratives and perspectives that enable me to enter this text as a curious and questioning reader. In a speech given on the subject of motherhood a year after *Of Woman Born* was published, Rich asserts:

I begin tonight by urging each of you to take responsibility for the voicing of her experience, to take seriously the work of listening to each other and the work of speaking, whether in private dialogue or in larger groups. In order to change what is, we need to give speech to what has been, to imagine together what might be. (1979: 260)

Rich calls for a reflexive experiential process that situates the trials of a self attempting to participate along with others in constructing new maternal languages—"the words are being spoken now, are being written down; the taboos are being broken, the masks of motherhood are cracking" (1986b: 24-25). Some of the most important features of Rich's own attempts to overcome years of silence are her autobiographical narratives which not only work to personalize mothering, but textually perform the social and affective complexity of her subjectivity in contradistinction to attempts to rationalize and homogenize motherhood. The very effort of remembering her maternal experiences confronts historical forces pressuring her to forget:

When I try to return to the body of the young woman of twenty-six, pregnant of the first time, who fled from the physical knowledge of her pregnancy and at the same time from her intellect and vocation, I realize that I was effectively alienated from my real spirit by the institution—not the fact of—motherhood. (1986b: 39)

While Rich appeals to a concretely lived realm of motherhood set against coercive institutional powers, her writings enact the impossibility of stability, transparency and objectivity. There is no easy or direct process of return back through Rich's experiences as a young mother, as gaps and opacity in her memory/body/speech work to fragment primary autobiographical texts read by Rich as symptoms of her psychic dissociation and social alienation as a mother. Rich opens *Of Woman Born* with a flood of impressions and story lines linked loosely through journal writings quoted as a way of unpacking an intensity of feelings lived at the time she was mothering small children:

April 1965

Anger, weariness, demoralization. Sudden bouts of weeping a sense of insufficiency to the moment and to eternity...

Paralyzed by the sense that there exists a mesh of relations, between e.g. my rejection and anger [my eldest child], my sensual life, pacifism, sex (I mean its broadest significance, not merely physical desire)—an interconnectedness which, if I could see it, make it valid, would give me back myself, make it possible to function lucidly and passionately—Yet I grope in and out among these dark webs. (1986b: 30)

Writing ten years later, Rich (1986b) becomes able to mobilize such instances of emotional paralysis through a cultural and political analysis of her “mesh of relations” without discounting the rawness and singularity of her affective responses in the past. She works to recontextualize them in ways that facilitate a critical process of revision. In this way she transfers maternal experience into acts of rewriting with an awareness of social and cultural determinations of her psychic crisis and her counterdiscursive revelations of maternal angers, habits and perceptions. Experience becomes an unfinalizable activity of naming a sensuous, socially situated and mediated self across time, enabling Rich to begin to signify her complexities and changes simultaneously as daughter and maternal subject.

Whereas dominant cultural forces are seen to perpetuate “visual and literary images of motherhood as a single-minded identity” (1986b: 23), Rich’s own attempt to graph disparate memories, incidents and feelings reveals the limitations of prescriptive identities, displaying highly volatile and conflictual relations of identification and disidentification. Allowing for temporally dynamic self-definitions, Rich approaches motherhood as “only a point in the process” (1986b: 182). Personal testimony is elaborated as part of an interconnected web of events and consciousness that comprise maternal experiences. Rich does not take up a single and decidable authorial identity, but moves between shifting, and at times conflicting, positions of address as a mother, daughter, feminist, poet, lesbian. Undermining naturalizing absolute values of maternal sacrifice and norms of “goodness,” Rich attempts to actively rewrite her own maternal self in the stream of her changing political and poetic positions.

Rejecting “the-personal-for-its-own-sake,” which characterizes liberal individualism and conventional autobiographical genres, while also refusing to become an “absentee author” (1986b: x) whose voice is obscured by detached speculations, Rich invokes a self in the flux of living, thinking, writing. She struggles to think through the importance of maternal subjectivity while at the same time questioning hegemonic notions of subjectivity premised on the denial of bodily relations and erotic feminine alterity. Her text interweaves perspectives as daughter and mother, she destabilizes knowledges which seek to unify and erase contradictions within and between women. But while autobiography lends individual uniqueness to Rich’s writing, she is careful to

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mark the partiality and limits of her words in relation to the development of collective knowledges:

I believe increasingly that only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can enable women to create a collective description of the world.... I am keenly aware that any writer has a certain false and arbitrary power. It is her version, after all, that the reading is reading at this moment, while the accounts of others—including the dead—many go untold.

This is in some ways a vulnerable book. I have invaded various professional domains, broken various taboos. I have used the scholarship available, without pretending to make myself into a specialist. In doing so the question, *But what was it like for women?* was always in my mind. (1986b: 16)

Rich suggests a precarious and tentative activity of narration. Speaking of her book as “tangled with parts of my life” and experiences “the most painful, incomprehensible, and ambiguous I have ever traveled, a ground hedged by taboos, mined with false-namings,” Rich indicates the difficulties of self-naming. This cautions against closures and exclusions occurring throughout *Of Woman Born*, signaling the impossibility of representing mothering as a coherent entity. In the midst of her trials and errors of naming, Rich inaugurates exchanges with other women so as to promote efforts in which “others like her, with different training, background, and tools, are putting together other parts of this immense half-buried mosaic in the shape of a woman’s face” (1986b:17). The constructive social activity of giving shape to “woman’s face” becomes a motif for theorizing experience. Embodiment gets depicted as an inventive realm of perception and cognition through which to connect and communicate with others. Writing of the maternal body as a relational movement between self and others, Rich refuses passive and solipsistic reductions of corporeality for connected empathic engagements. Against mythologies that romanticize a symbiotic unity between mother and child, Rich writes of her fierce desires to move beyond exclusive relations with her children, writing that a mother “needs to struggle from that one-to-one intensity into new realization, or reaffirmation, of her being-unto herself” (1986b: 36).

While mothering offers chances for physical pleasures and spiritual awakenings, they are shown to be overlaid with feelings of guilt and frustration under the pressure of normative ideals of the self-sufficiency and plenitude of the dyad. This is the crux of Rich’s ambivalence: living the “physical, fleshly changes” that bring about self awareness along with institutional “self-discipline and self-cauterization, those qualities which are supposed to be ‘innate’ in us: patience, self-sacrifice, the willingness to repeat endlessly the small, routine chores” (1986b: 37). Rich explores the psychic pain this produces in

relation to her own internalization of disciplinary maternal ideologies against the disruptive force of her desires. Speaking about maternal sexuality, incited and inhibited by cultural fantasies, taboos and fears, Rich does not replace or reverse patriarchal notions of maternal irrationality and passivity with a rationally willed subjectivity. Instead, she struggles to think through the vicissitudes of her psychosexuality: "I remember thinking I would never dream again, (the unconscious of a young mother—where does it entrust its messages, when dream-sleep is denied her for years?)" (31-32). In response, she attempts to recollect dissonant desires, exploring them within her poetic writings where she redefines a feminine-maternal imaginary in constant flux. Rich never fully identifies with hegemonic maternal scenarios, actively writing through her experiences of rupture and disidentification—"for me, poetry is where I lived as no-one's mother." (31)

Reproductive relations are theorized by Rich in conjunction with the sexual body, interrelating and complicating heteronormative maternal ideals. Unlike many radical feminist denunciations of motherhood as irredeemable for women's sexual emancipation, Rich presents a much more unsettling questioning of dichotomies between maternal and non-maternal subjects claiming that "the childless woman' and the 'mother' are a false polarity, which serve the institutions of both motherhood and heterosexuality. There are no such simple categories" (1986b: 250). "These polarizations imply a failure of imagination" (251). Although *Of Woman Born* only begins to acknowledge interlocking class and racial hierarchies which structure maternal sexualities, this text gestures to make links between heterosexism, racism and sexism that reinforce processes of "doubling thinking" between the female body as "impure, corrupt ... dangerous," or else "beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual" (1986b: 34). Against these totalizing assumptions Rich sketches the living ambiguities of maternal desires deprived of rational symbolic currency and requiring the subterfuges of marginal experiential texts. She affirmatively invokes those abjected from mythological realms of "goodness" to speak maternal desires for and about themselves.

Rich's interest in motherhood as an ongoing corporeal relational process—"We are neither inner nor outer constructed; our skin is alive with signals, our lives and our deaths are inseparable from the release or blockage of our thinking bodies" (1986b: 284). Such a process propels dissonant interpretations which throw into question her previous claims to an unmediated female commonality: "we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence" (1986b: 40). Rich actively challenges representations of the body as a uniform and passive material substance, encouraging responsive and situated languages which contend with psychic alterity and social contingencies. She argues for ethico-political choice and embodied agency, calling for the production of "self-knowledge to move from a centuries old 'endurance of suffering' to a new active being" (1986b: 129). This emphasis on embodied acts of thinking and politi-

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cization is extended in Rich's later writings in which she becomes more and more conscious of the partiality of her location as a feminist writer and the need to turn from declarations of "the body" toward inscriptions of "my body":

To write "my body" plunges me into lived experience, particularity: I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me. Bones well nourished from the placenta; the teeth of a middle-class person seen by the dentist twice a year from childhood. White skin, marked and scarred by three pregnancies, and elected sterilization, progressive arthritis, four joint operations, calcium deposits, no rapes, no abortions, long hours at a typewriter—my own, not in a typing pool—and so forth. To say "the body" lifts me away from what has given me a primary perspective. To say "body" reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions. (Rich, 1986b: 215)

In *Of Woman Born*, Rich names her experiences as part of a critical interpretive process activating memory and speech by "thinking through the body" which is part of her larger understanding of "thinking as an active, fluid, expanding process; intellection ... knowing are recapitulations of past processes" (1986b: 284). Rich writes her desiring experiential body as a site of revision and improvisation, as a sensuous mode of interpretation, a performative enactment of a maternal/daughterly self putting out into the world gestures and words that make up new ways of being and thinking. This is not to deny that Rich sometimes diminishes the innovative force of her text by appealing to a unifying category of woman focused around "female biology—the diffuse, intense sensuality radiating out from the clitoris, breasts, uterus, vagina; the lunar cycles of menstruation; the gestation and fruition of life which can take place in the female body" (1986b: 39). Yet there are countervailing signs of sex/gender instability that catch my attention as a queer daughter, especially those dialogical instances when Rich incites multivalent responses rather than pinning down preconceived truths.

In her introduction written ten years after the initial publication of *Of Woman Born*, Rich offers a criticism of her earlier lack of engagement with the writings by women of color, non-western histories of motherhood, and lesbian mother discourses, confronting powers of exclusion and privilege within white feminist thinking. Emphasizing her rejection of the concept of "patriarchy-as-catchall" Rich insists that "to view patriarchy as a pure product, unrelated to economic or racial oppression, seems to me today to skew the lines of vision along which we proceed to act" (1986b: xxiv), Rich questions her own text and supplements it with new readings that go further in elaborating political contexts of crisis and conflicts of mothering, attending to research, activism and writings by those who have followed her as a way of moving forward without relinquishing the value of past knowledges. Rich's

contributions as a feminist mother to others needs to be appreciated not as a static symbolic origin but as part of a mobile exchange that calls forth critical insights and alterations. Rich's later writings such as her essay "Notes toward a Politics of Location," assert the importance of rejecting monolithic visions of a feminist "we" for self-conscious investigations into the locatedness of the "I" as a place from which to launch experiential discourses as a basis for collective affiliations.

Notes towards a politics of queer-feminist-maternal locations

My reading of Adrienne Rich is mediated through the specific locations, intellectual investments and desires of a queer daughter, attentive to maternal knowledges constructed through struggle, questioning and transformation. Listening for something besides heteronormative reproductions of motherhood, I seek out those moments within Rich's writing that evoke "gender trouble," detailing ambivalent discourses that refuse to be reduced to biological and socially normalizing powers. Running throughout *Of Woman Born* are dialogically complex subjective languages at thresholds of body and mind, self and others, that dislocate patriarchal projections of maternity but do not solidify a single feminist alternative. Through the vulnerable relational openness of Rich's text it becomes possible to enter at an oblique angle as a feminist shaped through postmodern uncertainties without forgetting or foreclosing maternal legacies. An intriguing space opens up that defies polarities separating cultural feminism and queer readings, unfolding shared personal interests and political projects. This is not to deny ongoing tensions and historical differences, but to learn to keep alive traces of subversive embodiment and speech in Rich's writings on maternal experience rather than simplify and dismiss them as essentialist, as a conventional backdrop against which daughters name themselves as outlaws. Such reactive formulations indicate failures of imagination and generosity towards intergenerational learning and innovation, stopping short of recognizing just how mutually implicated mothers and daughters are in sustaining and disrupting oppressive systems.

It is up to queer postmodern readers to respond with a respectful curiosity that does not flee the memory of maternal histories for the sake of decontextual transgressions. By returning to Rich's grounded and intimate explorations of mothering, the body and its speech acts are made specific, challenging binary symbolic institutions and codes that split apart maternity and desire. It is the restless dialogical activity of Rich's self-representation that poses a challenge to queer interlocutors to account for how, when and why maternal subjects are erased and marginalized in the discursive frenzy to subvert and pluralize gender identities. Through textual enactments of experience as a relationally responsible and reflexive process, *Of Woman Born* calls forth future engagements from the past into the now of feminist inquiry. Through playful recollections of maternal narratives, an awareness and bridging of differences becomes possible which neither fixates on what has been nor leaps forward in defiance of the

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personal and cultural legacies of *woman born*.

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Carla J. McDonough

Motherhood and Feminism

Lessons from the Titanic

This essay examines my transition from career woman to stay-at-home mom, and how motherhood has raised my consciousness as to the naivete of the feminism I once embraced. In championing more power for women in the public world, feminism can no longer be seduced into accepting a male-defined scenario of how working life should work—the scenario of the ideal worker unencumbered by any family commitments that guides most corporate, professional, and governmental policy. Few workers are ever “ideal” (unless they have a full-time stay-at-home wife), nor is the world they live in. Continuing to acquiesce to such impossible ideal circumstances is rather like setting sail on the Titanic. The still rigidly gender-divided reality of parenting in most families throws into sharp relief how our “post-feminist” culture continues to devalue the “women’s work” of caring for a home and rearing children even as it makes that job necessary for all other jobs to occur. My new mother-feminist consciousness makes clear to me the next goal of feminism. We must make the culture of the (paid) working world adapt to the needs of mothers and children, allowing the work of parenting children to become what it should be: not a disaster waiting to sink us but the rudder intended to guide our communities to calmer waters.

I have a new feminist consciousness now that I have given up my career in order to meet family needs. A few years ago, rather than continue a commute after being unable to land a job in the same town as my husband, I resigned from a tenured position in an English department to stay home and take care of three children—infant twins and a four-year-old. I was 37 years old and closing the book on my chances of returning to academia, no matter what well-intentioned friends and colleagues said about the changing atmosphere in universities that might provide me opportunities to re-enter the profession. Although I had planned my life quite carefully up to and including the arrival of my first child,

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events in my life after his birth were increasingly not under my control. Brian Green (2003) discussing superstring theory in *The Elegant Universe*, comments about laws of physics that “new laws come into play when the level of complexity of a system increases” (17). I know of few systems more complex than a nuclear family with several small children and two adults working full time. And in the end I did not find myself quite up to that level of complexity.

It has been a rocky road for me, emotionally, since leaving my career to be a full-time stay-at-home mom, which I consider myself despite a few semesters of part-time teaching. I have gone through, and continue, an identity crisis as I have seen myself morph from the person I really am into someone else, at least as seen through other’s eyes. Whenever my children’s teachers and friends and even the neighbors call me Mrs. Hobson, as they do most of the time, I feel as if I have been miscast. My real self wants to say “Actually no. It’s Dr. McDonough”—but that seems pretentious for a woman who spends most of her day doing laundry, running household errands, managing family finances, cooking, cleaning, and sorting out the myriad activities, conflicts, and commitments that arise from parenting three active boys. On one level, I want to be a mother like my own was, and remains—someone who always has time for her children, never acts as if they are an interruption or a bother, always seems to know how to support and encourage them. On another level, I don’t want to be defined only by my children or for my life to be only in service to someone else’s needs.

So, I find myself wondering: have I been derailed by motherhood even though I consciously chose it for myself? In the past five years, I have felt shanghaied by a system that makes it so difficult for a woman to pursue a career and parenthood. Being unable to “find a balance” between work and home life, did I cop out to a gender stereotype? When push came to shove in balancing my wants and those of my children and husband, I gave up my personal goals for their greater good. I just could not make our family life work any other way because I did not want a frantic life. Having experienced the demands of full-time work and parenting I knew that feeling of skating on the edge where one slip up, one cog not working right in the machine of our lives threw everything into chaos. I knew how it felt to be one place but know I was needed somewhere else. Although my work life was often a respite from the demands of family and my family life a respite from the demands of work, the demands of both soon pushed our family into a pace of life with which I felt uncomfortable. Family dinners of home-cooked meals should not be a luxury. The decision to keep a sick child home from day care or school should be based on the child’s needs rather than on a work schedule. And small children simply need lots and lots of time. I was lucky enough that we could, with careful management, afford for me to stay home with the children—first on temporary leave, and then completely unemployed. At the same time, it never felt like a choice. If I could have landed a job in the town where my husband worked—one with flexibility for tending to children’s needs—I would have chosen that.

Thus when I first read Miriam Peskowitz's *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars* (2005), I felt relieved. Here was a researched, thoughtful study voicing all the doubts and concerns I had been recording in my own journal over the past five years as an unintentional stay-at-home mom. Peskowitz's interviewees were voicing my sense of loss over a career I never planned to give up as well as my happiness at having the chance to be home when my children are young. They reflected my fear of not being able to return to rewarding work and my discomfort with the traditional gender roles into which my husband and I have fallen. They mirrored the solace I have encountered from the support of other mothers I know, and they acknowledged the self doubts I sometimes feel over whether I am doing a truly "good" job of mothering despite my long hours and commitment to it. And most of all, the women of Peskowitz's book give voice to the burden that I have carried as a mother that some how it is all up to me, alone, to make things work for my family against the pressures of a corporate/consumer-driven culture.

The mother's or woman's perceived burden to "make it all work" is increasingly significant as I think of my ideas of feminism before I became a mother. Those early feminist ideas were about being in control of my life and my choices. Choosing what to study, what to do, where to go. My life, my future, were all up to me. The possibilities seemed boundless back then. I look back on that twenty-something woman and realize how little I knew about what choices would be available to me once I stepped out of the position of the ideal worker unencumbered by family commitments. So many of the arguments about parenting and work conflicts grow out of the issues of choice or the lack of it. Motherhood has made clear to me that a focus on personal choice often obscures the lack of choices that are offered us. More particularly, these choices often do not acknowledge the unpredictability of life, especially, but certainly not limited to, life with children. Increasingly I see the working world being created like the Titanic: built with such utter faith in one course of events that a simple matter of providing enough lifeboats has been overlooked because no one thought to consider the potential complications if an unexpected (or even an expected) obstacle were to arise. Any mother could have told those architects, designers, and financiers that obstacles will arise and that the improbable, unexpected, or unlikely can (and often does) happen, and thus should be planned for and accommodated.

In championing more power for women in the public world, feminism can no longer be seduced by the best-case scenario ideal of how working life should work that guides most corporate, professional, and governmental policy. Workers are not all "ideal," nor is the world they live in. Workers do get sick. They have important commitments outside of the office that include spouses, partners, children and parents whom they care for. Even when everything else is going smoothly in their lives, they still have to see doctors and dentists, pick up prescriptions, buy stamps, bank, update car registrations and driver's licenses, buy groceries, have their cars serviced, and a myriad of

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other errands that usually have to occur during traditional “working hours.” Since becoming a stay-at-home mom, I have increasingly been the one to take care of these things not just for me but for my whole family—including my husband who has moved into greater and greater time commitments to work in order to support our family on his salary alone. Many days I wonder how he would do these simple things just for himself if I weren’t here, much less manage to handle all the childcare, too. As it is, he has given up any semblance of personal time or regular exercise because he just can’t fit it into the day and also spend time with the children and cover the few parts of the childcare needs he can fit in. He has become the ideal worker whose work in the office is made possible only by having a spouse at home who covers the work of every other aspect of life for him from calling the exterminator when the house gets invaded by ants (and waiting at home during the four-hour time slot in which they might arrive) to washing his shirts for work (he irons them—I’m not a total domestic diva). If he wonders how he’d take care of the house and children without me, I have had many a sleepless night wondering what will happen to our family if he were to get sick or injured. Could I get decently paid work with such a huge gap in my resume? Are we on our own Titanic sailing gaily along toward some iceberg that will hit us unexpectedly one night? Do we have enough lifeboats?

As I have gotten older, I feel less and less in control of my life. And I wonder if that is the effect of maturity or the result of the insecurity that our still rigidly gender-divided parenting culture has created. A culture that still devalues the “women’s work” of caring for a home and raising children even as it makes that job necessary for all other jobs to occur. Do I feel insecure and uncertain because I am no longer an independent wage earner who supports herself and instead am relying on a (male) partner to take care of me and our children financially? Or do I feel insecure because the experiences of living make me realize the world itself is an insecure place full of the unexpected, the unlikely, the unpredictable. I know that despite our current workable arrangement our family may be just one unexpected event away from personal and financial disaster.

Many things hit us unprepared. Things that, as a friend of mine said to me recently, we never signed up for. How was I to foresee that a necessary job change on my husband’s part would dictate a move for the family and a commute to work for me, and then I’d be facing the arrival not of just a second child but unexpectedly of twins? Or how could my friend foresee her beautiful first son would turn out to have so many special needs? Or why would another friend of mine have been expected to “plan” on being diagnosed with MS after the physical trauma of giving birth? If motherhood has taught me anything about life, it is that the concept of being in control is tenuous at best. Birth defects, breast cancer, miscarriage, divorce. Life is full of things we never signed up for. So, is the concept of being “in control” of one’s life really possible for anyone? Given the uncertainties, I have come to believe that all of us, mothers or not, need to readjust our glasses to a realistic rather than an idealistic view

of the world, and couple it with the most significant trait any person can have: adaptiveness.

For me, the goal of the next wave of feminist activism is at last clear: expanding adaptiveness from our lives into the life of the culture we inhabit. Women are adaptable. We excel at it. Biologically, our bodies are coded to adapt to amazing extremes in the process of procreation—as anyone who has experienced or witnessed pregnancy and labor can attest. That women have for centuries been doing the work of bearing and raising children on top of the labor of the home and of the field and factory attests to the female ability to adapt to extraordinary demands. The question is, should such demands of adaptiveness be limited to women? Are we, as one of my friends recently put it when asked to take on yet another project at work on top of her already overflowing work load and her “home” work of parenting five children, being punished for our competence?

My nine-year-old son recently watched a television program in which scientists discussing the shrinking Y chromosome speculated that the male of the species could eventually die out due to becoming unnecessary for perpetuating the species. The genetic evolution of some species has been toward parthenogenesis, the female of the species adapting to a point where procreation is possible with no input from the male. My son, who is just on the cusp of really getting the whole sex thing, voiced concern over the idea of men dying out. “Do you think that’s true?” he asked me. I had a flashback to an earlier discussion regarding his fear about what would happen to people when the sun becomes a red giant and burns up the earth in a few million years. I comforted him then by saying that given the long time we have to prepare for such an event, I was sure that our distant descendants of the human race would figure out a survival plan. Looking at his concerned face as he contemplated the idea of men—such as he will be one day soon—eventually becoming genetically unnecessary, I did not give a hint of the round of articles that came out a couple of years ago about the obsolete male, fueled in part by scientists in Japan successfully forcing parthenogenesis in genetically altered rats (Kono, *et. al.*, 2004; Loebel and Tam, 2004; Kirchheimer, 2004). That a Google search of the term “obsolete male” would turn up over two million hits. Instead, I told him I did not know if such a thing would happen, but that evolution occurs slowly over many thousands of years, so it would be a long, long time before we have to worry about it. “And maybe by then,” he replied, “We’ll have figured some things out.” “I hope so,” I said.

But I was thinking we need to figure something out now. My husband and son don’t want to be obsolete men who are just obstacles to women’s success in the world. They don’t want to have their contribution to family reduced to their paycheck. They want to be working partners in the business of life. And I’m sure that women don’t want to have to evolve into some double-bodied creature that manages to be in two places at once—earning a living and parenting her children—or, worse, evolve into two types of females, like worker bees and

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procreating bees. Probably there are many men who still need to adapt further to the necessary roles of active fatherhood and full partners in running the home. But a key change needs to occur in our culture. Unless we advocate for significant change in the structure of our societies—changes that adapt to the needs of parents and children by valuing the traditional “women’s work” of home-making and child-rearing, we may be headed to cultural disaster. How long can we survive no paid family leave, little flexibility for workers to attend school functions or parent teacher conferences or to take care of sick children or elderly parents without jeopardizing their jobs, the high price of motherhood (so well documented by Ann Crittenden, 2001) that forces stay-at-home and part-time working mothers to sacrifice financial security in order to parent their children, welfare policies that insist on forcing mothers of young children into the work force?

As it stands now, with too many corporate and government policies that either conflict with or fail to acknowledge family needs, I can’t help but wonder—is America insisting on becoming the Titanic? A luxury liner, the grandest ship in the world with all the amenities imaginable for the upper class and locked decks to prevent the lower classes from climbing out—all sailing merrily to a watery death because we refuse to provide adequate lifeboats, escape routes, and support ships during the inevitable challenges of life? The biggest and most predictable set of challenges that the majority of adults face in life reside in parenthood. I think it’s time our culture starts to recognize that raising children isn’t like an iceberg in treacherous seas threatening to do us all in. It’s more like the rudder that should be properly positioned to guide us to calmer waters.

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Lorna A. Turnbull

The Dilemmas of Feminist Activism in Law

A recent Supreme Court of Canada decision about the constitutionality of maternity and parental benefits made some important statements about the role of the state and our collective responsibility for the work of bearing and raising children. The challenge for feminists is how to build on the court's recognition of substantive equality when the very system that was affirmed by their judgment is one that many agree is the wrong system for delivering maternity and parental benefits. This article reviews the history of maternity and parental benefits as well as the problems associated with the current model and outlines the highlights of the Supreme Court decision. It concludes with a reflection on where such progress leaves us if it is a positive step in the wrong direction.

Twenty years after the coming into force of the Charter equality guarantee the Supreme Court of Canada has recently breathed new life into the concept of substantive equality as it pertains to bearing and caring for children.¹ We could even look at this decision as coming full circle, back to the place where the Court first pronounced in 1989 that “those who bear children and benefit society as a whole thereby should not be economically or socially disadvantaged....”² Now, in 2005, the Court unanimously recognized the economic costs of motherwork and stepped away from the current tendency to reprivatize women’s social reproductive labour and upheld the power of the federal government to provide maternity and parental benefits as part of the Employment Insurance scheme. In this short note I will briefly outline the history and current functioning of the federal maternity/parental benefit scheme, describe the Quebec Court of Appeal decision and provide a few highlights from the Supreme Court reasons. I will close by looking at the question of whether and how activists concerned with equality for mothers can advance a maternity and

parental benefits scheme that truly meets the needs of all.

Initial attempts by the federal government to enact a national unemployment insurance scheme in the 1930s were challenged by the provinces as an encroachment on the provincial jurisdiction over property and civil rights. As a result a constitutional amendment was negotiated that allowed the introduction of a federal unemployment program in 1940. Maternity benefits were added in 1971 and were expanded to include 10 weeks of parental benefits in 1990. In 2001 parental benefits were extended to 35 weeks. It is section 22 that provides for the payment of maternity benefits to an eligible woman for a period of fifteen weeks surrounding the birth of her child. Section 23 provides for the payment of parental benefits for a total of 35 weeks to qualifying parents of a newborn or child placed for adoption. In order to qualify for either of these benefits the parent claiming them must have worked at least 600 hours in the preceding 52-week period. Under the scheme the benefit payable is 55 percent of the recipient's weekly wage to a maximum of \$413/week. With benefit levels this low many women cannot afford to take a maternity or parental leave. In families that can afford a 45 percent cut in income it is the lower income earning parent who will take the leave and in a heterosexual relationship this is predominantly the mother. In fact as recently as 2000, 98 percent of all recipients of maternity/parental benefits under the scheme were women.³

Only claimants with sufficient workforce attachment are eligible for maternity or parental benefits, thus workers who are self-employed, working part-time or on contract, or other contingent workers are excluded from the benefit. As a result, more than one third of new mothers do not have access to maternity or parental benefits. Half of these are women who did not engage in paid work, or did not have sufficient hours of paid work, in the qualifying period because of the nature of their employment or because they were caring for their other children.⁴ These inequalities are at the root of the many criticisms that have been leveled at the scheme over the years. Various challenges to the scheme for its failure to meet women's equality rights have failed at the level of the Federal Court of Appeal. For example, in *Lesiuk v. Canada*⁵ a mother of one child challenged the denial of maternity benefits for the birth of her second child on the basis that the qualifying requirement discriminated against her because her caregiving responsibilities for her first child affected the number of hours she was available to work preceding the birth of her second child. Her equality arguments were successful before the Umpire who found that the eligibility requirements had a disproportionate impact on individuals with childcare responsibilities, predominantly women. The Federal Court of Appeal struck down that decision on the basis that women's human dignity was not demeaned by a denial of benefits. The Federal Court of Appeal employed similar logic in *Miller v. Canada*,⁶ a challenge to the claw-back of regular benefits where a claimant has received maternity/parental benefits.

The essence of women's claims relating to the maternity/parental benefit scheme is that it was designed to meet the needs of the ideal male worker, one

who worked full-time, year round, and who had a partner at home taking care of all domestic labour. Because women's working patterns do not mirror those of this ideal worker, maternity and parental benefits have fitted poorly into this model with the most significant impact on marginalized women who already experience the greatest inequalities in the labour force. As Nitya Iyer has argued, the existing model reinforces the motherwork of the predominantly middle and upper class women who can access maternity benefits while "the maternal work of other women workers remains privatized and invisible."⁷

In Quebec, the story has unfolded somewhat differently. Throughout the 1990s women's groups and organized labour in the province worked with the government to develop a broader and richer maternity and parental benefits scheme under the opt-out provisions of the federal *Employment Insurance Act*. This new Quebec model suffered from fewer of the discriminatory problems that plague the federal scheme but negotiations between the province and the federal government on the cost sharing dragged on for years. Finally, in March of 2002 the Quebec government asked the Court of Appeal for Quebec to rule on the constitutionality of ss. 22 and 23 of the *Employment Insurance Act*.⁸ The Court of Appeal held that the federal government did not have the power to provide maternity and parental benefits under the unemployment insurance constitutional amendment. The Court held that this amendment was to be narrowly construed as relating only to loss of employment for economic reasons. Maternity or parental benefits are more properly seen as part of a social program aimed at a situation that is personal in nature and therefore properly belong within provincial jurisdiction. The Court, echoing the formal equality notions of voluntariness that were rejected in *Brooks*,⁹ stated that matters of personal choice could not be covered by an insurance scheme that is intended to protect against unforeseeable risk.

The decision of the Court of Appeal provoked a great deal of anxiety because of the mixed message it sent. On the one hand, the more progressive Quebec plan that had been hard won by a broad coalition of community activists had been upheld. On the other, a finding that the scheme was outside of federal jurisdiction raised serious concerns for the continued availability of any maternity/parental benefits elsewhere in Canada. Moreover the regressive language of voluntariness and choice was contrary to feminist theorizing about gender equality and women's social reproductive work. These tensions created an untenable situation for women's groups who might have considered intervening before the Supreme Court of Canada, as none wanted to be seen to be arguing against the accomplishments of our Quebec sisters and yet none wanted to lose the national program or leave the formal equality construction of women's childbearing work unchallenged. This ambivalence perhaps explains the absence of any feminist interveners before the Supreme Court.

In October 2005, in a decision where a majority of the judges were women, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the maternity/parental benefits on two grounds. On the division of powers aspect of the case the court

held that the maternity/parental benefits were in pith and substance a “mechanism for providing replacement income during an interruption of work. This is consistent with the essence of the federal jurisdiction ... namely the establishment of a public insurance program the purpose of which is to preserve workers’ economic security and ensure their re-entry into the labour market by paying income replacement benefits in the event of an interruption of employment.”¹⁰ It did not accept the dichotomy between “economic” and “personal” reasons that had been relied upon by the Court of Appeal. The Court also rejected the narrow original intent approach of the Court of Appeal although it did acknowledge the political elements at play in defining the features of federalism and affirmed that the “task of maintaining the balance between federal and provincial powers falls primarily to governments.”¹¹

Although it is not explicitly set out, the Court also brought a substantive equality approach to this case. Madam Justice Deschamps recognizes that “in our times, having a child is often the result of a deliberate act decided on by one or both parents. There are many facets to pregnancy however. Despite all the technological progress that has been made, conception does not result from a mathematical calculation that can be used to determine when or even if it will occur. In addition, the benefit derived from procreation extends beyond the benefit to the parents. Children are one of society’s most important assets, and the contribution made by parents cannot be overstated.... The decision to offer women the possibility of receiving income replacement benefits when they are off work due to pregnancy is therefore a social policy decision that is not incompatible with the concept of risk in the realm of insurance, and that can moreover be harmoniously incorporated into a public unemployment insurance plan.”¹² This language underlines the benefit society derives from women’s reproductive labour and the collective responsibility to support women in their roles as workers and mothers. It represents a move away from the privatizing approach that is seen in many recent decisions that touch upon social reproduction. The decision also seems to recognize that maternity/parental benefits are different from regular unemployment benefits because they are designed to meet the particular needs of women: “a growing portion of the labour force is made up of women, and women have particular needs that are of concern to society as a whole. An interruption of employment due to maternity can no longer be regarded as a matter of individual responsibility. Women’s connection to the labour market is well established, and their inclusion in the expression “unemployed persons” is as natural an extension as the extension involving other classes of insured persons who lose their employment income.... The social nature of unemployment insurance requires that Parliament be able to adapt the plan to the new realities of the workplace. Some eligibility requirements derive from the essence of the unemployment concept, while other requirements are, rather mechanisms that reflect a social policy choice linked to the implementation of the plan.”¹³

The power of this decision is that it represents the strongest statement of

the public, collective responsibility for the work of raising future generations since *Brooks* and it affirms an existing mechanism for providing at least some level of that public support. The challenge it presents is that many feminists and other activists in this area are agreed that maternity and parental benefits are best provided outside of the unemployment scheme where they could be expanded to cover the many marginalized women who are currently excluded from the benefits. The current scheme is still far from meeting the needs of the most vulnerable women in Canadian society and has significant regressive implications even for the more privileged among us. Because women still do the bulk of the work of caring for children even when they are employed in paid work inequalities in the maternity/parental benefits scheme disadvantage them disproportionately compared to men. A full realization of women's equality rights requires an adequate maternity/parental benefits scheme.

The strategic question facing activists now is how to continue to promote a broad social program with minimum national standards while advocating additions and enhancements to the program that are antithetical to its continued existence within the *Employment Insurance Act*. This is an especially pressing concern when the Supreme Court has taken a significant step in the direction of equality in a case that reinforces the position of maternity/parental benefits within the *Act*. Should we build on this momentum and lobby for a richer, more extensive benefit program along the lines of the Quebec program? Or should we be seeking a universal program that would include all mothers regardless of their connection with the work force in a way that recognizes the inherent value of each one's motherwork. There are numerous proposals for reform to the *Employment Insurance Act* that have been circulated recently, and practically speaking, such an incremental approach is probably the correct one. It is important to keep our larger, transformative, ideal visions of full equality in sight, but as we grapple with this challenge we should not forget to celebrate the victory this case represents for women who are struggling to reconcile their roles as mothers and workers in contemporary Canadian society.

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¹Reference re *Employment Insurance Act (Can.)* ss. 22 and 23, 2005 SCC 56.

²*Brooks v. Canada Safeway Ltd* [1989] 1 S.C.R. 1219.

³See generally Turnbull, Lorna A., *Double Jeopardy: Motherwork and the Law* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2001).

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⁴Shillington, Richard. 2003. Access to Maternity Benefits, http://www.shillington.ca/publications/maternity_benefits.pfd.

⁵[2003] 2 F.C. 697 (C.A.). For more on this case see Turnbull, Lorna A. "How does the Law Recognize Work?" (2004) 6 *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 58.

⁶2002 FCA 370. For more on this case see Turnbull, *ibid*.

⁷Iyer, Nitya, "Some Mothers are Better than Others: A Re-examination of Maternity Benefits" in Susan Boyd, ed. *Challenging the Public/Private Divide: Feminism, Law and Public Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) at 177. There is a voluminous academic commentary on the limits of the current maternity/parental benefits scheme that cannot reasonably be summarized here although reference to the Iyer article and to Turnbull, *supra* note 3 will give a reader some sense of the literature.

⁸[2004] R.J.Q. 399 (C.A.).

⁹*Supra* note 1.

¹⁰*Supra* note 2 at para 68.

¹¹*Ibid* at para 10.

¹²*Ibid* at para 54 & 56.

¹³*Ibid* at para 66.

Gina Wong-Wylie

Images and Echoes in Matroreform *A Cultural Feminist Perspective*

From a feminist perspective, the essence of life experience is construed in reflective narrative understandings. In this paper, the author shares personal stories that are reflected through photographic images. Photos capture a singular moment through the eye of the lens and the camera's partial scope; however, images embody echoes of deeply held stories. As a woman in early motherhood, the author's construction of herself as a "mother" only previously lived in wonderings and glimpses of her childhood experiences. The echoes heard through images of her youth harkens to underlying tensions and experiences of a Chinese Canadian girlhood. The process of "capturing" through the lens allowed this Chinese feminist researcher, writer, and mother to reflect on her youth and transform the dissonance of early experiences into harmony. This process represents the author's drawing of deep etchings on a previously invisible "motherline." A series of seven photographs and echoing stories outline issues in mothering, racial tensions, bi-cultural identity, and belonging, while proposing a new concept of "matro-reform." Emerging from Adriene Rich's "matro-phobia," the author argues for a more empowering concept of matro-reform, which is defined as an act, desire, and process of claiming motherhood power; it is a progressive movement to mothering that attempts to institute new mothering rules and practices apart from one's motherline.

Every moment of the day, we partake in an incessant parade of events that constitute our lives. Psychologist George Kelly (1969) reminds us that if we fail to make something of these events, we gain little in the way of experience from having been present when they happened. Kelly asserted that it is not the happening that makes us "experienced," but rather the successive construing and reflecting on the happenings that enrich our lives.

In this paper, by listening to echoes reverberating from photographic

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images, I was able to recognize how slowing down and deliberately reflecting on experiences transform the fragmented happenings of my girlhood and motherhood into poignant mementoes. Indeed, constructing and composing life stories are fundamental to comprehending ourselves. Stories or “narratives” derive the fabric and essence of who I am as a feminist, mother, academic, Chinese woman, and psychologist. I have experienced a bone deep understanding that I live through stories (Mair, 1988) and that in telling and sharing them, I can reaffirm them, modify them, and envision new plots and stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991).

Photos capture a singular moment through the eye of the lens and the camera’s partial scope; however, images embody echoes of deeply held stories. As a woman in early motherhood, the construction of myself as a “mother” only previously lived in wonderings and glimpses of childhood experiences. The echoes heard through snapshots of my youth harkens to underlying tensions and experiences of a Chinese Canadian girlhood. The process of “capturing” through the lens allowed me to reflect on my youth and transform the dissonance into harmony. This process represents my drawing of deep etchings on a previously invisible “motherline.” Through outlining issues in mothering, racial tensions, bi-cultural identity, and belonging, I deploy my process of *matro-reform*. This process is not only reforming and reaffirming; it is a feminist act of voicing up and out of invisibility and silence.

Korean American writer, Joonuk Huh eloquently captured that “[f]or the daughter-writers of our century, narratives are a means of rescuing themselves and their mothers through the act of storytelling” (2000: 268). Huh captured the poignancy of narratives as a way of emerging from invisibility for Asian mothers and daughters. Indeed, through unearthing old photographs, taking new ones, and hearing and writing echoing stories, I rescued myself and simultaneously contribute to the visibility of an Asian mother/daughter Canadian experience.

Images and echoes

Hearing echoes amongst dissonance

The camera battery power reads “low.” I am determined to take these last few—“Click,” “Click,” “Click”... convinced that the final few are where echoes can be heard the loudest. Trees ... flowers ... paths ... people.... Unfettered from the pressure of “getting it this time,” I freely click away.

The USB port connects my camera to the computer, like joining mind to spirit; I translate the images, waiting for meaningful echoes to call to me. Instead, they come up blurred and crazy-colored. Jumbled. Not a pretty patched quilt of colors... but rather technology and color gone wrong.

Undo “delete,” perhaps there is an echo here if I listen....

Bold hues of purples, blues, greens, greys, and reds are fighting energy with each other. They are a blur of emotions overriding the moment, muting the events.



Echoes of Peers

In a Montreal, Canadian girlhood, sounds of ridicule emanate from schoolmates. “Chink, Chink, Chink” is chanted in indignant rhythm. Images behind the blitz of emotions show little girls and boys spitting on the sidewalk at my feet as they chase and kick me.

I can’t recall my feelings in those moments, nor my reactions. I must have felt powerless, confused, and helpless... like a child falling down after being tripped. But as to the exact feelings, and how much the scrape hurt, I am uncertain. I’d like to imagine that I wasn’t affected by their insults: that I ignored them and skipped the rest of the way home, indifferent to their name-calling and cruelty; that I went homebound looking forward to a sweet, Chinese sticky bun as my after school snack. Yet, this was probably not the case. Through even blurred memories, zaps of intense emotions, and amidst uncertainty of immediate feelings, one message sinks in loud and clear: I am different. But not only am I different, I am inferior to these white-skinned, fair-haired children.

A snapshot captures life lived in moments and bytes. It does not however, preserve the underlying emotions. I search my memory bank but cannot recall my feelings about the ridicule, or remember a salient moment when I felt a certain way about myself or about these white children. Like a pot of water on

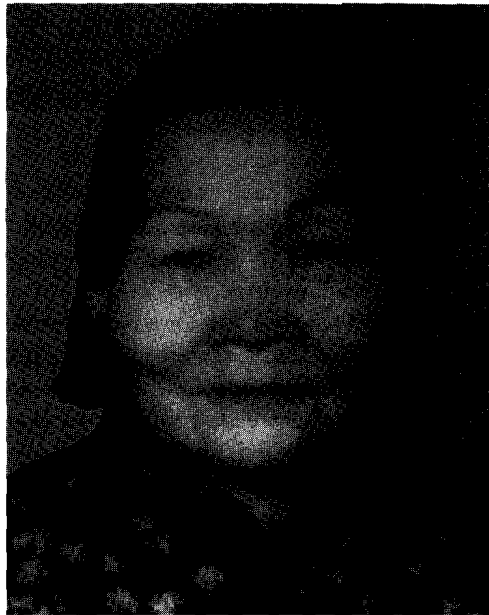
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a low-flamed stove, the heat slowly penetrates into the viscera of my soul. Their bitter words... their fingers pulling at the sides of their faces to imitate my Chinese eyes ... flavours the pot and simmers it ... stewing passively over the years ... in ways that I can recognize in retrospect.

I recall praying and wishing deep within myself that I could be different from “inferior” Chinese people. The greatest compliment anyone could have paid me during my early teen years was that I did not look or act Chinese. I strove hard for this ... and it was not difficult since I was immersed in Canadian culture and spoke English without an accent. I spoke no Chinese at all and when asked if I knew how, I denied that I had any comprehension whatsoever. I spent immeasurable amounts of time trying to alter my appearance. All because I believed the natural “me” was worthless. I struggled not wanting to be that Chinese girl with scraped knees. Trying to be who I am not ... trying to be what I have not yet become.

*Echoing Wonder ... what of my daughters?
Will they too hear echoes of cultural dissonance?*

Grandmothers: Dissonance relived



Echoes of Gnin

I was always darker skinned and further tanned myself to achieve an exotic look to hide/cover/ the obvious “Chinese” pale-yellowness. Gnin would pull me toward her and sit me in her lap. In Toi San she scolds me about how dark-skinned I am and how I do not speak Chinese anymore ... disapproval and

disappointment in her lilting voice. Barely understanding her words, I easily pick up disapproval and judgment in her tone. I have become unaccepted in two cultures.



Echoes of an Invisible Motherline

I look at this old photo of my Po Po taken when she first immigrated to Canada. Many immigrants from Hong Kong hold sacred their passport photo as a symbol of new life, freedom, and chance for prosperity. In my family, these passport photos are blown up 8 x 10 and framed to commemorate the individual at their funeral. The photo is then hung on the wall in the house of the eldest son as a shrine to remember and honor.

As a child, the shrine of my great ancestors lived in the basement of my home. A red light bulb shone night and day between the faded black and white photos. Red, the Chinese color symbolizing happiness and prosperity, only enhanced my fear of the shrine. In the middle of the night I would scurry past with my eyes clamped shut to prevent their images from searing into memory and allowing death to pop up whenever she wanted to frighten me. For many years, I did all I could to avoid looking at the photos.

Now, as I look deeply into this photo, I am not afraid anymore. It doesn't represent "death" ... now, it echoes "missed opportunity." In the far recesses of my mind I hear Po Po. I am taken back to the many times I hear her voice: hearing but not comprehending. One thing is certain, she speaks and speaks and speaks incessantly and loudly talking to and "at" my mother. My sisters and I count how many spaces between the loud trills of Chinese words we only

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partially understand and laugh at not being able to get to 3 seconds. How can she breathe through all that talking and what did she have so much to talk about? Other times, my mother spends countless hours on the phone merely saying “Ah ... O ... Ah ... Ah.”

On the first snowfall in early winter of 1997, I visit Po in the palliative care unit at the hospital. If only I could have understood those animated stories she told in half-Cantonese/half-Toi San and that she would fill my ears with—stories of her youth, her life, her triumphs, and struggles. What was it like raising two children single-handedly in Hong Kong and how did she maintain her steadfast, unwavering commitment to my grandfather who died when my mother was a girl? Most honoring Chinese wives do not marry after their husbands die. Did my Po Po not re-marry out of family honor or did she not remarry out of love? She died with those stories I will never pass on to my children nor know of my ancestral roots.

*Echoing Wonder ... what of my daughters and granddaughters?
Will colour, culture, language, and generational differences
impede them from knowing the stories I have lived by?
Can my Motherline become visible?*

Alice Walker’s 1983 essay *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* introduced the term “motherline,” which Sara Ruddick further describes in *Maternal Thinking* (1989). Motherline is a feminist, maternal genealogy of knowledge and wisdom handed down from mother to daughter through generations. Motherline becomes invisible (sometimes warped, crooked, thinned, or severed) when cultural dissonance impedes the growth.

Additionally, motherline can be warped and severed by the grand narratives of a particular culture. For instance, the Head Tax imposed on Chinese Immigrants by the Canadian government in 1885, which rose from \$50 to \$500 per Chinese person, followed by the *Chinese Exclusion Act* in 1905 was legislated racism. Such stigma in peoples’ history precludes visibility of motherline as mothers and grandmothers silence themselves and each other from recounting shameful stories of exclusion. Shame from poverty, from stigmatization, and internalized fear hindered my grandmothers and mother from drawing the motherline.

In my girlhood: Crumpled worth

My tiny frame shakes hysterically,
I am beyond fear.
At the age of 3, I know terror
as it rips through my small frame.
Screaming and shrieking at the top of my lungs...
Heaving and sobbing so greatly that the air

Images and Echoes in Matroreform

fails the expression of my helplessness.
Huge silences fill the gap between bellowed fear.
The basement cellar is my
Forever imprinted dungeon of abandonment.
The floor is cold and hard ...
darkness makes my dismal aloneness all the more palpable.
There are spiders here – no time for fear.
I must get out before the ghosted blackness snuffs out my existence.
Heart pounding with a life of its own,
I hold my breath, close my eyes,
and wail for reprieve as I live out my necessary punishment.
Punishment for what?
Perhaps I spilled my drink;
didn't finish dinner;
touched something not mine;
lied.

The crime is not what sears my anguish.
The punishment creases my dignity...
folds it tidily and
tears it to shreds.

*Echoing Wonder ... what of my daughters?
Will I mother with intention to their self-worth and dignity?*



Echoes of Worthlessness

Gina Wong-Wylie

In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich described matrophobia as a phenomenon of fear of turning into one's mother and the ambivalence in reproducing a mother's oppression and subjugation: "Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr" (1976: 193-195).

Though Rich (1976) appropriately defined a poignant fear, her use of "phobia" inaccurately defines what I believe is a keenly felt experience. Rather, fear of mother oppression and duplicating our mother's well intentioned but imperfect practices is not irrational, nor illogical, as the term "phobia" suggests. Instead, I believe it is a common experience, particularly of feminist mothers, to not want to reproduce, or be trapped in the oppressive bonds of conventional motherhood. The term "*matro-reform*" depicts what Rich explored and further describes an empowering process. I define *matroreform* as an act, desire, and process of claiming motherhood power; it is a progressive movement to mothering that attempts to institute new mothering rules and practices apart from one's motherline. *Matroreform* is a cognitive, affective, behavioural, and spiritual reformation of mothering from within including removal and elimination of obstacles to self-determination and self agency. Just as Huh, at a young age, makes up her mind not to resemble her mother, I too, experience reluctance to emulate my mother and must reform mothering from scratch.

Within my process of *matroreform*, I have recognized that my parents loved and love me deeply; nevertheless, many of their methods of teaching served to fortify my desire for *matroreform*. The authoritarian and punitive style of parenting and the cultural chasm between an immigrant mother and a rebellious, first generation, Canadian-born girl were significant barriers to a close mother-daughter relationship. It was not until adulthood, when I became pregnant with my first child, that the active process of *matroreform* was initiated.

Image and echoes of *matroreform*

July 16, 1999

Dear Baby,

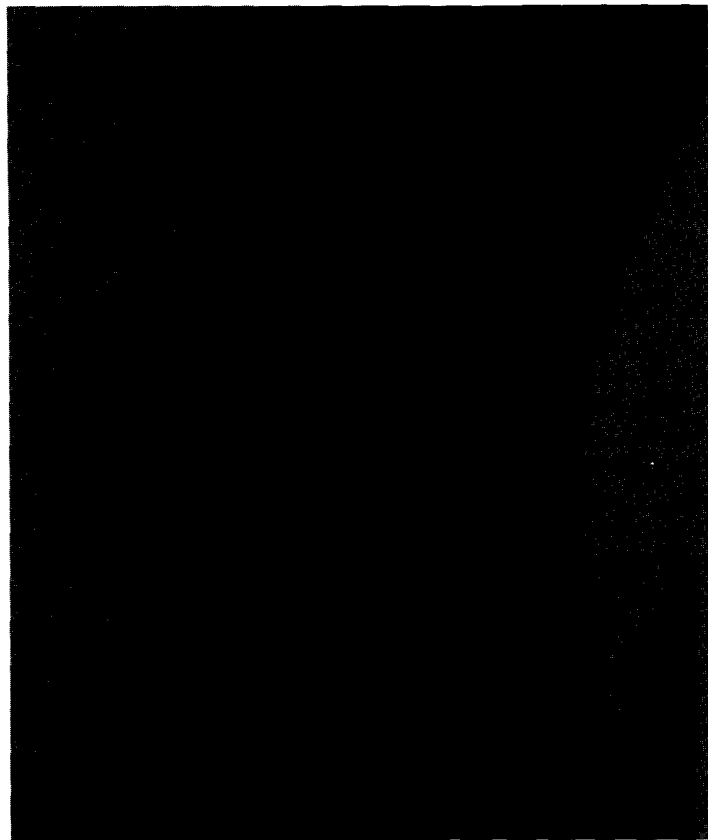
According to the ultrasound technician you are a girl. This might sound awful but it frightens me a little that you could be a girl. I've missed having a close relationship with my mother and I'm afraid that I may not know how to foster a strong and caring mother-daughter relationship with you. Silly ... because I know deep down, who I am is very unlike my mother. Some part of me believes that if you were a boy—I would have a better chance of having a different relationship with you.

August 30, 1999

Dear Baby,

I just turned over in bed—slowly and painfully so that I can write to you. My, are you (am I) big at 37 weeks!! Doug thinks you will be 8 or 9 pounds. We'll see. My candidacy is in one week. I can't wait to get past this hurdle so that I can focus all my energy on you.

I took part in a woman's Ph.D. dissertation research on the culture of mothering. I talked about not feeling like a mother yet. I described the non-supportive relationship I have with my mother and the trepidation it has fostered in my image of our relationship. I talked about how scary it is to me that you might be a girl with an expected due date right on my birthday. It's hard not to worry about repeating patterns when you could be born the day my mother gave birth to me. However, I also talked about the potential for healing—to know for myself that I can love you and be a good mother.



Echoes of Wonders

Gina Wong-Wylie

October 18, 1999

Dear Iris,

An unbelievable 6 weeks have gone by since your birth. You are lying next to me and for the first time since your arrival I have a few moments to write down some thoughts....

I could never have imagined how instantly I fell in love with you and how strongly and powerfully I feel that love. Everyday I tell you ... I can't tell you enough. All my anxieties and insecurities I had about being a mother were washed away when you crooked your head up to gaze into my eyes seconds after you were born. Your birth was incredible—brought out the best in me while challenging me to the fullest. I know you will continue to do this the rest of our lives. Thank you for coming into my life and for showing me my strength and ability to profoundly love a daughter.

I have many hopes that I can be a good mother to you. I hope that someday when you read this journal—many, many years from now—that you will be able to say that you have a good relationship with me and know how much you are loved and cared for. I hope you will be able to say that I've been unconditionally supportive of you and always let you know how important you are to me.

I feel that my life would not be as rich and meaningful if I cannot engender a feeling of worth and love in my children. I know now that I can forge my own ground for being a mother that is right for me. You're 9.6 pounds today—every ounce a joy!

October 11, 2002

Dear Iris and nine-week-old baby in my tummy,

It's past midnight on Friday and I just got into bed. Am thinking about how lucky I am to have you all in my life. Doug and I decided last night that 3 is the best age! Iris, you are so capable, independent, and articulate. You're throwing the frisbee well and hitting the ball with the bat. You love biking and want to go skiing. I love your sense of adventure and risk-taking. I feel proud that I am able to encourage you to explore your world and to stay a far enough distance, to let you learn from your own mistakes... Though never "perfect," I know that I am a nurturing and loving mother.

I look at you now and listen to the rain rattle and beat against the pavement outside. You've grown so much in a year...

And Patti Sinclair's wisdom echoes to me:

Our children offer us the sacred opportunity to overcome our deepest

fears, challenging us with our life issues, our fallibility, and our humanness. Also in the process, we have the greatest opportunity to witness a new beauty in life and experience a depth of gratitude and joy that stops and stills us. (2001: 139).



Echoes of a Visible Motherline

Going forward in motherhood



Echoes of Timelessness

Gina Wong-Wylie

Calming seas
The vast unknown...
how will this story of mine end?
All hallowed echoes heard through time,
Crashing against the waves
heard by all mothers.

I know
The answers to my echoing wonders live in the stillness of the water
and the grace of a lifetime...

The cultural chasm, this great water divide
Looks less ominous looking inward
Looking outward,
with You at my side.

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Maureen Linker

Explaining the World

Philosophical Reflections on Feminism and Mothering

This essay explores the evolving systems of justification and morality that emerge from mother and child dialogues. Contrasting a mother's ethic of care with a surrounding cultural climate of violence, I argue that children are capable of providing insight to this seeming social contradiction. I focus on a series of conversations I've had with my now five year old son with regard to naturally occurring harm (i.e. floods, disease...) and human created harm (i.e. war, violence, physical intimidation). I argue that my son's efforts to "make the symbolic real" are consistent with philosopher Gareth Matthews' (1980) claim that young children are capable of complex philosophical thinking though it may go dormant at about eight or nine years of age. My view is that philosophical thinking between mother and child typifies the feminist ideal that respectful investigation can occur between two parties who are unequal in terms of social power. Though my son is smaller, less experienced, and physically weaker, he has come to believe that these qualities will not be relevant in others' assessment of his explanations of the world.

In the context of academic scholarship, there is something both banal and transgressive in writing about child rearing. Banal because if one appeals to experiences with one's own child the work risks being seen as something like an episode of *Kids Say the Darndest Things!* Or even worse, the professional equivalent to a parent pulling pictures out of a wallet while you are forced to smile and coo.

But it is also transgressive, particularly for a woman, to focus on child rearing in a professional context. The efforts women have made to be taken seriously in academic and professional realms has often meant that they have had to minimize or downplay their role as mothers and care givers. It is also transgressive particularly in my own field of analytic philosophy, to appeal to

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something so particularized, so intimate and subjective as one's relationship to one's own child. Philosophy in the western tradition has had a long history of aiming toward general, universal principles of human experience that transcend the daily rituals of tending to the immediate needs of the very young.

Nevertheless, research that starts with one's own child is not anomalous in mainstream academic scholarship. For instance Jean Piaget (1957), in his research on children's cognitive development, very often used his own children as subjects of his research. For this reason Piaget referred to himself as a "father/experimenter." In this essay, I will adopt a somewhat similar perspective though unlike Piaget I will not describe my role as mother/experimenter but instead as "mother/philosopher." However like Piaget, I will attempt to transform what I believe to be fairly ordinary experiences with my own child into some cogent reflections on the general nature of philosophy, feminism and the reasoning that occurs between parent and child.

My research and scholarly interests have generally focused on social and cultural standards of rationality and reasonableness. Though my interests in feminist philosophy and social theories of knowledge have led me to question norms of "objectivity" I have still conducted my own scholarship from the perspective of an objective analyst. This present project then takes a different turn. Starting from my own experience as a feminist philosopher interested in knowledge, theory construction, and justification I examine my role as the mother of a young child, who, like most young children, is constantly in the process of building and rebuilding his theory of the world. Noam Chomsky (1959) has described the young child learning language as a "little linguist" constantly in the process of confirming or disconfirming their theory of grammar. I would like to offer some perspective on the young child as the "little epistemologist" constantly in the business of seeking the best account of their experience guided by norms of consistency and coherence. With regard to some philosophical skills, ones that are particularly of interest to feminist philosophers like empathy, care, and responsibility to others, young children may be in a better position than perhaps more mature children or adults.

That children are capable of sustained philosophical thinking is well illustrated by philosopher Gareth Matthews in his book *The Philosophy of Childhood* (1994). Matthews writes: "... my own research suggests spontaneous excursions into philosophy are not at all unusual for children between the ages of three and seven; in somewhat older children, though, even eight-and-nine year olds, they become rare, or at least rarely reported. My hypothesis is that once children become well settled into school they learn that only useful questioning is expected of them. Philosophy either goes underground to be pursued privately and not shared with others, or else becomes totally dormant" (1994: 5). Matthews' exploration into the value of children's philosophical thinking is unique in the philosophical literature. Though concerned to map out the parameters of "human" reasoning, most philosophy in the Western tradition has devalued or completely ignored the thinking of children.

Yet as a mother/philosopher I witness daily the dynamic interplay between my own efforts to set up some guiding principles for my child, and my child's response in testing the consistency of those principles against his own experiences. As a feminist, I am cognizant of the harm that hierarchies and dualities can do in explorations of knowledge and value. As a result, I have consciously sought to create the conditions for a joint partnership in explaining the world with my son. Of course I am aware that because I have more experience I can set boundaries and remind my son that "The stove is hot!" But it is in the deeper structural elements of how we explain the world that I see the tremendous potential for fruitful partnership. Philosopher Virginia Held has written: "There are no firm, precise, or lasting boundaries between the symbolic and the material in human affairs. Creating new cultural realities also means that you have now created new conditions for human behavior" (1993: 9). Nowhere does the lack of boundaries between the symbolic and the material seem more real to me than in raising a child. The framework of principles and values that I share with my child, become the very fabric of his world. And when that fabric fails to match up with what he encounters, he forces me out of a dire sense of consistency to either reframe my principles or make them real. In this way, parent and child together have to find a reasonable way to explain the world.

I was initially struck by my own son's tendency to construct grand unified theories when we were playing with his toy castle one afternoon, just before his third birthday. "You know," he said, "...every King has to be a man." Unable to resist my own training to form counterexamples I asked, "What about when I play that I am King?" He considered this for a moment and then said, "Oh yeah, every King is a man unless it is a Mommy King." What was remarkable to me about the comment was that it was so representative of trends in theory construction generally. As Thomas Kuhn has pointed out in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), historically, when a broad conceptual scheme faces a counter instance one viable strategy used by the theory's adherents is to subsume the instance under the theory.

The great twentieth-century American philosopher W.V. Quine (Quine and Ulian, 1978) offered some of the most powerful metaphorical images for theory construction and human knowledge building. One of these images was of a "Web of Belief" to illustrate how individual systems of human knowledge are constructed in an intricate web of intersecting beliefs with seemingly unreviseable beliefs at the core and less central beliefs at the periphery. The web metaphor lets us see the interconnections among beliefs and how a change in belief can resonate in a more or less significant way with the whole network of corresponding beliefs. As I witness my son constructing his own web of interconnected beliefs I also see how changes or revisions in his belief system permeate through other seemingly unrelated beliefs. At just around the age of two-and-a-half, when he started to understand that there was a difference between cartoon or drawn animals that do talk and photographs of animals in jungles or zoos that do not talk, I found him in our friend's kitchen asking her

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dog if he could talk. He is consistently at work matching the shape and design of his belief system with the shape and design of his experiences. And as I will argue, my role in helping him to do this forces me to reshape and revise my own view of the world.

Another metaphor for theory building that Quine (Quine and Ulian, 1978) offers is that of a person on a raft, roaring down a raging river. Constructing our theory of the world is like riding the raft and in the midst of the journey, we discover it needs repairing. We cannot stop the journey to assess the damage but rather we must repair and mend while we are moving, we have to grab for what we can while we are in motion and essentially do the best we can. In the same way, as children and adults trying to make sense of the world we have to revise, repair, and carry on all in the midst of the raging flow of experiences. The inputs do not stop because we are confused or because we have hit an inconsistency. We are forced to make some kind of sense or at least bracket the problem because we cannot make it all stop.

In my role as mother/philosopher I see evidence of this dynamic process of theory construction with my son, in two philosophical domains. The first involves matters of violence, peace and social justice; what we might think of as problems rooted in human choice and behavior. The second, what philosophers have traditionally called “natural evil,” includes illness, natural disasters, and natural death or problems that do not directly stem from human choice and behavior. While I recognize that these issues are not often paired with a sentimental view of the young child, I do want to show that they are relevant in the dialogues of parent and child. And in addition, I want to offer how my training in feminist philosophy has provided me with a more substantive lens from which to build a theory of the world with my son.

Negotiating peace and violence

We brought our son home from the hospital on the evening of September 10, 2001. After two days in the luxury of University of Michigan’s “birthing center” my husband and I looked forward to returning home to relish the two weeks (his paternity leave) we had together to just be a family. However, our pretense to some sense of control and preparedness was completely overturned the next morning. As I sat nursing my son on that brilliant fall morning my husband who had just gone out for bagels came flying back in the house. The way he ran in I thought he was going to be sick but instead of heading for the bathroom he ran straight for the TV. “What is it?” I asked. And then the events of September 11th unfolded before our eyes. Having been born and raised in New York City, with all my family and many of my closest friends in Brooklyn and Manhattan, I spent the day in a sheer panic unable to get through to my father, my brothers, my best friends. Our week of getting to know our baby and sharing childbirth stories with friends and family turned into the nightmare we all shared, as we watched thousands of people murdered on television.

Clearly, many other mothers and fathers throughout the world are forced

to deal with the horrors of war in a much more devastating, brutal, and heart wrenching way. Still comfortable in our middle-class lives, the violence of September 11th and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and now Iraq, have required very little of my small family in terms of material sacrifice. I don't pretend that my child has had to face the horrors of war up close, but nevertheless as long as he has been alive, there has a constant "culture of violence" more palpable for many Americans since our involvement in the war.

Feminist scholars in particular have been apt to recognize that military violence is not a distinct species of violence isolated from other social practices. As philosopher Sara Ruddick has argued in her book *Maternal Thinking*:

A continuum of harm, indifference, and willful injury connects bedroom, boardroom, death row, and battlefield; school room, university, welfare reductions, and precision-guided bombs; racial profiling, racist employment practices, and environmental hazards in the backyards of the poor. Children are taught not to hate force but to applaud it; they learn an elementary indifference to others' pain. (1989: 16)

However, the relationship between a mother and child with its emphasis on attentive care, loving connection, the devoted concern for the well-being of the body, and the peaceful, non-violent resolution of conflict, is more in line with what feminists have described as a "culture of care" and runs counter to the competing culture of violence. Much of the first several years of raising a child involve for most parents, creating this culture of care. The daily rituals of feeding, bathing, and dressing, all put the gentle care of the child's vulnerable body at the forefront of a parent's consciousness. When a child thrives, it is in the context of this loving attentive care. The violence and harm inflicted on human bodies during war run counter to every life preserving effort that parents engage in when raising a young child.

