

Introduction

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Over the last twenty-five years the topic of motherhood has emerged as a central and significant topic of scholarly inquiry across a wide range of academic disciplines. A cursory review reveals that hundreds of scholarly articles have been published on almost every motherhood theme imaginable. The *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* alone has examined motherhood topics as diverse as sexuality, peace, religion, public policy, literature, work, popular culture, health, carework, young mothers, motherhood and feminism, feminist mothering, mothers and sons, mothers and daughters, lesbian mothering, adoption, the motherhood movement, and mothering, race, and ethnicity, to name a few. In 2006 I coined the term *motherhood studies* to acknowledge and demarcate this new scholarship on motherhood as a legitimate and distinctive discipline, one grounded in the theoretical tradition of maternal theory developed by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, Adrienne Rich, and Sara Ruddick. Indeed, similar to the development of women's studies as an academic field in the 1970s, motherhood studies, while explicitly interdisciplinary, has emerged as an autonomous and independent scholarly discipline over the last decade.

However, the numerous edited collections on motherhood have tended to be discipline specific or thematic in focus. This is surprising, given the explicit interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of motherhood studies and the exponential growth of this field over the last two decades. Seeking to address this absence, this volume intends to provide an investigation of the salient motherhood topics across various scholarly disciplines. Specifically, this comprehensive interdisciplinary volume will examine the topic of motherhood explicitly from a twenty-first century perspective, making it the first collection of its kind.¹

The idea for this volume arose from the tenth anniversary conference of the Association for Research on Mothering, which was held in Toronto, Canada, in October 2006. A central aim of this conference was to reflect upon the development of motherhood scholarship over the last two decades and to explore how motherhood themes and issues have changed with the advent of the twenty-first century. While many of the motherhood issues remain the same, the two hundred plus papers presented at the conference revealed not only that these issues are becoming increasingly more complex and complicated, but also that several new issues and challenges have emerged and will continue to appear as the twenty-first century unfolds. Accordingly, the aim of this volume is to study motherhood from a twenty-first-century perspective and to consider the challenges and possibilities of motherhood as the first decade of the new millennium comes to a close.

In the thirty plus years since the publication of Rich's *Of Woman Born*, motherhood research has focused upon the oppressive and empowering dimensions of mothering and the complex relationship between the two. Indeed, almost all contemporary scholarship on motherhood draws upon Rich's distinction "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). Following the above distinction, motherhood studies may be divided into three interconnected themes or categories of inquiry: motherhood as institution, motherhood as experience, and motherhood as identity or subjectivity. Within motherhood studies the term *motherhood* is used to signify the patriarchal institution of motherhood, while *mothering* refers to women's lived experiences of childrearing as they both conform to and/or resist the patriarchal institution of motherhood and its oppressive ideology. While scholars who are concerned with the ideology or institution investigate policies, laws, ideologies, and images of patriarchal motherhood, researchers who are interested in experience examine the work women do as mothers, an area of study paved with insights derived

from Sara Ruddick's concept of maternal practice. The third category, identity or subjectivity, looks at the effect that becoming a mother has on a woman's sense of self; in particular, how her sense of self is shaped by the institution of motherhood and the experience of mothering, respectively.

Since the turn of the millennium a new theme in motherhood has emerged that I have termed *agency*. Motherhood scholarship, whether its concern is mothering as institution, experience, or identity, has tended to focus on how motherhood is detrimental to women because of its construction as a patriarchal entity within the said three areas. For example, scholars interested in experience argue that the gender inequities of patriarchal motherhood cause the work of mothering to be both isolating and exhausting for women, while those concerned with ideology call attention to the guilt and depression that is experienced by mothers who fail to live up to the impossible standards of patriarchal motherhood that our popular culture inundates them with. In contrast, little has been written on the possibility or potentiality of mothering as identified by Rich more than thirty years ago. This point is not lost on Fiona Green, who writes, "still largely missing from the increasing dialogue and publication around motherhood is a discussion of Rich's monumental contention that even when restrained by patriarchy, motherhood can be a site of empowerment and political activism" (2004:31). More recently, however, *agency* has emerged as a prevailing theme in motherhood scholarship. Specifically, the rise of a vibrant and vast motherhood movement in the United States over the last decade has paved the way for more meaningful exploration into the emancipatory potential of motherhood in the twenty-first century.

As the first to organize and examine motherhood research under these four constitutive themes, this volume will consider the impact of this new century on how motherhood is practiced and represented as experience, identity, policy, and agency. For the purpose of this volume, the more specific theme of *policy* will be used over the more general concept *institution*. Over the last two decades, most of the research on motherhood as institution has looked at how such is conveyed and maintained through ideology; less attention has been paid to how the institution of motherhood is, in the same way, enacted and enforced through policy, whether governmental, health, work, or educational. Thus, with the advent of the twenty-first century, a more policy-based perspective on the institution of motherhood is both judicious and essential.

