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Contents

Book Reviews

Front Cover

Judy Martin, "Self-Portrait," Detail. Painted cotton, recycled maternity clothing, hand-pieced and quilted, 46" x 50", 1986. (Turn to page 46 for more details.)

Juanita Ross Epp and Sharon Cook

The (Male) Advantage of a Feminist Mother

Working mothers have long battled the personal doubts engendered by a society which assumes that women who work outside the home are somehow damaging the children thus "abandoned" to other forms of childcare whether the alternative childcare is the other parent, another family member, a neighbor or a day care centre. In addition, women who profess to be feminists are accused of other equally damaging—although less well defined—atrocities toward their children. For example:

> Feminists have not answered the argument that day care provides no substitute for the family. They have not answered the argument that indifference to the needs of the young has become one of the distinguishing characteristics of a society that ... exploits existing resources with criminal disregard of the future. (Lasch, 1977: xvi-xvii)

These accusations are even more pronounced if the children happen to be male. As Adrienne Rich described it more than 20 years ago:

> I have been asked, sometimes with genuine curiosity, sometimes with veiled hostility, "What do your sons think about all this?" ("All this" being feminism in general, my own commitment to women in particular.) When asked with hostility the implication is that a feminist must be man-hating, castrating; that "all this" must of course be damaging to my children; it is a question meant to provoke guilt. (My only answer, obviously, is, "you'll have to ask them.") (Rich. 1986: 207)

We have been asked similar questions and in this paper have used historical, sociological and psychological literature as background for an examination of our own sons' reactions to "all this." We thought to augment our sons' perceptions with those of historically prominent males who had feminist mothers but the term "feminist" created some difficulty for both aspects of the project. Although relatively new, it is deeply mistrusted and misunderstood and has evolved so quickly that the definition has changed from one generation to the next. As Wolf (1993) pointed out, people have difficulty separating out the emotional side issues that have become attached to the feminist movement such as abortion, lesbianism, single parenting, birth control, pornography, spousal abuse, safe streets, common-law relationships, day-care concerns, child abuse, child poverty, racism, classism and a host of other issues. All of these are important to most feminists, but disagreement on individual issues has fragmented the feminist movement and lead to public misunderstandings about feminists' collective intentions. Our sons identified four types of feminism and were willing to be associated with only one of them. Fortunately, that definition coincided with ours, so for the purposes of this paper a feminist is anyone who believes in and is working toward equity between the genders—a definition based on an expectation of equal pay for equal work and equal sharing of household responsibilities.

Seeking the historical precedent

> For thousands of years, because of her awesome ability to spew forth a child, mother has been feared and revered. She has been the subject of taboos and witch hunts, mandatory pregnancy and confinement in a separate sphere. She has endured appalling insults and perpetual marginalization. She has also been the subject of glorious painting, chivalry, and idealization. Through it all, she has rarely been consulted. She is an object, not a subject. (Thurur, 1994: 299)

Most modern societies attach deep significance to the mother/child bond through the complex process of nurturance. Whatever the religious orientation, political positioning, class or ethnicity, women are likely to be given the task of interpreting, inculcating and monitoring the socialization of young children on behalf of the wider society. But women have not always had much to do with their growing sons. Until the late eighteenth century in North America, the cultural assessment of women's moral character was essentially negative. Rooted in religious distrust and governance restrictions, women's presumably inborn predilection for instability, emotionalism and irrationality caused many to counsel the removal of children, especially male children, from their mother's purview as early as was reasonably possible.

Before the nineteenth century, large families and the need for mothers to contribute actively to the family economy denied any one child much individual

attention and many young men were apprenticed or bound out as servants before their mid-teens, effectively removing them from their mother's influence. Colonial Americans, like members of most developing societies, understood their world as "an organic social order in which rights and responsibilities were reciprocal and in which terms like 'individuality' and 'self-reliance' had little place.... A person's identity was bound up in the performance of social roles, not in the expression of self" (Rotundo, 1990: 12-13). One "expression of self" thus denied to most mothers and sons prior to the nineteenth century was the assumption that they would have a personal relationship.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century several factors altered common views of nurturance. Family size declined, permitting mothers to accord more attention to each child. Fathers increasingly worked away from the home as the family based economy slowly gave way to an industrial system. The role of mother had changed:

> The specifically maternal duties of child care, once defined haphazardly by her round of daily tasks, became a self-conscious enterprise, one that was assigned exclusively to mother, complicated and time-consuming. (Thurur, 1994: 185)

Societal perceptions of women changed from condescension to an equally unbalanced attitude which set mothers up as models of moral rectitude, empathy, industry, self-restraint, and personal purity by which young men were to be both nurtured and uplifted. Fewer sons left the household before their mid to late twenties and mothers were expected to mold young men's characters through a blend of easy companionship and high moral purpose which would last a lifetime.

The advice literature for mothers in this period portrayed the ideal mother/son relationship as emotionally charged and almost sexually reverential: "'Oh mother, mother,' he sobbed, 'I wish I had never left you! I'll keep as near to you in heart as I can. I wish I hadn't grown away from you so; but I'll get back again if I can!'" (*Woman's Journal*, October 1890). The author of a pamphlet series directed towards young men in the late nineteenth century rhapsodized:

> One of the beautiful sights I have seen is a lady and her son walking, arm in arm, from church, Sabbath after Sabbath. He was like a lover in his tenderness. It made no difference who saw him, he was just as considerate as he could have been if she had been radiant with youth and beauty. (Scott, n.p.)

Mothers were responsible for their sons' physical well-being and their moral development. They were expected to keep the "hedonism of boy culture" out of the house and "extend their moral domain into boys' world" (Rotundo, 1990: 49-50). A really good mother would be able to control her boy's response

even if she was not present. A poem made available for Canadian children engaging in speaking contests sponsored by temperance youth groups between 1916 and 1922 spoke of "A Boy's Promise" to his mother which earns him the ridicule of his peers. He is undaunted:

> "Go where you please, do what you will,"
> He calmly told the other.
> "But I shall keep my word boys, still";
> "I can't; I promised mother."
> Ah, who could doubt the future course
> Of one who thus had spoken?
> Through manhood's struggle, gain and loss,
> Could faith like this be broken?
> God's blessing on that steadfast will,
> Unyielding to another,
> That bears all jeers and laughter still,
> Because he promised mother.
> —(Archives of Ontario, Colbec, n.p)

But this process of mother's uplifting influence occurred—and still occurs today—against a backdrop of expectation that the son will imminently move beyond this secure private zone into an intensely competitive and even dangerous public arena. Here he will be formally educated, socialized through male peers and authority figures, play male-dominated games, and learn to negotiate a profoundly male-centred public domain. This public life implicitly and even overtly denigrates values and behaviours which have come to be associated with women, and in particular, with the son's mother.

It has been argued that this denigration has often been accomplished through the "rule-bound structure of organized sports" which provided "a context in which they struggled to construct a masculine positional identity" (Messner, 1992: 150). Sports-facilitated masculine identities differ according to class and race (Connell, 1995; Davison, 1998; Frank, 1994; Messner, 1992: 147-163). This denigration of the feminine was —and is—also necessary to ensure that mothers will not prevent their sons from serving in the armed forces. Both sports and the military have been considered male realms, places in which women and women's ideas did not belong. This separation was a complex juncture for mothers and sons: masculinity and male status is in part expressed in men's successful separation from the subordination of the sphere of women's activity (Smith, 1985: 35).

Sons were expected to honor and love their mothers but to subjugate women in general, and mothers were expected to make the transition from authority figure to passive female at the appropriate time in their sons' lives. Thus, much of the literature produced for mothers over the past two hundred years prepared women for the possibility that their best efforts in civilizing sons

would be subverted by an exceedingly powerful society of which women were not a part.

Early feminists sought admission to that male world from an extremely disadvantaged position. Few women were allowed any knowledge of mainstream society and were routinely denied education and excluded from realms such as commerce and politics. They had to find entry points into "discourses from which women have for centuries been excluded" (Smith, 1985:. 4).

There were feminists who were also mothers who considered themselves to be active and visible participants in the public realm but they encountered resistance as they struggled to break down the barriers between the world of men and the world of women. There were those who believed that it was the twentieth century feminists themselves who encouraged the split worlds. As late as 1976, mothers were being admonished for their duplicity as perpetrators of the he-man myth:

> *Most mothers have retained, and further cultivated, the masculinity myth in their sons.* In a sense, they rigidly maintain a schizophrenic world: on one side they clamor for equality and unistandards and, on the other, they teach little boys how to become masculine he-men. (Sebald, 1976: 87, emphasis in the original)

Charting the contours of feminists' relationships to their sons was not easy. We needed access to the mothers' perceptions, the sons' reminiscences and some input from a third party such as a biographer or another member of the family. Such triangulation requirements immediately eliminated all but the famous (which limited the study's generalizability) and/or the rich, who sometimes have little to do with their own children. We found examples of activist mothers who commented on their sons, but few parallel accounts by these sons or by other observers and vice versa: we were well supplied with reminiscences by sons but we lacked their mother's perspectives. Activist mothers tended to write about global issues and commented little about their children. Reminiscences by sons of activists tended to focus on earliest memories rather than on their adolescent years when they would be more likely to understand feminist issues.

The references which do exist of writings about feminists by sons are frequently difficult and full of guilt. For example, in an afterward to his mother's book on parenting sons, Michael Silverstein writes:

> [M]y perceptions and memories of certain situations are different from my mother's. She remembers withdrawing from me and characterizes the attic room of my teenage years as "exile," while I remember my own active distancing behavior and recall that room as sanctuary. On the other hand, when she draws from her bank of therapeutic memories the general conclusion that many boys "not

> only accepted but encouraged this distancing," I see clearly the shadows of our own relationship.

This confirms what we probably all know: making sense of the mother-son relationship is not easy. Rich refers to the relationship between mother and child as "essential, distorted, misused ... The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" (Rich, 1986: 225-226).

The significance of collecting and comparing mothers', sons' and other observers' voices became clear when we eventually found an example fitting our criteria in the form of the relationship between Vita Sackville-West and her son Nigel. There were several biographies, a television series and collections of her letters. Her son had contributed thoughtful portraits of his mother, edited her correspondence, and published others' accounts.

The marriage of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson was privileged and unconventional in the extreme, as was their raising of their two sons. Vita was at the same time greatly admired and disparaged in her youth: bisexual, highly-strung, extraordinarily talented and closely connected to the Bloomsbury Set and in particular to Virginia Woolf. Nevertheless she remained married to the same man for her entire adult life and forged a compassionate and (eventually) stable household within which to raise her sons. In her youth and early adulthood, she was regarded as fiercely independent because she insisted on pursuing her writing career rather than acting as help-mate to her diplomat-husband. She was not a feminist in the sense of championing public issues of equity: as a member of the English elite, her social policies can only be regarded as conservative, but she demanded the kinds of life-style freedoms and personal equity within the domestic realm which late twentieth century feminists value. It is understandable that there was no expectation that her sons hold particular views on gender or racial equity since this was not characteristic of English feminism until the 1960's and was anathema to the class-based ideology within which the Nicolson family was enmeshed.

In surveying what Sackville-West divulged about raising her sons, one is struck by her insistence on honesty in the mother-son relationship, and her clear enjoyment of them as they were on the verge of adolescence. In a letter to Harold, Vita writes of the boys:

> 26 December 1926 [Ben was twelve; Nigel, ten]
> Ben is in bed in Cranmer's dressing-room—your room!—and I am in bed in Cranmer's bedroom, and we have the door open between us, so that we can talk. I can hear him saying to himself, "the mild continuous epic of the soil," like somebody rolling a sweet round and round his tongue. Niggs [Nigel] is the same little clown, a born comic. He has got his bicycle, and is as happy as a king. His is infinitely serviable, unselfish, and affectionate. Also sturdy, practical, resourceful, independent, humourous. I see no flaw in him, as a character;

> everybody loves him. I have had to institute scrubbage, as never was there such a little guttersnipe. Otherwise he is perfect; not an intellectual, but we shall have enough to spare of that in Ben. My darling, we are very, very lucky in those two boys. They will, respectively, satisfy all that we could wish for: Ben our highbrowness, Niggs our human needs. Or, at least, so I read them. (Nicolson, 1992: 179)

She was a great proponent of hard work for her sons, and work that stretched them beyond their present abilities. When Ben failed his entrance exams at Oxford, he explained weakly to his mother, "I am bad at being made to do anything which, had I my own way, I would not do." Furious with this self-indulgent attitude, Vita wrote back in exasperation:

> My dear Ben! really! What do you imagine life is made of? I curse you for being lazy, wasteful (time, not money) and without guts. I curse you for thinking a veneer of culture acquired principally from the conversation of people older, better educated, and above all more hard-working than yourself, is an adequate substitute for real knowledge, real application, real mental muscles. ... Veneereal disease, that's what's the matter with you. (Glendinning, 1983: 271)

Three years later, she reported to Virginia Woolf that Ben was writing a book on Seurat: "rather ambitious, I think, but I'm all for the young biting off more than they can chew" (DeSalvo and Leaska, 1985: 399). At the same time as she meted out censure when necessary to her sons, she took enormous enjoyment in their talents and affection.

As a writer, Vita Sackville-West worked exceedingly hard, often most of the night. She was an extremely skilled landscape gardener/artist, pouring her energies into the huge gardens at Sissinghurst Castle by day and writing by night. She fully expected her sons to be literate and artistic, to accomplish mastery of these fields through their own labours, and to distinguish themselves as men of "good character." Her sons both became men of letters. Until his death in 1978, Ben was an art historian and editor of the prestigious *Burlington Magazine*. Nigel is author or editor of eight books, publisher of many more and a former British Member of Parliament.

Nigel, apparently on behalf of his brother and himself, has written extensively about his mother. In his *Portrait of a Marriage* (1973)he notes that a gap always existed between mother and sons:

> It had been there since we were babies. When we were at school she dutifully tore herself away from her work to visit us on half terms at Summer Field and Eton, and was always sweet to us, but she could not disguise the effort it cost her to find new subjects to talk about when we had exhausted the garden and the dogs. ... Later she always took

> an interest in what was happening to us, and during the war wrote to us very regularly, but her letters were more constrained than those she wrote to Harold. Her pen had needed pushing, we felt, instead of keeping pace with her thoughts. She was guiltily conscious that she never managed to establish an intimacy with her sons, and thought herself a failure as a mother, but it was as much our fault as hers. We never made the necessary effort to know her well. (Nicolson, 1973: 226)

Clearly, guilt characterizes both sides of this and many other mother-son relationships. Glendinning (1983) suggests, and Nigel himself concurs, that Vita found it easier to nurture Ben than Nigel, to whom she warmed more slowly (272). Nigel expresses regret about his inability to relate easily to Vita: "I feel remorseful about this. I should have taken the trouble to know Vita better" (Nicolson, 1973: 14). In his *Portrait of a Marriage* (1973), Nigel recounts a painful effort on Vita's part to honour her son, and Nigel's life-long regret at his youthful response:

> She paused one evening at the bottom step of her staircase, turned to me shyly and said: "I have written a new poem, and I would like to dedicate it to you." "Oh, don't do that," I replied unthinkingly, "You know that I don't really understand your poetry." She went up the tower without a word, and when she came to dinner I saw that she had been crying. By this incomparably cruel remark I had meant, "Your poetry is the side of you that I have never shared, and cannot claim to share. I don't deserve the dedication. I would be a form of intrusion." But that was not what I said.... I was then 17. (1973: 272)

This story does little to illuminate the affect of feminist ideals on a son, but is does serve to remind us that what a son may assert at 17 is not necessarily what he believes in later life.

What, then, can we conclude about and from the relationship between Vita Sackville-West and her two sons? We know some of what Vita hoped forher sons, how she demanded on occasion that they improve themselves, how one of the sons remembers her, and what became of those sons. We know that this mother, who insisted on time for herself and for her own career development, elicited pride, sympathy and warmth in at least one son, and this the one reputedly more distant from his mother's affections. We have testimony from both mother and son that this unconventional, artistic, proto-feminist mother actively and effectively nurtured her sons, underlining their duties as well as their privilege. We can conclude much about the relationship between mother and sons, and while this relationship seems to have been mutually guilt-ridden, there is no sense at all that the sons regarded their often-absent mother as emasculating, hostile or non-nurturant.

Sons of third wave feminists

Our sons were born between 1971 and 1981. They were raised by feminist mothers in two-parent homes where the mothers may not have been "in the home" to the same extent as other mothers. There was perhaps more sharing of household responsibilities and it is likely that the boys had more personal time with their fathers (and less with their mothers) than was usual for other children. These were the physical implications of having an "absent mother". In addition, our sons were also the sons of feminists so they heard feminist rhetoric—ideas which may or may not have been in conflict with information they were receiving from other sources. We have tried to separate the issues associated with the "absent mother" from those associated with the "feminist mother."

When we conducted the research the sons were 24, 22, 18, 17 and 15. At the outset, we were prepared for nasty surprises: that is, we expected to hear about hidden resentments and unknown hurts concerning the ideological battles that had become a part of our professional lives. Neither of us felt that we had "failed" our children, but the natural doubts of parenthood were exacerbated by the fact that we had chosen not to be "at home" mothers. There was a possibility that disapproving relatives and neighbours might have been right. Perhaps we had damaged our children by our lack of "sacrificial willingness to set personal ambition aside" (Thurur, 1994: 287). There was also the feminist issue itself. Feminism is often misunderstood to mean a belief in female superiority and is often denigrated in popular culture. It was possible that our boys suffered because, in spite of our efforts, they did not understand our stand on equity or that they had been ridiculed by peers or mistreated by adults because of our activism.

We used "interlocking conversations" similar to those used by Castle, Reynolds and Abbey (1996). First, the siblings interviewed each other using a set of research questions. Before listening to our sons' interviews, we recorded our own recollections concerning the same questions. Finally, we had family interviews—mothers and sons. After these had been transcribed and shared, the two mothers discussed them and one mother did a further interview to clarify "absent mother" questions with her sons.

The absent mother

> The new division between the public and private spheres ... produced a more dichotomized view of manhood and womanhood, a more elaborate scheme of sex roles. It also made women's positions more precarious as men worked for wages and women performed the unpaid and increasingly devalued work at home. (Millman, 1991: 136)

When neither parent is available to be a "stay at home" person, there are several integrated issues to be considered: household duties, child care, child

development, and even family finances. The family practice of housekeeping and child care in a dual career household is dependent upon the family ideology. In families where there is a belief that certain activities are "women's work" there are two possibilities. There may be no change in the wife's household work load, or the man may assume tasks that he does not normally consider his responsibility in recognition of her wage earner status. In a more egalitarian relationship, the jobs may remain segregated with each partner assuming specific responsibilities or the jobs may be shared in a partnership format (Lein, 1984: 42). Children raised in an egalitarian partnership witness non-traditional work role separation and are more likely to be expected to do all kinds of work regardless of sex stereotyping.

Our sons mentioned almost nothing about household duties or housekeeping routines. One said: "I don't think there ever has been a time when we came home when there wasn't a meal on the table or in the process" The boys had the perception that cooperation in doing household tasks was normal:

> *You trade off things. Someone does the dishes, someone does the laundry, someone does the cleaning blah, blah, blah. We do it together. I think there is maybe a better understanding (now). I don't think there are many people out there among our friends who would say "I'm not going to clear" or "I won't cook" or "I'm not going to clean this because that is not my job." If it comes about, that's sort of a systemic thing that they don't talk about. I don't think people would just say I don't do cooking because I'm a guy.*

When specifically questioned on this issue they dismissed it as unimportant. One boy remembered a time when his friend had been surprised to see his mother driving the car when his father was in the car but other than that he had no comment on the issue.

In both households, childcare duties were also shared. The dual-parenting process produced a sort of "integrated parent" in the minds of the children. They repeatedly used phrases such as "both my parents" or "both you and dad" rather than centering on one role. They had difficulty sorting out which things about their childhood were affected by their mother alone, by their father alone or by this "integrated parent." The integrated parent allowed them to maintain balance in the absence of an individual full time at home parent.

Contrary to prevailing public perceptions, studies of the security, intelligence, and social adjustment and "masculinity" of sons of working mothers have concluded that they have emotional and intellectual as well as financial advantages. Increased interaction with both parents is beneficial to the child. Children securely attached to both parents showed the greatest interest in other adults, even more than those who were attached only to their mothers (Lamb, Pleck and Levine, 1986: 145). Teachers rated children of employed mothers as better adjusted, more independent and peer oriented (Mischel and Fuhr, 1988: 192). Although some studies have shown that sons of employed mothers had

lower IQs, when the same studies were done with children with increased paternal influence, there was no difference (Mischel and Fuhr, 1988: 193, 198).

Several studies cited by Lamb, Pleck and Levine (1986: 149) pointed out that children develop a sense of personal efficacy when parents make appropriate responses to their signals. Observations in the orphanages of Romania where children were fed, changed and cared for according to a timetable, serve as an example of this. Children who cried were ignored so they learned not to cry. When outsiders came to the orphanages after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, they found three- or four-year-old children who were delighted to accept rides on a merry-go-round but who would not ask for more nor show any indication that they wanted more. They were willing to accept what was given but had no idea that they could intervene to control their environment (*Ideas*, CBC radio, July 13, 1998). As Lamb *et al.* (1986) suggested: "Parents who provided stimulation that is developmentally appropriate and plentiful have more cognitively competent children" (149). However this stimulation can come from either parent or from other sources:

> The effects of increased paternal involvement on intellectual performance may reflect ... the benefits of having extensive stimulation from two highly involved and relatively competent parents instead of only one. (Lamb *et al.*, 1986: 150)

Stability of the family unit may be more important to the child than the details of who is available to care for them on a day to day basis (Stafford and Bayer, 1993: 142-146).

The effects of maternal employment on children may be related to how the mother feels about working. If mothers believe they are doing the right thing and they are happy doing it (whether it be working or not working) then their children are well adjusted. The unhappy stay-at-home mother is more damaging to her children than the unhappy working mother in measures of social and cognitive development (Mischel and Fuhr, 1988: 195).

The positive effects of a working mother are most evident during the teen years. Teenaged children of employed mothers have higher self-esteem, more sense of belonging, and better interpersonal relations both at home and at school (Mischel and Fuhr, 1988: 199). Our sons confirmed this research. As one of them said: "I don't think we suffered in any way."

Much "mother blaming" literature is based on a perception that an inadequate mother (or perhaps an overbearing one), will do irreparable damage to her son's masculinity. As Sebald wrote—in seemingly complete sincerity—in 1976: "If a mother does not identify herself with the feminine role, the boy's masculinity usually suffers and he exhibits more feminine traits" (97). Sebald set out to warn the American public about "Momism," a dreadful condition in which Mom "tries to manipulate the child by extending acceptance and love on a conditional basis" (Sebaald, 1976: 9). This results in a man who is "absolutely

unequipped for making personal decisions ... inclined to marry a woman who will exploit his overdependence ... his wife becomes a substitute Mom—a horrifying prospect indeed" (Sebald, 1976: 11). But fathers are not absolved from blame:

> The pivotal point for the boy's feelings of certainty and adequacy is the role his father plays in his life. If this role is salient, strong, and tangible, personality problems for the boy (including Momistic encroachment) can be warded off. (Sebald, 1976: 102)

Adrienne Rich counters this perception of the mother:

> The "son of the mother" (the mother who first loves herself) has a greater chance of realizing that strength and vulnerability, toughness and expressiveness, nurturance and authority, are not opposites, not the sole inheritance of one sex or the other. (Rich, 1976: 209)

In studies of sex role stereotyping, both girls and boys whose mothers work are less bound by stereotypical sex-role perceptions and girls in particular benefit from the increased "flexibility in sex-role perceptions" (Mischel and Fuhr, 1988: 200; Lamb, Pleck and Levine, 1986: 147). This lack of stereotyping provides expanded career options for both males and females and has been associated with more creativity and better personality adjustment and total adjustment scores on standard personality tests (Mischel and Fuhr, 1988: 201).

Although those who study the topics prefer to separate "masculinity" from the issue of homosexuality, questions about masculinity in relation to mothering often focus on the sexual preferences of the sons. There is no evidence that mothers or fathers have anything to do with the child's eventual choices. The myth that boys choose other men "either in flight from the power of women, or in protest against the traditional male role" is just as prevalent and unsubstantiated as the myth that a boy may become homosexual "in reaction to his fathers khamstvo, his gross abuse of women as sexual objects" or as a replacement for a father who was chiefly absent (Rich, 1986: 211).

Since there is no evidence that working mothers negatively impact their children and some evidence that increased paternal involvement has a positive affect on growing children, it would follow that the "integrated parent" that our children experienced was at least as valuable as having one full time parent and possibly more advantageous. Our sons did not feel that they had been disadvantaged. They spoke only of appreciating our parenting styles:

> *I guess the argument is that (working mothers') children suffer ... I think that this is sort of a conservative back lash statement. ... I don't think I have ever suffered in any way.*

Instead of feeling neglected by their mothers, our children commented on how having a working mother enriched their lives both financially (because they contributed to the family income) and intellectually (because they were more interesting). When we asked our sons whether or not women should work outside the home, the boys in both families confirmed that for financial reasons, having one partner stay at home was "not a reasonable way to live."

Our experience confirms Chodorow's (1978) contention that traditional views of motherhood are limiting to all concerned. By accepting women in the role of primary care givers deprive sons of the opportunity to develop their capacity for nurturance. By breaking the cycle with a new model of shared parenting "Both male and female children become more whole and ultimately more capable of satisfying relations than their parents were" (Cohen and Katzenstein, 1988: 31).

The feminist mother

> What do we fear? That our sons will accuse us of making them into misfits and outsiders? That they will suffer as we have suffered from patriarchal reprisals? Do we fear they will somehow lose their male status and privilege, even as we are seeking to abolish that inequality? Must a woman see her child as "the enemy" in order to teach him that he need not imitate a "macho" style of maleness? (Rich, 1986: 205-206)

The contours of modern feminist mothering theory and practice is documented by third-wave feminists of our own era. (Chodorow, 1978; Cole, 1986; Dinnerstein, 1977; Lorde, 1984; O'Brien, 1981; Reddy, 1994; Rich, 1976; Ruddick, 1980; 1984). A portion of this literature has been devoted to the question of the effective nurturing of male sons (Lorde, 1984; Rich, 1986, Silverstein, 1994). The focus of much of their work is based on the perception that feminists consider men to be "the enemy" and therefore must hate them all, even their own children.

For most feminists it is the patriarchal system which is the enemy, not the individuals within it, especially not those who do not subscribe to patriarchy. We want our sons to become men who understand the issues associated with male privilege and refute the inequity that they see there. This may alienate them from men who view feminist sympathizers with the same disregard as they view women. Thus the aims of feminists raising sons and daughters are similar. They hope to nurture them in a belief that all people are equal and to prevent them from being damaged by patriarchy.

> It is absurd to think that women on the path of feminism wish to abandon their sons, emotionally or otherwise ... We wish for our sons—as for our daughters—that they may grow up unmutilated by

gender-roles, sensitized to misogyny in all its forms. (Rich, 1986: 207)

In a special 1993 issue of *Ms. Magazine*, feminist mothers wrestled with the question of what constituted feminist nurturant practices of sons. They were concerned with the interrelated issues of teaching children "critical resistance", humanizing the parental-child relationship, and teaching "aggression deconstruction" and self-protection. They saw themselves as agents of change attempting to produce in their sons a critical view of society, intolerant of injustice. They chose to challenge patriarchal norms through daily discussion with their children, providing them with a vocabulary for understanding systemic injustice. But for boys it is harder than it is for girls. As Morgan noted:

> The challenges faced by a feminist rearing a daughter are enormous - but at least you can unambivalently (so I imagine) tell her, Go for it! Don't let anyone stop you. With a son, you must somehow erode the allure of male entitlement and communicate a delicate double message: Fulfill yourself to the utmost as a human being—but try to divest yourself of the male power that routinely accrues to you. Be all you can as a person—but don't forget your automatic male advantages are bought at the cost of their denial to female people. If, as in my case, the son is European American, you try to communicate a comparable message about being white in a racist culture. (Morgan, 1993: 37)

This was a part of our own feminist mothering. Our children spoke about feminism as a gateway to understanding other equity issues. When asked "how did it affect you to have a feminist mother?" one son responded:

> *I saw stuff more unbiased ... because when you are aware of some of the injustices, and are aware that they occur, you see them, not only as those injustices, but also others that don't have to do with feminism but racism and other stuff like that.*

Another son made a similar connection when trying to define feminism:

> *I think it (feminism) must go beyond just looking at equality ... I would say the same about the black people trying to get equality there. It's just basically fairness.*

They seemed to think that being feminist and holding to feminist ideals was "a normal process, especially for educated women."