I first began to notice my son's struggle with these clashing cultures of care and violence when he started to ask why certain creatures were so "grumpy." In an animal encyclopedia given to him by a relative, he discovered a very vivid photograph of a snake with a small mouse squarely in its jaws. Outraged he brought it to my attention and demanded to know, "What is this grumpy snake doing to this mouse?" He sensed the danger in the picture and the powerlessness of the mouse about to be eaten. But I also recognized his absolute indignation that this was not the way to handle things. He knew already by the age of three, that biting, hitting, and punching were not options even if you felt like doing them. In terms of standard developmental models, his newfound restraint was right on target with most other children his age. So then what was this grown snake doing and what were we going to do about it? His general outrage at this kind of behavior resurfaced again and again as he discovered grumpy dragons, grumpy witches, grumpy people all using unacceptable

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methods in their interactions with others. Though we limited his television viewing and had never taken him to the movies, there were enough violent scenarios for him to wrestle with in his investigations of the animal kingdom, his trips to puppet shows, and his exploration of fairy tales. “Why are they so grumpy?” he always demanded to know. I tried to explain grumpiness in terms of a lack of love and affection and caring. “Some people are grumpy because no one really took care of them and made them feel loved so they don’t really know how to treat other people well. They’re unhappy and they take it out on others.” I could hear him then trying this out, saying to friends or relatives. “Some lions bite zebras because they’re grumpy and no one loved them.” I then had to explain why we don’t hold animals morally responsible for their actions. “They’re like babies” I proposed “they don’t really have any language and they don’t understand so we can’t be angry with them for hunting and biting other animals.” As time went on, I saw his concerns shift dramatically from animal suffering to the matter of human violence and inflicted pain and suffering.

I think my son’s most jarring encounter with the senselessness of human violence came after he saw a knight’s joust at a local Renaissance festival. The sight of four men dressed in full armor on horseback, carrying long jousting lances and charging at top speed was initially irresistible. He begged to get front row seats and squealed with excitement. But as the battle went on and the actors faked terrible injuries with phony blood and then eventually a painful death my son began his persistent chain of questioning. He couldn’t get the points out fast enough, tripping over his own thoughts and almost ranting into the noise of the crowd. “Why did the white knight, I mean how did the blue knight, why did the horse, who had the sword...”

In his book, *From Paris to the Moon*, Adam Gopnik’s (2000) wonderful account of raising his American child in Paris in the early 1990s, he describes “Why the Ape, Why the Man” moments with his son. The reference is to a visit Gopnik took with his then four-year-old son Luke to an aging dusty paleontology museum just outside of Paris. Upon entering the “Big Hall of Evolution” Gopnik and his son are faced with a huge statue with the title “The Great Struggle.” The statue shows a great ape with his hands wrapped around a beautiful human youth. The youth, as Gopnik explains, “before being killed by the ape, managed to plant an ax in the ape’s side, where it left a hideous and gaping wound, perfectly cut in the stone.” (2000: 185) Luke couldn’t get the questions out fast enough and all it sounded like to Gopnik’s ears was “why the ape, why the man, why the ape, why the man.” Gopnik’s son, like mine, was so filled with the combination of revulsion, curiosity, dissonance, and injustice at the sight of unrestrained violence that he went into overdrive processing the information. My son talked about the joust for weeks. He asked again and again why the blue knight sworded the white knight and whether the blue knight was still able to be a knight. He wanted to know what we would do if the blue knight came to our house. “Would you or Daddy sword him?” he asked totally prepared to revise the entire web of his belief system in light of this new radical data.

“No,” I told him, “we don’t hurt people’s bodies.” This was something he already knew but how then were adult knights getting away with it? He asked about the knight’s parents and wanted to know in detail where their mothers and fathers were? And who let them battle that way? I realized just how wildly inconsistent this battle seemed with everything my son knew from the loving care he received at home to the gentle nurturing environment of his preschool to the tenderness he was shown by our friends and family. How could it be that people could hurt other people in this way? Where were the consequences for such outrageous behavior? As he said to me during this period “if I throw my hard toy at you mom you should take it away and if a knight swords another knight you should take his sword away and never give it back to him.”

I see now how my son and I together will learn and relearn concepts of peace, fairness, and conflict resolution. In his demand for reasons and explanations he is guided by the culture of care we have raised him in and the culture of violence that surrounds us. In his relationships with adults, relationships of inherently unequal power where he is clearly the weaker and smaller, he has come to trust that he will not be totally dominated, that his interests will be affirmed and that every effort will be made to maintain connection through reasoned conversation. His size, his lack of experience, and his vocabulary have not been held against him in his interactions with bigger, more powerful and more well versed adults. As a result he has model for equal treatment that is independent of power and expertise. Yet another reality surrounds us and uses these properties as a justification for mistreatment and inhumanity.

The principled commitments on the part of parents, teachers, and adult friends to be respectful and concerned are transformed by my son into the very substance of the world. His map of reality integrates these principles as organizing forces. For this reason, a battle between knights represents a fault line in the material circumstances of the world, not just an ideological difference between pacifism and violence. The constant backdrop of the war has not yet surfaced in his awareness, but already my husband and I are preparing ourselves for how we will explain this conflict and what it will mean for all of us collectively, in committing ourselves to making a culture of care more real than a culture of violence.

Natural evil, illness and dying

One morning, while listening to the news on the radio, a report came on about three people killed in a fire. “What happened?” my son wanted to know. At this point, he had some grasp of the concept of death mostly because a small bird had flown straight into our window one weekend morning and fell instantly to its death right beside our door. We went outside to inspect and it seemed immediately he understood the profundity of the situation. “Its hurt?” he asked. We bent down to look more closely but it was clear that the bird’s necked had snapped. “Its dead” I said. “This means the poor bird won’t wake up.” I gave him a short succinct explanation on death coming after one is very,

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very old or very sick and the sadness that follows for those who live. For a few days after, my son kept checking and rechecking this new information. “If you die you never wake up?” “Yes,” I would tell him. “But you and Daddy are not so old or so sick so you won’t die?” “We won’t die for a long, long time. Not until you are very grown up and are able to take care of yourself and have friends who will be grown up and can take care of you too.” However, when we heard the radio report about the fire he flinched. “Some people died in a fire.” I was prepared to have to explain how fires start and reassure him that we were very safe and had smoke alarms and the rest when his question surprised me. “Why won’t they say the names?” I wasn’t sure. The reporter gave the report but never identified the victims. My son kept listening and was repeating out loud “Who? Who?” And yelled toward the radio: “Say who is in the fire!” Later that day in the car he would not let it go. “Why don’t they say on the radio who was in the fire?” I explained that they were not people we knew and maybe the reporter didn’t have the names. “Why not!” he bellowed. “Who was it? Say the names, say the names.” The same thing happened again when coverage of the Tsunami included reports of thousands dying in floods but no names were given. My son, while visiting our relatives over the winter vacation, heard his uncles discussing the reports of how many people died in the water. “Who are you talking about?” he demanded. Then he came to me and said, “They’re not saying the names. Who are they talking about that died in the water?” My response that we wouldn’t know the names even if we had them didn’t seem to quell his desire. “But what are the names?” he repeated.

I have come to realize that part of my son’s understanding of injury and death is that it is serious business that requires a solemn and respectful understanding of who exactly was involved. And if illness and death are natural and inevitable, which he seems to find reasonable, then there is at least a responsibility for those of us who are well, to remember the sick and dying in a respectful manner. Just identifying “people” as dying runs counter to his expectations about how such a matter should be discussed. The impersonal way in which we process death and dying presents significant obstacles to my son in his efforts to remain consistent in his own thinking.

If illness and death are inevitable, there is still the requirement that those who die be remembered and that their life be understood with meaning and in context. Going back to my son’s surprising outrage at a report on three people dying with no identifying names given, the outrage may reflect his own efforts to make sense out of the naturalness of dying and understand these deaths as lives well lived. It is also consistent with his sense of connection with other living things. “Chimpanzees have mothers and fathers right?” he’ll ask, and “my friends at school wear pajamas and sleep in a bed at night too?” That we all have names and that our names designate our unique humanity and worth, are further principles for organizing the world.

I am reminded of Maya Lin’s seemingly naïve and simple design for the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C. Initially many Americans

objected that it was just a big slab with names written on it. What kind of tribute was this to those who had died? How did it represent the valor and courage of those who were willing to die? However after some time, “the wall” became the most visited monument in the nation. One critic wrote: “In viewing the long stretch of names you are not told what to think or feel. The power of loss is impressed onto you by the simple presentation of names, each one a world unto itself” (Totty, 2003: 123). The childlike demand to know: “Who? Who? Say the name!” This may also be a demand for a better death, a demand for those of us who are in the position to remember, to take on the responsibility of adequately memorializing those who have died. This strong empathetic response that so many children seem to have does not mean that they are in a position to offer a moral justification or give an account of their methodology in reasoning through moral problems. But it does indicate a working understanding of some of the central paradigms for moral assessment including compassion and care for those in need.

As a feminist philosopher raising a young child, I have come to believe that children can be quite competent partners in developing large scale, consistently structured theories of reality. My own child’s capacity to construct a meaningful view of the world and then his subsequent protests when that view fails to measure up with his experiences has forced me to take seriously the blurry boundary between ideology and activism. In creating a culture of care with our son we have also had to face the culture of violence that also threatens our efforts to resolve conflicts peacefully. I recognize that I can’t create an alternative reality to the one in which we live and neither would I want to. Rather, together parent and child must find points of entry and consistency between *one realm* and the other. In trying to make sense of the clashes between care and violence for my son, I have come to see very clearly that it is not just the absence of harm that marks safety but rather the success at creating a variety of peaceful options. In the language of political theorist Linda Rennie Forcey (2001), it is not efforts at peacekeeping or peacemaking that transform a violent society but only through the work of peace building.

My son has demanded that I refocus and redefine a number of things that in the past I either misidentified or ignored. He demands, for instance, that we not only visit the library but also sing its praises. “The library is great, great, great” he crows. Because he can’t believe that he is allowed to take home a huge number of books, movies, and puppets. This is so unlike our visits to the mall for instance. After driving by a cemetery every day on the way to school he asked what the place was. I gave him a brief explanation and he immediately changed the name “cemetery” to a “remembering park.” Now when we pass the remembering park he points out to me in a solemn voice “the people standing in there are together with the trees and grass and they’re remembering the people who died and who they miss.” And his comment forces me to notice that in the middle of the afternoon there are individual people here and there standing around graves. He is confident that “trouble makers” and “bad guys”

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can be transformed with enough love and care. If not, they will have to sit, and not move, and listen to him talk to them in his loud voice. “I will tell them: You stop doing that!” he roars. But in each of these instances I see the possibilities for a different world. The library is not a good civic gesture but instead a model for demonstrating how pleasures like literature, art, and music can be both precious and still shared freely. Paying attention to the cemetery means that we don’t forget to maintain a somber and respectful awareness of death and the wounds it leaves on those who survive. And if we believe that people can be persuaded with either enough love or passionate dialogue we have a reason to develop critical thinking as an alternative to adversarial models of “might makes right.”

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Pamela Aronson

“Iraq is a Small Purple Planet” Feminist Mothering During Wartime

The work of a “military wife” and mother during a time of war comes with a set of unacknowledged assumptions about the parenting division of labour between spouses. Despite the presence of women and single parents, the military continues to operate within a gendered model that presupposes a male breadwinner and female homemaker. The military assumes that a wife will support the soldier by replacing his domestic work when “duty calls” and he is sent away. In this personal narrative, I draw on my own experiences during my husband’s military mobilization to examine the dimensions of feminist mothering during wartime. This article considers the experience of living with contradictions, the relationship between feminist mothering and anti-war activism, the development of independence among military wives, and the difference between feminist mothering born from privilege and feminist mothering resulting from necessity. I argue that the gendered character of the division of labour during a time of war depends on an unquestioning belief in the war itself. Feminist mothering is irreconcilable with the roles of a military wife because the war machine itself is maintained through, and benefits from, a gendered division of childcare and household labour. Not only does “maternal thinking” challenge the legitimization of war, but feminist parenting challenges military assumptions that families’ sacrifices are justified.

I gave birth to my second child in late December 2002. Two weeks later, and with a five day notice, my husband’s U.S. Army Reserve unit was mobilized to prepare for the impending war in Iraq. I quickly became a “military wife,” although I was a reluctant, anti-war, and feminist one.

This is a war story, but it is not the usual war story that makes the news. This story does not take place on the battlefield, nor does anyone die in this account of the U.S. war in Iraq. This war story is not even based in the country

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that experienced the war's deepest ravages. Rather, it is based in the United States, in the Midwest, in the relative calm and privilege that characterizes an average middle-class family. Despite being far from the battlefields, my reflections capture the contradictions inherent in feminist mothering during a time of war.

This personal narrative illustrates the ways in which feminist mothering directly conflicts with the position of a "military wife." The work of a "military wife" during a time of war comes with a set of unacknowledged assumptions about the parenting and work division of labour between spouses. Despite the presence of women and single parents in the military, it continues to operate within a gendered model that presupposes a male breadwinner and female homemaker (Enloe, 2000). The military assumes that spouses will be willing and able to bear the unexpected burden of living as a single parent at a moment's notice, regardless of their parenting, career and financial circumstances. In fact, I argue that the war machine itself is maintained through, and benefits from, an assumed gender division of childcare and household labour. In this context, feminist mothering takes on a particular meaning, as it involves not only equality in parenting and raising feminist children, but also active resistance to the war (see also Ruddick, 1989). In addition to questioning the goals of war, feminist mothering for me came to mean refusing to accept the gendered division of parenting that was thrust upon me by the military.

My experiences suggest that there is a difference between feminist mothering born from privilege and feminist mothering resulting from necessity. Before the mobilization, I approached feminism from a standpoint of deliberation and choice. My husband and I had feminist goals: equality in work and parenting, attachment parenting coupled with career commitment, and non-sexist childrearing. In contrast to this privileged perspective, the mobilization forced me into a position that divorced women and single parents have always faced: an independence from men resulting from necessity. In this context, as many women have done before me, I had to reach deeply into myself to find the strength to function effectively on my own with my children. This process was much more difficult than I ever envisioned.

Although living independently from men does not necessarily result in the development of a conscious feminist identity for all women, turning points such as divorce can serve as a catalyst for the development of a feminist identity (Aronson, 2000). As a result of living on my own with my children, I developed new strengths to live independently and grew into a fuller person. Feminist mothering came to include taking on traditionally masculine activities, as well as emotional independence from my husband. This is a common occurrence among military wives (Enloe, 2000), but the depth of it surprised me. After experiencing such significant transformations, I eventually realized the limits of a feminism emerging from privilege. For me, forced self-reliance created a new dimension of feminist mothering, one based on a deeper level of independence than I imagined possible.

Living contradictions

The military demands allegiance to the goals of war by its soldiers and, although more subtly, military spouses. Soldiers are barred from open disagreement with U.S. foreign policy and leadership. Military spouses, especially those on military bases, are expected to completely support the goals of the military and its interventions (Enloe, 2000). Some military families have grown more vocal in their frustrations about the war, including Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a killed U.S. soldier. In August, 2005, Sheehan received wide press coverage for her month-long anti-war protest outside President Bush's Texas ranch. However, many spouses have been chastised for not "supporting the troops" when they questioned U.S. involvement in Iraq (Gettleman, 2003). Although some military wives are open about their negative feelings about their husbands' deployment in Iraq, they are typically quiet about their criticisms of the war (Witchel, 2005). Those who protest the war have been met with outright hostility, and this hostility often effectively silences those who disagree with the war (Houppert, 2003). Indeed, silencing dissent is an essential component of the rhetoric about the war, as a 2005 Veteran's Day speech by President Bush illustrates: "Some Democrats and anti-war critics are now claiming we manipulated the intelligence and misled the American people about why we went to war. The stakes in the global war on terror are too high and the national interest is too important for politicians to throw out false charges" (BBC News, 2005).

Many military spouses may rationalize their support for the war because they have difficulty living with the contradictions of disagreeing with the policies while supporting their spouses. As one military wife put it during an interview with a New York Times reporter: "the people who don't agree with the war, what are they left with if that person dies? I guess they're left feeling angry.... And so maybe I haven't allowed myself to go there. Because I just *want to believe*" (Witchel, 2005, emphasis mine). A desire to "believe" in the war may directly result from a psychological need to see the risk of one's spouse's life as legitimate.

However, believing in the war is not possible for all military wives. What happens when a military wife rejects the war while simultaneously operating as a vital part of the war machine? And what happens when the military's assumptions—about the division of child care and household labour and/or one's political beliefs—do not fit with the realities of people's lives?

As a feminist sociologist, I am not a typical "military wife." My research, for example, examines young women's attitudes toward feminism (e.g. Aronson, 2003). My teaching often focuses on exposing inequalities and helping students recognize their own role in an unequal social structure. I have also been active in feminist and progressive organizations.

Nor is my husband a typical enlisted soldier. Unlike the vast majority of enlisted Reservists, (6.6 percent have Baccalaureate degrees, and 0.8 percent have graduate or professional degrees¹ [Military Family Resource Center, 2001]), he has a doctorate. My husband enlisted in the active duty Army in an

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effort to “find himself” while he was in college. With a family history of military service and his desire to pursue specialized training, this decision made sense to him at the time. After an immediate change of heart, he left active duty service to complete his very lengthy contract in the Reserves. Today, the ghost of this commitment lives on, thanks to the military’s “stop-loss” policy, which prevents troops with specialized training from leaving the military despite the fulfillment of their contracts. Like other military personnel in such areas as special operations, intelligence, and some medical and engineering specializations, he had to “apply” to be discharged after his contract was completed. His application for discharge was denied.

The masculine military culture in which my husband was immersed provided a stark contrast to our feminist approach to parenting. We have worked toward equality in the household division of labour and have approached child rearing from an explicitly feminist perspective. My husband and I have always divided up household chores evenly and both of us are committed to being active and involved parents. For example, we both prioritize spending time with our children, we each took the same amount of time off of work when our first child was born, and we divide up parenting responsibilities equally. In contrast, the military is based on a “hypermasculine” culture that values extreme expressions of masculine behavior (Rosen, Knudson and Fancher, 2003; Enloe, 2000). Despite an increasing number of women in the military, the “warrior environment” pervades (Rosen *et al.*, 2003). On one occasion, one of my husband’s Army co-workers reacted with shock when he mentioned that he enjoyed cooking with his daughter. Given his particular training, he was seen as too “huah”² to engage in such feminine activities. Ironically, then, my husband was absorbed in a hypermasculine environment, while I lived for all practical purposes as a single parent and committed feminist with a demanding career. This new division of parenting and household labour was a radical departure from both my feminist values and lived experience.

My unlikely position as a military wife and feminist mother resulted in a number of contradictions, two of which I will reflect on here. First, my link to the military conflicted with my anti-war stance and activism. Second, while the mobilization pushed me into a more traditional feminine role with respect to household and child care responsibilities, it simultaneously reinforced my independence and my feminism.

“1, 2, 3, 4! We don’t want this imperialist war!”

On February 15, 2003, a remarkable opposition to the war was growing and made itself known as millions of newly mobilized peace activists took to the streets all around the world to protest the invasion of Iraq. My husband had been away for about a month, my son was six weeks-old, and my daughter had just turned four. I had not even had my postpartum doctor’s visit yet. President Bush was still seeking a United Nations Security Council Resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq. U.N. inspectors were in Iraq, looking for

weapons of mass destruction, and said they needed more time to evaluate the situation. It was clear that there were differences of opinion among the nations of the U.N. Security Council, and that many countries (especially France, Russia and China) seemed opposed to the use of force.

That cold day, I went with my children and my parents to a large peace rally in Detroit. We made our own signs: "Military Family for Peace," and "Bring our Daddy Home." My daughter came up with her own message to President Bush, which she wrote on a small sign, just the right size for her to carry: "Don't Do It." I was both excited and nervous about attending the rally. It was among my first postpartum outings, I was filled with a burning sense of purpose, and I was fiercely proud of our signs. At the same time, I felt awkward about my role as a military wife and its implications for my anti-war position.

In the middle of the rally, the stroller started to move. The baby was waking up! It is probably only new nursing moms who remember the fear of being in public when their newborns woke up after a long period of time, very hungry and ready to nurse. In those early days, breastfeeding was very difficult, since my young son had a hard time latching on properly. With the protesters still loudly chanting "1, 2, 3, 4! We don't want this imperialist war!" it was time for us to make a hasty exit so that I could nurse him in the car.

While loading the trunk with our home-made peace signs, the stroller, diaper bag and other baby paraphernalia, my father was confronted by a menacing-looking man who was standing near our car. "Why did you join the military if you didn't want to kick butt?" he snarled, referring to one of our signs. At first, my dad ignored him. "You're a coward," he persisted.

My dad finally replied: "This is not a good use of people's lives. You can't go bring democracy to someone else."

The man continued: "You look like an intelligent man, but I'm here to tell you that you're stupid." My dad got into the car, and I quickly locked the doors. At that moment, my four-year-old started screaming for a snack. The man continued to yell at our car, standing frighteningly close to us. We avoided eye contact, and pretended we could not hear him screaming, but he walked right in front of our car. Arms raised, he yelled "What about this?!" He had unzipped his jacket to reveal a black "POW MIA" shirt. "What about the POWs?!" And then, as quickly as he came, he was gone, apparently off to attend the boat show that was taking place down the street.

This confrontation captured the contradictions inherent in opposing the war as a military spouse. Average Americans, not to mention those with ties to the military, tend to link support for soldiers with support for the war. I noticed this conflation regularly, from the confrontation at the peace rally to the "No War" lawn signs that were taken down or replaced with American flags at the onset of the war. Disentangling support for the troops and support for the war reveals the emotional contradictions of being a feminist "military wife." Although I supported my husband and other soldiers, I was outraged about the war and my own powerlessness to control its direct impact on my life. I was also

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afraid every day that my husband would be sent somewhere where he would be killed. Finally, I was angry that support for the troops was equated with support for governmental policy. My yellow ribbon-covered tree and “Peace” lawn sign might have puzzled the average American, but they seemed perfectly harmonious to me.

Despite the presence of organizations that explicitly oppose the war while supporting the troops (including Veterans for Peace, Military Families Speak Out, and Gold Star Families for Peace), I am an anomaly among people I know as a result of my anti-war military spouse role (see also Aronson, 2004). Consequently, I often feel compelled to tell people about my position on the war because I want to distance myself from the assumptions often made about military wives: that they blindly support military policies and put a positive spin on the difficult absence of their spouses. At times, I have been concerned that acquaintances will think that I conform to the sexist assumptions of the military: that I put my husband’s career above my own or that we are not committed co-parents. On some level, I also think I tell people about my anti-war stance because I wonder if my “military wife” status will raise questions about my progressive and feminist credentials. I approach the war, like many of my colleagues and friends, from an intellectual position, but also as someone with a loved one who participated in it.

On an intellectual level, my feminist and maternal sensibilities make me feel strongly that war represents a hierarchical masculine desire for power over others. The debate about whether women and/or mothers are more peaceful than men notwithstanding, I felt a responsibility as a feminist mother to actively resist the war. My standpoint especially applied to the preemptive Iraq war, which was not a response to an attack but an aggressive invasion of another country. The masculine ethos of the Iraq war was exemplified by President Bush’s “bring them on” macho challenge in the summer of 2003 to those who might attack U.S. soldiers in Iraq (*USA Today*, 2003). In contrast to this ethos, philosopher Sara Ruddick (1989) has argued that “maternal thinking,” resulting from the work of mothering (especially feminist mothering), can make an important contribution to peace activism. As she puts it: “mothers who acquire a feminist consciousness and engage in feminist politics are likely to become more effectively nonviolent and antimilitarist (Ruddick, 1989: 242).” As a military spouse, I also believe that the sexist assumptions of the military undermine feminist parenting, a point I will examine next.

Feminism and independence

Both the family and the military have been called “greedy institutions” (Segal, 1986) because they “make total claims on their members” and “seek exclusive and undivided loyalty” (Coser 1974: 4). Generally, it is the family that is expected to adapt to the needs of military obligations. Being part of a military family “guarantees conflicts between work and family” as a result of relocation, uncertainty about length of time away, and family separation (Booth, Falk,

Segal and Segal, 2000: 320; Segal, 1986; Pittman, 1994). Dual earner families, especially those at difficult stages of family life (such as recent marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, or the presence of young children), may face especially great challenges reconciling the demands of these two greedy institutions (Segal, 1986; Bourg and Segal, 1999).

In the U.S., nearly two-thirds of women with preschool aged children work outside the home (Hochschild, 2000). These women are employed in all types of jobs, including the military. Currently, 17 percent of Reservists are women (Military Family Resource Center, 2001). Despite this historical increase in the number of women in the military (Military Family Resource Center, 2001), it operates within a gendered model that assumes a male breadwinner and female homemaker (Enloe, 2000). For example, the wives of active duty soldiers and officers often have difficulty developing their own careers, as they move frequently as a result of their husbands' transfers (Witchel, 2005). Women who live near military bases, and military wives in general, have lower annual earnings and higher rates of unemployment than other women (Booth *et al.*, 2000; Segal, 1986).

It is assumed that military wives will support the soldier by replacing his domestic labour. In my case, the household and child care work represented a particular burden because my husband and I had previously strived for equality in the division of labour. Even more than I had imagined, it was extremely difficult to juggle single parenting and a career. With only occasional exceptions, all babysitting time was used for work (either paid or unpaid), and all non-work time was used for childcare. It was particularly challenging to combine academic work with my "intensive" approach to mothering (Hays, 1996), such as breastfeeding and not wanting to let my baby cry himself to sleep.

With both of my children, I practiced attachment parenting, but the experience of mothering each child was quite distinct. For six months during her infancy, my eldest child's reflux and stomach pain made her cry for several hours each night. During this period, my husband and I took turns holding, comforting, and walking with her. One of us would hold her for a period of time and we would pass her off to the other when we became exhausted. Although I nursed on demand, my husband helped get her to sleep. When my second child was colicky, I relied extensively on the assistance of my own parents and babysitters. As a result of his stomach pain, my son had difficulty getting to sleep and staying asleep. The most effective method was a technique my dad perfected: he danced vigorously to extremely loud rock music while holding the baby over his arm like a limp rag doll. At one point, I realized that my dad had become my son's "#2": he had replaced my husband as the second caretaker. Despite a great deal of help, however, my son's colic was ultimately my responsibility. Although my dad effectively got the baby to sleep, it took him a long time to learn the art of arm-to-crib transfers, and his abrupt style often resulted in immediate waking and a new initiation of the nursing-burping-transferring-to-cradle cycle. When my son woke every three hours in the

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middle of the night with pain, the nursing and dancing tasks ultimately fell to me alone.

I hired a babysitter not only when I worked at my job, but at times when I needed an extra pair of hands to take care of the children. This is obviously expensive. Although many private companies make up the difference in pay between a Reservist's regular salary and military salary, they are not required to do so by law. My husband's employer did not make up the pay difference. For military parents who work, one would expect that increased childcare would be necessary to cover the labour of the absent spouse. In fact, at least one-fifth of American dual earner couples work different shifts on their jobs in order to care for their children without relying on day care (Hochschild, 2000). However, this labour inside the home goes unacknowledged by the military, which does not provide compensation to soldiers' families for their absence. The "separation pay" (about \$100 a month) that is provided only recognizes minimal extra expenses as a result of maintaining two households. The unspoken assumption of the breadwinner/homemaker model is that the military wife will pick up the household and childcare labour of the absent soldier without complaint or difficulty. As elsewhere, homemaking and child rearing are not considered worthy of compensation.

In addition to the strain of childcare adjustments, mobilization can cause significant emotional stress for families. The family disruption resulting from the soldier's absence can strain marriages, cause depression in both military personnel and their spouses, and lead to distress among children (Figley, 1993; Wood, Scarville and Gravino, 1995; Ford *et al.*, 1993). Spouses may even report more problems and lower morale than enlisted soldiers (Paulus, Nagar, Larey and Camacho, 1996). Difficulty adjusting to a partner's absence has been found to be especially pronounced among parents with infants and women who were pregnant at the time of deployment (Wood *et al.*, 1995). The first Gulf War (the "hundred hour" war), which was far shorter, less deadly, and more "successful," led to divorce rates of 50 percent at Army bases (Gettleman, 2003). In this war, divorce rates doubled between 2001 and 2004 (Leland, 2004). Veterans returning from the first Gulf War were more likely to report moderate or severe family adjustment problems than moderate or severe war-zone stress responses (Figley, 1993). These problems were particularly acute for Reservists, who were forced to abruptly leave their non-military lives (Figley, 1993).

In my case, we were lucky because my husband was not deployed overseas. He was instead responsible for training other Reservists to serve in Iraq, as well as occasionally serving as an Army representative at funerals for soldiers. Despite our luck, the mobilization was a major disruption to our lives. Nursing was not yet well established, we had no visible routine or schedule, and my four-year old daughter was distressed by the amount of energy a new baby took from her only remaining parent. The entire period of the mobilization was characterized by constant crisis. The workload of combining my career and single parenthood, the uncertainty about when he would return, our sense that our

lives were out of our own control, and my hostility to the war that had taken him away, resulted in a continuous feeling of tension and strain. Since we had always shared parenting responsibilities, I was shocked by the sheer workload of having sole responsibility for the well being of my children.

While meeting the physical needs of my children was challenging, it was the emotional needs that became overwhelming at times. In addition to a colicky baby, my four-year old daughter had great difficulty adjusting to the new situation. In fact, she developed a sleep disorder during this period. One night, I heard her in her bed desperately searching for a picture of her with her father that I had placed in a special holder: "Where is my picture of Daddy? I know it was here. . . . Where can it be?" I helped her find it under her pillow. After I left the room, I heard her talking again: "Daddy's going to die. I'm going to die." Shocked by her words, I went back in her room and we talked. She asked me, "Why did George Bush send Daddy away? Is there going to be a war in Iraq?" We discussed that Iraq was far away, and that Daddy was very close by in the United States. I told her that he was safe and he was not going to Iraq. "Iraq is a small purple planet," she told me. After I left her room, she sang a song with following words: "Daddy's not going to die. Why does George Bush want a war?"

It was moments such as these that crystallized my sense that feminist mothering was irreconcilable with my role as a "military wife." Reassuring my daughter about her father's safety was, in fact, a lie because his role in the military meant that his safety was never guaranteed. It was also disingenuous because my reassurances to her conflicted with my anti-war "maternal thinking" (Ruddick, 1989). As a result, the act of comforting my daughter ultimately served the goals of the war.

Although military bases provide important family supports to the military spouses who are left behind when the full-time soldiers get deployed (Witchel, 2005), little is done to assist the spouses of mobilized Reservists, who are often perceived as "second-class citizens" by active duty troops (Ford *et al.*, 1993). Even before 9/11, Reserve and National Guard units were mobilized at increasing rates as a result of the decline of the number of active duty troops (Enloe, 2000). Since the war in Iraq started, as many as 34% at any one time of the deployed soldiers have been Reservists. This has led to a concern in the military that the frequency and length of mobilizations are "beginning to stress the Reserve force" (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, 2004). The reason for the Army's concern is largely rooted in worries that soldiers will not reenlist (Enloe, 2000).

About two months after the mobilization, I got a letter from the Family Program Office of the Army, inviting me to come to a meeting for military families to discuss issues related to deployment. We were to talk about such issues as what to expect during the mobilization process, family issues, and health care. Children were not welcome at the meeting, yet there was no child care provided. Refreshments were provided, however. The closest meeting

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place was two hours away, and I was shocked to see that the meeting dates had already passed by the time I had received the mailing. It is important to recognize, however, that these program offices are typically run on the volunteer labour of the military wives of officers, who are pressured by the military into such uncompensated work (Harrell, 2001). My only other contact with the military was a letter and questionnaire that arrived from the USAR Family Program Office six months after the beginning of the mobilization. It sounded five months too late:

Don't feel like you're alone. The Army Reserve has staffed a USAR Family Program Office to help you. We're here to provide information, referral, outreach and assistance to family members of the United States Army Reserves. Our primary mission is to serve you and be your Army contact. We will assist you with questions and concerns about mobilization and remain in contact with you on a regular basis throughout the mobilization process. We will supply you with the necessary publications and workshops you need and give you feedback through surveys to ensure you are receiving the adequate assistance you need.... We look forward to serving you and your family.

The enclosed questionnaire asked a series of questions to which I unambivalently answered "no," including: "Have you received monthly calls/emails from any Family Readiness Group members' telephone tree?" "Were you provided a point of contact at your soldier's unit for concerns, questions and emergencies?" Thus, in my experience, the presumption of the breadwinner/homemaker model of the military did not include as a key component adequate emotional or informational support. This social support can be a key in helping to buffer the negative mental health effects of stress experienced by military wives when their husbands are away (Rosen and Moghadam, 1988).

At the same time as my husband's absence pushed me into a more traditional feminine role on many levels, it also served to reinforce my feminism and my sense of independence. Although my spouse and I had always made every life decision together, I now had to make them without his input. Before the mobilization, we had shared the power of decision-making. During the mobilization, I hired and fired babysitters, enrolled my daughter in new preschools, tried remedies for colic, re-mortgaged our house, and tried to solve the sleep disorder my daughter developed during this period. Although my husband and I had lived together for many years, I eventually learned to live alone with my children.

Military wives have often experienced an identity shift when their husbands went to war. However, they often do so in a way that is not explicitly feminist and is submissive to the goals of war. For example, during World War II, the government promoted women's work as their patriotic duty and encouraged companies to lay women workers off from their jobs when the men

returned home from the battlefields (Coontz, 1992). This situation may result in a "split personality" for military wives: "when her husband is at home, the military wife is a Donna Reed mom, raising the children and deferring to Dad. When her husband is deployed she becomes Rosie the Riveter, fixing toilets, paying the bills and cutting plywood to protect her house against a hurricane" (Witchel, 2005: 64). My own experiences reveal that my husband's absence strengthened my commitment to feminist mothering, as I took on new roles in my family and developed new strengths to live independently with my children.

The end and the beginning

After nine months, my husband was demobilized as a result of an injury incurred during the mobilization. The rest of his unit was extended beyond the initial one-year call up. He came home and started to pick up the pieces of his life: a job he left abruptly, a son he hardly knew, a daughter who had experienced distress about his absence, a partner who had learned to live independently, and his own physical pain.

The military's presumed traditional division of labour depends heavily on an unquestioning support for the goals of the war. In order for the system to work, military spouses need to be willing to view the potential sacrifice of their spouses' lives in terms of some higher cause. They must also be willing to donate their own household labour for the benefit of our "national security." In other words, one of the implications of the gendered division of labour assumed by the military is that the sacrifices that spouses make are both worthwhile and justified. In fact, the gendered character of the division of labour during a time of war depends heavily on an unquestioning belief in the war itself. When someone questions the necessity of war, one's sacrifices are in vain from the very beginning. As I questioned both the goals of the war and the assumed gender division of labour, the "military wife" role clearly contradicted with my feminist approach to mothering. Feminist co-parenting came to a grinding halt as a result of the traditional parenting assumptions imposed upon me by the military. At the same time, my feminist identity as a parent grew stronger as it was more profoundly based on necessary independence rather than privilege.

As I reflect on this experience, I realize that whenever we talk about mothering, we also need to talk about fathering. The military's treatment of mothers cannot be viewed independently from its treatment of fathers. In the assumption that the wives of soldiers have primary responsibility for the children, there is a corresponding assumption that those soldiers who are fathers are not vital and necessary to the growth and development of their children. The breadwinner model assumes an absent, distant and uninvolved parent rather than one who is equally invested and involved in their children's lives. This view has resulted in extensions of deployment periods, the denial of visits home, and the attitude that it is acceptable for soldiers who are fathers to be away from their children for months, and even years, on end. While the work of mothering during a time of war places an unreasonable and invisible burden

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on the mothers left behind, it also places an invisible burden on the fathers called away. Within the masculine ethos of the military, much of this burden remains unexpressed and unchallenged.

As the war in Iraq drags on with no end in sight, and as deployments are extended while the death toll rises, military families continue to face the strains of separation. These stressors will wear on even the best marriages and most tolerant children. For those of us who opposed the war in the first place and yet had to contribute our labour to it, the continued loss of life in Iraq is particularly troubling. For the military spouses who initially supported the war and have “kept the home fires burning,” one has to wonder how long their patience will hold. As public opinion slowly shifts, perhaps military wives will begin to add their voices to the public debate on the war. For those of us who opposed the war in the first place and yet had to contribute our labour to it, the contradictions that have filled our lives are not only personal, but are deeply political.

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¹A mobilization of this size disproportionately places a burden on the poor and working class who comprise the bulk of the so-called “all volunteer” military. This has lead journalists to charge that the composition of the military is “requiring what is, in essence, a working-class military to fight and die for an affluent America” (Halbringer and Homes, 2003).

²Military slag roughly equivalent to “tough.”

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**Leslie Wilson, Sue Wilson, Ann Duffy and
Nancy Mandell**

“She Could Be Anything She Wants to Be” Mothers and Daughters and Feminist Identity

Much of the recent research on feminist self-labeling has been limited to young women—the majority of whom are white, middle-class post-secondary students. This research suggests that young women embrace the politics of feminism but reject the label. There has been little research investigating the extent to which midlife women, who came of age with the women’s movement, identify as feminists. As part of a larger study, Ontario midlife women were asked to reflect on their family, friendship and work lives; to talk about their health and well-being and their connection to feminism and the Women’s Movement. These women were in their 50s and early 60s at the time of the interviews in 2002. Sixty-six women spoke about the impact of the women’s movement or feminism on their lives. They also spoke about their precarious, hesitant, complex relationship to feminist identity. Two-thirds (43) of the women expressed a favourable identification with feminism, although ten of these women qualified their answers in the context of their personal reservations with the label. Two themes emerged to explain the presence of a feminist self-identity among midlife women. The first was being the mother of a daughter. The second was the exposure to women’s studies courses and feminist theory in post-secondary education.

Women who are now at midlife came of age with second-wave feminism. By the time these midlife women were old enough to go to university, the universities were expanding. By the time they graduated, jobs were opening up in nursing, teaching and office work and they became part of a dramatic surge in women’s employment. They were the first generation of Canadian women to stay in the labour force after children were born. While employment opportunities opened for this generation of women, attitudes regarding family responsibilities were slow to change. The structure of work organizations, or

schools did not change to accommodate family care, and men and women were left to negotiate responsibilities for childcare and housework individually. Men's pay and opportunity advantage served to reinforce the traditional division of labour. For the most part these baby boomers have spent their adult lives overburdened by the need to combine family responsibilities and paid work.

As part of a larger study, Ontario midlife women were asked to reflect on their family, friendship and work lives; to talk about their health and well-being and their connection to feminism and the Women's Movement. We wanted to know whether women born during or after World War II saw themselves as feminists. Did these women, who grew up with the women's movement, who struggled, by virtue of the timing of their entry into the labour force to raise families and work for pay, who felt the economic insecurities of lone parenthood, or struggled to assert their sexual identity think of themselves as feminists as they reflected on their lives at midlife?

Most of the recent research on feminist self-labeling has been limited to young women—the majority of whom are white, middle-class post-secondary students. This research suggests that young women embrace the politics of feminism but reject the label. Indeed the label may have become a bit of an anachronism. The popular disclaimer—"I'm not a feminist, but..." appears to characterize the feelings of many contemporary young Western women (see Buschman and Lenart, 1996; Williams and Wittig, 1997; Zucker, 2004). Some argue that young women have become complacent with the gains of the women's movement (see Rebick, 2005). For example, abortion rights have been assured, however precariously, for a generation. In this context, identification with feminism is no longer associated with the struggle to attain personally important rights and opportunities. Young women have grown up in a social context in which the achievements of the feminist movement have been part of the taken-for-granted social fabric. Furthermore, young people, particularly post-secondary students, understand their lives in terms of personal ambitions and individual struggles. Culturally, it is preferable to construct their achievement in individual rather than collective terms (Bushman and Lenart, 1996; Williams and Wittig, 1997). Research which targets "minority" or "othered" women suggests that these women are more likely to self-label as feminist and support feminism (see Reid, 1984; Lavender, 1986; Chow, 1993; Dufour, 2000). Older women have not been the subjects of study regarding feminist identity.

Some researchers have looked at the intergenerational influence of a feminist identity, particularly between mothers and daughters. The (often contested) assumption is that second wave feminists will "pass along" their politics and the narrative of the women's movement, and that feminist identity is "inherited" from one generation to the next (Adkins, 2004). The responses in this study indicate support for a more complex acknowledgement of feminism, connected to one's political "coming of age." Intergenerational

impact is bi-directional, and the likelihood of self-identifying as feminist is influenced by the presence of female children (or close relatives). Having a daughter may provide a window for mid-life women to see themselves in terms of a collective, as more than just one woman—the idea that there exists a “common fate with women” (Reid and Purcell, 2004: 766). The opportunity to witness the achievements of the women’s movement play out in their daughters’ lives has a significant impact on the participants in our study. Their daughters provided these women with an impetus for (re)connecting the personal to the political, and being emotionally attached to the gains of the women’s movement, as well as the remaining obstacles, and the hope for the future, as embodied by their daughters’ choices and experiences.

The data reported here lets us look at feminist identity among Canadian women who grew up with the women’s movement. These women were in their 50s and early 60s at the time of the interviews in 2002. We used a two stage sampling strategy, contacting women through groups and organizations across metropolitan Toronto and the Niagara region. Some of the sample were contacted through women-based social groups or organizations, although these were not specifically feminist in nature. For example, some organizations that agreed to help recruit our sample were primarily concerned with addressing the needs of immigrant women or poor women. Others in the sample were contacted through religious groups. The research population was constructed through postering, snowball sampling, and direct contact with women’s organization and groups. Every effort was made to sample intentionally in order to provide representation from marginalized women, including racial or ethnic minority women, lesbian and women living with low income.

Women in the study engaged in in-depth face-to-face interviews concerning their reflections about their intimate lives, their economic and employment experiences, and their health and well-being. As part of the interviews (which ranged from one to three hours in length) women were asked to describe the impact of the women’s movement or feminism on their lives and to indicate whether or not they would describe themselves as “feminists.” Sixty-six women responded to this question.

Women in this study spoke about their precarious, hesitant, complex relationship to feminist identity. Most (43) of the women expressed a favourable identification with feminism. Ten of the 43 respondents self-identified as “feminist,” *but* qualified their answers in the context of their personal reservations with the label, or referred to other common perceptions of the term. For example, when asked, “Would you consider yourself a feminist?” one woman in her early sixties answered, “probably, if I knew what the real definition was” (B54). Another response from a 53-year-old single mother illustrates some of the hesitation over the meaning of “feminist”: “I believe I’m leaning more towards feminism than I ever have been in my life, but I don’t know whether I would actually describe myself as a ‘feminist’” (B10).

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A Muslim woman in the sample who moved to Canada in adulthood did not feel a connection to what she called “western” feminism. Her interview describes the negotiation of identity that she faced:

You know it's a little bit difficult to be a (country of origin) feminist, or to be a western feminist, or to be a black feminist. I think all of these feminists have (a) different definition for themselves. I consider myself as a feminist regarding to the (country of origin) culture. Regarding western culture, I think I need to work still. Because I don't get the western culture yet. (B9)

Twenty-three women respondents did not self-identify as feminist. Seven of these answered simply “No,” when asked. Fourteen women qualified their responses by saying “No, but...” or “I don’t think so, but...”:

I don't think I'd describe myself as a feminist, but certainly I am glad for the moves that women have made. (A13)

No, I don't think I'm a feminist, because I was raised in a setting, or a family setting where the man was the breadwinner, and the mother was the homemaker, but I certainly applaud the feminists to a certain degree. (A8)

No, I wouldn't call myself that... I have always maintained that women should have equal rights... I was brought up in a culture where women were subservient to men. (B15)

Well, I believe in equality absolutely, but I like having the door opened for me and I like somebody to sit my chair under me and pour me a glass of wine and... (Laughs) So if you look at that, no, then I'm not a feminist. (B20)

Some women talked about not being a part of the women’s movement in the past because of their privilege, or because they felt excluded or disconnected from it: “I probably came kicking and screaming into feminism until I finally made the connection. And I think a lot of that had to with my past, my privilege, I didn’t connect it” (B11).

A mid-life married mother of two, (who is now active in both religious and feminist communities), recalled the importance of having the language to identify the issues she was facing: “I couldn’t be a part of the movement because I didn’t feel I fit in, I couldn’t talk the language” (B2). She went on to discuss some of the barriers to participation in a movement that was seen as mostly upper-middle class and white, excluding women from marginalized or lower income backgrounds, and who instead were “largely focusing on survival.”

Two central themes emerged in the interviews that are of particular interest here. First, there was a strong connection to positive feminist identification among mothers of daughters. As these women elaborated on the

meaning of feminism in their lives, they also referred to the impact of the movement on the lives of their daughters. They described feelings of pride in their daughter's accomplishments, respect and admiration for their daughter's feminist politics, or appreciation for the increased opportunities available to their daughters as a result of the women's movement, and their hope for their daughter's future. Second, many of these midlife women who identified as feminist (and embrace the politics behind this label) credit this political consciousness to their educational experiences in women's studies courses and/or exposure to feminist theory in post-secondary education.

Mothers and daughters

Forty-nine of the 66 participants were mothers, and 35 of those were mothers of daughters. Most of the mothers of daughters (28, or 80 percent) said they identified as feminists. While this was not a question specifically raised in the interviews, their comments about feminism connected their relationships with their daughters to their thoughts about (and experiences with) the women's movement. Twenty respondents made explicit mention of their feminist identity as it relates to a daughter's life, or to their relationship with their daughter. (Two women also referred to feminism in the context of their nieces, and one woman discussed her sons in this context.)

These mid-life mothers framed their comments about feminism around the notion of increased educational and career opportunities for their daughters, particularly in contrast to their own experiences growing up:

... to think my daughters were able to go to university and to graduate school and this wasn't allowed 50, 60 years ago. (B41)

When I was going to college, you know like you were a teacher, nurse, or secretary; it didn't seem like there was a whole world out there for us.... There is a whole world out there, I think, for our daughters. (B19)

... it's great for my daughters coming along. I've got a daughter who wants to be a teacher—I mean she could be a doctor, she could be anything she wants to be, and in the past that wasn't quite as open for her to do; and I think that's terrific.... There are more opportunities. (B8)

I see my nieces playing hockey—their choice...I played hockey in a more casual thing, but they're on a team. I see my other niece; she works in the forestry and fisheries. She's capturing bears and doing this and doing that, and has this whole outdoor sort of thing happening. And I'm thinking, "who would have thought?" She's 25 years younger.... It's wonderful to see what she's doing...this is good, it's just more doors. But whether it's engineering, it's just things women never ventured into before. There's choices now. Not that it's easy, but there's choices. (B47)

Many women also referred to their daughters as feminists. One feminist mother proudly referred to her daughter as “a fierce feminist” (B2). A 58-year-old mother of four indicated the impact her daughter has had on her life, saying that her daughter “is a strong feminist—a very strong woman, and really inculcated the importance of being who you are” (B63). Another mother who immigrated to Canada from Africa talked about body image and politics surrounding her daughter’s “liberated” generation in Canada, and added: “I’m very proud of my daughter” (B15).

Women also referred to the impact of feminism on their ability to raise their daughters with an awareness and consciousness of women’s issues and the women’s movement. This was proudly noted by one respondent, who remarked: “I have raised three wonderful feminist daughters” (B16). Another participant echoed this sentiment: “The movement and feminism have allowed me to have a more satisfying life. It helped me raise daughters to have a feminist consciousness” (B50). The Women’s Movement offered mid-life women a mirror to their world, and a chance to develop their relationship to feminist identity while also cultivating a relationship with a female child. In this sense, participating in the growth and development of a daughter allowed women to see the contrast of “how far we’ve come,” and “how far we still need to go”:

I think that the issues for women are still the same; I think that we haven't made enough changes. I really don't know sometimes if it's because I'm an old fart or not. You know because ... I have teenage daughters.... They still (think) ... "God I should be beautiful." ... Yes, you should be beautiful, don't get me wrong, of course you should be beautiful, but you shouldn't centre your life around people with penises. It just doesn't work. And yet ... it's shocking for me for them to live in a house with an outspoken mother who's the economic provider, the social convener, the wonder woman, and they're still believing in this, "one day the prince will come." I mean their favourite woman is "Pretty Woman." So I ask: have we made a substantial change? I think the answer is yes. But is there still a long way to go? Absolutely. That's how I see it. (B12)

The following narrative recounts a third-generation consciousness, where a grandmother acknowledges the impact of interactions with her two female grandchildren:

I'm very aware of that when I speak to my grandchildren ... I was noticing that if it was the robin ... I noticed it in myself, "he's on the birdbath." Well it's not "he," right? It's the robin, but I saw that masculinization of all those sorts of things. So I would point that out to them, "Well it might be a male, well it might be a female; it's not always a male." (B13)

In addition, two respondents referred to the gains of the movement as

“She Could Be Anything She Wants to Be”

something that they feel their daughters “would just take for granted” (B45), or as something not understood by their daughter’s generation. (It is particularly interesting to note the use of the past-tense in this quote): “There was a women’s movement . . . but the next generation will have it as second nature to them” (B35).

Women’s studies and feminist theory in education

The midlife women in this study reported that access to learning and education was one of the important benefits of the women’s movement in their lives, and/or in the lives of their sisters, daughters, and nieces. Specifically, these women mentioned the impact of women’s studies courses and exposure to feminist theory as significant to their evolving belief system, consciousness-raising, and politicization.

Women referred to the importance of exposure to women’s voices, women authors, and female perspectives in general in literature, research and education. One summary of the importance of women’s studies came from a sixty-two year old divorced mother:

When I was growing up, I don’t remember taking books in school written by women. Then, to hear women speak, of course women have thoughts, ideas, and leadership qualities that we need in our community and work life. So, I think it was very important to me. I didn’t take formal courses, but I read a lot, and I did audit some courses, but I really felt that to hear women speak and formulate their ideas, I felt I was becoming more of an individual, of a person. I didn’t have to be in a relationship. My experience was other people’s experience. Even to help me identify that I could feel angry about being cheated, to identify that the things that helped form and develop me were from a masculine point of view. Things were imposed, even how I thought of women and women’s lives. The possibility of leading a different kind of life was satisfying. (B50)

A West-Indian immigrant mother in her late fifties expressed the ongoing influence of the movement in both “public” and “private” aspects of her life:

It had a strong impact on my life—feminism. It’s influenced me to go to school to begin with. And it influenced me also—well it influenced me to stay with my obligations with the family, but now it’s influencing me in another direction, and that’s to become a person on my own, to become an individual, to self-actualize. (B63)

Respondents talked about the importance of the framework and historical context that women’s studies provided, which was the foundation of their understanding of feminism in general. Women’s studies were an “eye-opener” to many women. Remembering her first exposure to these ideas, one respond-

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ent stated simply, “I am a feminist because of women’s studies” (B9). Women also expressed a feeling of vigilance, respect, and even frustration for their (lost) history:

I think the one thing that’s important to me is not to lose the sense of our history ... the history of the feminist movement. There are young people who didn’t understand that it used to be against the law to be queer, who don’t know anybody who died of AIDS, who didn’t live through the gross inequities between women and men in the work environment. They know nothing about any of that stuff... They’re not taught the history; they don’t understand the struggle (and the) place that we came from. (B59)

Conclusion

Although the literature, and the responses here, are evidence of a fundamental struggle regarding the problematic definition of feminism today, we have not found a lack of support for feminism and contributions of the movement to women’s lives. In spite of the confusion and hesitation surrounding the term feminism, the mid-life women in this study understood their lives in terms of the qualitative and quantitative achievements of feminists from the 1960s onward, and saw this played out—rather poignantly—as they watched their daughters cross the threshold into adulthood, and as they were exposed to the language of feminism in the curriculum of women’s studies courses.

A feminist identity requires a fertile seedbed: for example, a women’s studies class, the cultivation of mother/daughter relationships, or connection with female mentors; or negatively, the experience of sex discrimination or violence, or hardship based on the extra responsibilities of career/children/care-taking etc. (see Williams and Wittig, 1997; Reid and Purcell, 2004; Buschman and Lenart, 1996) In sum, there must be an exposure to the context of the issues and gains made by the feminist movement in the first and second waves, either through the eyes of mothering daughters, and/or through the mobilizing experiences of women’s studies courses, in order to (re)connect the political to the personal in the belief systems and identity-structures of mid-life women.

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Marguerite Guzman Bouvard

My Son the Feminist, A First-Rate Mom

This paper traces the years I spent rearing my son in a manner that was at odds with the prevailing views at the time for I discovered that boys suffered from social constraints as well as girls. My son was born when I was in my early twenties and the women's movement was in its very beginning. I wanted to bring him up to develop traits he displayed that were social taboo for boys at the time, a soft-hearted disposition and a range of interests that didn't include sports. Even today, men who do not display machismo are often viewed as "wimps." I believed that an important part of feminism was allowing men the options some of them enjoy today such as expressing affection rather than insisting that they follow the prevailing views of what men should be. Providing outlets for my son's interests in music and performance was a counterpart to helping validate his extracurricular activities in his school. The feminist movement happened to coincide with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, but I had always believed that feminism and developing a social conscience were inextricably tied together. As a result, I included my son in my social activism as well as exposing him to pressing political issues. Today, my grown son has become a wonderful "mom" and a supportive husband as well as a person who displays a deep concern for justice. In his work he has always displayed the qualities of a peacemaker, a trait still at odds with the prevailing view of male identity.

I am watching my son on a conference call in his home, mike under his chin, earpieces firmly attached. But that is not all he is doing. He also happens to be changing his baby daughter's very full diaper at the same time. Pierre, who is one of the top radio executives in the country, is doing what women have been doing for millennia—multi-tasking.

He is the one who bathes both daughters in the evening, still with his cell phone at hand because his obstetrician wife cannot predict her hours as she's on

call so often and periodically spends nights at the hospital. Pierre has more flexibility. He is sometimes able to work at home or come home early and head for his study late at night after the girls are in bed, just as I did when he was a child. He happens to be very proud of his wife's achievements as an endocrinologist and physician and does everything he can to support her career. They are a team, holding down two demanding jobs and parenting a one and a half year old and a two and a half year old daughters. Even at her young age, the oldest knows her mommy, "takes care of babies and ladies."

My son was born when I was in my early 20s and the women's movement was in its very beginning. I wanted to bring him up to honor all sides of his personality because he happened to have qualities that I cherished despite being social taboo for boys at the time, a soft-hearted disposition and a range of interests that didn't include sports. Even today, men who do not display machismo are often viewed as "wimps." I believed that an important part of feminism was allowing men the options some of them enjoy today such as expressing affection rather than insisting that they follow the prevailing views of what men should be. I imparted these values to Pierre by sharing my life with him as a pioneer feminist in a small corner of the world as well as by being very involved in his educational environment.

I began studying for a doctorate in Political Science when women were a rarity in that field and especially in public discourse. I was the youngest of three women at Harvard's graduate program in Political Science, fending off the sexual overtures of some my professors and fellow students even though I was married. I wrote my doctoral thesis when Pierre was just a baby, working at the library after he was in bed because we couldn't afford a sitter at the time.

As a tiny child, Pierre learned the meaning of the word "fesis" (thesis) as we discussed my progress at home. He attended my graduation with my proud husband, which happened to be the first time women were allowed to participate instead of marching separately at Radcliffe some blocks away. I was very pregnant with my daughter at the ceremony and like to think that the two of us broke down the barriers to women.

After that, I became a stay-at-home wife and mom as was typical of so many young married women. Then I read Betty Friedan's landmark work, *The Feminine Mystique* (1965) identifying "The problem that has no name" (utter boredom in simply keeping house), and found my own situation in our dull suburban town in her book. It was one of the many motives that propelled me to begin teaching political science at a small women's college.

Before the children were old enough to attend school, I arranged to teach my courses in the mornings so I could spend time with my children in the afternoons. I insisted on paying our nanny three times as much as the going rate because I felt that she too was a career woman balancing family and work. But I could only afford her a few hours a day and that meant putting in long hours to prepare my courses after the children were asleep.

At the time, the women in my neighborhood kept busy going to sales and

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having coffee together. They all kept telling me “I love my children,” as if I had abandoned mine to a cruel fate by picking up my briefcase and heading off to work every morning. That I didn’t fit the social pattern at the time puzzled my son when he was a little boy. “Why don’t you stay home and play cards like the other mothers?” he asked me when he was eight years old. But instead of saying something wise, I just snorted.

I devote this article to my son rather than my daughter because she too discovered sexism and the woman’s movement on her own. She came into my study when she was only five and cried, “Oh, I’ll never be able to become a priest.” I did bring both of my children up as Catholics although it is a particularly sexist religion simply because that was my heritage. However, I took over the task of teaching their Sunday school classes to prevent them from being subjected to the church’s peculiar views on women and also to expose them to different religions. When my son was an adolescent, at a time when the church as so many other faiths still believed that theirs was the one and only truth, the class attended Seder suppers, heard Quakers speak and explored different views. My daughter still remembers how I fought to have girls to serve on the altar when only boys were allowed in that role and how I organized the mothers who were teaching classes as volunteers to support that cause. Today of course, there are women Eucharistic Ministers and altar girls but still no women priests.

After his confirmation, my son told me that he no longer wished to be a Catholic. I supported him wholeheartedly. He happens to be a person with a wonderful sense of humour. Before confirmation, he kept saying he would wear a tee-shirt underneath his jacket with the words “I am a Jew,” scrawled in bold letters and that he would fling it open at the moment of confirmation. And instead of choosing a saint’s name as his confirmation name, he wanted to pick “Clint,” the hero in one of his favorite spy novels.

I felt that by the time my children were teenagers, they could certainly make their own choices about religion. I myself left the Catholic Church after the children were confirmed, considering my duty done and preferring to express my spirituality outside of the bounds of organized religion.

For me, feminism and social awareness go hand in hand as they did when I was bringing up my children in the late 60s and 70s when both the Civil Rights Movement and the Feminist Movement gained public notoriety. Thus, when Pierre was a small child, I began bringing him to events at the college where I taught, including an evening session with the fiery Rap Brown. I gave him a children’s book about Martin Luther King hoping to raise his social conscience and, in fact, it moved him deeply. Did my views on civil rights and my volunteer work teaching in the projects have anything to do with Pierre’s choice of moving into an African-American dorm when he attended college and defusing racial conflicts at the radio station there? (He told me that when he would sit down to lunch at an all black table, one young man would always quip, “There goes the neighbourhood.”) I don’t really know, but both children heard

my political views loud and clear over our dinner table discussions that were always peppered with healthy debate. More than likely, this is why Pierre is quiet about his political opinions.

I must add that my French husband was also a very different role model from the typical neighborhood Dad. He helped me clean the house on weekends and spent his free time wiring the house, taking movies and photographs of the children and going on family outings. Unlike other fathers, he openly expressed affection for our son and daughter. Added to that, we were not a family who followed sports events although once we did take Pierre to see a Red Sox game.

But at that time and unfortunately still today, there was a view that reason and emotions are at war with each other. Women were branded as emotional, and therefore less competent while men were considered reasonable, a conflict that is disproved time and time again, for these actually enhance each other.

This was more than a generation before Sara Ruddick's groundbreaking work *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (1989). When I read it, I felt vindicated for all the unspoken views I held about mothering and how much analytical decision-making occurs hourly while parenting. I was not only *thinking* about Pierre's welfare and development. I was also moving against the mores of the times in so doing as well as in my professional life, for teaching Political Science was still an all male preserve. In the 60s and 70s, intellectual challenge was for men. Emotion was a dirty word, especially in my chosen field; it was *subjective* while topics such as Multiple Independently Targeted Missiles or MIRVs to defend national security, which actually helped spiral the arms race, were *objective*. Mothering was viewed as related to *housework*, a female preserve of washing up, cooking and other purely *physical chores*.

Since I mothered such a long time ago, I can look back over this period and not only see the results of my efforts, but their multifaceted character. For me, feminist mothering meant transmitting a sense of social obligation to my children, challenging some of the pervasive values during that period, analytical thinking and wrestling with love and overwhelming responsibility. I believe it takes an uncommon amount of courage. It is a demanding role that can affect society and international relations. The way we mother has results that go far beyond family and local community as many activist moms have revealed time and time again.

That such views about the value of women and their particular attributes are still not widely accepted was reflected in an essay by the popular *New York Times* columnist David Brooks last October 2005. He wrote that because girls are outperforming boys in education, school curriculums should include more books about *combat* to better attract male attention. He argued that society needs to shift focus from feminine equality to masculine equality, but he failed to understand that feminism could contribute much to alleviate our fraught international and national political problems. Nor did he seem to realize how expanding opportunities for women do not imply that men will suffer as many

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men such as him frequently allege. Society does benefit when both men and women are able to pursue their interests and to choose their careers regardless of what the prevailing narrow images of what it means to be a man or a woman.

We are currently going through a phase of celebrating machismo in this country just when I thought it had not perhaps disappeared, but at least lessened in importance. However, it is a strand in our culture that surfaces when our government happens to be in the throes of political difficulties. It was very pervasive when Pierre was a child and since he had neither the inclination nor the personality to adopt that model, I fought hard for his integrity.

My first battle with my son's school on this very issue occurred when he was in kindergarten and was interested in drawing and dance. I noticed he would have inexplicable tantrums when he returned from school and I went to visit his teacher. "He refuses to play ball and to learn how to weave as a way of studying cause and effect," his battle-ax of a teacher pronounced. I then went to see the principal who was very understanding and sighed, "I know how she is, but she has tenure." He supported my decision to withdraw Pierre from the last months of the school year when he played happily at home. (I had taught him how to read and write.) However, unfortunately, that episode ended his interest in drawing and painting.

But I must admit I tried to push some of my own views on him on occasion. Sometimes they took hold. Other times they had hilarious consequences. I forbade him to have guns like the other children when he was young so he simply picked up sticks and cried, "bang, bang." I gave him a doll when our daughter was born, telling him, "This is your baby," only to see him fling it down the stairs. A propos of the guns, I once found an article in his room when he was only nine years old with the headline, "How To Tell Your Parents You Want to Join the Army."

Because my son did not have an aggressive bent and tended to pursue his own way as he was growing up, I found myself bucking both school and neighborhood to support his interests on an ongoing basis. "You're trying to protect him!" an outraged neighbor exclaimed when she learned that I had complained to the principal about a classmate beating him up in the playground. I didn't say anything, but I did think, "That's what mothers are supposed to do."

I found myself continually supporting my son against the prevailing view of the typical boy proving himself through physical prowess and conflict. Pierre hated sports and loved music, so we bought him a trumpet when he was nine years old. His fifth grade teacher complained to me that he turned down the position of first trumpet, "He's not competitive," she lectured me as if somehow I had failed. "He will stay on second trumpet," I replied. When the neighbourhood children started to quarrel over a ball game they were playing in the dead end circle where we lived, Pierre would simply step inside the house.

Pierre was always brimming with interests. First it was dinosaurs, first aid, airplanes and flight, followed by the history of World War I and James Bond

movies. When he became 11 and 12 years old, music became a passion and a constant in his life. He also loved small children and the neighbourhood kids were continually following him around. He began to babysit for a little boy that lived down the street from us at a time when this was regarded as girls' work.

Throughout his years at home, my son both observed and participated in my life as a woman handling many projects at once; childrearing, teaching, volunteer work and writing. Our home was always filled with the neighborhood children and I would take care for youngsters who needed help over the years, including a neighbor's four year-old daughter whose mother became ill. My son was always the one who jumped in to help out. The little girl happily rode Pierre's shoulders while she spent her days at our home until her mother was able to recover from her illness. When a group of friends and I sponsored Lao refugee families, resettling them in the area, Pierre offered to give the children magic shows during the holidays. I also took in a Hispanic boy from the inner city when Pierre was eight years old. He was Pierre's age and spent many summers and holidays at our home where he played happily with our children.

Now, when I visit Pierre and his family, I often find a child named Alex who lives in a housing project, sound asleep on the living room couch or with Pierre in the kitchen while he teaches him cooking. Alex is one of the children Pierre used to work with at the Birch Camp where he was a counselor there during his summers. He has become an important part of Pierre's life for the past five or six years.

By the time he was in the middle school, Pierre had a new vision of his mother. When he brought friends home, he would take them to my study and tell them with pride, "My mother is a writer."

He played the trumpet in the jazz band at middle school and started a career as a part time magician with John, his best friend. He and John had business cards made with the proud name of "The Wizards of Wellesley." I drove them to all their gigs and waited for them while sitting in the car and grading papers. Once when they were performing at a very posh house, the mother invited me in and promptly ushered me to the cloakroom where I worked on a pile of children's coats, fuming inside.

Pierre was terrific at drawing children into the excitement of the show, invoking much audience participation. My mother, his beloved grandmother, took him once to Tannen's, New York's biggest magic equipment store off Times Square. I have to add that my glamorous mother was a fashion designer and a vice president of a company that produced dresses for catalogues. She certainly gave him a different view of the roles women could play during that period. He spent much time with her in New York City going to the circus, to museums and taking in a city he grew to love.

We decided to send Pierre to a private school when our local public high school lost its accreditation. I sent him to visit several schools and he balked at most of them until we found one that was neither high-powered, nor "alternative," nor very *Yankee* for we live in New England and despite the cultural

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diversity, the Anglo-Saxon model still prevails there. He promptly won an art scholarship, very unusual for a boy at the time, by giving a magic show to a highly entertained board of directors of the school.