The papers selected for the volume cover a wide range of disciplines and consider many diverse motherhood themes, including globalization, raising trans children, HIV/AIDS, the new reproductive technologies, queer parenting, the motherhood memoir, mothering and work, welfare reform, intensive

mothering, mothers and/in politics, the influence of the Internet, third-wave feminism, and the motherhood movement. While all of the papers explicitly and directly address a motherhood concern central to the twenty-first century, the volume does not purport to fully represent twenty-first-century motherhood; instead, it offers a snapshot of the motherhood issues that have engaged scholars over the last decade. It should be noted that while this collection presents various regional, cultural, and racial perspectives—including Chicana, African American, Kenyan, Swedish, Canadian, American, Muslim, queer, low-income, trans, and lesbian—it remains largely North American in its perspective, as is the case with most motherhood research.

Overall, my aim in creating this volume has been to identify the salient themes of this new and exciting discipline of motherhood studies, and to investigate how these themes—experience, identity, policy, and agency—shape and are shaped by the new millennium. More specifically, the volume considers how the social, scientific, and technological developments of the last ten to twenty years, some of which were unimaginable even a decade ago—mothers and/on the Internet, interracial surrogacy, raising trans children, men mothering, intensive mothering, queer parenting, species-altering applications of new biotechnologies, androgenesis, the motherhood movement, mothering post-9/11, and the AIDS crisis—have forever altered the meaning and experience of motherhood for women and the societies in which they live.

The volume invites dialogue and debate on these important issues so that we, as mothers and as a culture, are able to fully comprehend and respond appropriately to such momentous changes. While in some instances these developments have been beneficial, in others they have been harmful; in any case, each set of outcomes requires new understandings of the experience and identity of mothering, and calls for new and innovative approaches to maternal agency and motherhood policy. While the changes examined here cannot be undone, it is my hope that this volume will enable us to better appreciate and respond to these developments by situating maternal experience, identity, policy, and agency in an explicitly twenty-first-century context.

EXPERIENCE

In her ground-breaking book *Maternal Thinking* (1989), Sara Ruddick, the first motherhood scholar to theorize the *experience of mothering* as opposed to the *institution of motherhood*, argues that mothering is a practice. “Practices,” ex-

plains Ruddick, “are collective human activities distinguished by the aims that identify them and by the consequent demands made on practitioners committed to those aims” (1989:13–14). To engage in maternal practice, Ruddick continues, is “to be committed to meeting the demands that define maternal work. . . . The three demands—for *preservation*, *growth*, and *social acceptance*—constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by work of preservative love, nurturance and training” (1989:17). In defining mothering as a practice, Ruddick enabled future scholars to analyze the experience and work, or practice, of mothering as distinct and separate from the identity of the mother. In other words, *mothering* may be performed by anyone who commits him- or herself to the demands of maternal practice. This perspective also enabled scholars to study the actual experiences of mothering as apart from, albeit affected by, the institution of motherhood. The word *mother*, as Mielle Chandler writes, is thus best understood as a verb; as something one does, a practice (2007:273). However, “mothering is not a singular practice, and mother is not best understood as a monolithic identity,” because even among similar mothers “practices vary significantly” (Chandler 2007:273). In acknowledgment of these insights, the papers in this section approach mothering as a verb and are attentive to the multiplicity among and *within* maternal practices.

In the opening paper, “Chicana Mothering in the Twenty-first Century,” Jessica Vasquez examines the experiences of mothering among Mexican American women in the early twenty-first century. Chicana mothering requires mothers to act as mediators between racial messages from the “outside world” and their children. As part of nurturing their children, minority mothers must consciously work to defuse negative external racial messages and replace them with affirmation. Just as racial and gender stereotypes pass from one generation to another within families, Vasquez argues, so can ideologies and resistance strategies. Mothers use their own experience as inspiration for teaching and molding their children. Vasquez concludes that the family is an important locus of study for an understanding of the transmission of both class and gender values with the Mexican American community.

Women’s lives are at the center of social change in the Muslim world, as the competing pressures of modernization create different understandings of motherhood for Muslim women. “Muslim Motherhood: Traditions in Changing Contexts,” by Gail Murphy-Geiss, argues that Muslim motherhood is changing in two main ways, resistance via “republican motherhood” and more moderate negotiation. These struggles are most pronounced among Muslim immigrants to the West. The author examines the long-lived traditional beliefs and practices

regarding motherhood in Islam, and then looks to the linked social forces of modernization and globalization, which suggest an “alternative model” of Islamic motherhood in the twenty-first century, one that will both safeguard cherished Islamic values and integrate aspects of Western culture deemed desirable by many Muslim women.