The feminist mothers in the 1993 Ms article indicated that they had fears for their sons: "Because many of us tend to characterize the world of men as predatory, aggressive, ruthlessly competitive, we fear for our sons more than mothers who see the world of men as more benign" (Gordon, 1993: 48). Rich

wrote sadly of the possibility of isolating male off-spring from the masculine world:

> We also have to face the fact that in the recent stage of history our sons may feel profoundly alone in the masculine world, with few if any close relationships with other men (as distinct from male "bonding" in defense of male privilege). (Rich, 1986: 207)

It was our knowledge of the perceived difficulties of being attached to feminist principles which caused us to be startled by the complete lack of resentment and absence of fear in own children. For them, the "aggression deconstruction" and self-protection needs described by the feminists of the '70s were not important. For example, they considered themselves either feminist or pro-feminist and did not hesitate to say so. One said, "Of course I am a feminist, I think I have always been a feminist." The sons identified four different types of feminism at various times throughout their conversations. They agreed with the "equity between men and women" type of feminism. One said: If feminism is the fighting for equality, then sure I would want to call myself a feminist. It's so natural ... I'm a feminist, everybody is feminist. Most intelligent and educated people are feminists." They also understood the sex role arguments:

> *Another way (of understanding feminism) is to redefine what is meant by the concept of women and analyze the concept of women. It may not be equality, but trying to change the definition of gender issues and gender roles.*

They were not enthused about "intellectual feminism" that is,

> *the "Simone de Beauvoir" feminism where there is a constant speaking of "Other" and women are labeled the "Other" with a capital "O." ... I'm not against it but I definitely wouldn't call myself a feminist in that sense. ... The language in which they write is so confused. ... It is purely intellectual sorts of games. It is really philosophical and interactive.*

They were strongly opposed to "Nazi Feminism which says things like 'all sex with men is rape' and things like that."

However, feminism as equity seeking was considered not only normal but beneficial. They intimated that this attitude gave them an advantage over their less enlightened male counterparts. When one said he was "raised to be pro-feminist" he was asked if that had affected his relationships with his peers. He responded, "Yeah. I'm better than them—socially better." Another commented "I am probably more sensitive to those issues than I would have otherwise been and that's a good good thing." Still another said that it gave him

an advantage over other first year university students:

> *I think we got it (feminism) from you (his mother) but for most people I don't think they get it from high school.... At least for males, it's sort of a slap in the face if you go to university ... (where) there is strong feminism and all the -isms and all the "Others," all the "marginalized" people really try to take back their lost power. For certain people, this was a shock, (for) those who have never experienced this before for a lot of males and a lot of females as well. ... a lot of shock tactics were being used.*

In a later discussion, he commented on the role of feminism in the university setting where "you tend to run into a lot of women who are experimenting themselves with feminism and you are in that process as well." He did not claim that it made relationships with women easier or better, just that:

> *You tend to try to understand that (their feminism) as well. If you bring it back to having a mother who had feminist ideas, I guess I am more aware of these issues than a lot of other people. I didn't think it made me anything, it just made me more aware of it.*

None of the boys spoke about difficulties in relating to male peer groups and they did not perceive themselves as being any different from other males their own age. As one explained it "I think all of my friends had a positive perspective of women and that they would take equality for granted."

The feminist mothers from the *Ms* article (and fathers in several of these relationships) seemed to attempt to demystify parental roles and encouraged their sons to see their mothers (and fathers) as real, fallible people. They saw mothering as "a learning process, rather than an interpretive and potentially critical act" (Everingham, 1994: 7).

There are as many styles of parenting as there are of feminism so it would be misleading to assume that all feminists adopt a similar style. However, parenting styles can be differentiated according to methods for securing the child's compliance. Parents may demand obedience, use reasoning, or accept non-compliance. Reasoning has been described as the most beneficial:

> "instrumentally competent" children (those who are friendly, independent, and assertive with peers and compliantly nonintrusive with adults) are likely to have authorative parents.— that is, parents who provide firm and articulately reasoned guidance for their children. Both authoritarian parents (those who fail to provide any rationale for their instructions) and permissive parents (those who fail to provide adequate guidance) have less instrumentally competent children. (Lamb, *et al.*, 1986: 152)

Everingham (1994) suggested that mothering should be understood as an interaction: "it is just as important to investigate what happens to the (m)other while nurturing as it is to investigate what happens to the child, since the affective sensations experienced by the (m)other while nurturing structure future patterns of interaction" (46). Thus parenting is not application of rules or even understanding what the rules are before the "game" begins. It is a negotiated relationship in which the parents seek what is best for the child in a rational and sensitive manner. What is right for one child or situation may not necessarily be right for another.

Our own sons felt that non-authoritarian processes had been beneficial to them. One son spoke explicitly about the advantages his parents gave him by providing a model of intelligent conversation:

> *I think it was a tremendous advantage to have educated parents, articulate parents who know how to hold a conversation.... Also important is the way we talked through arguments, not like angry but intellectual arguments... rationally debated.*

He commented specifically about his mother's role in teaching him how to articulate rational arguments and to think critically:

> *Rational argument and critical thinking — that was always the form that conversations have taken between Mom and I. It has never been a matter of "do this because you have to do it." It may well be done at the end, but it always started out by her explaining why this is the best thing, not just "this is the best thing that you have to accept" and that got my rational views working.*

The other mother felt that non-authoritarian parenting produced a questioning attitude in one of her sons which caused his teachers to think he was defiant. He would refuse to do assignments if he thought they were senseless and would do as he was told only if he saw good reason for it. This caused him trouble at school. His mother described it:

> *It (school) was just so straight and narrow that there wasn't space for a kid who was a little different.... He felt he was protecting his principles and I kind of agreed with him. I mean when you teach a kid to be wary of unreasoned authority, this is what you get. I had to side with him, he was just living out to the nth degree the things that I had taught him. It would have been easier if he had been less principled about it, but that was the way he chose to do it and I had to go along with it.*

The boy admitted that "(at school) I always had a problem with all the authority and I wouldn't do what they'd tell me." When asked about his

mother's involvement with his schooling he said "She always came in and went to the office for me because she got called in a whole bunch and she always fought for my side and I always appreciated that. She never took their side over mine."

Parents in pursuit of critical resistance who wish to protect their sons from being damaged by patriarchy are likely to use reasoned conversation in their interactions with their children. This approach is sometimes difficult in a world which does not always value reasoned fair responses and which is often controlled by unreasoned conventions. Our sons did not perceive themselves as disadvantaged by their upbringing and spoke positively about our parenting processes. They have learned to live in the society we have handed down to them and they seem to think that they are not unusual or in any way distinct from their friends because of it.

Another male advantage?

When we started this study we were unsure of the outcome. The best that we hoped for was that we would find out that our sons did not perceive us as having damaged them by being working feminist mothers. We did expect a few hurts and passing accusations and were not prepared for the wholehearted vote of confidence that we received.

Through this work we have been made aware of the complicated morass of interaction that makes up the parent-child relationship. However, we have been able to apply existing literature to our own experience, a process which was made easier when we accepted as discrete those issues associated the working (absent) mother and those associated with the feminist mother.

The working mother was rather easily absolved. In spite of folk wisdom to the contrary, there was no evidence in the literature which supported the notion that a working mother caused damage to her children. If anything, the literature suggested that rather than less outside work for mothers there should be increased parental input from fathers. Children of both genders who have working mothers have advantages in all areas including intellectual development, social adjustment and career opportunities. Our own sons saw nothing but advantages to having a working mother and planned to have working wives.

The effects of a feminist mother on her sons are less obvious. Although third wave feminists were able to identify their expectations for their children as "critical resisters" in a patriarchal world who would perhaps be isolated and punished for their stance, our sons do not perceive themselves as disadvantaged by their acceptance of feminist ideals. They could not remember any negative incidents associated with having a feminist mother, nor could they think of any way in which their awareness of feminism had worked against them. They were able to find specific aspects of their upbringing which valued in particular, their understanding of issues of equity and social justice. They suggested that it was useful to have an understanding of feminism but stopped short of saying that it had given them an advantage in forming relationships.

We realize the difficulties of building a theory on our own rather limited experiences and we remain puzzled by our own children's responses to feminism. They seemed almost nonchalant about an issue that we have always considered defining and life shaping. An issue that affected our lives in many ways seems to have coalesced into theirs without any ripples of resentment or emotional discomfort. We know that feminism is not an easy issue for girls to deal with. Could it be so simple for our boys? Perhaps part of the answer is a simplistic acknowledgment of the fact that patriarchy favours men and therefore, as men, they have a positive choice to make. They can choose patriarchy and enjoy the male advantage or they can choose to tolerate feminism and build strong relationships with women, take advantage of a strengthening trend toward equity and look forward to a wealthier future with a well employed partner. If this is the case, in an ultimate irony, it seems that feminist mothers may have handed their sons yet another male advantage. Let us hope that we have also raised them to be sensitive enough to use that advantage equitably.

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Nancy Backes

Beyond the "World of Guilt and Sorrow"

Separation, Attachment and Creativity in Literary Mothers and Sons

Robert Munsch's (1991) book for children, *Love You Forever*, tells the story of the mother-son relationship over the life span. In the story, a boy, first as a baby, then toddler, preschooler, adolescent, and adult is shown in a relationship with his mother who is young, middle aged, and, finally, senescent. As an old woman, the mother urgently requests the presence and solicitude of her son in a way that echoes the care she gave to him earlier; the relationship has been inverted. The son, after a visit to his mother who is near death, returns home and repeats his mother's tender refrain about unconditional love to his baby daughter.

It would be easy to dismiss this story as a sentimental portrayal of mothers and sons. Some would suggest that the story is inaccurate in its representation, for here it is a son rather than a daughter who reproduces mothering, contra Nancy Chodorow (1979). Also, this is a representation of a son who doesn't truly separate from his mother but rather retains a kind of allegiance to her power, a power that he keeps alive. Sentimental? Inaccurate? Maybe. Yet the book has had 56 printings since its publication in 1986. This popularity suggests that Munsch's story, unwittingly perhaps, reflects and provides a model for the qualities and theoretical concerns at work in the production and reception of many texts that feature mothers and sons.

How does the mother influence the son's construction of ego, the task, as literary and age theorist Constance Rooke (1992) sees it, belonging to the first life phase? How does the son affect the mother's "carefully designed and self-assured maturity" and how is he affected by it? If the task of old age is "deconstruction of ego," a willingness to relinquish social power (Rooke, 1992: 245), then why does the mother cry out in need to her son in old age? As the disintegration of ego continues in age, does it reflect the psychoanalytic belief

that the mother is completed through the life of the son (Freud, 1933: 133)? In the mother's mind, does the son now hold the power to bring coherence to her life, as she provided coherence for him in the mirror stage of infancy?

And how is it for the sons along the life course? For men, the mother assumes an almost clichéd omnipotence in their lives and in their texts; she exists, they seem to say, to thwart creativity at the same time she is the source of it. This implies that the concept of separation and detachment does not seem to occur in actual practice, as attachment theorists point out. Lillian Troll and Jean Smith (1976), for instance, argue that "[p]arent-child ties are not necessarily terminated at the age of 2, or at the time the 'Oedipal crisis,' or even during adolescence or young adulthood. In fact, they may not even be terminated by death—that is, the death of one of the people involved" (156). The invisible, but absolute, power of the mother lives on. Paul Olsen in *Sons of Mothers* notes that a man "can grow up, build a career, marry and have children, arrange for his mother's funeral, die. And through it all she will always be the most crucial, most dynamic, and most powerfully influential force in his life" (1981: 58). D.H. Lawrence wrote in *Sons and Lovers* that "[t]here was one place in the world that stood solid and did not melt into unreality: the place where his mother was. Everybody else could grow shadowy, almost non-existent to him, but she could not. It was as if the pivot and pole of his life, from which he could not escape, was his mother" (1913: 233). And John Updike: "She was in him not as he had been in her, as a seed becoming a little idol, but as the full web of his perceptions and reactions; he had led his life as an extension of hers, and when she died he became custodian of all his little images of her, of his thousand tiny nuanced 'understandings' of her, like the words of a once commonplace language of which he was now the sole surviving speaker ..." (1992: 35-36). What are we to make of these texts, these anxious testimonies concerning the loss and recovery of the maternal?

The answer to this and to other questions concerning this significant relationship are still being formulated. Although this is one of life's most permanent and powerful relationships, mothers and sons have not been much studied. Interestingly, the United States' Library of Congress lists only seven titles between 1968 and the mid-1990s with "mothers and sons in literature" as a descriptor.[1] Why is this relationship ignored by researchers? As Linda Fennie Forcey (1987) observes in her book *Mothers of Sons*, until recently, feminism disregarded "the paradoxical in human relationships, with one notable exception, mother-daughter relationships. There feminists felt comfortable." On the other hand, the mother-son relationship is, Forcey notes, a "taboo topic" (2).

This article outlines the emotional geography of this mother-son relationship over the life span as it is represented and reconstructed in literature. How does this relationship function as a catalyst or inhibitor of mutual creativity across life? For the son, at least as Olsen (1981), Lawrence (1913), and Updike (1992) see it, the mother is problematic: the source of their own creativity and

production, but at the price of their own freedom. This situation suggests the familiar paradigm of successful artist but failed person, a paradigm built with "mother" at the foundation. Pamela Bowker argues in her profound and provocative, but little-known study published in 1996, *The Grief Taboo in American Literature: Loss and Prolonged Adolescence in Twain, Melville, and Hemingway,* that repressed grief and unexpressed mourning—mourning specifically for the mother—is the wellspring of canonical American literature. The repression of feminine sensibility, indeed, of the female herself are, as she puts it, "central ingredients in the creative processes and the fictional products of the male American author" (3). The internal struggle of canonical American male writers between separation and attachment from the mother enables the creation of what Bowker calls "non-phallic masculinity at the heart of the traditional male canon" (3)—a feminine center that continues to remain invisible to literary practitioners.

Yet, as Bowker (1996) points out, men cannot—or do not—forgo the internal struggle with the mother and her image. The characteristic American literary heroic retreat into the Ideal—the world of ideas, abstractions, and utopia—is, in fact, a retreat from the daily world with its sensual data and conscious reminders of the mother and concomitant sexual complications. Bowker discusses this, as did Leslie Fiedler (1975) before her. Moreover, the tendency of the American literary hero to wander, to simultaneously seek and escape—think of Huckleberry Finn—and to constantly desire renewal is a strategy, Bowker maintains, for avoiding grief associated with separating from the mother. The heroic energy is consistently misdirected; the frenzy obscures the true object. And because the ostensible object—idealized nature, for instance—is removed from the true object—the mother—the grief never ends, the mourning never stops. The male writer's failure to acknowledge that it is mother at the source drives the literary production, creating the classic American hero: the isolated, adolescent wanderer headed for the territory on some ill-defined quest. Bowker mentions that in contrast, grief in literature by women tends to be overtly expressed, rather than sublimated or denied. I will take issue with this assumption in a moment.

The psychoanalytic texts of Freud (1953, 1933), John Bowlby (1973), D. W. Winnicott (1965, 1971), Alice Balint (1952), and Melanie Klein (1975), among others, do show that the relationship at each life stage is guided by the desire for a kind of innocence or renewal, which is actually a recapitulation of the desire to recover the perfect love of the mother during infancy. Balint (1952) theorizes that this is the source of all erotic striving. Bowker (1996), however, sees the desire for rebirth as a way to disavow and repress mother love and loss. The American ideal of renewal and regeneration, and the concomitant rejection of history, the failure of the generational passing of legacy from father to son, seems to suggest the primacy of the mother's influence on the son. Think of the flight into Nature of the Transcendentalists and Walt Whitman, which can be interpreted as expressions of longing for the pre-Oedipal mother. The

loss of the mother in the developmental process or in the unexpected event of untimely death—and the grief that this engenders—has no cultural outlet; it leads to what sociologists now call disenfranchised grief. It also leads to great art, art characterized by a frozen adolescence replacing the mother with a wife many years hence. In classic psychoanalysis this drama always is told in terms of the child, in terms of his developmental necessity. Feminists have complained for years that the Freudian model is based on the man's point of view of the boy's development, a model that denies the mother's subjectivity, as E. Ann Kaplan (1992), among others, points out.

So what is the mother's position and viewpoint of the Oedipal stage? Does she fear the loss, and then does she grieve the loss of her son who must, as the story goes, reject her in order to develop? I propose that the mother indeed has a struggle here, and that this struggle is a battle to retain attachment to her child, to extend the love and symbiosis of the pre-Oedipal stage, to preserve the union from unnecessary rupture. This battle and the inevitable grief suffered by the mother as a result of losing it present themselves in women's literature only indirectly, in a kind of code through metaphor and symbol; this aspect of indirection women-authored literature shares with its male counterparts, despite Bowker's (1996) claim to the contrary. However, the loss—even the fear of the loss—engenders tremendous sorrow for the mother, but it is sorrow that has no cultural outlet; the result is disenfranchised grief. And this grief of the mother at her inability to keep the blissful closeness and protection shared in earlier stages leads to resentment and deep despondency. Thus, the central themes of many literary women and their women characters has to do with their attachments to their sons and their resistance to the loss of their sons. In old age, however, women recover their lost sons, just as the mother does in the Robert Munsch (1991) children's book I mentioned in my opening. I will show this metaphoric grief and recovery at several stages in the life course, using several authors' representations.

I begin with motherhood and early childhood. Playwright Tina Howe (1977) dramatizes the intensity of the attachment between mother and son in a generally negative way in her early play *Birth and After Birth.* Howe, herself a mother of a son and a daughter, eschews the sentimentality of motherhood, saying: "As a mother, you experience moments of excruciating tenderness and love, but there is also a great savagery that has not been seen enough in the theatre and in movies...." (101). The first production of *Birth and After Birth* was in workshop in New York in 1974; the play has had limited production in the decades since, mostly because Howe guards it so closely. This play can be interpreted as a desire to recover the submerged maternal, to make visible the unseen non-phallic foundation that supports creativity in the son. This non-phallic foundation means that, in some cases, when we discuss mothers and sons, we may actually be discussing mothers and daughters.

John Bowlby (1973) suggests that in families in which a parent, usually the mother, keeps the child with her to meet her own unrequited needs for parental

Judy Martin, "October," Photographs, giftwrap, and cotton framed under glass, 24" x 29", 1986.

love, her action is a response to her mother who did not meet her needs. This mother, according to Bowlby, "treats the child as though he were a replica of her mother" (269). She seeks care and comfort from him, but may behave towards this child as though he were the dominant one. Is this why in Howe's play, *Birth and After Birth*, the playwright insists that the four-year-old son be played by an adult actor?[2] Is this towering, dominant child emblematic of the mother's mother? (Howe explored this theme in her other plays, most notably in *Painting Churches* in which the mother is dominant over both her husband, who has Alzheimer's disease, and the adult daughter who struggles to assert her own identity as a woman and as an artist.) Some of the maternal features of this intergenerational tangle as outlined by Bowlby are: redirection toward the child of the resentment and anger at not receiving love, misinterpretation of the child's behavior as rejection of her; reproduction of the anger of her own mother in the behavior toward the child (270)—conditions that abound in Howe's play. The mother, Bowlby further notes, has "unexpressed resentment" (270). In certain cases, the mother can treat the child as an attachment figure (271).

The scene in *Birth After Birth* is Nicky's four-year-old birthday party. Nicky, as I have already said, is played by an adult. One of the underlying premises of the play is that for each birth there must be a corresponding death; in this case, the giant child is causing the mother's figurative death, since she has completely submerged her own life into that of her son. As the play opens, the audience sees that Sandy, the mother, has been up all night decorating the room and wrapping presents; Sandy is appropriately named since whenever she

Judy Martin, "October," Detail. Photographs, giftwrap, and cotton framed under glass, 24" x 29", 1986.

combs her hair or shakes her head, sand falls out, suggesting, of course, that she is turning into dust. "My head is leaking.... My brains are drying up..." she says at one point (Howe, 1977: 110). It also suggests regression, return to a more primitive state: return to the sea (or at least the beach), the womb, a place of calm, tranquillity, and no responsibilities: a place of absolute oneness and attachment with the mother, with Sandy's own mother. Sea metaphors abound in the play. Explaining the birth process to Nicky, she says that the newborn, upon experiencing air for the first time "turns bright pink! As pink as a seashell!" (Howe, 1977: 115). It becomes clear that Sandy herself yearns to be in a pre-Oedipal state with her mother. Sandy: "It's the strangest thing—ever since I got up this morning I've been smelling the sea. We're hundreds of miles away from it, but that bitter salty smell of low tide is unmistakable. I noticed it the moment I woke up...." (Howe, 1977: 124).

But what happens to the mother—Sandy in this case—after she gives birth? As her son is growing and developing, she no longer has him on her own terms, but rather on his. This is consuming her. There is a line that Sandy utters three times in the course of the two-act play: "When I looked into the mirror this morning, I saw an old lady. Not *old* old, just used up" (Howe, 1977: 109, 129, 168). Used up, Sandy doesn't have the strength to keep the attachment.

And the boy? His power is considerable. Now at age four, in the throes of working out in a permanent cultural way who he is, he no longer is in perfect relation to his mother. In his anger and confusion, he finds himself in

opposition to her, as he attempts to make all of his needs—from demands for grape juice to birthday presents—her needs too.

There seems to be no way out for women. That Nicky's development takes its toll on the parents, and particularly the mother, through incessant needs and demands, is clear. Sandy says to Nicky: "I just don't understand you. One minute you're the sweet baby Mommy brought home from the hospital, and the next, you're a savage!" (Howe, 1977: 118). Nicky is, as attachment theorist Margaret Mahler once put it, "hatching from the symbiotic shell," a development that poses no end of problems for the mother, who has given up her*self,* and has nothing left, now that her son is growing into himself, a self into which she unwillingly dissolves.

When Sandy's distant relatives, Mia and Jeffrey, who are childfree career anthropologists, join the party, the play displays more clearly the mother's need to maintain attachment to her son as a way of keeping her own mother and her own motherhood. Mia and Jeffrey study children of what they call "primitive" cultures, particularly the birth ritual of the Whan See tribe. The Whan See women assist at all births; when the child is born, they stuff the baby back into the womb, a process that is repeated nearly twenty times. Most babies die. Mia: "Seventeen times that baby came out of the womb and sixteen times he was pushed back in. The pain that girl bore was beyond description" (Howe, 1977: 166). This ritual highlights the desire of the mother to maintain connection—in this case, the absolute pre-birth attachment—to the child. In the Whan See culture—and in our culture—this attachment is violated the moment the child is born; then he becomes the property of the culture and its expectations. This runs counter to the mother's need for pure attachment. Defending the Whan See, anthropologist Jeffrey says: "When a civilized woman has a baby, she too is possessive, only in more subtle ways. She's possessive of her birth experience and delights in retelling it. She's possessive of her baby and tries to keep him helpless for as long as possible. Well, these Stone Age women were just acting out that same possessiveness by reinserting the baby into its mother's womb" (Howe, 1977: 167).

The fantastic Whan See women retain the power of attachment, although death, in this paradoxical situation, is the usual result. Later in the play, Sandy and Mia enact their own birth ritual. Their absurd, exclusionary ceremony is one that occurs without conception—without men—and ultimately without a child. Just as well, Howe seems to suggest. For Sandy has lost her son, anyway: he now belongs to the culture. Her grief drives her to her origins, to the symbiotic sea.

Now I turn from the mother's perspective of the Oedipal crisis to the son's so-called latency years. What happens to the mother here? Ann Petry's (1946) *The Street* is most often read as a naturalistic novel, a story of characters unable to overcome life's larger forces, forces that shape their fate. In this novel these forces include racism, sex, and money.

Lutie Johnson is a single African American woman trying to raise her

eight-year-old son, Bub, in a way that will enable him to move beyond the mean streets of Harlem. Lutie is determined to create a better life for Bub, indeed, a better life for them both, although many men, symbolic of the father in the Oedipal situation, try to intrude on this strong mother-son bond. Lutie rejects them all; her devotion is to her son, to that relationship, to the better future they will share some day. One thwarted suitor, Jones, who is the Superintendent of the apartment building in which they live, manages to enact revenge on Lutie. Jones manipulates Bub into stealing from mailboxes. After Bub is caught, Lutie must come up with lawyer fees. Another suitor, Boots Smith, arranges for Lutie to get the money. There's a catch, he tells her; she must sleep with his white boss. Lutie, of course, rejects this idea. Unfazed by her protests, Boots decides that he must possess her sexually himself, underscoring the money and sex link that pervades the novel. Lutie resists Boots's rape—an intrusion that also violates the sanctity of the pre-Oedipal bond she and Bub still share. In the struggle that follows, to her horror, she kills Boots. She then robs him; he has, she discovers, plenty of money: "He could have given her two hundred dollars and never missed it," she thinks bitterly (432). But Lutie suddenly realizes that she cannot use this for lawyer fees for Bub; a murderer now, she must use the money to escape. Thus, as in all Oedipal situations, the mother loses the son; indeed, in this case, the mother abandons him for her own good and, I suppose, for his, as well.

Lutie Johnson's failure to rescue neither her son nor herself evinces the pervasive power of patriarchy—and I mean patriarchy in its literal sense: of power transmitted through the father—in our culture. Lutie insists on taking the father's role as well as her own. She is prophetically warned by a woman vendor early in the novel: "It's best that the man do the work when the babies are young. And when the man is young. Not good for the woman to work when she's young. Not good for the man" (Petry, 1946: 33). Lutie's insistence on absorbing the man's role, and subsequently rejecting the man, is part of her attempt to keep a dyad and avoid the triangular pull of the father in the Oedipal situation, a situation that indelibly alters the mother's relationship with her son. However, masculinity rules the street; the street becomes the intrusive, vengeful father who struggles against Lutie's efforts to save Bub, to keep him within her power. Enraged that Bub is trying to earn money with a shoeshine kit in a box that Jones the Super helped him design, Lutie muses to herself: "And you're afraid that this street will keep him from finishing high school; that it may do worse than that and get him into some kind of trouble that will land him in reform school because you can't be home to look out for him because you have to work" (Petry, 1946: 67). The street is the patriarch come to claim Bub as its rightful heir. It is the street from which Bub must be rescued at all costs.

The street is the rival for Bub that she must defeat. The street's masculine appendages—personified in people like Jones, Boots Smith, Mrs. Hedges, and, above all, Junto, the white man who owns real estate and businesses in this part of Harlem—are ready to assert control of Lutie and possession of Bub at any

given moment. Lutie regards all of these personages with healthy suspicion, determining, rightly, that they want to dissolve her relationship with Bub. On Bub's quick friendship with Jones, Lutie muses: "She didn't exactly approve of this sudden friendship because the Super was—well, the kindest way to think of him was to call him peculiar" (Petry, 1946: 68)—thus associating a strangeness and the potential for estrangement with Jones. Lutie is determined to raise her son without masculine interference, raise him into a decent man, doing so all herself. As she looks at Bub, Lutie is

> suddenly proud of him, glad that he was hers and filled with a strong determination to do a good job of bringing him up. The wave of self-confidence she had felt on the street came back again. She could do it, too—bring him up so that he would be a fine, strong man. (Petry, 1946: 72)

But there's so much to work against. Is it a coincidence that the Super's dog—a dog we are to think of literally as a dog from hell—is named "Buddy"—an anagram of the name "Bub"?: "Then the Super would say, 'Buddy!' and the dog would come back to lie down close beside the man" (Petry, 1946: 75)—does this represent his taking of Bub? And what match can Lutie be for the phallic-dominated universe in which she finds herself? Even she is aware of what she lacks; on a free night, she finds herself going to the Junto Bar and Grill—the bar Junto owns—to have a beer "so that she could for a moment capture the illusion of having some of the things that she lacked" (Petry, 1946: 144).

In Petry's (1946) novel money and sex, moreover, are always equated, as this passage about Min, who lives with Jones, demonstrates: "Big Boy, her last husband before Jones, would snatch and tear it [money] from her stocking, reach hard clutching hands inside her dresses in his eagerness to get at it" (Petry, 1946: 116). Lutie acknowledges repeatedly that money "was the only thing that could get her and Bub out of that street" (Petry, 1946: 166). The sexual-financial tension concerns who will possess Bub. Moreover, Lutie knows: "All the responsibility for Bub was hers. It was up to her to keep him safe, to get him out of here so he would have a chance to grow up fine and strong. Because this street and the other streets just like it would, if he stayed in them long enough, do something terrible to him. Sooner or later they would do something equally as terrible to her. And as she sat there in the dark, she began to think about the things that she had seen on such streets as this one she lived in" (194).

Of course, she blames herself when things go badly: "It was her fault he'd got into this trouble. No matter how she looked at it, it was still her fault. It was always the mother's fault when a kid got into trouble, because it meant she'd failed the kid somewhere. She had wanted him to grow up fine and strong and she'd failed him all the way along the line" (Petry, 1946: 405). Lutie accuses the street of "playing nursemaid" to her kid while she worked, but the mechanism more closely represents the father's assertion of his power over the mother and

the child: "The street ... became both mother and father and trained your kid for you, and it was an evil father and a vicious mother, and, of course, you helped the street along by talking to [Bub] about money" (Petry, 1946: 407). Lutie is conscious of a desire to kill Junto because of what he represents: the irrevocable loss of her son: "It is as though [Junto] were a piece of that dirty street itself, tangible, close at hand, within reach" (Petry, 1946: 422). And killing the street, removing the father, would preserve the relationship with Bub.