That is where he discovered his grand passion for there was a tiny radio station in the basement of one of the school buildings. Pierre soon became the station manager and his many talents of entrepreneur, peacemaker, and communicator flowered. He managed to settle a dispute with the local public high school over the allocation of air space by training the youngsters from that high school in station management and including them in his radio programs. When I was driving from the college to pick him up at school, I could hear his voice wafting from WRSB, the school ten-watt radio station that had a range of only ten miles.

When he was a freshman the question of sports reared up again. Pierre had the French gene of civil disobedience and would put on his sports uniform, join the group and then slip out of the back door and into the radio station. When it came time to award letters, Pierre felt that he had really tried at times and told me he so wished he could have one. I drove up to visit the coach, reminding him that he too had a son and asking him how would he feel if his son were denied a letter. The confused man backed away and Pierre got his letter. His best friend was in on that rather heated discussion and I heard him say, "Gee Pierre, your Ma is really something!" Despite the letter, Pierre soon lost interest because the radio station consumed him thoroughly.

At the age of 14, he took the subway into Boston and took an exam for a third class radio operator license. Soon after, I persuaded one of my students whose boyfriend was in radio to take Pierre as an intern. From emptying trash baskets, Pierre soon moved to operate the production board at WITS, the Voice of the Red Sox and he made friends there with some of the big radio personalities, friendships he maintains to this day.

Pierre was clearly on a very different track from most of the boys at school. He did have close friends who were following their own interests, a young man who seemed to live in the computer center and another youngster who had a knack for tapping into the principal's phone line so that the radio station could make calls to record companies nationwide and request free records as if WRSB were a commercial radio station.

Meanwhile, Pierre was participating in my life as a professor in an all male field by not only occasionally coming to work with me, but also by listening at the dinner table as I recounted what my misogynous department chairman was doing to undermine me because I had the nerve to publish and attract more students to my classes than he did. That man's name became a big part of our family discussions.

Those conversations had a big effect on Pierre. He does have teaching in his blood, but instead chose a career as a radio-marketing executive where listening to and working with customers was another form of teaching. It also made him aware of the difficulties women in radio that was also then a

predominantly male field.

That awareness stayed with him. Two years ago, we flew to Washington D.C. to attend an event where Pierre was presented with the annual achievement award from the Association of Women in Radio and Television. My husband, Pierre and a member of Pierre's staff were the only men present in a very crowded hotel ballroom. After the speeches and program were finished, I was surrounded by a group of women who wanted to tell me how much they appreciated his efforts. Pierre has spent years as the only male member on the AWRT board of directors, contributing his experience and his industry wide connections.

During that same period *Fortune Magazine* listed Pierre's company as one of the best places for women to work. He consistently hires and trains young women and has been richly rewarded for they have added much energy and talent to the company. He has arranged part time work for new moms and has made certain that bright young women are not only given responsibility but also influential positions.

Reciprocity between us has also become a happy and unexpected result of Pierre's feminist upbringing although it is also due in large part to his inherent generosity. He has supported my strong interest in writing about women and human rights in many ways. When I flew to Argentina in 1990 to interview the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (whose children were "disappeared" under the military junta) for a book I planned to write, Pierre gave me a frequent flyer ticket on business class so I could arrive in Buenos Aires less fatigued. And when I returned, he had a limousine waiting for me at the airport that took me to his New York apartment where I could spend the night and break the long flight before returning home.

By that time, even though Pierre was still a young man, he held a top position in a radio marketing company where he opened up new markets in Europe for the company. As a result his travels earned him many free airline miles.

When my book on the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo was published in 1994, I arranged for two of the Mothers to come visit Brandeis University where I am a Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center. Pierre took two days off from work. He flew to Boston to ferry the Mothers around and help me out, for I had them stay in our home where they would be more comfortable. He also took them out to lunch and to see the sights in our city as a treat and they were delighted with his company and their experience.

Two years later, I was embarked on yet another project on women and human rights. I wanted to have an interview with Hanan Ashrawi, a top political Palestinian leader who had taken part in the negotiations leading up to the Oslo Peace Accords. Not only was she interested in promoting the rights of her own people, but also at the time she was endeavoring to improve relations with the Israelis. She was staying in Washington D.C. for just a few days to meet with government officials. With much effort, I managed to schedule a 45-

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minute interview with her. Pierre booked a room for me in the same hotel where she was residing so that I could have easy access to her. He didn't want me to be stuck in traffic and lose my chance to connect with Ms. Ashrawi on the way to her hotel.

I return to the first image of Pierre as father and husband, holding his youngest daughter on his hip while he loads the washing machine, or getting up at night to feed her and loving every minute of it although both he and his wife are perpetually exhausted. Just recently, I read an article in the Business section of the *New York Times* about the president of an advertising company who claimed that there were no women in top positions in his company because they were better at nurturing than at managing, as if child rearing somehow dulled the brain. He was fired for his remarks, but I wish he could learn from Pierre and other men like him.

Pierre is not only supportive of women's human rights and their ability to chose in their public lives, but also in their private lives. After he married, his wife Mary wanted to wait to have children until she was established in her profession as an OBGYN. Pierre always dreamed of being a father but he honoured Mary's needs and she provided him with much loving support in his work. Before the children came, Pierre spent his vacations volunteering as a counselor at the Birch Camp for HIV positive children where he met Alex when he was a little boy. In his work as in his roles as a volunteer, parent and husband, Pierre has always shown a profound compassion, a quality that is absent from past and contemporary views of what constitutes male strength.

I think of just one of many instances where he was moved by a deep compassion. As he was walking back to his apartment in the city one late afternoon, a homeless woman with two children came up to him and told him of their hunger. He took them up to his bachelor pad where he had little to eat and where he learned that the woman had been evicted from her apartment because she couldn't pay the rent. Pierre called up the landlord, advanced the rent and went to an ATM machine to give her cash so they could buy groceries and return to their home.

In the United States, the male image of aggressiveness and toughness is supposed to represent strength. Women know that strength is a matter of combining mind and heart, of being able to acknowledge our shortcomings and vulnerabilities as well as honoring cooperation and mutual support. It is women who care about peace in the world and who organized a Million Mom March Against Guns in Washington D.C. a few years ago. I tried to impart this version of strength to Pierre as he was growing up, and he not only responded in his many faceted life, he has become a peacemaker at work and within both of his extended families.

While Pierre and I have always had a deep bond, he had his own strong personality and views. I can attest that he has a tact his mother sometimes lacks for I still have no compunction about proclaiming my political views. He enjoyed teasing and miming me when he was growing up. "Political Science,"

he would thunder when he was a teenager, furrowing his brow and looking deeply thoughtful. I taught international relations and Pierre would make fun of me by pretending I was reeling through a war-torn country while he would watch me cook dinner. He still has a wonderful perspective. Although he is hard working, ambitious and eagerly takes on perhaps too much responsibility, he doesn't take himself too seriously. Mostly he talks about his little girls and their progress, just like a proud Mom. It is a source of great satisfaction for me to see how feminist values inform the many aspects of his very rich life.

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Alicia Ostriker's Propaganda for Motherhood

In western culture, pregnancy and childbirth have been conceptualized, sometimes even by feminists, in ways that limit or deprive women of subjectivity. Since the 1960s a number of American women poets have been re-imagining motherhood, and more specifically pregnancy and childbirth, in ways that challenge existing constructions of these experiences. This paper discusses one such challenge, which is atypical in its overtly rhetorical nature. Alicia Ostriker wrote "Propaganda Poem: Maybe for Some Young Mamas" in reaction to an incident that occurred in the 1970s when, after reading her pregnancy poem to a group of women students who equated mothering to oppression, she was scorned. Her poem addresses these students and attempts to revise their conceptions of maternity and feminism. Ostriker presents a model of the mother/infant dyad that opposes both the medical model and the "feminist" model held by Ostriker's students. Ostriker explicitly explores the concept of love for an infant child, subtly infusing an element of sensuality into this relationship. Knowing that this description of love is insufficient to convince her students, the poet climaxes her "propaganda" by reversing the girls' notions of power and resistance. Although the poet aims to convince, she is honest and thus writes the "Postscript To Propaganda," where she recognizes some of the physical and emotional hardships of motherhood. "Propaganda Poem" moves from an idealized picture of motherhood, to a largely negative portrayal and finally in part three, "What Actually," to a more realist conclusion, where Ostriker attempts to present her ideological point of view, according to which, choice is the key word in re-imagining motherhood.

In western culture, pregnancy and childbirth have been conceptualized, sometimes even by feminists, in ways that limit or deprive women of subjectivity. Pregnancy and childbirth have been objectified, naturalized, essentialized, sentimentalized, concealed, ignored, idealized, and appropriated. These dan-

gers to pregnant subjectivity and the longstanding equation of the feminine *and* the female with motherhood have brought about the need for a re-imagination of the pregnant and birthing woman. For women writers and poets this need is even more intense, for historically women have had to choose between babies and books, between procreation and creation, and the presumption that any creative drives will be fulfilled through mothering still lingers.

Since the 1960s a number of American women poets, among them Muriel Rukeyser, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Alicia Ostriker, Lucille Clifton, Audre Lorde, and Sharon Olds, have been re-imagining motherhood, and more specifically pregnancy and childbirth, in ways that challenge existing constructions of these experiences. In this paper I shall discuss one such early challenge, which is atypical in its overtly rhetorical nature, and bears relevance even today.

Alicia Ostriker, one of America's foremost poet-critics, has consistently and repeatedly drawn on her experience of the maternal throughout her poetic career. If, she states, "the woman artist has been trained to believe that the activities of motherhood are trivial, tangential to the main issues of life, irrelevant to the great themes of literature, she should untrain herself" (1983: 131). Ostriker describes how rather during pregnancy she arrived at an incomparable profundity:

During pregnancy ... I believed from time to time that I understood the continuity of life and death, that my body was a city and a landscape, and that I had personally discovered the moral equivalent of war. (1983: 127)

Pregnancy also marked for Ostriker the "extraordinary sensation of transformation from being a private individual self to being a portion of something else" (1983: 127). This awareness of maternity as connecting the self to others, whether to her children, her students or the larger political and historical realm is the dominant strain in her pregnancy poetry.

Yet, despite her conviction that carrying children, birthing them and mothering them are acts that ultimately strengthen the intersubjective self, Ostriker is painfully aware of the simultaneous risks to selfhood that accompany motherhood. She states:

...existence is never the same afterward, when you have put yourself, as de Beauvoir correctly says, in the service of the species. You no longer belong to yourself. Your time, energy, body, spirit and freedom are drained. (1983: 130)

When one begins in pregnancy the physical process of ceasing to be a "private individual self," one undoubtedly experiences some sense of losing a degree of autonomy and independence. One gains at the same time though a heightened awareness of connection because of the complicated physical bonds

that tie one to another inextricably and permanently. This primary self/other relationship moreover teaches one, through the body, about being a self who is intersubjective, who has tangible links with others. The positive and negative experience of being connected in this way, starting in pregnancy, climaxing in childbirth and continuing through motherhood, is a central concern in Ostriker's pregnancy and childbirth poetry.

However, when Ostriker (1980) attempted to convey this sense of the complex but ultimately rewarding experience of motherhood to her students—"reading the girls my old pregnancy poem / that I thought was ripe and beautiful"—in the 1970's, when feminism equated childbearing to oppression, she was scorned and, she reports, "if looks could kill I would/ have been one dead duck in that/ so-called 'feminist' classroom." The negative reaction of her students, to whom Ostriker has said herself to be "maternally motivated," prompted her to write "Propaganda Poem: Maybe for Some Young Mamas" (1980). In this poem she addresses the "young girls in a classroom" who want "to live our lives" without "the burden the responsibility/ the disgusting mess" of motherhood, and attempts to explain the meaning of maternity to them. Ostriker does not simply launch into her "propaganda" but attempts, almost physically, to identify and understand her students: "I leaned and strained towards you, trying to understand/ what you were becoming." Her identification with them has at its root a hope that they will also identify with her.

Ostriker's students with their "smooth skins" and "good American bodies" seem to have been educated in the existentialist school of feminism promoted most notably by proto-feminist Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir is actually an example of how not only western culture but even certain feminists have, sometimes ambivalently sometimes enthusiastically, conceptualized pregnancy as purely natural and biological. While Ostriker might agree with Beauvoir's central thesis in *The Second Sex* (1953) that man has made woman into the Other, she certainly disputes many passages in Beauvoir's work that suggest that women's subordinate position has its source in her ability to bring forth children: "... in maternity woman remained closely bound to her body, like an animal." (97).

Much debate exists around the question of Beauvoir's devaluation of the maternal body, and the role that biology plays in women's subordinate position. Certainly both her detractors and her admirers make powerful arguments. I see myself in the middle, with those who recognize Beauvoir's ambiguity or, I prefer, ambivalence: "She hesitates, goes this way and that ..." (Leon, 1995: 152). What does seem clear, however, is that Beauvoir's negative comments surrounding the biology of menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation cannot be explained away so easily.

Even as Beauvoir insists that biology is not destiny, she draws a grim and detailed picture of woman's biological alienation in her reproductive functions. For example: "... gestation is a *fatiguing* task of *no individual benefit* to the woman ..." (1953: 33, my emphasis). Childbirth, she goes on to state, "is

painful and dangerous ... the infant ... in being born it may kill its mother ... (33, my emphasis). The nursing mother, says Beauvoir, “feeds the newborn from the resources of her own vitality...” (34). Beauvoir summarizes her thoughts on reproduction as follows: “It has been well said that women ‘have infirmity in the abdomen’; and it is true that they have within them a hostile element—it is the species gnawing at their vitals” (34). It seems fair to say then that for Beauvoir and later for Shulamith Firestone—whose controversial *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) focuses on practical ways to escape what Beauvoir saw as the immanence of the reproductive female body—woman’s reproductive ability is the source of her oppression and leads to the obliteration of her subjectivity. It is not surprising that Beauvoir opted not to bear children. In Ostriker’s (1980) opinion, re-imagining and confronting maternity rather than escaping it, is the way to tackle the problematic areas of reproduction and their representation.

And so, she attempts to convey to these thoroughly “feminist” students the uniqueness of having children, through a description of the mother/baby dyad in pregnancy:

one animal
and both gently just slightly
separated from each other
swaying, swinging
like a vine, like an oriole nest
keep returning to each other

These lines tackle the meaning of otherness within the self and thus of the borders of identity of the pregnant woman. The mother/fetus unit is “one animal,” a single entity, yet within this one “both” exist “just slightly separated from each other.” Tess Cosslett (1994) is correct in pointing out that the metaphors do not allow a clear distinction between mother and fetus. Thus Cosslett asks: “Is the mother the vine, holding up the nest? But the baby clings to her like a vine, and she is the nest for the baby” (120). The undecidability of these metaphors, together with the gentle “swaying, swinging” strengthen the sense of harmony and mutuality between both entities in the pregnant unit. Contrary to the medical model, according to which the fetus is almost awarded subjectivity and mother becomes fetal incubator, and the “feminist” model held by Ostriker’s students wherein the woman is the all-important subject who is threatened by a parasitic child (Cosslett, 1994: 120), Ostriker’s (1980) “one animal” model—“the dazzling circuit of contact without dominance”—challenges any either/or or hierarchical models.

In “Propaganda Poem” Ostriker explicitly explores the concept of love for an infant child in a way that confirms Julia Kristeva’s (1986) sense of the unique dynamic between child and mother—“the slow, difficult and delightful apprenticeship in attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself” (174). Ostriker,

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however, subtly infuses an element of sensuality into this relationship, which she describes in this poem as “better than sex.” Thus she urges her students:

and I want you to think about touching
and the pleasure of touching
and being touched by this most perfect thing
this pear tree blossom
this mouth these leafy hands these genitals
like petals

By framing “touching” by a space the poet invites the reader to give pause to imagine, to feel that unique type of touch, the space, reminding us to re-think our notions of pleasurable touch. The language is sensual in that the repetition of “touching,” “the pleasure of touching,” and “being touched” causes the reader to imagine the sensation. The metaphor of the “pear tree blossom” invokes an image of nature, freshness, innocence, rebirth and potential. These associations undercut the following line that calls to mind touching of a usually erotic nature: mouth, “leafy hands” and genitals/ like petals.” Thus the overall sense is not one of sexuality, but of a vastly sensual touch and highly pleasurable, innocent warmth.

In a short prose piece in Ostriker’s *The Mother/Child Papers* (1980) entitled “Letter to M,” Ostriker expands on this notion of a mother’s physical pleasure, especially during nursing, which she calls “one of the most pleasurable things it is possible for a human to do” (33) and wonders why she has never encountered a discussion of this experience:

why do we not say this? Why are mothers always represented sentimentally, as having some sort of altruistically self-sacrificing “maternal feelings,” “as if they did not enjoy themselves? Is it so horrible that we enjoy ourselves: another love that dare not tell its name? (1980: 33)

In these short lines Ostriker taps into another aspect of maternal subjectivity: that of physical pleasure disconnected from the sexual act between man and woman. The context for Ostriker is breastfeeding, but her discussion of sensuality recalls Iris Marion Young’s theoretical exploration of pregnant subjectivity, where she maintains that the pregnant woman “may find herself with a heightened sense of her own sexuality” (1984: 53) and thus enjoy “an innocent narcissism” (53). This sensual, but at the same time innocent, enjoyment of the maternal body and the self-awareness and self-satisfaction that accompany it strengthen pregnant subjectivity. This is especially true in the face of a cultural expectation, articulated by Ostriker (1980), that the maternal body be asexual, and naturally, selflessly inclined to perform the physical burdens of motherhood.

Sexuality is the chief influence on definitions of mothers as good or bad.

Catherine Stimpson (1993) explains: "...the good mother, who transforms sexual desire into reproductive bounty is pure. The bad mother, whose libido is imperfectly restrained ... is impure, even diabolically so" (316). The construction of the pregnant woman as beautiful, angelic, and *especially unsexed* has silenced her perhaps as much as her construction as object. The separation of pregnancy/motherhood and sexuality is a cornerstone of patriarchy, as Freud attests in his diagnosis of the mother/whore syndrome in his famous essay "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life" (1950). There he claims that men, aiming at all costs to preserve the mother's purity, deflect all sexual feelings onto another degraded object. Ostriker in her poem "The Cambridge Afternoon was Grey" (1995) portrays the forbidden nature of erotic pleasure in any facet of maternity. She describes how, on revealing her "hot breast," which "ran up to you like a dog/ to a younger dog it wants to make friends with" in excited anticipation of nursing her baby, "the scandalized aide had to pull the grey/curtains around our bed, making a sound of hissing virtue...."

This "sound of hissing virtue" takes a different form in the revulsion of the young women in Ostriker's (1980) class ("I see you shudder truly") and their resulting rejection of motherhood. Ostriker thus continues her attempt to convince them that freedom from motherhood will not necessarily bring them pleasure, but that having a baby might: her simple line "...there is no/good time like the good time a whole mama/ has with a whole little baby...." Moreover says the poet, and here the "propaganda" climaxes by reversing the girls' notions of power and resistance, the disassociation of motherhood from feminism is a mistake. Rather a positive, enjoyable motherhood can empower a woman, who "is acceptable if she is/ weak/acceptable if she is a victim" or an "angry victim" or acceptable even if she is "a deodorized sanitized sterilized antiperspirant/ grinning efficient woman...." It is the satisfied mother, the embodiment of fertility and the "joy that hurts nobody/ the dazzling circuit of contact without dominance" that is threatening, for it represents something magnificent and pleasurable that men cannot do:

But who can tolerate the power of a woman
close to child, riding our tides
into the sand dunes of the public spaces.

Throughout the poem sand represents grittiness, aridity, barrenness and emptiness ("why are you made of sand") while maternity is associated with water ("a little wave"), sustenance ("flowing sap"), greenness and fruitfulness. These final lines betray the threat that accompanies the powerful life force as it enters the barren, male-dominated "public spaces."

These final words of the first part of this poem are seemingly the culmination of the propaganda. However, the poet, although her aim is to convince the girls, cannot be dishonest, and thus writes the "Postscript To Propaganda." This demonstrates that re-imagination of pregnancy has little to

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do, even in a propaganda poem, with representing a rosy picture of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. In a short prose piece “Paragraphs,” Ostriker (1980) starkly emphasizes the importance of recognizing the difficulties of motherhood:

If I fail to acknowledge my will to murder the child, to wipe him like a spill from a counter—then all I call my love will evaporate, will choke. (33)

Adrienne Rich (1977), in her groundbreaking *Of Woman Born*, discusses the rage and violent fantasies—“the heart of maternal darkness”—of mothers, including herself. At length, Rich presents the dangers of censoring these feelings, of not somehow dealing with them: self-hate, repressed rage, guilt, depression, desperation, and even violence directed against children.

“Postscript to Propaganda” thus openly recognizes and enumerates some of the hardships of motherhood. For example:

That they whine until you want to murder them. That their beauty prevents you. That their eating and excreting exactly resembles the slime-trails of slugs. On your knees you follow, cleaning, unstaining....

Performing these tasks you feel: “your life peeling away/ from you like layers of cellophane.” Yet the menial jobs of mothers are nothing to the emotional toil they endure: “when your child grieves, mother/ you bend and grieve.” This skewed identification, commencing in pregnancy with bodily identification, continues throughout motherhood with an emotional identification that involves not only love and affection, but pain and frustration. Rich painfully and eloquently describes the painful inescapability of this identification:

To suffer with and for and against a child – maternally, egoistically, neurotically ... but always everywhere, in body and soul, *with* that child – because that child is a piece of oneself. (1970: 22)

Julia Kristeva (1986) agrees, suggesting that pregnancy and childbirth bring on an intense and constant pain that issues from becoming a mother:

But the pain, its pain—it comes from inside, never remains apart, other, it inflames me at once, without a second’s respite. As if that was what I had given birth to and, not willing to part from me, insisted in coming back, dwelled in me permanently. One does not give birth in pain, one gives birth to pain: the child represents it and henceforth it settles in, continuous. (179)

To be the autonomous, rational, individualistic self that Ostriker's students strive to be—"we want our freedom and we want it now"—is far easier than being related in this painful way. To be a relational being is to feel pain, not only one's own, but "its pain," the child's pain, the other's pain, as if it were one's own. True empathy is a central axis of intersubjective, ethical relations.

Like an Aristotelian thesis, antithesis and synthesis model, "Propaganda Poem" moves from an idealized picture of motherhood, to a largely negative portrayal and finally in part three, "What Actually," to a more realist conclusion. In part three, which reads almost like prose, Ostriker (1980) attempts to present her ideological point of view, not so much to the girls anymore, but to herself and all her readers. To sum it up she says:

... It is the unanimity that offends me.
The ideological lockstep, that cannot permit women, humans,
simply to choose for themselves.

Overlapping somewhat with *Of Woman Born* in terms of dates, this poem's ideological message is strikingly similar to that of Rich, even though it is a reaction not only against patriarchy, as is Rich's book, but a reaction also against a breed of feminism that thinks that "motherhood is the sinister invention/ of patriarchy." Ostriker and Rich agree that choice is the key word in re-imagining motherhood. It is not motherhood, but the institution of compulsory motherhood, or the stereotypes of "mother" that can inflict such damaging wounds on the personhood of a woman. Ostriker explicitly undermines any notion of biological determinism that casts all women as mothers, saying: "I believe that some of us are born to be mamas ... some born not to be. Some in/ the middle."

Rich (1977) concludes her book with the hope that the compulsory patriarchal institution of motherhood, and what Ostriker (1980) calls the unanimity or "ideological lockstep," can be destroyed. In its place a re-imagined conception of maternity would emerge:

To destroy the institution is not to abolish motherhood. It is to release the creation and sustenance of life into the same realm of decision, struggle, surprise, imagination, and conscious intelligence, as any other difficult, but freely chosen work. (280)

Ostriker closes her poem by returning to an image of the young women in the classroom, probing with questions addressed them, to herself and to her readers:

... Were there maybe a few young mamas sitting
in that classroom in the winter light, subdued, their codes
inaudible? Were they afraid to choose? Have we not explained

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to the young that choice equals risk? Wanted to tell them to
decode themselves ...

... Wanted to tell them, mamas or not mamas, we all get
damaged when put to use, ...

Her painful skewed identification with them, her “maternal motivation” towards them, present throughout the poem, is palpable in her urgent questioning, her repetition of “wanted to tell them” and her use of “we,” which forges a connection between them, her and the reader. Most importantly, the emphasis on choice awards agency to a woman who takes upon herself the activity or project of childbearing and rearing. Feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick (1994) confirms Ostriker’s sense that “choice equals risk” and that “resentments, ambivalences and fears”(39) may be part of that choice. However, by choosing to have a child a woman claims “pregnancy and childbirth as an expression of herself ... rather than as an alien condition or social expectation to which she submits.” (39)

Although written almost three decades ago, Ostriker’s propaganda remains relevant and even necessary in attempting to deconstruct the binaries that divide babies from books, and motherhood from creativity. Her poem also reveals much about the evolving attitudes of feminism towards motherhood and alerts us to the importance of examining ideologies and theories with a critical eye. Sometimes, Ostriker tells us in “What Actually,” “we paint ourselves wrong.” She warns against “self-serving, self-pitying rhetoric” that undermines the ability of women to choose the kinds of lives that will fulfill them. Hers is not an attack on feminist theory, but a move to look beyond the “garbage we all shovel” to a place where women can “decode themselves” to understand the power and joy of motherhood.

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Mommy Memoirs Feminism, Gender and Motherhood in Popular Literature

This paper analyzes the current public discourse on gender, reproduction and motherhood using personal narratives in contemporary popular literature on motherhood. Drawing on recently published memoirs, essays and personal short stories, the study focuses on prevalent gender conceptualizations, interactions between social structures of reproduction, gender and motherhood, and gendering of motherhood and parenthood in American society. These narratives reveal a biological emphasis on the bodily experiences of pregnancy and childbirth and on the different natures of men and women in parenting and childcare, which together contribute to categorical and dichotomous gender conceptualization. However, the biological differences are reaffirmed through social practices, and result in the reproduction of gender inequality. The writers of the analyzed texts, women who became mothers at the time of increasing gender equality and many of them avowed feminists, felt mostly unprepared for the motherhood role; the ambivalence about their position as mothers mostly stem from the persistent myth of the “natural” mother and resurfacing of the traditional gender practices they encountered once they became mothers. Motherhood changed their social position in the gender structures and remained one of the main elements of gender inequality.

Among the most popular representations of motherhood today are maternal memoirs. They feature women of different backgrounds and with varied mothering experiences, many of them avowed feminists, who grew up and became mothers during a time of increasing gender equality. However, most of them were largely unprepared for the transformation brought to their lives by pregnancy and motherhood. Becoming mothers made them rethink and reevaluate their relationships, values and ideas about gender and their position in society.

This paper examines the relationship between motherhood and feminism from the perspective of gender inequality embedded in Western motherhood using a popular narrative form of memoirs about motherhood as my evidence. I see these autobiographical accounts as a window into the current public discourse on motherhood and gender and analyze them using several key feminist writings on motherhood, gender and reproduction.

Research topics, data and methods

More than 800 books on motherhood were published in the years 1970-2000, the majority of them after 1980 (Douglas and Michaels, 2004: 8). While many of these are manuals, advice books, parenting books or academic analyses, many books focus on the author's own, often quite ambivalent, experiences with motherhood. Unlike academic studies of motherhood, these "mommy memoirs," written by mothers dealing with new joys and frustrations, are aimed at wide audiences and written in accessible language, emphasizing authors' subjectivity and experience. Differing in length, structure and method of presentation, these personal accounts claim to be confessions of imperfect mothers, surprised by the overwhelming nature of motherhood and changes it brought into their lives.

In this analysis I consider nine books featuring maternal autobiographical accounts, published between the years 2000 and 2004, and examine the authors' perspectives on motherhood and gender.¹ While these accounts are certainly not representative of the experiences of all American mothers,² their almost simultaneous appearance on the book market draws our attention to women's voices in the discussion about the enactment of the motherhood role at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The books analyzed are: Lisa Belkin's *Life's Work: Confessions of an Unbalanced Mom* (2002); Martha Brockenbrough's *It Could Happen to You! Diary of a Pregnancy And Beyond* (2002); Andrea J. Buchanan's *Mother Shock. Loving Every (Other) Minute of It* (2003); Susan Cheever's *As Good As I Could Be* (2001); Rachel Cusk's *A Life's Work. On Becoming a Mother* (2001); Faulkner Fox's *Dispatches from a Not-So-Perfect Life Or How I Learned to Love the House, the Man, the Child* (2003); Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender's edited collection, *Breeder. Real Life Stories from a New Generation of Mothers* (2001); Lauren Slater's *Love Works Like This. Moving from One Kind of Life to Another* (2002); and Naomi Wolf's *Misconceptions. Truth, Lies, and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood* (2001).

I analyze these memoirs to understand the authors' experiences and concerns and focus on patterns and concerns reoccurring within their writings. Most of the narratives bring to the forefront the ambivalence and unpreparedness the authors experienced once they became mothers and the dramatic life-changing nature and overwhelming character of mothering. However, this theme is intertwined with the strong emphasis on gender dichotomization, gendered character of motherhood and parenthood, and gender inequality perceived and presented by these narratives.

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The goal of this paper is thus to examine gender conceptualizations, interactions between social structures of gender and motherhood, and the experience and gendering of parenthood in contemporary American society using the analysis of narratives in selected popular literature. To accomplish this, I focus on four topics. First, I look at the emphasis on gender dualism and gender differences in parenting. Second, I analyze the significance of the bodily experience for motherhood and social control over women's bodies during pregnancy and childbirth for naturalization of gender differences. Third, I consider the "natural mother" myth, which assumes women's superiority and ability as natural caregivers. Fourth and finally, I examine how the authors experience and challenge the changes in gender relations and practices once they become rearranged after the birth of a child. I combine this analysis of personal narratives with a theoretical understanding of gender conceptualization and gender practices.

Biological essentialism and social construction of gender in maternal memoirs

Motherhood and reproduction play a significant role in the definition and naturalization of gender differences and justification of gender inequality. The books included in this analysis often represent women's biological role in reproduction and childbearing as a cause for the gender inequality they experience. The biological essentialism³ is created by the prominent bodily experience related to childbirth, breastfeeding and early stages of childcare and often a disbelief in men's ability to care for children equally well as a mother. The closer connection of women to their bodies and thus nature also add to the perception of natural differences between men and women. Emphasis on biological differences and overall different nature of men and women thus contributes to the categorical conceptualization of gender in these maternal memoirs.

Such accounts stand in contrast to most feminist theories that demonstrated that gender inequality and gender relations are not causally based on biological differences between men and women but are instead a result of social and political processes (see, for example, Lorber, 1994, 2005; Connell, 1987, Scott, 1988, O'Reilly, 2004). It is not the biological differences, but rather the cultural definitions of these differences and the power relationships rooted in these definitions that are significant in the gendering of social structures. The natural character of gender practices does not create gender relations and "the practices of sexual reproduction are often quite remote aspects of social encounters in which gender is constructed and sustained" (Connell, 1987: 81). According to Robert W. Connell (1987), social practices reformulate, restructure and often exaggerate and distort the natural differences. By becoming mothers and fathers, social actors reaffirm their position within existing gender structures. Social expectations of nurturing, care, motherhood and fatherhood are the "[s]ocial practices that construct women and men into distinct catego-

ries by converting an average difference into categorical difference ... negate the major pattern of difference that occurs within sexes rather than between them" (Connell, 1987: 80). Biological essentialism, through which the "natural" abilities of women and men in reproduction and parenthood are emphasized and seen as essential and universal, is then used to justify gender differences in parenting.

While most authors emphasize the biological difference between women and men, they are also aware of the social context of gender differences and their social construction. This explanation becomes evident in their discussions of gender inequality and the position of mothers in society. The authors employ social constructionist explanations of gender differences in challenging women's natural ability to care for their children and the gender division of childcare, although in most cases they simultaneously see themselves as more competent parents than their partners and are the primary caretakers of their children. Biological differences are reaffirmed and intertwined with social practices and together contribute to gender essentialism and categorical perception of gender differences.

The relationship between reproduction and gender inequality is thus one of the "paradoxes of gender" (Lorber, 1994). Judith Lorber argues that "gender inequality is located solely in the structure of gendered social practices and institutions. Procreation and sexuality are constructed as conditions of subordination within the social institution of gender" (1994: 285). Reproduction creates the basis for gender as a social process and at the same time the relations between men and women are largely defined through reproductive practices.

The analysis of the motherhood narratives suggests that biological essentialism and motherhood as a gendered social institution are fundamental for reproducing the existing gender inequalities in Western societies. By becoming a mother, a woman's femininity is essentialized and the biological differences between men and women become critical. At the same time, differences in social positions and existing gender structures become more visible and relationships become less equal. Biological differences are thus reaffirmed through social practices in family relations, childcare and even work arrangements. However, the repetitive character of social practices leaves some space for variation in performance (Butler, 1993) and practices (Connell, 1987) and allows for challenge and transformation of existing social structures as shown by the authors' experiences. I discuss these different forms of gender conceptualization in the remainder of the article.

Gender conceptualization in maternal memoirs

Gender differences in parenthood

It is part of the innate character of motherhood memoirs as a gendered form of writing that the stories they narrate are told from the female perspective. Transition to motherhood and parenting experiences are thus seen

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through gender lenses. The categorical distinction between men and women is inherent in all of the books included but these distinctions are further supported by repeated observations and remarks about the different nature of men and women, their different reactions and behaviors in the same situations, or even by the absence of men performing parenting tasks. Naomi Wolf describes hers and her husband's reaction to the news of her pregnancy as follows:

... we reacted very differently. My husband needed to go for a run—and think; and I needed to sit still, and not think. Male and female, after our first amazement, we reacted spontaneously, like different elements. (2001: 15)

For Lauren Slater, a longtime depression sufferer, her pregnancy was a source of constant fear and ambivalence about having the baby. From the beginning, pregnancy made her aware of how different she and her husband were in dealing with fear about the future, feeling close and separate from him at the same time (2002: 18). Despite the fact that her husband is less ambivalent than she about having the child, in the middle of her pregnancy she feels that "... this baby has yet to take root in him" (47). Talking with her sister, Slater fights the idea that men are so different and hopes that "[h]e'll catch on". But her sister argues that motherhood and fatherhood are essentially different: "[h]e's a guy.... Fatherhood is something you do. ... Motherhood is something you are" (49).

Martha Brockenbrough's husband was very involved in her pregnancy and in childcare; he even added several chapters describing the events from his perspective, emphasizing the different views men and women can have on the same matter. Although she feels that having a baby brought them closer together, in some ways she also finds him different, something she had not noticed before (2002: 175).

Essentializing and generalizing pregnancy and childbirth, Rachel Cusk reflects on the experience of pregnancy and childbirth and sees them as creating the gender difference:

I did not understand what a challenge to the concept of sexual equality the experience of pregnancy and childbirth is. Birth is not merely which divides women from men: it also divides women from themselves, so that a woman's understanding of what it is to exist is profoundly changed. (2001: 6-7)

Bodily experience: Social control over body and loss of autonomy

Experience of the body is an inevitable part of the definition of motherhood and gender for the writers of these narratives. Although the interpretation, setting and significance of pregnancy and childbirth are socially determined, they are biological processes, and pregnant women and new mothers are

highly aware of their physical bodies.⁴ Changes of the body during pregnancy make women feel more feminine and signify their position in the reproduction processes and gender system. While most of the authors feel empowered by the ability of their bodies to produce another human being, they also understand that their pregnant bodies affect their reception in the society. Social control over women's bodies exercised during pregnancy and childbirth further reinforces gender differences between men and women on the biological level but also on the level of power and control.

Hormonal changes during and after pregnancy make a woman feel more vulnerable, looking for support and protection from her husband, writes Wolf. This change led her to rethink her feminist and social constructionist beliefs: "The ways in which hormones during pregnancy affected me called into question my entire belief system about 'social construction of gender'" (2001: 115). She goes on to describe her changing body, its shape, colors and changes in her temperament and emotions.

In Lauren Slater's book (2002), hormonal changes are used as the metaphor for many changes that a pregnant woman experiences. The book is divided into sections based on pregnancy trimesters with a short introduction describing the effect of the respective predominant hormone. Slater finds most of the hormonal changes quite unpleasant: mood swings, the return of depression, absentmindedness.⁵

In the later stages of her pregnancy, Slater uses her mind to make her feel less pregnant. In the progress of a lecture she delivers, she changes from "a squat, rolling woman in a poorly patched dress, the face of a teenager, the body of earth" to her image of an author "slim and tailored, with precise mouth and tapered fingers, slightly stained with ink" (2002: 93). She was thus able to escape her maternal body, so incompatible with her professional intellectual activity.

Many writers point out that pregnancy changes the way they were perceived by others and how they perceive the world. Pregnancy becomes a sign of increased femininity and intrusion of the personal into the public life, making women more vulnerable to status devaluation in a masculine public culture. Lisa Belkin writes about working while pregnant:

After spending careers trying to prove that we're professionals and that our personal lives won't intrude on our work, we find ourselves occupying bodies that scream otherwise. We fear that colleagues and clients will dismiss us as less valuable, and we also fear they might be right. (2002: 45-46)

Hiding pregnancy weight gain and feminine physical changes is then a part of being able to maintain the appearance of professionalism in the masculine culture (Belkin, 2002). The pregnant body makes people feel uncomfortable, unable to deal with a woman the same way they did before (Wolf, 2001: 67).

Wolf felt that her lecture audiences became more absorbed with her growing stomach than with what she had to say and, as she gained more weight, was shocked by the reactions of her friends and acquaintances that ranged “from the embarrassing to the offensive” (64-66). In a culture with beauty standards based on thinness, gaining weight during pregnancy becomes a conflicting issue for women who had struggled with weight before. Min Jin Lin (cited in Gore and Lavender, 2001: 26-27), remembers her feelings when she noticed her increased weight: “Having previously struggled with a weight problem ... I did not want to be fat again, *ever*. The idea of gaining forty pounds was devastating.”

The emphasis on the responsibility of a woman for her child’s well-being is another aspect of the bodily experience of childbearing and begins even before the baby is born. Most authors disliked the patronizing tone of pregnancy and parenting manuals telling them what to eat, how to act and what to avoid to make sure their babies are born healthy, but at the same time they tried to follow these instructions and felt guilty about each small mishap (Wolf, 2001: 24; Cusk, 2001: 26-30; Fox, 2003: 43ff).

The intense physical pain of childbirth and heightened awareness and sensation of the biological processes of the body is also a significant part of the motherhood experience. Most authors vividly describe the immense pain of childbirth as something for which they could not prepare.⁶ Cusk (2001: 12) describes her image of childbirth as an act of violence on her body similar to the image of Mexican piñata filled with candy, forced to give it up.

Management of pain in the hospitals, where most births take place, is according to Wolf geared toward medicalization of laboring women, making them passive and unable to actively deal with the childbirth process. Faulkner Fox puts the issue of pain and control into direct opposition. Just like Wolf, she saw the hospital and modern medicine as masculine institutions taking away women’s control over their own bodies. In order to maintain this control, she delivered both of her children at home, with the help of midwives, but without any pain relief: “I’m no masochist, but I eventually figured ... that people barking orders at me, or worse yet, just doing things to me ... would be worse for me than any physical pain” (2003: 64).

The before-mentioned safety of an unborn baby is also translated into numerous medical interventions during labor and delivery. As Wolf, Cusk, and Fox point out, these interventions aim to protect the baby, but are often unnecessary and disrupt the autonomy and confidence of the birthing mother, making her further dependent on the help of experts.

Clearly, for these writers, the bodily experience creates one of the main gender divides between men and women and explains the naturalness of their own motherhood. Reaffirmation of the biological differences through social practices and shared understanding of them as natural contribute to the dichotomous categorization of gender and gender essentialism. Social control over women’s bodies during pregnancy and childbirth is thus conducive to social structures of power in gender relationships.

The “natural mother” myth

The biological connection between a mother and her baby presupposes the ability of a mother to care for the baby without too much effort or learning. Most mothers writing these books though soon discover that mothering skills do not come naturally and it takes time and experience to become a mother. The socially constructed myth of the “natural mother” prevalent in American society (Cheever, 2001: 21) makes it more difficult for women to deal with their own failures and mistakes in caring for the baby. For example, breastfeeding, culturally perceived as a natural way to feed and bond with the baby, becomes a stumbling block for many new mothers.⁷ Even mothers without breastfeeding problems, who enjoyed the closeness with the baby, often feel conflicted about it. The cultural image of the bond between a nursing mother and her child and mother’s fixed attention on the baby become oppressive for some during hours of nursing on demand. Wolf and Cusk both describe the sense of loss of control over their bodies, this time during nursing:

It was not longer “my breast,” since it had become her possession, so I thought of it as “the breast”... Really it was ‘her breast.’ (Wolf, 2001: 267)

The story of my need is over.... Instead I have become a responsive unit, a transmitter. I imagine my solidity transferring itself to her, leaving me unbodied. (Cusk, 2001: 98)

Mothers who wrote these books do feel the physical connection with their babies and some describe a feeling of closeness and unity that transcended the physical level (Cheever, 2001: 20), but they also feel that babies’ needs replaced their own. They are quite open about feeling conflicted toward their children but they are mostly unhappy with the social position they find themselves as new mothers – isolated, exhausted and left alone with the baby for most of the day. They realize that mothering is not completely natural and are upset about being left with it alone and unprepared. Their ambivalent feelings towards motherhood are according to these writers inadmissible to others, even their partners, because of the culturally engrained image of a mother rejoicing over her baby (Wolf, 2001: 211-223). The socially constructed myth of the “natural mother” thus makes mothering even more difficult.

Gender divisions in childcare and transformation of gender relationships

Related to the idea of the naturalness of motherhood is the perception of the mother as the only person able to properly care for the baby. While most authors challenge parts of the “natural mother” myth, most of them are also the primary caretakers of their children, although the involvement of fathers in childcare varies. With few exceptions, fathers are more or less absent, appearing

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at the time of birth and then playing a supportive role in the background. While Cusk (2001) purposefully omits her partner's role to focus on maternal experiences, the absence of fathers from the daily parenting tasks in other books remains mostly unexplained. Even if husbands are present, mothers usually adjust their lives to parenthood to a larger extent than their partners. This also contributes to the categorical differentiation between men and women presented in these books.

Many writers challenge these gender divisions in childcare and they do not easily accept the changes in their statuses to a mother, often accompanied by being a housewife. As professional women, who matured and had children at a time of increasing gender equality, the persistence of traditional gender practices in their family lives makes them unsatisfied and unhappy. Cusk was aware of the increasing status difference and gender inequality between her and her husband when she stayed home with their daughter, while her husband worked outside the house:

... after a child is born the lives of its mother and father diverge, ... before they were living in some state of equality, now they exist in a sort of feudal relationship to each other. A day spent at home caring for a child could not be more different from a day spent working in the office.... They are days spent on opposite sides of the world. (2001: 5)

The common and often unquestioned attitude of both mothers and fathers that it would be the mother who would take care of the baby changes the dynamics of the relationship between the parents. Even if both partners previously expressed their beliefs in gender equality and fairness, "with the arrival of the baby ... they [men] were slipping back into the cultural roles with which they had grown up." (Wolf, 2001: 235). Fox, whose husband was involved in the childcare more than other fathers (2003: 153), but not to the point of equality she desired, describes her feelings of injustice, inequality and lack of power. Consequently she felt resentful towards her life as well as toward her husband but also guilty for being selfish and wanting her work to be as recognized as fully as her husband's in their family circle. Once they reached a point of sharing the housework and childcare more equally, Fox was aware they would always have to work hard to maintain this delicate balance (134-164).

Gender practices, beliefs and ideologies have in the past thirty years become partially transformed towards increasing gender equality. However, on the familial level and in actual decisions made after the birth of the children, they switch back to the traditional, less egalitarian models. This becomes frustrating for most of these feminist writers because of their expectations of egalitarian marriage from the pre-baby time. Most of them also had careers and jobs which they put on hold to take care of their children. The lack of equality puts a definite strain on their marriages and highlights the gender differences

between men and women.

To deal with the discontent with the new family arrangements and the unequal division of labor, these women usually try to recover some parts of their pre-baby lives and establish a more equal division of household labor and childcare, looking for a compromise they perceive as fair (Wolf, 2001: 233-253; see also Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Hochschild, 1989). Through negotiations and challenges to existing gender inequalities, these new practices result in another transformation of gender relations.

Conclusion

The motherhood narratives analyzed in this article raise many issues facing contemporary mothers through first-person views of their experiences. Although it remains for future researchers to discover if the patterns discussed here are generalizable, these books provide a valuable source for the discursive analysis of motherhood and gender in contemporary American society. These memoirs present motherhood as a transformative experience for women and constitutive to existing gender structures.

I focus this analysis on gender conceptualization and find that gender is largely conceptualized in categorical and dichotomous terms. Rather than looking at the similarities between mothers and fathers and their parenting experiences, most authors stress gender differences resulting from biological processes and emphasizing the prominent experiences of the body for maternal experience. However, the biological differences are reaffirmed through social practices. While many social theorists have depicted social constructionism and biological essentialism in oppositional terms, I find that biological and social emphases in these motherhood narratives together contribute to gender essentialism and dichotomous categorization of gender (see also Fuss, 1989).

The authors of the texts feel conflicted about their positions as mothers mostly because of the persistence of the “natural mother” myth and traditional gender practices, which they challenge in their writings. Many authors notice the different approaches to childcare of themselves and their husbands, which constitute another aspect of gender differentiation. They become frustrated with the persistence of traditional gender practices in their family lives, leading to an increase of gender inequality in their relationships. They deal with this by recovering some parts of their pre-baby life and establishing a more equal division of labor and childcare, transforming the gender practices once again.

My analysis of the motherhood memoirs thus demonstrates that even today motherhood and parenthood are strongly gendered institutions. Motherhood changes the social position of women in both private and public spheres and remains central to gender inequality. With the lack of macro-structural support mechanisms for mothers and families with children, gender equality still remains at the stage of a stalled revolution (Hochschild, 1989). For these writers, who became mothers years after the results of the feminist movement were institutionalized and often taken for granted, this is largely unexpected.

¹The final selection for this study includes nine books. They are not a representative or random sample nor are they an exhaustive list of all books published on motherhood in the time period 2000 – 2004. Rather they represent all the books I found using the snowball method on the websites of the on-line bookstores Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com, which were published during this time and were written as personal accounts, memories or reflections on motherhood, thus excluding advice books, academic analyses and books of fiction or poetry. They vary in the scope and focus (from pregnancy and childbirth to raising teenagers), format (edited volume of short essays, memoirs) as well as by their authors (feminist activists, novelists, journalists, “regular” women).

²It is important to keep in mind that these are published accounts of mostly white middle-class or upper middle-class women professionals; working class mothers would probably perceive their position differently. The writers’ ability to hire help, pay for child-care, and go out to take jobs they enjoy might not be options realistic for women of different socioeconomic background.

³Dichotomization of gender differences, grounding them in the biological basis, talking about “women and men as such” and reducing differences among women and among men to a common essence are the most frequent critiques aimed at essentialism in feminist theories. Approaches criticized as essentializing also tend to generalize the experiences of one group of women for all of them and naturalize the social origins of gender inequalities. Essentialism in this form is quite prevalent in the motherhood memoirs and although most authors stress that they rely on their own experience or the experiences of few other middle or upper-middle class mothers, they do not escape generalizations about men, women, fathers and mothers.

⁴Adoption as a way of becoming a mother is mentioned only in one story in Gore and Lavender’s book (2001).

⁵During the first trimester, Slater stops taking her anti-depressants and experiences mood swings (2002: 17). But when her depression returns and she considers an abortion, her doctor connects her ambivalence about having a baby with her high sensitivity to progesterone, the hormone predominant during the first trimester. Hesitant and worried about the risks for the unborn child, which would follow her during the rest of the pregnancy, Slater gets on the anti-depressants again (25-34).

⁶In contrast, Slater and Wolf both notice that neither the best-selling pregnancy manual *What to Expect When You’re Expecting* (Eisenberg et al., 1996) nor childbirth classes prepare women for the level of pain they will experience, and pain is often referred to as “discomfort” or “pressure” (Wolf, 2001: 91-92).

⁷For example, Cheever thought that nursing would be an easy and natural process but when her daughter repeatedly failed to latch, she says: “I felt like a complete failure. I had no idea how to take care of my baby – the one being in the world I desperately wanted to care for. I couldn’t even feed her correctly” (2001: 22). She switched to formula and although later she realized that

breastfeeding does not work for all mothers, she still felt she failed her daughter. Wolf also noticed that women around her “saw nursing as a metaphor for being a good mother” (2001: 268).

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Channa Verbian

White Birth Mothers of Black/White Biracial Children

Addressing Racialized Discourses in Feminist and Multicultural Literature

This paper reviews literature relevant to White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children. Citing research on interracial marriage, motherhood, women's racialized identity in interracial families, racialized motherhood, and multicultural counseling and diversity, issues needing further study and inclusion in the feminist and critical multicultural literature will be identified.

In this paper I introduce current feminist and multicultural literature relevant to White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children. As such, it is neither complete nor comprehensive; rather, it is an introduction to some of the questions about racialized identity that might affect and inform how these mothers experience themselves.

Before I present this literature, I will briefly introduce myself and my reasons for investigating this very particular area. This past September marked the 22nd anniversary of giving birth to the first of my two Black/White biracial children. Reflecting back, I can say that it also marks the beginning of my informal research into the issues White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children encounter. Though I knew at the time I was crossing a social boundary not often crossed that would bring childrearing challenges different than those faced by other mothers in my cohort, I was unprepared for the frequent question "What about the child?" that family, friends, colleagues, and sometimes even strangers would ask me.

Outwardly, unwavering and defensive, I would let them know that I did not share their concern. Inwardly, I began to ask questions of my own. What gave others permission to question my choice to have interracial children and what subtext produced feelings of judgment and indictment inside me? As my children grew and others began questioning how my children were being reared

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to identify racially, my own questions changed. Though I felt confident in myself as a mother, I began wondering about the impact of racialized discourses on the self-concept of White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children in general. Turning to the literature for answers, I discovered a growing body of research pertaining to biracial children, adolescents, and adults, but a dearth of literature pertaining to parents in interracial families in general and to mothers in these families in particular. The literature that I did find generally pertained to the child's need for an uncontested identity and how parents could support this.

Given that the number of interracial families continues to rise due to social and demographic changes, the need for further research addressing other issues relevant to these families will likely rise as well. Research exploring the everyday experience of White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children in the Canadian context is one such need.

Since space constrains the length of this paper, the breadth of literature I present is limited. Because of this, notions of women's racialized identity in interracial families and racialized motherhood will be introduced without the framing discussion of the history of opposition to interracial heterosexual relationships. A brief discussion about relevant research concerns concludes my paper.

Women's racialized identity in interracial families

Discussions of family generally take place within dominant social discourses that privilege monoracial heterosexual relationships and patriarchal nuclear families. While all families falling outside this norm face particular challenges, the particular challenges facing interracial families occur within racialized discourses particularly harsh on White women involved with Black men. Various theories about White women who marry Black men have been posited. According to Paul Spickard (1989), Merton's "exchange" theory or "rule of hypogamy" is the generally accepted theory about gender patterns in intermarriage between Black men and White women to date. He states:

Certain upwardly mobile lower-caste men—those who are conspicuously handsome, talented, rich, or well-educated—trade those assets in a marriage contract for the higher caste status of women who have status but lack beauty, talent, wealth, or intellect (1989: 8).

Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) interviews with women uncover equally derogatory attitudes. From discourses about White femininity where White women involved in interracial relationships are presented as "sexually loose," "sexually unsuccessful," or "sexually radical," to discourses about interracial relationships as "transgressing fixed racial or cultural boundaries," she describes attitudes reminiscent of the United States' antimiscegenation past (1993: 77).

Others site similar findings. In her interviews with White women with

Black partners, Carmen Luke found that these women perceived, through overt or covert looks and comments, that they were considered “less than White” (1994: 60). Frances Winddance Twine’s finding that transracial mothers are “subjected to forms of surveillance, discipline and moral censure usually restricted to women of colour” (2001: 130) supports Luke’s. And according to Twine, though transracial mothers are one of the fastest growing social groups, they remain marginalized in feminist analyses of race and racism.

Racialized motherhood

The literature on racialized motherhood is central to my research. Briefly discussing literature on Black motherhood, then moving to an overview of the literature on White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children, I will identify recurring themes that contribute to racialized discourses about White birth mothers of biracial children. Discussing notions of maternal competence, transgression and status change, questions of how these social constructions may lead to internalized feelings of shame, guilt or judgment for these women will be raised. Finally, I will present the perspective of two birth mothers on mothering Black/White biracial children.

Patrice DiQuinzio writes that mothering is often a subject of contention and controversy because “being a mother and being mothered are both imbued with tremendous social, cultural, political, economic, psychological, and personal significance” (1999: viii). For some, the points I raise may seem contentious and controversial as well.

According to Patricia Hill Collins:

Motherhood occurs in specific historical contexts framed by interlocking structures of race, class and gender, contexts where the sons of White mothers have “every opportunity and protection,” and the “colored” daughters and sons of racial ethnic mothers “know not their fate.” (1994: 57)

This strong statement offers an example of how motherhood becomes racialized outside of dominant discourses. While Collins is justified in giving voice to concerns Black mothers face in raising their sons, her assumption of racial sameness silences the voices of those White mothers whose sons and daughters also face racism. When she asserts that “White women’s children are socialized into their rightful place in systems of racial privilege” while “racial ethnic women have no such guarantees for their children” (1994: 68), she not only universalizes their experiences, she also implies that a child’s future prospects are contingent on their mother’s race.

Beverly Greene also writes that a Black mother’s role includes tasks not shared by their White counterparts, specifically racial socialization of Black children (1990: 208). Stressing the incumbency on Black mothers to prepare their daughters to become Black women, she states that if a “natural” mother

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is unable to do so, “extended family, peers, or educational and mental health environments may do so,” though these “influences may be less intense and powerful” (218). Greene’s concern that a mother’s failure “to mitigate the dominant culture’s devaluing message can be associated with maladaptive adjustments in her daughter” (218) carries implications for White birth mothers of Black/White biracial daughters. Tracy Robinson voicing similar concerns writes:

White women, who are not aware of themselves as racial beings within a “racialized” world, may be compromised in their ability to provide their non-White children with important racial socialization skills and messages, yet little is known about the types, if any, of racial socialization messages that White mothers give to their non-White children. (2001: 171)

A theme of racial minority children’s mental health being contingent on their White birth mother’s ability to socialize them to cope with systemic racism is common in the literature. Robin Miller and Barbara Miller’s (1990) article on bridging the gap between African-American and White parenting styles of mothers of biracial children, and Ravinder Barn’s (1999) research on White birth mothers of mixed parentage children within the British child welfare system exemplify this. According to Miller and Miller the availability of “ethnically self-assertive role models” and an “ability to cope with the world from a minority perspective” are crucial for the biracial child’s developmental and mental health (1990: 176). This view, based solely on research findings on African-American parents’ role in socializing their children, implies that White birth mothers need to adopt the socialization skills of African-American parents. However, Miller and Miller’s conclusion that “neither the mother or father of an interracial child is capable of empathic understanding or role model provision for a mixed-race person” (1990: 176) creates doubts about these parents’ abilities to create environments conducive to their children’s mental health. These doubts are reflected in Barbara Tizard’s and Ann Phoenix’s assertion that while attitudes toward interracial relationships have improved, worries about the children of these unions continue. Despite benign appearances, the shift from “eugenic concerns with miscegenation” to “liberal concerns about child welfare” still constructs mixed relationships as problematic (2002: 39). Because the theme of maternal competence prevails in discussions about child welfare, White birth mothers remain under the lens. With most literature on multiracial families focusing on the children, a body of literature helpful for understanding the parents of these children in general and the mothers in particular is also needed. To date, Twine (1996; 1999; 2000; 2001) has contributed the most to the literature on White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children. She, along with Frankenburg (1993), Luke (1994), Robinson (2001), Maria Root (2001) and Tizard and Phoenix (2002) are

among the first to discuss these women within the context of discourses of racialized identity.

According to Twine (2000) there has been little sustained theoretical or empirical analysis about the ways racism structures the maternal experience of White women with Black/White biracial children. She states that most feminist theorists have assumed that mothering takes place within monoracial families and that White women are considered raceless or racially neutral (Twine, 1999). For Twine, "White women who give birth to African-descent children in contexts of White supremacy and racial disparities provide an innovative theoretical lens through which to examine the multiple meanings of maternal competence" (2000: 78). Given my interest in how racialized theories of maternal competence affect White mothers, Twine's research provides a reference point for my own research to build upon.

As I have shown, the theme of maternal competence emerges throughout the literature. According to Twine, racism complicates the meaning of maternal competence for White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children in several ways. Citing her study of transracial mothering in Britain, Twine (1999) identifies four themes related to maternal competence that emerged in her interviews with ten White birth mothers who classify their children as "Black."

The first theme was the struggle to negotiate the racist attitudes and practices of their natal families. For some women, the desire to continue their relationship with their natal families clashed with their desire to protect their children's positive self-esteem. Though the consequences of the pressure they felt to negotiate this struggle affected many mothers' mental health in ways ranging from nervous collapse to clinical depression, their desire to maintain their natal family relationships prevailed.

The next theme Twine identifies is pressure to find safe residential communities for raising children. Like their need to negotiate the effects of racism within their family environment, transracial mothers expressed their need to negotiate the everyday racism within the social environment of their neighborhoods, fearing that they or their children might be targets of racial abuse in predominantly White residential communities.

Themes of "othermothers" or co-mothering alliances and Black extended family relationships are the third and fourth themes Twine identifies. Because White transracial mothers often felt unable to provide Black cultural role modeling or mentoring to their children, they reported needing to rely on the Black community or Black friends and family for support. Twine reports that the women found the Black community both affirming and challenging. While many community members supported interracial relationships and felt sympathy for poor White women struggling to raise their children, others did not. Still, those who identified the Black community as their reference group and support, raised the theme of needing to constantly prove their maternal fitness to Black women about their ability to run a culturally appropriate household (e.g., through cooking, hair care, and discipline). Twine's conclusion that,

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consequentially, trans-racial mothers often subject themselves to harsh self-surveillance and criticism to ensure their cultural competence as mothers of Black children underscores the need for further research addressing the particular stresses of being the subject of racialized discourses about the maternal competence of mothers constructed as racially different from their children.

Other aspects of the racialized discourse on White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children relevant to my research are themes of transgression and status change. Twine writes:

The meaning of “transgression” and the process by which certain categories of women are defined as transgressive remains central to feminist analyses of race and reproduction ... White women who become transracial mothers are often perceived as transgressive in their families and communities. Transracial mothers, that is, mothers who are socially classified as belonging to a racial group considered distinct from that of their birth children, may be subjected to forms of surveillance, discipline, and moral censure usually considered restricted to women of colour. (2001 130)

These themes, like those of maternal competence, also can impinge on these women’s self-concept. Subjected to assumptions about their “maternity, morality, sexuality and respectability,” as well as to “verbal abuse, physical abuse, and the denial or withdrawal of social courtesies typically extended to White people by other White people” (Twine, 2001: 133) these women face numerous challenges. For example, Luke (1994) found that the White women with Black partners reported frequently experiencing innuendos regarding their sexuality. Statements like, “She couldn’t get a White man,” or “White men aren’t good enough for her,” racialized their sexuality outside of the White heterosexual norm. Katerina Deliovsky (2002) writes that White women in interracial relationships are often called “White slut” or told, “You go Black, you never go back.”

The birth of interracial children also introduces significant issues that are usually irrelevant in monoracial families (Root, 2001). For families who regard “racial reproduction as an important product,” a relative who marries outside the race will be marginalized. Attitudes such as, “If you divorce your husband, you still have biracial children so there is no going back” (138), highlight the concept of transgression. Root asserts that White women seem most affected by how their biracial children changed their identity since they were no longer considered White enough in the White world, yet under suspicion in the non-White world.

Luke draws similar conclusions. Because White women can experience profound changes in identity and social relations as their “public status” changes due to an interracial relationship with men of colour, their identities change

from being “insiders within their own dominant culture to becoming outsiders within” (1994: 58-59). As well, the perceived racial differences between a White mother and her child can undermine her “public maternal status” as she negotiates questions about her biological relatedness to her own child (Twine, 2000). This public scrutiny placing a White woman in interracial families outside of the monoracial heterosexual norm creates particular challenges for her. As Luke states, “Her sense of self, her family, work, and community relationships, and the politics of everyday life are circumscribed by discourses of culture, race, and racism which are not always congruent with how she is visually perceived in the world” (1994: 68).

The narratives of White birth mothers Maureen T. Reddy (1994) and Jane Lazarre (1996) reflect their own experiences mothering Black/White biracial children in the racially stratified United States. Echoing many of the concerns stated above, they offer perspectives and insights from their own rich experiences as mothers, but also as academics schooled in American literature.

Reddy (1994) in her autobiographical memoir uses literary analysis and ethnography to explore her awakening from “a delusion of colorlessness” brought about by her children’s own discovery of race. Describing her experience as a member of an interracial family as “standing on the color line” or “as a bridge uncomfortably stretching across it touching both sides while somehow remaining in the middle”(5) she succeeds to soften the language of racial transgression seen above. Reflecting that as a White woman, she was not “taught about resistance and survival” (16) as her children’s father was, she shares her uncertainty about her ability to help them with the challenges they will face because of their race. With interracial families usually either invisible, silent, or represented as pathologized subject of sociological study with their subjectivity absent, these families are “left with few but negative guides”(10). For these families in general but for the White mothers in particular, learning how to help their children navigate the racialized world is yet another part of the bridge across the color line. To Reddy “some of the difficulty of living as a bridge would be mitigated by company, but crossing the color line is a strangely lonely journey” (9).

While Reddy (1994) and Lazarre (1996) share many of the same perspectives on being White mothers of children who identify as Black, there is poignancy in Lazarre’s account that seems to amplify the feeling of loneliness that Reddy speaks of.

Lazarre (1996), a Jewish mother like myself, writes that as “a Jewish mother I am watching my sons move farther and farther away from a sense of a Jewish identity and, although I am not religious at all, this leaves me feeling a specific kind of loneliness”(66). Like Reddy’s (1994) experience of “crossing the color line,” Lazarre describes feelings “layered with anger, shame and sheer confusion” (66) about living with race in America where even fundamental maternal feelings to protect her children are touched by race. Highlighting two friends responses to her fear of being unable to protect her sons from experi-

ences such as racial profiling, Lazarre juxtaposes her White friend's "sudden insight that this is a common story of motherhood with a terrible added dimension" to a sense "gentle tolerance" in her Black friend's response (67).

Another theme that Lazarre returns to in her text is a feeling of being racially different or 'other' to her children, a feeling that seems to cause her distress. Stating that since her "sons reached adolescence beginning their lives as *young Black men in America*," she has wondered again and again whether "they think of me as white before or after they think 'my mother' . . . Does it touch off even a flashing moment of regret, an unbridgeable distance between us?" (10). When Lazarre tells us that on conveying to one of her sons that she understands why he rejects a biracial or "tragic mulatto identity" he responds saying, "I don't think you do, Mom. You can't understand completely because you're white" (24), the painful impact of racialized discourses on White mothers can be felt.

As demonstrated above women in interracial relationships and White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children become the subjects of public and familial discourses about their sexuality and maternal competence incomparable to those about White women in monoracial heterosexual unions. The stress of this may lead some to seek professional support and guidance. As we find ourselves called upon in this way, it is incumbent on us to have a framework for understanding these women's particular struggles.

In closing, I draw attention to research issues raised by Vanessa Bing and Pamela Trotman Reid (1996) and Root (1992). According to Bing and Trotman Reid, the portrayal of women and people of colour in both traditional and feminist psychological research is problem laden. Though progress has been made for certain groups, there remain large numbers of "unknown women" and "unknowing research" (176) Stating that because White feminist research often essentializes women's experiences, socially constructed markers such as race, class, sexual orientation, and gender that determine social placement and relative power are often overlooked. Referring to women of colour and poor women, Bing and Trotman Reid argue that, "further strategies are needed to begin to explain the needs and to hear the voices of the women who are still unknown in psychological research" (192). White birth mothers of Black/White biracial children who fall outside the juxtaposed categories of Black or White racialized identity are of these unknown.

To address this Bing and Trotman Reid (1996), and Root (1992) claim the need for different research models. Root (1992) contrasts older research "situated in an era marked by linear models of identity, rigid thinking about race and racial boundaries, and overt racism" (181) to today's ecological theories emphasizing "the interaction of social, familial, and individual variables within a [historical] context" (182). To Root, more than sampling and interpretation need to be considered when designing a study; the terms researchers use and issues of who performs the research are also important. Citing examples including the commonly used term "outmarriage," Root asks us to re-examine the connotations and biases inherent in many frequently used terms. As well,

she suggests the importance of initial research being done by multiracial persons or those “intimately informed of the experience by living a multicultural existence and in a multicultural environment” (188). Though Root acknowledges this could result in bias, she suggests that triangulation methods can offset lack of objectivity. Still, according to Root, the potential benefits of the researcher “intimately” understanding the relevant “social ecology,” outweighs the potential drawbacks.

In this way, I hope my own intimate knowledge and experience of being a White birth mother of Black/White biracial children will benefit my research on the issues mothers like myself face.

