

to becoming the primary caregiver in her household. In “A Mother’s Manifesto,” five short pages in a book of 287 pages, Wolf does little more than compile a “wish list” of demands such as “real Family Leave,” “on-site day care,” and “tax deductions and benefits” for family members who care for “the new mother and baby” (284). Ironically, the same woman who “helped to launch a new wave of feminism” – according to the dust jacket of her book – offers a “motherhood feminism” (284) that looks more like a consumer-rights than a feminist movement. Unfortunately, Wolf’s book will do little to overturn the misconception that motherhood is not a feminist issue.

Naked Motherhood: Shattering Illusions and Sharing Truths

Wendy LeBlanc
Sydney, Australia: Random House, 1999

Reviewed by Shelley M. Park

Naked Motherhood alludes to the story of the emperor who had no clothes. As Wendy LeBlanc suggests in her introduction, “[a]ll of us collude with the conspiracy by pretending we can see [mother] fully clothed in all her mythological finery. We fear we will look foolish and inadequate if we admit we find motherhood difficult or cry out for help when we feel we can cope no longer on our own. Our mothers walk naked – and they do walk alone” (1). As the mother of two elementary-school age daughters, I often have bemoaned the lack of social support for mothering, as does LeBlanc. Although the mothers whom LeBlanc surveys in this social scientific study of mothering are from Australia and New Zealand, the notion that effective mothering is easy is an illusion that needs shattering in North America, as well. The demythologizing of motherhood begins, as LeBlanc suggests, by sharing our struggles as well as our joys. Mothering is a humbling experience. And we need to share these truthful, sometimes painful, sometimes embarrassing, stories of humility.

LeBlanc’s book is divided into eight chapters, each intended to expose the “gulf between [a woman’s] expectations and the actual experience” of motherhood (13). The first four chapters are arranged, roughly, in the chronological order of a new mother’s experiences. Chapter one explores the difficulties mothers may face with pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, and sleep deprivation; chapter two examines loss of freedom and spontaneity; chapter three surveys post-partum changes in (physical, emotional, and social) self-image; and chapter four discusses the mother’s “emotional roller coaster.” Chapters five

through seven examine a mother's relationships with other persons, exploring respectively a (married) mother's relationship with her partner, a single mother's relationships with ex-partners, other caregivers, and men she is dating, and all mothers' relationships with "the greater world," namely extended family, other mothers, other children, friends, co-workers (or ex-co-workers), and childcare workers. Each chapter ends with a section entitled "Help for Hanging in There." These sections (along with the contact information for social service agencies provided for Australian and New Zealand mothers) are useful antidotes in an otherwise depressing book. It is not until the final (eighth) chapter, that the rewards, privileges, and joys of mothering are discussed.

As I have suggested, *Naked Motherhood* tilts heavily toward a discussion of the negative aspects of mothering. As a welcome alternative to works that seek to romanticize mothering, this book overcompensates by failing to tell enough about positive mothering experiences. Other limitations of this book include its almost exclusive focus on the mothers of newborns (none of the stories shared here concern teenagers, nor even toddlers), on heterosexual mothers (all of the partners here are either husbands or they are referred to by the gendered pronoun "he"), and on middle-class mothers (poverty is discussed primarily in the chapter on single-mothers, thereby implying that only single-mother families are poor). An additional difficulty with this book concerns its methodology. LeBlanc's book is based on quantitative and qualitative data obtained from surveying Australian and New Zealand mothers. Nowhere, however, does she indicate how many surveys were distributed, to whom they were distributed, how they were distributed, nor does she provide the response rate to these surveys. This methodological flaw may well be related to the apparent biases noted above. Qualitative data gleaned from these surveys is used effectively, as a means of women sharing stories about motherhood. But it is hard to know whether these stories collectively reflect demographic biases, and – without also knowing the methods used to gather data – how to appropriately theorize the narratives.

Nonetheless, LeBlanc's first book does succeed, in part, at doing what it sets out to do, namely, shatter some of the more prevalent and dangerous myths surrounding motherhood. Chief among these myths is the fiction that having a child will not change one's life. As LeBlanc states, "[m]otherhood alters a person at such a fundamental level. It exerts influence on the way she relates to herself, other people, the world and on her very experience of existence" (333). For first-time, middle-class, heterosexual mothers of newborn babies experiencing the shock of these changes, this book promises to assist with consciousness-raising. Like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* that (despite its limitations) inspired a generation of 1950s and 60s suburban women to abandon an identity steeped in the functionalist ideology of the housewife, LeBlanc's *Naked Motherhood* will teach important feminist lessons to a generation of women raised on the ideologies of motherhood perpetuated by 1970s

and '80s sitcoms such as *The Brady Bunch*, *Family Ties*, and *The Cosby Show*, ideologies that falsely led women to believe they could have it all and be it all. In fact, effective mothering is neither easy, nor natural; raising healthy, happy children without losing one's own identity and sanity requires systems of social support.

From Grandmother to Granddaughter: Salvadoran Women's Stories

Michael Gorkin, Marta Pineda, and Gloria Leal
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000

Reviewed by Kathleen L. Ward

From Grandmother to Granddaughter offers more than life stories of nine Salvadoran women. Embedded in the narratives are cultural traditions and values characteristic of El Salvador. In addition, the stories give evidence of the changing roles and status of women in a strongly patriarchal society and insight into the civil turmoil of El Salvador's recent past. These are ample reasons to read this rich collection of oral histories. But the primary reason to read this volume is for the opportunity to meet the women themselves: worth knowing and akin to the carefully constructed characters of good fiction, they tell us far more than we might realize.

Featuring three generations of women from three different family lines, the book conveys each woman's perspective on her life experiences: childhood, marriage, virginity, birthing, feminism, machismo, motherhood, war, and opportunities (both realized and lost). The book records the complex interplay of generations and, although intergenerational tensions exist and are discussed openly, affectionate respect connects the women across generations, particularly granddaughters and grandmothers: "You've been talking to her, right?" says Sara Gutierrez Rivas of her grandmother, Niña Julia. "So you know how hard her life was ... Others devalued her, but she never lost a sense of her own worth. I can feel this when she talks. She has this composure, this understanding about things."

Paulina Solares Nuñez, also a granddaughter, claims, "Actually, the one adult I can talk to about these things is my grandmother. She's cool. She's sort of modern.... I've asked her whether she was a virgin when she got married, and she said yes. But she didn't stop there and refuse to answer any other questions. She told me how she felt, how it was for her."

Class standing is central to the lives of these women. Niña Cecilia Nuñez's