The following paper, “Mothering in Fear: How Living in an Insecure-Feeling World Affects Parenting” by Ana Villalobos, investigates whether and how living in an insecure-feeling world with the possibility of sudden loss affects the ways in which women parent their children. Villalobos first establishes that there have been society-wide increases in subjective insecurity in the twenty-first century, resulting both from large-scale security threats such as 9/11 and from increasing access to communication technologies that allow broader audiences to witness personal incidences of loss, amplifying their effect on collective uncertainty. She then presents the mothering strategies a study group of contemporary women draws on to cope with perceptions of societal insecurity. Among these are classic protective mothering, in which mothers shield their children from information about or experience of negative occurrences, and what she calls *inoculation*, or the deliberate exposure of one’s children to small doses of harm or risk in order to make them stronger and more capable of navigating a difficult and insecure world. This form of strategic parenting has implications for twenty-first century motherhood. Indeed, Villalobos’ research suggests a possible shift in how women keep their children safe in a potentially hazardous twenty-first century world: from protection-by-*shielding* to protection-by-*exposure*.

In “Mother-Talk: Conversations with Mothers of Female-to-Male Transgender Children,” Sarah Pearlman examines eighteen mothers’ responses to learning that their daughters identify as transgender and intend to transition to male. The paper explores the participants’ initial reactions and the various turning points in the process as their daughters transitioned to male. Pearlman finds that the degree of maternal acceptance relies on personal characteristics, educational background, political and religious beliefs, and recognition of a child’s happiness following transition. Maintaining a relationship with their child was essential to these women, and each woman’s sense of self as both a mother and an individual was enhanced by continuing to nurture a bond with her now trans son. Many accepted whatever connection was possible, a connection that often depended on terms set by their child. As one mother said, “I’m not going to lose my connection. Whatever level he will allow it, I will have it.”

“Queer Parenting in the New Millennium: Resisting Normal,” by Rachel Epstein, reflects on the author’s fifteen years of research, education, activism, and

community organizing related to queer parenting. Currently there is much to celebrate on the queer parenting front in Canada, much of it affected by the debate on and the realities of same-sex marriage. The author seeks to celebrate the gains that have been made and the creative ways that LGBTQ people are making families, without denying sexuality or creating hierarchies of “normalcy.” How can queer families and parents get the recognition and protection they need without creating “good” and “not so good” families and parenting arrangements? As parents, how do they maintain a radical critique of normalized versions of the family while recognizing and fulfilling their desire to both protect and provide the best for their children? The author urges queer communities not to collude with the disavowal of sexuality from queer identities. She raises questions about how queer communities can maintain and build on the radical history they have inherited as sex and gender outsiders, as lesbians, as gay men, as bisexuals, as transsexual and transgender people, as queer people . . . and as parents.

To end this section, Thenjiwe Magwaza discusses how the twenty-first-century HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa is forcing a redefinition of the concept of motherhood, one that extends beyond the traditional boundaries of age, sex, and gender. More specifically, Magwaza argues that the HIV/AIDS context is principally responsible for a significant shift in the understanding of the concept and practice of motherhood within the African context. The paper is based on a case study of six “mothers” of both sexes who range in age from fifteen to ninety years, and who are from selected South African households that include children orphaned by AIDS. The main finding of the study is that the participants’ mothering practices and coping strategies are largely influenced by a strong commitment to the well-being of the children and involve a high degree of self-sacrifice on the part the “mothers.”

IDENTITY

This section builds upon the previous section by likewise problematizing and deconstructing the patriarchal construct of *mother* as a biological and essential category. Under the patriarchal institution and ideology of motherhood, the definition of *mother* is limited to heterosexual women who have biological children, while the concept of good motherhood is further restricted to a select group of women who are white, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, married, thirty-something, in a nuclear family with usually one to two children, and, ideally, full-time mothers. Feminist scholars over the last two decades have

vigorously and rigorously challenged this patriarchal construct and called for new and expansive definitions of maternal identity. “Good” mothers, from the feminist perspective, include noncustodial, poor, single, old, young, queer, trans, and “working” mothers; likewise, the biological category of mother itself is expanded so as to allow for other nonbiological identities of maternity such as other-mothers—grandmothers and mentors—and fathers. Similarly, patriarchal motherhood limits family to a patriarchal nuclear structure in which a child’s parents are married and are the biological parents, and where the mother is the nurturer and the father is the provider; conversely, families acknowledged from a feminist perspective embrace a diverse variety of compositions, including but not limited to single, blended, step-, matrifocal, and same-sex families. These new family formations have given rise to new social identities of motherhood; likewise, the new reproductive technologies over the last two decades have destabilized the biological category of motherhood. The papers in this section explore how the social, scientific, and technological advances of the twenty-first century have revolutionized the definition and representation of maternal identity. While the first three papers study the representation of maternal subjectivities in genres of the new millennium—motherhood memoirs and contemporary film—in the following studies new categories and practices of maternal identity are considered, including male mothering and androgenesis.