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Silvia Schultermandl

Motherhood and Mothering as Sites of Difference in Barbara Kingsolver's *Pigs in Heaven*

Barbara Kingsolver's novel Pigs in Heaven (1993) discusses a debate between a young white adoptive mother of a Native American girl and a young Cherokee attorney who advocates the tribe's legal rights in adoption cases. Kingsolver depicts the two women as antagonistic figures who debate over the child's "best interest." The adoptive mother believes that in light of the physical abuse her daughter suffered on the reservation, the adoption was an act of rescue and beginning of a more stable life for the five-year-old girl. The attorney on the other hand argues that the child's separation from the tribe is an act of interference with tribal traditions, which would result in the child's confusion about her cultural origins. This essay argues that Kingsolver's depiction of the antagonistic presumptions about the child's best interest are indicative of differences in mothering practices between Native and non-Native American women. Because their concepts of motherhood and mothering are rooted in different histories of oppression, the white adoptive mother and the Cherokee attorney in Pigs in Heaven embody different ideological issues within feminist theory. Therefore, as this essay suggests by interrogating Kingsolver's discussion of the various issues that arise in the context of (illegal) adoptions of Native American children by white parents, the controversy over what is best for the child amplifies the differences between white and Native American women's feminist agencies.

Ever since their emergence as commonplace in feminist theory and practice, motherhood and mothering have been sites of a variety of critical fields of interest. The very venue in which this essay appears is testimony to the abundance of critical and creative works that interrogate, re-negotiate, and contextualize motherhood under a myriad of scopes, all of which are innately feminist in their methodologies of argumentation and interdisciplinary in their reach. Aspects of race/ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality are intricately

linked to women's experiences of motherhood (the institution) and mothering (the practice) in the context of health, reproductive rights, and social rights. Mothering thus also offers a contestable terrain in which differences within feminist theories and practices become graspable. The various differences in women's experiences as mothers amplify different trends in feminism, especially in so far as these trends are deeply rooted in and draw critical attention to the circumstances in which women and mothers tackle everyday struggles as their agency. That is, the context of their agentic locations largely determines their mothering.

Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Pigs In Heaven* (1993) addresses the differences in motherhood and mothering between Anglo American and Native American women. In the confrontation between Annawake Fourkiller, a young Cherokee attorney, and Taylor Greer, the adoptive mother of a Cherokee orphan, the specific modalities of discussion over the child's best interest are indicative of the difference in family practices between traditional Native American and Anglo American cultures. Kingsolver depicts the two women as antagonistic figures whose debate over the child's "best interest" amplifies these differences. In *The Bean Trees* (1988), the prequel to *Pigs In Heaven*, Taylor Greer finds an abandoned and physically abused three-year-old girl in her car on her odyssey through the American Mid-West. Two years later, Annawake, a character that did not appear in *The Bean Trees*, learns about Taylor's adoption of a Cherokee child when Taylor and her daughter Turtle appear on a segment of the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. On the show, Taylor explains the unusual circumstances leading to Turtle's adoption, how somebody left the child in her car (52). Recognizing Turtle as a Native American child, Annawake suspects an illegal adoption performed by representatives of the state of Oklahoma and decides to press legal charges against Taylor, contesting the mother's right to sole custody over the Cherokee child. When Annawake meets with Taylor for the first time she informs her that Turtle's adoption papers might be illegal and invalid according to the *Indian Child Welfare Act* (1978), a law which ensures that Native American children may only be adopted by non-Native families upon the tribe's consent (78). Since Taylor basically found Turtle in her car and since Turtle's family and tribal affiliation were entirely unknown to Taylor when she filed for adoption, there was no involvement of the tribe's right to protect their children from unwanted placement in foster care.

Although this violation of the *Indian Child Welfare Act* can possibly abolish Taylor's custody rights, Annawake ensures Taylor that she does not want to take her child away from her but that she wants the child to be connected to her tribal family as well. After all, Turtle has a grandfather who still lives on the reservation. To Taylor, however, the abolition of her sole custody rights appears to be a violation of her rights to mothering. Taylor's fear of losing her child or to have to share her with somebody else is "reminiscent of the bereavement of Demeter/Ceres over the loss of her daughter Persephone/Proserpina" (Murrey, 1994: 159). This psychoanalytical reading of the threat under which Taylor's

mothering is being put emphasizes the mother's exclusive rights to her daughter. Indeed, as Adrienne Rich argues in her seminal book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, "[t]he loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy" (1986: 237). Still, in accordance with the *Indian Child Welfare Act*, the Cherokee tribe also has a right to its children, and this right, together with the idea of a tribe's dependency on its children, is quite foreign to Taylor's understanding of motherhood and family.

It takes a community

Mothering, or more specifically the right to mothering, is a central aspect of sovereignty for Native American women as well as for their tribes. Indeed, the figure of the mother, and by extension, the maternal and matriarchal guardian of tribal traditions and ancient wisdoms, is at the center of Native American feminist literature and culture studies (Bannan, 1980; Allen, 1986). At the same time, Native American women have seen their rights to mothering fiercely contested, such as through forced sterilization on the one hand and the residential school system and the system of foster care and adoption on the other hand (Guerrero, 1997). Through such practices, Native American children were taken away from their mothers and from their tribes and, after having undergone forced acculturation to non-Native American environments, grew up dislocated and alienated from their tribal cultures and from their families. It is this problematic of Native children's isolation from their tribes that Kingsolver's novel addresses.

While working on *Pigs In Heaven*, Kingsolver acknowledges in an interview that after the publication of *The Bean Tree*, she felt the need to tell the story more from the tribe's perspective: "I realized with embarrassment that I had completely neglected a whole moral area when I wrote about the Native American kid being swept off the reservation and raised by a very loving white mother" (Perry, 1993: 165). As a result, Kingsolver creates the character of Annawake, the Cherokee Nation's legal spokesperson and representative of the tribe's interest in the case of illegal adoptions. Through the introduction of Annawake's legal representation, Kingsolver depicts tribal struggles for cultural continuity and political autonomy, such as through the rights to raise Native children in tribal communities. Although not enrolled in any Native American tribe herself, Kingsolver has repeatedly emphasized her sharing of Native American world views (Perry, 1993). However, Kingsolver's attempt to serve as spokesperson for Native American rights in the context of family rights has been highly contested. Her idealization and exoticization of the Cherokee Nation, for instance, contributes to the further differentiation of Native American tribes as cultural "other." Kathleen Godfrey, for instance, argues that "despite her politicized sensibility, Kingsolver's depiction is undercut by authorial and rhetorical practices which commodify, ritualize, and idealize the Cherokee" (2001: 259). Kingsolver's use of one-dimensional, antagonist char-

acters, amplifies the differences in mothering rights and practices between Western patriarchal and Native American families.

The difference between western, nuclear families and tribal, extended families is implicit in the matter of handling adoptions of Native children outside their tribes. This practice of extra-tribal adoption is inherently connected to the disenfranchisement of Native tribal rights by interference of governmental policies with tribal traditions. In reference to the dire economic and social conditions on Native American reservations, as Marie Anna Jaimes Guerrero (1997) affirms, the US government justified placing Native American children in foster homes outside their tribal communities. These, mostly white, foster homes are supposed to provide the children with a stable and economically intact life, a life that would possibly save them from the disproportionately high rates of poverty, substance abuse, violence, and suicide on Native American reservations. At the same time, the US government fails to acknowledge that these symptoms of dislocation and disruption were caused by the history of genocidal practices against Native Americans since the first contacts with white settlers. The matter of adoption and foster care of tribal children is a product of that interference. Because the federal law does not recognize extended Native clans as family kinship, many Native American children have been separated from their relatives and placed in foster homes outside their tribe. Thus, the placement of Native children in residential schools is strategic intervention on the part of the colonizer to interfere with the integrity of tribal traditions.

Mothering and the “absolute power of motherhood”

In return, Taylor feels that her right to mothering is under threat. She is afraid of losing her “absolute power of motherhood” (Kingsolver, 1993: 341). This interpretation of motherhood as power is emblematic of Nancy Chodorow’s (1978) observation that, in societies where women in general and mothers in particular are being marginalized, mothers seek to re-invent themselves in the lives of their daughters by claiming their daughters as future, more perfect versions of themselves. For Taylor to lose her daughter, thus means a disruption of the prospective reproduction of herself in Turtle. In this context, Taylor’s possessive claim over Turtle is reminiscent of the patriarchal normativity of motherhood.

This intervention of a patriarchal model of motherhood stands in opposition to Taylor’s emancipation from patriarchal ideology in general. Her non-committal relationship to her boyfriend Jax, for instance, characterizes Taylor’s resentment to traditional patterns of relationships. Taylor even grew up in a fatherless family, which, as she implies at one part in the novel, made her the independent woman she is. Similarly, when Taylor decides to adopt Turtle, she does so following solely her own wish, without having conferred with her boyfriend or her mother. In this sense, Taylor is certainly a modern, independent woman who does not personify the conventional model of patriarchal

family structures. However, her claim to exclusive motherhood is indeed embedded in the history of childrearing within patriarchal structures. Kingsolver even goes so far as to define Taylor's demand for exclusive rights over her daughter as emblematic of American individualism. In "Everybody's Somebody's Baby," Kingsolver asserts that American society "has a proud history of lone heroes and solo fighters, so perhaps it's no surprise that we think of child-rearing as an individual job, not a collective responsibility" (1992: 49). This statement summarizes well the ideological concept of motherhood to which Taylor subscribes.

In contrast, Annawake adheres to a much different concept of motherhood and mothering. Annawake sees motherhood as cultural agency that ensures the survival of Native American tribal traditions. As she explains to Taylor, it is within the comfort of extended tribal families that Native Americans maintain cultural traditions and practices. The extended family per se is a legitimate and highly valued social entity in matrilineal Native American societies. In fact, Annawake emphasizes that the concept of the nuclear family was entirely foreign to the Cherokee Nation until social workers interfered with their traditional practices of communal child-rearing. In Annawake's opinion, nuclear families are "an insane rationale. We don't distinguish between father, uncle, mother, grandmother. We don't think of ourselves as having extended families. We look at you guys [non-Native Americans] and think you have contracted families" (Kingsolver, 1993: 284).

Residential schools, foster care, and adoption

In light of the many cases of Native American children being separated from their families and placed in foster homes or in adoptive homes outside the tribe, Kingsolver's depiction of the controversy over Turtle's adoption raises issues about sovereignty rights of Native American tribes, including the right to raise children in accordance with tribal traditions. The separation of children from their tribal families through the institutionalization of residential schools or foster homes, is a subtle form of colonization of indigenous peoples. In an interview with Donna Perry, Kingsolver asserts that the *Indian Child Welfare Act*, and its legal manifestation of tribal veto rights in the cases of federal foster home or adoption policies, is "one of the most valuable pieces of legislation that's ever happened for Native Americans in the United States because, throughout this century, a very strong and insidious form of cultural genocide has been the adoption of Native American children out of the tribe" (1993: 165).

This interruption of the "chain of caretaking" among tribal communities traumatized generations of Native Americans who grew up completely disconnected from their families and from their tribal heritages. In her depiction of the cases of the social workers' interference with Annawake's family, Kingsolver accounts for the colonization of Native American child rearing through western interference with tribal traditions. Annawake remembers: "Federal law

put them in boarding schools. Cut off their hair, taught them English, taught them to love Jesus, and made them spend their childhoods in boarding schools. They got to see their people maybe twice a year. Family has always been our highest value, but that generation of kids never learned to be in a family” (Kingsolver, 1993: 227). Annawake’s mother, Bonnie Fourkiller, went to a residential school, where she became “a die-trying acculturated Cherokee, like most of her generation, who chose the Indian Baptist Church over stomp dances and never wore moccasins in her life” (59). As a result of the traumatic separation from her tribe and the dislocation within white society, Bonnie fell into heavy alcoholism, and was finally institutionalized, leaving behind two young children. After Bonnie’s disappearance, Annawake was raised by her uncle Ledger, the tribe’s medicine man. Her twin brother Gabriel, on the other hand, was adopted by a Caucasian family in Texas at age ten, or, in Annawake’s words, “stolen from the family and can’t find his way home” (61). His adoptive family “told him not to say he was Indian at school, or they [teachers and fellow students] would treat him like a Mexican” (149). On the basis of his skin color, he was put in “the Mexican classroom” and eventually failed school because he could not understand the teacher who only spoke Spanish. As a result, Gabriel disappointed his adoptive parents who were unable to empathize with the social stigma their son carried as outsider both to the Caucasian and to the Mexican American groups at his school. At age 15, he was convicted of a juvenile delinquency felony and was then in and out of prison.

The child’s best interest

The controversy over Turtle’s adoption revolves around the question as to what is best for the child. As Mary Jean DeMarr suggests, “since *Pigs in Heaven* would be read by a predominantly white and middle-class audience, the sympathy of readers would naturally tilt in the direction of individualism, of the child’s best interest” (1999: 98). However, it is problematic to argue that Turtle’s separation from her tribal family would be beneficiary to her identity quest. Kingsolver constructs the circumstances of Turtle’s adoption so that Taylor’s motherhood appears to be an act of rescue to the brutally abused child she finds in her car. In *The Bean Trees*, Taylor muses when she discovers the child’s “bruises and worse”: “I thought I knew about every ugly thing that one person does to another, but I had never even thought about such things being done to a baby girl” (Kingsolver, 1988: 23). Given that Turtle’s abuse happened while she was at the Cherokee reservation, Taylor is resistant to Annawake’s suggestion that it is in Turtle’s best interest to remain in touch with the tribe: “Your people let her fall through the crack when she was in bad trouble” (Kingsolver, 1993: 76). Taylor even goes so far as suspecting a clever publicity ploy behind the Cherokee Nation’s sudden interest in the well-being of her daughter: “And now, that she is a cute little adorable child and gets famous and goes on television, now you want her back” (76).

This skepticism about the tribe’s intention and her conviction that her

right to absolute motherhood entitles her to make decisions for her daughter becomes most evident in Taylor's argument with Annawake about what is best for Turtle. Taylor's motto "Do right by yourself" clashes with Annawake's motto "Do right by your people" (Kingsolver, 1993: 88). As Annawake emphasizes the tribe depends on its children for the maintenance of its cultural heritage: "We consider the child is part of something larger, a tribe. Like a hand is that belongs to the body. Before we cut it off, we have to ask how the body will take care of itself without that hand" (338). This bi-lateral dependency between the tribe and its individual members is entirely foreign to Taylor's world view, her sense of agency, and her quest for individuality (Murrey, 1994). However, Turtle does have family on the reservation: her grandfather, Cash Stillwater, is her only living relative, and she his. Annawake mentions the "Baby M" legal case in the 1980s, where a Jewish American biological father's (and his wife's) custody rights were favored over the surrogate mother's because the daughter was the only living kin to the father whose relatives had all died in the Holocaust. Similarly, Turtle's role as embodiment of a minority culture contests Taylor's right to absolute motherhood rights.

To be precise, Annawake does not contest the general right to adoption, nor does she condemn adoption as an illegitimate manner of mothering. On the contrary, she acknowledges the love and dedication adoptive parents instill in their children. In fact, she does not want to take Turtle away from her mother, but instead, she wants to make sure that Turtle also has access to her tribal heritage and that her grandfather has a right to pass down his cultural legacy to his only living kin. In particular, as Annawake argues, it is important for Turtle to learn about her Cherokee heritage and to learn how to negotiate her Native origins in mainstream American society. Annawake specifies: "[a]dopted Native kids always have problems in adolescence when they're raised without an Indian identity" (Kingsolver, 1993: 148). What these children suffer, as the example of Annawake's brother emphasizes, is a sense of displacement when they grow up as members of Caucasian families while being reminded by society of their outsider status on account of their skin color and facial features, for instance. It is not the families in which these children are being placed, but their lack of awareness of the problems Native American children face when growing up in a predominantly white world.

Does mother know best?

Annawake speculates whether or not Taylor will be able to prepare her Turtle for the racist and xenophobic world outside the loving home: "I wonder what you are giving Turtle now that she can keep" (Kingsolver, 1993: 149). Indeed, Taylor is unaware of the struggles Native Americans face when they are confronted with the need to negotiate their identities in the face of a myriad of misrepresentations of Native American in pop culture: "In the last few days Taylor has been noticing images of Indians everywhere: the Indian-chief profile on a Pontiac. The innocent-looking girl on the corn-oil margarine. The

hook-nosed cartoon mascot of the Cleveland Indians, who played in Tucson. Taylor wonders what Annawake meant when she said Turtle should be in touch with her Indian side. Maybe that doesn't mean feathers, but if not, what then? [...] Maybe being Indian isn't any one thing, any more than being white is one thing. What mascot would they use for a team called the Cleveland White People?" (95).

Disregarding the cultural differences between her own and her daughter's backgrounds, Taylor manifests throughout the novel that, no matter what the circumstances, a mother always knows best. With the incident of Turtle's acute lactose intolerance, Kingsolver illustrates a case where Taylor, despite her unconditional love for her daughter, doesn't know best. As a pediatrician explains, it is the daily glass of milk that Taylor makes Turtle drink for an optimum intake of calcium, that causes Turtle's intestinal problems: "Cow's milk is fine for white folks ... but somewhere between sixty and ninety percent of the rest of us [people of color] are lactose intolerant" (Kingsolver, 1993: 295). Turtle's lactose intolerance underscores Taylor's "culture-blind" adoption policy, i.e. her lack of awareness of the specific needs of non-white children. At the same time, the novel juxtaposes Turtle's suffering with her ancestors' suffering from food intolerance that Annawake describes: "The food was nothing that forest people had ever eaten before, maggoty meal and salted pork, so everybody had diarrhea" (281). Turtle's suffering from lactose intolerance is symptomatic of her cultural estrangement from her tribal culture. On the level of cultural interference with tribal practices, there is a correlation between Turtle's sickness and the fatal dietary changes the Cherokee went through during their removal in the 1830s (Purdue and Green, 1995). This incident also illustrates that Taylor needs to overcome her Eurocentric ideas of motherhood and womanhood for the sake of a more heterogeneous feminist practice that addresses the culture-specific locations from with women and mothers of different cultural backgrounds can develop a sense of connectedness and solidarity with one another.

The adoption of Native American children by Caucasian parents raises a number of important questions about the cultural and social belonging of these children. Born Native and raised Anglo, these children are neither Native American nor are they Caucasian. In fact, because of their tribal heritage, they are outsiders in mainstream Anglo-American society. By the same token, through their Anglo up-bringing they are also outsiders to their tribes, whose cultural practices and traditions they are not familiar with. Because cultural performances, as for instance a person's sense of connectedness to tribal traditions, are "learned" features that rely on the nurturing capabilities of a cultural community that initiates and supports a person's cultural values, these children will not be able to contribute to the cultural survival of the tribes into which they were born.

These questions about cultural belonging and representation are central in Kingsolver's depiction of the custody battle between an Anglo American single

mother and the Cherokee Nation, her adoptive daughters' tribe.

However, by ending the novel with a deus-ex-machina solution, the sudden discovery that Taylor's mother is also Cherokee by blood relations and that, according to Cherokee matrilineal succession, Taylor herself is Cherokee by blood quantum, and by the love interest between Taylor's mother Alice and Turtle's grandfather Cash Stillwater, the novel's potential for a candid portrayal of the complex issue the adoption of Native American children poses comes to an abrupt and rather unsatisfactory conclusion. It would be interesting to see how the joint custody agreement between Taylor and Turtle's grandfather works out, or how Turtle will relate to her affiliation to two cultures that have Taylor's alleged family linkages to the Cherokee tribe and love romance between Turtle's grandfather and Taylor's mother Alice leaves the reader with the impression that the issues of Native American tribal sovereignty can be "resolved" by reuniting Native and non-Native American in one family, without pursuing the quest for tribal struggles against continuous colonization through a biased American legal system. In this regard, the novel can only partly succeed in advocating Native American tribal sovereignty rights.

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Creating a Life or Opting Out *Antifeminism and the Popular Media*

This article explores the recent explosion of anti-feminist motherhood tracts to interrogate the often fraught relationship between idealized notions of motherhood and demonized visions of feminism in the popular media. Motherhood should be a ripe topic for feminists; but, as feminist activists have been campaigning for equality in the workplace and feminist theorists have been debating the meaning of feminism on academic turf, they often ignore issues of mothering as a source of feminist power. In so doing, they have let the term “feminism” be commandeered by conservative critics who have no trouble with concretely defining what feminism means and with affixing moral judgments to women, in particular women with children, who call themselves feminist. Such negative definition has become a dominant, if not the prevailing, definition in the popular media from both the left and the right. Through Manichean equations, writers as diverse as Lisa Belkin and Danielle Crittenden have reified ideals of motherhood and in so doing have shifted the boundaries between public and private desire, essentializing and thus normalizing what should be individual private choices. More specifically, they have presented the choice to have children and stay home with them as anti-feminist and the wish, or need, to leave them, as feminist. Instead of privileging the ability to chose, they privilege what these women have chosen, often ignoring issues of class and personal desire.

When I was pregnant with my first child I took a prenatal yoga class. The class was taught by a woman named Deborah, a liberal mother of three, who spent most of the hour and a half explaining to us how childbirth had become overly medicalized and how the medical establishment is anti-woman. To my husband's dismay, I instantly fell in love with Deborah. She was strong-willed, opinionated, an advocate for women and children. One day during her regular sermonizing, however, Deborah said something that floored me. While

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coaxing us all into modified downward dog positions, she explained that the women's movement had done a real disservice to women by leading us to believe that we can do it all. "You can't work and be a good mother," she exclaimed, "the feminists were wrong." I was flabbergasted and infuriated. She worked, she was a mother. How could such a hip, progressive woman have such a conservative view of feminism? And when did feminism promise women that they could do it all?

That was over five years ago. Since then, I have had another child and have so many personal anecdotes about my encounters with anti-feminism and motherhood that I could write a multi-volume book. And, since then, a number of books and articles blaming "feminism" for misleading women have also emerged: Danielle Crittenden's *What Other Mothers Didn't Tell Us* (2000) and *Amanda Bright at Home* (2003), Sylvia Hewlett's *Creating a Life* (2002) (which inspired a *Sixty Minutes* segment and *Time* cover story), Lisa Belkin's *New York Time's Magazine* article, "The Opt-Out Revolution" (2003), and Louise Story's *New York Time's* front page piece, "Many Women at Elite Colleges set Career Path to Motherhood" (2005), are just a few.¹ In each case, the authors present a uniform and often highly essentialized notion of feminism, and in each case, they hold it somehow responsible for a host of personal as well as larger social problems.

This article explores the recent explosion of anti-feminist motherhood tracts to interrogate the often fraught relationship between idealized notions of motherhood and demonized visions of feminism in the popular media. Why can't the two happily coexist? Is it merely semantic or is there something about linking motherhood and "feminism" that is so alienating? Motherhood should be a ripe topic for feminists, but as Anne Crittenden has written in her excellent study, *The Price of Motherhood*,

Even feminists are often reluctant to admit that women's lives revolve around their children. They measure success from the distance women have traveled from *Kinder and Küche*, and worry that if child-rearing is made a more tempting choice, many women ... will drift back into domestic subservience. They fear that if women are seen to be mothers first, the very real gains that women have made in the workplace could be jeopardized. (2001: 7)

Indeed, as feminist activists have been campaigning for equality in the workplace and feminist theorists have been debating the meaning of feminism on academic turf, they often ignore issues of mothering as a source of feminist power. In so doing, they have let the term "feminism" be commandeered by conservative critics who have no trouble with concretely defining what feminism means and with affixing moral judgments to women, in particular women with children, who call themselves feminist.

For example, in her 2003 book *Feminist Fantasies*, Phyllis Schlafly, writes

that “the ideology of feminism teaches that women have been mistreated since time began,” and “as a political movement, feminism teaches that a just society must mandate identical treatment for men and women in every phase of our lives, no matter how reasonable it is to treat them differently and that gender must never be used as the criteria for any decision” (3). Now, anyone even vaguely interested in feminist theory knows the centrality of gender in recent—and not so recent—scholarship in the field.² Yet anti-feminists such as Schlafly omit such work in their formulations and instead make preposterous blanket statements such as, “Feminism’s psychological outlook on life is basically negative; it teaches women that the odds are stacked so severely against them that they probably cannot succeed in whatever they attempt” (2003: 3). While this might seem extreme to those of us for whom feminism is rooted in the successful creation of myriad choices for women—in work, home, relationships, etc—Schlafly’s negative definition has become a dominant, if not the prevailing, definition in the popular media. As for Deborah, my yoga teacher, feminism itself assumes a form of agency for Schlafly and becomes guilty of misleading women rather than helping them achieve the possibility of having rich life choices.

Such moves are common within conservative formulations. Take for example the work of Danielle Crittenden.³ In her diatribe *What Our Mothers Didn’t Tell Us*, Crittenden evokes the Bible of second-wave feminism, *The Feminine Mystique*, when she writes that “The modern problem with no name is, I believe, exactly the reverse of the old one: While we now recognize that women are human, we blind ourselves to the fact that we are also women. If we feel stunted and oppressed when denied the chance to realize our human potential, we suffer every bit as much when we cut off from those aspects of life that are distinctly and uniquely female” (2000: 22). Crittenden’s use of the “we” is interesting here. Women have always recognized that they are human. By evoking the pronoun “we” in this manner, Crittenden places herself outside of a gendered category. Who exactly is this “we” who did not recognize this before? By spatializing language in this way, she at first adopts a male voice that allows her to undercut Freidan’s articulation of the dissatisfied woman. However, in a confounding linguistic move, Crittenden then resituates herself back within her own gender in the same sentence when she says that: “we are also women.” If the “we” had been a group who once failed to recognize this fact, how can this same “we” suffer when cut off from “the aspects of life that are distinctly and uniquely female?”

The linguistic gymnastics in this passage demonstrate a recurring anxiety in Crittenden’s (2000) text, as well as in that of a number of the critiques of motherhood of the past few years, that emerge from the choices that contemporary women make when they work or when they serve as fulltime mothers, as well as the choice to be a working mother. For of course, Crittenden and Schlafly and my yoga teacher are working mothers. But they do not seem to want to acknowledge that choice. In fact, they seem to want to deny the

possibility of choice itself, for if they do not deny its existence, they might be forced to admit that their life choices have been informed by feminism. That is a position that they are not willing to grant, and so their work belies an anxiety that consistently rears its head. Indeed, according to her own definition, Crittenden and even Schlafly (2003) both should be considered feminists. Is this in fact their anxiety? Instead of embracing a definition of feminism that allows for choice and difference, why do writers such as Crittenden and Schlafly blame feminism for misleading women? Can't they be models of successful working mothers? Why are they afraid to admit this?

Like Schlafly, Crittenden (2000) constructs a concrete definition of feminism to first demonize it and then to ascribe agency to the movement rather than to individual women. In fact she argues outright against female autonomy, which she says makes women “self-centered” and “off-putting” to men. By relying solely on personal anecdotes and observations—as well as on an anachronistic rhetorical move that romanticizes “our grandmothers” and demonizes “our mothers”—rather than on any concrete evidence, she negatively mythologizes feminism and essentializes male and female difference to naturalize the idea of marriage and stay-at-home motherhood.⁴ Crittenden's insistence that the success of feminism has misled the “average woman” is problematic on a number of levels. Aside from the absurdity of claiming feminism's success, her average woman is white, middle class, and for the most part a fiction. But Crittenden's critique of feminism is part of a larger conservative critique. When she writes that the “solutions” proposed by “these feminists” “so dramatically fail to appeal to the majority of women,” feminism acts as a stand-in for a host of other liberal sins:

Abortion on demand and condoms in the classroom have failed to prevent millions of unmarried teenagers from becoming mothers before they are old enough to vote. Affirmative Action may have propelled some women through the executive ranks but it has done little for the vast numbers of women who build their work around their family obligations. . . . Generous welfare benefits to single mothers and shrill warnings about male violence have not dissuaded most women from wanting to share their lives with men . . . nor does “cheaper and better childcare” seem any sort of answer to mothers who are already guilt ridden about leaving their babies every morning. (2000: 24).

While Crittenden's conservatism is to be expected, her evocation of “generous welfare benefits for single mothers” in 1999—after the Clinton administration had radically restructured the welfare system, dramatically cutting benefits for Women with Dependent Children—if nothing else, crushes her authority. Yet, the book was well received and *Vanity Fair* called her one of the most important voices of the decade. Moreover, her ideas about feminism as a uniform entity with an agency of its own, has currency in the

mainstream, and even “liberal” media.

For example, Lisa Belkin begins her October 2003 *New York Times Magazine* cover story, “The Opt Out Revolution,” by delimiting a divide similar to the one Crittenden establishes between “feminists” and “average women.” Belkin writes,

The scene in this cozy Atlanta living room would—at first glance — warm an early feminist’s heart. Gathered by the fireplace one recent evening, sipping wine and nibbling cheese, are the members of a book club, each of them a beneficiary of all that feminists of 30-odd years ago held dear. The eight women in the room have each earned a degree from Princeton, which was a citadel of everything male until the first co-educated class entered in 1969. And after Princeton, the women of this book club went on to do other things that women once were not expected to do. They received law degrees from Harvard and Columbia. They chose husbands who could keep up with them, not simply support them. They waited to have children because work was too exciting. They put on power suits and marched off to take on the world. (2003: 42).

While certainly one of affluence, the picture Belkin (2003) paints of feminist success—Ivy League educations, successful husbands, power suits and book clubs—is rather limiting and defined almost exclusively in terms of these women’s relationships to what we might call traditional sources of female pleasure: husbands, children, novel reading, and wine and cheese parties. What makes these women appear “feminist,” “at first glance,” is their prestigious educations and their six-figure salaries. Despite their deferral of child-bearing for work, their lifestyle choices are ultimately still quite conventional and rooted in the normative construct of the upper-middle class, heterosexual family dynamic. But this limited notion of feminist success quickly gives way to its opposite as Belkin continues her story:

Yes, if an early feminist could peer into this scene, she would feel triumphant about the future. Until, of course, any one of these polished and purposeful women opened her mouth. “I don’t want to be on the fast track leading to a partnership at a prestigious law firm,” says Katherine Brokaw, who left that track in order to stay home with her three children. “Some people define that as success. I don’t.” (Belkin, 2003: 42-44)⁵

Brokaw, like all of the women spotlighted in the article, has left the corporate rat race for fulltime motherhood, and this, according to Belkin’s (2003) either/or paradigm, is not a feminist move. But why can’t Brokaw’s choice to stay home be construed as *feminist*? Isn’t Belkin overlooking the idea

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and act of choice as a form of female empowerment?

In many ways, Belkin's (2003) equation of feminism with a winning lap on the career fast-track and non-feminism as the desire to leave the race, is directly in line with notions of what constitutes feminism coming from Schlafly and Crittenden. All three ignore the important issues of race, class, gender, and sexual identity that feminist theorists and activists have spent the past "30-odd years" addressing. Belkin's limited definition of feminism, as measured solely in terms of professional success in comparison to men, becomes the proper object against which she measures all other lifestyle choices.⁶ The desire for things outside of this correspondingly becomes, in her equation, anti-feminist and in most cases, normalized. Indeed, defining feminism in relationship to an opposite empties the concept of its radical as well as its pragmatic potential. Distilling the complex relationships between feminism, work, and motherhood into binary terms, and then coding these as either feminist or anti-feminist, acts as a reductive strategy: arbitrarily bringing together diverse groups of people and force-fitting them into predetermined identity positions. Such a process closes the spaces for dissent as well as for social change. As in Danielle Crittenden's (2000, 2003) work, Belkin's (2003) formulations allow for the concept of feminism, as well as its uses, to be essentialized and then dismissed. By defining it in relation to its negative through assertions such as "feminists would be aghast..." and emptying it of the possibility of difference, they presume a unified feminist stance and present a homogenous picture of who feminists are and what they want by attempting to delineate what they are not. Through their Manichean equations, they have also reified ideals of motherhood and in so doing shifted the boundaries between public and private desire, essentializing and thus normalizing what should be individual private choices. More specifically, they have presented the choice to have children and stay home with them as anti-feminist and the wish, or need, to leave them, as feminist. Instead of privileging the ability to choose, Belkin privileges what they have chosen. Moreover, issues of class—many mothers have to work for economic survival—as well as other forms of what could be called non-biological maternal desire—many mothers find satisfaction in arenas that might take them away from their children, and they may identify as something other than a mother for part of their day—have fallen out of their scenarios and thus out of the larger popular debate.

What does the ubiquity of this formulation suggest? Why have writers as diverse as Lisa Belkin and Danielle Crittenden defined the relationship between feminism and motherhood in such a way that they undercut the very foundation of feminism: choice? There are models of feminist mothers that are compelling. Take for example the writer Ayun Halliday. After the birth of her children Halliday chose to stay home rather than continue working in the performance troupe of which she was a member. But she did not completely surrender her artistic autonomy nor did she thoughtlessly suppress her ambitions. Rather, she found inspiration in her new role as a full-time mother and

capitalized on it by creating a zine *The East Village Inky* and then a book, *The Big Rumpus* (2002), both of which chronicle the day-to-day antics of her life with her two children. After the birth of her daughter, Halliday—like many before her—experienced an existential crisis. “The baby had me in such a chokehold . . . that I feared that a large and utterly tedious beast would devour me before my firstborn child could mount the tenement staircase, pronounce her own name, or eat anything more robust than wallpaper paste. If it hadn’t been for the magazine, I don’t know what I would have done. The magazine saved my heiner” (2002: 6).

Unlike the mothers in Belkin’s piece, Halliday does not define her work experience through the construction of financial gain, but instead imagines it as a medium through which she can better articulate her experience of mothering. Unlike Crittenden, Halliday’s work—her writing—does not serve to separate her from her identity as a mother, but instead functions as an outgrowth of it. Despite being a stay at home mom, she identifies as a feminist and considers her magazine an iconoclastic, feminist publication. She writes:

It wasn’t one of those glossy mainstream monthlies that publish the same two articles in every issue describing your toddler and decorating the nursery for under two thousand dollars. It wasn’t a slick newcomer hyping money management as hip and fun. It sure as bugfuck wasn’t *Martha Stewart Living*. I guess one might call it an anti-corporate, consciousness-raising, feminist call to arms. (2002: 6).

By positioning herself in this way, Halliday (2002) defies categorization within Belkin (2003) and Crittenden’s (2000) rigid formulations. Her definition of feminism, like her notions of work and motherhood, is nuanced in a way that goes beyond either/or binaries. She works and she stays at home. She is a mother and a feminist. And her choices are her own. While she, like Crittenden and Schlafly and the women profiled in Belkin’s piece can afford to stay at home (and this is key), Halliday does not see this move as an anti-feminist capitulation. On the contrary, she regards it as an empowered choice; one that allows her to be both a mother and an artist, a feminist and a stay-at-home mom. Rather than locate her definition of feminism in the choices she has made—to have children and be their full-time caregiver—she grounds it in her ability to make these choices.

Perhaps we, as feminists, should follow Halliday’s lead and return to a more dynamic notion of feminism, rooted in choice for all women, regardless of who they are and where they work. If we make room for women who express a desire to stay home with their children under the feminist tent, perhaps then we can reclaim the term *feminism* from the negative grip of critics such as Phyllis Schlafly and Danielle Crittenden. By dispelling some of the anxiety surrounding the term, we may be able to work towards creating real choices for women and children, from all classes and backgrounds.

A. Joan Saab

¹A partial listing of these texts include Sylvia Hewlett's *Creating a Life* (2002); Naomi Wolf's *MisConceptions* (2003); Alison Pearson's *I Don't Know How She Does It* (2003); Danielle Crittenden's *Amanda Bright at Home* (2003); Phyllis Schlafly's *Feminist Fantasies* (2003); Lisa Belkin's "The Opt Out Revolution" (2003); and Louise Story's "Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood" (2005).

²See, for example, Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" in Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 28-52.

³Interestingly, Danielle Crittenden's mother-in-law, David Frum's mother, was the late Barbara Frum, another outspoken female and a pioneer in Canadian broadcasting.

⁴Kathy Peiss (1986), for example, demonstrates how women in the early part of the twentieth century, Crittenden's grandmother's generation, engaged in premarital sex and other forms of "treating" in her well-researched study *Cheap Amusements*.

⁵Lisa Belkin, "The Opt Out Revolution" *New York Times Magazine*, October 26, 2003. 42-3. The article generated the magazine's largest on-line response as well as a number of angry editorials in other publications from *Bitch* to the *Nation*. Importantly, and I don't go into it in detail here, most critics of the piece, myself included, took issue with the class-based assumptions of Belkin's article. These women could afford to stop working and live a life of continued comfort thanks in large part to the salaries that their husbands were still making.

⁶For more on the idea of feminism's "proper object" see Butler (1994). Butler is talking about what she sees as the false divide between feminism and queer theory; in particular the equation proposed by Henry Abelove in the *Gay and Lesbian Reader* that: "gender is to feminism as sex is to queer theory." Butler urges us to move beyond relationships defined by proper objects and "for feminism to offer a critique of gender hierarchy that might be incorporated into a radical theory of sex, and for radical sexual theory to challenge and enrich feminism" (15).

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**Leanne Ralya Eleff and
Angela Trethewey**

The Enterprising Parent A Critical Examination of Parenting, Consumption and Identity

This article is a critical analysis of how modern western parental identity, parenting practices and children's gendered identities are shaped by discourses of consumption and psychotherapy, as manifested through "entrepreneurialism." Examining the entrepreneurial discourse surrounding "the perfect child's birthday party," the authors examine how self-improvement, individualism, and consumption inform and constrain parental decision-making and, ultimately, their own and their children's gendered identities. Several ways of resisting the entrepreneurial discourse are suggested with an eye toward shifting our definition of "good citizenship," including good parenting, from consumption to service.

"The Perfect Outdoor Kids' Party!" shouts the cover of my latest copy of *Child* magazine. Wonderful! I think to myself. Timely advice for my son's upcoming birthday.

I flip to the page indicated in the table of contents. "Fresh Squeezed Fun" is scrawled across a picture of cut lemons. "They'll love every juicy minute!"

Wow, I think. What a telling introduction for a piece on parenting, consumption and identity.

In this piece, we explore how modern western parental identity, parenting practices and children's gendered identities are shaped by discourses of consumption and psychotherapy, as they are manifest in "entrepreneurialism." Entrepreneurialism describes a relatively new form of subjectivity wherein individuals act as "entrepreneurs of themselves, seeking to maximize their 'quality of life' through the artful assembly of a 'life-style' put together through the world of goods" (Miller and Rose, 1990: 25). These "enterprising subjects" (Du Gay, 1996) or "entrepreneurial selves" (Miller and Rose, 1990) are driven to pursue "meaning, responsibility, and a sense of personal achievement in life,

and hence in work” (Miller and Rose, 1995: 454). In other words, the constant consumption of products and technologies by the enterprising self is motivated by the perpetual pursuit of self-improvement.

Entrepreneurial discourse is relevant to this discussion because, as Angela Trethewey noted, it “now shapes the available subject positions for contemporary workers at every level of the organization” (2000). The discourse that had its origins in the workplace has now effectively colonized other aspects of the lifeworld, including intimate family relations. The assumption that “the self” is a continual project, always in need of improvement, and subject to the whims of “experts” is evident across a variety of life experiences. Stay-at-home mothers now use the language of the corporation, describing themselves as “family CEOs” and drafting strategic plans for their families, in order to lend credence to their parenting work (Medved and Kirby, 2005). We even adopt an enterprising approach toward sex when we buy lifestyle magazines that promise to help us “get more sex,” by teaching us “how to boost [our] investment in [our] sex life” or offering us “twenty ways to stop wasting time in the bedroom” (Tyler, 2004). In this essay, we argue that parenting, too, has become colonized by entrepreneurial discourses in ways that constrain our individual and collective abilities to serve our children, our communities and ourselves. Finally, we offer an alternative vision of parenting that draws upon alternative discourses of care and service.

Much of the evidence presented herein takes the form of discursive analysis of the first author’s personal parenting experiences (as a middle-class parent) and our scholarly interpretation of “expert” discourses on parenting.¹

Moreover, we would argue that the first author’s experiences are not unique, as evidenced by the burgeoning industry of parenting experts that speak to parents’ anxieties. Bookshelves, for example, bear such weighty titles as *The Mother of All Parenting Books* (Douglas, 2004), and *Building Moral Intelligence* (Borba, 2001).

Magazine racks are also laden with publications providing parental advice, including *Parents*, *Parenting*, *Child*, *Working Mother*, and of course, just about every mainstream women’s magazine out there, including *Good Housekeeping*, *Family Circle*, and *Woman’s Day*, which often have whole sections devoted to parenting/family/children. And the Internet provides parents with instant access to dozens of experts at the push of a button.

Clearly, the reason that this industry can support so many people is because so many parents are voracious consumers of so-called “expert” advice. In fact, our parenting culture is characterized by consumption in one form or another. For example, there’s material consumption and all its related industries—production, marketing, advertising, distribution, and sales. We consume services to create a rich environment for our families—yard maintenance, housekeepers, nannies and window washers. We consume technology to remain “connected” to our children—the Internet, cell phones, television and transportation. Finally, we consume information to ensure that we are doing

our parenting correctly—books, classes, lectures, and discussion groups.

Not only is our culture steeped in consumption, we have officially adopted it as a sign of good citizenship. When manufacturing jobs were heading overseas in record numbers, we were urged to look for the “Made in America” tag before buying. When faced with an economic downturn, President Bush pushed through a tax rebate so that we might spend our way out of a recession. And again, after 9/11, when Bush was asked what “average American[s] could] do besides spend, to help,” Bush answered that they should “go about their business” by “tak[ing] their kids on vacations [and going] to ball games” (Bush, 2001).

We have become so entangled in the consumption rhetoric that we now measure a person’s degree of “success” in primarily economic terms (Folbre, 2001). As a result, we often find ourselves in the losing battle of upscale emulation. Instead of trying to keep up with the Joneses—who live across the street and make roughly the same amount of money as we do—we are now comparing ourselves to the Trumps. Juliet Schor (1998) calls this trend “the new consumerism” (4), and points out that it has “led to a kind of mass ‘over-spending’ within the middle class” (20).

Indeed, mounting credit card debt and skyrocketing personal bankruptcy filings signify that consumption, or at the very least, one’s perceived ability to consume, are constitutive of identity. The body has become the signpost for an identity crafted through consumption (Jagger, 2002). “[C]onsumer goods [have become] attractive for their symbolism - for the imagery surrounding them and what this might ‘say’ about the person who buys or uses them.” (49). A Timex and a Rolex both tell time, but only one will elicit the admiration of peers.

The problem is that most Americans “live with high levels of psychological denial about the connection between [their] buying habits and the social statements they make.” (Schor, 1998: 19) Although we’re quick enough to attribute such motives to others, we don’t want to believe our own consumptive choices are motivated by social status. “Most Americans would deny that, by their spending, they are seeking status [...]. They might point out that they don’t want everything in sight, [or] that [their] purchases are often highly selective” (19). To put it another way, we justify our consumption based on which facet of our identity is activated at that particular moment. For example, if someone prides himself on being a “bargain hunter,” then he might justify an expensive purchase by saying he got a great deal on it. We constitute our identities through our consumptive choices, despite the fact that most of us live in denial (at least some of the time) about the fact that we are doing so.

Entrepreneurial discourses individualize success or failure, as seen in the self-branding literature described by Daniel Lair, Katie Sullivan and George Cheney (2005). According to the self-branding experts, “individuals [are] responsible for charting their own futures” (322). Practitioners of self-branding believe that success lies within reach if you can just package yourself correctly.

Inability to achieve success is your own fault, never the “fault of your employer or broader structures or policies” (333). In other words, wide scale adoption of the enterprising discourse prevents examination of larger social issues, instead blaming failure on the individual’s weaknesses, mistakes and lack of entrepreneurial drive.

The entrepreneurial focus on success and perfection are reflected in popular parenting literature. In “The Perfect Outdoor Kids’ Party!” article, the word “perfect” is mentioned twice: on the cover, and in the article’s lead-in.

Collectively, the emphasis on perfection contained within the parenting literature rests on a number of common assumptions: that a perfect childhood is both achievable and desirable; that parents have an obligation to their children to provide— or at least strive for—a perfect childhood; and that they (the magazine) are staffed by experts who can help parents in their pursuit of perfection. The implication behind all this contemporary parenting advice is that parents have to “get it right.”

Parents

While we have, up to this point, consistently referred to “parents,” the sad fact is that because mom is usually seen as the primary caregiver of a child, her child’s failure is most often laid at her feet rather than dad’s. For example, Dr. Spock, in his 1945 book *Dr. Spock’s Baby and Child Care*, assumed mom would stay at home, and addressed all of his advice to her. As Olga Silverstein and Beth Rashbaum (1994) noted, “[Mother] was to be affectionate but not too affectionate, warm but not too warm, to foster independence but to set boundaries, and so on” (23). It is still true today, that the good mother must walk a line so fine that the slightest bobble could turn her child into damaged goods. (For example, overly affectionate “smother mothers” are blamed for turning their sons into “momma’s boys.”)

The problem is that ten childcare experts will produce eleven different opinions about the “right” way to raise a child. Parents, particularly mothers, are in a double bind: they must try to parent perfectly, but because there are so many different opinions of what is perfect, they can never actually achieve perfection. Unfortunately, that’s the nature of entrepreneurialism. Every new “expert” brings something new, better, or simply different to the scene. Mothers find themselves striving for perfection in a climate that is constantly redefining perfection

I have a confession to make.

When I first read the “perfect party” headline, I was intrigued, but not for the reason I mentioned. The real reason I immediately flipped to the page in question was not to glean ideas for a future party, but to get a reading on the party I had thrown a few weeks earlier for my daughter. I wanted to see how my party stacked up against what these experts called perfect. In finding the lemonade stand, I realized for the first time that my idea of “the perfect party” was just that—mine. Which helped me realize that throughout the planning of

my daughter's perfect party, I never once questioned my own underlying assumptions of what constituted perfection.

For example, buying into the idea that a child's party needs to be perfect assumes that a child's entire life can and should be perfect. But I didn't think about that. Instead, I worried that my child might feel disappointed if her birthday celebration wasn't up to snuff. When I examined that worry more closely, I realized that I wanted to protect my child from disappointment of any kind. Emotionally, this didn't seem unreasonable, but cognitively, I knew it was neither possible nor desirable, which problematized the very notion of a child's "perfect life" entitlement.

Not only was I invested in the idea that a birthday celebration can and should be perfect, I also had a rigid list of ingredients necessary to achieve it: my time, my effort, and of course, money. Without sufficient amounts of these, it didn't matter how much fun the kids had, I couldn't bring myself to call a party perfect.

As I look back on it, I worried as much about what other people would think as I did about what Maya would think. Actually, what I really cared about was how this party would reflect on me, and my ability to enact the role of the "perfect" enterprising mother. In a sense, my child's birthday party had become a bangle on my wrist. Through it, I could show off a bit. What? You love the party? Well, shucks! I just threw it together at the last minute.

Throughout the party planning process, my actions were influenced by the enterprising parent discourse. I jumped onto the Internet to consult party planning "experts." I bought craft supplies, rented child sized table and chairs, and blew up dozens of helium balloons, because these were things that in my mind's eye, were omnipresent at the perfect child's birthday party.

My consumptive choices, while constraining my identity in some ways, were, in other ways, constrained by my feminist identity. For example, Maya wanted a princess theme for her party. I, however, on principle, refuse to buy anything Barbie or Disney Princess, which made planning the party a bit more challenging. And (primarily) because we were good enterprising parents who didn't want to "spoil" our child, we opted to forgo buying her gifts, in essence making the party itself her present.²

As this discussion indicates, many choices parents make are about identity, our own as well as our children's. As enterprising parents, we have the responsibility to shape our children's identity (whether this is something realistically achievable or not is rarely questioned), but what we don't seem to realize—or would prefer not to examine—is how much our own identity formation plays a part in our parenting decisions.

The "experts" that parents so often turn to for advice, have become gatekeepers for the enterprising parent's consumptive decisions. As parents, we have come to believe that we must choose the right products, "or else." Fortunately, there are plenty of experts out there willing to tell us what will happen if we choose the wrong products. The whole child safety industry is

built on fear-motivated, don't-let-this-happen-to-you reasoning. My mother didn't lock her kitchen cabinets, while mine require a special key to get into them. And now there are childproofing consultants who will come to your home and tell you all the different ways your child can injure himself and will also sell you the products to keep him safe.

The Baby Einstein product line is similarly based on anxiety, although in this case it's the fear of Junior falling behind in school. Never mind that school is several years off. In the pursuit of unexplored potentials, we enroll our children in a plethora of after-school activities. We take them on trips so that they can experience a larger sense of the world. We search exhaustively for the "right" preschool so they don't fall behind in kindergarten.

As parents, we are constantly consuming in order to give our children the best possible chances of success. In fact, we're so busy consuming that we rarely consider how our individual decisions shape and reproduce the larger culture. For example, Huggies Pull-ups are gender specific: the girls' version is pink with Disney princesses, while the boys' version is blue with Buzz Lightyear. Most people buy based on the "blue for boys, pink for girls" philosophy. It can be argued, however, that both options ratify and recreate the gendered cultural stereotypes of boys as active agents and girls as passive receptors, which is why I put both of my kids in the boy style. Furthermore, because I resented Huggies for not offering a gender-neutral choice, I ultimately switched to the Pampers version despite the higher cost.

Again, the choice of which training pants to buy was constrained by the feminist facet of my identity, while the decision to buy training pants (rather than going straight to underwear) was constrained by the opinion of potty training experts who said they would help my child become potty trained.

Resisting the enterprising parent discourse is not simply a matter of choosing to comply or resist. Rather, it is an on-going struggle that must be negotiated with each decision to be made.

We have discussed parents' participation in the enterprising discourse, but we haven't yet addressed how the children themselves are affected by it.

Children

Parents are often treated as the consumptive gatekeepers for their kids, but at some point, children themselves become consumers who are also interpolated by entrepreneurial discourses.

Marketers have expended many resources trying to figure out how best to sell directly to our kids. Walk down just about any aisle of the grocery store, and you will see familiar kiddie characters hawking a variety of products. But it isn't just what they are trying to sell, but how they are doing it. While it can be argued that the media don't create racial and gendered stereotypes (Sternheimer, 2003), they clearly help reinforce them.

As a mother, one way I've tried to deal with the media onslaught is through avoidance. I don't buy violent toys, I monitor TV time closely, and I've already

mentioned my boycott of Barbie and Disney Princess. But I've come to realize that trying to save my kid from drowning by emptying the pool one bucket at a time isn't a very sensible solution.

A better idea is to teach them to swim before they go near the water.

I'm talking about nurturing critical consumers.

As Karen Sternheimer (2003) points out, while we shouldn't fear media exposure, neither should we ignore it. But to truly make a difference, both kids *and* parents "need to work towards becoming critical media consumers" (218).

As adults, we can model critical consumerism by "question[ing] whose viewpoint a news report or political pundit represents. This means questioning what we are told are facts by the news media and challenging the logic of hyper-consumption, that more is better and that fulfillment and good citizenship is accomplished by spending." (Sternheimer, 2003: 218)

Rather than complaining about the media, we should spend more time analyzing it. We should look at how media representations of race and gender reflect and recreate social inequities. We must also scrutinize the media itself, asking who is producing it and why, what they are leaving out, and whose voices are being silenced.

But nurturing critical consumers is only half the battle.

Yes, we live in a society saturated by consumptive messages. Yes, we are culturally interpellated by the enterprising discourse. But neither one of these statements is inherently good or bad.

The problem arises when certain aspects of the entrepreneurial discourse are exaggerated at the expense of alternate interpretations. For example, focusing on material consumption causes us to frame ourselves primarily as consumers, thus flattening opportunities for personal growth. Women often justify breast augmentation by saying that it will enhance their self-esteem. Men going through a mid-life crisis might buy themselves a sports car. Both are experiencing a "lack" in their lives. But instead of looking inside themselves to find out why, they turn to the external world of consumption to fill the void. A consumer driven identity prevents them from seeing that personal development can be achieved through means other than material consumption. To do that, they would need to develop alternative identity resources.

Chris Weedon (1997), a post-structuralist feminist, recognized that identities are never entirely freely chosen; rather, agency is enacted through choosing among or combining in new and creative ways discourses that are already in circulation. So, although it may be true that we can't remove ourselves completely from the influences of entrepreneurial discourse, what we *can* do is appropriate new or different discourses, like those we describe below, in a way that develops our identity in enriching ways.

Another exaggerated aspect of entrepreneurialism is its focus on individualism. We've already pointed out that the self-branding literature puts personal success or failure in the hands of the individual. But the consequences of individualism go beyond that, because in an entrepreneurial society,

“[i]ndividualistic competition for wealth offers no rewards for the work of care” (Folbre, 2001: 24).

Our patriarchal culture has concluded that care-giving activities are unproductive, and that caring work is the “natural” bailiwick of women (Folbre, 2001). This has resulted in a cultural devaluing of both caring activities and the people who perform them, which explains why school teachers and nurses have historically been underpaid, undervalued women.

The entrepreneurial focus on material consumption and individualism has been insidiously stripping our culture of its ethic of care for our fellow human beings. Focusing on the economic success of the individual, poverty is no longer a problem belonging to society at large, but a symptom of personal shortcomings (du Gay, 1996). We would prefer to look after ourselves, letting others fend for themselves, which is why we don’t mind paying high taxes for schools as long as it’s our own children who benefit (Folbre, 2001). In the same vein, “businesses that don’t want to pay taxes or a living wage [and, thus, care for and be accountable to local communities] are finding it easier to relocate to other countries” (Folbre, 2001: xvi). Management’s focus on the bottom line means they no longer feel obligated to invest in the community’s production of capable, dependable workers.

To combat this trend, children (and adults) must come to see themselves as part of an interconnected global community, and to feel a responsibility towards others, even when those others speak a different language, have a different skin tone, or occupy a different economic stratum.

By helping our children to adopt an ethic of care, defined by Carol Gilligan (1982) as “an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, to taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone” (62), and teaching them to think independently, to ask critical questions and to challenge the status quo, we give our burgeoning adults the tools to see that consumption isn’t the only way, or even the best way, to attain happiness. We can teach our children that material consumption often has a cost associated with it, whether it’s the oppressed labor force from a third world country used to produce a good, or the space that product will ultimately consume in a municipal landfill.

How is this to be accomplished? As the enterprising parent discourse demonstrates, one way is through the parents. Parents can learn to become more critical consumers, as well as modeling an observable manifestation of care for others. Parents can work to strengthen values of love, obligation and reciprocity within the family, which, according to Nancy Folbre (2001), can “create a cultural environment in which the individual pursuit of self-interest can lead to healthy outcomes” (231).

Note that pursuing self-interest does not exclude the possibility of service or care. In truth, self-interest must be accommodated in order for a cultural shift of this kind to succeed. It is, however, important that our self-interest be motivated by something beyond financial or material gain, and that is care for

and service to others.

It is especially important for fathers to model a service attitude, because the cultural stereotype is for dad to earn the money, leaving the caring projects—helping an elderly neighbor, raising the kids, or serving on the PTO—to mom. But keeping mothers as the primary altruists in the family “separates care from power, and . . . reduces the overall level of social and economic support for caring work” (Folbre, 2001: 231).

But this shouldn't be construed as just another item to add to the list of things a parent must teach her child in order to “get it right.” It isn't just parents who should be responsible for teaching children these skills. Ideally, the entire society would adopt them. For example, schools would, instead of simply “teaching to the test” as the current educational atmosphere encourages, teach beyond the test, to give children critical thinking life skills early on. Schools could incorporate and institutionalize service learning³ into their curriculum, thereby fostering both critical thinking and service (www.learnandserve.org). Perhaps a mandatory year of service for every graduating high school senior would be a good place to start.

At a societal level, our definition of good citizenship needs to shift from personal consumption to service. Not just community service, but a *culture* of service that appreciates care given to others, economically as well as ideologically. Children would be seen as a product of the community, rather than just the parents. Schools would be fully funded, with schoolteachers being highly esteemed and well paid. Global corporations would accept responsibility for their role in the community, rather than simply getting a free ride. But all of this is a long way off. A good place to start is for each of us to begin to develop and expand our identity repertoire by actively resisting entrepreneurial discourses.

¹From this point on, sections discussing experiences of the first author will be written using “I”, while analysis and discussion will be written using “we.”

²I am not alone in this line of thought. Indeed, I got the idea from a friend who throws big birthday bashes every other year for her children, only buying them presents in the off years. Another friend explained to her son how much a birthday party costs, and he opted for a small family celebration and a check.

³Service-learning integrates community service projects with classroom learning by engaging students in the educational process, using what they learn in the classroom to solve real-life problems.

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Elizabeth Podnieks

“The One True Thing in My Life”

Mother-Son Relations in the Art and Life of Emily Coleman

*In 1925, following the birth of her only child, Johnny, aspiring writer Emily Holmes Coleman developed toxic exhaustive psychosis, which led to her being institutionalized in the Rochester State Hospital for two months. Upon recovery, she translated the trauma of labor into her autobiographical novel *The Shutter of Snow* (1930). After moving to Paris in 1926, Coleman hired the Russian émigré Madame Donn, who was married with two children, to be her son’s governess, and within a year had struck a deal that would shatter familial expectation and design: in exchange for financial assistance, the Donns agreed to have Johnny live with them full-time. Emily’s marriage to Deak Coleman was basically over (they divorced in 1932). Deak had no interest in raising his son, and Emily most wanted to pursue a life of art and self-expression on a wholly self-absorbed plane. To this end she became a some-time single mother who visited with her son occasionally while she was in Paris, or had him shipped over for holidays when she moved to London. I will explore the relationship between Coleman and her son through modernist and feminist perspectives. I will also examine how *The Shutter of Snow* gives us insight into her experiences with, and attitudes towards, mothering. In addition, I will analyze in detail the many entries in her diary devoted to her son which reveal the plethora of ways in which their relationship was sustained over the years.*

In 1921, the aspiring American writer Emily Holmes Coleman married advertising manager Deacon (Deak) Coleman—she was 22, he 23—and on January 6, 1924, she gave birth to their only child, John Milton Holmes Coleman. The delivery did not go well. She told her father: “I love him!” but added: “from now on I favor the stork method of acquiring a family.”¹ This flippant comment, clearly for her father’s benefit, belies the fact that she developed toxic exhaustive psychosis, which led to her being institutionalized

in the Rochester State Hospital, an asylum, for two months. Years later she recalled in her diary that she experienced immediate post-partum "insanity" which "came from excessive pain (not taking gas oxygen), and an infection." She explained: "I didn't take gas oxygen to save Deak money, neither of us dreaming that it would be such a horror to give birth."² Nearing the end of her treatment, she wrote her father: "Some day maybe you'll know what I've been through these two long months. (But just thank God that it is over now!)"³ Coleman's experiences as a mother, however, were just beginning.

Recovering in Rochester, Coleman confessed in another letter to her father: "You know, I've been terribly depressed since I've been home . . . I fight it all the time, but it's been very hard." In this same letter, she called her son "a perfect angel" but one who "gets cunninger [sic] every day—he's a peppy little rascal."⁴ Coleman here established two key points that would profoundly inform the way she viewed herself and her child over the next several years: motherhood was to be equated with "depression"—though in her diary she frequently used the more powerful terms "insanity" and "insane"; and her child possessed the dual nature of "angel" and "rascal" (soon to become "demon") which she would become increasingly unable to reconcile, fuelling the tension within her that she couldn't live without him but she couldn't live with him. Consequently, when John was two-and-a-half years old, she sent him to live more or less permanently with his nanny.⁵

While Coleman's actions might easily inspire us to condemn her as a "bad" mother,⁶ I believe a careful consideration of her situation allows us to appreciate her as the modernist figure she was: a woman who was brave enough, even selfish enough, to challenge what was expected of her as an intellectual and artistic female who was also a mother in the early twentieth century, a woman who refused to define herself according to her child and yet who loved him deeply. She wrote endlessly about him in her diary, and kept in constant touch through letters and periodic visits so that a mother-son bond developed in alternate modes of expectation. She takes her place beside other modernist mothers of her day and beside the mothers and scholars of our day who struggle to define and redefine what it means to mother, to be a mother, in ways that challenge long-held assumptions, taboos, abilities, and desires.

In the fall of 1925 the Colemans moved to New York where Emily began to pour her mental energies into poetry. Desperate to join the exodus of Americans to Europe, where she was sure her talent as well as her health would bloom, Emily set sail for Paris in October, 1926, taking her son but leaving her husband to wave them off at the pier—Deak encouraged her to pursue her literary dreams, but because her post-partum illness had exacted such a tremendous price on their finances he had to remain in the United States to work (he would join them a year later). Her creative spirit flourished in Paris: she took courses at the Sorbonne; published short stories and poems in the innovative journal *transition*; completed and secured a publisher for her novel *The Shutter of Snow*; and landed a job writing society articles for the Paris edition

of the *Chicago Tribune*.

These accomplishments were made possible by Coleman's reliance on child-care for John. After settling into a pension on the trendy Boulevard du Montparnasse, she hired a French "nurse" for him: "We are getting along very well with the new nurse, but I don't dare hope too much. I only pray it goes well enough for me to go to my classes this week."⁷ Coleman's tone suggests that she was feeling anxious about her freedom, and she grew increasingly aware of how being a mother and a single parent cut into her time for personal fulfillment. A letter written to her father two weeks later reveals that her fears were justified. She explains how she had to "dismiss" the nurse because "John was a demon with her," and that although she would be taking courses she was not trying to earn a degree from the Sorbonne because "it's too nerve-making, with the responsibility of John with me all the time."⁸ In this same letter, though, she happily announced that she had hired a new governess, Madame Donn, the woman who would within a short time become John's second mother.⁹

Nina Donn was a Russian exile, as was her husband who had been in the Russian cavalry and who now worked in a factory; their two young children were Olga and Rostislaw (Rostik).¹⁰ Coleman described Nina accordingly: "The new governess took hold with a practised hand, and from the first day there has not been the slightest difficulty. She has been governess for two other American children, has two of her own besides, and understands the child mind perfectly. She is scientific, modern, sensible, intelligent and devoted. I have not the slightest fault to find with her. John is mad about her and can hardly wait for one-thirty to come" (she worked from 1:30–6:30 Monday through Friday). Coleman added: "Directly lunch is over the governess arrives and I give him thankfully into her hands and make for the great outdoors."¹¹ Coleman's evocation of "the great outdoors" perfectly conveys her vast sense of release, of escape, from mothering. She was in fact finding it harder and harder to tolerate John's behaviour. She had previously told her father that the residents at her house "like us well enough now to put up with John's idiosyncrasies,"¹² and she later wrote: "I doubt if there is another place in Paris where they would put up with him. He threw his horse through the window Saturday." As a result of his actions she had to pay emotionally as well as financially "every week for this Terror."¹³

If John was a "Terror" and "demon," though, Coleman must have been an equally frightening spectre to her son, for she frequently hit him. In a 1936 diary entry, she recorded: "I got very mad with Johnny because he not only wouldn't obey me but was saucy besides, and peevish, and I walloped him hard, after taking him upstairs—I got so mad I lost control of myself." Recognizing that "[v]iolence is wrong for me, come what may, because it is my terrible weakness," she registered the impact of her actions: "Utterly ruined our relation for a couple of days. I explained it to him, and he saw my reasons, but kept away from me (inside) and made me feel sick." She further recalled: "When he was little and used to drive me frantic I resorted to hitting him—it never worked and it made

me ill and him callous. Madame Donn has changed all that."¹⁴ Given Coleman's nature, we can understand more fully her relief upon hiring Donn: "what a MARVELLOUS governess I have for him. She is worth her weight in gold seven times over. She has just my ideas on how to handle John—only she has the patience [and] endurance to carry them out!"¹⁵ As Emily grew increasingly familiar with the Donns, she came to view them, especially Madame Donn, as a safeguard against her violent nature which she feared would drive her son away—"God, how can I risk hurting his love for me, or his trust in me?"¹⁶

As the relationship with the Donns strengthened, Deak joined his family in Paris in September, 1927. The family would not be reunited for long: he was unemployed and they remained in economic trouble, so when he was offered a coveted job in advertising with the J. Walter Thompson Company in London in March, 1928, he had no choice but to accept it. Emily was at the time involved in a law suit she had filed against her employer, the *Tribune*, which had fired her "for insisting upon extra money for double work," but she hoped to join him as soon as it was settled.¹⁷ Their son, however, was not included in these plans. Some time between Deak arriving in Paris and departing for London, a deal had been struck that would shatter familial expectation and design: in exchange for much-needed financial assistance, the Donns agreed to have John live with them full-time in their crowded flat in Ivry, a suburb of Paris. Emily gained from the arrangement her freedom to pursue her burgeoning literary career, as well as the conviction that her son was happier, safer, and thus better off with Madame Donn. For this Coleman deserves the credit of recognizing that her abusive tendencies placed her son in potential physical and psychological danger, and she forsook him to protect him. Indeed, one of the reasons Emily was so eager for Deak to take the London job was that the money would allow them to "keep John with his governess"—"We shall not consider for a moment taking him away from Madame Donn." Emily was not embarrassed to confront her limitations where her son was concerned, as she acknowledged that the Donns "are such delightful, fine people—I can never get used to believing in the luck I had when I found her. John is a changed human being. I see a great deal of him, now that I don't have a job, and get along beautifully with him. My trouble is that I can't keep it up—we are too much alike and I am not fit for the job anyway—and after a day or so I am pretty well exhausted, even if he has been good."¹⁸

Unable to find work in London with Deak, and concerned that her health was suffering from European winters, Coleman jumped at the chance to move to St. Tropez that June where she served as secretary to Russian revolutionary Emma Goldman.¹⁹ Though Coleman was reluctant to move away from John, she reiterated to her father that it was for her son's sake that she was leaving him with the Donns: "John would have lost all that he has gained this last year. (For he is so different since he has been with her)."²⁰ John and the Donn family vacationed with his mother in St. Tropez that summer, and he went alone to see her the following spring—Coleman had a friend bring him from Paris on

the train. It was this visit that would crystallize for Coleman her lack of ability and desire to be a traditional mother, as she analyzed with profound self-awareness to her husband: “this will be a rush note because your son is horrible he is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen and the most original but honestly dearest I cannot go through with it. I always thought that if only I could get him alone and he behaved and I had the patience all would be well with our relationship, but all these things are so now, and we get along swell [. . .] and yet I never felt so absolutely unfitted for anything in my life, and I am wondering how long it can go on.” She had no choice but to conclude: “No use, these last months have finished me for motherhood—I might as well let the sentimental and rosy dreams go by the board and face the fact that the deeper my writing goes the farther behind I leave what is behind.” She continued: “I have still clung to the idea that sooner or later I was going to take him away from Madame Donn, that I could not be without him, etc. These things are not true. I can’t be WITH him. I love the idea of him—I cannot even look at that face without kissing it—but when it comes to giving stretches of time to him I just CANNOT keep my mind on it.” In a dashing blow to feminine stereotypes she affirmed: “i [sic] have been throwing things overboard in my usual ruthless fashion. now [sic] it is the maternal instinct.” Coleman feared the consequences that such “instinct” might wreak on her quest for autonomy: “I can’t put myself in a mood to even think of poetry or considering the causes and effects of life, because the minute I do John begins to get on my nerves again. I cannot be poet and mother at the same time.”²¹ She would repeat this sentiment in her diary with the lament, “there has not been a good woman poet who had had a child.”²²

Coleman may have felt “unfitted for” and “finished” with mothering, but in this she was responding to traditional notions of parenting. She did not abandon her son, but rather went on to prove that there is more than one way to raise a child. In *Redefining Motherhood*, Sharon Abbey and Andrea O’Reilly (1998) feature authors who “move beyond the myths and stereotypes of mothering to explore differences among women and within individual women in order to challenge the existence of a universal meaning of motherhood and the notion of a fixed and stable maternal identity” (1998: 14), and we can comfortably place Coleman within such a community of revisionists. Just as Abbey and O’Reilly state that “Mothers are never only mothers” (1998: 14), Coleman refused to privilege her identity as mother over her other identities as writer, lover, friend, and so on. Further, a brief look at representations of and expectations for mothers throughout western history allows us to appreciate that however unconventional or controversial Coleman’s mothering may have seemed to her early twentieth-century culture—as well as to ours today—it had much in common with practices widely promoted and accepted centuries before.