But how do you kill a street? Can't be done. But the alternative? The only way to resolve the dispute over power and control is to remove the mother. Leaving her son forever, "Lutie found a seat midway in the coach. She sat down near the window. Bub would never understand why she had disappeared. He was expecting to see her tomorrow. She had promised she would come. He would never know why she had deserted him and he would be bewildered and lost without her" (Petry, 1946: 435). Bub, of course, will continue to wish for her, for her presence. Lutie draws a "series of circles" on the train window as she moves away: the undifferentiated circle that she had once envisioned with her husband Jim, Bub, and herself and later between Bub and her: this symbiotic circle has exploded into the Oedipal triangle of Lutie, Bub, and the street, with the street finally asserting its power. Lutie has lost her son; Bub has lost his mother. The only mutuality here is mutual grief at their permanent separation.

Perhaps Bub will keep his mother's memory alive. The creativity of memory, memory re-inscribed, keeps the essence of the maternal figure alive despite its omnipresent association with death. And what of this deadly association? Sarah Kofman's reading of Freud asserts that this connection is owing to the mother's lesson about the bargain struck at birth with the son, namely, that the conditional gift of life has to be paid back, in time, with death (Kofman, 1985: 75). However, the struggle lessens over time; what emerges is the need to acknowledge the primary attachment between mothers and sons, and the need to repair the deep and primal grief.

In her essay "Late Theory, Late Style" Kathleen Woodward (1991) discusses the change in Freud's late work, a change that involved seeing the source of anxiety not as a fear of castration but rather as longing, mourning: the missing of a loved one. His thinking involved a return to his mother, "the great missing figure of Freud's work over his long life" (Woodward, 1991: 87). This mother figure—who represents "the dawning psyche's first and everlastingly internalized encounter" as Updike (1984: 441) has said—opened a way for Freud to re-think his earlier theories. How did Freud highlight the figure of the mother—his own mother, particularly—over the life course? Freud (1953) wrote in "The Theme of the Three Caskets" of:

> the three inevitable relations that a man has with a woman—the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate and the woman who destroys him; or ... the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man's life—the mother herself, the beloved

> one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more. (1953: 301)

Reading this text, Sarah Kofman remarks that:

> Freud gives back to his mother what he has borrowed from her; this text is a debt of gratitude to her .... In one sense he gives up his own life here so as to "save" the Mother, to her leave her in the position of primacy. The tribute consists in fact in the eternal wisdom he draws from his analysis (in particular that of *King Lear*), namely: that one must renounce love, choose death, come to terms with the need to die; it is precisely this wisdom that his mother taught him ... and the text delares it to be a simple return to the wisdom of the *original myth*.... (1985: 75-76)

It is this natural order expressed in myth that science and psychoanalysis merely formalize. Freud accepted this natural order, and could not abide any tampering with it. For example, he could not bear the thought of dying earlier than his mother; the death of his daughter, and, especially, the death of his grandson were unbearably absurd deaths. That Freud's mother died before him came as a relief, as Woodward (1991) has noted, and granted him freedom to die. Thus, the mother-son relationship is associated with death in a way that the mother-daughter relationship is not; the daughter, as Chodorow implied, is charged with carrying on life, while the son separates from the mother in order to better perceive her lessons of death and the particular conditions involved in returning to her.

Another related idea growing out of the missing mother in psychoanalysis has to do with the metaphoric description of the mother-son life course relationship. Woodward notes that throughout his productive life Freud "continued ... to build his life in theory" (1953: 89). Traditional Western literary criticism has held that the journey in life is the movement from illusion to disillusion. I propose, however, that the life course, broadly considered, is a movement instead from illusion to re-illusionment, and that this is accomplished through a movement from the experiential to the theoretical. In this, it seems to me, mothers and sons must acknowledge their basic attachment as the source of their desires and their creativity. As Jane Lazarre's (1991) narrator, who is the mother of two sons, puts it in the novel *Worlds Beyond My Control*: "Two stories converge in my life, one about motherhood, the other about writing ... " (130).

With these ideas in mind, I turn to Flannery O'Connor's (1992) "Everything That Rises Must Converge." Here the inversion—that is, the caretaker role reversal—and the oneness are shown in powerful, yet explicit ways. Although Julian must see that certain of his mother's needs are met—he must help her get to where she needs to go, whether driven by bus or by psychic

energy—their life views are on opposite sides of convention. Julian, a college-educated aspiring writer, lives at home with his aging mother whose southern genteel ways he regards as unenlightened and hopelessly old-fashioned. Julian resents her verve and flamboyance; he is annoyed that her "sky-blue" eyes "were as innocent and untouched by experience as they must have been when she was ten" (O'Connor, 1992: 192), while "he was as disenchanted with [life] as a man of fifty" (O'Connor, 1992: 197). His mother is secure in some larger cosmic identity, and says: "If you know who you are, you can go anywhere" (O'Connor, 1992: 193), to which Julian responds: "Knowing who you are is good for one generation only" (O'Connor, 1992: 194). Apparently, in the style of the American male, he intends to keep reinventing himself. The mother brags that Julian is a writer, though the reader knows the depths of his failure at this profession.

Yet the mother thinks warmly of him. Why? Studies suggest that, as sociologists Marcene Goodman and Robert L. Rubinstein (1996) say, "from the mother's perspective, the emotional content and the meaning of the mother/child relationship appear to remain unchanged over time" (295). Julian's mother has built up an inflated image of her son, but this has, in sociological parlance, several adaptive functions. Called by Goodman and Rubinstein an "adaptive illusion," it is the means by which, "in supplying a 'happy ending' to the child's life, the [mother] could take comfort in knowing that [her life] had been of some value, or had 'paid off.' Further, believing in [her] child's security helped [her] to alleviate anxiety over [her] own." This enables the mother to put "satisfactory closure on life" (Goodman and Rubinstein, 1996: 296). Without such an adaptive illusion, Julian's mother would no doubt lapse into despair. Indeed, Goodman and Rubinstein "contend that elderly mothers' illusion of cohesion and centrality in their only child's life are critical to maintaining their sense of identity into latelife" (Goodman and Rubinstein, 1996: 298). The mother in O'Connor's (1992) story keeps her son close to her through her own illusion. This imaginary recreation enables the mother to recover and reclaim Julian, completing the maternal life cycle.

Julian, of course, believes he has a much different task, the task of individuation. He thinks that he must escape his mother's illusions; he desires to "evade and deny the cohesiveness" (Goodman and Rubinstein, 1996: 297). Sociologists tell us also that Julian longs to bypass the relationship he has with his mother in order to create himself. He mistakenly thinks himself emotionally engulfed by his mother, when the two of them are divided in false and unsatisfactory ways. When she talks of the fences that separate, Julian believes his mother is talking in support of racial segregation; however, it is actually a generational fence that is at the heart of the story. This fence—this separation of mother and son—must break down. And it does. His mother is physically attacked by an African American mother, an attack she has innocently provoked. This precipitates her stroke and Julian finds himself "looking into a face he had never seen before" (Goodman and Rubinstein, 1996: 203).

Alarmed, he sees that a "tide of darkness seemed to be sweeping her from him" (Goodman and Rubinstein, 1996: 204), and the primacy of their bond returns to him as he cries out to her and then cries out for help in recovering the mother he is about to lose. The final sentence of the story is: "The tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow" (Goodman and Rubinstein, 1996: 204).

Julian is shocked by his emotions, for wasn't his mother attached to him, while he struggled to be free? And isn't this the usual situation with an aging mother and an adult son? For the aged mother, the child becomes the attachment figure, the person whom the mother needs. These are, in Bowlby's (1973) phrase, "anxious attachments"—displaced yearnings whose characteristics are difficult to accept. Inverted needs, whenever they appear, bear, in Herbert Blau's (1986) words, the "unexpected virulence of the return of the repressed" (19)—in this case, for both mother and son.

Women, in both life and literature, as one might expect, experience the mother-son relationship as an important and recognizably distinct part of their lives; motherhood and creativity form a synergy. As Lazarre (1991) writes, this relationship is a story "about the closeness of a mother and a son, a story implying that no matter how separate they must learn to be, they are still—well, *one* in a way, different yet the same" (83). Toni Morrison (qtd. in Moyer and Bucher, 1994: 2) too, has implied that having two sons influenced her work;[3] she maintains that her writing and her mothering are the two elements of her life she could not possibly do without (Dreifus, 1994: 75). In a mother's very old age the creativity can overcome the loss and recover—indeed, reclaim—the child.

And so I come to the final story in my literary life course: Eudora Welty's (1992) venerable story about a black woman, "A Worn Path."[4] This story, first published in 1941, is about an old woman—Phoenix Jackson is at least in her 90s, perhaps in her 100s—who is making her annual trek into Natchez to get medicine for her grandson. Phoenix—her very name suggests revival—renews herself by holding before her the image of her grandson, a grandson who may no longer in fact be alive; her fantasy of his life and his need for her "soothing medicine" are what sustain her in her very old age. She tells the nurse at the clinic that "[h]e wear a little patch quilt and peep out holding his mouth open like a little bird" (Welty, 1992: 15). This is fiction; given Phoenix's age, this grandson is probably in his forties, or even older. Or perhaps it's not her grandson as a small boy she recalls at all, but rather her own son; since Phoenix reinvents herself, she can reinvent others. She loves artifice, and her tools for creating it are her memory and the reinterpretation of actual events. She can collapse generations and time if she wishes. She can make her grandson or son dependent on her if she wishes. She subverts reality as she pleases. In the process, Phoenix challenges our own worn paths—the worn paths of our thinking about age and relationship to one's children. For Phoenix, it may be

that the best children are the ones she has in theory. As creator and theoretician, Phoenix is the one who matters. Often asked whether the grandson was alive, Welty famously replied: "*Phoenix* is alive."

Life exists for Phoenix only as she can invent it through language and image; she re-creates life, sets it in motion, as in the scene with the dogs and the hunter. A dog comes seemingly out of nowhere, and when she raises her cane at him, she falls. A young white hunter with his own dog comes along and helps her out. The hunter condescends to her on the basis of her age and her race. He has a too easy familiarity: he has the power to name, and so calls her "Granny," but this is not a grandson Phoenix would ever trouble over. She reveals little about who she is, but she subverts his power by setting another story in motion: she manipulates the hunter into sicing his dog on the big black dog that knocked her down, and, in the bargain, secretly claims a nickel that falls from the hunter's pocket.

She puts any number of events in motion with a creator's zest. Ostensibly on a journey to get medicine, Phoenix subverts the ideal of the self-sacrificing traditional mother. Once in Natchez, she asks a white woman burdened with Christmas presents to tie her shoe, presumably, just to see what will happen. (The woman ties Phoenix's shoe.) Phoenix's words, her illusions, her theories—in short, her possession of her grandson/son within herself—are alive. By keeping her creativity/procreativity—in a way that echoes Sandy's and Mia's childfree childbirth ritual—she keeps her subjectivity and recovers her son.

The bargain that Sarah Kofman (1985) posits in her interpretation of Freud—the conditional life that the mother gives must someday be replaced with death—has been reversed with Phoenix's insistence on her attachment to her grandson or son. Phoenix cannot face the death of her grandson; she cannot bear eternal separation. Freud made creative uses of his grief in old age; Phoenix, too, reconstitutes her grief into a new story that enlivens the worn path. Phoenix gets sustenance *from* (and, curiously, not *for*) her son/grandson: from an invented theoretical construction of him. Nor is Phoenix enslaved by the natural order of life and death; she builds on the possibility of death to create literary life and an association of the mother with life, not death. Phoenix retains the attachment to her son and uses that attachment, or rather her disengagement from it, as a rich source for her own continuing life story, a story that she reinvents minute to minute. She engages in a process not of disillusion, but of re-illusionment: a re-illusionment that sustains both her and us. The ties of the mother and the son are not broken, even with the loss of the son/grandson; and, thanks to Phoenix's (and Welty's) creative gifts, neither is our tie to Phoenix, although Phoenix, too, would be "dead" by now.

In Welty's (1992) story, no one gives up the other; there is no separation. Rather, the other is continually recovered, and life is rejuvenated. Indeed, all of these fabulists—Howe (1977, 1984), Petry (1946), O'Connor (1992) and Welty (1978, 1992, 1993)—lament the cultural insistence on the separation of mother and son. Creativity, as Phoenix Jackson shows, can just as easily emerge

from mother and son bonding as it can from the myth of separation for individuation. Division, separation, conflict: that particular cultural plot valorizes the male as the solution to the son's incest dilemma. But the mother's holding of her son's emotions and the son's eventual holding of the mother's—the life-course portrayal in Munsch's (1991) *Love You Forever* with which I began—generates closeness. What's more, the energy of the bond radiates creativity. As we've just seen, Phoenix Jackson presents us with a kind of literary generativity—to borrow Erik Erikson's (1964) term—as she builds upon the mother-son (grandson) relationship. She gives us some soothing medicine to heal the wounds of the sons we never should have lost.

[1]These titles are: Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest (New York: Routledge, 1992); Adele Marie Barker, *The Mother Syndrome in the Russian Folk Imagination* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1986); W. Eugene Davis, *The Celebrated Case of Esther Waters: the Collaboration of George Moore and Barrett H. Clark on "Esther Waters: a Play"* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); Kerry Driscoll, *William Carlos Williams and the Maternal Muse* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987); Joyce Elaine King, *Black Mothers to Sons: Juxtaposing African American Literature with Social Practice* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); Janet Perkins, *The Feminine in the Poetry of Herbert to Helder* (London: Tamesis, 1977); Margaret Storch, *Sons and Adversaries: Women in William Blake and D. H. Lawrence* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990).

[2]Similarly, Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, editors of *Representations of Motherhood,* begin their Introduction with a discussion of a 1940s photograph in which "[a] tiny mother, shrunk, strapped, and held captive in an infant swing, looks up at her massive toddler. The imposing toddler—*clearly a boy*—towers over her, arms folded, leaning on the wall as if he were in control of the space and master of her life" [emphasis added] (1994: 1).

[3] Toni Morrison said: "There was something so valuable about what happened when one became a mother. For me it was the most liberating thing that ever happened.... Liberating because the demands that children make are not the demands of a normal "other." The children's demands on me were things that nobody else had ever asked me to do. To be a good manager. To have a sense of humor. To deliver something that somebody else could use. And they were not interested in all the things that other people were interested in, like what I was wearing or if I were sensual. Somehow all of the baggage that I had accumulated as a person about what was valuable just fell away. I could not only be me—whatever that was—but somebody actually needed me to be that" (qtd. in Moyers and Tucher, 1994: 2).

[4]I owe a huge scholarly debt in this section to Elaine Orr's (1992) "'Unsettling

Every Definition of Otherness': Another Reading of Eudora Welty's 'A Worn Path.'"

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... About the Front Cover

Judy Martin, "Self-Portrait," Detail. Painted cotton, recycled maternity clothing, hand-pieced and quilted, 46" x 50", 1986.

"This piece was done shortly after the birth of my third child, Grace. The image is of a mother doing two things at once, breastfeeding her baby and drawing her own image. The working hand is cut off by the image of the next baby. Our two girls and a boy are represented by the clour of their sleepers. One side of the quilt has no border to show that we are not finished our family yet, and we are planning our fourth child."

—Judy Martin

Robin Edward Gearing and Sandra Campbell

Deconstructing Mother Guilt

Single Mothers Can Effectively Raise an Emotionally Healthy and Well Developed Male Child

Single mothers raising children on their own can be the result of a family breakdown, separation, divorce, or the result of a decision to have a baby without a partner. This family structure occurs in lower, middle, and upper class socioeconomic backgrounds and the number of children raised by single mothers has increased dramatically in recent years (Whitehead, 1993).

Guilt, shame, and inadequacy—feelings of a single mother raising a son

Feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy may be present particularly when a single mother is raising a son on her own. Some of their apprehension, fears and guilt are fuelled by society's view of single mothers and the problems this family constellation causes for the child and society. One societal myth is that sons of single mothers will have difficulties developing masculine tendencies and normal emotional development with the absence of a significant male. Who will teach them to rough house, play sports, and develop female relationships, if not their father? The common view is of a single mother raising her son and struggling to survive financially with few resources remaining for other important factors, such as fostering healthy self-esteem, social skills, and academic skills.

In addition, recent articles have blamed the increase in school violence partly on broken homes, as single parents may fail to provide the necessary controls for their children. They may be exhausted after work and lack the strength to set strict guidelines for their children. Separated parents who continue to argue and criticize each other in front of the children prolong and increase the damage caused by a breakdown in the family. Children will model their parent's behaviour in the schoolyard with peers and in future relationships.

Healthy children need two healthy parents?

Whether left unspoken in a room with a single parent, fostered by the media, preached from a pulpit, reflected in government policy, hidden in corporate practices, overtly minimized in public education, steeped in family histories, or held in the questioning stares of society, there exists a myth. The myth recognizes as an unassailable fact that a single parent is a poor and ineffectual substitute to a two-parent household (Pollack, 1998; Eyer, 1996; Ahrons, 1994; Goodrich *et al,* 1988). It is worse still if the single parent is a female: a mother to whom so many stigmas are directly and indirectly attached.

Is this myth real, does it have proven substance, reliable research and studies to support its claim, is it steeped in countless quantifiable observations? Single parenting, specifically single mothers have received an inordinate amount of focus and scientific scrutiny. The studies range from the breakdown of the family, academic performance, family values, poverty, sexual orientation, youth crimes, attachment in relationships, drug and alcohol abuse, to teenage pregnancy. Diane Eyer, in her book *Motherguilt,* succinctly summed this negative myth as follows:

> Being a single mom is basically immoral and selfish, the reasoning goes, since it deprives children of an important paternal role model and source of income. Single mothers are seen as engenders of the underclass—the juvenile delinquents, drug addicts, and violent criminals who plague the country. (1996: 29)

The single parent myth has risen steadily since the 1950's with the decline of the white picket fence surrounding the suburban home with its dutiful working father and nurturing stay at home mother—the North American dream. It is without doubt that the last two generations have seen a sharp rise in divorce rates in which one in two American marriages end in divorce, while in Canada this statistic hovers around 35-40 percent; as well as an ever increasing number of women in the work force. Constance Ahrons (1994: 7-14) noted that we continue to glorify the "intact family" while stigmatizing "broken homes," without recognizing that divorce is now normal. Even the language of divorce and separation conveys inadequacy and guilt to the parting parents. Words such "broken, dysfunctional, abnormal, split, and parted" replace words like "whole, functional, normal, together, and complete." The negative judgmental nature of these terms are unfairly applied largely to women who are, according to the myth, the real gatekeepers of relationships.

Excluding economic and relational shifts and developing trends in our culture and society does a child need two healthy parents to become healthy and functional? This question, although well studied, does not contain a simple answer. The question latently allies itself with the myth, guilt and negative language of the two-parent family. A less loaded query might ask: can a single parent raise a healthy and functional child? Altering this question is not an

argument in semantics or a lesson in political correctness; rather it succinctly captures the essence of the question without value or morality. Similarly, the following questions are burdened with judgmental weight: will a child raised in a more affluent family be more healthy and functional; or does a child, whose parents can provide better diet and medical attention perform better in school; or a child raised by parents in an economically advantaged society develop better than one raised in a "Third-world" shanty town? Although often contradictory in results, methodology, and theoretical approach, studies have revealed that there are some advantages to raising a child in a two-parent household. However, these narrow advantages are dependent on a multitude of variables notably including no emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and a relatively stable, open and amicable parental executive.

No study or research has ever stated that a single parent cannot raise a healthy and functional child. Some research indicates that single mothers may have the propensity to have less resources and support, which in turn can have some adverse affects. However, some recent studies have openly questioned the myth that two-parent families are essential in raising a healthy and well developed son. Adolescents living with single mothers in these studies received more parental support than those in two parent families and the males were no more likely to be involved with drugs or alcohol; or be delinquent or a school dropout than those living in other family constellations. Yes, there may be some advantages to a two-parent family, but there can also be some disadvantages. Furthermore, there can be advantages for a mother or father to raise a child without a partner. Shaw (1991) suggested that single parenting often develops the parent's independence and ability to handle a variety of situations. In addition, children may benefit from increased levels of responsibility in homes of single parents.

Male children need a stable significant male parental figure in their lives in order to become healthy and well adjusted

Family therapists for years have openly asked, encouraged, and at times expected that a single mother should find a male figure to help effectively rear her male child. Pollack stated, "single mothers say they are almost universally counseled to find the boy a male role model, as if a mother cannot possibly raise her son alone, as if she will be unable to convey some vital secret about masculinity" (92). The stigma of raising a healthy child by a single mother seems to resonate significantly if that child is a boy.

Until recently there was a notable absence of research and scientific questioning regarding the ability or inability of a single mother to raise a boy to be a healthy and well-adapted man. In the last ten years, this area is beginning to receive some attention in the literature (Pollack, 1998; Russell and Saebel, 1997; Zinner, 1997; Eyer, 1996; Snider, Smith and Mitchell, 1995; Silverstein and Rashbaum, 1994; Brocke-Utne, 1991). What remains absent is any discriminating evidence that reveals that a single mother is less able or equipped

to raise a male. According to Russell and Saebel (1997) little clear evidence has been found to mark any discernable difference between differing parent-child gender relationships.

In spite of this lack of supporting scientific evidence there apparently continues to exist a socialized belief that a developing boy requires a stable male role model beyond his single mother. An unfortunate ramification of this reified belief is the internalization by females of mother blaming, specifically mother-guilt. In literature and in our clinical practices, it has been repeatedly revealed that single females often feel greater inadequacy and guilt when raising a son. One highly educated single mother recalled crying for days after leaving the hospital upon having a male child; lamenting at not having had a daughter and filled with the thought, "how can I raise a boy, I don't even know how to play baseball." This internalized mother guilt by single mothers may further exacerbate this erroneous belief, as studies have revealed that the mother's mood influences maternal interactions with their child. In the study by Jouriles *et al*, it has been noted with male children (Jouriles, Murphy, and O'Leary, 1989).

Challenging the accepted perceptions of single mothers

A myth about the deficiencies and difficulties regarding a sons' experience when a single mother raises him has fuelled much unnecessary guilt and shame in this group. Single mothers need to confront the myths that suggest that they provide inadequate care for their children. If they accept the commonly held societal beliefs, then feelings of guilt, shame, depression and inadequacy may develop. Single mothers can proactively challenge, confront and replace societal misconcepts through a variety of methods, both internally unto themselves and externally unto the world. Internally, single mothers can continue to develop insight into their personal belief structure and their internal feelings in order to sort out the truth and cope with their own potentially intense emotions.

It is important to be self aware of the need to seek out emotional support, guidance, and nurturing when it is necessary and not feel that independence and self sufficiency hold greater value than interpersonal connections and support. Also, mothers can internally identify their own unique resources and strengths that they possess as a mother and an individual. The internal measuring stick with which an individual judges or rates the self is not merely externally imposed but co-created from within. As Michael White aptly noted, "that which we copy we make new" (White and Epston, 1990). According to Winnicott, a child does not need a perfect or society driven ideal archetype mother but a "Good Enough Mother" (Winnicott, 1988). Similarly, foremost family therapist Virginia Satir echoed this point in recognizing that a parent is the best parent they can be at any given moment (Satir *et al*, 1991). Recognizing her strengths and ability to parent is essential for a single mother. Single mothers are "walking the walk" and may need to ignore the "talk."

Externally, many options exist for single mothers to deconstruct the

outdated myths and replace them with the more appropriate one: that single mothers are effective, nurturing and able to raise a child, son or daughter. One external avenue is support groups for single mothers; or group therapy may be beneficial in instilling hope, normalization and in helping them realize that they are not alone and unique in their problems and thoughts. Another path is to openly challenge noted misconceptions when they are faced with them in society, social institutions, conversation or even humour. Advocacy for single parents often can facilitate those without a voice to be heard. Also, modifications to the current welfare system and legislation to provide additional financial support to single mothers is encouraged. Single mothers can break the cycle by challenging the myths with their own children. One technique is to instill self-esteem and respect into the children by helping the child to understand—a lesson single mothers sometimes forget—that it is who you are not what you have or lack. The child's humour, intelligence, understanding, playfulness and resourcefulness are much more important than external items the family may possess, such as cars, video games, and televisions.

Conclusions

There are several publicly held misconceptions accepted as norms concerning single mothers raising sons which have perpetuated unnecessary and harmful shame and guilt on single mothers. Research has not supported the many myths that continue to be accepted by our society. It is time for single mothers to be proactive in challenging and dispelling these misconceptions. To effectively change these stereotypes it is essential for both single mothers and others to recognize and become more aware of the internal and external components that propitiates these myths. Frequently, this starts by recognizing that generally single mothers are positive and nurturing parents who need not accept the values or guilt of others.

It is important to note that this article was not meant to suggest that single fathers do not also experience problems nor was it intended to undermine the fact that two-parent families are very capable of raising psychologically healthy children. Rather, its purpose is to challenge the myths faced by single mothers and to acknowledge that single mothers can raise healthy, well-adapted children.

It is recommended that issues regarding parenting alone and single mothers receive further attention in both research and study and that future work in this area continues to deconstruct accepted traditional norms and myths about single parenting.

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Wanda Thomas Bernard

Bringing Our Boyz to Men

Black Men's Reflections on their Mother's Childrearing Influences

This paper will critically examine the role of African mothers in the Diaspora, who are raising sons, from the perspective of sons. Using a reflective analysis of data gathered in a cross-national research project that explored survival strategies used by Black men in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Sheffield, England, this paper will focus on their discourse about mothers and Black women who fulfill *mothering* roles in their lives, as grandmothers, sisters, aunts and *othermothers*. The findings in this research challenge some of the social science literature which pathologizes the role of Black women who are described by Symonds (1989) as "loving their sons" and "raising their daughters."

My interest in this topic is both personal and professional. The professional interests emerged through the conduct of the research with Black men. However, this was also deeply embedded in my personal connection to the topic. I have spent considerable time analyzing the different relationships I observed between my mother and her sons, as compared to her daughters. I have also looked at these relationships across generations and over time. I am a step-mother to a young Black man, and I have been an othermother to my brothers, nephews, and community sons and daughters. I want to develop richer understandings of the multi-generational motherlines between mothers and sons. This is a beginning journey, a work in progress, which examines Black men's views of their mothers, grandmothers and othermothers' contributions to their successful negotiation to manhood. This article explores the three themes that emerged in this study: Black mothers and othermothers are seen as superwomen and are key to Black men's survival; grandmothers are guardians of the generations, particularly the maternal line; and othermothers lessen the negative impact of mother absence. I begin with a review of the literature on Black motherhood.

Naming contradictions: the experiences of Black motherhood

It has been argued in the literature that the Black woman, as matriarch, is largely responsible for the social castration of Black men (Moynihan, 1965 qtd. in Rainwater and Yancey, 1967, Staples, 1978). The relative lack of involvement of Black men in the parenting role [regardless of the reasons for this phenomena], has frequently meant the over involvement of Black women in the lives of their sons (Bernard, 1996). Some suggest that the institution of Black motherhood has helped to exonerate men from authentic fathering and shared parenting roles and responsibilities (Franklin, 1984).

Collins (1990) provides a useful critique of the literature and the various perspectives on Black Motherhood. She challenges white male scholar's claim that Black mothers, as matriarchs, have contributed to the deterioration of the family structure as we once knew it. Collins (1990) also asserts that whilst white feminists have challenged white male perspectives on motherhood in general, they have not significantly challenged the matriarch image of Black motherhood. Finally, Collins (1990) challenges the Black male scholars who tend to glorify Black motherhood and have helped to fuel the superwoman image.

In examining the politics of Black motherhood, Bernard and Bernard (1998) state that Black motherhood may be the site of oppression, or an opportunity for creativity, empowerment and social action. Acknowledging the contradictory nature of Black motherhood, they go on to suggest that Black mothers' ability to cope with race, class, and gender oppression should not be confused with transcending those conditions. Placing Black women on a pedestal, as the strength of Black families and communities (Bernard 1996), also sets them up for failure in the role, particularly in relation to the mother/son relationship. Collins (1990) advances our analysis of Black motherhood with her position that self-definition is essential, as externally defined definitions of Black motherhood are always problematic, both those that are positive and affirmative, and the more visible negative and controlling images. Externally imposed definitions of Black motherhood help to reinforce the marginalization and oppression faced by Black women, children and families (Bernard and Bernard, 1998). Collins (1990) argues that when Black women self-define Black motherhood, they expose the contradictions that are inherent in the role, the tensions between the oppression that is reinforced through the controlling images of Black mothers, and the potential empowerment and independence that the site of Black motherhood offers.

Black women have been described as the "strength" of Black families, the matriarch, the super woman. McCray (1980) says:

> the Black woman has either been depicted as the dominating, castrating female under whose hand the Black family and the Black community are falling apart, or as the romanticised, strong, self-sufficient female responsible for the survival of the Black family and of Black people. (67)

These dichotomized views of Black women permeate the social science literature, and the popular media. Collins (1990) identified four controlling images of Black women: mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, and jezebel (the sexually aggressive woman). She argues that these images, designed as tools of domination, are used to make poverty, racism and sexism appear to be a natural part of everyday life. These images are transmitted through institutional sites such as: the media, schools and other external sites; and internal sites within African communities such as the family and the Church.