In the opening paper of this section, “Ambivalence of the Motherhood Experience,” Ivana Brown reflects on and analyzes current representations of the maternal experience in popular literature on motherhood—in particular, memoirs, essays, and short stories published at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Brown argues that the recent wave of maternal memoirs can be characterized by the emphasis on the ambivalence involved in the motherhood experience. Using a sociological understanding of the concept, she analyzes maternal ambivalence as a social phenomenon that is produced by mothers’ relationship toward the social institution of motherhood and the social expectations that are encompassed in the mother role; it is not rooted in mothers’ relationships with their children. As Brown further argues, the authors of the memoirs also use their writings to uncover some of the untold realities of mothering, and to deal with their transition to motherhood as they negotiate and present their new identity and maternal status.

In the following paper, “Supermothers on Film; or, the Maternal Melodrama in the Twenty-first Century,” Adrienne McCormick argues that Hollywood representations of mothers in the twenty-first century reveal the return of the maternal melodrama with a difference. The films under study—Joseph Ruben’s *The*

Forgotten (2004), starring Julianne Moore, Robert Schwentke's *Flightplan* (2005), starring Jodie Foster, and Walter Salles' *Dark Water* (2005), starring Jennifer Connelly—involve supermothers who save their children by overcoming incredible odds. McCormick points out that these representations do not signal a new feminist era in Hollywood film, but are rather linked to Hollywood's penchant for idealizing certain kinds of motherhood over all others, with working mothers receiving the most negative treatment. In examining continuities between the melodramas of the 1930s–1940s and those of the contemporary period, McCormick shows that while both periods idealize motherhood as sacrificial, both also allow for contradictory readings that audience members can ponder in relation to their own lives. In the contemporary period, this is especially crucial for mothers in the audience, as they negotiate the debasement of “actual mothers” on the screen and the reinforcement of ideas of supermotherhood particular to the twenty-first century.

In her “Juno or Just Another Girl?: Young Breeders and a New Century of Racial Politics of Motherhood,” Mary Thompson argues that the publication of *Breeder: Real-Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers* (2001), co-edited by Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender, and the release of *Juno* (directed by Jason Reitman and written by Diablo Cody) in 2007 reflect a renewed twenty-first-century popular interest in young/teen mothers. Both texts celebrate young, counterculture women who elect to defy the social script of carefully delayed and well-planned pregnancy. A discussion of Sapphire's novel *PUSH* (1999) and Leslie Harris' *Just Another Girl on the IRT* (1992) aid in considering the invisible racial and/or class privileges of the counterculture stance. Finally, while *Breeder* explicitly recounts the experiences of young women carrying on the feminist struggle for reproductive rights and child care (*Juno* does so implicitly), it also reveals the problematic celebration of “choice” within feminism's third wave.

Andrea Doucet's paper, “Taking Off the Maternal Lens: Engaging with Sara Ruddick on Men and Mothering,” is intended as a conversation between Sara Ruddick's view that “men can mother” and fathers' narratives. Drawing from her in-depth research project with 118 Canadian fathers who are primary caregivers of children, she explores fathers' narratives of caring for their children through Ruddick's threefold classification of mothering: preservation, growth, and social acceptability, which Doucet frames as three parallel parental *responsibilities*: emotional, community, and “moral.” Encompassing theoretical work on gender equality and gender differences, as well as Doucet's own long trajectory of feminist research on the importance of men's involvement in childrearing, her paper addresses how fathers enact and speak about gender similarities

and differences in parenting. Contrary to Ruddick and other feminist scholars who argue that men “can and do mother,” Doucet argues that men do not mother per se because of the effects of deeply ingrained gendering processes, gender differences in friendship patterns, community wariness, and the long shadow of hegemonic masculinities. She concludes that listening to and theorizing men’s narratives through a “maternal lens” can obscure the important reality that fathers enact wider conceptions of caring, which in turn has implications for theoretical and empirical understandings of mothering, fathering, masculinities, and parental responsibilities.

In “Reproducing Possibilities: Androgenesis and Mothering Human Identity,” Deirdre Condit does the “unthinkable” and explores a new understanding of reproductive embodiment that is informed by the work of Shulamith Firestone and the writings of three materialist feminists who have come after her: Mary O’Brien, Nancy Hartsock, and Marge Piercy. Strongly felt throughout the paper is Condit’s postmodern impulse to deconstruct identity, biology, and even materiality, despite the continuing conundrum of the “essentially” sexed body. Using Firestone’s initial insights as a platform, Condit claims that an even more fully materialist reading of the dialectic of sex reveals that the problem of equality originates not with the fact that women’s bodies reproduce, but rather with the fact that *the bodies of men do not*. Her argument holds that the lack of material reproduction in men significantly contributes to the fracture between men and women that has become sex oppression. Thus, while Firestone called for ectogenetic reproduction to free women to achieve equality, Condit explores the materialist implications of androgenetic reproduction as a means to free men, and thus generate a new avenue to equality.