In particular, Coleman’s acknowledgement that she had thrown “maternal instinct” “overboard” leads us to feminist scholar Elisabeth Badinter, who provocatively shows that such an instinct is a misnomer. In the Foreword to

Badinter's *The Myth of Motherhood*, Francine du Plessix Gray summarizes how Badinter "has set out to prove that maternal love is not linked to any immutable female nature; that its manifestations have been too varied throughout history to merit the term 'instinct'; that it is, instead, a socially conditioned 'sentiment' that varies widely with the mores of different epochs; and that, like all human sentiments, it can prove to be frail, fluctuating, and aberrant" (1981: x). Perhaps the most "aberrant" sign of Coleman's maternal (mis)behaviour is her giving her son to the Donns, but Badinter provides a startlingly useful context for understanding both Coleman's and the Donns' actions. Focussing on mothering in France—Susan C. Greenfield and Carol Barash (1999) make similar claims for practices in Great Britain and the United States in *Inventing Maternity*—Badinter shows that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, children from the bourgeois and aristocratic classes experienced "three acts of abandonment": as babies they were cared for by wet nurses; as toddlers they were brought home but cared for by governesses or tutors; and as teens they were sent to convents or boarding schools (1981: 91). She contends that these "phases of child rearing" were predicated on "finding a way 'to get rid of the children and still hold one's head high'" (1981: 108), asserting that "there was no doubt a complicity between father and mother, husband and wife, to adopt the forms of behavior that prevailed" (1981: 110). Just as it was Emily and not Deak who worried whether she was "fit" for the job of parenting, so Badinter contends: "we are less shocked by the male's behavior because no one has ever, even up to the present day, claimed that a father's love constitutes a universal law of nature." For this reason, then, the "wisest and most necessary course would be to resign ourselves to the varying qualities of mother love as well, recognizing that the so-called laws of nature defy easy categorization" (1981: 110), and it is in this light that we must illuminate Coleman's own mothering practices.

If parenting customs held to the course established in the past as we have seen, then we would have little reason for examining Emily Coleman as a mother who radically challenged convention. Her desire for intellectual and creative freedom, her needs as a social and sexual being, and her admissions that mothering could bore her all reflect the norms rather than the deviations of a culture.²³ However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the "image of the mother, of her role, and of her significance changed radically," such that mother love was elevated "to a natural and social good, favorable to the species and to society." A dramatic cultural shift took place in which "women were told to be mothers first and foremost, engendering a myth that is still tenaciously supported two hundred years later: maternal instinct, or the spontaneous love of all mothers for their children" (Badinter, 1981: 117). It was thus during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that this "new mother"—mainly middle-class²⁴—gathered her family around her "interior" universe of hearth and home, becoming the "domestic monarch" (Badinter, 1981: 189) or "angel in the house."²⁵ As Badinter concludes, "Trapped in the role of mother, women

would no longer be able to escape it without inviting moral condemnation” (1981: 206-7). From the nineteenth century on, “anathemas were hurled at bad mothers” (1981: 237). Among the wicked women identified by Badinter, the “selfish mother” and the “working mother” are the two categories most directly applicable to Coleman. The former “loves her child a little, but not to the point of sacrificing herself for him” (Badinter, 1981: 242) while the latter, who either had to work out of economic necessity or who chose employment and or “higher education” for its own sake, was to be feared for the damage she wrought to marriage and children (Badinter, 1981: 244-45).

If the early twentieth century perpetuated a prison of conformity, subservience, and guilt in which women were forced to live out their terms of motherhood, it simultaneously provided a release as women threw off these shackles and embraced the spirit of modernism and its attendant mandate to “make it new”—not only in artistic ways but also in social and cultural practices, including mothering. Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers rightly argue that “Modernism, for its women, was not just a question of style; it was a way of life” (1987: 11); “What is most striking, both in itself and in relation to their writing, is the shared anti-conventionality of the personal lives of these women at a time when the overwhelming social expectation was that a woman should marry, bear children, and remain both married and monogamous” (1987: 12). Though not included in their study, Coleman was just such a modernist.

Literary modernism welcomed challenges to traditional narrative theme or content. Tess Cosslett shows us that within literature the subject of childbirth “as seen from the mother’s perspective” dates back only to the 1930s (1994: 1). In a related sense, Coleman’s novel *The Shutter of Snow*, published in 1930, was groundbreaking as it shattered taboos with its depiction of post-partum depression.²⁶ This autobiographical work features Coleman’s persona, Marthe Gail, struggling to regain her identity following the birth of her child. Convinced that she is none other than Jesus Christ—“This time its [sic] a woman” (Coleman, 1997: 10)—Marthe is deemed crazy and unfit to mother. The novel suggests that the woman who revels in the glories of her reproductive body threatens the traditional, patriarchal order and must be removed from society. Her husband tells her that she will be released only when she rids herself of her “delusional” power and behaves like a “Dear little girl” (1997: 27). In this provocative text, Coleman takes us on a very graphic tour of a mental institution, where women are routinely locked up and tied down, to show that the agonies of birthing are real and can have a lasting, debilitating impact on a woman’s body and mind; and she offers a dramatic reworking and subverting of the Judeo-Christian religions in order to recoup for women their own unacknowledged creative, maternal powers. Refusing to let the trauma she suffered during parturition control her, she invests that trauma with social, political, and even religious meaning as she translates the agony into art. Lois Rubin notes: “Traditionally, motherhood has been considered an impediment to artistic creation, the two roles thought to be incompatible” (1997: 19), a point

Coleman understood perfectly, hence her complaint, noted earlier: "I cannot be poet and mother at the same time." And yet, in and through *The Shutter of Snow* she was able to harness the emotions attendant on mothering and thus found motherhood not an "impediment to" but rather a stimulus for artistic creation.²⁷

Coleman lived as well as wrote her modernism. Like so many women of her day, she revelled in the social and sexual freedoms permitted to expatriates within the salons, cafes, coteries, and bohemian sub-cultures which flourished within and around the cities of Europe. Though her father complained about his daughter and son-in-law's separate living arrangements, she penned a response that drives home her radical perspective: "I do not agree with you that any two people *ought* to live together"; and she warned, "You will just have to get used to one idea, darling, and that is that our life will never run along the lines of the conventional married folk..."²⁸ Not only did Emily and Deak spend much of their married life apart, but also they engaged in extra-marital affairs which they seemed to take as a matter of course.²⁹ When Deak finally fell in love with another woman Emily was relieved, and they divorced officially, on friendly terms, on 17 May 1932.³⁰ It is important to emphasize that there was never any question of Deak raising his son, and even after Deak remarried John's relations with him were relegated, as they were with his mother, to periodic visits. But because we are, as Badinter states, "less shocked by the male's behavior" (110), it was left to Emily alone to don the cap of the "bad" parent who walked away from her son. She followed in the infamous footsteps of her fictional counterparts Nora Helmer (in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* [1980]) and Edna Pontellier (in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* [2003]) who turned their backs on their respective husbands and children,³¹ and she fell in stride beside a group of women we might call the "bad" mothers of modernism such as Rebecca West, Hilda Doolittle, Mina Loy, Mary Butts, and Antonia White, who oftentimes privileged themselves over their offspring.³²

In her study of Australian women circa the 1950s who leave their children, Petra Büskens asserts that when women leave their husbands they rarely also leave their children behind, because the "stigmatisation is simply too great" (2002: 34), and she goes on to pose the controlling questions of her research: "what happens to motherhood when it occurs outside the conventional nuclear or single-parent family? What happens to a mother who has left home?" (2002: 34). Büskens suggests that such women offer a "potent and challenging instance" of "subversion and reinvention" of traditional mothering (2002: 34). She studied 15 such women, but focussed on the story of one, Lilith, whose actions lead her to conclude that Lilith "*did not leave her children, rather she left the hegemonic institution of mothering* which dictates that women relinquish their autonomy for the sake of familial others" (2002: 43, emphasis in original). She further notes that of the women studied, "every woman has returned to mothering some or all of her children" in different ways, which "suggests that 'leaving' is, rather, a *strategic process of withdrawal on the mother's behalf geared to disrupt and reorganize the terms on which conventional parenting is organized*"

(2002: 43, emphasis in original).³³ Emily certainly “withdrew” physically and even psychologically from her son’s life for stretches of time, but she also “reorganized” the traditional family by providing her son with an additional or alternate set of parents, the Donns (as well as an instant set of “siblings”—Olga and Rostik), who would fill in for her during her absences. Moreover, she parented from a distance via an extensive correspondence with Madame Donn, with Deak, and with John himself, underscoring how she “subverted” and “reinvented” traditional concepts of mothering.³⁴

Büskens’s (2002) study is of further relevance for its discussion of sexuality and mothering. In exploring the issue of extra-marital relations enjoyed by her subject Lilith, Büskens confronts the notion that “heterosexual monogamy” is culturally inscribed “in the term mother,” as is our “intuitive, albeit ideological, sense that a good mother doesn’t ‘fuck around’”: “In western societies, we are structured by a dominant belief system promulgating an equation between maternity and selfless (or is that sexless?), devotion” (2002: 35). Shari Benstock defines women’s modernist challenges in sexual terms as well. Of the many Americans who fled the conservatism of their homeland for France, she asserts: “For these women the flight to freedom often meant a flight from the implicit expectation of marriage and motherhood,” and in this liberated spirit “[h]eterosexual and homosexual expatriates ... discovered sexualized writing identities in expatriation—and in doing so they changed the history of modern women’s writing, charting the terrain of female sexuality from female perspectives” (1989: 28). Coleman certainly resisted the “implicit expectation” that because she was married with a child she had to remain married and monogamous. Embarking on a series of love-affairs both during and after her marriage, she refused to deny her sexual desires; instead, she wrote about them openly and often passionately on a near-daily basis in her diary, thus living as well as writing through her sense of self as a “sexualized being.” Like many of her modernist colleagues, she did not draw a line between her sexual and maternal selves.

Coleman recorded in her diary that if her “American Puritan” father knew she was having sexual relations out of wedlock, “He would kill himself.” Her diary reveals how he influenced her as a young woman to view sex repressively: “I remember how I went to him, when I had first known Deak, and said, ‘What’s this? What you’ve taught me about life isn’t true,’ and he was furiously angry and said, ‘Any young man that talks to a woman about sex before he marries her is a cad,’ and got so excited that I could tell him nothing more. I half believed him then, I was afraid it was so, and I could not resist him, as I could now, with consciousness of right behind me.”³⁵ As a “daughter” she played the conventional roles expected of or prescribed for her. In contrast, as a mother she freely, unabashedly immersed her son in her unconventional world, taking him around town with her when she went out with her various lovers, and being as open and honest with him about herself and life as possible.

This modernist stance is further evidenced in the playful way she approached the subject of sexuality in her relationship with John. On vacation

with her then 12-year-old son, she recorded: "We have the same room (necessity) and are extremely modest, but he screams and shouts if I open the door and shrieks—"Go 'way, or I'll kick you in the cock!" Coleman retaliated: "I went to bed the same time he did the other night, and he undressed in the bathroom. When he came in I was in bed but I screamed, 'Go 'way! Go 'way! Or I'll kick you in the cock.'" This brought him to tears of mirth.³⁶ Coleman refused to apply the puritanical restraints of her own upbringing to her son, allowing him to appreciate that sex and sexuality are inevitable and healthy components of life and self. As a mother who challenged conventional mothering, she did not want her son to be "afraid" of sexuality, as she had been with her father; and she determined that the "consciousness of right" regarding sexual knowledge and practice, which took her so long to acquire, would be instilled in him from an early age.

Coleman wanted to show respect for her son as an independent, intelligent being, and to this end she more often than not regarded him as a potential equal. It is especially important to note that even within her circle of largely unconventional friends and lovers, Coleman was criticized for being *too* extreme in her rejection of convention, as was the case with her good friend Peggy Guggenheim: "Peggy said it was dreadful because I told Johnny to behave one way in front of people and another when we were alone. But he understands this. I said living in England I had to make some (outward) concessions to what English people think about children, which I don't believe in. I have this understanding with Johnny. I don't care if he insults me when alone, if it's not insolent. Peggy thinks this is shocking."³⁷ Coleman often asked for friendly rather than filial devotion from her son, a point illuminated in her statements: "He's very companionable," and "he and I are so happy together, so lovable in comradeship."³⁸ More profoundly, her dismantling of a traditional mother-son hierarchy is made manifest in her report, "He is delighted with me when I drop the mother."³⁹ For his part, he seems never to have picked up the "mother," for he called her by her nickname Mimi.

Coleman often positioned herself as a mentor rather than as a parent to her son, and in this capacity she strove to develop his intellect and instil in him an appreciation for and talent in the arts. For instance, believing he was gifted she encouraged him to draw and paint;⁴⁰ and she frequently took him to the ballet and to the art galleries and concert halls when they were together in London or Paris. Because the life of the mind was more important to her than anything—or anyone—she was not able to be a good mother to her infant son: "I did not love him when he was aged 2-7 years, that awful period." But she felt certain: "we shall get more and more intimate as we get older."⁴¹ Perhaps not surprisingly, the tension that informed her earlier response to him—"i cannot bear to be away from him yet i cannot live with him, yet i miss him so strongly [sic]" intensified as he grew older and became increasingly interesting to her.⁴²

When John was eight years old—just past "that awful period"—not only did Coleman come to want him more and more but she became jealous of

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Madame Donn.⁴³ During a visit with him in Paris in December, 1932, she registered a desire to lay a stronger claim on him: “I almost decided to take him to school in England.” However, Guggenheim’s lover, John Holms, “talked me out of it because I haven’t a proper place to keep him in, said I would communicate my tense state of mind, etc., and he wd. not be in normal conditions.”⁴⁴ This reference to her “tense state of mind” suggests the long-term impact of her post-partum illness, as well as her penchant to lose control and hit him when he got on her nerves, all of which accounted for her believing John to be better off with the Donns. Four years after this trip to Paris, she recalled in April, 1936, the conversation with Holms referred to above. Inspired by a letter she had just received from her son, she penned a lengthy diary entry about her confused feelings:

When I got the letter I put it away quickly, not thinking about it, as I do whenever he seems extraordinary, a letter or a painting. I feel he can’t belong to me—that I can’t have him. I wish he lived with me, so that I saw him every day—just to see him for an hour or two—I don’t like to think about it—his being away from me these years—I don’t know him—and can’t know him, like this—if he lived with me and went to school I could do all the writing I wanted—I want him with me. When he’s not with me I get used to it, and fill my life, which is so full; but I would rather it were filled more with him—it is a question of money and of his being happy—as John [Holms] said years ago when I tried to bring him to England, he should not be alone with me when he is this age—he’s queer enough and I would make him queerer. He is used to France, and Madame Donn, and she is wonderful for him—a normal home atmosphere.... It would be like taking the pins from under him to put him here in a school. Even if I had the money I might hesitate. Will wait and see what he is like when he is older ... I don’t want to give him any new problems; but let him grow. He’s adjusted to life beyond his years already.⁴⁵

Coleman articulated her conviction that the arrangement with the Donns was predicated on her desire to do what she felt was in her son’s best interests. Though she frequently confessed throughout her diary that “I don’t really care about anything but myself,”⁴⁶ she equally emphasized how much she loved her child and how torn and miserable she was about her decision to live apart from him. We can perhaps better understand this dichotomy by recalling what Büskens concluded of her subject Lilith: she “*did not leave her children, rather she left the hegemonic institution of mothering*” (2002: 43). It is precisely because she did not leave him in heart that she asserted: “he remains here, the one true thing in my life.”⁴⁷

Coleman also wrote of herself and her son, “[w]e’ll touch, like spirits,” reinforcing how she revised the notion that parenting takes place only on a

physical plane.⁴⁸ In this, she seemed remarkably prescient, for within less than a decade she would return to the United States and quite literally renounce her worldly ways by dramatically converting to Catholicism. Even more astonishing is the fact that John would follow her not only back to his native country but into her new faith as well.

Coleman had sailed to Connecticut to visit her father in October, 1937; reluctant to return to Europe because of threats of war, she stayed on, eventually settling in Arizona with her new lover, ranch-hand Jake Scarborough. Her relations with her son continued in their usual pattern: he made trips from Europe for several weeks and even months at a time between 1938-1940 to visit with her.⁴⁹ In the fall of 1940, John decided to take up residence in New York after enrolling at Columbia, though he quit before earning a degree. He was rejected for the military because he was "unfit nervously for the strain of battle,"⁵⁰ and supported himself through a series of odd jobs—i.e., news agent, journalist, secretary, book editor.⁵¹ When his mother renounced her affair with Scarborough and entered the Catholic Church in 1943, John was all too eager to embrace her faith (and his mother) in a new life together. In 1944, for instance, Coleman spent several months in New York, writing to her friend Antonia White: "I go to communion daily, with Johnny"; and "I see Johnny all the time. I live opposite him."⁵² The following year she updated White about her involvement with her son: "You have no idea what Church has done for our relationship—At one time we could hardly get on at all—he picked on me and I was tactless with him. We have always been quite mad about each other, but now we are beginning to be able truly to enjoy each other."⁵³

In 1945, John wrote a lengthy letter to Guggenheim, in response to her concerns about his mother's extraordinary change in behaviour. His language and tone underscore the degree to which he and Coleman had by his early adulthood achieved a strikingly intense intellectual and spiritual union.⁵⁴ He wanted to tell Guggenheim "a little about the change that's come over Mimi and myself": "It's simple: a little less than two years ago Mimi and I became Christians. This means we've formally *given up* and have ever since been trying to give up, our allegiance to the world, and to shift it to God." He qualified: "though Mimi's and my spiritual development have followed widely different roads, it's possible to a considerable degree for me to speak in the name of us both." Throughout the letter he consistently referred to himself and his mother as "we," and summarized: "I am recapitulating what Mimi and I believe," thus writing as if their two selves had become one.

Of particular note is his sense of having "received the grace of conversion" at the moment when he "was beginning to do what *so many moderns do*, which is spend a life in adoring and giving honor to" oneself (emphasis mine). This statement could be a criticism of his mother; however, his widow, Marie-Claire Coleman, informed me that John maintained that although he felt emotional pain at the time, he believed that Emily had been right to have left him with the Donns, and that he came to respect her for doing so because he recognized

that she needed artistic freedom.⁵⁵ John clearly came to respect his mother's spiritual choices as well, for he adopted them as his own. In the letter to Guggenheim he went on to credit Coleman for her strength of character: "And now she is straining every fiber in her body (and I who know can tell you this is not an exaggeration) to living as good a life as she possibly can—not, as you probably understand, by being good-goody and thrumming a harp in the mystically inspiring dimness of churches, but by heroic acts of self-sacrifice and love...." Büskens, we should remember, affirmed that of the subjects she interviewed, "every woman has returned to mothering some or all of her children" in different ways (2002: 43). We can read Coleman's conversion in this still unconventional spirit: ironically invoking and reworking traditional images of Madonna and Child, she "returned" to the role of the "self-sacrificing" mother not as the Virgin Mary cradling an infant but as Mary Magdalene walking side by side with her grown up son; she became, moreover, an "angel in the house" but it was not a husband but God whom she served within, and only because she chose to.

Corresponding with White, Coleman explained that she was inspired to convert after reading the Bible, for "terrible conflicts were shedding from me.... The conflict between artist and the good life, between artist and woman, has nearly killed me."⁵⁶ To this we might add the conflict between artist, woman, and *mother*. In embracing the Catholic Church, Coleman found new ways to repair her fractured selfhoods. Self-love and son-love fused as mother and child achieved a new level of equality within the context of their shared religion. They spent the rest of their lives working for God together, experiencing yet another radical mother-son dynamic. John had affirmed to Guggenheim not only that his mother was engaging in "heroic acts of self-sacrifice" but also that "God loves a man who tries"; Coleman was a woman who tried to do her best as a mother, and in the process she has helped us to appreciate that trying to redesign the institution of mothering is in itself an "heroic act."

¹Letter from Emily Holmes Coleman to John Milton Holmes, Box 134, F. 1595, January 8, 1924. The Emily Holmes Coleman Papers are housed at the University of Delaware Library, Special Collections. All quotations from letters and diaries are from this collection, and will be cited according to Box and File number (F.), date, and page number(s) where given. I have preserved Coleman's grammatical and spelling errors (indicated with [sic]) except in the case of contractions: she almost always wrote these without the apostrophes and to insert [sic] at every point would make reading the quotations arduous. I am most grateful to Joseph Geraci, Executor of Coleman's Estate, for his ongoing support of my research and for giving me permission to quote from the archive.

²Box 77, F. 630, October 9, 1932, 48.

³Box 134, F. 1595, March 20, 1924.

⁴Box 134, F. 1595, April, 1924.

⁵Coleman's mother, Lucy Adams Coaney, was sent when Coleman was a child to a nursing home to be treated for what Coleman referred to as "insanity"; she spent the rest of her life there, dying when her daughter was 19. Coleman and her two brothers were cared for by a "nurse" in their early years, and were eventually sent to various boarding schools (Coleman, "The Story of My Childhood," Box 119, F. 1075). Her father, John Milton Holmes, sold insurance and was often away from the family home in Wyoming, New Jersey, on business. Throughout her childhood, Coleman had almost no contact with her mother, and her father, who received a promotion and was sent to Hartford, Connecticut, chose to parent her from a distance. I believe it was Coleman's fear that she had inherited her mother's temperament, coupled with the precedent of absence set by her father, that would inform Coleman's decision to live apart from her own child.

⁶I use the term in the ironic sense suggested by Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky in their aptly titled *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*. They contend, for instance, that the group of mothers to whom the pejorative label is most frequently applied is "those who did not live in a 'traditional' nuclear family" (1998: 3).

⁷Letter from Emily Coleman to John Holmes, Box 134, F. 1595, November 29, 1926.

⁸Coleman had graduated from Wellesley College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1920.

⁹Box 134, F. 1595, December 14, 1926. While my focus here is on Coleman as a woman who challenged assumptions about mothering, it is crucial to emphasize that there are two modernist mothers in this feminist story, Madame Donn being the other one. In taking on the responsibility of caring for, raising, and loving another woman's son, she also asks us to rethink what it means to mother. I cannot, however, in this limited space do justice to her equally compelling biography.

¹⁰Rostik was born in 1919; Olga in 1917.

¹¹Box 134, F. 1595, January 3, 1927.

¹²Box 134, F. 1595, December 14, 1926.

¹³Box 134, F. 1595, February 14, 1927.

¹⁴Box 78, F. 636, April 13, 1936, 208-210.

¹⁵Box 134, F. 1595, February 14, 1927.

¹⁶Box 78, F. 636, April 15, 1936, 211. Note that Coleman spoke French with the Donns, who knew no English; they would raise John to be fluent in both French and Russian.

¹⁷Coleman won the suit, but did not want to continue working at the paper. Emily Coleman to John Holmes, Box 134, F. 1595, May 11, 1928.

¹⁸Emily Coleman to John Holmes, Box 134, F. 1595, March 3, 1928.

¹⁹In exchange for room and board, Coleman would help Goldman edit her dense autobiography, eventually published as *My Life*.

²⁰Box 134, F. 1595, May 28, 1928.

²¹Emily Coleman to Deak Coleman, Box 10, F. 100, April 20, 1929.

²²Box 77, F. 626, January 27, 1930, 315.

²³Madame Donn can be viewed as performing the various roles of wet nurse, governess/tutor, and convent/boarding school matron.

²⁴The middle-class women “saw in this new role the opportunity for an increase in social status and an emancipation that the aristocratic woman was not seeking”; while the lower class women continued to send their children away because they needed to work to survive (Badinter, 1981: 189-90).

²⁵Coventry Patmore established the term as ideology for Victorian culture in his poem “The Angel in the House,” leaving feminists and modernists alike a debilitating legacy. As Virginia Woolf profoundly articulated, “I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her.... I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily” (2003: 1987). Woolf concludes: “Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing” (2003: 1988).

²⁶Coleman’s work contains many echoes and allusions to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s even earlier story “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), also about a woman’s post-partum breakdown and confinement. For example, Coleman’s protagonist Marthe is described as “saying things with a pencil on a small piece of *yellow paper*” (emphasis mine) (Gilman, 1985: 12).

²⁷Though lack of time here precludes analysis, it is important to note that in 1930 Coleman wrote a series of sonnets to her son, earnestly trying to overturn her conviction, “there has not been a good woman poet who had had a child” (Box 77, F. 626, January 27, 1930, 315). Consider these lines, for example, from # 38, “To My Son”:

“The hour I felt you leap in my cold womb—
Life I had made, now active, now alert
To push its pattern through, to do me hurt
Even to the end, when passing from the gloom
Within my walls it burst into the light—
That hour was sacred in my almanac.” (F. 1465)

²⁸Box 134, F. 1595, May 28, 1928.

²⁹Coleman recorded in her diary that Deak told her not to worry about the fact that she didn’t desire him sexually: “He said, ‘But you are so interesting.... I can get sex other places’” (Box 77, F. 626, December 24, 1929).

³⁰Emily officially left her husband at the start of 1931. He had been transferred from London to Antwerp in 1929, and although she had visited him frequently she had never moved there.

³¹Note the remarkable echo in the women's attitude towards themselves as mothers: Nora tells her husband, "I'm not fitted to educate [the children]" (99); Edna feels the role of mother is something "for which Fate had not fitted her" (25); and Coleman, as we have heard, affirmed, "I never felt so absolutely unfitted for anything in my life" (Box 10, F. 100, April 20, 1929).

³²See Anthony West's autobiographical novel *Heritage* (1984a) or his *H.G. Wells: Aspects of a Life* (1984b), for hostile accounts of his mother, Rebecca West; Antonia White was implicated by her daughter Susan Chitty, whose memoir *Now to my Mother* (185) takes for its epigraph Hamlet's famous lines: "Soft! Now to my mother. I will speak daggers to her, but use none." See Hanscombe and Smyers (1987) for brief accounts of Mina Loy, H.D., and others.

³³Büskens (2002) states that the women's strategies were aimed at involving their husbands more directly in parenting. While Coleman cannot be said to have given John to the Donns in order to engage Deak, she certainly aimed to "disrupt and reorganize the terms on which conventional parenting is organized."

³⁴Coleman wrote in her diary: "I had a card from Deak, about Johnny. It seems so absolutely wrong, writing back and forth about a child. We should be together, with the child. I know this, but two wrongs (marrying Deak, and staying with him) do not make one right" (Box 78, F. 632, June 21, 1934). Deak was eventually transferred to Australia, where he and new wife Louise lived for many years. They had no interest in having children.

³⁵Box 77, F. 629, August 30, 93-94.

³⁶Coleman Diary, Box 79, F. 639, Saturday [September 18], 1937, 45.

³⁷Coleman Diary, Box 78, F. 633, July 29, 1934, 76-77. Guggenheim's comments are ironic given that she too epitomized anti-conventionality: divorced from her husband Laurence Vail, she maintained custody of their daughter Pegeen while he took their son, Sindbad. Guggenheim lived for years with her lover John Holms out of wedlock.

³⁸Coleman Diary, Box 78, F. 633, July 10, 1934, 21; Box 78, F. 636, April 13, 1936, 210.

³⁹Coleman Diary, Box 79, F. 639, September 26, 1937.

⁴⁰Coleman was so proud of John's work that she made it the subject of discussion among her adult friends like John Holms (Guggenheim's lover, not to be confused with Coleman's father, John Holmes), who is recorded thus: "he came and took the drawing and really spoke. He said there is not a doubt that if this talent continues he will be a painter. He said, 'Look at the life in that lion tamer—three lines.' There was a view through a tent where there were some acrobats. John said it was astonishing the way he got the acrobats, in so few lines, and the audience-tiers. He said, 'That child is very much aware of the life around him.' I said, 'Suppose his mother was'" (Box 77, F. 631, Dec. 1, 1930, 205). Here, as elsewhere in the diary, Coleman does not distinguish between her son as a child and artist but gives respect to his talent in and of itself.

⁴¹Coleman Diary, Box 78, F. 637, July 16, 1936.

⁴²Coleman Diary, Box 77, F. 628, March 6, 1930.

⁴³In conversation with friend Sonia Himmel she admitted: "We talked about our children, and I said how I am jealous of Madame Donn" (Box 77, F. 629, August 12, 1932, 22). Two months later, she wrote about her decision not to travel to Paris in October, 1932, to see her son: "I wrote Peggy honestly about my child, I never got it out before. The truth is, I don't want to see him now, because to see him I should have to be with Madame Donn, and I can't bear it. I want him entirely to myself, and in the best conditions. I prefer to wait until Christmas to see him. Even if his face comes before me fifty times a day, and his hair, I'll wait" (Box 77, F. 630, October 29, 1932, 102).

⁴⁴Coleman Diary, Box 77, F. 631, December 17, 1932, 240. As noted earlier, Guggenheim's lover, John Holms, is not to be confused with Coleman's father, John Holmes.

⁴⁵Box 78, F. 636, April 24, 1936, 241-42.

⁴⁶Box 77, F. 629, September 6, 1932, 134-35.

⁴⁷Coleman Diary, Box 78, F. 635, March 8, 1936, 129.

⁴⁸Box 78, F. 635, January 16, 1936, 2.

⁴⁹Coleman had written to her friend Antonia White on September 20, 1938, that she wanted John to stay on with her in Hartford and not return to Europe due to threats of war, but in writing to White on April 22, 1939, Coleman made reference to John, then 15, having returned to Paris because that is where he wanted to be. This and subsequent letters to White are in the private collection of White's daughter and son-in-law, Susan and Thomas Chitty. I am very grateful for their generous permission to view the archive at their home in Sussex, England, and to use the material in my research.

⁵⁰Letter from Coleman to Antonia White, September 7, 1945.

⁵¹John would eventually make his living as a conference interpreter, translating to and from English, French, Russian, and Spanish.

⁵²Coleman to White, May 20, 1944.

⁵³Coleman to White, January 2, 1945.

⁵⁴The letter to Guggenheim, dated March 4, 1945, was shown to me by John Coleman's widow, Marie-Claire Coleman, during an interview at her home in France on May 30, 1999. John Coleman died on April 25, 1990; his mother on June 13, 1974. I remain most grateful to Marie-Claire for opening up her home and her life with John to me during my visit.

⁵⁵See note above; I have had only the one interview with Marie-Claire Coleman.

⁵⁶Coleman to White, August 21, 1942.

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Corinne Rusch-Drutz

Performing the Good Mother Maternal Identity, Professional Persona and Theatre Practice

In her book, Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace, Sara Ruddick argues that a maternal community is essential for the empowerment of mothers. This view is an acknowledgement that motherhood is not a solo performance but in fact requires support and encouragement not just from the private domesticity of one's home and family life, but from the culture at large. And yet the theatre community—both local and global—has been more than reticent to acknowledge motherhood and the way it affects practice on a variety of levels, putting pressure on women to appear as childless in order to maintain their professional status. As women's work in theatre is often regarded as separate and independent from their role as mothers (if indeed it is addressed at all), the equilibrium between their working persona and their maternal identity is often at odds, resulting in considerable stress. At the heart of this anxiety is the issue of balancing work and home life. Using the experience of "Mia," a stagehand, carpenter and technician who has recently become a new mother, as a case study, this paper will investigate the delicate balance between maternal identity and professional persona in relation to theatre practice, focusing on the issues of "passing" as a non-mother in theatre, negotiating new motherhood and breastfeeding with technical production, and the rhetoric of the "Good Mother."

In her book, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, Sara Ruddick (1989) argues that a *maternal community* is essential for the empowerment of mothers. This view is an acknowledgement that motherhood is not a solo performance but in fact requires support and encouragement not just from the private domesticity of one's home and family life, but from the culture at large. It presupposes a complex of social structures and relations for women with children among those with whom they live and work, speaking to a way of thinking that is sustained by a sense of belonging. And yet the theatre

community—both local and global—has been more than reticent to acknowledge motherhood and the way it affects practice on a variety of levels, putting pressure on women to appear as childless in order to maintain their professional status.

As women's work in theatre is often regarded as separate and independent from their role as mothers (if indeed it is addressed at all), the equilibrium between their working persona and their maternal identity is often askew, resulting in considerable stress. At the heart of this anxiety is the issue of balancing work and home life, as the distinctive nature of the time commitment necessary to theatre-making makes some work practices visible while obfuscating others.

Using the experience of Mia,¹ a stagehand, carpenter and technician who has recently become a new mother, as a case study, this paper will investigate the delicate balance between maternal identity and professional persona in relation to theatre practice, focusing on rhetoric of the "Good Mother," the question of "passing" as a non-mother in theatre, and the difficult tightrope of negotiating new motherhood and breastfeeding with the rather unaccommodating world of technical production.

My purpose is to look at Mia's motherwork and its intersection with her everyday work experiences within the broader context of theatre as an institution.² Though her experiences are in no way meant to be read as exhaustive or indicative of all women technicians, they are extremely useful in laying bare theatre's institutional processes, divisions of labour, conceptual practices, discourses, and taxonomies. In short, what Dorothy Smith calls the documentary practices of the institution which, in this case refers to theatre's method of allocating and identifying work processes, many of which are necessary to its functioning but do not necessarily enter its accounting system. Using Smith's theory of the everyday world as problematic, this mode of investigation explores theatre's institutional practices from within the working experience of women as subjects by analyzing their everyday activities, cares, concerns and efforts as active in the social relations of the institution, not as effects of social processes. This type of institutional ethnography employs everyday experience—and the language used to describe it—and affords the feminist researcher a standpoint from which to comprehensively observe and analyze women's work while bypassing institutional discourse and the categories and taxonomies it devises.

The unhappy marriage of motherhood and theatre

For mothers working both in and outside of the theatre, the pervasive and ubiquitous figure of the postmodern *übermom* is one of the most toxic ideologies they face. The image of this self-sacrificing superwoman who is calmly and gracefully able to manage both career and family is a myth with which at some point most mothers need to contend. Motherhood within this mythologized and sacred ideal is, as Joan Peters notes, "evoked as a religious calling, a state of being that elevates women above the human condition" (1997: 39). Indeed,

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it places the focus of a child's success from infancy onward almost solely on the mother, viewing her as the linchpin in any future achievements or failures a child might have. This "Mommy Myth," what Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels have coined as the "new momism," is "the insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7 to her children" (2004: 4).

For many women theatre practitioners, this all too real pedestal represents a particularly difficult obstacle to overcome, particularly when working conditions call for extended periods of absence from one's children due to the unusual operating hours of professional theatre. As Diane Eyer has observed:

The Good Mother changes form with the Zeitgeist and is an ideal that is always grossly overstated, not so much for the sake of the children, but rather for the restriction of mothers who must be kept in "their place." Therefore, mothers are hardly guilty of hurting their children if they do not conform to these hyped-up images of the Good Mother. Yet... these ideals have been socially constructed, ...[and] mothers are now faced with a greater arsenal of scientific studies directed at them than ever before... study after study says that... [a woman's] very biology has programmed her to care exclusively for her young children. (1996: 68)

As I argue in an article in a recent issue of the *Journal for the Association for Research on Mothering*, women's work in theatre is often regarded as a separate, independent identity from their role as mothers, and their relationships with their children often undergo considerable stress (Rusch-Drutz, 2004).³ At the heart of many working women's anxiety is the issue of childcare. For most women who assume the combination of work and mothering, concerns often arise in regards to solving this problem so that both parties are reasonably satisfied. But the distinctive nature of the time commitment necessary to theatre-making—such as touring, which requires women to be away from home for long periods at a time; tech week, which necessitates extremely long days with a short turnaround before returning to work the following day; and sporadic bouts of night-time work leading up to and during the run of a production—makes some work practices visible while rendering others imperceptible, leaving children and their mothers frustrated over the murky relationship between these two worlds. What is more, theatre's documentary practices rarely account for women's roles as mothers within the institution, forcing them to conceal their motherwork when it "interrupts" their professional labour, adapt male standards of practice, and, in many cases, attempt to pass as non-mothers so as not to draw unwanted and gendered attention to themselves.

Interview analysis: Mia's story

Let me now provide an example as a case study for this discussion. Mia is a 33-year-old white, heterosexual woman living in downtown Toronto. She has been working as a professional stagehand, carpenter and technician in the Toronto theatre community for the past ten years. Mia generally works on four or five shows a year at various theatres throughout the Greater Toronto Area, with an average three to five week rehearsal period—including tech week—followed by a four to six week run. She is a full member of IATSE, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, and her primary responsibilities include constructing sets, wiring the stage for electricity, and hanging and operating lighting. At the time of our interview her daughter was six months old. With the exception of one or two “quickie gigs” (unusually short term contracts of one to two days work for special events), Mia has only taken on one major production since giving birth, an experience she describes in some detail on the pages that follow. Excluding these paid work occasions, Mia rarely leaves her daughter's side—doing what she calls “the stay-at-home-mom thing because that's best for the baby right now.” In addition to these short contracts and one fully mounted production, she plans to return to work full time in a few months. Her husband works in the same profession but with the unusual advantage of being a full-time lighting operator and technician with a major Canadian theatre, giving him the ability to take paid parental leave through Employment Insurance and receive a benefit package from his employer. Unlike her husband's long-term contract with the theatre, Mia's work, like most artists and theatre practitioners in Canada, is contract based and she is unable to claim benefits of any sort. Prior to starting a family, both she and her husband saved up to accommodate for what they knew would be close to a year's lack of income on her part. In our interview we discuss, among other things, her transition into new motherhood, its affect on her professional practice, and her feelings about choices she has made with regard to her baby daughter.

Here she talks about her attempts at finding a balance between new motherhood and work:

For one thing I'm very lucky because [my husband] is in the same profession. But I have watched other people's marriages completely crumble because of it. I've also watched other people's marriages be okay. It's hard to balance anything while you're on call, that's true, but I'd have to say I have a very well-adjusted, happy baby, so I must be doing something right. Which I think is actually a very good marker for whether or not your life is in balance, quite frankly. How do you balance? Well, sometimes you don't. That's the truth. There are weeks when you just don't. That sometimes means not taking a show, or that extra call to stay home with the baby. During tech week for a show it means that you may not be home—or not at home when the kid is up, right? It's funny because it used to be unreasonable to ask me to be up before ten [in the morning]. If you're asking

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me to work until eleven, twelve, one, two, three o'clock in the morning the night before, then it's just not going to happen. But now she [her daughter] gets up so early and so I've got to get up with her so I'm running on empty. I worked really hard before [I had the baby] so that I'd be able to set aside a little nest egg and take some time off. Because I was breastfeeding I knew that I wouldn't have the time, or that if I did have the time after a little while, I wouldn't have the energy. I know it's not forever, like I'll be back steady in the fall. That'll be a transition for me, finding a full-time babysitter who works nights. I don't want to think about it just yet. I suppose that the older she gets, the less willing I'll be to upset my life. I want to be more involved with family.

Mia's assessment as to what makes for a good mother and a well-balanced family life is a happy and well-adjusted baby. This is certainly a reasonable measurement, but while it is a very good indicator of her child's well being, it does not take her own welfare into account. Her attitude and demeanour seem particularly well-adjusted, given the conflicting demands of her theatre practice and motherwork, but her language indicates that her daughter's happiness is more important than her own, suggesting that as her child gets older, too many theatre contracts will keep her away from home, "upsetting her life." Moreover, it places the bulk of the responsibility for her daughter's happiness in her lap, not her partner's.

Mia sees herself as lucky because her husband is in the same profession and therefore understands the erratic time commitments that are involved in theatrical production, which for her is very important, as she's witnessed (as she indicates here and elsewhere in the interview) a number of marriages break up when one partner does not understand the irregularities involved in this kind of lifestyle. Though she realizes that part and parcel with this existence is an acceptance of the fact that at times it is simply impossible to balance home and work responsibilities, she assumes the primary care of her daughter (even though her husband is both capable and willing to stay at home on paid leave), and talks about her feelings of "guilt" and "confusion" when she decides to take on paid work. Her response in the short time she has been a mother has been to not take too many extra calls (even though they would supplement her "nest egg," what she sees as her financial contribution to the family) during her unofficial—that is to say, unpaid—"maternity leave" of roughly six months. Her challenge, when she returns, will be "finding a full-time babysitter who works nights," a rather unusual childcare arrangement to be sure.

Since having the baby, she has taken on one major show, which left her "miserable" (as she tells me a little later on in the interview) and feeling as though she were "running on empty" because during tech week she was at the theatre until very late at night (or very early in the morning) and would have to return to the house only to be woken up several hours later by her daughter's

early rising. The erratic hours and lack of sleep (coupled with missing her infant child) were very rough on Mia's post-partum system, which at four months was still recovering from labour and childbirth. Extended night-time working hours and an inconsistent weekly day schedule while working on the show (she had a two-week period in which to build the set and another to load it into the theatre) interfered with her breastfeeding (which for her daughter was roughly every three to four hours). Unable to pump her breast milk at work and find a suitable pattern for regularly replacing certain feedings with formula, Mia decided to give up breastfeeding much earlier than she had intended. She describes the difficulty in coming to that decision in this section of our interview:

Yeah, I would have liked to continue nursing for the full year or at least until now, but I just couldn't. It was too much pressure. Yeah, literally it was pressure on my boobs, too. I was walking around so full that it became painful and I was hardly about to excuse myself for twenty minutes to half-an-hour every three to four hours to go pump in a corner somewhere. Oh, excuse me while I plug my electric pump into this extension cord here. You don't mind if I unplug this drill and whip it out right here, do you?.... Yeah, like I'm going to do that with all these guys around who can't handle the fact that I've got breasts, much less that I'm a mother.... It was bad enough when I was pregnant—people looking at me funny if I even thought about going anywhere near a ladder. Thank G-d I'm small and you couldn't really tell for the first while, because once it became public knowledge, people treated me so differently. Man, did I get looks. So I was going to be damned if I was still going to feel like that after I had the baby too. So I just stopped putting so much pressure on myself and gave it up. They say it's so much better for the baby to nurse for the first year for [the prevention of] allergies and stuff but I just couldn't do it all. One day she can tell her therapist that everything stems back to the fact that she wasn't breastfed for long enough. Oh well...

In this example, Mia responds to balancing the physical and emotional demands of her child with the realities of her work in the theatre. The specificity of her job as a stage carpenter for this particular production necessitated highly irregular working hours, interfering with her breastfeeding, which, as Rhonda Shaw has noted, is in fact a set of practices, not a single unified act (2004: 124). Moreover, the physical pain associated with ongoing engorgement during long, physically intensive working hours makes it extremely uncomfortable for her to work. As one of only two women on this particular carpentry crew, Mia feels that any further notice of her postnatal body will draw too much unwanted attention. This, coupled with the embarrassment she feels over having to excuse herself to pump her milk for 20 to 30 minutes at a time (an experience she likens elsewhere in the interview to feeling "like a cow") at least twice in a full eight-

to ten-hour shift, and the awkwardness of dealing with the mechanics of the pump itself in a carpentry shop, puts her too much at odds with her work environment. As the only other woman on her crew, Mia is more than reticent to single herself out in her workplace by discussing her lactation needs with her employer. As one of very few women in her local who has ever taken any kind of maternity leave (either paid or unpaid), much less lactated on the job, Mia refuses to distinguish her postnatal body, already overly displayed during pregnancy. Mia's reluctance to discuss the matter with her co-workers speaks to both the gendered nature of theatre and the semiotic of breastfeeding. As Fiona Giles observes, "We think of lactating women as immediately postpartum, still wrapped in the aura of childbirth and laden with the trappings of infancy" (2003: xi). Literally dripping with physical difference, Mia's maternal body is at odds with her surroundings, contributing to her anxiety, pressuring her to quickly return to her pre-natal state in which she was just another worker. Thus her ability to perform well at work is weighed according to a male standard in which the only room provided for the maternal body is on stage, definitely not behind it.

Expressing milk with an electric pump (as opposed to the manual variety) is a loud, cumbersome and, for most, private act that requires a number of preconditions to be met in order to insure its functionality and the health and safety of both mother and child. Electric pumps, it goes without saying, require electricity, which in this example means an outlet (though there are a number of battery-operated models available), and are (as any woman who has ever used one will tell you) notoriously noisy, interfering with the privacy of the act by humming in a loud, monotonous drone. They also require a sanitary environment for their proper use, meaning that the area should be well ventilated and free of dust and dirt—difficult for someone working in a carpentry shop or trying to express milk in the privacy of a bathroom stall, which is where Mia tried to pump before deciding it was too demanding and demeaning. Finally, once the milk has been expressed, it must be refrigerated immediately. Mia responds to this issue by putting the milk in a labelled, generic-looking cooler in the company fridge for fear of both ridicule and someone mistakenly using it for coffee.

Unable to comfortably adapt the demands of her postnatal body to the confines of theatrical production in a carpentry shop, she decides to stop putting so much pressure on herself and discontinue her breastfeeding—what Giles calls "the leakiness of motherhood" (2004: 41)—a course of action which leaves her feeling decidedly guilty. Naomi Bromberg Bar-Yam's research on nursing mothers indicates that both the length of maternity leave and the number of working hours upon return to the workplace have a direct bearing on successful lactation (2004: 133). She points to a number of key factors that are essential in helping employed women to continue breastfeeding effectively, including the length of the initial maternity leave, the hours women work upon return to the labour force, prenatal and post partum

education and support, and the proximity of the child to the mother's workplace (128). Bar-Yam notes that the existence of "workplace lactation support" can also aid employees by indicating that the workplace "understands the importance of the roles as mothers and that they, as people, cannot be separated into 'workers' and 'mothers,'" whereas "nursing mothers with no lactation support face the opposite situation. For them, breastfeeding in the workplace is *their* indication to their *employers* that they are both 'workers' and 'mothers' and that these roles cannot be separated" (131). Unable to separate her working life from her mothering, Mia does not even disclose to her employer that she is breastfeeding, much less having difficulty maintaining her nursing schedule, echoing what Shaw has characterized as the invisibility of lactation in contemporary western cultures (2004: 125), and precipitating her decision to discontinue. With no lactation support from her employer, feelings of discomfort about her postnatal body as one of only two women on her crew, lack of time to properly express her milk, and in need of a clean and well ventilated space in which to continue pumping her breasts, Mia "gives up," convinced she should stop putting so much "pressure" on herself, as it is impossible to successfully accommodate both her professional and familial demands, though guilt-ridden over not providing the best care for her for her daughter's optimum development.

Breastfeeding is advocated by health officials as the best nutritional choice for baby, nature's perfect food, as indicated in the popular mantra "Breast is Best."⁴ Even packaging on prepared formula encourages it.⁵ Though there are many circumstances which prevent breastfeeding as a natural course of action following childbirth, most mothers who give birth to a healthy baby under routine circumstances in an Ontario hospital will be encouraged to breastfeed almost immediately after labour. Toronto Public Health Publications distribute a pamphlet that is given to mothers in greater Toronto area hospitals entitled "Breastfeeding Your Baby" (they do not put out a pamphlet on formula feeding) upon their discharge. Moreover, the province of Ontario, through OHIP, routinely sends a follow-up lactation consultant to a nursing mother's home (with the mother's permission) within six weeks of delivery. Mia's guilt over her decision to stop nursing speaks to the rhetoric of the "Good Mother," as it is manifest in the municipal, provincial and national healthcare systems, which equate a mother's decision to breastfeed as providing the *best* for her child. Though Mia realizes that the sporadic and intensive binge nature of work in her area of theatre practice makes it at times difficult to maintain a balance between work and family, her decision to discontinue breastfeeding after four months creates feelings of guilt foisted on her both by the healthcare industry and her own pre-existing feelings of physical difference brought on while working during her pregnancy, a situation which made her feel "bad enough." This case confirms with Giles observation that "the details of how we fit breastfeeding into our lives, or decide that it doesn't fit, are not well known" (Giles, 2003: xii). Although she stands by her choice, her wry comment that her

daughter will one day need therapy as a result of her decision points to her naturalizing of “Good Mother” ideology. Moreover, Mia’s account of her experience returning to work in the professional theatre speaks to her concealment of her motherwork and her inability to integrate it with her paid labour by blurring the lines between the two, and pointing to the construction of the maternal subject in theatre and its invisibility within theatre’s accounting procedures.

The good, the bad and the invisible mother in theatre practice

Andrea O’Reilly has observed that “the discourses of motherhood script all women’s lives whether they are biological mothers or not” (1999: 12). And yet the Toronto theatre community has been relatively silent about motherhood and the ways in which it directly affects both women’s lives and the production of theatre on a variety of levels. There are, as I have noted elsewhere, reasons for the absence of parenting discourse in the theatre community, among them the exclusion of mothering as a topic for dramatic and performative work; its omission as an issue worthy of consideration among theatre artists in general (and the ways in which it has been by-passed as a topic for feminist theatre practitioners in particular); and its lack of address at the institutional level (Rusch-Drutz, 2004: 93). As Elaine Aston, one of the few feminist dramatic theorists to document work on motherhood and theatre practice, observes, “The pressure on women to ‘appear’ to be without children is particularly acute—especially for women working in professional theatre,” further noting that as a result of this anxiety, many women feel the need to “pass” as non-mothers (1999: 178-179). Jill Greenhalgh, artistic director of the Magdalena Project, an International Network of Women in Contemporary Theatre, concurs. Writing in the *Magdalena* newsletter on the theme of motherhood and theatre, she refers to the working mother’s “legacy of guilt,” suggesting that, “it almost feels as though we are being treacherous to our work by even giving space to speak about children within an artistic context” (1995: 1). Eyer and others have called this predicament a “maternal wall,” one that either “keeps mothers from having access to work they have already been hired to perform” or “keeps them out of the workplace altogether,” since pregnant women and new mothers often work themselves harder to maintain the occupational standard in order to avoid being perceived as inadequate, lest they risk “punishment on the job” (1996: 29). She cites the growing trend of women like Mia who shorten their maternity leave or decide not to take it at all, and lie about family responsibilities and medical appointments “for fear their standing at work would be jeopardized” (29).

While Mia’s experience is unique and hardly suggestive of all young mothers’ experiences in Toronto theatre, it speaks to the social relations of their working conditions in immediate and important ways. Mia’s feeling that she must behave according to a male standard is indicative of the fact that she is one

of only a handful of women in her local of IATSE, placing her gender at odds with the institutional standard. Her return to work stems from economic need, as IATSE does not have any form of maternity or parental leave for its workers (this type of leave is administered by individual theatres based on the nature and length of one's contract). Moreover, the fact that according to the federal government Mia is self-employed and works on a contract-to-contract basis, disqualifies her for maternity benefits administered via Human Resources and Development Canada under the Employment Insurance Act.

Additionally, Mia's inability to negotiate her breastfeeding due to the nature of her contingent work hours and unsanitary work space speaks to the fact that theatre sees motherhood as a privatized activity that is unrelated to its day-to-day functioning. To her mind, these factors force her to either live up to the untenable normative prescription of the Good Mother or fail miserably. Because it has been so difficult to be one of only a few women in her local, it is easier for Mia to cloak her motherwork and become an invisible mother in what remains largely an "old boy's" network.

But Mia's is only one story among many. The lack of discourse on mothering and theatre has put the art form—on the cutting edge of so many critical ideas about women and representation—in the virtual dark ages with regard to issues of motherwork. Though theatrical theory has become quite central to areas of women's and cultural studies (witness the appropriation of the "performative" in so many other disciplines), theatre has yet to address the performative of mothering as it intersects with professional practice. With the prevailing notion in Toronto theatre that mothering is a woman's personal predicament, divorced from the institution of theatre proper, change is unlikely to occur at as rapid a rate as in other areas of the workforce. For this reason, women's experiences of motherhood in theatre in all their complexity and diversity need to be addressed at the institutional level. And though the road to a maternal community in theatre has been strewn with obstacles, change in institutional practice is worth fighting for as it is essential for recognition of motherwork in the structures of theatre practice.

¹Mia's name has been changed in order to maintain her anonymity.

²Mia's initial interview was obtained as part of research for my doctoral dissertation, *Interviewing the Mothers of Invention: A Qualitative Analysis of Women Theatre Practitioners in Toronto*, which set out to look at theatre's function as a workplace and the ways in which a specific group of 25 women operate within this institutional environment. Mia was one of 16 mothers interviewed.

³In "Stage Mothers: A Qualitative Analysis of Women's Work Experiences as Mothers in Toronto Theatre," I argue that the social conditions of motherhood, childcare and the emotional labour of motherwork interact with theatre as an institution in immediate and central ways, though it is a topic that has been

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all but absent from feminist theatrical discourse and/or research on the working conditions for women in theatre (Rusch-Drutz, 2004).

⁴Diana Kalnins and Joanne Saab's *The Hospital for Sick Children: Better Baby Food* maintains that, "Breast feeding is recommended for infants. Formula feeding is an adequate nutritional alternative, but does not provide the many immunological benefits of breast feeding" (9). In a discussion of "Why breast is best," Sears and Sears, the leading attachment parenting advocates in North America insist, that "Breastfeeding does good things for baby. Breastfeeding does good things for mother... Breastfeeding matters!" (118).

⁵See Enfalac, Evenflow, and Similac, among other brands.

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Maternal Commitments to the Nation

Maternalist Groups at Work in Quebec: 1945-1960

This paper explores the intersections between mothering, motherhood and feminism by looking at the maternal philosophies and activities of four Quebec women's organizations for the period 1945 to 1960. A content analysis of the archival documents of the Cercles d'économie domestique (CED), l'Union catholique des femmes rurales (UCFR), the Canadian Association of Consumers (CAC) and the Quebec sections (FFLPQ) of the National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada (NFLWC) was conducted. This research exposes the concerns of each group about the status of mothers in post-war society and what duties to family and nation should accompany it. Their calls for reform were framed by the language of democracy and the ideas of liberalism and citizenship in circulation at the time. A focus on the attempts of the CAC to extend mothers' citizenship rights through their consumer activism, the Liberal club women's desire to support working women and give mothering a special place in politics and the maternalist organizing around issues of leisure and recreation as well as the protection of the physical and moral landscape of Quebec by the CED and UCFR, reveals how associational women expected to claim citizenship rights by transposing their private, domestic roles to the public and push for more active participation in post-war reconstruction plans. In this way, the traditional distinctions between private and public were displaced by a new configuration designed to show the importance of the family and the unpaid work of mothering to the politics of nation building.

In 1949, the President of the National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada (NFLWC) wrote an article in the federation's monthly bulletin emphasizing women's longstanding national commitments through their caregiving duties to the major institutions of society: "No community is stronger than the leadership of its women. No nation, no project ever becomes

firmly established without their support. Women have worked for schools, churches, hospitals, homes, and now they want a larger share in the community housekeeping.”¹ These commitments depend on a maternalist notion that women’s mothering responsibilities in the private sphere give them significant place in the broader public community. The demand for women’s “larger share in the community housekeeping” also reflects concerns of the 1950s post-war society with the construction of a welfare state for Canadians. This expanding state would be based on liberal democratic principles of participatory government, citizens as individual holders of rights and freedoms and (limited) public provisions to strengthen the private realm. The above quote represents women’s interests in making demands on the state for improved social security provisions. These demands reveal a growing sense of entitlement cultivated during the war years. Women expected to claim their citizenship rights by transposing their private, domestic roles to the public and push for more active participation in post-war reconstruction plans. In this way, the traditional distinctions between private and public were displaced by a new configuration designed to highlight the importance of the family and women’s unpaid work to the politics of nation building. Thus, the NFLWC believed the work of mothering was a source of power for women and a way to advance gendered citizenship rights.

This paper explores the intersections between mothering, motherhood and women’s activism by looking at the maternal philosophies and activities of four Quebec women’s groups for the period 1945 to 1960. A content analysis of their archival documents reveals concerns about the status of women in post-war society; what duties to family and nation should accompany it; and extending women’s rights in the areas of education, paid employment, social security and civil law.

Like their Canadian counterparts, the groups believed that a democratic, interventionist-state, predicated on liberal values, would be the best mechanism for granting social equality to women but with a twist. They joined ruling male political and intellectual elites to call for the development of a welfare state that would be controlled by a Quebec nation. These four groups can be defined as maternalist because their politics relied on a uniquely feminine value system as a platform to press for social programs, the expansion of women’s domestic duties to the public world and the promotion of their mothering responsibilities to the nation. Their calls for reform were framed by the language of democracy and the ideas of liberalism and human rights in circulation at the time.

The four groups are the Canadian Association of Consumers, Quebec branches, (CAC), the Quebec sections (FFLPQ) of the National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada (NFLWC), the Domestic Economy Clubs [*Cercles d’économie domestique* (CED)], and the Union of Catholic Rural Women [*Union catholique des femmes rurales*, (UCFR)]. The last two were confessional, church run associations and grouped large numbers of working class, French-speaking women from rural parts of the province. The CAC and

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FFLPQ belonged to Canadian federations with moderate membership in Quebec composed primarily of urban, middle class, anglophone and francophone women.

What is worth examining are the gendered dimension of liberalism, citizenship rights and activist mothering in post-war Quebec society. In particular, is how the four groups used their maternalist identities to carve a public space for motherhood by applying the ideas and language of democracy and liberalism while they simultaneously made demands for recognition of their gendered citizenship rights. I draw on the work of Carole Pateman (1988) to explore the theoretical imperatives of the dimensions of gender and citizenship. According to her, liberal notions of citizenship, individualism and of public and private construct women as mothers and regulate them to the private realm. While men are configured as public individuals with rights by virtue of their participation in the labor force, women are not seen as being part of this realm and so their citizenship status stems from being men's dependents. Thus, as mothers or future ones, women are simultaneously included and excluded from the citizenry of liberal democratic societies.

In the 1950s Canadian liberal democratic political culture, the expanding welfare state emphasized public entitlements with limited provisions to meet private needs. Women were granted certain services as needy mothers but public entitlements were few since they were viewed as non-deserving of public rights and freedoms. Historically, the women's movement fought for the extension of full citizenship rights to women. In the 1950s women's groups waged these same struggles.

The three themes I discuss are the attempts of the CAC to extend mothers' citizenship rights through their consumer activism; the FFLPQ's desires to support working women and give mothering a special place in politics; and the maternalist organizing around the protection of motherhood and the nation by the CED and UCFR.

Context: Mothers' status in post second world war Quebec society

Between 1945 and 1960, Quebec underwent a period of nationalist reawakening as the result of renewed urbanization, the rise of mass consumption, American influences on culture and lifestyles and modernization of its economy and accompanying social and institutional transformations.² Federal reconstruction plans and a newly created welfare system also sparked nationalist sentiments about Quebec's aspirations to manage its own institutions, especially immigration, as well as social and health programs. In addition, the increasing numbers of university-trained specialists was the direct result of the 1950s institutional growth in French Canadian society.

Ideologically, these societal changes produced a reappraisal of traditional nationalist thinking. Expressing old nationalist sentiments, Quebec's conservative elite and clerics faced opposition by an emerging French middle-class

that believed this ideology to be out of step with a modern society. Various groups made up this new social class, including contemporary intellectual thinkers and social critics, health, psychological and educational experts, trade union activists, women's associations and university students. They were all outspoken about the conservative political regime that had a stranglehold on the province's economic and social development.³ They wanted to see a number of social changes happen with themselves taking a more active role in shaping the nation and its future.

These ideological and political reforms accompanied a shift in gender relations as the birth rate continued its decline, more and more women completed university education and an increasing number of wives and mothers worked outside the home in the rapidly expanding tertiary sector of the modern industrial economy.

During this time, Quebec women participated in different types of political activities.⁴ But this period would hardly be characterized as a responsive political and social climate for the advancement of women's rights. So they had to design distinct ways of mobilizing, often times outside men's traditional power bases. Women's means of doing politics comprised professional, lobby, grassroots or community-based associations, networks of advice and self-help and interests beyond equality rights to include legislation centered on women's duties and responsibilities in the private sphere.⁵ While many associations fought for women's rights to higher education, equality in the labor force and marriage and more representation in politics,⁶ others made consumer issues their concern⁷ and some used their maternal positions to influence civic affairs.

There were many voices of activism including sentimental and progressive maternalism. Maternalists rely on a specific ideology of motherhood and press for state services to expand women's domestic duties to the public sphere. According to Molly Ladd-Taylor (1993), sentimental maternalists wish to transpose women's private tasks to the public realm predicated on a unique feminine value system and progressive maternalists use the principles of social justice and democracy to justify women's public services to the nation (110). Although none of the groups laid claim to these titles they are useful concepts to interrogate their political identities and activities. I call the CED and the UCFR sentimental maternalists and designate CAC and FFLPQ as progressive maternalists.