The "matriarch" image which has dominated the social science literature allows Black women to be blamed for the success or failure of Black children (Collins, 1990: 74) and for the perceived social castration of Black men (Moynihan, 1965 qtd. in Rainwater and Yancey, 1967). Collins argues that these views divert attention away from the systematic inequalities that Black women face socially, politically and economically. It also serves to create divisions between Black women and men, diverting attention from issues of racial and gender inequality. What is needed is a more balanced perspective which looks at the various roles performed by Black women in families and communities. Given the opportunity to tell their own stories, some Black men present a different view of the roles of their mothers and Black women as othermothers in helping them to negotiate the rocky terrain they must navigate on the journey to manhood. In this article, I explore the role of Black motherhood in the rearing of sons who are perceived as successful, from the voices of the sons themselves.

The research sudy

This participatory action research project involved two groups of Black men, in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Sheffield, England, called Research Working Groups (RWGs), in an exploratory study of the strategies they used to survive in societies where they were expected to fail. They also examined the definition and meaning of success, as defined by Black men themselves. Data gathering included individual interviews with forty men, twenty in each site; two focus groups in each site, involving another twenty men; and a conference in each site, which allowed for a wide range of Black men, as well as others interested in Black masculinity, to be involved in the research.

The RWGs did an initial thematic analysis of the data, which was further developed by the focus group participants, and the conference participants. The conferences and focus groups enabled many more men to be involved in this research, creating member checks and inquiry audits (Lather, 1991). The research process was fluid and dynamic. The participatory model was a successful tool for a woman to use in engaging men in an exploratory study of their lived reality. However, this success was also partly due to the way in which we developed a working relationship, where people from diverse backgrounds and social positions, and shared histories, were able to build partnerships as they engaged in this collective study.

One of the survival strategies that emerged in the research, was the significance of family and friends. Further analysis of this finding suggested that in naming family, many of the Black men were referring to the significant roles their mothers, grandmothers and othermothers played in their survival. Our analysis suggests that the role of Black mothers in particular and othermothers or community mothers, were key to the survival of many of the men who participated in this research.

What follows is a discussion about the ways in which Black women, as mothers, othermothers and community mothers, contributed to the survival and success of Black sons, as told by the sons. The men's stories are organized around the following themes: Black women and mothers are superwomen, and are essential to Black men's survival; grandmothers are the guardians of the generations; and the impact of mother absence is lessened by the presence of othermothers.

Black men's views of their mothers' influences: Black mothers as superwomen

The majority of our Sheffield participants described their mother's influence as very positive, nurturing and caring.

> *She played a major role in my survival, but she has also performed her duties as a Mom, in terms of protection: we are all very well balanced in terms of morality ... She is supportive in terms of work, goals and achievement....* (Sheffield)

> *"My mother was nurturing, and I value that a lot. She would worry about my safety, and always had a great caring thing ... She would look after my needs ... She was protective and fuss....* (Sheffield)

> *Most of what we [Black men] learn, we learn from Black women [mothers]. They make more contributions to our survival than the men....* (Sheffield)

The Halifax participants shared very similar descriptions about their mother's role and influence.

> *My mother was a very strong, caring and dedicated woman. She was always there for her children ... She was there to cook, clean, sew, and to heal you when you got sick. Her affection was always evident and outgoing.* (Halifax)

> *"Black women have made quite a lot of contribution to my survival, beginning with my mother who gave me protection and always shielded me from harm.* (Halifax)

> *"Black women have given me life; they taught me how to be a strong person. My mother ... [has] been the most influential in my surivival.* (Halifax)

In both Halifax and Sheffield, the mothers are described as the epitome of strength, and the foundation of the family. These views are consistent with the ways in which Black women have been typically viewed in the literature. Confronting both racism and sexism, Black women know intimately the place of oppression. A tradition of resistance and a collective Black women's consciousness does exist, yet these are consistently overlooked, or misunderstood in the movements to eradicate sexism and racism (Collins, 1990; Scott, 1992). Black women have much to offer, however, the persistence of such dichotomised views about their role leaves us divided on many levels. Yet these men tell a somewhat different story. The Black men in this study stressed the significance of Black mothers and othermothers in their struggle to survive, and to become men that their mothers could be proud of. One participant put it succinctly:

> *I never got into trouble with the law, thanks to my mother... I was always more afraid of disappointing her, than I was scared of the police. I had such respect for her that I would never do anything to bring her shame or distress....* (Halifax)

Another participant offers a similar perspective. He said:

> *"I would not have survived if it had not been for my strong and supportive family, especially my mother ... I could not have coped with all the racism in the world without them as my safety net.* (Sheffield)

Whist the literature suggests that the matriarch role and the superwoman image helps with the social castration of Black men, these men credit their mothers strong, supportive and stern presence as one of the most significant contributions to their survival and success. For many, their mothers have been role models and mentors that have helped them prepare for survival in a hostile and unwelcoming environment, where they are constantly devalued. In addition, despite the superwoman image that is evident in these men's stories, there is also a recognition of the struggles and suffering that Black women endure. The following quotations are illustrative of their perceptions and serve as an acknowledgement of the difficulties that Black women deal with as they fight for the survival of their families and communities.

> *They [Black women] have taken on burdens above and beyond the call of duty.... Their strength has been passed on to their children.... They have worn our problems for too long, and now it is time for us to "give back" as Black men....* (Sheffield)

The preserverence of Black women is admirable ... I want to emulate this ... we need to gather strength from each other.... Black women can't carry the burdens on their own.... I would like to see a better, stronger Black family in the future.... As families we must realize that we are in this struggle together so we must work together.... (Halifax)

Brothers could take a lesson or two from a page of the Black woman's book of struggle and success ... we have a lot to learn from our sisters and it is time for us to shoulder more of those responsibilities.... (Halifax)

More than an acknowledgement of their strength and the additional burdens they have carried historically, these men called for their brothers to work more collectively with Black women, and to take on responsibilities for nurturing and mentoring Black sons and daughters. There is also an acknowledgement of the role of mothers across generations. We heard many accolades about the strengths of Black grandmothers, especially the maternal line. Similar to their views about their mothers, these men's stories reveal a reverence and respect for their grandmothers, and one gets a sense of their positive contributions to the survival of Black men.

Grandmothers: guardians of the generations:

There has been little research done on the experiences of Black grandparents. However, Taylor *et al.* (1990:998) reviewing a study done by Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1986, reveals that in comparison to whites, Black grandparents take a more active part in the parenting of grandchildren. The reasons for this vary, however, cultural traditions of extended family and elasticity of roles may explain this in part, as is evidenced in some of our data. The role of grandmothers, particularly maternal grandmothers, is quite similar to that of mothers, with many of them being seen as superwomen, and as guardians of the generations.

My grandmother gave me much insight and was a strong influence. She was always there, even when my parents were not. We had such respect for our grandparents, especially our grandmother ... I am sad that my kids don't have that in this country ... but we have found replacements ... older women in the community are like community grandmothers. They pass on the wisdom from the former generation.... (Sheffield)

However, for many of our respondents, especially in Sheffield, grandparents are generally not available and/or accessible, as they are more likely to be still living in the Caribbean. Fifty per cent of our Sheffield respondents had no contact with their grandmothers who were either still living in the Caribbean (50 percent of this group) or had died when they were young (25 percent), or before they were born. For the 50 percent who had contact, 75 percent of these had positive, nurturing contact with their maternal grandmothers, and none

with their paternal grandmothers. There appears to be more contact with the maternal lineage.

The other 25 percent of this sample had positive contact with both grandmothers. For those with contact, the relationships were usually described as caring, loving, supportive and nurturing, in fact, as indicated these are strikingly similar to the way in which their mothers are described.

> *She (maternal grandmother) was like my mother. I was very special to her and she to me.* (Sheffield)

> *She (maternal grandmother) was always there for guidance and support.* (Sheffield)

> *I was influenced very early by my grandmother. She was always a constant source of strength and love for me. She always stressed that I should be all that I could be, and I always knew and believed that she wanted the best for me.* (Sheffield)

Halifax participants described their grandmothers' influence in similar ways: supportive, encouraging and caring, and a replacement Mom.

> *My (maternal) grandmother taught me about human emotions; that everyone can cry. I learned from her that crying was "okay" even when everyone else said it was bad ....* (Halifax)

> *My (maternal) grandmother kept me in line. She was there for me at lunch and after school because my mother worked.* (Halifax)

> *My grandmother was a carer and she taught me to be a caring person. She also taught me how to respect and love myself so that I could learn how to love and respect others. She handed down all sorts of stories and family traditions that I still share with my children today.* (Halifax)

Once again, we see incredibly high expectations of grandmothers, particularly maternal grandmothers. Frazier (1966 qtd. in Hutchinson, 1994) described grandmothers as the guardians of generations. McCray (1980 qtd. in Hill, 1977) argues that grandmothers are the most significant force in the socialisation of Black children. These findings support the theory that grandmothers, especially maternal grandmothers are very significant in the socialization of Black men, for their positive survival. The lineage from mother—to daughter—to children appears to be the one most strongly identified by our respondents. Despite this generally positive picture that emerged about grandmothers, there was also some concern expressed about the preservation of that role given the challenges faced by families who are displaced due to immigra-

tion and migration. One participant aptly states:

> *I am concerned about the future of Black families and Black men because parenting is changing ... . Today's parents are forgetting their cultures; they do not teach their children the things that we were taught, and they don't have contact with the grandparents who were able to fill the gaps .... What will happen to the next generation?* (Sheffield)

Who will fill the role of grandmothers as guardians of the generations for the next generation? To what extent can community mothers and othermothers help in the process of bringing our *boyz* to men?

Mother absence: othermothers and community mothers

A major gap in the literature that explores Black motherhood is the lack of attention paid to the issue of mother absence. As noted previously, Black women are seen as the epitome of strength and few writers dare to examine mother absence in African communities. Collins (1990) begins a dialogue about the challenges faced by some Black women who do not want to be, or are not able to be mothers to their children. The topic emerged in this research as Black men talked about their mothers and those people who became replacement mothers when their birth mothers were not able to be there for them.

In most of the Halifax cases, the mothers, othermothers and community mothers were identified as being present, and as an integral part of the lives of these men. One Halifax participant was raised by foster parents, who described his foster-mother as being very significant. However, wanting to find his biological mother was an issue which he struggled with during adolescence. For another, the death of both parents led to bonding with othermothers who filled those roles.

> *After my parents died I had to have somebody that I could confide in and to console me; I had my Godmother and some aunts. I had a lot of people that were instrumental in my life....* (Halifax)

> *My adopted mother is a white woman, and I love her to death, but I went to Black women in the community to really find out who I was, to find my true identity. I will be forever grateful to the Black women who helped me to understand myself and Black women....* (Halifax)

In Sheffield, two participants indicated they were not raised by their mothers:

> *My mother was an absent parent; her always being away perhaps affected my relationship with women.* (Sheffield)

> *I still get angry sometimes when I think about my mother leaving .... Things were never the same when I joined her in this country ... the mother-son bond was broken ... and this angers me.* (Sheffield)

There appears to be an undertone of anger and resentment towards these absent mothers, which was not evident in respondents' responses regarding absent fathers.[1] This may reflect a position of internalised sexism and the expectation that mothers are 'supposed' to be there, and that all bloodmothers want to be mothers. However, as Collins (1990) and Bryan (1992) argue, motherhood may be burdensome and oppressive for some women.

The mothers in our sample were described as having a very important, significant influence on the survival of their sons. Even in the absence of blood mothers, the mother's influence was sought and found by these men, as noted in the examples cited above. For the most part, these women are revered and placed on a pedestal in the eyes of their sons. These stories help to fuel the stereotype of the Black superwoman, which fails to reflect the diversity in the lives of Black women. Higginbotham (1982) argues that although Black women are able to overcome very difficult situations, they are not superwomen who have no needs or emotions. An assessment of Black women's roles as mothers reflects such a diversity of experience. That diversity can be seen in the way in which these men described the significance of other women in their lives who performed the nurturing roles. This extended family network is common amongst African families throughout the Diaspora. Migration has broken those bonds for some Africans and African Caribbeans in Britain and Canada, however, the kin network remains a strong stabilizing influence in Black families. The separation of blood kin was also a focus of discussion at the Sheffield Conference on Black masculinity that we held as part of this research. In the workshop on Black Men and Displacement, participants discussed the impact of forced migration and immigration on Black families. The resulting absence of mothers and grandparents in the Sheffield sample is one example of this.

However, for many of our Sheffield and Halifax respondents, this void has been replaced by the development of other family support networks, and reinforces the significance and value of othermothers (Collins 1990), the extended family network (Stack, 1974; McAdoo, 1980; McCray, 1980; and Neverdon-Morton, 1989), and what Edwards (2000) calls community mothers. The men's stories proclaim the significance of othermothers and community mothers.

> *My parent's friends became aunts and uncles because we had no other family here....* (Sheffield)

> *My Aunt has sort of replaced my parents, who are now dead. She's like a grandmother to our children, so the lineage continues...* (Sheffield)

Participants identified a host of extended family and friends, in the absence of family or in addition to, who have had a positive, supportive and encouraging impact on their survival. Aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbours and parent's friends were identified as significant people in the lives of these men.

> *All of my family have had a strong influence on me. We are a strong, close family. The extended family maintains contacts, although we are on several continents now.* (Sheffield)

> *I have no other family in England. We had family friends who were considered family, special aunts, uncles and cousins.* (Sheffield)

> *Because the communities are divided, the family, including extended family members, has the strongest stabilizing influence. The children especially have an impact on the lives of Black men.* (Halifax)

> *... This continuation of family networking is vital to our future ... I believe that family unit, and community support tempers everything else. The family including the extended family, is the 'buffer zone'. It is a great source of social support for Black people.* (Sheffield)

It appears that in addition to being a source of support, comfort and nurturance, the Black family is also seen to have an educative role, one which imparts social, political and cultural education, as well as values and morals. The data here also suggests that the women have been seen as the primary performers of these expectations. Are these role prescriptions that Black mothers, grandmothers, othermothers and community mothers want to take on? Is this consistent with how Black women see themselves in their families? How does this fit with the ways in which Black women are described in the literature?

Conclusion

Do Black women place too high expectations on Black men? Or, conversely, are their expectations too low? Do these positive perceptions of Black women's contributions to the survival and success of Black men, from the voices of sons, reflect an acceptance of the matriarchal role of women as care-takers, nurturers, and primary child rearers? The findings in this study suggest that these Black men perceive the role of Black women in a positive light. Black mothers are seen as superwomen who are crucial to the survival of their sons. Grandmothers share a similar role, but are more important as guardians of the generations, passing on traditions, values, history and legacies from one generation to the next. Finally, when mother is not there, emotionally or physically, then grandmothers, othermothers and community mothers fill the nurturing roles that have been ascribed to Black mothers.

However, an issue that needs further discussion is the potential for these perceptions to reinforce patriarchal sexist definitions of Black women's contributions to the survival of Black men. There is some attention paid to the multiple oppression of Black women, and the sacrifices that Black women have made, and continue to make, in their efforts to help the family and community survive but is this understood? How do we move forward from here? We need to continue the dialogue that gets Black men and women talking with each other about Black women's roles in bringing our *boyz to men*. We need to critically examine these roles, strengthening that which is working, and challenging those things that are problematic. Black men in this research project thank their mothers and Black women in general for the work they have done over the years to preserve and protect the Black family, including Black boys. They also invite their brothers to take on more of the responsibilities for helping to bring Black boys to manhood.

[1]Further discussion of Black men's experiences with their fathers can be found in Bernard's *Black Men: Endangered Species or Success Story*, (forthcoming, Fernwood Publishers, Halifax).

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Dannabang Kuwabong

Restoring the Memories of Joining Between Mother and Son

A Reading of Lorna Goodison's Maternal Poems

Lorna Goodison's poetry encompasses a wide range of topics reflecting her concern with intersecting issues confronting postcolonial Africaribbean women writers: race, gender, culture, spirituality, sexuality, class, language, history and, most of all, the reclamation of an Africaribbean motherhood and matrilineage. Because motherhood is central to the experiences of most Africaribbean women, Goodison's desire to construct an Africaribbean matrilineage leads her to positively consider the issue of Africaribbean motherhood and mothering. Her position attempts to develop a rhetoric of recovery of Africaribbean motherhood and mothering in response to her experience of being mothered and being a mother herself, and in contradiction to the decades of seeing Afrisporic mothering as deviant and emasculatory of their men-children. Goodison's poetic of recovery is linked to the voices of other Africana Womanists poets including Claire Harris, Marlene Nourbese Philip, Cynthia James, Grace Nicols, and a host of others. Their voices are joined to those of Afrisporic theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins, Patricia Bell-Scott, Andrew Billingsley, Paula Giddings, Robert Staples, and Bette J. Dickerson. As a team, they not only question but also provide alternatively more in-depth and reclamatory readings of Afrisporic motherhood and mothering. This does not of course suggest that all Afrisporic women writers engage in this redeeming design to reclaim themselves by positively reclaiming Afrisporic mothering and motherhood. Rather, there are a few writers who present a very problematic relationship with the mother. The case of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* is one example.

Most of the writing by Afrisporic women has tended to focus on the daughter-mother relationship, but little has been heard about the mother-son relation from the perspective of the mother as writer. One often has to look into

the writings of Afrisporic male writers, who tend to romanticize the mother, and gloss over problematic issues in the relationship. In this paper, I examine four of Goodison's poems to show her unequivocal stand for motherhood, which is built around the mother-son relationship. Her stance is a not a retrogressive move into voluntary and involuntary entrapment in the world of patriarchal constructions of motherhood. I explore the mother-son connection in the poems, "My Last Poem," "Songs for My Son," "My Will," and "My Last Poem (Again)." In these poems, Goodison's songs of love to her son help fill what Nina Lyon Jenkins calls the "voids in our existing knowledge of the diversity of Black women's experiences" particularly as mothers (208), which needs to be understood within the milieu of Africaribbean socio-cultural and historical dynamism, and blended with conceptual frames on mothering from other feminist postulates. The poems demonstrate Goodison's concern for her son's future in a racist, sexist, and a classist world in which to be an Africaribbean male means to be threatened with all sorts of invisible dangers to the personhood. Thus, Goodison's poetic blessings, incantations, spells, and advice are all tended to the son in maternal love, which transcends biological nurturing and hidden psychological desires and designs of power play. Of course, as Paul Olsen (1981) has postulated, the language and contents of Goodison's poems can easily be misread as an attempt on her part to use her position of power during the son's infancy to shape his "whole world perceived and interpreted" by her (15). Nonetheless, Goodison's poems do demonstrate aspects of the first two stages delineated by Olsen to explain a mother's hidden attitude toward her son (at this stage of the son's infancy), to verbally and nonverbally shape her son's future (16).

These hidden attitudes are what Adrienne Rich (1976) identifies as the "special version of the mother-son relationship" (202). For Goodison, an Africaribbean mother, this special version does not rise simply from internal cultural dynamics, but from an externally constructed ideology, often imposed upon the group as a method of control over their self-definition. The history of their enslavement, colonization, and racist denigration and rejection, is compounded by other socioeconomic forces arraigned against her in a sexist society. Rich has pointed out that the Afrisporic mother then "has been charged by both white and black males with the `castration' of her sons through her so called matriarchal domination of the family, as breadwinner, decision-maker, and rearer of children in one" (204). But as Rich further recognises, these so-called qualities of the Afrisporic mother are severely curtailed by "the bonds of racism, sexism, and poverty" (204). Rich writes:

> What is misread as power here is really survival-strength, gut, the determination that her children's lives shall come to something even if it means driving them, or sacrificing her own pride in order to feed and clothe them. In attributing to the black mother a figurative castration of her sons, white male racism which has literally castrated

> [millions] of black men, reveals yet again its inextricable linkage with sexism. (204)

Apt as Rich's (1976) elucidation of the causes of Afrisporic mothers' oppression, and subsequent apportioning of blame, her position, nonetheless, locks Afrisporic mothers and sons perpetually into a dichotomous location in which Afrisporic women are seen merely as victims and the sons as ungrateful misogynists, who link up with the dominating white male to oppose the Afrisporic mother. In so doing, Rich fails to recognise any agency among Afrisporic mothers, and consequently ignores the role played by Euro-American racism and misogyny to influence the Afrisporic male's attitude to women.

My focus on Goodison's is dictated by her unique position as a poet-mother writing dealing with her relationship to her man-child. Moreover, Goodison's ability to publicly celebrate her "maternal presence and influence"(Hirsch, 1989: 416), deserves study. Her poems proclaim what Robin Morgan asserts as the "concept of mother-right, affirmation of a woman's child-bearing and/or child-rearing when it is a woman's choice"(8). In addition, Goodison as mother and poet articulates the position which does not paint glorious "portrayals of strong and powerful mothers," but rather of a fearful mother whose position is ambiguous because of "the relative absence of fathers" (Hirsch, 1989: 416). Thus Goodison's poems display what Hirsch has argued is "[a] uniquely female tradition ... in which to explore issues of maternal presence and absence, speech and silence" (416). This absence of fathers to help Africaribbean mothers raise their sons is variously articulated in Africaribbean male narratives. In this absence of a father figure to help raise sons, Africaribbean mothers do both the mothering and fathering. The combination of the two roles is defined by Collins as motherwork (47-49).

While recognizing the history of slavery, racial oppression, and sexism, which have all affected Africaribbean mothers' relationship to their sons, Grace Nicols, nevertheless, still "reject[s] the stereotype of the 'long-suffering black woman'" (1990: 284). She worries about the "danger of reducing the black woman's condition to that of 'sufferer,' whether at the hands of white society or at the hands of black men" (285). But such reductionism completely denies the women any agency. This reductionism engenders a pervasive myth about how female headed households in Afrisporic families is dysfunctional and deviant, and is perpetuated by such patronizing, racist, and sexist writings as the *Moyniham Report* (1965). These myths have successfully been rebutted by several writers including Norma J. Burgess (1995: 21-36). The matriarch's reputed power and dominance over men are nullified in the light of the reality in Africaribbean socioeconomic relations. Senior (1991) writes that while "younger, upwardly mobile women nowadays voluntarily choose single parenthood and household headship, for the older women, there is usually no choice; the role is foisted on them by circumstances" (102). Consequently, Senior's research reveals that these "female household heads on the whole are poor,

black, uneducated and in the worst paid and lowest status jobs. These women are truly working miracles, in ensuring at least the survival, and sometimes the advancement, of their families" (102). It is this crippling poverty that Goodison captures so eloquently in "My Last Poem" as she ponders what will happen to her and her son now that her father is dead (32).

Senior's (1991) research echoes earlier work by Leota Lawrence (1983). Leota argues that in spite of these women's terrible socioeconomic locations, they all seem to place a high premium on the value of motherhood as a trope of self-validation and fulfilment (4). Motherhood, writes Lawrence, is the unifying vision of women in the Caribbean. Goodison celebrates these views in her own poems to her son. She does not see motherhood as a male-inspired construct to bind women to biological determinism. As she insists in a conversation with Denice Narain DeCaries, "this (motherhood) is an important issue. ... I cannot see my life without mothering a child. ... it's just something I couldn't see myself not doing because to me having a child is the key to a whole lot of things in myself" (23).

Goodison's position is supported by research findings of both Senior (1991) and Hodge (1990). On one the hand, Senior's research on motherhood concludes that "childbearing is one of the few areas in the lives of Caribbean women that is not surrounded by ambivalence. There is an almost universal impulse to mothering.... " (66). She further states that in spite of the advances made in the lives of women through education, "the view persists that the real vocation for women is motherhood" (66). Merle Hodge (1990) draws the same conclusion (41). On the other hand, both Senior and Hodge postulate that this type of motherhood ideology can be an oppressive expectation to some other women. For instance, Africaribbean women may actually be socially pressured to become mothers early, even when they may otherwise would have loved to pursue a carrier, or further their education. This contrary perception is well articulated in Sybil Seaforth's recent novel, *In Silence the Strands Unravel* (1999). Here, four middle class women lament the loss of their individual desires for personal and career growths because of their choice of Victorian concepts of motherhood as the best and only choice for women.

In spite of all the issues raised, which seem to suggest that Afrisporic mothers have no agency, this really is not the case. Afrisporic mothers have an agency which is embedded in the "Afrocentric tradition ... [of] motherhood of varying types, whether blood mother, othermother, or community othermother" (Collins, 1994: 207). The problem that arises here is how that agency is utilized in the socialization of sons by mothers without falling into the traps of bad mothering set by sexist and racist misogynists. Rich (1976) advises that if mothers want their sons to grow up unmutilated by sexist attitudes, they must sensitize their sons on all aspects of misogyny while developing strategies of negotiation against their exclusion from social discourse (207) still dominated by patriarchy. The method of socialization of sons by Afrisporic mothers is encapsulated in the question: "what do I want for my son?" (211). Rich's

statement below suggests a possible solution:

> Women who have begun to challenge the values of patriarchy ... want [their sons] to remain, in the deepest sense, sons of the mother, yet also to grow into themselves, to discover new ways of being men even as we are discovering new ways of being women. We would wish that there were more fathers—not one, but many—to whom they could also be sons, fathers with the sensitivity and commitment to help them into manhood in which they would not perceive women as the sole sources of nourishment and solace. (211)

A way of fostering this concept of the new man in a man-child is for the mother to craft the tools that would enable the man-child to possess the "courage of women" (215), so that he can avoid retreating into the "old male defences, including that of a fatalistic self-hatred" (215). Carole Klein (1984) interprets this method of man-child education as the ability to help the man-child recognize, develop, and synthesize his feminine and masculine personalities (245). Goodison negotiates her response to the question through her poetry. "Song for My Son" begins with a confession of anguish of a mother who fears for the loss of her son to death: "I live in fear of his hurt, his death. / The fear is real" (43), even though every rise and fall of breath of this "man-in-miniature" (43) assures Goodison that he is alive. Goodison's concern for the well-being of her son is reflective of the maternal fear that if the man-child is to die, then all her labour of love would have been in vain, and her desires to leave her mark in the world would have come to nought. At this stage of the relationship between mother and son, we see Goodison displaying what Olsen has defined as the first stage of four overlapping stages through which a mother gradually shapes her son's future to coincide with her deepest aspirations for him. This first stage is "where her fantasies and attitudes, joys, fears, and hates will be communicated primarily nonverbally, though accompanied by words" (16). These perplexing responses by the mother are well represented in a poem by Theresa Lewis, an Africaribbean Canadian poet.

Her eyes were shining brightly
A glow was stretched
around her skin-tight face

She laughed out brashly
when they said
'You've had a boy'

A boy? she queried wildly
(as though the specie
had a dozen kinds)

A boy ... a boy?
She laughed again in wonder

But when they placed him
in her arms
she cried
she cried
she cried!
("Motherhood")

The new mother expresses emotional ambivalence toward her new born boy, not only from the way she responds to the news of the sex of the child, but also in the manner in which she physically demonstrates that response through laughter and tears. The laughter is brash and wild, and the tears are uncontrollable. Her tears can be a sign of either over-joy or over-sorrow. The unworldly laughter, and the unstoppable tears, perhaps originate from both fright and hope. She hopes, as Klein puts it, that her son "can more easily than his mother, possess the world she brings him into, because he is a sexual 'other'" (12), but fears what the system in Canada may do to him because he is a racial "other." Unlike Goodison's "Song for My Son," "Motherhood," does not dramatize a son's birth as the occasion for family and generational reunification, bonding, and an experience of momentary peace. Both mothers, however, share the same sense of loss of their girlhoods (Klein 12), and the control and connection between them and the man-child, now that the cord of connection has been severed at birth.

If in Lewis' poem then the new mother's reactions are unpredictably contradictory, Goodison as mother suffers from insomnia, which is instigated by fright that her son may die, and in so doing, deny her the chance to imprint herself on the world through him. She hoists herself above her ill son, praying and bargaining with God for his survival. The son's "... stomach hurt[s]"(43) from the mothers' breast milk. The situation is aggravated because "my son cries / the cats answer" (43). Her fears are linked to what some might label as maternal folk superstition caused by a sense of insecurity traceable to her cultural and adopted narratives about the evil powers of cats. The regeneration of this fear makes Goodison semi-paralysed, and she falls into a trance. In this state, she relives her time of labour when she is reunited with the spirits of foremothers and othermothers, who all come to help her go through the arduous task:

They gather from beyond
through the trees they come
gather on the banks of the family river
one by one they raise the keening song
great grandmother Rebecca of the healing hands

> Tata Edward, Bucky, and Brownman
> my father's lost mother Maria
> and now my father
> come to sing the birthsong
> and Hannah horsewoman to ride me through
> ("Songs for my Son" 43-44)

This spiritual and communal act of birthing practices is traceable to Africa. After the son is out, and after they have told her the sex of the child, they immediately let her know that the real work of mothering has just began. What Goodison so ably captures in this poem is very well documented by the female shaman, Sobonfu E. Somé's (1999: 56-70). In African cultures, writes Somé, every child is a spirit that takes on human flesh. Hence, Goodison's midwife "summons the appropriate spirits / to witness your crowning" even as she severs the cord that bonded mother and son (44). Consequently, both mother and son: "... we'll never smell / its primal top-notes ... / without memories of our joining" (44). But this statement cannot be taken to imply a weakening of the usually very close relationship between Africaribbean mothers and sons. Goodison identifies a three-way connection between her and her man-child that hold this relationship together. These include the womb and severed umbilical cord, the breast of the mother that now provides milk to the infant son, and the fact that the child is flesh of her flesh. Also, the three-way connection is drawn from Goodison's Afrocentric cultural praxis in which the birth of a child concretizes the cyclical link of the ancestors (past), the mother (present) and the child (future). It is this three-way connection that will ensure a continuity and strengthening of mother-son bonding. In this triad, there is no mention of the son's father. Interestingly, the father figure that is represented is Goodison's father's spirit, who joins her other relatives during her labour.