POLICY

The third section explores governmental, work, medical, and health policy in various geographical and ethnic contexts during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The positions and experiences of mothers in contemporary societies are significantly affected by various forms of policy, which shape the choices that women have about their mothering. Indeed, whether they are medical, governmental, or workplace, policies have a significant impact on the lived experience of mothers, through their potential to be emancipatory or oppressive. Martha A. Fineman alludes to this oppressive potential: “Even social or cultural institutions such as motherhood that women occupy exclusively were what I call

‘colonized categories’—initially defined, controlled, and given legal content by men. Male norms and male understandings fashioned legal definitions of what constituted a family, what was good mothering, who had claims and access to children as well as to jobs and education, and, ultimately, how legal institutions functioned to give or deny redress” (1997:224).

Although much has been written about motherhood as an ideology, and while specific aspects of mothering in isolation have been addressed in the literature, none of this has been grounded in the actual experience of mothering. Likewise, feminist theorists have looked critically at the effect of policy in a range of areas, but often in isolation from other aspects of a mother’s lived experience. Fineman argues that there is a need to focus more positively on mothering, law, and public policy, maintaining that “in feminist legal theory, motherhood has primarily been presented as problematic for women.” The invisibility of women’s motherwork creates an incongruence between what policy says about mothers and what many women experience as mothers. The troubling result is a lack of support from society for the work that mothers do, which in turn can undermine women’s equality.

Lorna Turnbull, in *Double Jeopardy* (2001), has identified several relevant themes that affect mothering. She highlights the rhetoric of law, policy, and politics that defines mothers as good or bad, the disadvantaged circumstances in which many women mother, the control that medicalization and professionalization exert over their mothering, the undervaluing of motherwork, and the position of relative inequality of mothers as it relates to a variety of areas such as income tax policy and the child welfare system. A review of *Canadian Feminist Literature on Law: An Annotated Bibliography* revealed that some areas of key concerns to maternal scholars include maternity and parental leave, workplace benefits, work-family balance, social welfare cutbacks, reproductive technologies, and increasing privatization of caregiving work.

This collection’s section on policy will consider all of the aforementioned issues. The first two look at governmental policy with respect to both globalization and welfare reform in the United States, the next two examine workplace policy by focusing on academic mothers in the U.S. and breastfeeding and workplace practices in Kenya; the final two look at medical/scientific policy in relation to interracial surrogacy and the new biotechnologies.

Toward the end of the twentieth century an analysis of the interaction between welfare states and the international political economic context in which they operate began to emerge; however, analyses that consider the position of women remain rare, despite all of the new challenges women face in the

twenty-first century. In “Mothers of the Global Welfare State,” Honor Brabazon seeks to open this analytical space by using Sweden and Canada as examples. Brabazon takes the case of the availability of quality day care as a significant factor influencing women’s employment—more specifically, mothers’ employment. She combines (1) vertical analysis, examining the impact of neoliberal globalization on the particular interaction between market, state, and family that is characteristic of the welfare state, with (2) horizontal analysis, comparing these influences and interactions in two different countries representative of different welfare state models. While hers is an introductory analysis of complex subjects, Brabazon effectively distinguishes certain trends: the vulnerability of mothers’ employment to global changes in the twenty-first century, and how the type of welfare state appears to have a significant influence on both the real and rhetorical pressures these changes create, and the responses of state and society to these pressures.

Next, Fiona Pearson examines “The Erosion of College Access for Low-Income Mothers.” In 2005 the United States Congress reauthorized the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which had provided aid for low income parents and their children since 1996. Under this program, family members demonstrating need could receive public assistance for up to five years as long as adult participants actively engaged in work or educational activities. Many critics argued that the TANF program unnecessarily restricted participants’ college educational opportunities before reauthorization. However, as Pearson argues, many of those limitations have remained in place since reauthorization, and so continue to effectively prevent participants from pursuing baccalaureate or graduate degrees. Such social welfare policies reflect trends that emphasize work in the formal economy over education, which may in part rest on the assumption that adequate institutional resources to meet low-income parents’ educational needs lie elsewhere. This paper, based on interviews with nineteen TANF student participants, outlines the types of institutional resources that students have relied upon in the past to facilitate their educational goals. This study also demonstrates the ways that these resources have been challenged and restricted, particularly over the past eight years. The long-term implications of these findings must be further researched to determine how low-income students’ access to college is changing as a result of current policy and budgetary decisions.