Mrs. Canadian Consumer and community housekeeping: The CAC and FFLPQ

Established in 1947, the CAC was a permanent consumer group headed by women and "was born out of their experience gained during the war"; it recognized "[women's] consciousness of their effectiveness when united, their desire to be well-informed, their desire to continue to be of service to their country and their desire to have a medium through which to express their opinions to Government, industry and other groups."⁸ Using the slogan "there

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is strength in unity,” the association accomplished its consumer protection goals by investing mothers and housewives with the responsibilities of safeguarding the family and post-war society. The Quebec branches of the CAC recognized the fact that women’s domestic roles made them “primary purchasing agents” for the family unit. In an increasingly complex consumer society, the association sought to enhance the buying power of women by making them informed consumers. Appealing to all housewives, the group promoted a consumer-oriented education “to inform both the consumer and the interests that sell to us, as to the needs, rights and problems of both of us. It is a voice for the most basic economic citizen of Canada—the purchasing-housewife.”⁹ The association also aimed to strengthen women’s role as consumers because; “...they have a keen sense of human values and human welfare which, coupled with adequate information, should make their united voices of value in the practical workings of democracy. It should ensure better homemaking as well.”¹⁰

The CAC empowered its members with the knowledge that mothers were vital partners alongside male capitalist and government leaders in Canada’s economy. The association encouraged all members to participate in actions to improve consumer standards and to enforce fairness throughout the economy. Such actions as petitions, boycotts, conducting consumer studies, and demands for representation on government commissions and legislation achieved this objective with marketplace and government officials. The group’s emphasis on fact finding and dissemination of information provided a powerful tool for market reform and state legislation in the form of consumer protection. The CAC believed it was giving women a bigger role in the economy through their domestic responsibilities:

the Canadian Association of Consumers is the biggest thing that women in Canada have ever tried to do. Its success lies in the hands of the women’s organizations. If you can interest a majority of your members in investing a small .50 a year in the national, economic house we are trying to build for the consumer of Canada, you will be helping women take a long step forward towards equal economic representation in the affairs of their country-and I will personally be most grateful to you.¹¹

By linking the traditional role of housewife and the public status of consumer, housewives and mothers were given the responsibility to maintain the standards of living at home and take care of the country’s welfare through their consumerism. “[T]oday, with the CAC’s intervention, 13,000 Canadian housewives have become workers in a nation, not just a kitchen.”¹² Association members realized; “the modern family is smaller, more mothers now work outside the home,” the real work of women was as empowered (although unpaid) consumers for family and their communities.¹³

The CAC believed a women's duty was to maintain stability in turbulent times through their public consumer roles. According to the association, since women did 85 percent of the retail spending in Canada the job of consumer was a "serious and full-time position." In an attempt to show the importance of this position to Canadians, it was variously referred to as; "consumer-housewife, managers of the nation's housekeeping dollars, pilots of our economy or purchasing-agents-in-chief-of-Canada."¹⁴ As managers, pilots and purchasing agents, housewives had to adhere to a specific set of duties and responsibilities. These included wise decision-making when purchasing goods:

How we buy? What we buy? And the services we more and more demand to make us buy ... decides, more than anything else in Canada where it will pay Canada's man-power best to work ... and what it will pay Canada most to produce. (emphasis in original)¹⁵

"Mrs. Canadian Consumer" was also responsible for becoming informed about the business of supply and demand; "...our choices reflect the last word in the uncertain sales and production cycle and our 'freedom of choice' comes with the price of all our freedoms and assumes a certain amount of responsibility."¹⁶ At a time when few women chose to be directly involved in politics through elected office, their voices would be more effectively heard by government officials through associational participation. Besides, the role of consumer started at home for each and every mother; "(r)esponsibility for the economic health of the nation is placed fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the women of Canada who too often regard themselves as 'only housewives,' and fail to see that as Canada's 'purchasing agents-in-chief' they wield unsuspected power in shaping the buying habits of the country."¹⁷

Membership in the CAC brought power which emanated from empowered mothering. Transported to the public realm housewives would be able to shape the future of the nation. The job of "purchasing agents-in-chief" was, according to the CAC, bestowed upon women through :

rights to the same legislative consideration of our buyers' interest as has been given in the past to legislative consideration of Canada's selling interests. We will be justified in claiming these rights however only if we make every effort to be sure serving them will ... in the long run also serve the general interests of all Canada. (emphasis in original)¹⁸

A common theme found throughout the discourses of the CAC was the idea of national progress to promote women's participation in the public realm of society. Women's rights were compatible with those of the democratic nation because they would be using these rights to serve the nation through their consumer duties. In this way, the duties of "Mrs. Canadian Consumer" became "...the most important forward step in the business of being *full*,

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participating Citizens in the management of our own affairs, that women have taken since they won the vote.”(emphasis in original)¹⁹

The CAC believed the basis for women’s citizenship status was their mothering practices and as “citizen consumers.” The group’s focus on mothers’ special duties to the nation through their unique experiences in the family illuminates the progressive maternalist ideology of the group. The association sought to give credibility to women in the public world through the traditional role of housewife. “Mrs. Canadian Consumer” may have paralleled the dominant gender ideologies of post-war, capitalist society, but it made motherhood compatible with national progress and the extension of citizenship to women. The CAC transformed the traditional family arrangements because the consumer duties of housewife was an avenue for the group to insert women into the body politic. “Economic citizenship”²⁰ was a gender-specific status rooted in women’s traditional caregiving roles. It became the basis through which the CAC sought to grant full citizenship status to women. The group’s quest for a gendered concept of citizenship and its appeals to uphold traditional duties reflect maternalist efforts to include mothers in the political and social realms of society.

The FFLPQ also wanted mothers to accept their role as citizens in the political processes of the country because women have “the intelligent interest in everything concerning us, so that by general knowledge of the world about us we can be finer citizens of Canada and thus be greater Liberals.”²¹ Mariana Jodoin, President of the Quebec Liberal Association, believed women’s participation in representative government and liberal democracy stemmed from their duties to nation; “The serious woman, the woman interested in social and political affairs remains the great educator. Let us then, unite our efforts, ... The woman, I know will be appreciated for her devotion, her sincerity and her intuition, all qualities which make her an essential part of the country’s administration.”²² Politics, she argued, needed their unique role as educator and commitment to social affairs as a counterpoint to men’s political views. Jodoin’s beliefs were typical of contemporary bourgeois gender ideologies of western democracies.²³ While middle-class activists like her were willing to support liberal claims of individual rights for women, they should be exercised through their domestic roles.

Mothers’ secondary status in the formal economy and their role in politics commanded the attention of the FFLPQ. The demands for equality of opportunity in terms of choices, working conditions and income security, the eradication of discriminatory attitudes and practices and women’s participation in state bureaucracies were the means by which the FFLPQ worked to support economic rights for married women who worked for pay. Influenced by the liberal principles of human rationality, individual responsibility and a conviction that “the progress of society depended on its members’ freedom to develop their fullest potentials,”²⁴ the group applied these tenets to the issues facing:

the large and growing number of self-supporting women who are to a very great extent independent in politics. These women are generally 30 years old or over, widows-or others who expect to remain self supporting-many of them with dependents.... These women have considerable influence and are deeply concerned about the welfare of the individuals in their various groups. They are giving serious study to the question of the status of women in both politics and employment....²⁵

Recognizing that many women, “some with dependents” or “self-supporting,” had the greatest voice in the formal economy the national director was hoping to inspire liberal membership as the avenue to fight for gender equality. Everyone, especially married women with children, should have equal opportunity to participate in paid work. Encouraged by member participation, these early calls led the federation and its provincial counterparts to seek state assurances of equality rights legislation for the advancement of women’s full potential as working citizens.

The subject of married women’s discrimination in the labour force was an equally important subject of concern for the federation. In 1948 members protested the changes to the income tax structure which discouraged married women from working for pay. Appealing to the state to “reconsider legislation designed to reduce income tax rates on married women workers,” the federation denounced the government amendments for their discriminatory nature and for “[having] an adverse effect on the employment situation [of working wives and] the supply of female labour.”²⁶ The NFLWC based their formal demands on a belief in the group’s ability to effect change through liberal party politics and influence the state to equalize opportunities between the sexes.

The federation also believed that women’s political responsibilities should be shared through appropriate representation. They made repeated resolutions urging federal and provincial governments to appoint them to boards, committees and commissions. Its efforts resulted in women’s representation in various bodies responsible to the Minister of Labour including the Unemployment Insurance Commission’s Advisory Committees and the Advisory Committee on Vocation and Technical Education.²⁷ The NFLWC wanted mothers to make a difference by inserting themselves into state practices and structures, therefore the federation worked with representatives to establish a network of liberal women throughout the federal and provincial government bureaucracies.

Combined with their demands for social rights for employed women, the work reveals the NFLWC’s attempts to institutionalize their quests for equality of opportunity. These early calls reveal the desire to build a democratic state with a set of social policies and programmes sensitive to the needs of married female workers.

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Throughout the 1950s the federation and its provincial groups became increasingly public in their requests for state intervention in married women's lives in the hopes of enhancing opportunities and providing resources in the formal economy. However, members of the federation had trouble with the concept of younger mothers with small children working away from home for pay. The NFLWC believed that women were mothers first and workers second. They accepted that only when forced by circumstances should a woman work outside the home (e.g., divorce or widowhood). Despite the fact that more and more married mothers with children were working in the postwar economy, the NFLWC persisted in advocating that women should only enter the workplace before and after their domestic duties were complete or when the male breadwinner was absent.

While the group supported the liberal feminist claim that all females had a right to economic opportunity and security, their middle-class, bourgeois views accepted the dominant gender ideology that the real job of women should be mothers and housewives. Committed to the ideal of the traditional nuclear family with a stay-at-home wife and breadwinner father, the Liberal federation did however find a way to reconcile women's dual labors. It appealed to the ideals of national progress to uphold their public "job" of providing for the welfare of the nation. The job of "community housekeeper," which the NFLWC saw as the logical extension of women's concern for home and family life, was a legitimate avenue for them to enter public life and meet the challenge of helping to build a capitalist economy and welfare state. Sounding much like the CAC, "community housekeeper," was a way to transcend outdated family roles, but still preserve proper motherhood and the duty to be involved in politics. The best way to do so was through the associational activities of the NFLWC:

...every liberal woman [shall] help in the building up of our forces, so that, if and when the time comes, we can march shoulder to shoulder with Liberal men in the fight against those who would destroy the Liberal pattern of life.²⁸

Thus, women and men were to participate equally in the liberal political processes. They believed these positions should be established on the basis of the gender differences between the sexes. Believing that women's difference was a powerful asset, mothers were told to:

be politically active in the field you can touch. You cannot build a better world unless you begin. If you have a young family; begin by looking after your home, your husband and bringing up your children to be Christian citizens and by keeping yourself well informed. When your children are older you can serve on school boards, you can serve on committees with men, you can try your hand in municipal politics.

If you do not get elected try again. You will learn to give and take. Above all, remember you will have to work twice as hard as a man, without comment, and never, never forget that you must work as a woman.²⁹

Like the CAC, the group believed women could contribute to the health of the nation by caring for family members and afterwards participation in associational life would prepare them to enter official politics. Underlying the campaign to pressure the state for social rights was the federation's conviction that the job of "community housekeeper" was a status granted to women as citizens of Canada. This citizenship status became the basis for the extension of gendered social and civil rights as well as the reason for their involvement in politics:

Madame, if you like the family allowance cheque you are getting, if you think more should be done to protect this country, if you think your husband shouldn't have the right to control your personal property which is not your current home, then Madame, you aren't only interested in politics, you're in politics.³⁰

The author of these words was trying to mobilize women to become more active in politics, which she envisioned as part of mothers' domestic duties and responsibilities to the nation. She called on women to "discover their rights" and claim citizen status by exerting them.

While members realized pragmatically, that many married women worked out of necessity, they believed full-time mothering suited most. Accepted by the federation however, were women who engaged in the work of community housekeeping where they were responsible for the needs of families and the nation. These responsibilities gave them an opportunity to establish a feminine place for themselves in politics, one that would complement men's position. These duties in the public world became the basis from which women could claim a set of social rights that were sensitive to their needs as caregivers. The status of "community housekeeper" then, guaranteed women equality through gender-specific rights and full citizenship.

The members never referred to their political orientation in their discourses, but it would appear that they expressed progressive maternalist views. They used these views to work out the contradictions between the liberal democratic tenets of individualism and motherhood as self-sacrifice. The result was to uphold mothering as a full time job. The federation wanted equality for working women based on the liberal principles of individual progress and economic freedom in terms of access to jobs and representation in politics for young women with no children or older housewives whose families had grown up. For women with caretaking responsibilities their "work" was justified through the public job of "community housekeeping" whereby, they were

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encouraged to participate in associational and political life for family and national progress.

Empowering motherhood through the Catholic faith and French-Canadian nationalism: The CED and UCFR

Throughout the 1950s, the CED and UCFR's maternalist views combined with a traditional French-Canadian nationalism to produce a forum for their nation building project. Gender and culture were central to this endeavor. Among the many issues they felt important to sustaining the French-Canadian nation was the promotion of motherhood.

The belief that the French-Canadian family was vital for national survival was an important theme for the CED and the UCFR. In promoting the unity of the family, both organizations emphasized the gendered duties of women. Their basis was the division of labor in the home as well as the nation. Since their beginnings, the UCFR and the CED defined all francophone women as married, educators and housewives (*épouses, éducatrices et ménagères*). With this construct the groups attempted to situate the identity of French women differently in Quebec society from their English counterparts.

As a new round of industrialization and urbanization forever changed the social fabric of Quebec society, the CED and the UCFR believed the worst: French-Canadian women would leave their families for the lure of economic independence in the big city and become like Anglo women in Canada. As this threat became more and more of a reality, so they thought, the desire to protect the nation and its gender and cultural boundaries by linking women's familial duties to Quebec prosperity grew.

Members of the CED were working class as well as French, Catholic and village dwellers (*canadiennes-françaises, catholiques* and *femmes des villes*) and guided by the principles of work and charity (*Travail et Charité*). "[T]his association was founded especially for women living in small towns and to group women who want to better themselves morally and intellectually and preserve the Catholic faith in the family and community" (my translation).³¹ The UCFR was dedicated to the earth and family (*la terre et la famille*) and grouped only women from rural, farming regions of Quebec. "[Their] goal is to work for the religious, moral, social, economic and technical improvement of rural women, to develop the intellectual talents of rural families and to improve their material well-being." (my translation).³²

Whether rural or urban, both groups viewed the nature and duties of French-Canadian women in society through a maternalist ideology. They credited women with being morally superior to men, modest, spiritual, dedicated to serving others and, most important of all, responsible for safeguarding the emotional and physical well-being of families. The maternalism of the CED and the UCFR led them to expect all mothers to extend their familial and spiritual duties far beyond the home to protect the nation. They were fearful of

the dramatic changes that were happening to the social order, specifically, how these might threaten family stability. The groups believed women were necessary for developing good citizenship and promoting a healthy French-Canadian society in Quebec. For this purpose, both groups needed, and so constructed, gender and cultural identities that were coherent in their definition of women as different from men and built on the concept of a nation as a distinct entity and centered on a homogeneous French-Canadian culture.³³ The goal was to insert this female identity into the project of strengthening French-Canadian society and its nationalist ideology. Thus, the maternalist beliefs of the groups were the foundation for their engagement with traditional nationalist projects of sustaining the collectivity in Quebec.

The work of affirming the nation's strengths and French-Catholic character was decidedly women's. "[O]ur nation is grand because our women make it so, she (the nation) is strong because our mothers are the ones that rock the cradle and look after the land and because mothers instill in their children the virtues of faith, hope and charity." (my translation)³⁴ The nation is constituted through the maternal. She (the nation) is motherly, devoted, abundant and self-sacrificing. As symbolic markers women were responsible for maintaining the purity of the nation's boundaries by transmitting the culture's traditions to her children. When the traditional nationalist call came to build the French nation, organizational women were ready for the task. Rather than reject the maternal symbols of nationalism, the clubs embraced these gendered notions and worked to make Quebec a French-Catholic territory.

Armed with the conviction that mothers were responsible for the health of the family, as well as the nation, the CED and the UCFR used their maternalist views to preserve the status quo of a stable, gender-ordered, rural, Catholic and French nation. They were sentimental maternalists relying on the cultural construction of motherhood as modest, pure and self-sacrificing. For these two groups there was no public-private divide in women's lives. There was no contradiction between family and work because, in their view, mothers were not employed outside the home for pay. The mission of all women was to mother family, home and nation. This task required full time devotion. Motherhood then, became a source of empowerment and a way for women to use their maternal responsibilities and participate alongside the Catholic Church and French-Canadian nationalism in the preservation of the nation.

Conclusion

Maternalists at work in the 1950s were committed to making mothers direct participants in the post-war society's plans for the future of Canada. Their activism built on the convictions that women's mothering duties in the private realm gave them a unique and challenging role to play in extending the principles of liberal democracy to all corners of the nation. Guided by the tenets of individualism, citizen rights, participatory government or nationalist desires to contain the boundaries of the nation, they acted on their beliefs that women

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were entitled to representation based on the construction of motherhood as nurturing and self-sacrificing. At a time when there was neither little political talk nor concern for the rights of women, the CAC, FFLPQ, CED and UCFR created a “larger share in community housekeeping” for mothers. Through their maternalist agendas, the groups empowered mothering with the ability to insert women into the citizenry by transposing their private, domestic duties to the public thereby subverting traditional distinctions between women’s and men’s worlds. Mothering was now important, not just to home and family, but to the politics of nation building. Mothering also became the avenue for making the welfare state democratic, the nation stronger and society more just. Through empowered motherhood, the groups carved out a significant place for women in the broader society and led to the advancement of their gendered citizenship rights. The legacy of our foremothers lives on in the work of outlaw mothers today.

¹National Archives of Canada (NAC), National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada (NFLWC), MG 28 IV 3, Vol.1078, “Never Underestimate the Power of Women,” *The Liberal Woman*, Ottawa: National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, Vol. II, No.1, January 1949, p.2.

²For the history of this period see Dickinson and Young (1993).

³See for example Behiels (1985); Neatby (1997); Hébert (2002); Black and Brandt (1999) and Piché (1992).

⁴Scholars like Kimberly Springer (2002), argue that the wave model excludes women of color from the history of Western feminism, because of its focus on white activism only. Her view is that the construct of “wave” disregards the role race plays in the women’s movement. As well, the continuity work is not present. Many women, non-white and non-anglophone, participate in between and after each wave. As Springer suggests, including these differently situated women and their activities would make [the two waves] “much bigger swells.” Clearly, there is a need for a more useful concept to overcome the hegemonic view of the women’s movement and highlight how various women at different times contribute to the struggle for gender equality and rights. Rather than emphasizing origins and ends or the development of new elements, I look for the bridge work activists of the 1940s, ’50s and early ’60s do to sustain themselves in a non-responsive political and social climate.

⁵I ground this approach in the empirical work of several scholars who uncover previously unrecognized modes of women’s political activities and concentrate on the continuities of this behavior between waves. See for example, Strong-Boag (1986); Kealey and Sangster (1989).

⁶See my PH.D thesis, *Vers l’Avenir. Quebec Women’s Politics Between 1945 and 1967: Feminist, Maternalist and Nationalist Links* (Ph.D History), Montreal University, 2003.

⁷Women’s consumer activism has a long history among Canadian and Quebec

women. See Baillargeon (1991); Parr (1999); Fahrni (2000).

⁸NAC, Fonds l'Association canadienne des consommateurs (CAC), MG 28, I 200, Vol.3, "Suggested Points for Speakers to Make," (nd but early in the organization's founding). The CAC continued the work of the former Women's Regional Advisory Committees of the Consumer Branch of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board.

⁹Ibid, "President's Annual Report," English Branch of Quebec Provincial Canadian Association of Consumers, June 1, 1950, p.2.

¹⁰Ibid, Vol.40, "This is *your* organization. Its effectiveness depends on *you*," date unknown, p.5.

¹¹Ibid., Vol.27, Correspondence, Letter from CAC national vice-president and executive member for Quebec to women's organizations in Canada and Quebec, February 2, 1949.

¹²Ibid., Vol.27, "A mon avis," *Le Bulletin de l'ACC*, L'Association canadienne des consommateurs Bureau-Chef, No.59, juin, 1956, p.2.

¹³Ibid., Vol.3, "Report on Annual Meeting," No.17, June 1954.

¹⁴Ibid., Vol.3, "Economics in Skirts," Speech prepared in Montréal, March 3, 1952, p.1.

¹⁵Ibid., p.2.

¹⁶Ibid., Vol.27, "A mon avis," *Bulletin de l'ACC*, L'Association canadienne des consommateurs, no.50, août, 1955, p.2.

¹⁷Ibid., Summary of remarks made by national president of CAC before the Eastern Ontario Women's Institutes, October 29, 1953.

¹⁸Ibid., "Economics in Skirts," *op. cit.*, p.8.

¹⁹Ibid., p.3.

²⁰Ibid., Vol.3, In her speech "Economics in Skirts," the author refers to women as "economic citizens."

²¹NAC, Fonds FNFLC, Vol. 1078, "Pep Up Your Politics," *The Liberal Woman*, Ottawa: The National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, Vol.1, No.7, October 1948, p.2.

²²Ibid, Vol.1078, "To the French Speaking Liberal Women of Canada," written by Madame Tancrede Jodoin, President of the Quebec Women's Liberal Association, *The Liberal Woman*, Ottawa: National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, Vol.1, No.8, November 1948, p.2.

²³Franca Iacovetta (2000) explores how dominant gender ideologies of liberal minded reform women operated in their social service work with immigrant and refugee women.

²⁴NAC, Fonds FNFLC, MG 28, IV 3, Vol.1078, "A Message from the President," by Nancy Hodges, *The Liberal Woman*, Ottawa: The National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, Vol.1, No.1, January 1948, p.1.

²⁵Ibid., Vol.1057, "Speech given by National Director of women's work," Mrs. S.C. Tweed, to President and members of the executive of FNFLC, December 16, 1947, p.1.

²⁶Ibid., Vol. 1078, "A Message from the President," by Nancy Hodges, the

quotes are from the reply of Douglas C. Abbott, Minister of Finance to the federation's resolutions, *The Liberal Woman*, Ottawa: The National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, Vol.1, No.2, January 1948, p.2.

²⁷*Ibid.*, Vol.1078, "Resolutions of National Convention," held in October 1947, *The Liberal Woman*, Ottawa: National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, Vol.1, No.1, January 1948, p.2. The position on the UIAC would later be dropped.

²⁸*Ibid.*, "A Message from the President," Nancy Hodges, *The Liberal Woman*, Ottawa: National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, Vol.1, No.3, March 1948, p.1.

²⁹*Ibid.*, "Feminae Rei Publicae," by Mary Mack, President, Eastern Ontario Women's Liberal Association, *The Liberal Woman*, Ottawa: National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, Vol.IV, No.1, January 1951, p.4.

³⁰*Ibid.*, "Dad Looks After That," by Dorothy Jorgens Dowhan, Editor, *Nanton News*, Nanton Alberta, *The Liberal Woman*, Ottawa: National Federation of Liberal Women of Canada, Vol.IV, No.II, March 1951, p.2.

³¹Archives nationales du Québec a Montréal (ANQM), Fonds CED, 06, M-P 129, Reel 9936, "Historique du Cercle d'économie domestique de Dolbeau, 1952-1962," from the speech of M. l'abbé G. Levesque, aumônier diocésain de l'U.C.F., 1962. The fact that all club documents, monthly bulletin l'Essor and correspondence were written in French and its members were of French origin attests to the exclusivity of the CED.

³²ANQM, Fonds UCFR, 06, M-P 129, Reel 9936, "L'Union catholique des fermières *Buts, Organisation, Programme, Statuts*," 1949, p.17.

³³Louis Balthazar (1993) argues that French-Canadian nationalists saw the nation as an ethnic entity and racially homogeneous.

³⁴*Ibid.*, Reel 9936, Marie Dupuis, secrétaire générale de l'Union catholique des fermières, "Le Role de la femme et de la jeune fille dans l'établissement rural," 1949, p.35.

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Judith A. MacDonnell

Exploring Matrices of Mothering and Feminisms

Understanding Mothering Discourses for Lesbian Health Advocates Through Life Histories

This critical feminist research explored the career histories and lived experiences of ten female nurses who are publicly known as lesbian health advocates in their communities across Ontario. The findings focused on the development of political identities and the meanings of this politicization to their career and life decisions. What was unexpected as researcher and participants co-constructed their life histories was the complexity of mothering discourses that emerged from many of the narratives, although not all participants identified as mothers. This paper considers how these diversely situated nurses, identified as lesbian, bisexual, questioning or heterosexual, who have worked across geographic locations and domains of nursing practice “talk feminisms and mothering” as they construct narratives focused on their career and life decisions. Motherhood discourses were discussed in relation to feminisms and other politics, political practice, personal identities and work in the public and private spheres. Integral to these understandings were issues of race/ethnicity, class, religion and age framing the performance of gender for these nurses as they created meaning in their lives. There are implications for understanding the interface of motherhood and feminisms through lenses of sexual identity and political activism and the complexities of meanings that pertain to women’s lives in the female-dominated health professions in Canada.

“My kid is political, in part, because I am political. Whether I do it or don’t do it, it is infused into his life.” (Chandra)¹

Mothering was not initially on our minds. This was policy research, a project exploring the dynamics that shape nurses’ capacity to influence policy change through their everyday political work. As I spoke with nurses and examined their narratives more closely, however, it became evident that a range of

mothering discourses and practices were relevant to the personal and professional politics of these women, whether or not they were mothers.

Feminist life history methodology

In this project (MacDonnell, 2005), I undertook one or two 2-4 hour interviews, career histories, with ten female nurses across Ontario who are publicly known for their work as lesbian health activists. Participants represented diverse rural, urban and suburban geographic locations and types of nursing practice: front line nurses in critical care to street health, as well as educators and researchers. Six self-identified as lesbian, bisexual, questioning (LBQ) and four as heterosexual.

Using critical feminist analysis (Casey, 1993; Vickers, 1997), themes such as the development of political identities and the meanings of this politicization to their career/ life decisions emerged. What was unexpected, was the complexity of mothering/feminist discourses embedded in many of the narratives, yet not all nurses identified as mothers; neither did I explicitly focus on mothering. Of the ten, five participants were biological mothers. Two were co-parents, one self-identified as a godparent,² and two were not mothers at this point in their lives.

Reflexive process

Ironically, my own engagement with lesbian health eight years ago emerged in relation to mothering and motherhood. As a heterosexual public health nurse who had taught prenatal classes, I began to explore why it was that I was unaware of the lesbian baby boom and lesbian motherhood and factors that shaped my own heterosexist practices, as well as heterosexism in the profession. This highly politicized issue became the focus of my graduate studies—something totally unexpected for someone who considered herself relatively apolitical. I became not only politically involved, but publicly visible in LGBT activism, including same-sex parenting, in volunteer and professional contexts. In fact, this reflexive feminist study on the politicization processes and lived experiences of lesbian health nurse advocates developed as I reflected on my own experiences of both incredible support and dynamics of silencing related to this politics (MacDonnell, 2001). So, although on some level, I had anticipated that motherhood and politicization might be part of these nurses' stories, in fact, I was quite unprepared for the range of mothering discourses that were woven into their lives.

It struck me that the concept of matrices was useful to frame the complexity of these findings, considering a matrix as a 3-D array of rows and columns. I could conceptualize this in various ways: with the ten nurses themselves as representing each point in a 3-D matrix, much like the old Tinker toys with spokes connecting in various ways to other nurses. Or, I could set this up with themes in a similar way ... beginning at a chosen point and moving to others linked by narratives. At the same time, I have concep-

tualized race, class, gender, etc. as intersecting axes that also frame how these issues are taken up (Jakobsen, 1998). Not only do these matrices intersect with each other, but each point of the matrix is constantly shifting, as competing and contradictory identities and meanings are reconstituted with each point of entry and in relation to non/dominant discourses in these narratives and larger social/political contexts.

Talking feminisms

Consistent with a feminist methodology according to Jill Vickers (1997), I start with where these women are. They are a highly educated group of nurses, half with graduate degrees. Many of the LBQ nurses have significant experience as clinicians, educators and researchers in institutions and community settings. All of the heterosexual nurses currently work in sexual health programs in public health units, but have varied nursing experience. Participants self-identify as mostly White, middle-class and able-bodied. One is an ethnoracial minority and another is Jewish. They range in age from their early thirties to late fifties and have high social privilege.

As lesbian health activists, these nurses are participating in personal and professional activities that are consistent with feminist goals to improve the everyday lives of women and marginalized groups. Their individual and collective advocacy related to lesbian health and other issues includes socially activist education or religious communities and political action on various levels, including links with Aboriginal, street outreach, LGBT, and woman abuse agencies. They have participated in local Pride and women's health events, HIV/AIDS fundraisers, conferences, committees, research projects, and as board members of social agencies; some activities were part of official work time—others done on a volunteer basis. They belong to unions and professional bodies such as the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO). They advocate across domains of nursing practice, on the front-lines, as educators, administrators and researchers to effect policy change.

Despite the highly politicized nature of their advocacy work, some challenged the term “feminist” or “political” to describe their philosophies. Few subscribed to a specific political party affiliation, opting to support those with a social justice perspective. As Abby,³ a lesbian, noted, “I’m political in conversations, but I don’t outwardly don’t go on marches, etc. I’m more introspective in that regard.” She consciously addresses lesbian and bisexual health in the nursing classroom, and states, “I think I’m somewhat political when I teach.” Several describe positive connections to women’s groups in community or academic spaces. Chandra explained that she participated in an academic support group for women with families, saying, “I would probably say I am a feminist, but not in any formal way.”

For some, the word “feminist” conjured up such terms as “man-hating” and several nurses challenged and distanced themselves from that stance. Lyn, a

heterosexual, describes how her feminist affiliations have shifted. “Probably when I was in university... more as women’s issues—not in-your-face type of stuff. In more recent years I would defend the term “feminist” to people who put it down...probably ...more as humanist, human rights.” Most emphasized the value of women and men working together on these issues, as they discussed the meanings of feminisms to their advocacy. As Fran, who was very active in building lesbian community over the decades, notes,

I would say, feminist, but I have a problem with that because of the way feminists are seen as man-haters ...I also have a problem with the word “lesbian” because I don’t mind saying I’m a proud lesbian, but ...I don’t like the assumption that you hate men or that you don’t have room for men in your life, but I’m aware of where that assumption that we hate men comes from. It’s not that we have to sleep with them.

Feminist influences on professional activities

Most of these nurses implicitly and explicitly addressed women’s issues, the women’s movement, and gender roles in their framing of their everyday work with communities. Some align themselves with feminist or women’s studies. Ginny, a lesbian, connects lesbian and feminist influences in her practice: “There’s no way you can teach women’s health material without becoming quite politicized towards women’s health... I teach a course that was seen as radical in thinking for the 80s.” Adrienne, who self-identifies as questioning, considers herself a women’s health activist, but indicates that she has “a lot of trouble with women’s health being seen as a comparative to men and ...an add on to men.” Some participants use terms such as radical feminism and counter hegemony and most address intersectionalities and/or human rights’ issues.

Several heterosexual allies view feminism as having a major impact on their nursing practice. Julie cites the contributions of the women’s movement as she speaks of mainstream professionals’ current capacity to address violence against women. In her years of working with teens, Sandy incorporates feminist values into health strategies for both females and males to counter the rigidity and narrow-mindedness related to gender roles and sexuality that some rural communities continue to perpetuate and which have negative health consequences. For her, young women need to hear that it’s OK to be “powerful, intelligent women ... ‘stand up for yourself.’”

While many of these LBQ nurses acknowledge the deeply embedded gender dynamics that contribute to lack of political engagement, social conformity, and heterosexism that shut down lesbian visibility in the profession, they stress that nursing has strengths and this facilitates their capacity to advocate. However, while Fran feels accepted as an out lesbian in her workplace, she names patriarchy as relevant to the barriers she encounters as a nurse activist.

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The role of advocacy was never really a viable option within the role of nursing. For me, it was seen as patriarchal, male-dominated, very medical-model hierarchical, whereas I tended to think outside of the box, matriarchal... and so any advocacy work which I've done tended to be outside nursing. So, although I took that nursing part of me with me... I downplayed it, even though I knew that was very much a part of me.

She and others, some who have encountered job loss or career consequences, are strategic about their lesbian activism inside/outside of the workplace, at times omitting their nursing affiliation as they state their professional credentials.

Politicization and mothering

In contrast to many other aspects of their nursing or advocacy practices, these nurses agree that lesbian health is highly political. However, their politicization varied considerably, especially with respect to a focus on lesbian health. For all LBQ nurses, lived experiences contributed to decisions to avoid or engage publicly with the issues in a particular context. Some, but not all heterosexual nurses described their involvement in political and/or feminist activities before they began working in sexual health programs that responded to gay community's call for youth support.

Mothers were cited in various ways in relation to politicization. These nurses referred to what was, at times, unexpected support from their mothers related to their identities or lesbian-focused work, but images of their mothers are embedded in these critical incidents. Stacey, a heterosexual, attended a panel in which a lesbian spoke of the difficulties growing up in rural Ontario, and this sensitized her to youth issues. Later, Stacey spoke with her mother about her sexual health focus, including her lesbian health activism, and discovered that her mother, a strong Catholic, was okay with this nursing focus and was actually aware before she was that the males in her Catholic high school peer group were gay.

Ginny contextualized her narrative with historical perspective on same-sex issues. She had left her hometown in her country-of-origin in the 60's, at a time in which "you were mentally ill if you were gay or lesbian." When she returned in her 50s, she explained:

My mother took me for a walk through the town down the one main street, and she said, "Here, you grew up with her, she's a lesbian. You grew up with him, he's gay." She had introduced me to all the gays and lesbians in town. I didn't know a single one of them.

Tara describes her mother's decision to become a teacher as a critical link in her politicization when she spent a year at an upper class private school in the U.K. at the age of seven while her mother trained.

I was a very street-smart fighting kind of kid surrounded by people who were used to privilege, and I think that's what politicized me. "Why can't ... the other 55 kids [from my old school] ... be in this class with me and have all the advantages that I got in that one year?" It really grounded me academically.... That one year in my formative years ... really made me think about ideas and it made me think deeply.

Adrienne's developing sense of injustice emerged around the same age with questions for her mother about women's role in the Catholic Church. She explains, "I actually went up to the priest and asked him why there were no women up there and about being an altar girl and still not understanding why the women were literally and metaphorically off to the side."

Nurses' political engagement as mothers

Social justice themes are woven through Julie's family-of-origin with its Amish roots. Her mother's relatives sought religious freedom in Canada, and a motherline (O'Reilly, 2001) of political activism surfaces as Julie speaks of her mother's advocacy work as a school nurse. While Julie had already been highly politically active in university, she became involved in a volunteer capacity with activism after her children were born. As advocates in their communities, balancing family responsibilities and involved with issues relevant to their local communities, women may have significant professional impact. Their work may be deemed community service. While involved with a group initially formed to address the marginalization of nurses' paid work as prenatal teachers within the profession, Julie and her peers wrote a position paper, developed conferences, and advocated to a variety of lay and professional groups about childbearing and breastfeeding issues, activities which also fall within the realm of public health nursing work.

There are implications for the continued invisibility and legitimacy and scope of women's political contributions in their social environments. Julie's narrative makes visible issues of paid and unpaid work of political activism often by middle-class mothers—activities that she has been paid to do as a public health nurse in other contexts.

Lyn, a heterosexual, also identifies motherhood as a factor that sparked her political action, encouraging her to speak out when some of her colleagues opt to remain quiet. She speaks of having to advocate for herself when she was going through the infertility process and fighting in the school system on behalf of her child with disabilities. She makes connections to understanding how she experiences the system when she does not have the taken-for-granted privilege of motherhood, although acknowledges she has high social privilege as a White, middle-class, English-speaking and heterosexual professional.

Nursing profession and motherhood structures

In the female-dominated profession of nursing, prevailing notions about

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practice are equated with an important, but limited view of nursing at the bedside that parallels traditional caretaking functions of motherhood (McPherson, 1996). However, nursing practice also incorporates complex critical analysis. Nurses with an explicitly anti-oppression approach often consider the racialized, classed, gendered and sexualized dynamics of their practices in which mothers are their clients. Adrienne describes the implicit gendered structures that frame child psychiatry and public health parent-child programs, stressing that mother-blaming is rampant. She questions whether nurses can truly advocate on behalf of mothers, given program mandates to find “at-risk” mothers. She explains that when

*something goes wrong for a child or youth, the mothers are blamed...
[When] young women... are admitted... they're chemically restrained, and
the mothers are blamed.*

She questions why fathers or other partners are not scrutinized the same way. “What’s wrong with being 17 and having a child? What does age have to do with decisional ... and thinking capacity?” She suggests that nurses often find creative ways to foster material support for mothers.

In a similar vein, Abby questions whether her agency’s focus on producing another pamphlet will actually be relevant for her “HIV-positive client, who’s a woman who just came to Canada as a refugee, who has a husband and four kids, and she’s here with no money, no health care, no job, little language skills.” Julie and colleagues foster culturally-sensitive prenatal programs for the diverse ethnoracial minorities in her community, noting that people attending are mostly White and middle-class.

The invisibility of lesbian motherhood

These nurses are very much aware of the heteronormativity of their professional practice settings and seek windows of opportunity to challenge institutional norms. For the most part, lesbian health is equated with sexual health in professional programming if it is visible at all. These nurses find more agency support for sexual minority youth than other groups, such as lesbian mothers, who are often invisible despite the media hoopla. Discourses of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory motherhood frame the nuclear family and many nursing programs.

Some nurses find ways to challenge these. One nurse recently obtained public health support for the development of a LGBT parenting group in her community. A lesbian couple disclosed in another nurse’s prenatal classes. Assuming colleagues might also want information, she played a tape on lesbian parenting from a conference at a prenatal teachers’ meeting, “but they really didn’t know quite what to do with it...Most prenatal teachers still have a nuclear families approach.” Chandra explains that at some point during the year, she discloses that she has a female partner to her nursing students, who

are invariably taken aback because she has often talked about her children.

Queering motherhood

There are specific challenges to advocating for lesbians, however. Julie contrasts how breastfeeding and same-sex issues, both of which she identifies have political overtones, are viewed in her agency: “But you’re talking about motherhood and apple pie. You’re talking about breastfeeding, right? It’s different when you’re talking about homophobia and sexual orientation issues...[because of] the ingrained homophobia throughout society.”

Political allies, even those who reap heterosexual privilege by their visibility as mothers in nuclear family relationships, can encounter negative workplace dynamics related to this focus. As Lyn remarks, colleagues and social contacts respond differently to her now that she works with sexual minorities and HIV/AIDS programs than they did when she focused on (assumed to be heterosexual) pregnant and childbearing families. She indicates that “If you say, ‘I work with ... the gay community’... the conversation shuts down...There isn’t that validation of you as a nurse socially because nobody wants to hear about what you do.”

In fact, these “straight” nurses working explicitly with lesbian motherhood at times find themselves somewhat alienated from both heterosexual and same-sex communities. As Adrienne notes, questions arise about why nurses who do not explicitly claim a same-sex identity would be involved as political activists. She finds that making links between nurses’ experiences with sexual minorities in a health context can provide insight into the advocacy role that nurses of all sexual orientations have in preventing negative health consequences, although in her experience, heterosexual and queer communities still question whether these nurses are “in the closet.”

Weighing career decisions

Although some wonder whether younger lesbians may disclose with more confidence than those who are older, career impacts potentially await those who are open about their same-sex identity. One lesbian mother was outed publicly during a media event related to same-sex parenting. Despite positive comments from patients in her health agency in a large city, Tara was fired from her non-unionized nursing position. The organization negotiated a hush-hush settlement, however, the incident was not only emotionally devastating, but sent her back into the closet. There are economic and unspoken career risks to becoming visible. LBQ nurses raising families or those who are considering motherhood weigh verbal disclosure or affiliations that would link them to sexual minority issues that could have workplace costs.

Mothering figures providing safe havens

These nurses contend with social and material consequences as they seek affirmation for their lives as sexual minorities and/or activists who challenge

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existing systems. While mothers and mother figures, such as aunts, both supported and discouraged these women's choices to become nurses, they also provided safe environments during young adulthood. Tara, living in an abusive family, found a safe haven moving to her aunt's home overseas in her mid-teens.

Abby was raised in a family with an authoritarian father. When she began dating, she encountered resistance from both parents who expected her to marry within her cultural community. She found an ally in her mother when she disclosed as a lesbian, but together they made a family decision not to inform her father, who "has a certain understanding of who a woman is, roles ... gender, sexuality, race, position in life, power.. There was speculation that I would be thrown out of the house if he found out." When this did happen several years later, her mother put pressure on her father so that she could return home to a fragile safety. However, her lesbian self remains virtually unacknowledged, even by her mother, to this day. As Abby notes,

[She] is always interested in what's happening with my sibs...Are they going to have a baby?...But when it comes to me and my partner... no questions,... It was arranged [that] I have a place outside of my home, so that if I had any guests, it would not be [at my parents'] ...So my mother helped me get this place....getting me on my own two feet, because my father didn't want to see any of this.

Abby's mother is a cultural mediator, providing caring and acceptance to some degree, although still protecting the grandmother and extended family from the knowledge her daughter is a lesbian. However, the contradictory mothering support she offers is evident to Abby. Political activism in relation to lesbian health for Abby is informed by embodied experiences of marginalization related to sexuality, gender, race/ethnicity and class both within the family and in the larger community context.

Nurses as mothers: Effect of politicization on children

Participants also spoke of certain lesbian and religious communities as validating for lesbian mothers. Chandra connected with other lesbians raising children when she became a single parent. Fran was active in providing community support for lesbians raising children at a time when those raising sons often encountered limited validation from other lesbians. Both speak of their religious communities as offering crucial nonjudgmental affirmation of LBQ families, as well as sites of political activism and suggest that their children potentially benefit. Chandra's son is open about his mother's politics as an educator and how it influences his LGBT activism in an urban environment. "My kid is political, in part, because I am political. Whether I do it or don't do it, it is infused into his life." In fact, Chandra, who is part of several minority communities, considers mothering her primary identity.

Sandy, a heterosexual ally working in a rural area, has a highly visible political profile having “taken on everything political...woman abuse, reproductive choice, you name it.” She spoke with her children when they were young about her work. “What I do, that is my career and I believe in it wholeheartedly, but you don’t have to believe in it. You should have the right to make up your own mind.”

Lesbian mothers: Godmothers, co-parents, and biological moms

These lesbian mothers described a variety of ways their mothering influences children in their lives. Fran, who is active in suicide prevention, including that focused on sexual minorities, has a close relationship with her goddaughter. “When she was about 11 she wanted to talk about suicide at school.” However, she notes that there were concerns from the school about why she was doing that. “Teacher called mom. Mom called me.” Fran explained how her goddaughter “couldn’t understand why no one wanted to talk about this topic.” Not only did the school discourage her goddaughter from raising the issues, but “they don’t talk about it in that high school to this day.”

Ginny, long-time co-parent to her partner’s biological daughter, speaks of her nursing colleagues’ acceptance of their daughter when she visited the workplace. Ginny recalls that as a much younger girl, her daughter became quite aware of some of the political repercussions of her work. Shortly after having come out as a lesbian at work, she discovered that a male was stalking her. Along with security, her partner and daughter attended her workplace, watching for any signs of trouble.

On the one hand, Tara stresses that sexual minorities need to see healthy lesbian families such as hers, in which her children consider their “step mother, their other mother, their best parent they ever had who’s been in their life for [many years].” On the other, she realizes that even now, she is reluctant to be so publicly out, even in a lesbian-affirmative workplace. “I’d rather be hiding and do what I do from the periphery. It’s safer...[Disclosing] is not something that is easy to do and it’s not something that’s comfortable. This is 2004! And you’d think we were in the dark ages sometimes!”

Conclusion: Mothering discourses and practices

As these female nurses create meaning in their lives, they articulate a range of mothering and feminist discourses framing their personal and professional selves, their families, and their communities. They refer to diversely situated mothers as clients and communities and work to enhance the provision of supportive services. They acknowledge how mother figures are intimately associated with critical incidents and influences in their politicization and identity processes. They are mothers who are political actors, embodying resistance and accommodation to dominant discourses of heteronormativity. Through their individual and collaborative activism, they challenge queer and

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dominant motherhood discourses and effect policy change. They create meaning and politics through their families, communities, and nursing practice. They challenge their peers to facilitate collegial and workplace support for LBQ nurses and their allies. Their everyday politics bridges personal and professional domains.

These nurses' actions to advance social change in relation to mothering discourses and practices are consistent with feminist mothering practices that make visible and act to shift the dominant ideology of motherhood that is embedded in all social institutions. Feminist mothering practices foreground how patriarchal authority is implicated in the regulation of gender and sexuality and influence the capacity of women to achieve self determination. With its focus on gender and other relations of power, this critical feminist analysis of female nurses' career histories illustrates the complexity of contemporary mothering in which dominant and counter mothering discourses and practices coexist in women's lives, whether or not they are mothers (O'Reilly, 2004). Integral to these understandings are issues such as race/ethnicity, religion, age, sexual identity and social privilege that shape these nurses' lived experiences of gender (MacDonnell, 2005; O'Reilly, 2001).

As a group, these women represent a spectrum of family configurations that both converge and diverge from the prevailing White, middle-class, North American nuclear family reference point. As lesbian, bisexual, questioning women, heterosexual biological and adoptive mothers, coparents, and godmothers who are often raising politically active sons and daughters, they challenge the rigid gender boundaries of dominant motherhood structures that define and constrain gender roles and mothering possibilities (O'Reilly, 2001). As they grapple with dynamics of support and safety, their identities and social privilege have implications for their capacity to claim all of their identities or advocate at particular historical moments (O'Reilly, 2004).

Gendered social and material influences shape their lives as diversely situated mothers, mothering activists and politically active nurses across their public and private communities. Patriarchal authority underpins the construct of the "good mother" (O'Reilly, 2001), as well as the practice norms within this female-dominated health service profession. Collectively, their everyday politics within and outside of professional roles creates counter discourses to the dominant gendered, sexualized, and racialized discourses of nursing that shape professional activities with mothers as clients in which mothering identities and practices are regulated. As professionals, these activists accommodate and resist dominant gendered practices through practices of surveillance, as well as empowerment and transformation with goals of enhancing positive relationships that enhance growth. Their gender non-conforming practices⁴ within the nursing profession are consistent with feminist mothering goals of care, connection and social change (MacDonnell, 2001, 2005; O'Reilly, 2004).

These narratives reflect a spectrum of feminist mothering practices: strong women who are involved in nurturing individuals and building healthy com-

munities with a view to promoting relationships that challenge patriarchal norms. Yet, their lives are fraught as they demonstrate the embodied effects of challenging the prevailing heterosexual nuclear model script of motherhood. Along with their significant political contributions—validation, increased visibility and material support for diversely situated mothers and incremental system-level change that enhances women’s lives—come emotional upheaval, risk of professional marginalization, silencing and threats to personal safety (MacDonnell, in press).

As they talk feminisms and mothering, these nurses illustrate the contradictory tensions in their lives as politically active women. Gender dynamics and mothering, in its multiple iterations, shape their understandings and lived experiences as women, female nurses, and mothers and daughters as they act purposefully to “meet the demands...for preservation, growth, and social acceptance...that define maternal work” (Ruddick as cited in O’Reilly, 2004). There are implications for understanding the interface of mothering and feminisms through lenses of sexual identity and political activism as they pertain to women’s lives in the female-dominated health professions.

¹Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

²Although godparents are not usually included in family constellations, even in lesbian family research, this godparent relationship was highly significant to this participant’s life history in terms of her capacity to find supportive community as a lesbian.

³Pseudonyms used.

⁴Gender nonconformity of appearance and behaviour is embedded in the lives of nurses who are involved in lesbian health advocacy. See MacDonnell (2005) for in-depth discussion.

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Marty Grace

A 21st Century Feminist Agenda for Valuing Care-Work

Feminism has a long history of fighting for economic independence for women. First-wave Australian feminists sought motherhood endowment on the basis of women's difference from men, but gained child endowment. Second wave feminists emphasised equality rather than difference, and made enormous gains in women's access to labour markets. However the goal of economic independence remains elusive, especially for women who become mothers. This article explores the links between contemporary concerns with valuing care-work, "balancing" work and family responsibilities, and economic independence for mothers. It discusses what would be distinctive about a third wave feminist agenda for change, taking account of our experiences of the gains of earlier changes, and the early twenty-first century socio-political context. A proposed third wave agenda would incorporate the unfinished business of second wave feminism including high quality accessible affordable childcare, gender equity and paid parental leave, as well as a system of payments to parents that would value care-work as well as facilitating and rewarding labour market earning. It would include equity between parents and non-parents as well as gender equity, and would respond to the diverse aspirations and desires of contemporary women.

In Australia, as in many other places around the world, we are struggling with questions of how to value caring work, and how to enable people with caring responsibilities for children to be, in Belinda Probert's words, "both the parents and the workers we want to be" (2001: 1). In this article I identify two ways of valuing care-work: intangible and tangible. I discuss the importance of valuing each of these aspects in an appropriate way. In relation to work and family, I challenge the notion of "balance", and discuss the idea that responsibility for caring for young children is a matter of equity between parents and non-parents, as well as a matter of gender equity. These matters are profoundly

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relevant to the long-term feminist goal of economic independence for women. I discuss how a third wave feminist agenda for change might differ from earlier agendas, placing this third wave agenda in the context of some earlier Australian twentieth-century feminist activism and theorising.

My own interest in these matters comes from my attempts at feminist praxis in my own life, and I have woven accounts of my experiences and reflections into the text. I refer to mothers and mothering in relation to the care of young children because it is mothers who carry out the vast bulk of this work. This does not imply an acceptance of the social arrangements that give mothers little choice in this matter.

Valuing care-work

Mothering has a strangely ambiguous status, being treated as simultaneously priceless and worthless. In seeking to understand this ambiguous status, it is useful to acknowledge that mothering care-work involves both love, an intangible, and labour, a tangible. Cultural ambivalence about the value of mothering reflects the high value placed on mother-love, and the low value placed on mother-work. Personal ambivalence about mothering may reflect the way the love traps us in the work. The institution of motherhood (Rich, 1976, 1986) and the ideology of motherhood (Wearing, 1984) trap women, as the love we feel for our children compels us to accept the undervaluing of our labour.

Like care-work, the concept of “value” has both an intangible and a tangible meaning. Intangible values are our commitments and beliefs, those things we hold dear. Money cannot buy the love and devotion that mothers typically put into raising their children, nor can they be quantified. (An important question in relation to mother-love is whether it is necessarily linked to gender, and the embodied experiences of childbearing, but this and related questions are beyond the scope of this paper.) The tangible meaning of “value” relates to whether an activity is worthy of recompense. Paid work, business, voluntary work and the labour involved in caring for children can all be valued in terms of the time spent, the capital invested, and the cost of the raw materials involved.

I would suggest that if we want to improve the valuing of the intangibles of mothering we are looking for cultural change, and if we want to improve the valuing of the tangibles of mothering we are seeking economic system change. My focus in this article is on the tangibles, while keeping awareness of the intangibles in the background. Other recent Australian work such as that of Anne Manne (2005) foregrounds the intangibles.

The labour, the tangible work involved in caring for young children, takes time (Craig, 2004, 2002), and that time is consequently not available for labour market earning. This important realisation provides the link between the valuing of care-work and the issue of work-family balance. If we undervalue or underestimate the time taken to care for young children, we might think that

a mother can easily undertake full-time paid work as well as caring for children, especially if we think only of the intangibles of care-work. This fallacy is embedded in the notion of “quality time”—the idea that quantity of time is irrelevant.

Balancing work and family

The pressures facing people who have both family responsibilities and paid work are often referred to as “work-family balance”. Unfortunately the term “balance” suggests that one might achieve this state by individual ingenuity and commitment, as with an aspiration to a balanced diet. It depoliticises the issue and puts responsibility on to the individual rather than the social arrangements that make this lack of “balance” a social problem rather than an individual matter.

In June 2005, Pru Goward, Australia’s Sex Discrimination Commissioner, released a discussion paper entitled *Striking the balance: Women, men, work and family*, and invited public submissions on the topic. Goward *et al.* (2005) express the hope that community consultation and preparation of a further paper will contribute towards more equitable social arrangements in the future. They recognise that this is more than an individual matter. However, they couch the issue in terms of gender equity, implying that if men would do their fair share we could solve this problem. Goward *et al.* (2005) are very aware of the parental time spent on caring for children, and they see this work as having value. However they stop short of stating that this work has an economic value for the rest of the community and is deserving of recompense (Folbre, 2005). In contrast, Michael Bittman and Jocelyn Pixley (1997) see the rest of the community as free-riders on the labour of mothers. Acknowledging that raising children provides an economic benefit to the rest of the community makes this a matter of equity between parents and non-parents as well as a matter of gender equity.

Economic independence for mothers of young children

For centuries, feminists have emphasised the importance of economic independence for women (Spender, 1983). This means access as individuals in our own right rather than as dependants of men to the resources to sustain life. Through most of the twentieth century, Australian social policy and industrial relations treated women as gendered family members to be supported by males.

In this article I focus in particular on the situation of mothers of young children. This is for three inter-related reasons. First, the undervaluing of mothers’ work in caring for young children could be seen as both cause and consequence of the undervaluing of women’s labour in general. If women will work for nothing, perhaps their work is worth nothing. If women’s work is of little value, then their time consumed in the care of young children is of little consequence. The second reason is that care of a young child takes 60-90 hours of someone’s time (Bittman and Pixley, 1997). This is much more than a

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normal working week, and full-time childcare replaces only a small proportion of this time (Craig, 2002). Thus it is extremely difficult for a mother with a young child to earn sufficient labour market income to achieve economic independence. The third reason is that childbearing has both a short-term and a long-term impact on mothers' incomes. Matthew Gray and Bruce Chapman (2001) estimate that Australian women with one child lose about 34 percent of their lifetime earnings, increasing to around 40 percent for those with three children.

Second wave feminists sought access to paid employment as a way to achieve more autonomy and control in their own lives. Western women now have better access than ever before to education and employment. However Australian women do not enjoy the same level of economic independence as Australian men (Summers, 2003). Greater labour market participation has brought tension between the demands of paid work and family responsibilities (Goward *et al.*, 2005).

Paid work and family responsibilities relate to each other in complex ways. For women, especially following the impacts of second-wave feminism, participation in paid employment has been both a source of fulfilment and symbolic equality with men, and a way of achieving economic independence. Family responsibilities have been both the motivation for women with children to earn income to support the family either fully or partially, and the source of frustration in women's efforts to develop careers and earnings.

Feminist activism and theorising

The past century has seen major changes in the socio-political context of feminist activism and theorising. First wave feminists fought for and won the vote, and then set about using the suffrage to achieve change, often on the basis of women's distinctive role in life or difference from men. Second wave feminists emphasised equality with men, particularly in the labour market, and shied away from claims on the basis of difference. Third wave feminism could be seen as bringing together claims for both equality and difference in relation to men, as well as emphasising issues of justice across differences in race, class and culture as well as gender. A third wave feminist agenda for change must respond to the current socio-political context, which has been shaped, among other influences, by earlier feminist activism and theorising. It must also relate to the diverse aspirations and desires of contemporary women.

Early in the twentieth century most Australian feminists argued for a style of economic independence that accepted different social roles for women and men. "[Women activists] made a particular case that the state should support those who worked as mothers, providing them with an income which would free them from a demeaning dependence on husbands" (Lake, 1999: 56). Post-suffrage feminists fought for and gained some improvements in mothers' economic and legal circumstances, including the introduction, in 1912, of a Maternity Allowance, a one-off payment of five pounds, equivalent to around

five weeks wages for a woman. Reflecting the widespread racism of the time, it explicitly excluded mothers who were “Asiatics” or “Aboriginal natives of Australia, Papua or the islands of the Pacific” (Lake, 1999: 56).

In the 1920s, feminists successfully defended the Maternity Allowance against politicians and the medical establishment who sought to abolish or slash it. To their disappointment, in the 1930s a Labor federal government reduced the allowance to four pounds and introduced a means test, moving it towards being a targeted welfare benefit rather than a right or recompense. Lake (1999) summarises the disappointment:

It became all too evident that the state was more responsive to demands for an increase in resources for babies and children—the future citizens—than to improving the wellbeing of current women citizens ... Authorised to enter the public domain as the protectors of children, feminists found that in the longer term the cause rebounded on them, as the welfare of children became the justification to undermine the rights of mothers. (82)

World War II removed men from their places of employment, and industry needed women to take their places. Women increased their wages in some industries from 54 percent to 90 percent of male wages, and state-regulated childcare facilities were established. However, following the war, childcare centres closed and women experienced ideological pressure to return to unpaid domestic roles in order that men returning from the war could have the jobs. With the post-war baby boom, high wages for men, and the increase in Australian suburban living, quintessential 1950s domesticity blossomed (Curlewis, 1984; Matthews, 1984).

My own mother was part of this post-war milieu. She married my father in 1942, during the war. In their wedding photograph he is in Royal Australian Air Force uniform, and she looks slightly stunned. She was nineteen years old at the time, and a qualified primary school teacher. As a married woman, despite the fact that her husband departed immediately for training in Canada and subsequent service based in Britain, she was required to resign from her position with the State of Queensland teaching service. She took other paid work while he was away. After his return four years later, she had four children. She would have liked to return to teaching, but my father was very much against it. He finally agreed in 1966 to her taking a teaching position, on the condition that he never saw any of the money she earned. Throughout her life, my mother was adamant that she was not a feminist. However she was certainly indignant about women’s condition, and determined that her daughters should have education and opportunities in life. I still recall being intrigued and excited as an eleven year old when I discovered in 1961 that she had refused to classify herself as “housewife” on the census form, describing herself instead as “household manager.”

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By the late 1960s and early 1970s a groundswell of women's dissatisfaction with the conditions of their lives became second-wave feminism. At this time, feminists focused on the relationship between women's roles within families and their lack of labour market earning, moving very explicitly away from earlier claims for state-provided incomes for mothers. The "wages for housework" campaign was an attempt to gain economic independence for women and recognition for the value of the work undertaken by housewives. Ann Oakley (1974) argued persuasively against the campaign and the role of housewife:

Proposals in favour of a "housewife's wage" are made today by both liberationists and anti-liberationists. The liberationist advocates wages for housework because she sees it as crucial recognition of women's traditional unpaid labour in the home, and a step in the improvement of women's social status. Anti-liberationists argue for the same development on different premises. Their premise is one of "hygiene": that woman's place is, and should be, in the home, and everything should be done to make it as pleasant as possible. This is the crux of the argument: if housewives are paid, the status quo will be maintained. A system of state payment for the woman-housewife's labour in the home will recognize and perpetuate the validity of the equation woman = housewife. (226-7)

In an important distinction, she continues:

Many proposals for a housewife's wage are actually proposals for paid child rearing. This is a different matter altogether. Since the state invests so much money in the education of children (beyond the magic age of school entry) and in child health and development generally, it is reasonable to suggest that some financial recognition should be given to the childcare role of the parent in the home. (227)

Second-wave feminism brought explicit discussion of the role of families in women's oppression and exploitation. Views varied from those who saw heterosexual nuclear families as so destructive to women that they should be abandoned entirely, to those who called for change but not total abandonment of existing family forms. Authors including Shulamith Firestone (1970), Germaine Greer (1970), Kate Millett (1970), and Juliet Mitchell (1971) put a name to the oppressions suffered by women, and set an agenda for liberation. Refusing to fulfill sex role stereotypes and demanding full access to the labour market were important aspects of that agenda, clearly drawing more on a concept of "equality" than "difference." Marilyn Lake (1999) comments on this shift:

Feminists generally advocated a combination of different reforms to

achieve economic independence: legislation to require husbands to share their family wage and to grant ownership to wives of household savings; motherhood endowment and later a supporting parent's benefit; the public provision of childcare; and equal pay or the rate for the job. As it became clear that the only way women would enjoy their own income was by following men into the labour market, so "equality"—in wages, opportunities and conditions—became feminism's defining goal. (4-5)

My own feminist identification and expression in the 1970s took the form Ferree (1990) describes as typical of the time—rejection of sex-role stereotypes. I had two young children, and I studiously encouraged them in non-stereotypical play and language. My daughter had trucks and a treehouse. My son had a doll called Sam. I referred to the crossing sign at traffic lights as "the green person." For myself, I tried to maintain a professional identity by having paid work one day per week. I was my own handyperson around the house and tried to encourage my then husband to share in the household chores. On one occasion I left the washing up for a whole week in the expectation that he would eventually get desperate and do it, but this strategy failed and I eventually purchased a dishwasher.

Housework, motherhood and women's traditional handcrafts fell into a kind of feminist disrepute. My own experience of second-wave feminism included a suppression of stereotypically feminine activities. This pressure could be characterised as "Don't mention the children and don't knit in public". I recall a feminist gathering where the guest speaker gave a glowing account of having recently become a grandmother. I found her enthusiasm sweet and touching, but she received a stony reception from the gathered feminists.

Second-wave feminist critique of the institution of the family included attention to motherhood and mothering. Feminists criticised conventional child development theory (e.g. Bowlby, 1963; Winnicott, 1965) with its emphasis on the well-being of the child, with the mother as agent for the society, rather than possessing her own agency (Everingham, 1994). Second-wave feminism brought a dramatic shift from the focus on the experience of the infant/child to the experience of motherhood, from the point of view of the mother (for example Oakley, 1979; Rich, 1976, 1986; Wearing, 1984).

At the same time as second wave feminist activists were fighting for recognition as full persons, equal access to employment, anti-discrimination legislation and formal childcare (Lake, 1999), feminist theorising of the late 1970s and 1980s included a shift from sex role theory to gender theory (Ferree, 1990) and a re-valorising of mothering (Rich, 1976).

Sex role theory identified the nuclear family as the originator and enforcer of sex role stereotypes. Gender theory shifted the focus to include the broader institutions and culture as enforcers of the gender system (Ferree, 1990). Black feminists challenged the understandings of family, drawing attention to their

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experiences of families as sites of resistance, solidarity and comfort in the face of racism (O'Reilly, 2004). This increasing complexity and diversity in understandings of families could be seen as part of a transition from second-wave feminism influenced by modernism to a third-wave feminism that has become part of post-modernity.

Feminist theory re-valorising mothering brought more complexity and diversity to understandings of women's aspirations and desires. Later work has built on Adrienne Rich's (1976, 1986) distinction between motherhood as challenging and rewarding experience and the oppressive and exploitative institution of motherhood. Australian Betsy Wearing (1984) reflected on the ideology of motherhood that obscures the lived experiences of women who are responsible for children.

Feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick (1990) expressed a strong social and political focus in her reaffirmation of the value of mothering. Ruddick claims that maternal practices produce a valuable perspective that is lacking in public affairs. Similarly, Carol Gilligan's (1982) work explores the way that women's moral development and awareness was left out of past theorising, and she explores, describes and values women's "ethic of care."

The 1990s and early 2000s have produced what could be seen as "protest" or "breaking the silence" literature. Stephanie Brown *et al.* (1994) found that becoming a mother had a profound impact on women, as they experienced themselves and the world in new and unimagined ways. In addition, the study showed that women often experience isolation, lack of support and lack of preparation for the demands of caring for a baby.

Australian-based Susan Maushart (1997:47) writes that "mothering is the most powerful of all biological capacities, and among the most disempowering of all social experiences." She claims that second-wave feminism washed over motherhood, leaving its contours remarkably intact. However, she says, women's lives have changed dramatically, from the "tranquillised," empty lives that Betty Friedan described to lives of "juggling" multiple expectations and responsibilities. She states that "our thinking about motherhood as a role and as an institution has become hopelessly muddled over the course of the past two generations," citing ambivalence about day care as an example (Maushart, 1997: 12; see also Probert, 2001).

Barbara Pocock (2001) states:

Women are trying to do more, especially in paid work, and the tensions are well known. The surprising thing is the lack of real change. And it is far from obvious that the next generation of women—through better choices, the deferral or refusal of motherhood, or smaller families—will do better.

...

Despite well-assembled evidence of pressure, there has been all too little real change in workplaces, kitchens and households. Women's

guilt—so widespread and striking—is an indicator of the privatised nature of the present pursuit of balance, and the privatised nature of disappointment that individuals alone can't always achieve it. (14)

A third wave feminist agenda for change

A third wave feminist agenda would include economic independence for women, as this goal has not been achieved, nor has it lost its relevance. Valuing caring work, and resolving tensions between family and employment responsibilities are necessary foundations for change that will give mothers of young children opportunities for economic independence in the short term and greater economic equity with both men and non-parents in the longer term.

The post-suffrage feminists who fought for motherhood endowment won child endowment. These payments were intended to ensure the health and development of children, the nation's future, rather than recognising the work of mothers. Second-wave feminists rejected the idea of wages for housework, and achieved vastly improved access to paid employment for women. A third wave feminist agenda for change must be grounded in the work and wisdom of earlier generations, and in our experiences of the gains they achieved. It must address the further issues that those gains revealed as well as including the claims that have been only partially realised, such as childcare and paid maternity leave.

As with earlier generations, third wave feminist activism must respond to the current socio-political environment, and will incorporate at least some of the themes of feminist theorising. A full discussion of these topics is beyond the scope of this article. However some points are particularly relevant here. The socio-political environment includes a less rigid gender system than in earlier times. Young women grow up with more of a sense of entitlement to a life of their own than previous generations. Fathers are spending more time with their children (Bittman and Pixley, 1997; Craig, 2002). I recall that in the 1960s Australian fathers generally avoided anything to do with the care of young children. The fathers I knew in regional Queensland would not have been seen walking down the street pushing a pram, and changing nappies was definitely women's work. My personal contact with Australian fathers suggests that many now expect to play a much more active part in their children's lives.

In relation to feminist theorising, we can bring together principles of equality and difference, rather than seeing them as incompatible with each other. In addition, we are aware of the need for social provisions that are flexible, empowering women to live their lives in diverse ways. Such provisions must take account of the diversity of women's desires and aspirations in relation to employment and mothering.

The gains of second wave feminism have highlighted the role of mothers' unpaid work in resourcing the raising of the next generation. A third wave feminist agenda would include recompense for that work, in a way that would open up options rather than trapping women in domestic roles. Nancy Folbre

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(2005) has recently suggested that government payments to parents should be seen as payments for services rather than as welfare. This is clearly at odds with second wave feminists' concerns that wages for mothers would essentialise women and trap them in the domestic sphere. However, there is some evidence that we have moved on culturally to a place where being trapped in the role of housewife is no longer such a threat as it was at the height of second wave feminism. At that time the work of mothering was very integrated with housework, but the distinction between the two is now clearer. We could argue that everyone generates housework, and it is reasonable self-care that everyone should do some housework. Caring for young children is different. It produces a public benefit and it is reasonable that the whole community should contribute to the costs of this work (Bittman and Pixley, 1997; Crittenden, 2001; Folbre, 2005, 2001). Cultural change towards men wanting to participate much more than earlier generations in the hands-on care of their babies reduces the likelihood of women being essentialized and trapped in housewife roles. If the work of caring for young children received recompense as a service to the rest of the community, it may increase men's take-up of these activities, as increased wages have done in occupations such as nursing and social work. Of course, it may seem threatening to some women to give up control over their children's care, especially given the inferior access that women have to labour market earning and career advancement.