The presence of the paternal spirit in what is usually considered in both Africa and among Africaribbean communities to be an all female affair speaks volumes of untold connections. His presence at the birth of his grandson by a daughter who possesses the qualities of the son he probably wanted, but who instead had a daughter, blends well into the patriarchal environment in which households are mostly female-headed. This testifies to some extent the desire of Goodison to have a father figure for her son. Failing that, she would rather have her own father as that figure, not just to seal the grandfather-grandson bond to ensure the passing on of family tradition of maleness, but also to satisfy Goodison's desire "for a second chance to form a love bond with her father, through delight in a boy who shares their genes and is part of their family history, and can have important aspects of redemption. The loneliness and pain of her own childhood—which Goodison articulates in "For My Mother (May I Inherit Half of Her Strength)" (71-74)—may recede beside the happy continuity of generations that she has made possible" (Klein 20). The son is

named Miles "for the music, and for coming / a long way" (44).

In "My Will," the stage of "separation-individuation" seems to have been passed, and Goodison begins the process of disengaging herself from the self of the son. But in order to facilitate this move, Goodison must hand over certain treasures that will prepare the son to meet the bumpy and unfriendly world outside the domestic sphere, and beyond the power of mother's protection. Song is the first gift she allocates to him because in diasporic African communities music is "This sweet immediate source / of release ... " (45), and through music " ... God takes hints" (45). Song incorporates the psalms of faith, the religions and Africaribbean spiritualities, which have over the years sustained Africaribbean people in the face of slavery, colonization, poverty, and racism. The next gift to the son is a prayer that the son will grow up respecting his elders "in the layered love of our / simplest ways" (45). Again, the mother's spirituality burst forth as she instructs her son to be thankful to God for every meal he gets. She ardently prays that her son may never "know hungry" (45). Goodison's relationship with her son is reflective of the spiritual and corporeal aspects of mother-son relationship, but does not seem to reflect the idea of mother-power through which she engages structural designs to mould the future of her son. What is clear here is the demonstration of the dual roles of the Africaribbean mother, who in the absence of the son's father, assumes the burden of being both a father and a mother to her son, and giving him the appropriate tools with which to face the world as he matures and becomes independent.

Collins (1994) has stressed that among racial ethnic mothers, "preparing children to cope with and survive within systems of racial oppression is extremely difficult because of the pressures for children of racial ethnic groups to assimilate" (57). She postulates further that "mothers" in these circumstances, are therefore forced to "make varying choices in negotiating the complicated relationships of preparing children to fit into, yet resist, systems of racial domination" (58). One of the negotiating strategies is for mothers to "transmit sophisticated skills to their children, enabling them to appear to be submissive while at the same time to be able to challenge inequality" (59). Goodison's actions then must be seen as an attempt to negotiate possibilities for her son within the narrow confines in which they as Africaribbeans find themselves in North America. The advice to put on a "patina a shade subdued / so when you bloom they / will value it" (46) is one of these negotiating strategies she is teaching her son. Another strategy is knowledge through education. She tells him to love books. To Goodison, education is the best way for her son to rise above the peripheral location into which Africaribbean males are marooned by the system. Because Goodison is politically conscious, and an Africana womanist, she realizes that her son cannot afford to rely on the system. Moreover, as she puts it, even human friendship does fail, but not so with knowledge. Success for her son does not also mean material wealth or financial success: "too many die/kill for it / besides its face is too bold" (46).

From this preview of the two poems, it is realized that Goodison desires to raise her man-child according to the cultural dictates of her community which stresses the need for the son to "respect her way of offering love and to believe that hard work is often the irreducible factor for survival, not something to avoid" says June Jordan (1984: 105). Goodison also creates a safe environment for her son to grow up in. bell hooks has written extensively about the nature of such safe havens Afrisporic mothers provide for their children. Like Jordan's mother, who provided a reliable space for her children to "pursue the privileges of books and music" (105), Goodison also desires to provide a similar space for her son to grow up in.

In "My Last Poem," Goodison is a desolate and destitute maternal figure with a son to look after. Her lamentation originates in a feeling of insecurity caused by her father's death, and the threat of abandonment. In this position, her creativity diminishes, as well as her material resources. She is suddenly confronted with the spectre of starvation in the face of the absence of a father figure in both her life and that of her son. Her situation is ameliorated with the help of an othermother. In this situation, her immediate desire is to feed her son. In order to get food, Goodison utilises the services of the othermother:

I gave my son
to a kind woman to keep
and walked down through the valley
on scarred feet,
across the river
and into the guilty town
in search of bread (32)

The bakery is shut. She returns to her son, not in a mood of panic and manic depression, but in state of renewed creativity in spirit. Thus, instead of bread, she feeds him with poetry. There is a hint to the biblical statement that "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." In the place of God, substitute the mother.

Subsequently, when the act of creative writing is combined with the act of reproduction of species through a mother, she becomes a co-creator with God. In a similar way then, Goodison in "My Last Poem (Again)" (80), equates the birthing of her son to the process of creative writing. As a woman and a mother, she feels the connection between the two. This connection is defined by love, the same type of love that Rich (1976) articulates in her writing.

Goodison writes:

Poems, you were blood leeches attaching yourself to me
in my should-have-been-brighter moments.
You put to flight lovers who could not compete
you forced yourself into my birthing bed

so I delivered one son and a poem. (80)

Goodison confesses that the poem is not her best, but insists that it nonetheless chronicles her autobiography for her son's education. Goodison's role as autobiographer to provide her son with a sense of his history, is symptomatic of the place of the mother as storyteller and oral historian in both African and Africaribbean communities. This important function of the mother in Africana communities is arguably not peculiar to African and Afrisporic women, but it is much more prevalent among them (Rushing 1978: 19). In this process of educating the son about his history, the son shows he is not just an uncritical recipient of such knowledge. He establishes his individuation through a critically engaging discourse in which he requests the mother to write poems that will leave some room for negotiable responses. The dialogue between mother and son not only shows a recognition by the son of the mother's legitimate claim to a separate identity, but the son's own graduated move toward maturation. This acknowledgement of a separate maternal identity amalgamates with the son's endorsement of the mother's authenticity of voice. The discourse also ensures a continuation of the connection between them. When the son, therefore, stresses that the mother should relax her hold on him a bit to allow this dialogue of ideas between mother and son, and between different traditions, she suddenly realizes that she has successfully raised a man-child, and that she has also almost become a woman. But this recognition fails to free her from continuing to see him in her heart as her baby:

I warm my son's clothes
in this cold time
in the deep of my bosom
and I'm not afraid of love
In fact, should it be
that these are false signals I'm receiving
and not a real unqualified ending
I'm going to keep the word love
and use it in my next poem (33)

This perceptual framing of the son in an eternal infant stage has been exposed and critiqued as one of the indirect causes of the tensions between sons and mothers, and also a source of male excuse for excesses. Goodison's infantilization occurs in the creative sphere where the son's maturing sensibilities are recognized and immortalized in poetry. On the one hand, creativity to Goodison involves a re-visioning of the Eurocentric patterns of mother-son concerts into which Afrisporic mothers have unwillingly and sometimes unwittingly been pushed and locked. On the other hand, re-visioning as a praxis is a way of synthesizing Africana mothering and Euro-American mothering techniques in order to raise her son in the way that Rich (1976)

canvasses feminist mothers to do. Re-visioning, as seen in Goodison's poems, then implies acts of transcending boundaries that limit the wealth of experience between mother and son.

This re-visioning poetics prevents Goodison from demonstrating in her poems the same terror and ambivalence manifested in Lewis' poem. There are also no signs of that repressed rage, which Rich (1976) delineates as being responsible for the fostering of masculine aggressiveness in sons by mothers (206). Goodison's structural design for her son's welfare does not, however, stem from a belief that society has created more opportunities for male children, as Rich has emphasized (193). But considering the history of Afrisporic people, the system has created fewer opportunities for Afrisporic males. The so-called qualities of independence of men, which make them "actively willing, original" with no room for the "self doubt and ambivalence" (193), that Rich confesses stirs her to want to be a male, are not the same reasons for Goodison's instruction to her son. Rather, these qualities are to be inherited from Goodison, who is described as a headstrong woman: "It's a son, a great grand grandson, a man / born to a headstrong, heartfoolish woman" (44). Of course, Rich stresses that she possessed all those qualities in her youth and wanted her sons to inherit them from her (194).

Like Rich, therefore, Goodison's poetic talent becomes the medium through which she articulates the implications of womanhood/motherhood, but it is in only the three poems that she presents us with a personal testimony of what it means to be an Africaribbean mother to a son. In these poems, Goodison, as the mother of a man-child, situates herself in a position to see her son, as Rich puts it, "not as 'sons' and potential inheritors of patriarchy, but as the sweet flesh of infants, the delicate insistency of exploring bodies, the purity of concentration, grief, or joy which exists undiluted in young children, dipping into which connected me with long forgotten zones in myself" (1976: 194). For Goodison, these "long forgotten zones" of herself are situated within patriarchy and the peculiarities of Africaribbean history, dipped in the experience of slavery, colonialism and neo-globalist American imperialism. As Marianne Hirsch (1989) infers, these multitudinous locations into which Afrisporic mothers have been constantly rotated, creates among Afrisporic writers the "complicated feelings that shape the portraits of mothers, and the tremendously powerful need to present to the public a positive image of black womanhood" (417). Of course, this attempt to present a positive image of Afrisporic motherhood to the world is underscored by the relationship between boys and their mothers.

As stated above, this relationship is considered sacrosanct and celebrated thus by notable Africaribbean male writers including Edward Kamau Brathwaite in *Mother Poem*, and in George Lamming's *In The Castle of My Skin*. Hence, Andrea Benton Rushing (1978) has stated that "the image of the mother is the most prevalent image of black women" in their poetry. In the works of majority of Africaribbean male writers also, the mother figure rises like a supra-natural

being to give love, nurture, guidance, healing, and protection to sons in a hostile world without reliable fathers. These mothers give of their best to their sons because they do not want the sons to experience the same type of rejection and humiliation that they go through to provide for them. Indeed, far from emasculating the sons, Afrisporic mothers actually create in some of these sons a suffocating psychological misogyny which is critiqued by Michelle Wallace (1980). But from the evidence above, it can be assumed that Goodison's relationship with her son as presented in the poems will create a man who possesses the courage of women.

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Nancy D. Tolston

1st Day

I started my period today and that was a relief. Not that I was really worrying about it but in the back of my mind there was a little drum beating softly the worry song. I colored my hair a few nights ago because I wanted a change, so I went to a warm brownish-red from my flat-matted brownish-black. The gray didn't do a thing and I was cool with that. It took four bottles to do my entire head since my dreadlocks are down my back. My son was one of the first to run to the car the next day to say that my hair in the daylight looked cool.

I dropped him off this morning to high school. His first day of high school, he wore his baggy black denims and the shirt that he has worn at least twice a week for the past year. (I will be so glad when that shirt wears out.) He didn't want to wear the new clothes. Not even for the first day. I was a little disappointed but I understood. He ain't his mama.

I thought back to his first day at kindergarten. He told me that he could go in by himself. He told me that I didn't have to hold his hand. He was mad because I was not obeying his words. I held his hand tighter as I walked him to his door, hoping that the teacher would take his hand and hold it the rest of the day until I could relieve her at three. I was four good months pregnant, two months into my dreadlock growth, owner of a 14-month-old female child with mood swings that were swinging pretty high that day from side to side. I had my afrocentric print dress on—it was snug but I didn't care and I walked my first-born male child into kindergarten. Tearful already, the morning was not helped by a chubby little woman who jumped out from behind a car taking pictures of us. My mother. "Ma don't," she continued to click. I was mad because she was not obeying my words.

Today I dropped him off. I had not gotten dressed for the day but just put on the ragged pair of blue jeans, a t-shirt and gym shoes. I tried to joke in the

car. "Want me to take pictures?" I asked and he grumbled a no. I asked him did he know which class he was going to first. He answered something. I gave him the first day of school rules and then asked again did he know where he was going. We talked about other things but as we got closer to the school I became less interested in what he was saying and more concerned about what was coming next for him and for me. I had three tissues left in my abused tissue box under my seat. I bent down to reach for them as I slowly stopped the car for drop off. I told him it was time to get out not really wanting him to. I even jokingly said, "give me a kiss" only to get a louder grumbled "no" and a quicker jump out of the car. And then he did it. In the audiovisual department in my mind —in slow motion—he crossed in front of me, smiled, and waved. I waved and drove one tire rotation and began to cry wishing there were a teacher at the door to hold his hand.

I got home in time to disrobe two wrinkled daughters. They were busy stuffing their backpacks with new school supplies and they never asked did he get off to school okay? How do you feel mommy? They didn't even notice my red eyes as they poured out their cereal wearing only bright pretty tops and panties and listening to their Cleopatra CD. As I ironed two Winnie-the -ooh jumpers that were not new.

The little chubby woman was not there to jump out from behind a car this morning, because we no longer reside in the same state. But I reached out and touched her once I got settled. We laughed over my tears as she admitted that she thought about him this morning. But the most important question from her was "did you take pictures?"

I wish I had.

Susan Koppelman

A Meditation on Mothers and Sons by Nathan's Mother

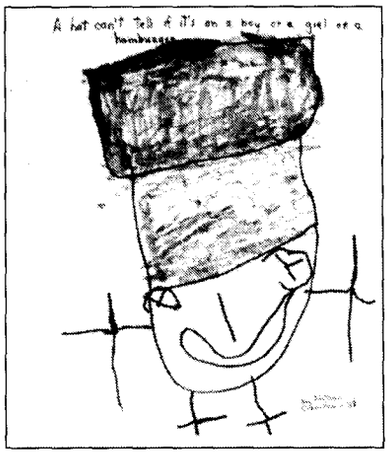
The dedication to my first book, the1972 *Images of Women: Feminist Perspectives*, honors my three and a half year old son.

"To Edward Nathan Koppelman Cornillon who likes his dolly house as much as he likes his trucks, and for whom I wish, and am working to build, a better world." The book also includes my son's first publication, a drawing he made in response to my request for a picture for Mommy's book. I was as impressed by his creation as I was by anything else in that book.

I am still impressed by it, by its wisdom, its humour, and its absurdity, and by the fact that my little boy, Nathan, did it.

Nathan has impressed me since a few hours after his birth when he lifted his head and looked directly into my eyes. His expression that day is as clear in my mind's eye now as it was five minutes after I first saw it. I recognized that my experience was not mine alone when I read Elizabeth Enright's short story "The First Face" and came across this description of a new mother's first sight of her sleeping son:

> ... the expression of his ... face ... was—"majestic" ... For this was a face of total calm, a face where doubt had never yet been seen. One might have called it stern, but stern-



Nathan's drawing at three-and-a-half years old. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

> ness presupposes an attitude toward acts or beings, whereas he had just accomplished the first and most important act of his life, willy-nilly, and as for beings, he was not so much ignorant as innocent of their existence ... this must have been the look he had worn, lying in the oceanic fastness of the womb, sustained beyond doubt or question, assured as no caress or mortal word could ever reassure him. In his lifetime, he would hear and say the hackneyed word "security" a hundred thousand times, perhaps, never quite forgetting that once it was no word but his own kingdom. (1955: 252)

I felt a sacred responsibility for that tiny person and promised him that I would keep him safe, let him come to life on his own terms, in response to his own sense of wonder and curiosity instead of allowing life to impose on him. I promised him safety and justice and beauty; I promised him adventure and tenderness and a chance to become his best self. I promised him my patience and attention and respect. I believed that there were no significant differences in potential between males and females and that I could protect this small person from gender imprisonment. I failed, I was unable, to keep most of those promises. Our lives were harder than I could have imagined. Both acute and chronic illness moved in our family before he was one year old and whatever plans we had for a stable and productive life were thwarted. Together we experienced poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, endless health crises, promises broken, hope encumbered, and uncompensated deprivations. But still, my son has come to adulthood successfully, with authentic knowledge of himself, with a capacity for love that makes him a good husband and father, with a sophisticated sense of justice, and with the ability to feel joy in his work. I am impressed. I am also deeply sorrowful about all that we missed during his growing up years, all that will never be recovered, all the memories we never made, and all the distance that separates us.

What was most remarkable to me about my son in his childhood was not his beauty, which I took for granted, not his intelligence, which I was anticipated, not his obsessive involvement with the things that impassioned him, which I shared, but the strength of his will and the implacability of his logic. I think I have never won an argument with him, never persuaded him of anything, never changed his mind about anything, and never succeeded in leading him to water, let alone getting him to drink.

Commitment to the struggle for social justice had been a part of my life since 1955, when I was 15 and carried my first picket sign in a circle of marchers protesting the Woolworth policy of not serving "Negroes" at their lunch counter. It seemed as natural to me to include Nathan in my activities (when I knew they were safe) as it was to feed him when he was hungry and change his diapers when they were wet. So, at the age of 20 months, he cheerfully rode on my shoulders as I marched to the draft board headquarters in Haverhill, Massachusetts, to insist on my right to register for the draft. I wanted to

simultaneously protest the gender inequity of endangering only male citizens and to make my protest of the draft more than symbolic. When I asked for the papers to register, he said, "Me, too."

When at the age of three, he came to a party with my feminist allies in Bowling Green, Ohio to make picket signs to carry at the Miss Ohio Beauty Pageant protest scheduled for the next day, Nathan cheerfully decided to make his own sign: "GIVE CHILDREN RIGHTS!"

"Well," I thought, laughing to myself as I enjoyed the cheers the other protesters greeted his effort with, "he's got it!"

Nancy Hale's words at the beginning of her story "On the Beach" resonated in my heart, reminding me of what I felt for and with my young son:

> She was sure Mac, her seven-year-old by, felt just the same way, that the blue, crystal perfection of the morning was their private production, because they always felt the same way about everything ... Ever since he was a tiny baby, their instant sympathy had been astounding. He had used to look up even from his playpen, the light in his face reflecting her exact mood. It was wonderful to have one person in the world who felt along with you, without words, as though by an electric communication. (94)

When Nathan was seven or eight and we were living in St. Louis, he began arguing for his right to have a toy gun like the other kids had. I insisted that our home would be without guns, that as long as he was living in our home, he wouldn't be allowed to bring guns into the house. He looked at me with the look of impatient patience I came to know all too well and said, "Mom, I don't need you to buy me a gun. I don't need a gun made out of plastic to have a gun. If I want a gun, I can take a stick and pretend it's a gun and point it at the other kids and say 'Bang bang' and it will work just as well as a plastic gun. You can't keep me from having a thing like a gun, so why don't you just let me have a *real* toy gun?" He was, of course, right. As he demonstrated, even a pointed finger accompanied by the appropriate bang bang sound was a sufficient gun. But I never did solve the mystery of why he wanted a gun in the first place. Why any of his little boy friends wanted to play gun games. His closest friend, Patrick, the little boy from across the street who has become our play-son, our unofficial foster son, after years of playing paint-ball, has grown up to be a Marine.

I wondered if all little boys invented guns. I wondered if little boys were really different from little girls. I wondered if all those qualities that I thought of as Nathan qualities were really boy qualities. I questioned the feminist theory about socially determined gender roles that I embraced with so much hope for a just and humane future human society. Was the theory really just about hope and not about truth. I wondered if other people's little boys invented guns. I wondered if little girls invented guns.

I don't remember if I acquiesced to Nathan's wish for a gun at that time or

not, but I do remember my despair. He was right: he could make a pretend gun and all his friends would honor its "gun-ness." And I remembered how that story by Nancy Hale ended, how that perfect day on the beach was shattered when, as her little boy lay down for his nap, "There was a tearing, ripping sound in the heavens, a kind of whizzing like a length of silk being split. Mary sat up sharply.

> Mac got up, too; he jumped t his feet with his head thrown back, peering up into the unbroken blue whence the piercing sound had come.
>
> "Jets!" he cried joyfully. "Pr-r-r-r-r-r-r ... " and he began to imitate the sound of a machine gun, doubling himself over and holding an invisible gun to his hip.
>
> The jerk came them, in her innermost, uncontrollable foundations. Sick, draining, both startling her out of the dream of the day and blacking consciousness, the jerk came and went. She sat quite still, letting the sensation pass.
>
> "'Weren't they lovely jets?" the child said happily, lying down and lifting his face for his kiss.
>
> But she felt no impulse to give it to him. He seemed too far to reach.
>
> When she bent over anyway to kiss the round cheek, nothing went out to her child. All her life and her love seemed to shrink behind her eyes and mouth, gathering themselves around some other focus, as blood and fluids rush to a wound.
>
> But the child was satisfied, and rolled over on his side, heaving a great sigh. (Hale 100-101)

Years later, when I read Pamela Sargent's (1987) post-nuclear apocalypse short story "Heavenly Flowers" my blood chilled with a sense of déjà vu. Sargent's story tells of the thirtieth anniversary of the launching of the missiles that had ended civilization. She describes the worldwide ritual ceremony of rejection of all forms of violence in human society. The mass destruction and its sequalae are recounted

> Within an hour a billion had died; within a month, another billion; within a year, most of the world." A poisoned earth and a genetically compromised small survivor population were all that remained. The lives of the survivors were limited in every way possible by the consequences of the self-destruction of the species. The loathing of all forms of violence and destructive machinery was believed by those who remembered what life had been like before the missiles flew to have been hardwired into the survivors and their pathetically deformed and deprived offspring. And yet, and yet—once the ceremonies were complete and the gathered crowd prepared for departure

> from the gathering places, Junior wandered over to them, clutching a toy made of wood. One end of the toy came to a pint; two wings had been carved on its sides. The boy lifted it, swooped toward Maisie, then stabbed the toy into the ground at her feet.
> "Boom," Junior shouted as he strewed dirt around with his hands. "Kaboom. Boom. Bang." (304-305)

II

In 1984, I mailed the completed manuscript for my third book, *Between Mothers and Daughters: Stories Across a Generation* to Florence Howe at the Feminist Press several months earlier than either she, my publisher, or I expected. My 15-year-old son had finally broken through my three years of phobic resistance to "those things" and taught me to use the Commodore 64 his grandmother had bought him at his request for his 12th birthday when his mother said, "No way." He taught me to use his computer as a word processor. My son. My 15-year-old son. My beloved Nathan who has said to me that he figured I was glad to have had a son instead of a daughter so I could pioneer raising a feminist son.

Nathan read all the stories I considered for *Between Mothers and Daughters*, not just the ones I eventually included in the book. His emotionally detached, insightful, and witty comments about the stories enriched my own readings. My acknowledgments for that book conclude: "It is often said that family members can't teach each other things; disproving that is the most fun part of our family life. Nathan helped me conquer my technology anxiety and taught me to use his word processor. It has transformed my work life, and I am forever grateful. Now that I've made a book for Grandma, I agree with him that it's time he and I made a book for each other about mothers and sons" (1983: xiv).

Well, it's 16 years later; my son is a 31-year-old married man, the father of a daughter, and a Program Manager at Microsoft; I've published five more books, many articles, many reviews, and some short stories. But I still have not completed the book I promised my son in 1984. One more promise I haven't kept yet. This article is many things. It is an apology to Nathan because his book hasn't yet been completed. And an apology. It is a celebration of my son and my love for him. It is a chance to tell some of my favorite stories about him.[1] And it is a preliminary version of the introduction to the book of stories by women about mothers and sons.

III

One reason I haven't yet completed Nathan's book is that the mother/son stories I have discovered so far raise so many painful questions about mother/son relationships, offer so little hope, and, together, don't seem at all like a gift to offer my son. They reflect what we have learned from cultural anthropologists and other social scientists about the relative helplessness of mothers in exercising significant control over the circumstances of their sons' growing up,

their helplessness in providing safe lives for their sons, and their rapid disappearance from their adult sons' lives.

In some cultures, sons are taken literally and physically from their mothers when they reach a certain age and stage of development. They go to live with the adult men once they can be useful and don't require a whole lot of physical care. In our culture the boys are usually left in their mother's physical care until they are 18 (at least); the patriarchy just takes their minds and hearts, shapes their priorities and dictates their values. And their lives, too, when they are ready to be used to fight wars.

The patriarchy has managed to trick women into doing more and more of the work of son-raising in return for less and less respect and reward, and under increasingly powerless conditions. The patriarchy has persuaded mothers to accept as part of their jobs teaching their sons to be loyal to the patriarchy. Mothers of sons are conditioned to push their sons toward emotional "independence" from their mothers and to worry that they have failed at their jobs of rearing healthy men if their sons seem to love their mothers "too much."[2]

Why would a woman want to mother a son? How dare a mother love her son?

She knows that he is destined to grow up to inherit a greater privilege than is available to her daughters, or to herself. He may not consciously become, but he cannot entirely avoid becoming, her oppressor. These little boys we bear from our bodies are no more "ours" than the silver polished by a maid is hers.

I know—I know, we do not "own" our children. Of course I agree that they are free and unique souls, belonging only to themselves. I know well the words of Kalil Gibran about loving and letting go, about bows and arrows. Of course we don't and aren't supposed to own our children, but neither should their fathers or the FatherSystem own them. And certainly the FatherSystem does own our sons. Our sons can be snatched from us without either our or their consent, and taught to aim a gun at other mothers' sons and to pull those triggers and kill or be killed by other mothers' sons as soon as they are big and strong enough to hold those guns. Sometimes sooner. Certainly it doesn't happen to all of our sons and it doesn't happen to the sons of every generation—but there is nothing in a son's basic character that helps a mother know which ones will be left intact and which ones won't escape absorption into the heteropatriarchy.

The stealing of our sons, the impressing of them into the service of the heteropatriarchy is as random, as rampant, as heartbreaking, and as inevitable as domestic violence and rape, which is just an additional dimension of the warfare they are conditioned to engage in. Only this guerrilla warfare—domestic violence and rape—is waged against women, their mothers, their sisters, their daughters, and their granddaughters and the mothers, sisters, daughters, and granddaughters of the mothers' sons they are taught to murder.

But how can we not love our sons? How can we not love those tiny-fingered bright-eyed good-smelling little bundles of glorious babyhood when they are

little? If we keep our babies, rear them, live with them every day, from infancy to manhood is a matter of such incremental changes, we barely notice when they segue from little people who need help with their buttons to people who shave their faces daily.

How do we keep the mothers' sons who have already grown up to become killers and rapists from stealing our sons and teaching them to become killers and rapists in their turn? And at the same time, how do we protect ourselves from those we have already lost to the killers and the rapists?

What do we do about our ambivalence when they are born and we learn that "It's a boy?" How do we handle the congratulations heaped on us for having produced a boy? How do we handle the personal, private disappointment we often experience that the baby is not a girl? What do we do about the barbarity of circumcision? What do we do about indoctrinating them into faith traditions that teach them they are better than we are because they have that leaky tiny flower bud between their tiny legs?

IV

Long before I became an historian of U.S. women's short stories, I was introduced to stories about mothers and sons in another context. Women did not write the earliest mother/son stories I read as an elementary school aged girl in Sunday school at Park Synagogue, a large conservative Jewish synagogue and religious school in Cleveland, Ohio. Four stories triggered powerful and lasting emotional responses as well as outraged questions and protests from me. The first two are from Genesis: the story of the sacrifice of Isaac and the story of Rebekah providing her younger and favorite son, Jacob, with the tools for tricking his father Isaac into giving Jacob the patrimonial "blessing" intended for the older twin, Esau. The third is from Exodus and involves the killing of many sons. The killing of the Jewish boy babies is mandated by the Egyptian Pharaoh to protect him from a prophecy. And later when he will not comply with Moses' demand that he let the Hebrew people depart from their slavery despite the visiting of a series of plagues on Egypt, the final plague is wrought on the Egyptians and their Pharaoh: the killing of the first-born sons of the Egyptians. A fourth story was Apocryphal, read as part of the Chanukah ritual. It was the story of Hannah and the sacrificing of her sons.[3] Each son was given the choice between great material rewards if he agreed to worship the deity of the conquerors or death if he refused to betray the Hebrew God. Each son looked to his mother for a sign, each son chose death, each son was killed in front of his mother and brothers. When finally only the youngest, smallest little boy remained alive, the torturers, horrified by what they had done, what the mother was suffering, and what remained for them to do if the little boy refused to bow down, pleaded with Hannah to tell her little boy to chose life. She did not. The child was killed.

That God is reported to have ordered Abraham to kill his and Sarah's son and Abraham was willing to obey horrified me—and frightened me! What if

my father started hearing voices that told him to kill me? I trusted my father, believed with all my heart that if he began to hear voices telling him to kill me, that he would tell the voices to shut up. Why hadn't Isaac done that?