“Academic Life Balance for Mothers: Pipeline or Pipe Dream?” by Michele L. Vancour and William M. Sherman explores how the institution of motherhood, in both workplace policy and the ideology of intensive mothering, is experi-

enced by academic mothers. Many of these highly educated professional women found themselves in a “tug-or-war” as they struggled to meet the overwhelming demands of two complicated roles, which both required their full-time psychological presence. Presented with extreme pressures to succeed in all aspects of their lives, women often make sacrifices that jeopardize their health and potential advancement; this trend may be more problematic for academic mothers with preschool children. In an attempt to better understand the phenomena academic mothers’ experience, interviews were conducted at four teaching universities with seventeen female faculty members who have preschool-age children. The results of this research could potentially help women to achieve the delicate balance necessary to sustain intensive motherhood, an academic career, and a healthy lifestyle, and also support academic efforts for female faculty recruitment and retention.

In the next paper, Violet Naanyu explores the duration of exclusive breastfeeding with regards to work policies in different occupations in contemporary Eldoret, Kenya. The study, “Exclusive Breastfeeding and Work Policies in Eldoret, Kenya,” examines the duration of exclusive breastfeeding during the first five months after birth, and goes on to investigate whether exclusive breastfeeding varies with demographic characteristics, mothers’ occupation, distance to work, and work policies. The findings show that the duration of exclusive breastfeeding is similar for most mothers irrespective of occupation. Higher durations of exclusive breastfeeding are associated with increasing age, maternity leave, and distance to work. Surprisingly, she determines that access to breastfeeding-friendly work policies is not automatically associated with increased exclusive breastfeeding. In documenting the increasing complexity of mother-worker role conflict and utilization of family-friendly work policies in the twenty-first century, this paper calls for more research in this area.

Laura Harrison, in “Brown Bodies, White Eggs: The Politics of Cross-racial Gestational Surrogacy,” argues that the feminist debates surrounding surrogacy have been fundamentally altered by technological shifts that have enabled gestational surrogacy, in which prospective “parents” can retain full genetic kinship ties to a child born by another woman. This technology has led to increasing numbers of women of color acting as surrogates, meaning that black or Latina women can give birth to a “white” child in what this essay refers to as “cross-racial gestational surrogacy.” This essay will analyze surrogacy as a practice that has been transformed by technological innovation, incorporating an intersectional reading of this issue that interrogates how the multiple interstices of race, gender, and structural oppression come into dialogue with the “service” of surrogacy.

Scientists in the fields of genetics, robotics, informatics, and nanotechnology are leading a twenty-first-century revolution that could cure many currently incurable diseases, and open the door to a future in which we make a fundamental—and perhaps irreversible—break with human nature as we have known it. The work on these technologies in the United States is proceeding within an environment that is largely unregulated, with little public conversation about which technologies should or should not be allowed. In the paper that concludes this section, “What Will Become of Us? New Biotechnologies and the Need for Maternal Leadership,” Enola G. Aird argues that the dominant values of American society are propelling us toward a future in which there will be no limits on the use of these new technologies, which will ultimately lead to a new eugenics and the commodification of human beings. She contends that maternal values, focused as they are on preserving the lives and dignity of children, may be our society’s only remaining source of “braking” values—values that might enable us to slow down and set limits. This paper issues an urgent call to mothers—and others who subscribe to maternal values—to take a leading role in slowing down the biotech revolution before we reach a point of no return.

AGENCY

In *Of Woman Born* Rich writes: “We do not think of the power stolen from us and the power withheld from us in the name of the institution of motherhood” (1986:275). “The idea of maternal power has been domesticated,” Rich continues, “In transfiguring and enslaving woman, the womb, —the ultimate source of the power—has historically been turned against us and itself made into a source of powerlessness” (1986:68). The aim of empowered mothering is to reclaim this power for mothers; to imagine and implement a mode of mothering that mitigates the many ways that patriarchal motherhood, both discursively and materially, regulates and restrains mothers and their mothering. In contrast to the patriarchal institution of motherhood, an empowered practice of mothering is one modeled upon maternal agency. More specifically, as patriarchal motherhood characterizes childrearing as a private and nonpolitical undertaking, maternal agency foregrounds the political-social dimension of motherwork. Even as feminist researchers concur that an empowered mothering that is modeled on maternal agency is better for mothers and their children, discussion remains on how this goal, as both practice and politic, may be achieved and sustained (Green 2006; O’Reilly 2007a, 2007b; Jeremiah 2006; Hewett 2006; DiQuinzio

2007; Stooke et al. 2010; Stadtman Tucker 2008). In other words, how do mothers individually and collectively refuse and resist the ideology and institution of patriarchal motherhood? What makes this possible? While researchers agree that “the process of resistance entails making different choices about how one wants to practice mothering” (Horwitz 2003:58), the larger question remains: What is needed at both the individual and cultural level to enable—or, more specifically, to empower—women to engage in this process of resistance? The papers in this section explore the achievement and implementation of maternal agency across a wide range of practices, both private and public, to include the motherhood movement, politics, childrearing, the Internet, and feminist mothering.