It could well be that Australia's current social arrangements are more likely than payment for caring for their own children to trap women in "career" motherhood. These social arrangements make it difficult for mothers to combine earning and caring, and offer incentives for partnered mothers to stay out of the labour market. However caring for young children is not a life-long career. It is clear from time use and labour market participation data that babies and toddlers take up huge hours mothers' time. Except for children with special needs, that time demand drops off as children grow. We need much more research into the work involved in caring for children of different ages, in order to determine what would be reasonable recompense for the care of children of different ages. We can learn from Scandinavian experiences with generous parental leave and universal childcare provisions (Haavind and Magnusson, 2005). It seems likely that such provisions, along with good access to education and training after childbearing would increase mothers' labour market earning after their youngest child is three years of age. If parents were paid for their services in raising children, these payments would not have the same conditions as apply to welfare payments. They would not be means tested against a partner's income. They would not be lost if a mother or father receiving the payment took some employment and paid for alternative care. They could be structured to have some of the characteristics of wages, for example accumulation of superannuation (retirement pay), and some of the characteristics of service contracts, for example freedom from close day-to-day supervision.

A third wave feminist agenda for change must recognise that caring for

children is valuable, not only because it is precious, important and worth doing, but because it takes up time. Looking after children is not “doing nothing.” There are costs involved that are at present borne unfairly by mothers. An agenda for change must include a way to redistribute the costs to those who benefit from the unpaid work that mothers put into the care of their children. Clearly, women will have many different preferences about how they arrange their lives. Economic independence for mothers of young children would open up choices and possibilities, increasing options for paid work, study, recreation, and active citizenship. The changes we seek for the future must relate to the diverse aspirations and desires of contemporary women.

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Between the Baby and the Bathwater Some Thoughts on a Mother-Centred Theory and Practice of Feminist Mothering

Opening with a reference to the Goddess Demeter, herstory's most celebrated empowered mother, the article provides an overview of current feminist thought on empowered mothering. The article goes on to argue that as feminist literature on motherhood has allowed for new progressive styles of childrearing and generated maternal activism, it has not gone far enough in its attempts to transform motherhood for the mother herself, to realize fully the maternal power and fury promised in the Demeter archetype. More specifically, the paper contends that current thinking on feminist mothering, in its emphasis upon child-rearing and in its strategy of ratiionalization, fails to develop a revolutionary model of mothering that takes as its aim and focus the empowerment of mothers. The paper asks that we consider a more radical and militant politic that is, in the style of the Demeter archetype, more discordant, direct, and defiant in our critique of patriarchal motherhood. The aim of this paper is to alert readers to what I see as a worrisome trend in contemporary writing on feminist mothering and to appeal for a more mother-centred mode of feminist mothering.

In 2005 *The Association for Research on Mothering* launched a publishing division, Demeter Press, the first feminist press to publish books on and about motherhood. As founder of *ARM* and Demeter Press, I authored the first book for this new publishing initiative.¹ This book, entitled *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Motherhood, Feminism, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering* (O'Reilly, 2006), explores, what most agree, is the central issue in motherhood studies today, namely the oppressive and the empowering aspects of maternity, and the complex relationship between the two. While feminist research on motherhood has focused on many topics over the last 15 years—work, family, sexuality, cultural differences, public policy, images of motherhood, to name

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but a few—these studies and reflections have been informed and shaped by larger questions: namely, how do we challenge patriarchal motherhood? How do we create feminist mothering? And, finally, how are the two aims interconnected?² *Rocking the Cradle* explores these central questions by way of a section on motherhood and another on mothering. The first section is concerned with identifying, interrupting, and deconstructing the patriarchal discourse of motherhood while the second examines the formulation and articulation of a counter maternal narrative, one that redefines mothering as an empowered and empowering practice. In its concern with imagining and implementing a empowered theory/practice of mothering, *Rocking* serves as appropriate inaugural text to celebrate and commemorate ARM's new publishing division because the Goddess Demeter, for whom the press is named, was herself an empowered and resistant mother.

Adrienne Rich (1986) in *Of Woman Born* interprets the Demeter/Persephone myth, particularly as it was enacted in the Eleusinian mysteries, as representing every daughters' "longing for a mother whose love for her and whose power were so great as to undo rape and bring her back from death" (240). As well, the myth, Rich continues, bespeaks "every mother's [longing] for the power of Demeter [and] the efficacy of her anger..." (240, emphasis added). In patriarchal culture where there are so few examples, in either life or literature, of empowered mothering, Demeter's triumphant resistance serves as a model for the possibility of mothering first imagined by Rich in *Of Woman Born*. A central aim of *Rocking the Cradle*, published in 2006, the thirtieth anniversary of *Of Woman Born*, is to, likewise, envision and achieve a feminist model of mothering, in both theory and practice. *Rocking*, concerned as it is with empowered mothering, seemed like a suitable text to launch a press named after herstory's most celebrated empowered mother, the Goddess Demeter. However, as I re-read *Rocking the Cradle* in preparation for the book's publication, I reflected upon the triumphs and tribulations that I and other scholars have experienced in our attempts to imagine and implement a truly feminist theory/practice of mothering. In particular, I began to question whether my research and that of feminist scholarship on motherhood more generally, has truly and fully actualized the potential of the Demeter archetype, and more specifically "her power and the efficacy of her anger." I want to suggest that while the new feminist literature on motherhood has allowed for new progressive styles of childrearing and generated maternal activism, it has not gone far enough in its attempts to transform motherhood *for the mother herself*, to realize fully the maternal power and fury promised in the Demeter archetype.

In her book *Mother without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood*, Elaine Tuttle Hansen (1997) argues that "the story of feminists thinking about motherhood since the early 1960s is told as a drama in three acts: repudiation, recuperation, and, in the latest and most difficult stage to conceptualize, an emerging critique of recuperation that coexists with ongoing efforts to deploy recuperative strategies" (5). I want to argue, using Hansen's meta-

phor, that as feminist theory moves from a repudiation of patriarchal motherhood to a recuperation of motherhood (i.e., the formation of feminist mothering) we must not lose sight of what must be the primary and central aim of our challenge to patriarchal motherhood, namely the empowerment of mothers. In other words, as repudiation and recuperation define the first two acts of the feminist resistance to motherhood, the final act must be expressed more specifically as a revolution of motherhood for mothers themselves. As of late, we have lost this focus and our tone has become tame and timid and our manner cautious and circuitous. Instead of demanding change for mothers, we are now requesting them on behalf of children.

This paper asks that we problematize this rhetoric of rationalization and consider a more radical and militant politic that is, in the style of the Demeter archetype, more discordant, direct, and defiant in our critique of patriarchal motherhood. More specifically, the paper will argue that current thinking on feminist mothering, in its emphasis upon childrearing and in its strategy of justification, fails to develop a revolutionary model of mothering that takes as its aim and focus the empowerment of *mothers*. However, the intent of this article is not to blueprint a model of mother-centred empowered mothering—this will be the subject of a future paper—but rather to alert readers to what I see as a worrisome trend in contemporary writing on feminist mothering and to appeal for a more mother-centred mode of feminist mothering.

In *Of Woman Born* Rich distinguishes “between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential* relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction—and to children; and the *institution*—which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control” (1986: 13, emphasis in original). The term motherhood refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word mothering refers to women’s experiences of mothering which are female-defined and centred and potentially empowering to women. In other words, while motherhood, as an institution, is a male-defined site of oppression, women’s own experiences of mothering can nonetheless be a source of power.

It has long been recognized among scholars of motherhood that Rich’s distinction between mothering and motherhood was what enabled feminists to recognize that motherhood is not naturally, necessarily or inevitably oppressive, a view held by some second-wave feminists. Rather, mothering, freed from motherhood, could be experienced as a site of empowerment, a location of social change if, to use Rich’s word’s, women became “outlaws from the institution of motherhood.” However, in *Of Woman Born*, however, there is little discussion of mothering or how its potentiality may be realized. The notable exception is the brief reference Rich made to her summer holiday in Vermont when her husband was away and she and her sons lived “as conspirators, outlaws from the institution of motherhood” (1986: 195). However, while mothering is not described or theorized in *Of Woman Born*, the text, in

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distinguishing mothering from motherhood and in identifying the potential empowerment of mothering, makes possible a feminist theory and practice of mothering.

However, as Fiona Green (2004) notes, still missing from discussions on motherhood is “Rich’s monumental contention that even when restrained by patriarchy, motherhood can be a site of empowerment and political activism” (31). A review of motherhood literature reveals that only two books have been published specifically on the topic of feminist mothering: the edited collection *Mother Journeys: Feminists Write About Mothering* (Reddy, Roth and Sheldon, 1994) and Tuula Gordon’s book, *Feminist Mothers* (1990), books now ten-plus years old.³ This omission, I found puzzling for several reasons. Feminist scholarship on motherhood is now an established field. Why, I wondered, is the topic of feminist mothering not explored in scholarship that is explicitly about feminism and motherhood. As well, feminist mothering is an evident example of empowered mothering and so provides a promising alternative to the oppressive institution of patriarchal motherhood, first theorized by Rich and critiqued by subsequent motherhood scholars.

Feminist mothering, whether it be termed resistant, courageous, hip or rebellious, operates as a counter narrative of motherhood. It seeks to interrupt the master narrative of motherhood to imagine and implement a view of mothering that is *empowering* to women. A review of the scholarship reveals two central themes in feminist mothering literature: anti-sexist childrearing and maternal activism. Both perspectives emphasize maternal power and ascribe agency to mothers and value to motherwork. As a consequence, mothering in feminist theory and practice, becomes reconfigured as a social act. While patriarchal motherhood defines motherwork as solely privatized care undertaken in the domestic sphere, feminist mothering regards such as explicitly and profoundly political and public.

This political-social dimension of mothering is manifested in two ways. The first occurs in the home wherein these mothers bring about social change through the anti-sexist childrearing of children.⁴ Termed “A Politics of the Heart” as I do, or “Home is where the Revolution is” as Cecelie Berry (1999) does, this perspective regards the motherwork undertaken in the private sphere as having social consequence and political significance. The second way that mothering, in feminist practice, becomes a public act is through maternal activism. Motherhood, in Western culture, is most often seen as a private, and more specifically an apolitical enterprise. In contrast, feminist mothers understand motherwork to have social and political import. For many feminist mothers, their commitment to both feminism and to children becomes expressed as maternal activism. Mothers, through maternal activism, use their position as mothers to lobby for social and political change, usually for and on behalf of children. Central to the feminist challenge to patriarchal motherhood is this redefinition of motherwork as a political act, undertaken at home and in the world at large.

Anti-sexist childrearing and maternal activism are significant and essential tasks of feminist mothering. However, I want to suggest that maternal activism on behalf of children and feminist childrearing for children, does not in any real manner address the needs of mothers. More specifically, I would argue that in defining feminist mothering in this manner we have, consciously or otherwise, discounted and disregarded what must be the first and primary aim of feminist mothering; namely the empowerment of mothers. Feminist scholarship has documented well how and why patriarchal motherhood is oppressive to mothers; however when this same scholarship seeks to imagine a feminist mode of mothering the focus inexplicably shifts from the mother to children (anti-sexist childrearing) and/or to a world apart from the mother (maternal activism). In its first stage, a repudiation of patriarchal motherhood, the mother, and her discontent, was our foremost concern; however in the second stage, recuperation, as we seek to re-conceive and reclaim mothering, the mother, while still crucial, frequently becomes instrumental to larger and seemingly more important objectives of social change. In other words, mothers are accorded agency to affect social change through childrearing or activism but little attention is paid to what this agency does or means for the mother herself in the context of *her own life*.

Equally troubling is the way much of this literature justifies and rationalizes the reasons for empowering mothers. Too often, the demand to empower mothers is recast as a strategy for more effective parenting. Erika Horwitz, in her article, "Resistance as a Site of Empowerment: The Journey Away from Maternal Sacrifice" (2004) argues, for example, that empowered mothering is characterized by women insisting on "the importance of mothers meeting their own needs" and the realization that "being a mother does not fulfill all of women's needs." However, in most instances, the mothers' demands for agency and autonomy are repositioned as requirements of the children. One woman in Horwitz's study remarked that "If I was going to love that baby, have any quality of time with that baby, I had to get away from that baby. I had to meet my own needs" (48) Another woman explained that she resisted patriarchal motherhood, "to make me a better mother for my children" (52).

In *A Potent Spell: Mother Love and the Power of Fear*, Janna Malamud Smith (2003) does reference the myth of Demeter and Persephone but does so to argue that children are best served by empowered mothers. Demeter, Smith argues "is able to save her daughter because she is a powerful goddess who can make winter permanent and destroy humankind" (59). "Demeter," she continues, "possesses the very qualities that Mothers so often have lacked—adequate resources and strength to protect their children, particularly daughters" (59). Therefore, and contrary to patriarchal, or more generally accepted, wisdom what a child needs most in the world, Smith argues, "is a *free and happy* mother" (167, emphasis added). Ann Crittenden, who is cited by Smith, elaborates further: "Studies conducted on five continents have found that children are distinctly better off when the mother possesses enough income and authority

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in the family to make investing in children a priority" (120). "The emergence of women as independent economic actors," Crittenden continues, "is not depriving children of vital support; it is giving them more powerful defenders. Depriving mothers of an income and influence of their own, is harmful to children and a recipe for economic backwardness" (130). To return to the story of Demeter: "It is only because Demeter has autonomy and independent resources," as Smith explains, "that she can protect Persephone" (241). Conversely, "when a culture devalues and enslaves the mother, she can [not] be like Demeter and protect her daughter" (244).

Re-reading my own work, I recognize that I too have been complicit in this questionable tactic of rationalization and justification. In both theory and practice, my demands for empowered mothering are defined and defended as necessary and essential *for children*. Like much of feminist scholarship on motherhood my campaign for empowered mothering centred upon how this would benefit children. In *Mother Outlaws* (O'Reilly, 2004b) I argued that empowered mothers are more effective mothers. Most notably, I used the metaphor of a airplane safety procedure to illustrate this argument. Anyone who has been in a plane knows the routine if oxygen masks are required: put on your mask and then assist children with theirs. This instruction initially seems to defy common sense; children should be helped first. However, the instruction recognizes that parents must be masked first, because only then are they able to provide real and continued assistance to the child: unmasked they run the risk of becoming disoriented, ill or unconscious due to lack of oxygen and then of course would be of no use to the child. This instruction, I argued, serves as a suitable metaphor for empowered mothering; mothers, empowered, are able to better care for and protect their children.

Moreover, in my writings on Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (O'Reilly, 2004a) I argued that Rich was one of the first feminist writers to call for anti-sexist childrearing and women-centred practices of mothering.⁵ I go on to explore how the two, in Rich's view, are intrinsically linked in so far as the goal of anti-sexist childrearing depends upon the abolition of patriarchal motherhood and the achievement of feminist mothering. Anti-sexist childrearing—a challenge to traditional practices of gender socialization for both daughters and sons—Rich argues, depends upon motherhood itself being changed. Only when mothering becoming a site of power for women is feminist childrearing made possible. In other words, I see empowered mothering as a means to an end; rather than an end in and of itself.

While I do believe that empowered mothers are more effective mothers and that anti-sexist childrearing and maternal activism are worthwhile aims, I still wonder and worry why the rhetoric of rationalization has become the strategy of choice among feminist activists and scholars today and why our campaigns for social change centre on children, and not ourselves as mothers. Why can we not simply demand that motherhood be made better for mothers themselves? Why are our demands for maternity leaves, flex-time, greater

involvement of partners in the home etc. always couched and explained as being for and about the children? Why are mothers' demands for more time, money, support and validation only responded to when they are seen as benefiting children? I realize that this rhetoric is often employed strategically by feminists to make gains for mothers that otherwise would not be possible in a patriarchal culture. Patriarchal culture will accord mothers resources if they use them on behalf children; i.e., the mother can take time for herself if this makes her a better mother for her children. While I appreciate the utility of this tactic, it still deeply troubles me. Such a strategy will certainly backfire. Moreover, and most importantly, real change for mothers can not be achieved if such is always defined as for, and about children. While I am not suggesting that we do away with a strategy that has proven effective, I do believe that we must, likewise, lobby for and on behalf of mothers; to secure and guard a place for mothers between the proverbial baby and the bathwater. Only as an empowered and enraged Demeter, can we achieve a truly transformative and transgressive feminist theory and practice of mothering.

¹Future titles to be published by Demeter Press include: a book on Aboriginal mothering (Fall 2006); *White Ink*, a collection of motherhood poetry (Spring 2007); and a Motherhood Reader (Spring 2007).

²Please visit The *Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM) website www.yorku.ca/crm for a listing of the various topics explored by maternal scholars. ARM, founded in 1998 and now with more than 500 members worldwide, is the first international feminist organization devoted specifically to the topic of mothering-motherhood. ARM hosts two international conferences a year and publishes *The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, bi-annually. For more information please visit the ARM website.

³Two of my recent books have sections on feminist mothering. *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* (2004a) and *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (2004b). A few books have looked at the topic of being a daughter of a feminist; see in particular Rose L. Glickman's *Daughters of Feminists* (1993) and Christina Luper Baker and Christina Baker Kline, *The Conversation Begins: Mothers and Daughters Talk about Living Feminism* (1996). As well, several books have examined the relationship between feminism and motherhood. For two important works on this topic, see Laura Umansky, *Motherhood Reconciled: Feminism and the Legacy of the Sixties* (1996) and Susan E. Chase and Mary F. Rogers, *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analysis and Personal Narratives* (2001).

⁴In my scholarship on African American motherhood I argue how, in the instance of African American mothers, the political-social dimension of motherwork assumes as its central aim the empowerment of black children. Please see my book, *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart* (2004c).

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⁵Please see my edited volume, *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* (2004a).

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Folio



*Detail from "Peter Pan: To the Spirit of Children of Play," by Sir George Framptom.
1929 Replica, Glen Gould Park, Toronto. Photo: Joe Paczusi*

Editor's Notes

Of Silence and Idolatry: The Poems of Ann Fisher-Wirth

Let's not speak of the sorrow
this child and her sister and brother
will inherit; instead, listen to the story
their mother tells them, how all the babies
line up in the sky by the baby ladder,
and slide down when they hear their future
parents say, This one...This one...This one...
How they are the chosen babies of the world.

Ann Fisher-Wirth, "Devotions"

I first met Ann Fisher-Wirth in July 2004 at the Poetry and Sexuality Conference at The University of Stirling, Scotland. The poetry reading she gave at the conference included poems from her first book *Blue Window*; it was a beautifully eloquent performance. In her poems, Fisher-Wirth tangled the everyday of family, motherhood, and the natural world with sexuality and erotic love in a unique lyric voice. I remember thinking as I heard her read, that this was a poet with a courageous, sensual voice, whose work was rooted in the body.

In this issue of *Folio*, I am pleased to feature a selection of Ann Fisher-Wirth's poems that convey a visceral, deeply embodied perception of motherhood, a physical, psychic landscape in which the wounds of infant death, the dissolution of a marriage, the agonies of loss and guilt for the mother whose children are moved to another state by their father, are narrative threads juxtaposed against the protective fierceness of a mother's love.

In the opening poem “In Crescent,” we are introduced to the mother’s body:

The bloodwall thickens
and everyone I have loved
begins to ripen within my body.

...

And so inch forward toward that
teeming bed
where we all lie down together.

In “Moth,” the young woman, “the girl I once was,” grieves for her dead newborn daughter, breast milk letting down over her new white dress:

Oh I was death’s girl,
sure to poison anything I loved,
any sweet cock or baby that came near me.

In “Devotions,” the narrator describes the devastations of a life of poverty: “It’s 1973. They’re so poor/it’s a crisis when she breaks a jar of honey ... Let’s just say/ poverty and terror can break a marriage.”

Throughout these poems, there is a sense of rawness, the narrator confessing the intense physicality of her mothering, as in “Kisses:” “Kisses like birth fluid, floating them, surrounding them, until the day they die. No, confess. She wants her kiss-shaped seal still to be glowing at the end of eternity.”

The Trinket Poems, were composed after Fisher-Wirth acted as Trinket Dugan in a production of “The Mutilated,” a Tennessee Williams play. Fisher-Wirth takes us deep inside the character of Trinket, offering us provocative perceptions of the nature of maternal desire. The poem “*Blesser*” plays on the meaning of the French word, problematizing the word which means “to wound” in French. Fisher-Wirth contemplates *blesser* alongside the English “to bless.” For Fisher-Wirth’s narrator, for the reader, there are no easy answers:

Oh I know
it’s false etymology but think about it: doesn’t what
brings you to your knees gut-punched, or makes you
sit on the toilet as your lover lies sleeping
and scratch bright welts along your thighs
with the paring knife, the fingernail scissors,
or drops you fetal to the forest floor because you’ve
run so far away from home, sobbing *mother, father,*
help me—doesn’t the day you stand in the empty house

of the family you destroyed, sent your children
like dandelion seedpods spinning into the golden
canyons of grief far beyond their small as yet imaginings—
doesn't even this somehow bless them, bless you?

In the powerful closing prose narrative, "Of Silence and Idolatry," Fisher-Wirth uses a double-voiced technique that exposes the power struggles between ex-spouses and the mother's decision not to place her children in a court battle. The contrast between the aims of shared custody, the powerlessness of the mother who loses the daily presence of her children in her home, and the incapacity of legal systems to serve familial needs are keenly conveyed. The "idolatry" of this poetic prose is contained in the mother's intense love for her children: "This is my idolatry. I know every inch of their bodies. Which ones vomit easily, which one fights it. . . . I know my children the way you know your breath, your voice, the water in your eyes."

As we read Fisher-Wirth's work in this issue on mothering and feminism, the lawyer's words remembered by the narrator are a haunting reminder of the legal struggles of mothers and a long history of untenable choices: "Remember the day the lawyer said, 'Once a woman falls off the pedestal in Virginia, she's in the mud?' Remember how happy she sounded, even though you'd heard she was a feminist and were planning to hire her?"

What is most impressive about Ann Fisher-Wirth's work in these poems is the voice that manages to convey vividly the irreconcilable subject position of the mother who leaves her children, "not meaning to leave them." The question "Why did you do it?" is answered by the narrator's conception of the lover who becomes the "one love strong as birth."

As I write this introduction to Ann Fisher-Wirth's poems, I have just returned from meeting her once again in July 2006, in Stirling, Scotland at the Poetry and Politics Conference. As I listened to Ann read poems from her new book, *Five Terraces*, I knew this was a poet highly attuned to the world, full of authenticity, surprise, intellect, passion, grace and courage. Her work extends our understandings of the immense complexities of the roles of wife, mother, lover, poet, while acknowledging a terrible beauty in the luminous particulars of human living.

—Rishma Dunlop

Ann Fisher-Wirth

In Crescent

The bloodwall thickens
and everyone I have loved
begins to ripen within my body.
A quiet time: the house
curls in upon itself, enfolds
the sleeping children; the daisy
shuts its petals, and their lashes are wet
with the mercy of sleep.

Summer's grasses
are long, so long
that we seem to move through water.
Children again, we clamor, Mother
may I, mother may I? And she
by the elm in shadow, whose belly
catches moonlight: Come
as you will, I will hold you,
I am warm, all steps
lead where I am hidden.

And so inch forward toward that
teeming bed
where we all lie down together.



*Detail from "The Endless Bench," by Lea Vivot, 1984.
Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto. Photo: Joe Paczuski*

Moth

The girl I once was
stared through grief and fever
at a devil clad in orange, some earth-arranger.
He waited beneath the pines
as they tucked my newborn's ashes
beside my father's grave, grim joke
or grace: *Watch over her, Papa.*
Papa you died in time to spare you shame.

Three weeks later milk came in,
all down the front of my new white dress.
I gave myself to scalding waters,
pounded my head on the walls of showers.
Oh I was death's girl,
sure to poison anything I loved,
any sweet cock or baby that came near me.

*

When my other children came,
a half-light dogged them. They learned to want her too,
the dead sister who made me a mother,
who made me stop, sometimes,
and go quiet in hallways, as if my arms
were full of blankets for someone who was not them,
who slept down a long corridor
in a room where curtains billowed
in watery sunlight.

Or when I
read to them at night and their sweet
bodies and hair grew sticky with summer as they
sprawled all over me, there was a moth
at the window, a soft moon-splotched moth battering at the window,
and that moth could never get in
no matter how they opened
and opened—

Devotions

Every night, every morning, she holds
her finger beneath the baby's nostril
and waits for the warm slide of breath
across her finger, the moist, infinitesimal
fluttering. She hangs prostrate on a sign:
a grunt, a fart, that sweet involuntary sucking
where the lower lip vanishes. *If it rises
and falls, if it rises and falls...* She cannot
believe the child will live. She watches
her daughter's chest, the small waves
of her breathing—

It's 1973. They're so poor
it's a crisis when she breaks a jar of honey.
A lemon tree spreads at their bedroom window,
and at night, around the patio the young
husband made, driving to the chaparral
for stones then lugging them back
in the old VW van, bamboo groans with growing.
Let's not speak of what's wrong between them,
this husband who's so anxious and thin
he can suck his belly like a cavern
to his backbone, this wife who stayed in bed
all spring, scarcely daring to lift her head
every time the spotting started, since that day
in the mountains at four months when she bled
and the nurse at the emergency clinic
told her, Yup, I heard of a woman who woke
after a week of safety and the whole
bed was a puddle of blood.

Let's just say poverty
and terror can break a marriage.
Let's not speak of the sorrow
this child and her sister and brother
will inherit; instead, listen to the story
their mother tells them, how all the babies
line up in the sky by the baby ladder,
and slide down when they hear their future
parents say, This one... This one... This one...
How they are the chosen babies of all the world.

Kisses

First kiss is Denis Honeychurch, at the party where Jennifer Miles is smooching her no-count boyfriend, C. B. “C. B.?” the girl asks, “Is that his real name?” “Jeez,” Jennifer groans, world-weary. “S-E-A-B-E-E. Don’t you know it’s like a sailor?” They’re up, down, up, down, in the clinch on the couch, and each time Jennifer comes up for air she tells the girl, “You’ve been Denis’s girlfriend for months, just *do it*.” The girl’s ducking this way and that, he’s trying to zone in, and finally she lets him and lets him and lets him till her braces are cutting his lips and Jennifer Miles is pulling them apart, bug-eyed, telling her, “Stop now. I won’t take *any* responsibility.”

Second kiss is Billy McKay at the bottom of the hill that’s her back yard. In the little pagoda by the cracked badminton court her father is reclaiming, Billy wraps his arms around her and barely brushes his lips on hers. Nights, she languishes on her balcony, gazes at his roof, imagines him adding her name to the list of the girls he’s kissed. She’s fourteen. She longs to elope with him to Alaska. The third, fourth, fifth kisses are Billy too. Karl Heimlich calls him no good, tells him to leave her alone, so Billy’s friends from St. Mary’s storm the school grounds one lunchtime to fight with Karl’s friends from Garfield Junior High. “So *this* is the face that launched a thousand fists,” Mr. Wigaman, Boys’ Dean and history teacher, comments after he breaks the fight up and comes to class.

No, Merrie Lu is earlier than Denis, even. They lie in her bed in the little stucco house upstairs from the shrunken father and bossy Christian Scientist mother who waves her arms around while reciting the Lord’s Prayer, and pretend they are grownups. Merrie Lu will take a lover while still in high school—the middle-aged hippie jeweller in the tiny store on Telegraph. She’ll vanish from the girl’s life, vanish from the circle of girlfriends or even the gossip at Berkeley High. Back then, they put Kleenex between their lips as they take turns lying on top, lowering their faces toward each other, but they do not touch each other’s skin—they’re saving their glistening flesh for boys.

Allan Hance is the taste of Chesterfields and boredom. Not boredom with her, just boredom, stretching out blond and lanky on the daybed in his sister’s house,

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kissing hours, hours, as Alicia and her lover and their roommate discuss Nietzsche or béarnaise or their architecture projects in the Berkeley kitchen over *egri bikaver*, bull's-blood wine. In the warm still night, his boredom seems holy. It's not love that's missing between them, but the will to claim, to bind. They don't date, really, just kiss. Like hay ripening, or the stars that make their way across the window, or two corks bobbing on the water, they drift through the months. They'll write for a while, then seldom think of each other again—until he writes her nearly forty years later. There is no end, no end, of things in the heart. He and Alicia are kind to the girl all summer.

It's always easier not to start than to stop, once she parts her lips she's a goner. That consent of the teeth and tongue, the wet, the source of words. When she's small, she knows it makes a wet spot, so she sidles up to some beloved adult—her mother, say, or her mother's best friend Lureen—parts her lips, and touches just the tip of her tongue to the face. In college, she can never understand girls who set out to kiss—to kiss but *just* to kiss—like Kathy Nye in the freshman dorm, who plays the bases like a nun nymphomaniac. If the girl kisses someone she wants his body in hers, to hurl herself over all the steeplejack jumps. The *yes* is nearly infinite.

And when she is grown, kissing her children, she wants to bless them with her lips, to seal them forever in her love. Eskimo kisses where they rub noses, trading breath, "Nuggie nose, nuggie nose." Butterfly kisses—eyelashes tickling the cheek, up and down, fluttering. Eating the toes and fingers kisses, smunching down on the belly kisses. Kisses on the eyes to magic away headaches, on the salty sweat-damp hair, the hollow under the ear, the plump pulse at the clavicle. Kisses like water sheeting down a mountainside. Kisses like birth fluid, floating them, surrounding them, until the day they die. No, confess. She wants her kiss-shaped burning seal still to be glowing at the end of eternity.

Daughters

My house is full of blood.
And my daughters, now,
who used to be so cleanly
cleft, so simple, carry
the bit flesh in them,
shark-torn fish trailing
blood in the sea. Even
my tortoiseshell, delicate,
female, yowls when the
blood comes to her, and,
tail up in anguish,
drags her pretty belly
on the ground.

My house is full of breasts,
softly deep and nipping
beneath camisoles or
sweaters. I have to inch
around them. I have to
squeeze by, narrow. They
float above my daughters
in the bathtub, I mean, they
are my daughters' in the
bathtub, pale, warm moons
in a watery sky, they who
suckled me now outdo me.

And though I do not stare,
my house is full of fur.
Already, boys
have touched it.
This, one daughter
tells me, and I think of how,
when she was born,
I stroked her arm so gently,
cherishing the vein-fine
skin, and swore no one would
ever hurt her.



*Detail from "Peter Pan: To the Spirit of Children of Play," by Sir George Frampton.
1929 Replica, Glen Gould Park, Toronto. Photo: Joe Paczuski*

Raccoons, A History

We watched him last summer by flashlight,
moonlight, sharp paws flickering,
thick-furred body anxious and upright—
Quick, quick, he'd dive at the cat food,
then feint and check for danger. Now it's January,
raining, death swells in the walls—
he must have come home to die last fall,
slunk off into the crawl space.
First we noticed the sweetness,
the something-not-quite-clean here.
Was it a squirrel, a mouse? we wondered.
Weeks passed, and it didn't diminish—
Could we take the boards off? No, too old,
they would splinter. And we didn't know
for certain where the dead thing was.
So my husband climbed on to the roof
to shovel ten pounds of quicklime into the crawl space—
and found the other raccoon, the little female.
Shivering and scrawny,
she tried to squeeze into the hole,
but he blocked it with his body.
He said, "She looked sad. She turned away."

Last spring they were born in the walls,
where my daughter slept in the guest room bed.
We heard them scabbling, squeaking.
"It's beasts," I said, "are they dying?"
But she laughed like she laughed when she was little—
"Mom, listen to them, they're snuggling, they're happy."
They grew and climbed out from the roof,
played with their mother and dug through the compost,
pawed at the screen on the kitchen window.
We loved them. Then the big one

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started to fight the female, scratching and snarling.
Plenty of food for both of them,
but he'd snap and slash till she cowered on the deck
with her one filched piece of cat food.

Sometime in the fall, the mother vanished.
For the big one and the female, was it sickness? Poison?

—January, raining, first came the stench,
then quicklime dusting down from between the beaded boards,
then snow, and the smell diminished.
Now lime-floured flies
drawn forth by the warmth of the kitchen
dot the walls, caress the light globes, circle and hover like ghosts, stunned.
I vacuum them up, they're easy targets,
but wave after wave they emerge from the door jamb.

At McClure's Beach, Point Reyes National Seashore, California

I would ask my family

Wait for a foggy afternoon, late May,
after a rainy winter so that all
the wildflowers are blooming on the headland.
Wait for honey of lupine. It will rise
around you, encircle you, from vast golden bushes
as you take the crooked trail
down from the parking lot. Descend
earth's cleft, sweet winding declivity
where California poppies lift up their
chalices, citrine and butterscotch,
and phlox blows in the wisps of fog, every
color of white and like the memory
of pain, and like first dawn, and lavender.
Where goldfinches, nubbins of sunlight,
flit through the canyon. Walk one by one
or in small clusters, carrying babies,
children holding your hands—with your eyes,
your oval skulls, your prodigious memories
or skills with the fingers. Your skirts or shirts
will flirt with the wind, and small brown rabbits
will run in and out, you'll see their ears first,
nested in the grasses, then the bob
of fleeting hindquarters.

Now come to the sand,
the mussel shells, broken or open, iridescent,
color of crows' wings in flight
or purple martins, and the bullwhips
of sea kelp, some like frizzy-headed voodoo
poppets, some like long hollow brown or bleached
phalluses. The X X birdprints running

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across the scalloped sand will leave a trail of stars,
look at the black oystercatcher, the scamp
with the long red beak, it's whizzing along
in its courtship dance. Look at the fog,
above you now on the headland, and know how much
I love the fog. Don't cry, my best beloveds,
it's time to scatter me back now. I've wanted this
all my life. Look at the cormorants,
the gulls, the elegant scythed whimbrel,
do you hear its *quiquiquiqui*
rising above the eternal Ujjayi breath,
the roar and silence and seethe and whisper,
the immeasurable insweep and release of ocean.

**Blessor. (Fr.) To Wound, to Hurt;
to Offend, to Injure; to Wring,
to Shock, to Gall**

If *to wound* is *to bless* they are blessed,
Trinket and Celeste, these two drunk, aging floozies—
one needs makeup to look aging and the other,
the desperate courage of aging to play a floozy—
they are blessed as they kneel there with the gallon
jug of Tokay, the crystal wine decanter, and their
loss-induced vision of the Virgin Mary. Oh I know
it's false etymology but think about it: doesn't what
brings you to your knees gut-punched, or makes you
sit on the toilet as your lover lies sleeping
and scratch bright welts along your thighs
with the paring knife, the fingernail scissors,
or drops you fetal to the forest floor because you've
run so far away from home, sobbing *mother, father,*
help me—doesn't the day you stand in the empty house
of the family you destroyed, sent your children
like dandelion seedpods spinning off into the golden
canyons of grief far beyond their small as yet imaginings—
doesn't even this somehow bless them, bless you?
Hard to speak of, even now. You will pray the kind
earth to swallow you.

Ah, but the god doesn't care.
Trinket turns to the Virgin when the bright one
spurns her. As for you—
that long-ago April you kindled like leaf fire.



Mount Pleasant Cemetary, Toronto. Photo: Joe Paczusi

Of Trinket, of Mary

When you stand by the radio after
the Sailor spurns you, and because it is
silent, the cathedral empty, you know
the Christ child has been born, your hand wanders
to that absence as if He seeks the thin blue
milk, the veined orb beneath the cloth of stars—
As your Sailor sleeps his brutal sleep you speak
of the Christ child, his blind sweet hands
fumbling beneath the robes of his mother,
and Trinket, I had that. Rocking or
in bed, or carrying my babies beneath
my pink *ruana* as I walked hours
and hours through the summer woods, their lips
pulling down the starry river, I had that.



*Detail from "Stop the Hurt," by A. Belluz, 1991.
Children's Aid Foundation, Toronto. Photo: Joe Paczuski*

Of Silence and Idolatry

I run my hands over the perfect, smooth slipping body of my child. I hover over the toilet when she is sick, and full of pity for the small bowed back, I watch the shit come out of my sick child's bent and laboring body. Then I know the depth of my idolatry.

This is a memory I have of my daughter when she was two in the upstairs bathroom on 9th Street, the bathroom where the toilet was raised above the floor to retrofit the plumbing. The next-to-last house I lived in with John, when our three children were tiny. The house in California with apricots, plums, blackberries, strawberries, figs, lemons—with impatiens, begonias, calendulas, ranunculus—and the tree I thought of as paradise, a huge grapefruit tree by the street on which buds, white flowers, green and golden fruit all coexisted, in a simultaneous birthing and fruiting and blossoming. The house we brought our son to as a newborn, where the girls sat on the front curb with grandma and grandpa, holding their new stuffed lambs, waiting for the car to pull up and their brother so beautifully tanned with jaundice to be handed gingerly to them. A few days later, on a bright June morning, I laid Lucas on the bureau by the window, naked, soaking up sun for his jaundice, and Jessica on the bed bumped her hand and started to cry, and Pascale on the stairs bumped her foot and started to cry, then Lucas started to cry, and there they were, scattered, bawling, and there I was, outnumbered.

Loving them so, I've never written much about them, my three children with John, nor written much about him. And that is the door that remains to be opened. *Why? Why go there? Why, when there is so much pain, and so many things you still can't talk about?*—To make my children part of my book. Children love to hear their mother praise them, and so here I will conjure them over and over, my

 daughter daughter son
whose lives are the music in my blood. Whose lives my leaving broke in two, though when I left I didn't mean to leave them.

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So when you fell in love that spring with Peter, suddenly and forever, you thought Virginia would be the same as California, where no one got blamed, everyone divorced, and everyone shared custody. Well. Remember the day the lawyer said, "Once a woman falls off the pedestal in Virginia, she's in the mud"? Remember how happy she sounded, even though you'd heard she was a feminist and were planning to hire her? Watching her smirk, you drove the sharp end of a paperclip into the palm of your hand, over and over and over. That's when you knew you would not fight, would not start taking the children to church in dresses and little suits, sitting up front like that lawyer said you'd have to. Not try to make John look bad, not drag the children to court and make them choose between you. —A voice comes in me: Bitch, remember the 4 p.m. you signed the separation agreement, your hand lowered to the heavy legal paper, and though you swore you would die instead you agreed not to see them from summer to Hallowe'en, from Hallowe'en to Christmas, from Christmas to Easter, from Easter to summer? Remember the moment he drove them out of sight and they knelt on the back seat looking out the window, and you stood on the porch next to the apricot tree and did not even die, and turned and went inside, and they were moving back to California?

I don't understand happiness or how you ever know. Our marriage was probably ending for more than a decade. But most of the time we got along just fine. Most of the time we lived the way you do, moment to moment, day to day—

I take hamburger from the freezer, tonight I'm going to make spaghetti sauce. I've waited too late, again; why can't I ever take it out in time for it to thaw? But I'm clever with the spatula, cooking it over low heat, scraping it off as it warms and softens. The children have their deep bottom drawer—an idea I got from Ellen. They can keep their toys and junk right here beside me in the kitchen, and play around my feet, which sometimes they do peacefully. Or let's say I'm constantly interrupted, Pascale and Jessica both want the Holly Hobby coloring book, Lucas's shirt is wet with juice, someone has skinned a knee, someone needs a nap, surely needs a diaper change—and the kittens are mewling to come inside, the mother cat needs food, Pascale wants to tell me in endless detail the plot of "The Aristocats," her favorite movie. That's the late afternoon. And the refrigerator is on the back porch, so cooking means walking back and forth, get the meat, the onions, the tomatoes, the bread and butter and jam for a pre-dinner snack for Jessica, who's starving. Or cheerios for Lucas, in his high chair. Then everyone needs milk, in a Tommy Tippee cup or bottle.

Day by day, those years, I thought I could live with John forever. Jackie said, "Do you know how lucky you are, to have such a great family guy?" So I don't want to tell you, don't want you to know, how I failed him in my thoughts, how I failed him in my deeds, lay beside him night after night in my old lady

underpants and cotton flowered granny gown dreading the day the children would grow and we'd have nothing to talk about. Once I told him, "This is practice for when I'm dead," and for some reason I thought of it as a friendly thing to say, an acknowledgment: "I'm not here, really, you move across the ghost of me."

But there is happiness in the daily round from sink to stove to table, from bath to garden to kindergarten, the long delirium of immersion, in service to their sweet bodies. Picking up and doing laundry, home haircuts, we are so poor we barter what we can, do yard work for rent, rejoice at the relatives' cast-off clothes and furniture. John scrounges the trash, that's how we get our ironing board, a bronze floor lamp, a Craftsman chair. In the garage we find—and keep—a previous tenant's enormous walnut picture frame, and I buy a cheap print of a Right Whale that reminds me of Moby-Dick. —What do the children wear? Pascale likes pants, she climbs trees, John takes her to see "The Wild Child" and for months she becomes l'enfant sauvage, scampers naked in the macadamia nut tree and on the roofs of neighbors' houses. Jessica is the prairie girl in little shawls and dresses, she wears hats and strings beads on tiny wires, making bracelets, necklaces. Lucas stuffs his tummy into his patched green jeans, his feet into Zachary's cowboy boots. John ties a bandanna around Lucas's neck and sits him on the motorcycle he bought for \$5, that runs only once, and goes "vroom vroom" and makes Lucas laugh. One year I am on a seamstress jag and I make the girls nightgowns, sweaters; the nightgowns are stiff and soon too small, and the sweaters get bigger every time I wash them. —What do the children do? Well, for one thing, we garden. We walk up to the plant store, and that in itself takes forever, me pushing the buggy with someone skipping alongside and someone riding behind. We walk around the aisles of plants looking at the flowers and reading off names on the little six-packs. Zinnias, cosmos, calendulas, Johnny jump-ups, nasturtiums. Snapdragons that open wide when you squeeze their hinges and clamp their jaws on the children's fingers. Ranunculus bulbs, my favorite, because I keep thinking this time they will flower abundantly, and sometimes they nearly do, but then because the soil wants to revert to desert no matter how much I water, no matter how much I add loam and compost, they grow peaked and wizened. Then we walk home and plant things. I can garden while they nap or they can help me, looking for sowbugs and snails, picking strawberries when they're ripe, or blackberries when they poke through the neighbors' fence, that's fair, or apricots big as tennis balls. —What do the children eat? Pumpkin bread. Milk, though they hate powdered milk, which John makes them drink because it is cheaper. Apple juice, applesauce, apple pie. Hamburgers, meatloaf, all the usual things. Bananas, avocados. Big Macs for Pascale, raspberries for Jessica, and for Lucas, his own invention, triple-butter sandwiches. Only a few things they all agree on: lasagna, spaghetti, homemade doughnuts, fudge ripple ice cream.

This is my idolatry. I know every inch of their bodies. Which ones vomit easily,

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which one fights it. Whose diaper rash responds to Desenex, whose to Caldesene powder, whose to aloe vera. Who nearly drowns, who gets croup, who gets scarlet fever. Who has ticks one day on the genitals and deep in the folds of the ear. Who has ringworm, constipation, nightmares of wolves and schoolrooms, a herniated navel. . . I know their feet pushing off against my belt, their gums then teeth at my nipples, the swivel of their downy sticky heads, their pee on my jeans and slobber down my shirt, how they pack dirt and baby food in the fat folds of their chins. I know their sweet heft: so many years carrying babies, always on the right hip, that my ribcage finally pivots, the bones poke out, and I am sure I am dying of cancer. I know them with my prayers and all ten fingers. God, I know my children the way you know your breath, your voice, the water in your eyes.

Nearly twenty years ago, when I was visiting them in California, the kids and I stood talking to their neighbour, who said, "Ah yes, I remember you now. You are the woman who never stopped touching her children."

Now they're grown, they are strong and beautiful. *And John?*—I used to dream sometimes that I was still married to him but had been having an affair with Peter for years, and in my dream I would think, This is wrong, Peter is the one I should be married to, I have to leave John. Last night I dreamed we made love, John and I, though in my dream I didn't want to dream it, I wanted it to be Peter, but John kept saying, No, *me*. So we did. And now I understand it. When you draw a circle of love you can't just forever leave somebody outside.

Today the rain has stopped. A cloudy sun comes out behind the trees, here where I sit, once again in California. Thirty-four years ago we honeymooned, John and I, in Inverness, just across Tomales Bay from where I spend these days at Point Reyes Station. The people at the hotel loaned us their little sailboat, we assured them we could sail—and we could, sort of. When we ran aground we were so full of guilt, afraid we'd hurt the boat, we gingerly lifted it off the rocks to check the paint for scratches, but we hadn't done a bit of damage, and soon, in the sun with a breeze behind us, we were asail again.

Such anguish, the seven years I did not live with my children. Those comings and goings, letters and cards and sticker books and stickers, the stories read over the telephone. The angry hugs that hurt. Nights of sobbing, rigid, before parting. Then songs all the way to the airport, "Early Morning Rain," "The Water Is Wide," "Sleep, Baby, Sleep," "Hush, My Honey," "The Street Where You Live," and all the rest, as if to fill them for my absence. My sweet children, till you lived with me again, those were our history.

And I sat in my office that Monday in Virginia, my suitcase hidden behind the door. I had cooked eggs and toasted bread, kissed the children, John had driven me to the office as he did every morning. A few months later Karen brought me an article, meaning to be kind, about mothers who have divorced and lost their children. — Why? Why did you do it? Why did one foot follow another and your body consent not to be home when they came home, not to be there with your arms, why did you leave them that first night, bitch, bitch, why did you let them rock and cry and how do you think they could sleep and wake without you? Because I could not sleep or eat, having found Peter, the one love strong as birth? Because John refused to leave and he was bigger, he could pick me up and put me outside, he could lock the door, I couldn't win? Because I had Peter and John had nobody? Truth is, because I didn't think I'd lose them, I thought we'd live close by and see each other daily, they'd be mine because I was their mother, John would agree to that, and the kids would sleep three nights with me, three nights with him, we'd be one of those loose California families. John? Who was John? Not my enemy.

“All we can be sure of is that at our most subjective we are universal; all we can be sure of is the profound flow of our living tides of meaning,” Muriel Rukeyser writes in *The Life of Poetry*. But a mother who loses her children—a mother who loses her children—who bears them and loves them and cares for them and then lets the maw of the world yawn wide so that when they look they cannot find her—I'm not sure such a woman's subjectivity can be universal. For many years, I felt: If the world would stone such a creature, would leave her to die by the road, I would not blame it.

How you want them sleeping that small, gummed sleep, working their mouths a little, making those tiny smacking sounds like they did at the nipple when they were babies. Then waking up happy or grouchy or any old way, rubbing the sleep from the corners of their eyes. You want them in footed pajamas, in down jackets, Nikes, boxer shorts, ripped jeans, body piercings, you name it, their lanky or curving flesh crossing your doorsill, flopped at your table. Even their music, turned up loud. Their broken-down jeeps in your driveway, their Great Dane puppies yapping in the mudbath devastation of your yard.

Those first weeks after birth, I'd hold my babies in the bath. Their head would rest on my breast, and their feet would reach to my pubic bone. My heart would beat into every bit of their bodies. I'd lay my hands upon them, gently, lightly, cradling the tiny butts and legs, and spread a wrung washcloth over them to keep their little backs warm.

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Note to “*Blessed*” and “Of Trinket, of Mary”:

These poems are part of a sequence called “The Trinket Poems,” which I wrote after acting the part of Trinket Dugan in “The Mutilated,” a little-known one-act play by Tennessee Williams which is part of a double bill called *The Slapstick Tragedy*. The paragraph below is from the preface to “The Trinket Poems,” written by the play’s director, Michele Cuomo.

In April 2002 I directed a production of *The Slapstick Tragedy* at the University of Mississippi, featuring Ann Fisher-Wirth as Trinket Dugan in “The Mutilated.” Trinket’s left breast has been removed. Her mutilation leaves her heart close to the surface. Celeste, her shoplifting prostitute companion, “exposes” Trinket’s mutilation, not only by scratching it on the bathroom wall, but also by slowly opening her heart. Trinket at first seeks to salve her wound with “the Christmas gift of a lover.” In our production, Trinket adorns herself with Mardi Gras beads and stretches them out to her drunken sailor, offering herself as a sacrifice in a Dionysian ritual; she returns to the spirit of the original Mardi Gras carnival, a valediction to *carne*, offering herself to indulge the sailor’s desire to rend her further. This ritual, however, is a failure, as the sailor and Trinket tear away from each other when Celeste’s screams interrupt them, and the sailor falls asleep. Trinket is then stirred by maternal longings, and mourns her missing breast for its ability to nourish. She transfers her desire back to the maternal, and feeds and comforts the starving, childlike Celeste. She passes wine and wafer to Celeste, and in that ritual of the mass, her room at the Silver Dollar Hotel becomes a sacred space where Trinket and Celeste can commune with the divine.

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“In Crescent” first appeared in *Iris: A Journal About Women* and is published in *Five Terraces* (Wind Publications, 2005).

“Moth” is published in *Five Terraces*.

“Devotions” first appeared in *Wind* and is published in *Five Terraces*.

“Kisses” first appeared in *Flyway* and is published in *Five Terraces*.

“Daughters” was published in *Blue Window* (Archer Books, 2003).

“Raccoons, A History” was published in *Blue Window* and in *Elemental South: An Anthology of Southern Nature Writing*, ed. Dorina G. Dallmeyer (University of Georgia Press, 2004).

“At McClure’s Beach” first appeared in *Poetry International* and is published in *Five Terraces*.

“*Blessed*” and “Of Trinket, of Mary” were first published in *The Trinket Poems* (Wind, 2003) and are republished in *Five Terraces*.

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Mother Outlaws ***Theories and Practices of Empowered*** ***Mothering***

Andrea O'Reilly, ed.
Toronto: Women's Press, 2003

Reviewed by Silke Frischmuth

Following Toni Morrison's advice to "write the books that I wanted to read" (3), Andrea O'Reilly has assembled essays—previously published in the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* and her own edited books—in a volume for use in courses on mothering and motherhood. *Mother Outlaws* is a significant contribution to the theory on empowered mothering and helps fill a gap in theoretical works on this subject.

O'Reilly takes up the key distinction that Adrienne Rich makes between the patriarchal institution of motherhood that is oppressive for women, and a women-centered style of child-rearing that empowers women. O'Reilly contends that mothers, in order to experience mothering as empowering, have to separate themselves from the ideal of the "good" mother and become "bad" mothers, or "mother outlaws." Mother outlaws are women who raise their children in opposition to the normative motherhood ideal of the always present and self-sacrificing mother.

The book consists of five sections that cover the following topics: feminist mothering; lesbian mothering; African-American mothering; mothers and daughters; and mothers and sons. In her excellent introduction, O'Reilly traces the history of normative mothering practices in North America since World War II, and points out that motherhood is a cultural practice rather than a biological function (5). She discusses the ideology and practice of intensive mothering that emerged in the 1980s, with its focus on the perceived needs of the child. The author emphasizes that the "discourse of intensive mothering becomes oppressive not because children have needs, but

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because we, as a culture, dictate that only the biological mother is capable of fulfilling them” (11). Empowered mothering, in contrast, “recognizes that both mothers and children benefit when the mother lives her life and practices mothering from a position of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy” (12). In each of the five sections, the essays explore topics related to alternative mothering styles. They show how women of all races, classes, and sexual orientations are exposed to, accept, resist, or negotiate the dominant discourse of “sacrificial motherhood.”

I was especially interested in the essays on African-American mothering which construct a mothering style that differs completely from the white middle-class ideal of intensive biological mothering. The essays show how traditional African-American women-centered mothering, community, and other-mothering benefit women, children, and communities alike.

Another essay that stands out is Paula Caplan’s “Don’t Blame Mother – Then and Now.” Caplan discusses the mother blame inherent in the dominant psychological discourse and how it characterizes anything related to mothers as pathological and devoid of value. She uncovers the scapegoat function that mothers fulfill in North American society, assigning them the blame for such social problems as crime. Her harsh criticism of psychoanalysis, and the ways in which psychiatrists decide who is “normal,” is refreshing for every mother torn between her interest in education or paid work and her alleged duty to live only for her children.

This first Canadian volume of scholarly work on empowered mothering is a must for anyone interested in the contradictions that underlie the experience of mothering and the institution of motherhood.

The Grand Permission *New Writings on the Poetics of Motherhood*

Patricia Dienstfrey and Brenda Hillman, eds.
Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003

Reviewed by Teresa Ottewell

Patricia Dienstfrey and Brenda Hillman’s anthology, *The Grand Permission: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood*, is a compelling collection of women’s writing that belongs on the bookshelf of every mother who yearns to find ways to “get through the day with an intact sense of self.” *The Grand Permission* speaks succinctly to the experiences of women attempting to maintain a creative, soul-affirming existence amidst the conflicting time and emotional

demands inherent in the role of mother.

The editors asked 32 contributors to describe the dynamic connections between motherhood and creativity. Through the insightful and intimate exploration of self and (m)other, the authors' perspectives on the challenges of early parenting, on managing shifting priorities, on the loss of personal space, time, and freedom, and on the profound personal growth and development that motherhood offers, will resonate with any mother involved in creative pursuits.

Maxine Kumin opens the anthology by recalling her struggle to be regarded as a legitimate artist in 1950s middle-class America, when most female poets were childless (she had three children) and where the domestic form (which Kumin and fellow poet Anne Sexton used when writing about children, mothering, and emotion) was considered inferior. Toi Derricotte's stunningly frank account of being eighteen, middle-class, pregnant, and black in the 1960s strikes a strong chord about the perceived shame of a young mother in the pre-feminist era. Derricotte could not write of her experience until her son was sixteen.

Writers also consider the difficulty of being bound to structure and form, poetic or (m)otherwise, during motherhood. Mary Margaret Sloan writes that all boundaries were clear before she had a child; as a writer she "could withdraw into my solitary fastness of silence, to observe, think, read, and dream from my own point of view." Once her child was born, however, she felt "the rupture of my personal boundaries, the conquering of my keep of quietude, the assault on the solitary, inner directed self I hadn't even realized I possessed. . . . how could I even know who I was, or what I was thinking, or what I wanted to do if I weren't able to occupy my single point alone, if I had to share it with another person?" For Kimiko Hahn, being a mother-poet allowed her to be more fragmented, which brought her to writing Japanese *zuihitsu* poetry, a form that literally means to follow the impulses of the brush. Hahn states "fragmentation suits me because I love long pieces into which I can come and go as I please. Compartmentalized not unlike my own life of mother, wife, teacher . . . writer."

Alicia Ostriker writes that we learn to speak through our mothers, for "language is female. Silence is masculine. Masculinity is silence." Lullabies, baby talk, storytelling, rhyming games, and staccato toddler conversations become the poetics of motherhood in Frances N. Phillips's essay "Allowance." In our daily caregiving roles, these authors assert, we are all creative, even if that means being creative with our time and energy management. Dale Going writes that she "never figured out, as mothers who write must, how to act and reflect in the same time/space. How to live/how to write, without the slash." Going's observations capture the experience of creative mothers everywhere who cannot find the "uninterrupted time in which to be receptive to revelation."

In *The Grand Permission*, the rich inner and outer experiences of the writer/mother are wonderfully articulated. Beautiful and eloquent, the anthology is a delight to read.

Mothering Occupations Challenge, Agency, and Participation

Susan A. Esdaile and Judith A. Olson, eds.
Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 2004

Reviewed by Wendy Cater

Mothering Occupations is a wonderfully readable book to be savoured at one sitting or dipped into regularly for its many pleasures. Editors Susan Esdaile and Judith Olson describe their aim—to investigate mothering “through the lens of the helping professions from a feminist phenomenological perspective”—and argue that “the authors in this text do not speak for mothers, but they speak out for mothers.” Each chapter comprises an introduction, stories about the various experiences of three mothers/mothering experiences which pertain to the chapter content, a succinct explanation of the theoretical context of each section, a description of the challenges raised by the chapter, and anticipated outcomes for readers.

In “Mothering in the Context of Unpaid Work and Play in Families,” for example, Loree A. Primueau anticipates that readers will achieve the following outcomes after studying the chapter: readers should be able to a) define mothering; b) discuss the literature and research findings related to divisions of unpaid work in families; c) distinguish between traditional and nontraditional gender ideologies and gender practices; d) identify work and discuss two types of parental strategies used in mothering in the context of unpaid work and play in families; and e) describe parental participation in play within household work.

Mothering Occupations is an antidote to books that tell mothers the “right” way to do things. It includes the stories of five families and their respective experiences of play and work within the home that range across the spectrum of traditional and nontraditional approaches to family life. Moreover, the book validates a mother’s individual commitment, as Sara Ruddick suggests, “to meet three universal demands of children for preservation, nurturance and training to take their place in society irrespective of gender, biology or social role.”

The volume traces the lifetime continuum of mothering that women embark upon from the moment of conception through, for example, to caring for children with disabilities. It also considers mothers who are physically debilitated or mentally ill. The authors’ inclusive language enhances a reader’s awareness and understanding of the possibilities of mothering. The chapter “Mothering across the Lifecourse” is particularly insightful as it acknowledges that mothering is a tenured position. Each chapter concludes with a list of suggested readings that is especially useful. I found *Mothering Occupations*

readable and informative and would recommend it to professionals working with families, parents, and parents-to-be.

Women and Children First *Feminism, Rhetoric, and Public Policy*

Sharon M. Meagher and Patrice DiQuinzio, eds.
Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005

Reviewed by Tatjana Chorney

This collection of twelve essays is an important contribution to feminist scholarship and contemporary cultural and political discourses shaping how we see mothers and children in the context of citizenship. The essays use a variety of feminist theoretical frameworks to analyze the rhetoric of heretofore unexamined American and Canadian public policies proposing “to put women and children first.” The essays reveal the paternalistic and “masculinist” logic underlying these policies whose real effect is disempowerment—sometimes harm—to those they ostensibly seek to protect. The book demonstrates in compelling ways that individual realities are linked to wider social realities, and advocates greater critical scrutiny of how the discourses of modern liberal individualism often obscure this crucial interdependence.

The collection is divided into five sections. Part one, “(Mis)Representations of the Domestic Sphere: State Interventions,” features discussions focused on the co-optation of feminist discourse in the rhetoric of American homeland security and defense against terrorism; the oppressive and exclusionary nature of the heteronormative family ideology in public policy as manifested in the Census; and the use of international human rights discourse in domestic violence cases whose rhetoric erases power differentials, reinforces constructs of middle-class motherhood, and calls for increased surveillance of poor families.

Of the two essays in part two, “Medical Discourses and Social Ills,” one documents through cases studies the tragic effects of the promotion of a rigid conception of sex and gender for parents of “intersexed” children; the other analyzes depression in women as a “social” rather than an individual phenomenon, finding its causes in contemporary culture whose persistent patriarchal values continue to devalue and debase women and mothers in ways that “colonize psychic space” (100).

The essays in part three, “Subjects of Violence,” reveal how a culture with traditional masculinist values celebrates violence when used “properly” in the service of protection, without acknowledging that “protection and predation are intimately linked to one another” (123), as well as remind us—by uncovering

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the ambiguity in Battered Women Syndrome—that domestic violence is a social problem, not located exclusively in individual pathologies.

Parts four and five are more directly focused on the theoretical and practical implications of motherhood. In part four, “Mothers, Good and Bad: Marginalizing Mothers and Idealizing Children,” the authors show how the rhetoric of child protection agencies in Canada implies that the women referred to as “toxic moms” produce children who end up in the sex trade, and explore the disagreement in public policy over what counts as harm and under what circumstances a mother should be held accountable for making risky choices during pregnancy. The authors of essays in part five, “Protesting Mothers: Politics under the Sign of Motherhood,” argue that motherhood did not afford women a platform from which they could articulate a meaningful critique of the military state during the Gulf War, and that the deployment of the “essential” motherhood discourse during the Million Mom March in 1995 obscured the extent to which “individualism itself defines subjectivity in terms of situations and experiences more typical of men than of women” (229).

All twelve essays “interrupt dominant discourses by deconstructing their logic” (133). *Women and Children First*, a book I highly recommend, offers a set of much needed perspectives on contemporary society.

The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?

Miriam Peskowitz.
Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005

Reviewed by Jessica Smartt Gullion

If the media are to be believed, there is an ongoing battle between stay-at-home mothers and working mothers. Which mother is better? Who provides the best environment for her children? Mothers are constantly judging each other in the quest to be declared the best.

In *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars*, Miriam Peskowitz deconstructs the much-hyped Mommy Wars. In truth, writes Peskowitz, mothers cannot be divided into two neat, opposing groups. Many mothers alternate between staying at home full-time, working for pay full-time outside the home, and taking on part-time paid employment, sometimes done at home and sometimes done outside the home. The result of this fragmentation is that mothers divided do not band together and insist on social changes that would benefit all parents. Yet, as Peskowitz demonstrates, social change is needed.

Public discourse has relegated the subject of parenting to the realms of personal choice and private responsibility. Yet the “choice” to parent has

significant public consequences. Parents who opt to either stay out of the paid workforce or work part-time lose social security and other benefits. Employers also lose, particularly when trained employees feel they must leave their jobs because they are not given the options of reduced or flexible work hours. Parents (most often mothers) struggle to “do it all”: to have a career and raise children, to have enough money to support the family and enough time to devote to it. *Mothering in America* is not an isolated task, Peskowitz writes—it is deeply engrained into social, cultural, economic, and political issues. Yet these issues are not fully discussed publicly. For the most part, mothering is featured in the media as yet another style issue.

Peskowitz makes a concerted effort to include the concerns of mothers from diverse backgrounds (with the exception of lesbian mothers). She examines the early feminist movement and the split between the concerns of working-class and middle-class mothers. She also attempts to reframe the problem of work-life balance as a parenting problem, rather than a mothering problem, although she acknowledges that the majority of parenting is done presently by mothers.

Consciousness-raising is a powerful tool for changing systems of oppression. Peskowitz challenges us to move beyond the Mommy Wars to make social structural changes that will benefit all parents. She envisions a “playground revolution”: “Motherhood can feel so private, so isolating. How then do we connect it with building new playgrounds and political activism and changing public policy? This is our challenge, the next feminist challenge, the work left to do.”

Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970

The Maternal Dilemma

Ann Taylor Allen
Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

Reviewed by Fiona Joy Green

In *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970*, history professor Ann Taylor Allen explores the “maternal dilemma” facing women living in western Europe during the twentieth century, namely their ability to be mothers and autonomous individuals. Drawing on her extensive knowledge of women’s history and feminist movements—mainly in Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands—Allen pens an enlightening, if non-academic, examination of how motherhood came to be perceived as freely chosen.

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The first section of Allen's book considers the pre-First World War years, 1890 to 1914. Chapter one provides an excellent overview of the maternal role as read by feminist scholars who challenged the notion of universal subordination of women and mothers in prehistoric times with a maternalist understanding of motherhood as the highest form of human achievement, thereby confirming women's powerful positions in the private and public realms. Chapters two and three trace efforts made by feminists to increase the legal status of mothers (married or unmarried), and their demands for economic independence for wives and mothers whose subordination was understood to be rooted in their economic dependence on men. Chapter four considers how the view of mothering as public duty contributed to a new definition of motherhood that included personal choice, the reproductive rights of women, and the role of the state in these matters. Chapter five considers the effects of the First World War on feminist approaches to motherhood and reproduction that safeguarded the lives of mothers and children, as well as the independent employment of mothers in traditionally male-dominated jobs.

The interwar years 1918 to 1939 are the focus of the next three chapters, which begin with feminists challenging the social ideal of the full-time mother in a compassionate marriage and acknowledging the triple burden of marriage, motherhood, and employment. They offer a view of motherhood that combines a caring commitment to children and a career, particularly in the dirty thirties when attacks on working mothers increased due to the high rate of male unemployment. Chapter seven addresses birth control movements and their creation of the new ideal of heterosexual marital bliss and parent-child intimacy that undermined the maternalist view of motherhood as a public service. Chapter eight explores feminist responses to the contradictory understanding of motherhood by the emerging field of psychiatry: that motherhood is a normal, biological imperative, but mothers need the advice of experts if they want to avoid harming their children.

The final section addresses three major developments of the period 1945 to 1970: (i) new laws affecting mothers, children, and female reproduction; (ii) the presence of mothers in the labour force; and (iii) the feminist rebellion against maternity. Allen argues that parental rights of mothers, state benefits to families, the legalization of birth control, and psychological theories that redefined motherhood as a finite job rather than a lifetime identity supported a new emphasis on women's personal liberty and self-realization. Allen concludes that the difficulty of reconciling maternal and familial responsibilities with individual aspirations continues today.

For readers interested in social history, policy, law, and feminist movements, this book provides insight into the work of feminists on issues of motherhood, as well as the history of feminism over an era of great social and economic change. It also offers a macro view of the social, political, and economic contexts that shaped the work of feminists.

In the Middle of Everything *Memoirs of Motherhood*

Michelle Herman
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005

Reviewed by Jane Satterfield

In her 1994 book, *Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourses about Motherhood*, Tess Cosslett showed how deeply embedded cultural assumptions shape women's attitudes toward mothering. When women compose childbirth stories—in person or in print—as narrators they are always “making use of, but also questioning existing ideologies.” Childbirth is both a turning point and a narrative crisis that “destroys, confirms or creates a woman's sense of identity.” This narrative crisis—and the mother's subsequent recreation of identity—provides a focal point for Michelle Herman's *In the Middle of Everything: Memoirs of Motherhood*.