Then I began to wonder what would happen if I grew up and got married and had a son and his father heard voices telling him to kill our son. What if he tried to kill *my* son? Was I supposed to just let it happen? What kind of father was Abraham that he would let some voice in his head tell him to kill his son? Whose voice, inside or outside of his head, could be important enough for him to do what it told him to do when it told him to do something so horrible as to kill his child? That story sickened and scared me. No God I would believe in and honor would issue that order or would want to be represented to the world by someone who would be honor such an order and be willing to kill his own child.

And what about Sarah? She was his mother! Whatever she might have wanted or thought or felt or deserved just didn't count. Why didn't God talk to her? Probably because she wouldn't have paid attention! What mother would? But why would any father pay attention to such a horrible request?

And why didn't Isaac and Rebekah let their sons share the inheritance? Why set them up as competitors? And why, if Isaac was dying, was the inheritance going to either son instead of to Rebekah?

These stories[4] set me in a state of permanent contention with my heritage. They also triggered questions that prepared me for all the revolutionary movements I have spent my life supporting: civil rights, feminism, lesbian, gay, and bi/transgendered rights, and disability rights.

V

In addition to the various faith traditions that teach us that sons are more important than daughters and that mothers are excluded from "the loop" of decision makers about their sons' futures, we learn about mother/son relationship from popular culture.

In spite of our most loving, intelligent, dedicated, pure, and impassioned efforts, they will most likely be lost to us. They will grow up to be our enemies and our oppressors, learning that to love us is to be weak, and that evidence of having loved us is a matter for shame.[5] They will grow up to condescend to us, to be fond but patronizing, to be generous with everything but their time because we bore them, we aren't important, our ideas and opinions are, literally, worth nothing. We will be, at best, loved like shameful backstreet women, because no man worth his salt, except for a very few, dare to be a public Mama's Boy. The few? Lee Liberace, Elvis Presley, and Bill Clinton in the latter part of the twentieth century. And these public-figure sons who love their mothers are—sexual outlaws in one way or another, for one reason or another.

Perhaps the most famous Mama's Boy on film is James Cagney in "White Heat." Writing about this 1949 film, Pauline Kael comments that:

> This Freudian gangster picture, directed by Raoul Walsh, is very obvious, and it's so primitive and outrageous in its flamboyance that it seems to have been made much earlier than it was. But this flamboyance is also what makes some of its scenes stay with you. James Cagney plays the tough guy who sits on the lap of his mother (Margaret Wycherly), and goes berserk in the prison mess hall when he learns of her death—a horrible sobbing whine comes out of him, and it just keeps coming, as he punches out anyone who gets near him. (Kael 1982: 650)

Leonard Maltin labels Cagney's character a "psychopathic hood with mother obsession" and comments that the "Top of the World" finale has become a "movie legend" (Maltin 1990: 1250-51). In the grand finale of "White Heat" the Cagney character proclaims to his now dead mother, as he himself is dying in a fire atop a burning oil derrick, "Look at me, Ma. I'm on top of the world." This dying declaration of a Mama's Boy makes mother love in an adult male appear to be a hopeless sickness that can only pervert the son who experiences it. Are we to think that mother love in a man inevitably leads to criminal behavior, sociopathy, death? Does it mean (of course it does!) that if we do not "cure" our sons of loving us we are responsible for damaging them? If we are to "cure" our sons of loving us for the sake of their mental health, what about our mental health? Are we supposed to stop loving them? When? At what age?

VI

I have remained faithful to the reading schedule I established for myself in November 1972. I read three new (to me) stories by women each day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Or at least that's how my reading averages. And, just as I keep track of all the stories thematically (among many other ways) I've kept track of and collected mother/son stories all these years. I never start to winnow stories into a thematic collection until I have accumulated at least one hundred stories that explore the theme. I've never done a mother/son collection because I have yet to encounter the crucial one hundred stories. During the years of reading and studying short stories by U.S. women writers and of trying to construct a history of U.S. women's participation in the development of the genre, I have observed that the mother/son relationship is one of the less scrutinized family relationships in women's writing.

There are 58 stories in my inventory of mother/son stories. These are enough, by my standards, to begin speculating about the thematic sub-genres, although not enough to begin the culling for a book. I have stories written from 1878 until 1998—120 years. There are multiple mother/son stories by some individual authors, including Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Kate Chopin, Fannie Hurst, Zona Gale, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Nancy Hale, Gloria Naylor, Pamela Sargent, Lynda Shor, and Sally Bingham. Multiple explorations of

important themes by a single author are not unusual and these multiple treatments follow the general pattern of multiple treatments of other relationships, such as the mother/daughter relationships and women's friendships. In addition to these ten writers, thirty-one others are represented with a single story each. These writers include Constance Fenimore Woolson, Beth Brant, Anna Lee Walters, Joyce Carol Oates, Marita Bonner, Alice Brown, Alice Elliot Dark, Alice Walker, Hortense Calisher, Marjorie Kinnen Rawlings, Nella Larson, Janet Burroway, Janet Lewis, Maxine Kumin, Kay Boyle, Ruthann Robson, and Lorrie Moore. There doesn't seem to be any correlation between whether or not the woman writer was or is the mother of a son or sons and whether or if she wrote mother/son stories.

Many more stories written by women are about mothers and daughters than mothers and sons. It makes perfect sense that this is so. Both mothers and daughters are women and both mothers and daughters, when they write, are likely to write mother/daughter stories. The mother/daughter theme is the single most frequently revisited theme in all of women's short stories. In the mother/son relationship, however, only the mothers are women, so only their stories can be considered among those I study—stories by women written in the United States or territories that later became states. Adding to the reasons for smaller numbers of mother/son stories than mother/daughter stories is the fact that more daughters write mother/daughter stories than do mothers. Mothers of both sons and daughters have often been unable to find the time, the room of one's own, to write their stories. The percent of mother/daughter stories written by mothers, or from the perspective of a mother, is far smaller than that of those written by or from the perspective of a daughter.[6]

All of the mother/son stories by women that I have found over the years of reading and looking and thinking and rereading have to do with the questions I have asked myself ever since the afternoon of November 1, 1968,when the doctor said, "It's a boy." The stories explore the dynamics of the power of the sexist, homophobic, classist, ableist, racist heteropatriarchy and how those dynamics intervene in, pollute, and appropriate for its own purposes the relationships between mothers and sons. Love and pain are the dominant emotions in the stories. The mood that prevails is sadness, sometimes accompanied by bewilderment or anger or submission to the loss of her young, beautiful, basically gender-neutral child as he transforms into an Other or is lost to her by illness or death.

Some of the mother/son stories I have read over the years have had a profound impact on me emotionally. When I do complete the collection, it will certainly include those stories.[7] I have already referenced some of those stories above and, in my remaining space, will talk about a few more of them.

VII

Fannie Hurst has written a number of stories[8] in which the mother/son relationship is the central relationship being explored. Each of these stories is

a somewhat different take on the same tangled dynamic. The dynamic is this: the widowed Jewish immigrant mother has expectations of her adult son that reflect the values of the shtetl culture of Eastern Europe. The son, whether American born or brought to this country as an infant, has grown up in households and, often, communities in which the shtetl values define the appropriate relationship between and obligations governing an adult son and his mother. The pull of assimilation and the different values of the dominant American culture, is personified by a young American (-Jewish) woman who is the love interest, potential marriage partner, or wife of the adult son. Her expectations of marriage center on the creation of an independent two-generation nuclear family. His mother's expectations are that her son will bring his bride home to a three- generation extended family living under one roof. The son loves his mother, has enjoyed both her company and her ministrations all his life, and, as an adult, enjoys being head of his mother's household. He has no desire to abandon her. He understands that if he honors his obligations to his mother, he will lose the woman he loves. He is forced to choose.

These stories have parallels in father/daughter stories by Jewish-American women writers. Wilma Shore Solomon's "The Great Tradition" is one of the most interesting of these parallel stories. In this story, a young woman is courted by two men. One of the men represents the traditional culture of her parents' world; the other promises the best of the New World. She must choose: does she embrace her paternal world or abandon it.

In both sets of stories, the parent/child relationships serve as opportunities to explore the clash of cultures faced by assimilating generations of immigrants. The son must chose between his mother's world and the world of his sweetheart. The daughter must choose between two suitors, one who represents the culture of her father, the other who represents the culture of the New World.

The culture of the parent embodies multigenerational family residency and intimacy, ritual religious activities, and a slow pace of life. The culture of the assimilated mate/lover was fast paced, filled with indulgences in contemporary popular culture, and acquisition. In the father/daughter stories, the daughter usually chooses the suitor who promises to honor by living the tradition of her father. In the mother/son stories, the son agonizes about the choice between his sexual attraction to a woman of his own generation and his love for his mother and what she represents until one or the other of the women makes a choice for him. When the object of his lust insists that if he doesn't choose her *now*, she will abandon him, the mother dies to make way for her son's freedom and happiness.

Fannie Hurst's (1918) story "A Boob Spelled Backward," is one of the great stories of a man being torn between his mother and the other woman he loves, a woman he wants for a wife. It is the story of an early middle-aged man in business who has always lived with his widowed mother. He has always loved her, loved her caring for him, loved bringing her gifts that delighted her, loved sharing peace and quiet with her, loved to provide her with comfort and

security, loved her pride and satisfaction and approval—for and about him.

He loves a career woman. He wants them to marry, live with his mother, assuming that they would live in a way that would not interfere with Mama's ways, their ways. The career woman is equally in love with him, but she wants to live her own way in her home. She wants her husband and herself to create their own way of life. She wants him to leave his mother and be alone with her.

She delivers an ultimatum: give me what I want or give me up; there is another man who has offered me the life I want. I'm not getting any younger and earning a living isn't getting any easier. I want security while I can still get it. I want the promise of a way of life that will make me happy. I would prefer to have those things with you, but if you won't leave your mother and give me my own home, I will marry this other man.

She presents him with a plan—to enlist in the army. They could marry and she would follow him to wherever he is assigned and they could live together. His mother would stay home. By the time the war is over, she will be used to living alone. He must choose. He is faced with an agonizing choice. He is utterly sensible to the pain he would cause his mother if he left her and also utterly sensible to her desire for him to be happy, her desire to not stand in his way. She hasn't, in fact, imagined any way in which she could stand in the way of his happiness. After all, doesn't she want for him what he wants for himself?

And he is utterly sensitive to the grief he will feel if, when, this woman he loves marries another man and is lost to him forever.

The potency of his sexual desire for his fiancee makes it clear that we are not dealing with, what in U.S. culture is so often dismissed contemptuously, a "mama's boy." And for him, these feelings are the feelings of love; he is not a lewd man; he does not objectify women. His mother is a woman and he loves his mother. He cannot "love" in the fragmented way of men who are alienated from their mothers, who consider mother-love to be a sign of mental illness or characterological flaw.

Why must a man turn away from his mother to be completely adult? And what service is performed in our society by the alienation of a man from his mother? It makes him a more willing warrior, more vulnerable to the seductions of being both a purveyor and a pawn of the patriarchy. It is asserted that for a man (sic) to become whole (sic) he has to amputate his love for his mother. What kind of wholeness is achieved by amputation?

One of the reasons that Fannie Hurst has lost her popularity is that stories like these have lost their audience. We no longer have an audience ideologically predisposed to accept her premises. Once upon a time her stories were read by audiences who knew what the stories were about and were not embarrassed or disgusted by men who loved their mothers; they did not see that deep and joyful connection as perverted or demeaning or unhealthy. But it has become taboo for a man to love his mother or for the mother of a son to want her son to love her and remain close to her. The taboo has been enforced under the guise of mental health.

"A Boob Spelled Backward" was written during that period when all the immigrants were mad for assimilation. Many, perhaps most, didn't differentiate between "Americanism" and "Protestant Imperialist Capitalism." The white male apparently heterosexual apparently Christian patriarchy has long wanted to define Americanism they way and, for the most part, desperate and desperately hopeful immigrants have fallen for their definition. After all, how can a stranger in a strange land know the difference? So the children of immigrants have grown up as true to the Ideal of the Patriarchy as they could make themselves.

In this story the career woman-fiancee represents the assimilationist argument/point of view/values and priorities. And in that culture, people aren't tribal, as are the people from the cultures who are the subjects of Fannie Hurst's stories. So part of what is going on in this story is the struggle between Old World tribal culture and New World patriarchal wasp culture. If you belong to the tribal culture, the story reads like a real tragedy and all the pain is believable, palpable. The story makes you cry. But if you belong to the culture that has become dominant, the culture that has generations of history of sending their sons off to war without a whole lot of fuss, then the story seems sentimental, all emotional purple prose, some sort of vulgar emotional burlesque that is embarrassing because it seems to be ignorant of the sexual deviancy its expression makes public.

Fannie Hurst has another powerful mother/son story, "Seven Candles," published first as a short story in 1923 but later incorporated into her novel *Lummox* (1923). In this story, the son is torn between his Orthodox Jewish mother, old Mrs. Palestine, for whom he feels deep love, profound attachment, and deep filial obligation, and young Mrs. Palestine, his Episcopalian wife, a woman with deep contempt for his mother and all that she represents. "Poor Palestine. It was as if a wire cage had curved itself somehow about him, with the egress woven cunningly into the mesh. He was in and the two women with him, making a prison of what, with either of them alone, might have been a nest."

In both of these stories, there is no peace for the son until the mother dies, which she does sooner than her age or health would suggest, knowing full well that her death will bring her son grief immediately, followed by relief and peace.

VIII

There isn't room here to write more than briefly about other mother/son stories I have collected, but besides the already mentioned mother/son stories representing the conflict between tradition and modernity, I will briefly mention some stories that represent other kinds of conflicts.

Stories by women about domestic violence, whether emotional, physical, or intellectual, sometimes focus on the mother/son relationship rather than on the abuser/victim-survivor relationship. Right now (March, 2000) an anti-domestic violence public service announcement is running nightly on Tucson

(where I now live) television. A voice-over tells the story of a woman whose husband began beating her during her first pregnancy who was finally able to negotiate a safe escape from him, saving herself and her two children from her husband's further brutalities. The psa is moving—until she gets to the line that indicates that the most important catalyst in her leaving was learning that little boys who grow up in households where their fathers abuse their mothers are likely to grow up to be abusers themselves.

I wrote in March of 1984 (Koppelman) "I am the mother of a 15-year-old male child. He is not a rapist. He does not molest little girls. He is a not a physically abusive person. He avoids fights and over the years he has developed an astonishingly clever routine, or set of routines for "turning aside the harsh word," for defusing emotionally charged situations threatening to escalate to physical violence. It is too soon to know if he will abuse his wife and children. It is too soon to know if he will have a wife and children, or have even a single child, as his mother and his mother's mother did. But he lived with wife and child abuse in his early years and statistics suggest that his chances of becoming a wife and/or child abuser are greater than they would have been otherwise ... I have often asked myself how it felt to the women whose sons were wife and child abusers or rapists. I should think she would be torn between an inability to believe that her son could have done these things, committed these unspeakable acts of violence and violation against a woman who is a woman like herself and the most impotent grief a parent is capable of feeling. I think it must be as profound a loss of the child you loved and nurtured with hope and tenderness as death might be ... ."

I included the 1907 *Atlantic Monthly* story "The Quiet Woman" by Mary Heaton Vorse in *Women in the Trees: U. S. Women's Short Stories About Battering and Resistance, 1839-1994*. Mrs. Wetherill is so distressed by her son's behavior, his way of being-in-the-world which is so like her husband's, that she discourages her dear young friend, the only woman Henry has ever loved, from marrying him when Katherine asks her advice.

> Men like Henry don't know how they hurt women like us ... Henry's like his father ... All the Wetherill men are alike. They crush the weaker people around them out of existence; they don't mean to,—they don't even know they do it." While she told what her son was, she had to cry out in the same breath, "It's not his fault."

Mrs. Wetherill tells Katherine that if she were to have married Henry,

> "I should have lived over through you all that has been hard in my life. It would have been like having my own at war with my own. I should have had to know that no day of yours went by without its humiliation, without its bruise. I should have known that it was my son's fault. He couldn't help doing it,—and you couldn't help him. You would try and

> try and then you would see that neither patience nor submission nor love could change him."
>
> "They are the men with no woman in them. They are the ones who first created our meanness and weaknesses and then laughed and scolded and sneered at us for being as they make us." Her voice softened. "They can't help themselves for their unconscious abuse of power," she said. (Vorse 1996: 63-64)

Because she loves Katherine, the young woman she has befriended, too much to collaborate in dooming her to her own silenced fate, she collaborates in breaking her son's heart. She has never before denied him anything.

In the acknowledgments to *Women in the Trees: U. S. Women's Short Stories About Battering and Resistance, 1839-1994*, which I think of as Nathan and my book, I wrote: "I am grateful to my son, Edward Nathan Koppelman Cornillon, who suggested that I make this book instead of just talking about the stories and who shared with me the important personal issues we had to wrestle with then and now."

When my son asked me to do a book on domestic violence, he reminded me, as he has since he was 15 and I began to worry about those predictive statistics, that violence is always a choice. And that it is not a choice he will make.

I hope Nathan recognizes that book about domestic violence as "our" book and I renew my promise to create "his" book, a collection of stories about mothers and sons. The stories I have discovered in these years of research have been filled with provocative wisdom, distinguished writing, memorable characters, and emotionally eloquence. But they have almost all made me sad. The mother/sons stories have made me sadder than the stories about domestic violence because they have offered even less hope for reconciliation and social transformation. Nevertheless, they have filled my personal journals with bits and pieces of the most exquisite of all jewels—wisdom grounded in love. I want to close by quoting one of these gems from Alice Elliott Dark's (1993) story "In the Gloaming":

> ... she and Laird began to speak. The air around them seemed to crackle with the energy they were creating in their effort to know and be known. Were other people so close, she wondered. She never had been, not to anybody. Certainly she and Martin had never really connected, not soul to soul, and with her friends, no matter how loyal and reliable, she always had a sense of what she could do that would alienate them. Of course, her friends had the option of cutting her off, and Martin could always ask for a divorce, whereas Laird was a captive audience. Parents and children were all captive audiences to each other; in view of this, it was amazing how little comprehension there was of one another's stories. Everyone stopped paying attention so

> early on, thinking they had it all figured out. She recognized that she was as guilty of this as anyone ... Now she had a chance to let go of ... old notions. (272)

[1]What I'd most like to do is tell Nathan stories. I'd like to write a whole book of Nathan stories. Judith Arcana's (1983) wonderful book *Every Mother's Son* is, essentially, a book of Daniel stories. Judith tells me that her son is okay with it; I wonder if Nathan will be?

[2]A joke making the rounds on the Internet: "There comes a time in every man's life when he must stand up and tell his mother that he is an Adult. This usually happens at around age 45."

[3]I haven't revisited that story in many years. Perhaps I should have looked it up, made certain that I was retelling it correctly before I wrote about it. But instead I told it the way I remember it, because how I remember it is how I have been influenced by it, how I have always thought about it, been frightened and anger and outraged by it.

[4]The story of Job was equally appalling and outrageous to me, but, not being a mother/son story, I won't discuss it here.

[5]Norman Mailer, commenting on his perception of his portrayal in a documentary about himself, wrote: "For a warrior, presumptive general, ex-political candidate, embattled aging enfant terrible of the literary world, wise father of six children, radical intellectual, existential philosopher, hard-working author, champion of obscenity, husband of battling sweet wives, amiable bar drinker, and much exaggerated street fighter, party giver, hostess insulter—he had on screen in this first documentary a fatal taint, a last remaining speck of the one personality he found absolutely insupportable—the nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn. Something in his adenoids gave it away—he had the softness of a man early accustomed to mother-love" (qtd. in Wolfe, 1973: 192).

[6]This appears to be changing somewhat, as evidenced by the wonderful collection *Mothers: Twenty Stories of Contemporary Motherhood* edited by Katrina Kenison and Kathleen Hirsch. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996).

[7]Assuming, of course, that I can discover who owns the copyright, track down the owners, and successfully negotiate for the rights to reprint the story—always a precarious, time-consuming, and not always successful process.

[8]Two of Hurst's mother/son stories are "A Boob Spelled Backward" (1918) and "Seven Candles" (1923). The latter was included in the anthology *The Best Short Stories of 1923.* (O'Brien, 1923) and reprinted *Famous Story Magazine*, October 1926.

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Christine Peets

Feminist Moms and Sons
Making A Difference

When I first conceived this article a few years ago, I thought writing about feminist mothers and sons would pertain to non-sexist parenting, and the influences of the media, school, peers, family, etc. With the article finally being born (deliberate choice of words), I've found it goes much deeper than that. In the past, it seemed feminist scholars studied and wrote more about their challenges to the institution of motherhood rather than looking more specifically at the mother-child relationship. That appears to be changing. Study of the mother-son relationship is very close to my heart as I am the mother of two sons, Eric, age 18, and Jeremy, age 15.

In September 1998, I attended a fascinating conference, "Mothers and Sons Today: Challenges and Possibilities." There were speakers and participants from Canada, the United States, Britain, Australia, and Israel. Many aspects of the mother-son relationship, and women's roles as mothers and non-mothers were discussed. While there were many references made to the mother-son relationship as portrayed in literature, I found the personal stories more riveting.

One of the most difficult things for mothers (and fathers) is worrying about keeping their children safe. Whether it is protection from the neighbourhood bully, or to the extreme, literally keeping them alive, we worry.

Mothers feeling responsible for their sons' survival was dramatically outlined by Amia Lieblich from Jerusalem who discussed the mother-son relationship in the shadow of war. "To put it into a historical context, if God had asked Sarah for her first born son, rather than asking Abraham, the answer would have been 'No'," Leiblich stated in discussing Israeli Jewish mothers' reluctance to follow the tradition of sending their 18-year-old sons to war. (Girls are sent to the army at the same age, but they do not face combat duty,

so have a much higher rate of survival than do 18-year-old boys.)

Joyce King, an educator and sociologist from the United States, spoke of her difficulties in allowing her children to stay in the public school system with their neighbourhood peers. The violence is so prevalent in her neighbourhood; her son is the only one from his Grade 8 public school class left in the area. "The rest are either dead from gang violence, or in prison, as a result of being in a gang and getting into trouble," she says.

King is a black woman and very proud of her African-American heritage. To keep her son safe, she sends him, and her daughter, to a private school where most of their classmates are white. She also has them schooled in their African-American heritage by a neighbourhood scholar after their other studies are finished. She does this to help "recuperate their cultural consciousness." King noted that the decision to use private schools did not come easily. She has faced criticism from her community, and from other black scholars at the university where she teaches. "When our young men are protected by their mothers who are faced by institutional racism, an anger surfaces in them, and we can teach them to use that anger to turn it to a creative force and something positive comes from that."

Throughout the conference, it was noted that roles and relationships between mothers and sons change as the boys grow to manhood. Indeed, Adrienne Rich (1976) noted more than 20 years ago, in her book "Of Woman Born" that in order to be "strong"; boys must "grow away" from their mothers, especially if she is a strong woman. Otherwise, he will be seen to be a "sissy."

Marni Jackson, author of the book *The Mother Zone* (1992), was one of the keynote speakers at the Mothers and Sons conference. She disagrees with Rich. She noted that "mothers may think that we must let go of our sons in order for them to become men." Jackson says her theory is simple: "The closer and more physical the bond between a mother and son is from the beginning, the greater the independence both will enjoy later on. In many ways, the message of our culture to the mothers of boys is not to hold, but to withhold. But by trusting ourselves, listening to our kids, and resisting those messages, we can begin to discover the true contours of the relationship between mothers and sons." Jackson has a 15-year-old son, and she says it has not been easy letting him find his own way, and make his own decisions. She says she has had to renegotiate their "closeness contract" in order to respect his need for privacy more.

But even when we do trust our kids, and ourselves, we look for support from others and we are devastated when we don't find it in the one place we thought we would from other feminists. Fiona Joy Green, another presenter at the conference, stated that in her research through the Women's Studies Program at the University of Manitoba, she finds a lack of support in raising sons in a "feminist mode" within the feminist community itself. In her research, Green finds that feminist mothers often find "a lack of support for decisions that cast their children as outsiders ... for example, for supporting non-athletic boys, or boys with longer hair." "There is still an assumption," she says, "that

boys who do not fit the 'masculine' model will be ousted by their peer group and by adults, and to conform to this ideal is still very important." Green notes that another area where feminist mothers lack support or where they are open to criticism, is when they are judged to be teaching, or expressing ideals that counter those that are presumed to be feminist.

I have encountered this when I tell people that Eric is going to learn to design video and computer games, which he loves playing, and is very good at. These games are often criticized for being too violent, and anti-female. How can I, as a feminist, and a pacifist who has preached non-violence, accept this material being brought into my home, and support his choice to become more enveloped in that world? The easy answer is that as a mother, I support my children in all of their choices, and the right to make those choices, even if I don't agree with them. That's part of mothering. The trickier answer is that I accept it because I respect their critical thinking skills, and the fact they know fantasy from reality. There have been some games which I have out-and-out banned because of their overtly violent nature, and lack of story development.

Fortunately, I have only had to do this a couple of times, when the boys were younger. If I question a game, we discuss its merits as far as the boys are concerned, and look at it critically together. To try and "get into their world," I have played a few of the video games. I wanted to see what the attraction was. I was thankful to find out it wasn't the fact that Lara Croft, the hero of "Tomb Raider," a strong, and capable woman, performs all of her deeds dressed in short-shorts and a halter top, showing her ample bosom. The attraction of that game, for all of us, was the challenge of moving from one level to the other, getting past a number of obstacles, and enemies, while developing strength and skill. I couldn't get past the first level, because I could never get all of the buttons co-ordinated to move the character the way you want her to go, but I found it challenging just the same. A bigger challenge for my sons was teaching me to play.

In playing the games, I found great variety—everything from sports to road races to "strategy" military-style games. Our discussions of these games (and the movies and television shows they watch) showed me young men who do respect women, and their abilities. They see women in leadership roles, even if the context is one I don't necessarily like. (being a "commando"). Eric feels that if women want to be in the military, and can pass basic training, all options should be open to them. Fortunately, he sees this is not the case, and there is need for change.

Media aside, there are a number of things in the outside world to which our sons will be exposed, and perhaps influenced by. Whether these influences—peers, other family members, and school—wind up having more influence on their value system than do their parents, especially their mothers, is still debatable.

Green says that feminist mothers try to balance their philosophies with the pressure the children feel from the outside world. She adds that having open

discussion with our children, especially our sons, about the variations of understanding the world, and what is harmful to people, and what is not so harmful, is often at the heart of a feminist mother's parenting.

She adds that while mothers may have strong influence in their son's lives when the child is young, fathers have more influence, as the boy grows older. There are great variations in terms of support the feminist mother receives here, from non-existent, especially if the father is not present in the home, to a true and equal sharing of parenting responsibilities and teachings. Our sons have an involved, loving father who supports my feminist principles when they make sense to him. At other times, compromises are reached and differences in attitudes discussed. He has accompanied them to films we might have otherwise forbidden and then they have a discussion about it. All of this gives the boys good role models for healthy relationships.

While it may not be as strong as feminists perceived it to be, there is support for feminist mothering from other feminists. Hence the conferences on mothering. Also, Mothers Are Women (MAW), a non-profit feminist group based in Ottawa advocates for all mothers, and particularly for the concerns of those who have spent, or are spending, some length of time at home as primary caregivers. Lisa Zanyk, Sue Robins, Stephanie Lienert, and Roxanne Higgins are MAW members who shared their thoughts on feminists raising sons. These women are involved with their community, some are writers, and all are politicized about changing the world for women who choose to be at home with their children.

Lienert, whose son is 21 months old, says that she has heard some feminist moms desiring a daughter, in front of their male children, which, to her, is as sexist as fathering desiring sons over their daughters. "I feel this only leads to low self-esteem, misogyny, and possible gender confusion. A male child brought up in a loving, approving, respectful household will most likely grow up well-adjusted, healthy and very feminist (humanist)."

Zanyk is the mother of two sons, and a daughter, ages ten, eight and six respectively. She worries that her "actions contradict my feminism" because she is in the more "traditional" role of mom at home. Zanyk says she is determined that her sons will not be men who "power trip or prey upon women." She talks to them, and her daughter, about sexual discrimination, stereotyping, and looking at a wide range of options for studies in school and the future, including being at home with children.

Robins says that at the tender age of five, her son Isaac tells her the "difference between boys and girls is that girls wear lipstick and boys don't, and that girls can do whatever boys do, and boys can do whatever girls do." She feels that if he can always keep that last statement in mind, he will "grow up to be a good man."

Higgins says that even though her son Brendan is only two, she has already been faced with what she says is her biggest challenge: "buffering the perceptions of the world. So many people are quick to set boundaries for him in 'boys

do this, they are fast at climbing, slow at toilet training.' Even feminist acquaintances do this."

Higgins also makes reference to American author and psychologist William Pollock talks about the "boy code" in his book, *Raising Sons*. His studies, says Higgins, show that boys hurt as much as girls [emotionally] but it is a more cloaked or covert way. This "boy code," however, does not impede boys progress in the workforceóit is their membership card in a way.

"How do you become a member if you haven't been given the "boy code" test (i.e., girls aren't included in this club)?" Higgins asks. "We unfortunately don't grow out of this 'playground contest stuff' as adults. It becomes imprinted on our identity, which we carry into the boardroom in adult life. As we tell our children, can't we all learn to co-operate rather than compete with each other, and try to learn from each other?"