In the opening paper of this section, “From ‘Choice’ to Change: Rewriting the Script of Motherhood as Maternal Activism,” Judith Stadtman Tucker argues that a growing awareness of the “motherhood problem”—the combination of cultural factors, social trends, and policy shortfalls that makes mothers and other caregivers disproportionately vulnerable to financial insecurity and makes the daily work of mothering harder than it has to be—presents an important opportunity for organizations and grass-roots activists intent on mobilizing mothers for social change. However, there is no clear consensus among leaders of the emerging mothers’ movement about the best way to describe mothers’ contributions to society or how to define and defend their rights. In particular, there is a shared conviction among movement activists that the present generation of mothers is indifferent or antagonistic to traditional feminist analyses of gender, power, and systems of oppression. In public statements, mothers’ advocates blend and weave compatible and incompatible political theories and ideological frameworks to validate their agenda for change; liberal feminism, maternalism, and feminist care theory are among the predominant influences. The results of this exercise are often inconsistent and unpersuasive; consequently, this strategy may ultimately impede the movements’ growth and visibility. This essay discusses some of the underlying obstacles to articulating a coherent politics of motherhood in today’s cultural context, suggesting that the future success of the mothers’ movement will depend on leaders’ ability to develop and communicate an effective change narrative.

In “The Mothers’ Movement: The Challenges of Coalition Building in the Twenty-first Century,” Patrice DiQuinzio considers the implications of Bernice Johnson Reagon’s analysis of coalition politics for the contemporary mothers’ movement. DiQuinzio argues that the movement requires a clear understanding of both the difficulties and the value of coalition building and a strong commitment to doing the hard work of coalition building. Without this understanding

and commitment, the mothers' movement risks focusing too much on nurturing and supporting others—and only some mothers at that—and thus jeopardizes its revolutionary potential. DiQuinzio draws from her own experiences of small instances of coalition building; using the examination of those differences among women and mothers that she personally finds very hard to negotiate, she illustrates the applicability of Reagon's analysis of coalition building to the mothers' movement. Through this, she is able to suggest some mothering issues and differences among women and mothers that provide ample opportunities for coalition building.

Marsha Marotta draws on her extensive explorations of the relationship between power and spaces in "Political Labeling of Mothers: An Obstacle to Equality in Politics." Marotta's work engages spaces as concrete, socially constructed, and political, as she provides a spatial context to consider the gender gap in voting and gender stereotypes in attitudes toward politics. She helps illuminate the links among culture, identities, and practices by examining such imposed labels as "soccer moms" and "security moms," as well as the self-packaging of mothers in Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Million Mom March. Marotta shows how such labels illustrate the ways in which political discourse disseminates the ideology of the "good" mother, as well as how the labels help locate and keep mothers in what she calls "MotherSpace"—a particular space in politics and society that tends to reinforce notions of selflessness in mothers rather than advance equality and full participation as citizens. She argues that such practices place outer boundaries on mothers that ossify the meaning of motherhood, reduce the potential threat mothers pose when they do venture outside MotherSpace, and keep mothers at the margins of political power.

The next paper, by Camille Wilson Cooper, examines "Racially Conscious Mothering in the 'Colorblind' Century: Implications for African American Motherwork." The twenty-first century is remarkably unique given the widespread political, social, and educational claims that U.S. society is now—or should be—"colorblind." Yet a key paradox of the twenty-first century relates to the coexistence of racial transcendence and racial regression, which inevitably filters into African American mothers' consciousness. Cooper explores the ways in which living in an era that questions the salience of race may alter African American mothers' identity, experience, and politics. In particular, it considers whether colorblind ideologies and politics present better chances for African American families to achieve equality or if they veil racial oppression. The author contrasts the colorblind rhetoric and politics of twenty-first-century United States with the racially conscious mothering traditions of African American

mothers; these traditions are closely tied to quests for racial liberation, cultural pride, and community uplift, which constitute acts of political resistance. The author further considers the extent to which these African American mothering traditions can and should be sustained given the contemporary milieu; she does this by describing some key opportunities and dilemmas that a nation aspiring to be colorblind presents to African American mothers and their families.

Next, in “It Takes a (Virtual) Village: Mothering on the Internet,” May Friedman looks at the fascinating juxtaposition between the lived experience of mothering and the myriad ways that such work is documented on the Internet. Friedman argues that parenting has already become embedded in cyberculture and that, as such, any analysis of the pros and cons of the Internet as a parenting venue are facile; she notes that “despite the very real concerns present in understanding the ways that maternity is performed on the Internet, such an analysis *must* take place.” The paper grapples with the chief flaws of online parenthood: (1) that within the context of cyberspace, patriarchal motherhood is once again the chief example of mothering practice; and (2), that the Internet itself is not a space that is equally accessed by all, but rather requires significant privilege in the guise of spare income and time. Having acknowledged these limitations, Friedman notes the ways that the Internet has allowed some mothers, particularly those with non-normative social locations, to connect and create a new form of community online. She explores important questions regarding the nature of community and activism and interrogates the possibility that, despite their unusual manifestations, both are firmly present within parenting cyberculture.