A writer and professor, Herman's memoir begins aptly, not with birth, but in the middle of things—the end of an ordinary, chaotic day in the Midwestern home she shares with her painter husband (“the only person I ever lived with, other than my parents, and now our daughter”). Herman and her daughter Grace, then eight, share a familiar mother-and-child bedtime scene: the child singing Britney Spears lyrics, talking about her first crush, asking her mother about the nature of love. This simple appeal takes Herman back to her past—her Brooklyn childhood of the 1950s and '60s, a romantic life of dating, and her passionate pursuit of an artistic vocation—vividly recreated in careful detail to explore the particular confluence of place and time that shapes this mother's and her generation's identity.

An accomplished storyteller, Herman's multilayered narrative moves back and forth in time from early adolescence, when her mother suffered a temporary but debilitating depression, to her own imperfect present. Herman's efforts to mother are met with unexpected challenges—her daughter's hunger strike at three months and a near-breakdown triggered by “separation/individuation issues” at age six. Having succeeded—having “managed to completely fulfill my daughter”—Herman confronts the difficult truth that it might not be so clear whose needs she has satisfied.

At the centre of *In the Middle of Everything: Memoirs of Motherhood* is Herman's voice—witty, insistently inquisitive, and deeply engaged in daily life. As she reflects on the joys of teaching, the enduring value of friendships, the dynamic evolution of mother and child, and her own misguided assumptions about every aspect of life, Herman's narrative affirms her conviction that love “improves you.” She suggests that the problems associated with motherhood are, in fact, “problems of humanhood: the experience of being alive and joyful,

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or suffering, or in doubt or in a cloud of gloom or worry, or living through a moment of quiet, perfect pleasure.”

**From Motherhood to Mothering
The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born***

Andrea O'Reilly, ed.
Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004

Reviewed by Monika Lee

This book is a thought-provoking array of disparate though wide-ranging essays, some of which are only tangentially connected to Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). The strength of the volume, however, lies in the diversity of perspectives and disciplines addressed: sociology, law, feminist theory, literary criticism, sexual politics, poststructuralist theory, and autobiography are all brought to bear on the discussion. Unfortunately, this reader was often left wishing for more thematic consistency or focus on the subject of the collection. The volume's introduction, for instance, might have established some of the lines of Rich's book's huge influence on culture and critical thought. Nonetheless, O'Reilly's introduction is readable and provides a comprehensive overview of the terminology of motherhood/mothering that has emerged from the legacy of Adrienne Rich's "ovarian" text. Insofar as O'Reilly documents her emotional and visceral response to *Of Woman Born*, the introduction is quite compelling; her reactions of outrage and awakening are clearly more than individual responses, for they have arisen in many of Rich's readers. O'Reilly also provides the requisite preview of the essays which constitute the rest of the book.

Even essays little concerned with Adrienne Rich are well worth reading. Margaret Morganroth Gullette's, "The Broken Shovel: Looking Back at Postmaternity at Co-Parenting," has little overt connection to Rich, but is a well-written and moving retrospective account of feminist co-parenting. Similarly, Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke's essay stands out as nuanced and provocative, although it too treats *Of Woman Born* only tangentially. Watson-Franke provides an anthropological overview of the few extant matrilineal societies in the world today and the ways in which these societies are empowering of mothering.

The collection is divided into three parts with part one, "Motherhood as Institution: Maternal Power and Maternal Outrage," focusing on the political implications of state reproductive control. Diana Ginn's essay offers a persuasive analysis of connections between Rich's ideas and Canadian court decisions

in 1997 and 1999 which help to protect women from the institutionalized patriarchal constraints of cultural mother-blame. Sarah E. Stevens critiques the dangerous schism between public and private that, in China, has reinforced patriarchy at the expense of maternal power. Emily Jeremiah's essay on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* considers both the advantages and the limitations of Adrienne Rich's thinking in relation to the racial and violent instances of mothering depicted in Toni Morrison's novel about child murder.

Part two, "Mothering as Experience: Empowerment and Resistance," takes up the bulk of the volume with seven essays, and draws attention to the many ways in which *Of Woman Born* might empower mothers. Dannabang Kuwabong's feminist and matrilineal reading of Mojica's play, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, provides a valuable corrective to Rich's focus on European patriarchal constructions of history, but it does so with occasionally distracting stylistic and grammatical errors which more rigorous editing could easily have eliminated. Fiona Green's essay on "Feminist Mothers" presents interesting anecdotal evidence of patterns of feminist mothering, albeit with some intellectually woolly identifications of patriarchy with every other form of social injustice. Karin Voth Harman's "Immortality and Morality in Contemporary Reworkings of the Demeter/Persephone Myth" examines the explosion in literature dealing with the mythic mother/daughter pair as a collective response to Rich's cry for the unwritten stories of mothers and daughters. Editor O'Reilly's own constructive essay on "Mothering against Motherhood" draws our attention to Rich's unique role as the theorist of an integral connection between feminist child rearing and the emancipation of mothers and, by building on Rich's argument, proposes actual strategies for achieving better results than mothers have effected in the past. The best discussion in this section is Kate McCullough's "Motherhood outside Institutionalized Heterosexuality"; it is well researched and well organized, and it integrates Rich's work throughout its own argument that resistance to institutional motherhood is "a work-in-progress." The specific question of the extent and nature of Rich's influence is convincingly addressed here.

Part three, "Narrating Maternity: Writing as Mother," is the strongest section of the book with three of its best essays: D'Arcy Randall's reading of *Of Woman Born* as a text of literary criticism, Jeanette E. Riley's fine overview of Rich's poetry, and Ann Keniston's theoretical analysis of the authenticity and candour in the "prose articulation of a lyric impulse" (233) in *Of Woman Born*. Riley's "A 'Sense of Drift': Adrienne Rich's Emergence from Mother to Poet" is a model of rigour and thoroughness with respect to Rich's actual historical impact and provides an excellent summary of Rich's poetic development while integrating *Of Woman Born* into the discussion. Keniston in "Beginning with 'T': The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*" picks up Rich's and O'Reilly's autobiographical threads to analyze the element of memoir in Rich's text. Keniston's is one of the best essays in the collection, and its conscientious reading of Rich, through balanced and sophisticated treatments of feminism,

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autobiography and theory, is most welcome and, because it raises questions for further consideration, such as feminism's own essentializing tendencies, Keniston's essay is a suitable finale to a comprehensive volume.

**The New Midwifery
*Reflections on Renaissance and Regulation***

Farah M. Shroff, ed.
Toronto: Women's Press, 1997

Reviewed by Jan E. Thomas

For generations, Canadian midwives have assisted women during pregnancy and birth; only recently, however, have they done so with state recognition. The essays included in *The New Midwifery: Reflections on Renaissance and Regulation* discuss the process of legislating midwives in Canada and the implications of state regulation for midwives and mothers.

The first section of the book introduces issues of diversity and debate. One key concern is the newly created divisions between midwives. Cecilia Benoit's essay on professionalizing midwifery suggests that legislation has created three key points of contention within the midwifery community: midwifery training, regulation of practice, and organization of work. While midwives gained much by becoming autonomous professionals, they have also had to compromise some of the freedoms that went along with being independent of the health care system. Several essays draw attention to these issues and concerns.

The essays in the first section demonstrate how regulations do not affect all groups equally. Pat Israel's essay on mothers with disabilities provides a succinct and practical summary of specific issues that affect this group of women. An essay by an Aboriginal midwife illustrates the unique blending of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of birth and healing that is part of her culture. Other essays explore how legislation might impact immigrant women and midwives from the global South countries who live with the legacy of colonization, racism, and oppression.

The second section focuses on state regulation in six provinces with legislation in place by 1997. While essays concentrate on specific provinces, many common themes emerge. First, the importance of state support for midwifery (including funding) is made very clear. State support confers legitimacy on the profession and provides midwives with a place in the mainstream medical system. The celebration of state recognition, however, is tempered with concerns about the limitations of regulations. Many of these issues are raised in the first section and further illuminated by the case studies in the second section.

The issues of race, class, and gender are also woven throughout the book. At the time of legislation most midwives who were authorized to practice were white and middle class (like those most involved in crafting the legislation). Several essays discuss the need to incorporate more women of colour, Aboriginal women, and culturally relevant care to make midwifery services truly accessible to all.

Finally, the importance of women's voices is interlaced throughout the essays. In some cases, they are the voices of midwives who share the unique needs of women in their communities. More subtly, the collective voices of Canadian women who want their birth choices to be respected are heard, including the voices of women politicians, social scientists, and health workers who help contribute to this story of creating a model of midwifery care in Canada.

The strengths of this book are its inclusion of these diverse voices and its mix of practical, theoretical, and academic essays. *The New Midwifery* is appropriate for birth activists, midwives, and those interested in the broader context of midwifery care. It will be particularly useful for those grappling with the legalization of midwives in their own communities. The book provides important insights, lessons, and potential models. Regrettably, it was written soon after regulation went into effect and the long-term successes and failures of legislation are still unknown. Those stories remain for others to tell.

How to Avoid the Mommy Trap A Roadmap for Sharing Parenting and Making It Work

Julie Shields
Sterling, VA: Capital Books, 2003

Reviewed by Diana L. Gustafson

How to Avoid the Mommy Trap is hailed as “the essential guide for women who want to balance motherhood and life.” Clearly written, cleverly packaged, and humorous at times, lawyer and mother Julie Shields offers a roadmap to shared parenting that includes practical strategies for recognizing and avoiding the mommy trap. According to Shields, a woman is stuck in the “mommy trap” when she takes on a disproportionately greater share of parenting and household responsibilities with a disproportionately lesser share of leisure and personal time than her husband, and when she objects to this situation, believes it is unchangeable, and makes no plan for “getting unstuck” (14).

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The book draws on formal and informal interviews with 80 mostly suburban American couples aged 30 to 40 years in their first or second marriage. Most participants are educated—from high school to graduate school—and are well established in their careers. Based on her data, Shields classified couples as *traditional* (nurturer mothers and breadwinner fathers); *egalitarian* (parenting is shared); or *transitional* (a contentious middle ground where beliefs and values about parenting collide). Strategies for success are supplemented with professional resources and interviews with a range of family and child-care experts. Support for statistical claims and practical suggestions are drawn from sources as diverse as a 2001 Harlequin Romance e-survey about what women want, to studies by noted University of California at Berkeley sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild.

The book maps a staged plan for shared parenting, from courtship through to marriage, pregnancy, and new motherhood. Three composite case studies illustrate a variety of hazardous detours and productive routes: some as obvious as discussing the division of parenting responsibilities before baby arrives, and other more creative ways for women and their partners to negotiate positive change. Packaged for both the serious parenting journeyer and the casual tourist, there are Cosmo-type road signs (how to spot his gender ideology; a mommy trap diagnosis), a two-page resource of books and websites to visit, and a chapter on national parenting and child-care legislation of particular interest to American readers.

Unfortunately, this Dr. Phil-like self-help guide assumes that women are individually and collectively responsible for “getting stuck.” According to Shields, the most important reason why “women collectively have not negotiated good deals for themselves . . . is *low aspiration level* [emphasis in original]” (51). Women are described as ineffective complainers who “gripe,” “whine,” and are “unable to stop grouching” (10) because of their “failure to understand the wide range of options available to modern parents” (15). With disturbing regularity, these damning descriptors are juxtaposed with assertions about women’s collusion with, and unquestioning acceptance of, gender stereotypes in the media and social and economic inequalities in the workplace and the home. According to Shields, a woman chooses between getting stuck or unstuck in the mommy trap.

Feminists and other critical theorists agree that “choices spring from power, and those who have limited power have fewer choices” (Giroux 305). The uncomplicated, socially decontextualized understanding of women’s choices advanced in this book is deceptively attractive because it is skillfully packaged to appeal to women whose justifiable “complaint” is inequality in parenting and household responsibilities. This roadmap may be useful for readers with a critical lens to separate the individual from the systemic, and the social and economic power to choose among flex-time, part-time work with reduced income, and full-time nannies. For women with fewer choices, however, this roadmap may reinforce the negative and persistent message that

getting stuck or failing to get unstuck is a mother's choice and a woman's personal failure.

Reference

Giroux, H. A. 1997. "Rewriting the Discourse of Racial Identity: Towards a Pedagogy and Politics of Whiteness." *Harvard Educational Review* 67 (2): 285-320.

Abortion and Nation *The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland*

Lisa Smyth
Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005

Reviewed by Máire Leane

Abortion and Nation analyzes the ways in which abortion politics have been framed and reframed in Ireland over the past two decades. The discussions of abortion contained in three key daily newspapers, in parliamentary debates, and in the two governmental working-groups established on the topic provide the data sources on which Smyth's analysis is based. She argues convincingly that a hegemonic construction of Irish nationhood as essentially familial, Catholic, traditional, and heterosexual has shaped the nature of abortion debate in Ireland and has mitigated against the introduction of a right to reproductive choice.

In chapters four and five, Smyth demonstrates how during the successful 1983 campaign to introduce a constitutional ban on abortion, abortion was framed as a moral/religious issue with the anti-abortion stance constructed as representative of the traditional Catholic, familial ethos of the Irish nation. Within this frame, concerns for women's rights were marginalized while the rights of the foetus were strongly asserted.

As Smyth's analysis in chapters six and seven reveals, however, the 1992 "X case," and the outpouring of rage and compassion it generated, forced a reappraisal of this anti-abortion stance. "X," a fourteen-year-old girl pregnant as a result of rape, was prohibited by the Irish courts from travelling to England to procure an abortion. A subsequent Supreme Court decision permitted "X" to leave the country on the grounds that she was suicidal and that there was a substantial risk to her life. Smyth argues that following the "X case" press coverage of the abortion issue constructed the State as repressive. Furthermore,

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anti-abortion moral absolutism was replaced by considerations of the complex realities of abortion, and increasing press space was given to a reproductive rights discourse. Smyth's analysis of the parliamentary debate surrounding the "X case" and subsequent official responses to it reveals, however, an official reframing of abortion as a medical issue distinct from a moral/religious issue, and a political failure to engage with more complex understandings of abortion. Within this context, the reproductive rights discourse, which gained ground following the "X case," became marginalized as pro-abortion groups adopted the pragmatic strategy of arguing on the basis of women's needs for medical services as distinct from their right to make choices.

The outcome of this reframing of abortion was evidenced in the publication of the Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Bill in 2002. This proposed legislation allowed for abortion in the case of risk to a woman's life, rather than risk of self-destruction. A constitutional referendum reflecting this proposed legislation was rejected by a majority of less than one per cent in March 2002. Thus, after two decades of debate, a woman's right to abortion in Ireland exists only in the context of a serious medical threat to her life.

Smyth concludes that the various framings of abortion politics in Ireland since 1983 reflect an ongoing connection between abortion access and a politics of nationhood. Her reading of official responses to abortion—as a struggle to maintain a distinctive national identity while simultaneously meeting the standard of rights and compassion expected of a modern democratic nation-state—is original and exciting. Chapter One, which deals with the history of Irish abortion politics, and chapter two, which reviews feminist positions on abortion, are especially accessible to a general audience and could be read on a stand-alone basis. Overall, this work makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of material on abortion in Ireland and will engage readers interested in abortion, politics, sociology, or cultural studies.

A Lot to Learn

Girls, Women and Education in the 20th Century

Helen Jefferson Lenskyj

Toronto: Women's Press, 2005

Reviewed by Dorothy Lander

The appeal of this book, which author Helen Jefferson Lenskyj reveals on the first page of her Introduction, is its blend of biography and autobiography written as social history, and the opportunities it offers for comparing Lenskyj's mother's life and education with her own, and for comparing Australian and Canadian contexts of schooling and educational activism, especially anti-

homophobic activism. I wonder why Lenskyj waited until the last sentence of her book to tell the reader that the title, which references Lenskyj's commitment to anti-oppression teaching, is inspired by her mother's phrase, "We have a lot to learn" (165).

Lenskyj identifies many of the feminist, historical, and auto/biographical works that inspired her book project of retrospective adult memories and revisionist feminist life histories. Like Carolyn Steedman, one of the authors who inspired her, Helen Lenskyj explores both her mother's history and her own through contemporary theories of the lives of working-class people. Lenskyj delivers on her declared task of interpreting her mother's story and her own story through the sociological lens of women's history and education, community activism, and feminist pedagogy. She does not accomplish (to my satisfaction) the integrative and comparative links between social contexts—for example, public education in early twentieth-century private schools in Sydney, Australia in the 1950s; parent activism in 1970s Toronto; and, the feminist activist community in Toronto from the 1980s to the present day. On the basis of the Introduction, I expected Lenskyj to make strong generational comparisons of mother-daughter life histories. Yet Lenskyj's chapter-by-chapter narratives from each of these social contexts could stand alone as exemplars of individual life histories and feminist pedagogy.

In chapter one, formal education plays a relatively small part in her mother's life history; for example, her elementary education occupies about two pages and offers little by way of personal stories of the experience of this "free" and compulsory education for children aged six to fourteen in Australia in the early twentieth century. By contrast, her mother's informal education is a richly storied account that includes growing up in poverty, early training in thrifty household management under her grandmother's tutelage, her working life, and her life as a married woman and mother. Chapters two and three focus on Lenskyj's formal education at Australia's Kambala Foundation, a private school for girls. Given Lenskyj's choice of life history as her methodology, why are so many of her accounts of her teachers, including headmistress Miss Fifi Hawthorne, drawn from secondary sources? Lenskyj's vivid accounts of friendships with Kambala girls and sexual identity dilemmas, in which she was attracted to a girl in her class and subsequently to her teacher, anticipates her life history as an activist-educator in part two. She tells how she visited this teacher and her partner some 40 years later; the collapsed time frame anticipates her lesbian-feminist activism focused on curriculum transformation and anti-homophobia education from the perspective of a mother with young children in Toronto public schools and as an instructor in women's studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. These earlier chapters illuminate both the formal and informal systems of learning one's station in life in the context of one's formal education, imbricated with religion, gender, and sexuality, including "heterosexual hegemony" (67). I found myself trying to make comparative links with her mother's family history and informal

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education. The influence of mother and grandmother, for example, so central to her mother's life history, is conspicuously absent from Lenskyj's life history.

The tone and writing style change in part two as Lenskyj interlaces life history with increasingly academic discourses of feminist pedagogy, diversity, positionality, and anti-oppression. As a university distance education teacher, I also have learned to declare my "subject position" (156)—White, middle-class, heterosexual woman in my case—and I appreciated Lenskyj's personal positioning that introduces her stories of the promise and perils of confronting questions of difference (race, ethnicity, sexuality) in the context of teaching women's studies by teleconferencing. Her final reflections emphasize diversity issues in the present education of girls and women in Australia and Canada, without specific reference to her own or her mother's life histories.

I was disappointed that Lenskyj did not take up the life history focus that she promised in her Introduction and integrate her mother's life history with her own through the theoretical lens that is prominent in part two. It occurred to me that an academic analysis of difference on the basis of the subject position of "mother" would have effectively integrated the experiential and theoretical dimensions of this book and the distinctive tones of the two parts, allowing a tighter weave of the mother-daughter life histories that purport to be at the centre of this book.

Spirituality in the Mother Zone *Staying Centered, Finding God*

Trudelle Thomas
New York: Paulist Press, 2005

Reviewed by Colleen Carpenter Cullinan

Trudelle Thomas opens her powerful and wonderfully practical book with an anecdote instantly recognizable to anyone who has ever tried to balance a desperate and sincere desire for prayer time with the far more worldly demands of a wiggling preschooler. As her readers will no doubt know, there are no good solutions to that conflict, and the frustration and resentment it engenders are not exactly conducive to anything approaching a joyful, peaceful, blissfully transcendent worship experience. Yet as Thomas points out, despite such conflicts, becoming a mother leads many women to a "deeper, more passionate faith" (3)—just not one that can be contained in the structures of most Christian churches. And it is not just worship time that is often child-unfriendly and mother-unfriendly, Thomas argues, but more basically the theology and spirituality of traditional Christianity.

Luckily for Thomas, she was introduced early in her mothering to the writings of Elizabeth Johnson, a Catholic feminist theologian whose magisterial *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* is a brilliant corrective to patriarchal understandings of Christian faith that are almost entirely inaccessible to “the tired mother who craves spiritual food but must squeeze reading time between packing lunches and late night runs to the convenience store for milk” (4). Johnson’s book enabled Thomas to see the connections between her faith and her mothering, between the bodies and bloodiness that had suddenly become an everyday reality for her, when the Body and Blood of Christ that had nourished her for so long suddenly seemed painfully out of reach. With the help of Johnson’s insights and the wise and kind presence of Sister Miriam, an elderly nun (and the mentor we all dream of), Thomas struggled through the enormous changes in faith and practice that accompany the major life crisis called *matrescence*, or becoming a mother for the first time (27). Her reflections on that difficult and amazing journey are the heart of her book.

Thomas’s book is divided into three sections: “Beginnings,” which deals with the crisis of *matrescence* and the dangers women face navigating this major life change; “Clashes,” which looks at the conflicts between (patriarchal) social expectations and the lived reality of mothers and children; and “Imagining a Different Future,” in which Thomas both envisions a new environment in which to raise children and helps it come into being through reflections on new (female) images of God, spiritual practices that make sense for mothers and children instead of celibate males in community, and her hopes for child- and mother-friendly churches. Each section is rooted in her own experience, deeply practical in terms of what other mothers and mothers-to-be can take away for their own lives, and filled with spiritual wisdom. Finally, the bibliography at the end is an absolute treasure trove for both mothers and scholars interested in the connections between women’s spirituality and mothers’ lived experience.

Spirituality is a relatively new field of study in the academy; it is neither the study of religion nor the study of theology, and its methods and subject matter do not line up easily with its nearest scholarly relatives. Thomas’s central academic contribution here is the precise and beautiful way she has integrated the often social-scientific study of motherhood today with cutting-edge theological work on God-language, gender (human and divine), ecclesiology, ethics, and liturgy. I highly recommend her work for women’s studies courses, women and religion classes, courses in contemporary spirituality—and church-based women’s book groups. *Spirituality in the Mother Zone* would also make an outstanding gift for any mother, church-going or not, who is struggling to connect the day-to-day busy-ness of her life with something she identifies as Meaning, Mystery, or Spiritual Truth. It is invaluable both as reassurance to mothers who feel alone in their struggles, and as a rich theological reflection on mothers, motherhood, and the bodiliness of human living.

Fear of Food A Diary of Mothering

Carol Bacchi
North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2003

Reviewed by May Friedman

In *Fear of Food*, feminist academic Carol Bacchi records her extremely personal journey through the first year of her son's life. In doing so, Bacchi exposes some of the pervasive challenges facing mothers. The details of Bacchi's situation—her status as an older, single mother and the specific physical and medical challenges of her son—provide the context for this moving story.

Within the first months after his birth, Bacchi's son, Stephen, faced a number of medical challenges that resulted in his total rejection of food. In addition to the usual rigours of new motherhood (sleep deprivation, physical discomfort, overwhelming emotional reactions) Bacchi was faced with the very real possibility of her son wasting away. When she sought help, she was patronized by medical doctors who concluded that Stephen's major problem was that he had a "tense mother."

The great strength of this book is Bacchi's voice. Large portions of the book are direct transcriptions of Bacchi's diary and the feeding and sleeping records she rigorously kept in the year following her son's birth. These accounts are interspersed with her current perceptions, ten years later. Bacchi allows the reader to eavesdrop on the inchoate panic of her voice throughout this harrowing crisis, and balances its visceral narrative with her more polished, present-day analysis of the past. Throughout the book, Bacchi achieves a skilful mediation between her obvious adoration of her infant son with her terror and resentment at the ways motherhood has overtaken her life. She offers these contradictions to the reader in order to "prick the balloon of idealized mothering which makes it so difficult to admit, to oneself and to others, that mothering can be frightening, exhausting and even, at times, totally demoralizing" (xii). Bacchi's testimony is even more moving since it comes through her experience as an academic: as an "expert," her bewilderment in coping with her young son is intensified.

If the strength of Bacchi's text is in its intensely personal form, it is perhaps this same trait that leaves the book open to criticism. Bacchi is a relatively well-known feminist academic. Her past books include *The Politics of Affirmative Action* (1996) and *Women, Policy and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems* (1999). Given her background as a critical feminist author, it is somewhat frustrating that *Fear of Food* remains so intensely personal a memoir. Tantalizing glimpses are given of an analysis of the larger context within which mothering occurs. Overall, however, Bacchi skirts the issues that underpin her

story, including the absence of both formal and informal supports for new mothers, and the systemic hostility faced by mothers whose children present challenges that cannot easily be solved. Ideally, Bacchi will use this memoir as a starting point for further analysis into the issues hinted at within the text. Despite this criticism, *Fear of Food* is a moving and well-paced text that will resonate strongly for many readers.

Adopting Maternity: White Women Who Adopt Transracially or Transnationally

Nora Rose Moosnick
Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004

Reviewed by Dorsía Smith Silva

In *Adopting Maternity: White Women Who Adopt Transracially or Transnationally*, independent scholar Nora Rose Moosnick examines how the social constructions of race, gender, and class are connected to White women who engage in transracial or transnational adoptions. Focusing on interviews of a focus group of 22 White adoptive mothers, she interrogates their different adoptive processes based on the race of their adoptive child: White, Asian, Black, and Biracial. The text, divided in five chapters, aims to give readers a look into the multifaceted process of the adoptive experience and brings the narratives of White adoptive mothers into the public sphere.

In the first two chapters, Moosnick gives a brief overview of the historical perception of transracial and transnational adoption. She calls attention to the protest of the National Association of Black Social Workers during the 1970s when they challenged Black adoptions as “cultural genocide” (2) and how social workers “redefined” the ethnicity of Black and Biracial to make them more appealing to White adoptive families (3). According to Moosnick, racial attitudes have since changed; yet, there is still a greater preference among White adoptive mothers for “lighter skinned” children (13).

Moosnick also sets the stage for raising the critical issue of whether White adoptive mothers who participate in transracial or transnational adoptions are victims and/or victimizers. She finds that these mothers are socially perceived as saving the adoptive “child from the biological mother who is understood to be neither morally nor financially capable” (13). However, she also becomes a part of the power hierarchy, which gives greater privilege to White adoptive families because they are socially perceived as more fit and “legitimate” (24).

The third and fourth chapters explicate the role race plays in adoption. In

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particular, White children are “the hardest babies to acquire and Black ones the easiest” (55). Asian adoptions can also be lengthy, especially if White adoptive mothers go abroad. Moosnick also notes that adopting Black and Biracial children is the most difficult because of the need to consider the child’s racial identity and societal prejudice. She gives several accounts from the participants of the study group, which describe how their adoptive child experienced racist encounters. For many of the White adoptive mothers, they neutralized the racial incidents and dismissed the significance of race. Moosnick describes this dismissal as the White adoptive mother’s belief in color-blindness and promotion of social equality. She overlooks, though, the examination of how White adoptive mothers disregard race because of their unwillingness to acknowledge its importance.

The last chapter recaps the text’s premise about the interconnections of race, class, and gender with White adoptive women and transracial and transnational adoptions. While Moosnick does critically engage the issues of race, more in-depth analysis is needed with how class and gender factor into this distinct adoptive situation. She speculates in the Conclusion about these gaps in the text and how further research would enhance our knowledge of transracial and transnational adoptions.

Contributor Notes

Pamela Aronson is Assistant Professor of Sociology at University of Michigan-Dearborn. Her research examines the transition to adulthood, including the meanings of becoming an adult, women's work and family experiences, role models, and gender differences in career development. She also studies women's attitudes toward feminism, including women of the so-called "post-feminist" generation.

Patricia Bell-Scott is Professor of Child and Family Development and Women's Studies and an Adjunct Professor of Psychology at the University of Georgia in Athens. She was founding co-editor of *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* and principal editor of the award-winning anthology, *Double Stitch: Black Women Write about Mothers and Daughters*. She is co-editor of the first text in Black women's studies, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men: But Some of Us Are Brave*, as well as editor of *Life Notes: Personal Writings by Contemporary Black Women*, and *Flat-footed Truths: Telling Black Women's Lives*. She specializes as a teacher and writer in black women's narratives.

Mary Kay Blakely is an Associate Professor at the Missouri School of Journalism. She is the author of three books, including *American Mom—Motherhood, Politics and Humble Pie*, and her essays have been collected in numerous anthologies. A *Hers* columnist for the *New York Times* and currently a contributing editor to *Ms.* and the *Los Angeles Times* magazine, she has published essays and articles in *Mother Jones*, *Life*, *Working Woman*, *McCalls*, *Redbook*, *Psychology Today*, *Self* and many other publications. She now teaches Advanced Writing at the University of Missouri and is director of the New York Summer Journalism Program at the New School University.

Contributor Notes

Marguerite Guzman Bouvard is a Resident Scholar at Brandeis University's Women's Studies Research Center. She is the author of 14 books including *Revolutionizing Motherhood*; *The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, *Women Reshaping Human Rights*; *How Extraordinary Women Are Changing the World*, as well as five books and two chapbooks of poetry. She has had a number of residencies at the Leighton Artist Colony, the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts.

Ivana Brown is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. She is interested in the cultural production of motherhood and cultural and social structural effects on mothering and mothering experience. She is a mother of two children.

Arlene Campbell is an African-Canadian educator in the public school sector. She has also taught preservice, in-service and professional development courses at York University. A doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at York University, her major areas of research include Black feminist pedagogy, teacher education, mothering in the African diaspora, and life writing.

Paula J. Caplan, Ph.D., is the author of *THE NEW Don't Blame Mother: Mending the Mother-Daughter Relationship* and eight other books. She is a Visiting Scholar at the Pembroke Center for Research and Teaching on Women at Brown University and is former Professor of Applied Psychology and Head of the Centre for Women's Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. She is also a playwright, actor, and director, and her play, *CALL ME CRAZY*, includes a monologue delivered by "Amalia Freud" (Freud's mother) that is partly about mother-blame and being a mother. She lectures and teaches workshops about mothers and daughters, and has helped organized social and political action about various matters, including sexism in psychiatric diagnosis and in the use of psychotropic drugs.

Wendy Cater is a doctoral student studying at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia. Her thesis dissertation is about representations of single fathers in Australian fiction since 1990.

Tatjana Chorney completed her Ph.D. at the University of Toronto in 2003. She is currently Assistant Professor at Saint Mary's University, where she teaches courses in Renaissance Literature, Gender, and Literature and Society. She is also Adjunct Faculty for the Women's Studies Program and the Department of Criminology at Saint Mary's.

Suzanne M. Cox is a developmental psychologist and associate professor at Beloit College, a selective liberal arts college in Beloit, Wisconsin, USA. Her scholarly interests include quantitative and qualitative research on mother-

child interaction and attachment, childbirth, and children born “at risk.” She is the mother of three sons and one daughter.

Colleen Carpenter Cullinan received the Ph.D. in Religion and Literature from the University of Chicago Divinity School. She is author of *Redeeming the Story: Women, Suffering, and Christ* (Continuum, 2004) and lives in rural Minnesota, where she serves as lecturer and practical theologian at Earthrise Farm, a retreat center run by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She also teaches part-time at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, MN, and is currently researching the connections between ecology and beauty in the work of Canadian artist Emily Carr.

Patrice DiQuinzio is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of Women’s Studies at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, PA. She is the author of *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism, and the Problem of Mothering* (Routledge, 1999) and co-editor of *Women and Children First: Feminism, Rhetoric and Public Policy* (2005). Her articles on philosophical problems in theorizing motherhood and on motherhood as a model for citizenship have appeared in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* and *Women and Politics*. She is currently working on analyzing contemporary instances of US women’s civic engagement conducted under the sign of motherhood, such as the Million Mom March and Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Susan Driver is an Assistant Professor at York University. She works on intersections between feminist and queer theories and is about to publish a book on queer girls and popular culture.

Ann Duffy is Professor of Sociology and Labour Studies at Brock University. She is presently co-authoring a study on mid-life Canadian women with Sue Wilson and Nancy Mandell. Her research interests centre on women, employment and aging.

Rishma Dunlop is a professor of literary studies and education at York University, Toronto, and winner of the 2003 Emily Dickinson Award for poetry. She is the author of three books of poetry: *The Body of My Garden* (2002), *Reading Like a Girl* (2004), and *Metropolis* (2005). She is co-editor of *Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets* (2004), and editor of *White Ink*, an anthology of poems about mothers, forthcoming in 2007, published by ARM’s Demeter Press. She is also the author of a radio drama, *The Raj Kumari’s Lullaby*, commissioned and produced by CBC radio, published in *Where is Here?: The Drama of Immigration* (2005). She is the mother of two daughters.

Miriam Edelson is a social activist, mother and writer living in Toronto. Her

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creative non-fiction and commentaries have appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, *CBC Radio*, *This Magazine* as well as other periodicals. Born in New York, Edelson spent her teens in Toronto and completed graduate studies in political science at Carleton University. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies in sociology and bio-ethics at the University of Toronto. Her particular area of interest is social policy regarding the care of medically-fragile infants. Edelson has worked in the trade union movement since 1980, specializing in communications and human rights issues. She lives in Toronto with her daughter Emma.

Leanne Ralya Eleff has recently received her Master's Degree in Human Communication from Arizona State University. She is presently working to integrate full time motherhood with a burgeoning career in writing and academic research in the area of parenting and feminism.

May Friedman is a doctoral candidate in the School of Women's Studies at York University. In addition to her academic interests, May has worked as a social worker for the last few years. May is interested in the relationship between the state, feminism, law and moral regulation, particularly as these sites relate to social work.

Silke Frischmuth, Ph.D., is a student in the Department of Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. Her research interests include: women's mental and reproductive health; mothering; cultural representations of women and motherhood; mothers and paid work.

Cheryl Gosselin has been teaching at Bishop's University for the past 15 years in the Department of Sociology and Women's Studies. Her courses are in the areas of family, gender studies, feminist theory and methodology, race and ethnicity and social justice. Her research interests include maternal politics, the Quebec women's movement, past and present, and rural women's activism, especially anglophone women in Quebec and their relationship to the state.

Marty Grace teaches practice, policy and research subjects in the social work program at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include homelessness and material aspects of mothering. She is an experienced mother and grandmother with broad interests ranging from quantitative research to quilting.

Fiona Joy Green is the mother of a teen aged son and the Coordinator of the Women's and Gender Studies Program at the University of Winnipeg. Her research on feminist mothering has been published in *Socialist Studies*, *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, *Mother Outlaws* (Women's Press), and *Motherhood to Mothering* (SUNY Press). Her most recent interests related

to mothering/motherhood lie in media representations of mothers, most notably in the new “reality shows.” A critical discussion on *Supernanny* can be found in an upcoming edition of *Storytelling: A Critical Journal of Popular Narrative* (Winter 2007).

Jessica Smartt Gullion earned her Ph.D. in sociology in 2002. Her research interests include the critical exploration of discrepancies between expert and lay knowledge and feminist theories of motherhood. She is the mother of two preschoolers.

Diana L. Gustafson is an Assistant Professor, Faculty of Medicine, Division of Community Health and Humanities and affiliate faculty in the Women’s Studies Program at Memorial University. Together these positions allow her to pursue her commitment to equity and social justice in teaching, research, and community life. Her most recent book, *Unbecoming Mothers: The Social Construction of Maternal Absence* explores the ways women negotiate their lives apart from their children and how they attempt to recreate their identities and family structures.

D. Lynn O’Brien Hallstein is an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric at Boston University, Boston, MA, USA and is the mother of two boys, four and eight.

Heather Hewett is Assistant Professor of English and Coordinator of the Women’s Studies Program at the State University of New York at New Paltz. She has work published or forthcoming in *Women’s Studies*, *MELUS*, *English in Africa*, *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, and an edited collection, *Chick Lit: The New Woman’s Fiction*.

Emily Jeremiah studied Modern Languages at Exeter College, Oxford and gained a Ph.D. in German Studies from the University of Wales Swansea. She has taught at universities in Finland and Britain. Her research interests include feminist theory, literature, translation, and queer theory. She lives in London, where she is working on a novel.

Miriam Johnson is a retired Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon whose teaching and writing has been focused on gender and the family throughout her career. She is the author of a book entitled *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives* and co-author with Jean Stockard of a text on sex and gender. She and her husband of many years live in Oregon where they both taught sociology. They have two children, one married and one single. Currently she is affiliated with the Council on Contemporary Families, which attempts to get accurate research information out about the many different kinds of contemporary families besides the so called “ideal” nuclear family that now exist in the U.S. and Canada.

Contributor Notes

Dorothy Lander teaches in a Master of Adult Education program at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Her research focuses on the discourses and representations of women activists as educators and learners in historical and contemporary social movements, including temperance, cooperative, art-medicine, peace, anti-poverty, and palliative care/hospice movements.

Máire Leane, Ph.D., lectures on family policy, gender, sexuality, and motherhood in the Department of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, Ireland. Her current research interests include women in Irish society, sexuality and social policy, experiences of motherhood in Celtic Tiger Ireland and feminist oral history.

Monika Lee is an Associate Professor in the English Department at Brescia University College in London, Ontario. She is author of *Rousseau's Impact on Shelley: Figuring the Written Self* (1999), *slender threads* (2004 HMS Press), essays on Romantic, Canadian and medieval literature, and dozens of poems. She teaches the Family in Literature, an interdisciplinary course in Family Studies, Women's Studies and English.

Maureen Linker is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Women's and Gender Studies Program at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Her teaching and research interests include feminist theory, epistemology and the ethics of care and applications to mothering. She lives in the Detroit Metropolitan Area and is the proud mother of Jackson, her four and a half year old son.

Laura Major has just completed her Ph.D. through Bar Ilan University in Israel. Her dissertation focused on the pregnancy and childbirth poetry of contemporary American women. Her current research interests include: motherhood and literature, religion and literature, and autobiography. Laura is temporarily living in Minneapolis with her husband and four children.

Judith A. MacDonnell teaches at the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Toronto. She recently graduated with a Ph.D. in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education with a Collaborative Graduate Program in Women's Studies at the University of Toronto. This article is based on her life history research with politically active nurses.

Nancy Mandell is Associate Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at York University and currently Chair of the Sociology Department, Faculty of Arts. Her most recent research includes a co-authored study with Sue Wilson and Ann Duffy on the midlife involvement of Canadian women in work, family, health and the women's movement.

Carla J. McDonough, Ph.D., is a former tenured English professor who once commuted between Illinois and New York while pregnant with twins. She is now home fulltime, rearing three boys and writing. Her publications include *Staging Masculinity: Male Identity in Contemporary American Drama* and numerous articles and book chapters about various contemporary playwrights.

Amy Middleton works at Alberta's Provincial Health Ethics Network and is pursuing an MSc in Health Promotion at the University of Alberta. She holds undergraduate degrees in Philosophy (Wilfrid Laurier University) and Health Studies (York University). Her current research involves critically analyzing ideologies of "good" and "healthy" mothering in breastfeeding promotion programmes.

Carolyn Mitchell, professor of English and Director of women's studies, earned her Ph.D. from Boston College, her master's from Michigan State University and her bachelor's from Hunter College. The author of a number of books and articles, her interests include 19th- and 20th-century American literature, African-American literature, women's literature, women's studies, theory and criticism.

Andrea O'Reilly, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University, (Atkinson Faculty) where she teaches a course on motherhood (the first course on Motherhood in Canada). She is co-editor/ editor of seven books on Motherhood: *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns* (Second Story Press, 1998); *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment and Transformation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); *Mothers and Sons: Feminism, Masculinity and the Struggle to Raise our Sons* (Routledge Press 2001); *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* (SUNY, 2004); *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (Women's Press, 2004); *Mother Matters: Mothering as Discourse and Practice* (ARM Press, 2004); and *Motherhood: Power and Oppression*, (Women's Press, 2005). She is author of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, (SUNY, 2004); and *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Motherhood, Feminism, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering* (Demeter Press, 2006). She is currently completing three co-edited books on Feminist Mothering, Maternal Subjectivity, and Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Fiction and beginning one on the Mothers' Movement. As well she is working on a SSHRC-funded research project on "Being a Mother in the Academe." O'Reilly is founder and director of *The Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM). Founded in 1998, ARM is the first feminist research association on the topic of mothering-motherhood with more than 600 members worldwide. As well Andrea is founder and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* (the first and still only scholarly journal on motherhood). Both ARM and its journal are recognized

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around the world as the leading research centre/journal on motherhood. In 2005, she launched Demeter Press, the first feminist press on motherhood. In 1998 she was the recipient of the university-wide "Teacher of the Year" award at York University. She has given many talks and has been interviewed widely on the topic of motherhood. Andrea and her common-law spouse of 23 years are the parents of a 21 year old son and two daughters, ages 16 and 18.

Teresa Ottewell, M.Ed., is a writer, educator, and spiritual healer. Her writings focus on mothering and spirituality, and parenting as a conscious journey toward personal empowerment. She currently facilitates workshops in the Greater Toronto Area for parents of highly-aware children (labelled "Indigo," "crystal," ADD/ADHD, autistic, etc.) She can be reached through her website at www.millenniumfamilies.com.

Joe Paczusi teaches photography and literature at a high school in Toronto where he endeavours to integrate creativity with the arts of education, empathy and dignity. His poetry and photography have appeared in a variety of publications and venues. His photos grace book and journal covers. His poems have been broadcast over CJRT-FM and his latest collection, "The Blue Gravel of Stars," was published by LyricalMyrical Press.

Ruth Panofsky is Book Review Editor of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* and Associate Professor of English at Ryerson University where she teaches and researches in the areas of Canadian literature and culture. Her most recent book, *The Force of Vocation: The Literary Career of Adele Wiseman*, was published by University of Manitoba Press in 2006. She is also the author of *Lifeline*, a volume of poetry.

Elizabeth Podnieks is an Associate Professor (as of September 1, 2006) at Ryerson University, where she teaches and researches in the areas of life writing, women's literature, and twentieth-century literature and culture. She is the author of *Daily Modernism: The Literary Diaries of Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart, and Anaïs Nin* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000). She is the co-editor of *Hayford Hall: Hangovers, Erotics, and Modernist Aesthetics* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2005). She is also co-editing with Andrea O'Reilly the collection *Textual Mothers, Maternal Texts: Representations of Mothering in Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century Literatures*.

Elaine Porter is an Associate Professor at Laurentian University. As co-investigator of the WEDGE provisioning project, she is currently studying the provisioning work of women in disadvantaged communities. Past research includes a study of the effects on women's wellbeing following mine closures in a single-industry town.

Joanna Radbord is a lawyer with the firm of Epstein, Cole, and is a lesbian who is planning a pregnancy with her spouse. Her practice focusses on family law and gay and lesbian equality rights, and she is particularly interested in the legal regulation of lesbian mothering. Joanna was involved with *M. v. H.*, the first Supreme Court of Canada decision to successfully challenge the definition of “spouse” as restricted to opposite-sex couples. She was counsel to a lesbian father in *Forrester v. Saliba*, which states that transsexuality is irrelevant to a child’s best interests. She is currently co-counsel to the eight same sex couples seeking the freedom to choose civil marriage in Ontario.

Sara Ruddick is the author of *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. She has co-edited three anthologies, most recently *Mother Troubles: Reflections on Contemporary Maternal Dilemmas*. For many years she taught at The New School University in New York City where she lives.

Corinne Rusch-Drutz, Ph.D. (U of T), has taught in the Department of Theatre at York University and the Department of English at the University of Toronto. Recent publications include: “Stage Mothers: A Qualitative Analysis of Women’s Work Experiences as Mothers in Toronto Theatre” in the *Journal for the Association for Research on Mothering*; “Feminist Theatre in Toronto: A Look at Nightwood Theatre,” in *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women’s History in the Twentieth Century* (McGill-Queen’s 2001; 2004); “Uncovering a ‘Herstory’ of Power: Mediterranean Goddess Myth, Image and Symbol in Contemporary Canadian Women’s Playwriting,” in *Scripta Mediterranea*. Forthcoming articles include: “Good Female Parts: Analyzing the culture of institutionalized theatre scholarship,” in *Transformative Pedagogies: Feminism, Theatre, and Activism*, and “Maternal Bereavement, National Identity and Loss in Three Plays by Canadian Women” in *Theatrical Portrayal of Mothers: A Historical Tracking of Mothers, Mothering and Motherhood through the History of World Theatre*.

A. Joan Saab is an Associate Professor of Art History and the Director of the Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester. She is the author of *For the Millions: American Art and Culture Between the Wars* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) and a variety of articles on American art, and urban planning. She is currently working on two projects tentatively entitled *How to Take a Picture* and the *Parental Public Sphere*. She is married and has two children, Phineas (5) and Wilson (3).

Lori Saint-Martin is a professor in the literature department at the Université du Québec à Montréal. She has published two books of short fiction, *Lettre imaginaire à la femme de mon amant* (1991) and *Mon père, la nuit* (1999), French translations of six English-Canadian novels, in collaboration with Paul Gagné, and several books of non-fiction on women’s writing in Québec, including *Le*

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nom de la mère. Mères, filles et écriture dans la littérature québécoise au féminin (*The Name of the Mother: Mothers, Daughters and Writing in Quebec Women's Fiction*), 1999. Her current research project is on fathers and children in contemporary Québec fiction (supported by SSHRC grant). With Paul Gagné, she has two children, Nicolas, born in 1993, and Anna, born in 1995.

Jane Satterfield's poetry collections are *Assignment at Vanishing Point* (Elixir, 2003) and *Shepherdess with an Automatic* (WWPH, 2000). Essays from a new manuscript, *Motherland: A Year in Britain and Beyond* have received the *Florida Review's* Editors Prize for 2005, the Heekin Foundation's Cuchulain Prize for Rhetoric in the Essay and the John Guyon Award in Literary Nonfiction.

Silvia Schaltermandl is an adjunct professor in Women's Studies at Karl-Franzens-University Graz, Austria, where she obtained a Ph.D. in American Literature and Culture Studies in 2004. She has written extensively on contemporary multi-ethnic American literatures and is currently working on a book on transnational feminism in Asian American mother-daughter writing.

Dorsia Smith Silva is a Ph.D. candidate in Caribbean Literature and teaches English at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Pedras. Her current research interests include mothering in the texts of Jamaica Kincaid and Lorna Goodison.

Jan E. Thomas is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Kenyon College, Ohio. Her research focuses on women's health in the U.S. and maternity care in the U.S. and Sweden. Prior to becoming a sociologist, she worked as a health educator in hospital-based and feminist women's health centers.

Angela Trethewey (Ph.D., Purdue, 1994) is associate professor and assistant director of the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication. Her research, grounded in feminist and post-structuralist theories, explores the impact of contemporary discourses of work on women's embodied identities.

Lorna Turnbull is a graduate of the International School of Geneva (Switzerland), Queen's University, the University of Ottawa and Columbia University in New York City. She has taught and published in both law and women's studies. She is currently an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Law, University of Manitoba. She recently published *Double Jeopardy: Motherwork and the Law* which is recognized nationally and internationally as "essential reading" on motherhood and law. In addition to teaching and academic writing, she has been involved in social development at the grassroots level for most of her life. Currently she is involved as part of an advisory group on gender equality claims being litigated before Canadian courts and another group working for gender based analysis in the Manitoba budget process. Dr. Turnbull currently resides in Winnipeg with her partner and their three children.

Channa Verbian is a registered social worker and a doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology and Collaborative Womens' Studies (OISE/UT). Her research interests include critical multicultural and feminist psychotherapy practice, identity and white and/or Jewish women in interracial relationships. As well, she has a private psychotherapy practice in downtown Toronto and is the mother of two Black/White and Jewish children.

Leslie Wilson has a Master's in Communication and Culture, and she is currently working as a Research Associate in the Faculty of Community Services at Ryerson University. Her research interests include feminist identity, the women's movement, and women's health issues.

Sue Wilson, Ph. D. is Associate Dean of the Faculty of Community Services at Ryerson University and Professor in the School of Nutrition. She is a Sociologist whose research interests include women's work, the health and well-being of midlife women and spirituality supports used by women living with breast-cancer.

Ann Fisher-Wirth's second book of poems, *Five Terraces*, has just been released by Wind Publications. She is also the author of *Blue Window* and two chapbooks: *The Trinket Poems* and *Walking Wu Wei's Scroll*. Her poems have appeared widely in journals, online, and in anthologies. Her awards include a 2003 *Malabar Review* Long Poem Prize, and, in 2004, the Rita Dove Poetry Award, the Poetry Award from the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters, and a Mississippi Arts Commission fellowship. She teaches at the University of Mississippi.

Gina Wong-Wylie, Ph.D., is a Licensed Psychologist and an Assistant Professor in the Centre for Graduate Education in Applied Psychology at Athabasca University, and faculty member in the Campus Alberta Applied Psychology: Counselling Initiative, which is a collaborative partnership between University of Calgary, Athabasca University, and University of Lethbridge. Gina is interested in reflective practice, counsellor education and development, and women's issues, in particular, researching mothering experiences. Her private practice focuses on supporting women through maternal transitions. She has two young daughters and straddles academic work and family on a continual basis. She resides in Alberta, Canada.

HAPPY 10th ANNIVERSARY ARM!

The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) is thrilled to host our 10th Anniversary conference:

The Motherlode: *A Complete Celebration of Motherhood*

October 26-29, 2006

This conference promises to be our most comprehensive investigation of motherhood issues to date.

Confirmed Keynotes include:

- **Ann Crittenden**, author of *The Price of Motherhood* and *If You've Raised Kids, You Can Manage Anything*
- **Miriam Peskowitz**, author of *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?*
- **Andrea Doucet**, author of *Do Men Mother?*
- **Kim Anderson**, author of *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*
- **Lorna Turnbull**, author of *Double Jeopardy: Motherwork and the Law*
- and MANY MANY MORE!

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Registration TBC.

—Call for Papers—

NEW DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 1, 2006

The editorial board is seeking submissions for Vol. 9.1 of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM) to be published in Spring/Summer 2007.

The journal will explore the subject:

Young Mothers

The journal will explore the topic of Young Mothers from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. We welcome submissions from scholars, students, activists, artists, mothers and others who work or research in this area. We also welcome creative reflections such as poetry, short stories, and artwork on the subject.

Submission guidelines:

Articles should be 15 pages (3750 words).

Complete style guide is available on our website at:

<http://www.yorku.ca/crm/Journal/guide.htm>

Articles should be in WordPerfect or Word and IBM compatible.

**Please include your 50 word biographical note and a 250 word abstract with your submission.

For more information, please contact us at:

Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson, York University,
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3
Call us at (416) 736-2100 x 60366,
Email us at: arm@yorku.ca
Or, visit our website: <http://www.yorku.ca/crm>

To submit work to the journal, one must be a member of ARM and memberships must be received by November 1, 2006.

Call for Papers

The editorial board is seeking submissions for Volume 9.2 of the Journal of The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) to be published in Fall/Winter 2007.

The journal will explore the subject:

Mothering, Race, Ethnicity, Culture and Class

The journal will explore the topic of mothering, race, ethnicity, culture, and class from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. We welcome submissions from scholars, students, activists, artists, mothers and others who work or research in this area. We also welcome creative reflections such as poetry, short stories, and artwork on the subject.

Submission guidelines:

Articles should be 15 pages (3750 words).

Complete style guide is available on our website at:

<http://www.yorku.ca/crm/Journal/guide.htm>

Articles should be in WordPerfect or Word and IBM compatible.

**Please include your 50 word biographical note and a 250 word abstract with your submission.

For more information, please contact us at:

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726 Atkinson, York University,
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Call us at (416) 736-2100 x 60366,
Email us at: arm@yorku.ca
Or visit our website: <http://www.yorku.ca/crm>**

Submissions must be received by May 1, 2007.

To submit work to the journal, one must be a member of ARM.

—*Call for Papers*—

Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)
11th Annual Conference!

**Mothering and Creativity,
Mothering as Creativity:
Expression and Activism
October 26-28, 2007**

Deadline for Submissions: March 1, 2007

This conference will explore mothering and creativity as seen and expressed in literature, the arts, and popular culture. As well it will examine mothering as a creative act, in the context of childrearing and as related to activism and social change. Full details to follow.

We welcome submissions from scholars, students, activists, artists, mothers and others who work or research in this area. Cross-cultural, historical and comparative work is encouraged. We encourage a variety of types of submissions including academic papers from all disciplines, workshops, creative submissions, performances, storytelling, visual arts and other alternative formats.

If you are interested in being considered as a presenter, please send a 250 word abstract and a 50 word bio by **March 1, 2007** to: arm@yorku.ca.

**ARM is seeking Keynote Speakers for this conference.
Please send any/all ideas to arm@yorku.ca**

One must be an ARM member to present at the conference.
Membership forms and more information are available at
<http://www.yorku.ca/crm>

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—Call for Papers—

The editorial board is seeking submissions for Vol. 10.1 of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)* to be published in Spring/Summer 2008.

The journal will explore the subject:

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The journal will explore the topic of Caregiving and Carework from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. Topics can include (but are not limited to):

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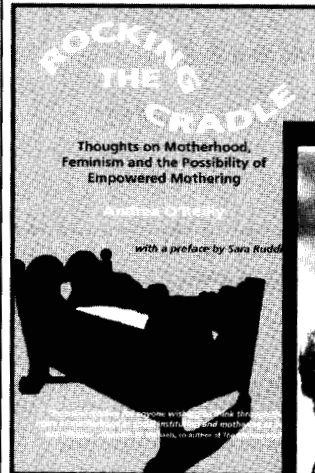
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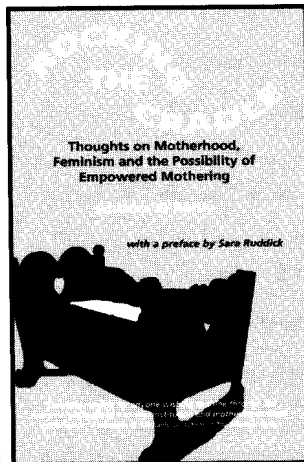
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Andrea O'Reilly



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Andrea O’Reilly is an Associate Professor of Women’s Studies, York University, Toronto and Director of the Association for Research on Mothering. She is the author of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, and editor of eight books on mothering including *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering*.

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**Jeanette Corbière Lavell is Ojibway First Nation, and member of the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island. Jeannette is one of the primary and founding Board members of: Ontario Native Women’s Organization (ONWA) and Indian Rights for Indian Women Native Women’s Organization of Canada. Currently, Jeannette teaches Fine Arts and Parenting at Wasse-Abin Wikwemikong High School.

**Dawn Memee Lavell-Harvard is currently working on her PhD at UWO, and is full time mother of two little girls, Autumn Sky (8 years) and Eva Lillie (14 months). Ms. Lavell-Harvard’s research addresses the epidemic of low academic achievement and high drop out rates among aboriginal populations in Canada.

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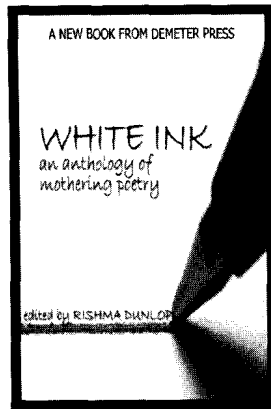
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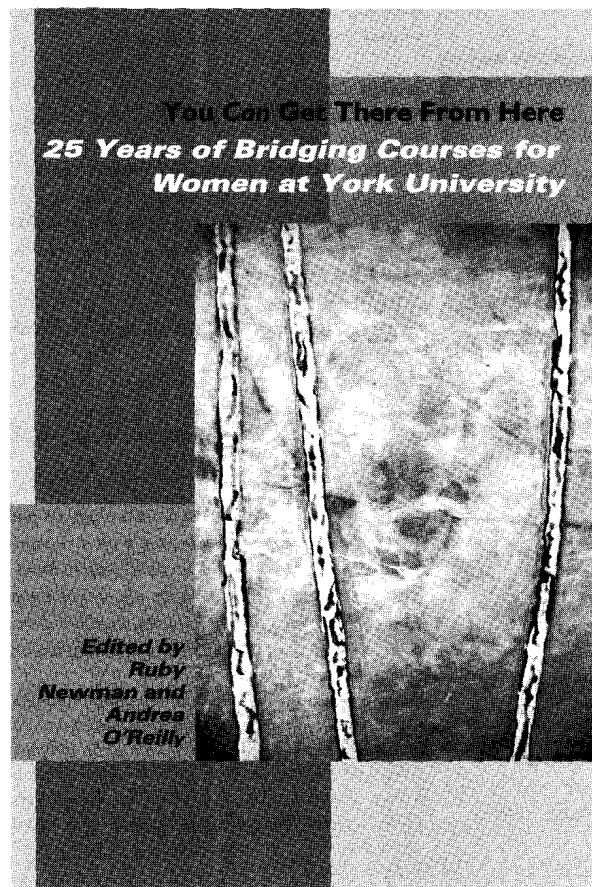
Rishma Dunlop is the winner of the 2003 Emily Dickinson Award. She is the author of three books of poetry: *Metropolis* (Mansfield Press, 2005), *Reading Like a Girl* (Black Moss Press, 2004) and *The Body of My Garden* (Mansfield Press, 2002). Rishma is also co-editor of *Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets* (Mansfield Press, 2004). She is a professor of literature and education at York University in Toronto, Canada.

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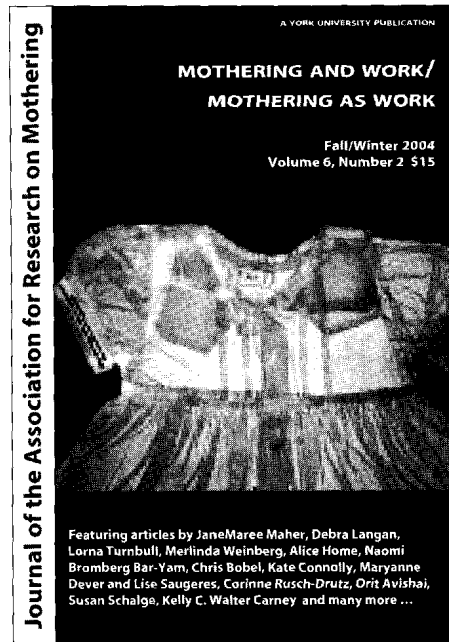


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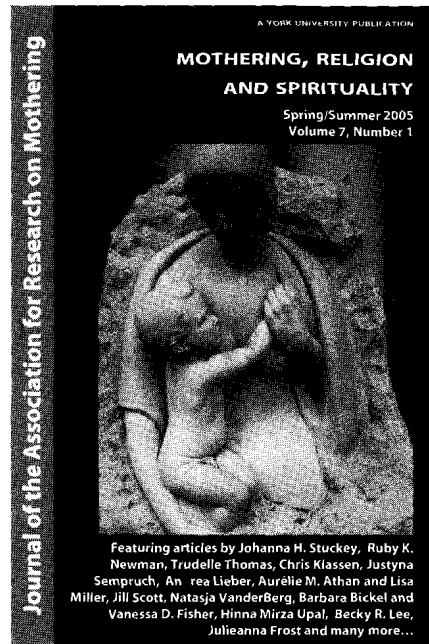


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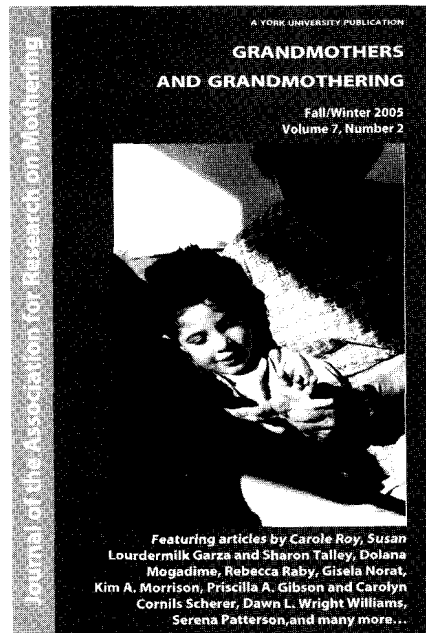


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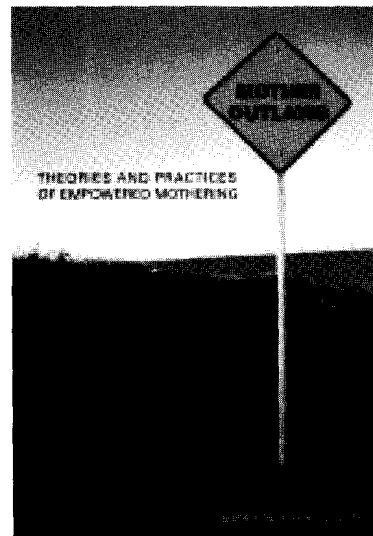


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Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering

Edited by Andrea O'Reilly



Andrea O'Reilly, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University. She is co-editor/editor of five books on Motherhood: *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns* (Second Story Press, 1998); *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment and Transformation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); *Mothers and Sons: Feminism, Masculinity and the Struggle to Raise our Sons* (Routledge Press, 2001); *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* (SUNY, 2004); *Mother Matters: Mothering as Discourse and Practice* (ARM Press, 2004); and author of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart* (SUNY, 2004). O'Reilly is founding president of the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM); the first feminist association on the topic of mothering-motherhood with more than 600 members worldwide, and is founding and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*. Andrea and her common-law spouse of twenty-three years are the parents of three children.

Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* distinguished between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential* relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution* which aims at ensuring that that potential and all women shall remain under male control. The term motherhood refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word mothering refers to women's experiences of mothering which are female-defined and centred and potentially empowering to women. The reality of oppressive motherhood thus must be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of empowered mothering. While most feminist scholars now distinguish mothering from motherhood and recognize that the former is not inherently oppressive, empowered mothering has not been theorized in feminist scholarship.

The theory and practice of empowered mothering recognizes that both mothers and children benefit when the mother lives her life, and practices mothering, from a position of agency, authority, authenticity and autonomy. Secondly, this new perspective, in emphasizing maternal authority and ascribing agency to mothers and value to motherwork, defines motherhood as a political site wherein mother can affect social change through feminist child rearing and in the world at large through political-social activism. This collection examines how mothers seek to imagine and implement a theory and practice of mothering that is *empowering* to women as opposed to oppressive, under five sections: Feminist Mothering, Lesbian Mothering, African American Mothering, Mothers and Daughters, Mothers and Sons.

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Mothering is a central issue for feminist theory, and motherhood is also a persistent presence in the work of Toni Morrison. Examining Morrison's novels, essays, speeches, and interviews, Andrea O'Reilly illustrates how Morrison builds upon black women's experiences of and perspectives on motherhood to develop a view of black motherhood that is, in terms of both maternal identity and role, radically different from motherhood as practiced and prescribed in the dominant culture. Motherhood, in Morrison's view, is fundamentally and profoundly an act of resistance, essential and integral to black women's fight against racism (and sexism) and their ability to achieve well-being for themselves and their culture. The power of motherhood and the empowerment of mothering are what make possible the better world we seek for ourselves and for our children. This, argues O'Reilly, is Morrison's maternal theory—a politics of the heart.

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Edited by Andrea O'Reilly

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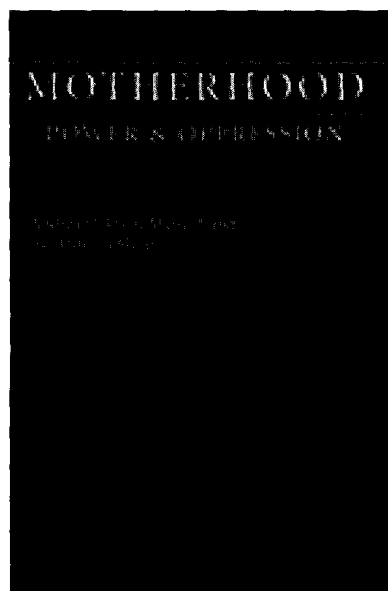
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Motherhood Power and Oppression

Edited by Marie Porter,
Patricia Short and Andrea O'Reilly



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In feminism, the institution of mothering/motherhood has been a highly contested area in how it relates to the oppression of women. As Adrienne Rich articulated in her classic 1976 book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, although motherhood as an institution is a male-defined site of oppression, women's own experiences of mothering can nonetheless be a source of power. This volume examines four locations wherein motherhood is simultane-

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About the Editors:

Marie Porter is a lecturer in the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, University of Queensland, Australia. **Patricia Short** is a lecturer in the School of Social Science, University of Queensland, Australia. **Dr. Andrea O'Reilly** is Director of the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) and Associate Professor of Women's Studies, York University. She is the author of *Mother Outlaws* (Women's Press, 2004).

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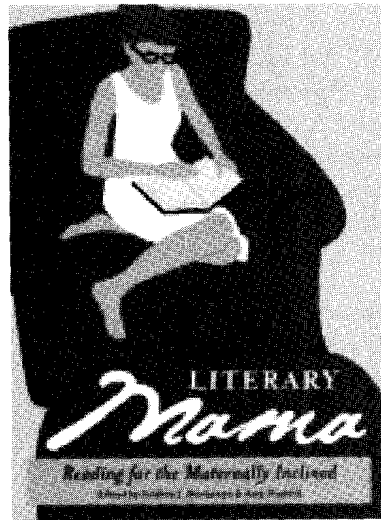


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