

This assertion of personal maternal experience as a form of expertise is a significant feminist claim. Throughout *Transformative Motherhood*, the authors build on one another's research and often present subtle similarities and differences. The result is a cohesive collection that reflects the contributors' mutual respect.

American consumer culture, these authors believe, frequently focuses on superficial physical perfection. Only a woman who manufactures a perfect product (a physically and mentally "perfect" child) is considered a real mother. In opposition to such social prejudices, the authors in this volume assert the profound spiritual value of the gifts and lessons mothers give and receive through their experiences as life givers and caretakers. As Gail Landsman notes in her essay, "Mothers of children with disabilities talk about reassessing values, realizing true priorities, putting things in perspective, and above all, being less judgmental of others. The child's gift of knowledge of unconditional love provides mothers a vocabulary with which to develop a critique of consumer culture" (159).

Mothers also use the rhetoric of gift giving to discuss their contributions to society. For example, Danielle F. Wozniak discusses the role of foster mothers: "Through transformative relationships with children, women healed a portion of their community and contributed to overall social reform. Through mothering work, women saw themselves as family makers, professional caregivers, and community healers" (89). Both researchers and mothers note that these gifts are deeply valuable and could, if understood by others, benefit and possibly transform American culture.

The essays in *Transformative Motherhood* are well written, engaging, and important. They will be especially helpful to parents who have been marginalized by mainstream American culture. This volume is suitable for women's studies courses and courses on motherhood and/or disabilities.

Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890-1930

Molly Ladd-Taylor
Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994

Reviewed by Stephanie Chastain

Marshall McLuhan once said that the politics was the offering of "yesterday's answers in response to today's questions." It seems that what McLuhan failed to take into account was that today's questions are not very different from those

of yesterday. This is made clear in Molly Ladd-Taylor's *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890-1930*. This text reveals that contemporary questions about the role of women and the care of children are similar to questions posed since the latter part of the nineteenth century. One might conclude that our culture has been obstinately unoriginal in the way it addresses the persistent and repetitive questions about working women, and the role of government in fostering care for children.

Ladd-Taylor begins her history with the heartbreaking experience of infant death. She takes as the seed of her history this particular anguish, outlining the way in which infant death was a significant factor in the development of modern attitudes toward working mothers. Due to the high infant mortality rate at the beginning of the twentieth century, mothers looked desperately to the medical community for care and advice. As mothers turned away from traditional wisdom and remedies and relied more heavily on doctors and professionals for advice, they reinforced the growing power of the medical profession and facilitated the transfer of their expertise to the *new* experts.

Meticulously researched, Ladd-Taylor's history charts issues that concerned parent organizations and women's groups that organized to protect the interests of children and standardize childcare. She looks at the special interests of groups invested in improving social conditions. At the urging of the community, government involvement fostered the creation of social services and the intervention of service agencies precipitated the regulation of the care and protection of children.

If this sounds familiar, it should. Today's concern with the value or necessity of childcare, the fate of the working mother, and the involvement of government were serious concerns at the dawning of the industrial age, when Americans found that the self-contained family could no longer exist in isolation. Ladd-Taylor reminds us that looking to medicine and social services for protection of sick and deprived children did not then (nor does it now) address the causes of the problems themselves: poverty, deprivation, crowded living conditions. These social conditions were seen as crimes against society and, if the intervening child advocates did not blame mothers for these conditions, they often blamed themselves. Women's groups who formed on behalf of children sometimes contributed to the notion that mothers did not know what was best for their children. Was it not their desire to work outside the home sufficient proof of women's inattention to their children?

Ladd-Taylor calls attention to the racial biases that have come into play as women have increased their demands for work and child services. She shows how diverging interests and political agendas have turned on issues of race, poverty, and immigration and the way these issues have influenced the development of practical and productive policies to protect children and allow women to work. Black women are criticized for having too many children; the alienation of immigrant women is romanticized; white women are faulted for delaying childbirth in favour of work; and issues of poverty have always

connected and estranged all ethnicities. Marginalized cultures have additional childcare concerns: children must not only be healthy and safe but taught to survive in a racially divided world.

The care of children and the working mother continues to be a hot political topic and the right of women to work is still part of a large, conflicted political agenda. Working mothers continue to be viewed as pathologically neglectful both of their children and of their duty to society. Ladd-Taylor has documented the history of the relationship between working mothers and government. *Mother-Work* cautions that domestic and family issues have a serious and complex political history. They demand renewed and serious attention; they require solutions of tomorrow, not those of yesterday.

Trans Forming Families: Real Stories About Transgendered Loved Ones

Mary Boenke, ed.
Imperial Beach, California: Walter Troom Publishing, 1999

Reviewed by Fiona Joy Green

Trans Forming Families was inspired by editor Mary Boenke's personal journey of coming to terms with and supporting her middle child's transition from female to male. This is a collection of narratives written by people living in England, Iran, the Netherlands, and North America about living with trans family members. For those new to this topic, a glossary of transgender terms, a list of American National Transgender Organizations (including web sites and email addresses), and a brief reading list of transgender works published between 1990 and 1997 are included at the back of the book.

Readers will be moved by the clearly written, honest stories in this modest 146-page book. I was touched by Boenke's opening dedication to her son and to transgendered persons and their families. I developed an appreciation for the close kinship within trans communities as I read the forward and introduction written by trans activists. Examples of the intense struggles and perseverance of family and friends are woven throughout the four sections of the book: raising gender-variant children; learning from our children of all ages; inventive love relationships; and crucial others.

Each story is prefaced with a brief, contextualizing biography of the author. I felt part of a sharing circle in which people speak openly about the trials of living with, loving, and supporting people who are unhappy in their bodies. While I do not have a story of my own, I live—as we all do—among transgendered people and, as my family grows and changes, I could find myself