British sociologist Janet Sayers noted at the conference that when we teach our sons to deal with all kinds of emotions, including anger, fear, and rejection, we teach them to learn compassion for others as well as themselves, and they do not feel as threatened by others anger towards them.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin, author of *Growing Up Free* (1981), and *Family Politics* (1985), notes there is a positive effect on young men and women of today from non-sexist parenting, and from feminism. When interviewed for this article, she said, "There is an ethos of 'I can do, and be, anything I want' with young men going into helping professions and music, and young women going into science and body building, without feeling they have to justify, or explain, their choices. There is progress in the sense of entitlement they feel."

At the "Mothers and Sons" conference, there was much discussion not only about how we thought we had influenced our sons, but also how they had shaped us. One woman told how her son admonished her for being a "wimp" when it came to standing up for herself at home instead of wanting to always be the peacemaker.

> *I have no trouble standing up for myself at work and in the community, but on the home-front, it seems to be a different story and my son was the one who had to point that out to me. I suspect a lot of women find themselves in that position because of our socialization, but if we want our sons to respect us as feminists, and regard women as equals, then we have to change that behaviour.*

If our daughters feel entitled to do, and be, whatever they want, do our sons see this as the girls "catching up" to the male advantage which they have always had? I wonder about this with my own sons. They just don't seem to "get" feminism. They question the need for conferences called "The Power of Women" or symposiums for "Today's Female Entrepreneurs" which I have attended in the past year.

When I try to explain (going into my "feminist tyrant" mode—Eric once

said that, I think meaning "tirade"), that men already have power, and have a long established role as entrepreneurs, it does not ring true for them, because that is not their experience. They see that getting established in business should be the same for men and women, and if there are difficulties, they should each get equal help. "Things like jobs and training should go to the best qualified person, and if there is a problem getting that training, then you go back to the schools, and fix that, rather than just hiring a woman because you are 'supposed' to," Jeremy says.

So the challenge remains to explain patriarchy to our sons, where it is not recognizable to them, but also to ourselves. Have enough battles on the feminist front been won that patriarchy is not as dominant as it once was?

For many years, women who declared themselves feminists often left out "mother" in their self-definitions, perhaps fearing rejection from other feminists. That is changing, which is good for our daughters, but moreso for our sons. If they know that "feminist mother" is not a contradiction in terms, that will bode well for their future relationships with women and with their sons and daughters.

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Joyce B. Castle

Sons of Feminists
Learning from Their Talk

In recent studies, I and two colleagues investigated the influence that we as feminist academic mothers had exerted on our own children's educational experiences. Our intent had been to explore, in a collaborative format, the mother-child-education connection to determine what our sons' and daughters' experiences could reveal about our feminist stance and our impact on their identity formation. Selected findings from these studies have been published elsewhere (see Castle, Abbey and Reynolds, 1998; Abbey, Castle and Reynolds, 1998). In this paper I revisit the specific study with our sons and present other findings related to mother-son relationships. My focus here is on our sons' use of language during their conversations with us, their mothers. Since talk contributes to the construction of identity and serves to mark gender, our sons' language offered an avenue to explore their development and the role that we had played in their identity formation. This paper presents the key aspects of our sons' discourse and highlights the key lessons to be learned from their talk about schooling, our influence in their lives, and the unfolding of their masculinity. It is white, middle-class masculinity that is referred to here and throughout the paper.[1]

Theoretical framework

Two main frames of reference guided both my exploration and analysis of our sons' talk.

Social constructivism

A social constructionist position argues that concepts such as identity and ways of interacting in the world can be considered a social construct: "a system of meaning that organizes interactions and governs access to power and

resources" (Crawford, 1995: 12). From this perspective, gender becomes socially constructed and exists not in the individual but in transactions with others. While gender as a system then operates at different levels from the individual to the interpersonal to the social level, it nevertheless remains a social system.

Within this framework, language becomes a set of strategies for negotiating social landscapes. As such, talk is a powerful resource accomplishing a range of purposes such as influencing others, justifying one's behaviors, or building relationships. Regardless of the situation or interaction, says Nofsinger (1991), the same language system is used, adapted for situations. When gender and language are considered together, both from this constructivist position, one can focus on questions such as how gender influences conversation, how interactions of status or power affect talk, and how one actually constructs one's beliefs in relation to one's talk. As well, one can ask how institutions such as education or the family construct and justify individual understandings of identity as a consequence of the language strategies they employ. It was these sorts of questions that led me to delve deeper into our sons' storied recollections in our study. I was influenced by Davies (1993) and Heilbrun (1988) who argue that various "subject positions" are constructed by individuals in a culture, and that when we draw attention to what a text reveals and talk about the constructed subject positions, it becomes "a way of unravelling old realities/ perceptions and thus making way for new ones" (Davies, 1993: 14). Exploring the language used by our sons then became "a vital entry point for examining the interaction between the individual and the society in the construction of gender" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989: 5).

Language analysis

Within a framework of social constructivism, the analysis of talk calls for an approach focusing on interaction. This allows for an analysis of how different power relations among groups and individuals affect the kind of interaction and feedback offered and received. It also allows for an investigation of the ways in which gender as a system interacts with other constructed systems such as race, class, and status. The study of language, then, becomes part of a broader study of relations between language and social meaning (Ochs, 1992).

According to Tannen (1994), much of the research on language and gender has sought to describe the linguistic means by which men dominate women. Tannen argues, however, that the source of domination or powerlessness cannot be located in the specific speech strategies because the same linguistic means can have different effects in different contexts. Human interaction is a joint production, and so what occurs is a result of the interaction of all participants involved.

From this perspective, any exploration of language must consider gender in relation to other constructed systems such as race and class. Crawford (1995) argues for methodological plurality in such endeavors and claims that methods

such as modes of discourse (Mulkay, 1988) and speech act theory (Gervasio and Crawford, 1989) can serve feminist ends with careful attention to interactional context. Yet she also points to problems with such research, mainly as it relates to the concepts of relativism and interpretive readings, and she stresses that such analysis must be used reflexively in order to overcome these difficulties.

It was this human interaction perspective that guided my exploration of our sons' discourse. I focused on the topics they addressed and the ways they interacted in groups. I saw our sons' language as a source of understanding their lives and the impact of our feminist mothering on their identity construction.

Details of the study

The original mother-son study was based on a number of interlocking conversations. We were three white, middle class mothers, all in our late forties, all working as professors in a faculty of education, and all espousing feminist views. Our three sons were single, ranging in age from their early to late 20es. The youngest was completing an undergraduate degree in computer science, while the other two had completed university and were working, one as an actor and one as a police officer.

The conversations in the original study had been directed by questions aimed at uncovering narratives related to personal experiences about schooling, mother-son relationships, and identity formation. The process first involved paired interviews between the mothers themselves and the sons themselves, but later involved open-ended conversations with all participants.

The focus in the present paper is on the content and nature of our sons' talk during the various interactions. Talking with one's peers is different from talking with one's mother and even different yet from talking with peers and mothers together. The large group conversations were not only mixed gender, but also inter-generational, and we as mothers held positions of power as mothers and project researchers. As well, the nature of these conversations was academic and purpose-oriented rather than familiar and informal, and this was a new mode of interaction among us as mothers and sons. As Lakoff (1990) notes: "unlike ordinary conversation, institutional and professional talk, has, until recently, been almost totally a male preserve, so the rules of male discourse are not only seen as the better way to talk but as the only way" (210). This, I felt, could complicate the power balance. I set out to explore what our sons revealed to each other and to us during these talks, and what their use of language revealed about themselves and mother-son relationships. In the two sections that follow, I summarize the five themes that emerged in their talk, and I highlight the two key strategies they employed during group interactions.

Themes in our sons' talk

Because all conversations were part of a research study, we as the researchers had controlled the direction of the talk. Yet we had no overt control over our sons' responses; they chose what to focus on, what to emphasize, and what to

reveal about their schooling, our mothering, and their masculine identity.

Centrality of the teenage years

In their talk about school and their own development, our sons emphasized the teenage years. They remembered little about elementary school, and revealed little about university life, but they were very verbal about secondary school. They portrayed those years as happy ones and mostly emphasized the social dimension of life at that time; this emerged as central to their self concept. They recounted having circles of friends, having many interests in and out of school, and of feeling good about themselves and about life.

This emphasis on the teen years was not unexpected given that these are years when one struggles to form one's identity. But our sons' positive recollections stood in contrast to the stories of angst generated by teenage girls (e.g., Gilligan, 1982). Yet whether talking amongst themselves or with us, our sons emphasized their teen years and painted a portrait of these years as very good ones.

School as a game

A second theme that surfaced was the notion that school was a game. Our sons talked of doing well in school, but not of striving to be better or of attributing much importance to marks. They were in fact critical of the academic component of secondary and university schooling, claiming it was not relevant to them or the real world. All spoke of knowing they could do more academically, but of choosing to put school "in perspective"; it was a game with rules to be questioned and at times manipulated.

They recounted having numerous interests in and out of school and alluded that their self-esteem was related more to their social lives than their academic lives. They seemed to have resisted any message calling on them to excel in school and instead constructed their own lives around outside interests and used these to develop pride in themselves and respect from others. While interests such as acting, music and art were recounted as ways they channelled their energies and gained acceptance from others, the activity mentioned most was sports. All three sons recounted sliding easily into the sports culture from an early age. They talked of excellence in sports as part of the male ideal (not so with the arts they felt), and recognized the benefits to them of being able to fit the athletic mold, both in and out of the school context. They appeared to have learned this message early on, and not to have resisted it.

Gender inequities

What also emerged repeatedly in our sons' talk was reference to differential treatment for males and females, right from an early age. They remembered manipulating female teachers in elementary school by being "cute," and then later influencing male teachers in secondary school by demonstrating their skills in sports. In university, however, they talked of a changing playing field; here they viewed females as receiving preferential treatment. They recounted

feeling disadvantaged, stressing that females always received the best treatment and the highest marks. They also talked of changing equity policies that influenced work force hiring procedures, and they suggested, albeit meekly, that in many cases this was discrimination against men. Yet with prodding, our sons acknowledged a certain privileged status. As one said: "I never remember as a young man saying 'Jeez, I wish I was a young girl....'"

Advantage of feminist mothers

When recounting their lives with us and our involvement in their development, our sons were clear about our influence. They were highly positive about our impact, both in relation to schooling and life in general. They described us as "powerful" and claimed to be proud of us and our careers. We had, in the words of one of them, "always been there" for them.

Our sons also spoke of being brought up differently than many other young men. They recollected not always liking to "fend for themselves" when they were growing up and we were busy with work and careers, but they then acknowledged that males should be able to "cook and clean" and they felt able to do this now. They also claimed that some of their views about equality and fairness set them apart from their contemporaries, but they claimed they did not feel disadvantaged by this either. Only one called himself a feminist however; the others rejected any such label. They were clear about the need to support fairness and equal opportunity, but they denounced what they viewed as feminist views portraying men as villains succeeding at women's expenses.

The masculine ideal

The final theme emerging in our sons' talk concerned masculine identity. It proved difficult for them to talk about what it meant to be masculine. In many ways their talk revealed traditional, stereotypical interpretations. One recounted growing up associating masculinity with images of the physically strong, aggressive, competitive male hero who could handle all situations and conquer all demons. Another stressed freedom of movement and choice and portrayed an image of masculinity that incorporated cigars, scotch, and football games. The third espoused a more relational view, seeing masculinity as the antithesis of femininity. All three sons seemed almost apologetic in describing such interpretations, and they acknowledged that such views developed as a consequence of social messages received from an early age. And even though none could identify any individual who fit their ideal male image, and even though they readily referred to themselves as different from other males, implying that they had resisted many of the messages about the ideal male, none offered a definition of masculinity to replace the traditional notions that came through the masculine culture.

Strategies in our sons' talk

It is not only the content of one's talk that reveals constructions of identity,

but also the ways in which one uses language with others. Micro-social positions come into play, and aspects such as when, where and how the talk unfolds and which devices are used can contribute to gaining an understanding of the individuals involved. In the case of our sons, two particular aspects emerged as noteworthy.

Code switching

Some of the group talk occurred among our sons alone, while at other times, it involved mothers and sons together. It emerged that our sons used different conversational modes in each group. Amongst themselves, they tended to be somewhat guarded, and their talk tended to be somewhat superficial, with comments kept brief and to the point. As well, their peer talk was at times punctuated with jokes or comments that would trivialize the statement or topic. However, when talking with us, their mothers, in an intergenerational, mixed gender group, our sons were much more verbal, much more serious, and much more assertive. Winning our approval seemed important here, and our sons appeared not to want to let us down. As well, however, they seemed to need to demonstrate power in the larger group. Their use of linguistic strategies such as interrupting others or using aggressive language demonstrated a need on their part to assert authority and dominate the conversation (Tannen, 1994).

Silence

On many occasions our sons, the youngest one in particular, declined to comment or answer a question, both in the small and large group. In doing so they appeared to be demonstrating an understanding of the power of silence to guard their privacy and withhold information. Talk and the absence of talk can serve as powerful instruments both of inclusion and exclusion, and our sons' decisions to talk or not served to demonstrate their power. Frank (1996) refers to silence as "masculine hegemony" and as a highly rational, if not costly, choice on one's part. Yet it must also be considered that true communication is a complex process, one which was complicated further in this study by the power differentials across the groups. So while our sons had clearly opted at times to enforce their will to be quiet, their options for silence might have resulted from a desire to exert control as well as from a desire not to say the wrong thing in our presence.

Lessons learned from our sons' talk

Smith (1995) claims that "for centuries, women have mothered male children without understanding the masculine culture of which their boys are part" (3). As we initiated our original study, the three of us, as feminists, felt we were well aware of the world of patriarchy and the ways in which family and school serve as cultural reproducers and also sites for resistance. As mothers, we saw our mothering role as raising well-adjusted sons who resisted traditional

male values Forcey (1987). As educators who knew how ingrained schools were in patriarchal teachings (Connell, 1989), we also intended our mothering to dispel patriarchal messages delivered in the educational system.

Our study with our sons taught us, however, that while we had been aware of patriarchy, we had not been sufficiently aware of the ways in which messages from the culture were received and negotiated by young men. My exploration of our sons' talk in this study showed just what they had accepted and rejected, and just how much their identity construction was laced with complexity. I summarize here the key lessons extracted from their talk.

First, our sons' talk revealed a positive construction of their own image, right from an early age, and a portrayal of themselves as fitting comfortably into the larger society. So while sons can be raised by feminist mothers who feel they demonstrate resistance to traditional gender socialization, it appears that those same sons can still slide into traditional patterns with relative ease and then be pleased with themselves for fitting that structure.

Second, our sons' positive recollections of their teenage years and our roles in their lives at that time revealed their perception that they had enjoyed the teen years and survived them relatively unscathed. Feminist maternal fears that sons might suffer and be unable to adjust during those crucial years are perhaps totally unfounded. Others have also reported findings supporting this. Mischel and Fuhr (1998) found that teenage sons from homes with busy working mothers had advantages over other teens—they had higher self-esteem, a greater sense of belonging, and better relations with others at home and at school. Smith (1995) found as well that sons benefitted from mothers with a life and career outside the home because they provided an identity with something males understand and value.

Third, our sons' talk about their schooling revealed a view on their part that they were privileged individuals with power to control their environment. For example, they reported choosing not to excel in academics but in other activities. Ironically, however, their referral to sports as a prime outlet served to reveal an acceptance of traditional masculine norms. Davison (1998) and Griffin (1995) stress that "lessons" of masculinity in school often center around sports, and that sports in turn serve a number of purposes which perpetuate traditional conceptions of masculinity. As a mother, however, I recall openly encouraging participation in sports, so I am left questioning the extent to which feminist mothers continue to indirectly accommodate traditional gender socialization.

Fourth, our sons' comments on their self image revealed perceptions that they held views that set them apart from other males. They attributed this difference to our feminist mothering and claimed to have gained advantages from this upbringing. Not only could they fend for themselves whenever needed, they said, but they could also relate better to females and more readily accept the changing social and work structures calling for equal treatment of men and women. Yet in their talk about university life, they complained of

preferential treatment for females without ever voicing the possibility that females might simply receive better marks because they perform better in class and complete superior work. And when talking about the work force, they still spoke begrudgingly about hiring policies they saw as discriminating against men. Even though mothers feel they deliver messages about gender equity, then, sons can still perceive themselves as automatically deserving of better treatment than females.

Finally, despite reported perceptions of themselves as different from other males, our sons had difficulty defining masculinity. They talked about traditional stereotypes of the ideal male while seeming apologetic about expressing such views. They suggested that the collective public ideal was lacking, but they did not put forth other standards or define themselves in ways that resisted traditional views. Arcana (1983) holds that while most North American mothers easily reject traditional masculine stereotypes, their sons adhere to them because they feel they are expected to. In our case it seems that our sons understood that another model was needed, but they could not articulate one. So even though mothers might model a female view of relationships with sons, those sons do not automatically internalize a view that feminine characteristics, including greater attention to the emotions, might be characteristic of the male ideal. As well, only one of our sons identified himself as a feminist. All three voiced clear acceptance of the standards of fairness and equity for all, but they did not equate this with feminism; they regarded feminism as something more radical. How mothers conceptualize feminism, then, is not automatically internalized by their sons.

Considered together, these lessons from our sons' talk help fill in one frame in a larger complex picture of the development of masculinity, at least as it applies to sons of feminists in a white, middle-class environment. Our sons' talk revealed that their identities had been shaped by outside forces, including us, but that they had also played a part in shaping their own masculinity. As they constructed their understandings of maleness, they had exercised the choice to accept some messages and resist others. The nature of resistance is also complex, however, and as Kimmel (1994) stresses, it is much more difficult for men to reject than to accept the dominant message; to Kimmel, men most fear not fitting in to a norm which in itself embodies oppression of others.

This fear of not fitting in as a male is also perhaps as strong for the mothers as for the sons. Feminist mothers recognize that the gender equity they promote could ultimately result in loss of privilege for their sons, which could then work against their best interests. Rich (1986) asks explicitly what it is that we fear: "Do we fear they will somehow lose their male status and privilege, even as we are seeking to abolish that inequality?" (206) So while feminist mothers claim to want to change their sons, they also must come to deal with the tension they experience from delivering messages that might disempower their sons. Our sons' talk reveals, however, that in their eyes at least they had not suffered from our mothering. But it is we as mothers who must come to terms with

whether indeed our sons have won or lost, at least in our eyes.

[1]The literature on masculinity is varied, with differing views put forth on male's experiences with, and construction of, identity, especially as this might relate to such factors as social class, economic status, race and culture. For varying views on masculinity, see, for example: Bell. (1982): Berger *et al.,* (1995); Bly. (1992); Brod and Kaufman (1994); Clatterbaugh (1990); Connell (1995); Frank (1997); Franks (1984); Haddad (1995); Hearn and Morgan (1990); hooks (1990); Jackson (1990); Johnson (1986); Kimmel (1996).

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Marie Porter

A Mother, Two Sons, Then Another

I am the mother of three sons. Simple statement, but behind this simple statement is the story of half my life. It is a long and involved tale of a life lived on the edge of unknowing. It too frequently descends into the darkness that exists where life meets death, where we stand waiting to meet the victor of these basic forces. Sounds a dramatic outcome from deciding to become a mother? I assure you it is not as dramatic as the reality. What follows is but a synopsis.

My precious first born, David John, arrived in 1963. It was he who gave me my mother identity, who caused the most extreme of feelings to wash over me, who had to cope while I learnt to mother. I loved this baby so much, (I remember crying just looking at his perfect little toes) but so much of the motherhood package roused intense negative feelings in me. I found being constantly responsible for another human being—one who couldn't even tell me if he was too cold, too hungry, overfed, sick or in pain—extremely wearing. I seemed to spend my time in a state of anxiety, of constantly questioning if I was "'doing it right." Besides I was a person who liked organization and had been a teacher whose days were routinized. I found it nigh on impossible to adjust to this baby with his unpredictable needs and wants. It did not help that David was highly allergic, sick regularly, and not a good feeder. Nor did it help that he was an advanced child who couldn't wait to achieve his milestones. The mother road, full of twists and bumps was both unfamiliar to me and being covered at breakneck speed with my baby son in the driver's seat. I do not know what I would have done without my mother and father and my mother-in-law. All three supported me.

My precious second son, Bernard Thomas, arrived after I'd coped with two miscarriages. David was now a mature three-and-a-half year old. Bernard was a long thin baby who had a hearty appetite and good health. If he was well fed,

Happy Christmas, 25/12/1989

he was content. No doubt much of the reason he was content was that I now *was* a mother. His elder brother had paved the way, making life easier for him. I had discarded my training wheels. Although Bernard was also a forward baby, he was different from David. He had an ability to make us all laugh. He did not seem to challenge me as David had done. However, I learned that on the occasions when he did he, he was not open to reason or distraction as David had been, but determinedly held onto his position while I had to think of a way to solve our confrontation and save both our faces. They were very different individuals. What worked for one certainly was no guarantee it would work for the other.

My husband and I decided to have a third child who was due to be born when David was six and Bernard was two-and-a-half. By now, I suppose if

Anthony and I, September 1985.

someone had asked me, I would have said I was an experienced mother. No doubt that was true. Sara Ruddick (1989) argues that maternal work consists of preserving, growing, and training the young in social responsibility. My two sons were well on this road.

Six weeks before my third baby was due, I wrote to my close friend telling her of my fears for my baby. This feeling was new to me. Such fears had never entered my head during my other pregnancies. I had been worried about carrying Bernard because of the miscarriages, but I had no concerns about his "normality." My friend, the mother of five, replied in her usual practical way that if there was something wrong with the baby I was carrying, worrying about it for six weeks wouldn't help.

My precious third son, Anthony Gerard, arrived after a short easy labour. This was heaven in comparison to the previous traumatic labours and births. Anthony, at eight pounds, was larger than his eldest brother, and smaller than Bernard. He was a beautiful baby. It puzzled me at the time, and still puzzles me, why, with this easy birth, I spent the next twenty-four hours crying. I had not descended into sadness after the others were born. Do we sometimes "know" the future on some inexplicable level? At this stage there was no inkling of the problems ahead. Anthony wouldn't suck, but then neither had David in the first couple of days.

I soon learned my beautiful third son was a nightmare to feed. He couldn't suck enough to keep the nipple in his mouth. Finally, after ten days of persevering, I had injections to dry my milk. I was very upset about this as I had breast fed my other sons. Bottle feeding wasn't a breeze either. I had to support Anthony's chin and put gentle pressure on his cheeks to enable him to suck. I kept insisting something must be wrong with this supposedly big healthy baby. The doctors could find nothing.

By six weeks, Anthony was back in hospital with the first of what was to become almost constant chest infections. It was still a nightmare to feed him, as he coughed and sputtered and kept losing the grip on the teat. He tired easily. He "rattled" when he breathed. I needed all my professional and organizational skills and every bit of experience I had gained in my mothering of my other sons just to get through a day. My husband was running our busy business and I had

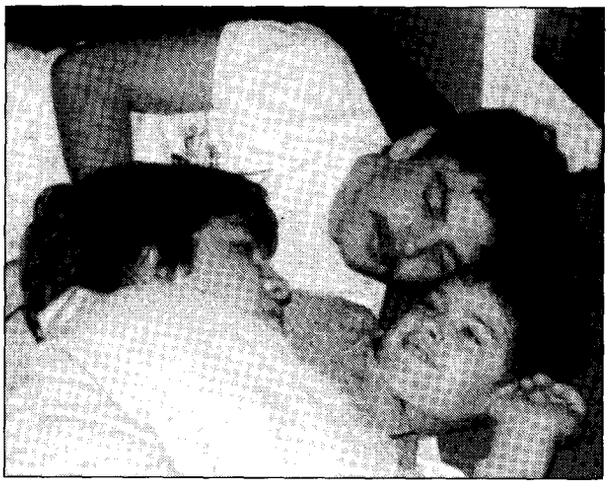
Bernard at home all day. He seemed to mature over night and was a great help to me, young though he was.

Because of my insistence that something must be wrong with my baby, while Anthony was in hospital on this first visit, he was thoroughly checked by both the family doctors and a specialist. The verdict? He was intellectually way ahead, but physically lagging. However, he was sick and I was used to forward babies. No problem. He'll be fine.

I tried to believe this. Anthony was certainly a beautiful baby with his dark brown eyes and eyebrows, long lush eyelashes and platinum hair. He was also a happy charismatic baby who loved people and drew them to himself, an ability he has honed over the years. However, he still "rattled" and feeding him was getting worse rather than better. Because he tired so easily, I was often feeding till late in the night to get an acceptable amount of formula into him.

When Anthony was four months old, I took my three sons to visit the friend I'd confided in before Anthony was born. Deep down I think I was seeking the opinion of an experienced mother who, I knew, would be truthful with me, but who was not a family member constantly interacting with this baby. Anthony still had all his old problems and none of his muscles seemed to be working. He could not even hit a toy or hold his head at all. He also now was waking frequently at night covered in sweat and obviously in severe pain. This scenario was repeated during the day. (It was repeated for nine years until we discovered a urologist who was both interested and knowledgeable. The pain was due to urine retention and Anthony was in danger of severe kidney damage. Under this doctor's expert and exploratory care, Anthony was soon only waking about three times a night. We thought we were in heaven. He is still under the same urologist and his kidneys are still fine.)

Both my friend and her doctor agreed there was a problem and soon we were in the State Capital city with a team of medical experts investigating and testing Anthony in every possible way. Nobody could find anything wrong with him. This was a repeating story even though it became more and more obvious as Anthony grew older without physically improving that something was desperately wrong. Four



Anthony and his two brothers, July 1984.

Off to Padua for the first time, 4/6/1981.

months later, when he still hadn't improved physically, we were told he would not survive until his first birthday. He didn't have enough muscle tone to support life and would either choke or die of pneumonia. His one hope was that the doctors didn't know how he had survived so long with so little muscle tone. He must be very determined with a strong life force, they thought. We have 30 years of evidence that that is true.

My husband was devastated at this news. For me what was being verbalized was what I already knew only too well from eight long months of reviving Anthony when he choked, listening to his chest rattle, and sitting with him in hospital while he struggled to live. The words were a relief in a way. Anthony's reality, my reality, the reality we lived with in our family, was being acknowledged at last. My main concern apart from keeping Anthony alive, was how to prepare my two older sons. They adored their little brother. I knew before I could prepare them I had to be able to cope myself.

I drew on the wisdom of another mother, a mother whose story I had read years before, whose name I could not remember, but whose wisdom had stayed with me. She also had had a child with a slim grip on life. She had told her children that their baby was not very strong and would not be in the family for long. All the family could do was enjoy him and make his stay as happy as possible. (And earlier this year Bernard said with a laugh, "And twenty-nine years later ...?") My sons seemed to accept that story without too much fuss although every crisis worried them as it did us.

That was my approach with my boys. My self approach was that I decided that when Anthony died it would not be because I was incompetent. I would preserve, grow, and train this child as I did my older two. I'd just have to learn more, be more efficient, and I must create a pattern to do this because the patterns of life on offer for disabled people that I saw in Australia in the 1970s were not good enough for my darling son with his many gifts.

I never wanted to be a doctor or a nurse, but I learned to cope with heart failure, choking, and massive spasm attacks that could be fatal if not responded

to promptly and properly. I learned to do urinary catheters, chest percussion, mouth and throat suction, and so on it went, while all the time coping with choking and chest infections. We all learned to rejoice in the many small victories and recover from the many crises quickly. Anthony was a great help as his wonderful optimistic nature and his determination to live was always there for us to draw on. For Anthony once he had survived a crisis, we'd best get on with life quickly before the next one hit. Most importantly, I loved my precious son and still do. That is not to say I do not equally love his brothers, but they have different needs especially now.

David is now 36. He has given me a great daughter-in-law, Bernardine, whom I love dearly. Together they have presented our family with three darling boys—Anthony's precious nephews. David has a successful business and is a good husband and father. Bernard, a successful barrister, 32 and has a partner whom we gladly welcomed into our family. Anthony is 30. He has been near death countless times. His disabilities became worse as he got older. He lost his ability to swallow, to make sound, the very limited function he had in his right index finger. He can no longer say or do anything, but he can communicate well with his vital brown eyes and also with his yes/no. He is fed through a tube. He was told a year ago that his lungs would be lucky to support life for another six months, but my smiling, determined son is still with us, enjoying his circumscribed life. He listens patiently to, and sympathizes with, other people's problems despite the vastness of his own. He is the only person I know who can throw a party with five days notice and have 85 people come.

I am a mother of two sons, then another. Sara Ruddick put into words for me my own approach to mothering. I have preserved, grown, and trained my three sons into socially adept adults. As I cared for David, I became a mother. As I cared for Bernard, I honed my skills. As I cared for Anthony, I ventured into a land of challenge, drama, and exhaustion beyond comprehension. Mothering was suffocatingly intense and complicated. I adapted what I had learned in mothering David and Bernard as best I could. As I look back now, I see that land as a war zone rather than a mother zone (Jackson, 1992). There were many casualties, we all carry scars, but out of the chaos new life emerged. We all have understanding, depths, and skills that have developed from the challenges we faced. I have been well supported by other mothers—family, friends, and acquaintances. As a result, I know so many strong, talented mothers. I have great respect for mothers. It is my dream to have society similarly recognize and respect the value of mothers and their motherwork.