With the emergence of an international motherhood movement and the development of motherhood studies as an academic discipline, maternal scholars and activists have sought to define and develop a politic or theory of maternal empowerment. Maternal activists and researchers today agree that motherhood as it is currently perceived and practiced in patriarchal societies is disempowering if not oppressive for a multitude of reasons, ranging from the societal devaluation of motherwork to the endless tasks of privatized mothering and the impossible standards of idealized motherhood. Maternal activists and researchers likewise contest, challenge, and counter patriarchal motherhood by way of a plethora of theories of and strategies for maternal empowerment. The final paper, “Outlaw(ing) Motherhood: A Theory and Politic of Maternal Empowerment for the Twenty-first Century,” will not so much revisit these ideas and strategies as request that scholars and activists alike rethink received or accepted notions of how and why motherhood functions as an oppressive institution for women. When asked, students, mothers, and researchers readily describe the

exhaustion, guilt, boredom, anxiety, loneliness, and so forth of contemporary Western motherhood but are less forthcoming on why this is so. It is my view, and the argument of this paper, that modern motherhood functions as a patriarchal institution, one that has largely been impervious to change despite forty years of feminism, because of the gender ideology that grounds it: namely, gender essentialism and the resulting naturalized opposition of the public and private spheres. Only by unearthing and severing the ideological underpinning of patriarchal motherhood can we develop a politic of maternal empowerment and a practice of outlaw motherhood for the twenty-first century.

I became a mother to three children during the mid to late 1980s in a world radically different from the one explored in the papers in this volume, and while every decade brings change, I see the last two decades as being particularly transformative in relation to the meaning and experience of motherhood and mothering. Two decades ago, interracial surrogacy, androgenesis, and species-altering bio technologies were still the stuff of science fiction, and the looming AIDS/HIV crisis was only slowly being understood as increasing numbers of our gay friends and family members took ill and died. While the conservative backlash originated in the 1980s, the fallout took its greatest toll over the last decade in terms of welfare reform, cuts to social spending, loss in reproductive rights and freedoms, “downsizing,” and so forth. Indeed, in the mid to late 1980s, “9” and “11” were still numbers, globalization was a concept largely known only to academics, and Islam was a religion unfamiliar to most in the West. Today you can do a Google search of the words *motherhood*, *mothering*, and *mothers* and come up with 438,000 hits; this is light years away from what was available to mothers ten to twenty years ago.

In 1983, when I first became pregnant, you would be lucky to come across a copy of Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976) or Jane Lazarre's *The Mother Knot* at a used book store, that is, if they had not gone out of print; we certainly could not turn to the estimated 8,500 parenting blogs for comfort and community. Again, if we were fortunate we had a mother-friend from the same apartment block whom we could meet in the playground after dishes were done and weather permitting. The playdates, attachment parenting, “compulsory” breastfeeding, hyper-parenting, designer baby wear, and the “hurried child” of this century's new momism were all but unheard of twenty years ago. In addition, over the last decade and a half there has been a baby boom among lesbians, a reality worlds removed from the 1980s, when lesbians routinely lost custody of their children. Likewise, Chicana and African American motherhoods are now respected areas of scholarly

research in the university, and they are increasingly regarded as valued and essential cultural practices of empowerment in the larger North American society.

The year 2008 witnessed a mother and an African American man competing for the leadership of the Democratic Party and a mother of five young children being nominated by the Republican Party for the position of vice president. In the first decade of this century the motherhood movement emerged as a formidable social movement, by and for feminists and mothers alike, one that provides an organized campaign to secure social and economic rights and recognition for mothers, making real what seemed a utopian fantasy a mere twenty years ago. So is it any better or easier to be a mother in 2008 than it was in 1984, when I first became a mother? At age 48, with my three children pretty much “raised” and with two friends close to my age becoming mothers this past year, I have found this to be a meaningful point of reflection lately. While I am relieved that I had my children before the rise of intensive mothering, I am also delighted that lesbian moms, single parents, common-law marriages, and “blended” families now outnumber patriarchal nuclear families. As the first decade of this new millennium comes to a close, I remain uncertain whether there is any conclusive answer to this timely question. Nonetheless, I am convinced that the issues facing mothers today are, for better or worse, more messy and muddled than they were two decades ago; if nothing else, this makes motherhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century a compelling topic, one that is truly worthy of “a volume of its own.”

NOTE

1. The collection *Motherhood in the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Alcira Mariam Alizade, was published in 2006. However, this collection looks at the topic solely from the perspective of psychoanalysis.

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