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Ruth Panofsky

The Moment of Goldfish

i

It took five years
to arrive at the moment of goldfish
and now he is proud
keeper of two
who rely on him
for nourishment
and care

This
is my child's simple yearning:
to nurture
two beings
smaller
and weaker
than himself

ii

Here you stand
taller than my breasts
arms reaching up
to grasp my head
in an insistent embrace

You are unyielding
in this combined show
of strength and devotion
for the woman
who bore you
unaware then
that my own show of strength
would soon be matched
by a boy
released into life
gasping for milk
and for breath

iii

He moulds
moist clay
smooths
the rough exterior
refines and shapes
a small bowl

In this
his first work
in clay
he seeks perfection
already lost
to his six-year-old
world

iv

I am not the same
since the doctor
called to say
your son
has Tourette Syndrome
since then
I see things
differently
distorted by a sharp
twitch here
a random
jerk there

sound now springs
from my throat at
odd moments
when speaking with
my boss
or reading
to the children
I catch myself
click click clicking
and recall that
I'm not the one
with Tourette
but that no longer
seems true

v

Buoyed gently
in my womb
a boy nestled
unaware
as the sweeping hand
of god
was lured down
downward
to touch
ever so softly
here
  and *here*
shaping the unmistakable
identity
of those chosen
and marked

vi

Cast adrift
I float through days
that once were substantial
abruptly
I start and shift
uncertain now
in thought and movement

as the ground moulders
underfoot
my spirit unmoored
by the practiced grip of illness
determined to possess
my boy
and my will

vii

I recoil
into a self
wholly altered
by my son's
implacable sickness
determined
to thwart my attempt
at perfect mothering

The pain
is acute
on darkest days
when his
marked
imperfection
disheartens me
so

viii

I mourn my lost child
a fresh-faced boy of four
torn from me
by an illness
that too soon claimed
his flesh
as hostage
to an unholy visitor
that defies his
sweet determination
to be himself
to simply
be

ix

I have been shaped
by the *b b b*
caught in my son's throat
fluttering eyes
pounding clap of hands
and frenetic bursts
of boundless energy
signals of anxiety
that overwhelm us
son and mother both
shackled
by a disease
that taunts human effort
to overcome
its merciless hold
on our days
and our lives

x

When each morning
forces my reacquaintance
with an unnatural power
the morbid
dominatrix
that possesses my son
I retaliate with poems

Against a formidable foe
I wield my pen
and with each line
subdue the enemy
within my boy
for the briefest
of seconds
minutes
hours

Anna Hagan

Just Me and My Boy Going Fishing

The sun came up as it does most days in Provincetown, through a cool misty fog that gets burned off by 10:00 a.m. My four-year-old son and I had plans to go deep sea fishing that day at 1:00 p.m. I'm not sure who was more excited, or, for what reason. Somehow, I thought we may just have been there for the boat ride.

I crammed his already too large frame into my baby seat on the back of my bike and off we went, whizzing past the sand dunes. The pale sand sparkled in the sun and we both reveled in the sheer joy of our surroundings, of being alive and free together. As we approached the designated pier, we saw a large crowd gathered around the beach. Surely there were more than 200 people, looking most distressed. I had to blink three times to be sure what we saw, was really there before us. A large black whale, beached. Periodically blowing through the blow hole, it looked at us all mournfully. I had seen many whales out in the ocean and this one looked small comparatively. I was sure it was a baby whale and panicked immediately. Where was it's mother and why was it here? The whale suddenly became my baby, and I cried.

"The Coast Guard has towed him out three times, he keeps coming back and bashing himself on the boats in the harbor" a man said as we stood paralyzed looking at the magnificent creature with his smooth underbelly. "He's a Mincke whale, not a baby , just an old guy coming in to die" the man said again, as if he read my minds questions. I stood and looked at the crowd and the concern in their eyes. A young boy continually bathed and splashed the whale with water, from his little yellow beach bucket. Of the hundreds of people there that day, there was one man I will never forget.

The sadness on his face, the pain in his eyes, the despair in his soul was so plainly evident to me. I stood transfixed, searching every deeply etched wrinkle

and gray hair he had. I cannot describe why I stared at this man so long except perhaps only to realize what he displayed so blatantly, felt so deeply. Death lurked above us and I felt unsettled.

My son, uncomfortable with the tragedy, and perhaps frightened by the fact that all these adults could do nothing for this helpless creature, yanked on my arm, asking that we not "look" at the whale any longer. I looked down at him weeping and I too felt the bitter sting of salt on my sunburned face as the tears rolled down my face effortlessly, like the endless slapping of the sea to shore.

The blast of our fishing boats' horn jolted me from the trance, jerking me suddenly away from the whale and my focus on it's demise, my young son's innocence lost as he stood also helpless in the face of the whale. The boat was signaling its departure and I swiftly swept my son into my arms, holding on tight for a hug that we both needed. We had witnessed something bigger, of which we could not comprehend. We were left there speechless in the face of mother-nature. As we had reveled in the beauty of the dunes and ocean, we sat in horror within the same moment questioning the reality of lifes cycle and rebirth. I knew my son could comprehend the magnitude of this event and I looked at him with pride, as we had shared this horrible moment together. I could think of no one else but him that my soul could have survived such an assault. I still had him, I thought as he asked many questions. Many of which I could not answer but again I reveled in being his mother.

We climbed aboard and within minutes we were in the depths of the ocean. Nothing else around us. We were both enormously relieved to be away from the beached whale. We were together, and happy just to be . We caught no fish, but shared a lot of smiles and hugs. Quite honestly, I don't think either of us could bear to have caught one anyway! Five hours later our boat docked and we smiled as the skipper threw bait to the seagulls who flew deftly to catch the minute morsels of clam.

The sun was going down and the whale, gone. My daughter and spouse waved madly from the pier, having missed us on our long journey. My heart warmed as I saw their smiling faces. The ocean and my young son, cleansed my soul of despair that day. I think back to that feeling frequently and remember the tranquillity and feeling of being one with my son, the ocean and nature. Sometimes when I can't sleep I think of the quiet but dull, constant hum of the foghorn, at the lighthouse we saw jutting out of the rocks near the pier. There is no lullaby on earth that puts me to sleep faster than the memory of that sound and just me and my boy going fishing.

Aileen M. Fitzke

Mothers, Sons and God-Concepts

When I was pregnant with my second child, I was also becoming more deeply immersed in feminist theological writings. I had hopes that maybe my second child would be a girl. I could share with her all my discoveries about the feminine face of God. I could encourage her to see the Divine in herself. We could go to women-church[1] gatherings and participate in mother/daughter Goddess circles together and share the knowledge that we, too, were created in the image and likeness of God. My second child, as well as my first, was a boy and so I had to come to terms with the fact that I was going to have the challenge of sharing my feminist religious consciousness with my sons.

The entrance of women into the fields of theology and religion, in recent years, has prompted a critique of traditional understandings of religious ideologies. Among other things, feminist theologians have questioned the interpretation of sacred texts (Trible, 1984; Fiorenza, 1994 (1983); Brenner and Fontaine, 1997), the exclusion of women from full participation in clerical and leadership roles within church structures, and most importantly, for my purposes, the language which is used to speak about God (Daly, 1973; Christ, 1979; Ruether, 1984; Carr, 1988; Johnson, 1992). In doing so they have exposed the way in which religious traditions, interpreted through a patriarchal lens, have oftentimes contributed to the oppression of women and children in church and society.

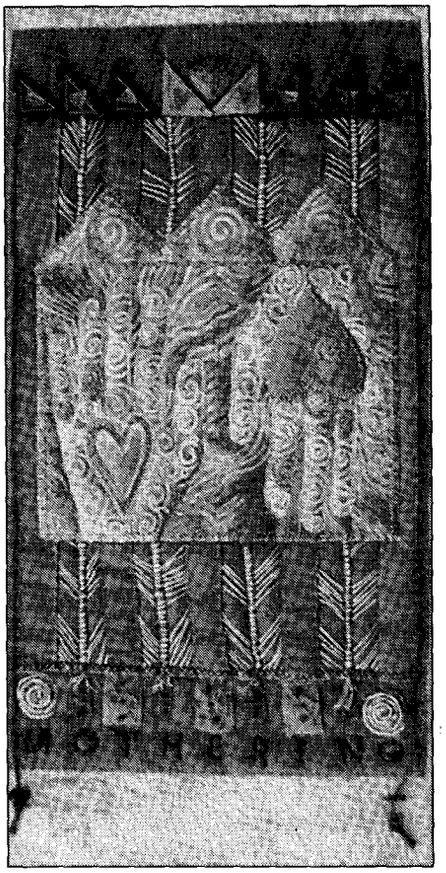
Male only God language, specifically, confuses Divine mystery with literal conceptions of a male, father-like God, reinforcing patriarchal control of women and children. Christianity, in particular, has been dominated by paternal metaphors for God. Although mothers, in general, are the primary caregivers for children, they are separated from the Divine image in a way that fathers are not. Elizabeth Johnson (1992) writes:

> Feminist theological analysis of God makes it clear that the tenacity with which the patriarchal symbol of God is upheld is nothing less than violation of the first commandment of the decalogue, the worship of an idol. An idol is not necessarily a god in the shape of an animal, a golden calf or little statue with no breath that needs to be carried, as described in the Hebrew Scriptures. Rather, any representation of the divine used in such a way that its symbolic and evocative character is lost from view partakes of the nature of an idol. Whenever one image or concept of God expands to the horizon thus shutting out others, and whenever this exclusive symbol becomes literalized so that the distance between it and divine reality is collapsed, there an idol comes into being. Then the comprehensible image, rather than disclosing mystery, is mistaken for reality. Divine mystery is cramped into a fixed, petrified image. Simultaneously the religious impulse is imprisoned, leading to inhibition of the growth of human beings by the prevention of further seeking and finding. (39)

When I present the Divine to my sons, I do not want their religious impulses "imprisoned." I want their image to be more open, more diverse, and less dogmatic than the one on which I was raised. In an already sexist society anything that reinforces male dominance such as male-only God images and concepts should be re-imagined. Trying to re-imagine God-image with our children is difficult. Because in Western culture, despite the work of prominent feminist theologians, God-concepts in popular imagination tend to remain almost exclusively male. In the following paper I will briefly examine my experience of God-image in popular imagination[2] and go on to discuss the ways in which I have tried to broaden the God-concepts of my own children.

God-image in popular imagination

In my own personal experience of having volunteered for different sorts of children's ministry within my own church (Roman Catholic), from religious education instructor to coordinator of children's liturgy, and having been a participant in classes which instruct religious educators, I have observed the hesitancy of adults, who teach children, to embrace anything other than a male image of God. A woman in one of my classes conceded that while God was probably male, He presumably had some feminine characteristics. At a large conference for religious educators that I frequently attend, I overheard a woman complaining about a workshop leader who had advocated inclusive language (i.e., alternating the pronouns "he" and "she" when referring to God) in liturgical music. She said that everyone knew that God was male and that the workshop leader was just trying to stir up trouble. The irony of her attitude, I hope, is not lost. A lesbian woman I know, who, with her partner, is raising a daughter, overheard me talking with our pastor about using inclusive language in the liturgy and expanding images of God. She pulled me aside afterwards and



Judy Martin, "Mothering," 1998, Dyed felt, printed and painted papers, embroidery floss, 14" x 20"

told me that it had never occurred to her that the "father-language" she uses to teach her daughter about God would not have any relational significance for her as she was being raised by two mothers.

This unconscious adoption of male God language may be changing. The past twenty years or so of feminist scholarship in religion and theology may at some level be affecting the way in which people think about God. Despite the overwhelmingly spontaneous use by subjects of male God language in their study on androcentric God-language, Foster and Keating (1992) found that a small percentage of their subjects, when talking about God, used inclusive pronouns (he/she), used no gender specific pronouns, or referred to God as "It." Within my own tradition, more enlightened editors of religious education texts, have begun using gender neutral language when speaking directly about God. Many congregations are choosing to use inclusive language lectionnaries (i.e., the books within which are the scriptural readings and responses for liturgy). Celebrants of liturgy are referring to "Mother /Father God," although they are probably not the norm. And, increasingly, women in many denominations (not my own, however) are being ordained and bringing a fresh look to the altar, forever changing the face of religious authority to many children. Marcus Borg (1997) relates a story that captures this change when he talks about the image his wife, an Episcopal priest, sends to children:

> Among the people kneeling at the altar rail was a four-year-old girl, looking up expectantly at my wife's face as she bent down to give her a piece of bread. My wife has a beautiful face and a wonderful smile. As I watched the little girl, I suddenly wondered if my wife's face was filling her visual screen and being imprinted in her mind as an image of God, much as the face of the male pastor from my childhood had

> been imprinted on mine. And I was struck by the difference: an image of God as a male authority figure shaking his finger at us versus an image of God as beautiful loving woman bending down to feed us. Of course I do not know what was happening in that little girl's mind, but the difference in images is dramatic. In that difference, something is at stake for both men and women. (71)

Re-thinking God-concepts with my children

My husband called God, "He" (a rare event because he usually uses totally non-anthropomorphic metaphors in discussions of the Divine, the Unknown, the Meaningful, etc.). My six-year-old son turned to him and said, "God is not just 'He.' God can be 'He' or 'She.' God can be both." When playing with one of his friends from across the street, he called God, "She," when his friend brought God into their conversation. Incidents like this warm the cockles of my feminist religious heart. He had actually been listening to me on the few occasions that we discussed my concept of the Divine. His four-year-old brother, with whom I have had fewer conversations, calls God, "He." He also calls his friend Julia, "he", so perhaps in his case it is a pronoun problem. While I do not have a dogmatic aversion to the pronoun "he" in relation to the God, I do have an aversion to God always and exclusively being referred to as "He". One of the reasons I call the God, "She," to my sons is because I know in every other instance in which they hear talk about God, it will be in exclusively male terms. In church, in popular culture (e.g., the Sunday funnies, the disembodied male god-voice in television commercials), and in conversations with peers God language and image is almost exclusively male. God concepts in the majority of children and adults, still remain predominantly male.

My own experience of re-imagining God did not come until I turned thirty. Working as a scientist for a large pharmaceutical company had raised my feminist consciousness. Being a woman in a male-dominated field is not always easy and being referred to as "one of the girls in the lab" started becoming annoying. Yet even as my feminism was developing in relationship to my career, my relationship to my religious life still remained unquestioned. I had always been a practicing Roman Catholic and not just nominally. After twelve years of Catholic school, I became an active participant in Catholic campus ministry at the large secular university I attended. As an adult I have been a Eucharistic minister and lector at Mass, a religious education instructor, and have held various other volunteer functions, as needed. Two things forever changed my perception of my faith life and they happened almost simultaneously, discovering feminist theology and having children.

While pregnant with my first son, on my commute home from work, I heard a radio interview with a woman, Mary Jo Weaver, a Catholic feminist theologian, who was promoting her most recent book (Weaver, 1993), and it shook my whole belief system. While on maternity leave, I read her book and many of the books mentioned in her bibliography. When I gave birth to my son,

I was not prepared for the intense feelings of fierce protectiveness and overwhelming love for this tiny person that enveloped me, and it gave new meaning to the idea of God as mother that I had been reading about. Not returning to work and going back to study Feminist Spirituality[3] at a graduate level, further reinforced the idea that re-imagining God is a crucial tool in undermining the patriarchal language and symbols associated with Divine mystery. Carol Christ (1979) writes, "symbols have both psychological and political effects, because they create the inner conditions.... that lead people to feel comfortable with or accept social and political arrangements that correspond to the symbol system" (274).

That being the case, it is important what we tell our children about God. David Wolpe (1993) writes, "all children, even those from nonreligious homes, develop images of God. It is our responsibility to help them develop those ideas in a way that is constructive and true both to the traditions we value and to what we know about the world" (26).

When I first introduced the concept of God to my older son, I pondered over how I could approach the subject. What parts of the God concept did I want to introduce first? I certainly was not going to start with the "Our Father" as my own mother had with me. When he was about three years old we were sitting outside our house on a grassy slope and I decided to try telling him about God being present in everything. I told him God was in the trees and the flowers and the grass. I told him that God was in him and in me. I told him She loves us and protects us and is always around. He responded, "Oh, God is like Mommy." He was very comforted by this idea. I also tried this approach with his younger brother who immediately became distressed. "What's wrong?" I asked. "I don't want God to be in the trees and the flowers," he responded. So the same approach does not always work with all children.

Despite my obvious displeasure with exclusively male God language and patriarchal symbol systems, I am still a practicing Catholic. Also, there are a lot of things about the tradition that I really love and want to share with my sons. I do not make my children come to Mass with me (my husband, who does not participate in any organized religion, stays home with them), but my older son often asks to come. We discuss anything he asks about afterwards.

I have chosen not to put my sons into a formal religious education program mainly because I do not know all the people who might teach them. Religious education in the Catholic Church, unless one goes to Catholic school, is basically carried out by volunteers. Though well meaning, most have very little formal religious training and next to none (including some parish directors of religious education) are aware that feminist theology even exists. I have instead chosen to teach them about God with a group of books that my oldest son has named "God-books." They are by no one author but are books that I have come across in libraries and book stores which are specifically about God but whose authors have chosen unique ways to talk about God. They use inclusive language for God (i.e., alternating he/she for God or using gender-neutral

language) and their illustrations depict the diversity of humankind.

Old Turtle, (Wood, 1992), is one of my favorite theologies of the Sacred. It teaches children, using the voices of all creation (e.g., mountains, trees, animals, etc.), that there are many ways to think about God and that we should respect them all. It also has a deep ecological message about respect for the earth. *Where Does God Live?*, (Bea, 1997), teaches children that God is present in the world:

> You know God made everything, seen and unseen,
> The wind and the sun and the meadows so green.
> Flowers and stars and oceans of blue.
> Trees, birds, and rocks, and all people, too.
> And when God makes a person, a star, or a wave,
> A part of God stays with whatever God's made.

"Little boys and men equally need the balance which feminine imagery meditation provides, for their spiritual breadth has also been stunted by the predominance of masculine imagery (9)," write the authors of *Heart Talks with Mother God* (Meehan *et al.*, 1995). This book introduces to children, through meditative images, the idea that feminine imagery (particularly maternal imagery) for the Divine is as acceptable as masculine imagery. Finally, *In God's Name* (Sasso, 1994), introduces children to the different ways people name God, using anthropomorphic images (e.g., mother, father) and non-anthropomorphic images (e.g., rock, source of light). These are just a few of the "God-books" I have discovered. When my sons get older I will have to think of more sophisticated ways to discuss God. Also, as a Christian, I will have to think of ways to address the whole idea of Jesus. So far we have talked about Christmas and Easter. My explanation of the resurrection elicited the response "cool" from my older son. It is a start.

I do not know what the long-range effect will be of teaching my sons diverse images of God. I could find no studies out there that were titled "Men Raised with Diverse God-concepts and Their Attitude Towards Women." All I know is that men, whom I have met, who have embraced female images of God are also strongly aware of the effects of sexism on society.

My older son keeps me humble, though. When I ask him what he wants to read before bed he says, "Anything but the God-books." "Why," I ask. "Me and Daddy, we aren't as interested in God as you are."

I suppose, for the time being, that is acceptable, too.

[1]Women-church is a movement throughout North America of Christian women who have chosen to gather and create women-centered liturgy and ritual.

[2]A section which contained in-depth research on God-concepts has been

edited from the text published here due to space constraints. The full text of the paper can be found on my web site, http://ourworld.cs.com/aileenfitzke.
[3]I study at Immaculate Heart College Center in Los Angeles. It is the only institution in the U.S. which offers a Masters specifically in feminist spirituality.

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Marion Gold

A Personal Reflection on Mothers and Sons

"Come to the edge," he said.
They said, "We are afraid."
"Come to the edge," he said.
They came.
He pushed them
And they flew.
—Apollinaire

In the beginning

Mothers are assigned the difficult and heavy responsibility of rearing sons and daughters perfectly and we are held accountable for any acting-out that our children express even into their mature adulthood. But even before that, we believe that it is our duty, our obligation, to bear the children in the first place. Then, the onus is always on us, the enablers, to get it right the first time. We delve into self-help books on how to raise daughters and sons, according to the ideology of the day. We even consult our mothers and grandmothers in weak moments. And we absorb the arguments put forth about permissive versus authoritarian child rearing practices, read books written by child psychologists and pediatricians as well as new mothers who want to share their recently discovered wisdom about mothers and sons, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, fathers and daughters. We cite these experts and learn to rely on their words of wisdom and we learn to ignore our own innate sense about what is good for our children. We ignore the wisdom of women sitting around the kitchen table dispensing the wisdom of the ages. We neglect to establish our own comfort levels and parent as legitimately and appropriately as we can. And we forget to inculcate the accumulated knowledge contained in stories told to

us by our friends, relatives, and colleagues so that we can create a bank of experiences from which we can all learn. When we do speak to the "experts," it is not in a sharing mode but as supplicants reaping the wisdom of the ages about the grand themes in life, not the nitty-gritty details that comprise our daily lives and which can drive us to unreasonable action.

And in the hive of busy-ness that envelopes us, we forget that our ultimate goal, our ultimate challenge, is to push these babes who are no longer in swaddling to the edge and over and watch them fly. We need not forever be enslaved to the ideals of motherhood.

After you are privileged to watch them soar to the heavens on the wings of their dreams, you can begin to reassemble the bits and pieces of your psyche and attempt to reclaim your identity as a person in your own right. Slogging through the various stages of child rearing, beginning with that first magical moment when you see that beautiful baby, through the terrible twos, the toilet mouthed fours, to the day when you reread your journal and discover that you wanted to walk away from it all changes your persona. I do not believe that you can reconstruct yourself as you once were, but in many respects my past has been my prologue and I fall back all too easily into the nurturing, hectoring, advising motherhood stance I adapted during my twenties and thirties. The experience of motherhood leaves one changed beyond words and, at the same time, responding to adult sons and daughters as if they were twelve. It can be difficult letting go, watching them fly and knowing that you can no longer reach out, catch them and bring them back to your bosom, to a simpler era, when they were babes in swaddling drinking deeply their share of mother's milk.

Narratives of experience mothering sons

The poem, "Milestones in the Life of a Mother or on the Subject of Sons and Toilet Paper," was inspired by a coffee break conversation with a group of desperate working mothers. And it was related to giving up the good fight because it was all just too overwhelming. That particular day we spoke about personal hygiene and its absence as expressed by our sons deeply rooted aversions to water, soap, towels and toilet paper. Toilet paper? Yes, toilet paper!

Milestones in the Life of a Mother
Or
On the Subject of Sons and Toilet Paper

There are three washrooms
In the house
Count them
three
And toilet paper in only one
The one that is
Located

In my bedroom
Opposite the walk-in closet.

Does no one use
Toilet paper?
Do you pray that
You will have
The good luck
To find a crumbled
Tissue or two
In one of your pockets
After you have used the facilities?
Or do you use the toilet
The one
In the master bedroom
Opposite the walk-in closet
Which always has toilet paper.

There comes a time in the life of every mother when you remember the daily struggles to lead your son to the shower and a bar of soap and find yourself almost wishing them back again when sons discover pubescent charmers and the joys of daily showers. Your son now showers for hours or until the hot water tank is empty and his skin all wrinkled and prune-like in appearance. The telephone is always engaged and if you concede to requests for a second telephone line, you will find that your enterprising son will use your line for outgoing calls and his for incoming ones. My daughter once answered the telephone only to have a female voice demand accusingly: "who are you?" She answered, "I'm his sister. Did you think he was a man of independent means, living alone?"

The widespread introduction of personal computers and email does not really solve the telephone problem. Using email, should you have a computer and an email account, ties up the phone line as well unless, of course, you have a second line. Please refer to the incoming/outgoing call comments above. The situation can only become more trying when son insists that he is doing research for a school project on the Internet, not on a chat line. He is not that irresponsible! How can you deny him computer time when all he is trying to do is complete an assignment due tomorrow. After all, you do want him to succeed at his studies, don't you?

About Sons and Girls

You know your son has discovered girls
When he takes showers unbidden
And uses at least a half bottle of cologne

Or after-shave lotion
Reeking of budding manhood

You know your son has discovered girls
When he changes his name to
A uni-syllabic grunt
Symbolizing teen-age angst and machismo

You know your son has discovered girls
When he dashes to answer the telephone
With the bound and flourish
Of an Olympic runner
Striving to reach the finishing line tape
At the end of the 100 metre race.

Testosterone Surges

This is the story of the fight
Between two brothers
The story of the fight
And the broken hand

Two brothers circling each other
As boxers do
Searching for the chink
In the armour
That sliver of space
Between the upraised circle of arms
To reach out
And punch the other
In the head

One reached out with a long hard jab
The other did not duck quickly enough
The jabber did not make a proper fist
He broke his thumb!
The jabbee danced away
Laughing
Dancing away
From the glancing blow
To his head

Horrified
I asked

"how could you do this to your brother?"
He, of the bad fist, replied
"very easily"
The doctor taping the splint
To the broken thumb
Disdainful of my horror
Pronounced
"It is easy to see that you had no brothers."

Decision-making

Reflecting on my oft-stated mantra that my role as a mother was to teach my children to live independent lives, leave home relatively guilt free, and, as the bible states, leave parents behind and cleave unto a partner so closely that it is as if you were one flesh reveals something less than honesty on my part. At the time I believed that bravely stating that my goal as a mother was to teach my sons and daughters to become independent adults who would make their own decisions in their lives would actually ensure a smooth transition from childhood to independent, mature, appropriately-behaved adulthood. My entire being, my raison d'être became my children. I had swallowed the myth of natural mothering and the enabling woman.

With the impetus to be the perfect mother, I pushed away from my mother and constructed myself as this paragon of virtue, industry, and love—the perfect mother. And I began the process of teaching my children to make choices, responsible decisions; I made a promise to myself that I would not control their every action. I would let go, when that magic release time arrived.

I remember beginning the teaching of decision-making by affording them a choice. "Will it be orange juice or will it be apple juice? Will it be in the blue plastic or the yellow cup?" That really was not an exercise in decision-making, but rather clever manipulation on my part.

"If you can get up in the morning without me waking you up to go to school, you can stay up as late as you want. If I have to wake you up, I set the bedtime hour, but you can read in bed for a half hour before lights out." Well, we all know the outcome of that little exercise in parental control. Yet I held on to the illusion that I was teaching them responsibility, how to be independent, and how to make appropriate decisions.

Eventually something happened that pushed my theorizing to the edge and over. It was my friend's older sister who finally pushed me to the edge of that perimeter so that I might witness the first solo flight of my two oldest sons into the skies of adulthood. It was also my induction into trust, trusting my children to tell the truth about their experiences, believing them and recognizing the legitimacy of their claims to justice.

Both boys had been sent to their first ever sleepover camp and it had not been a good experience. The older one asked that I take him home on visiting day because he was not feeling well. I knew that if I took the older one home,

I would have to take the younger as well. So I doubted both of them.

"How old do they have to be before they can tell you the truth?" their sister asked of me. "How old do they have to be before you will believe them?"

With these words ringing in my ears plus her exhortation that I not be like our parents, I was prepared to take my sons home on visiting day. My first glance at my son's swollen face and body, disfigured by both poison oak and poison ivy, with superimposed huge welts delivered by mosquito bites on the network of rash covering his body left me limp and weeping. The camp nurse confirmed that no doctor had been called in to treat him. I took them home!

My Three Sons
And
My Two Daughters

My three sons
And my two daughters
Became a team
But as they grew
Older
Their dreams
Their aspirations
Their goals
Changed
And
Each developed
According to a
Master Plan
Certainly not
My Master Plan
But
According to their own
Master Plan

Yet I remember
With fondness
Their earliest dreams
Of becoming
Mommies and daddies
And especially the
Dream
Of one
Independent
Non-conformist
Sister

Who wanted to
Grow up
To be a
Dinosaur!

About grandsons

Only children have no one to blame for things that go wrong about the house, unless, of course, they have a pet dog or cat. Children with siblings are especially advantaged when it comes to denying responsibility or even knowledge of a misdemeanor. My son telephoned me to inform me that his son had learned two wonderful new words, words that would help in deflecting anger, blame and avoid responsibility for his own behaviour. That telephone call was the inspiration for the poem "About my Youngest Grandson."

About my Youngest Grandson

My youngest grandson
Blessed with
Three older sisters
Has learned the
Two most important words
In the English language
Words that will
Stand him in good stead
Words that
He can lean on to sustain him
For many years to come.
What are these magical two words?
Not me!

Who put the empty ice cream container back in the freezer?
Not me!
Who emptied the last drop of milk from the last container?
Not me!
Who filled up an entire sink with glasses
Soiled and stained by mere tap water?
Not me!
Who filled the sink with dirty dishes?
Not me!
Who is going to put them in the dishwasher?
Not me!

About grandmothers

Now that I am pursuing a doctorate in education, I am asked why, at this

stage in my life, I decided to challenge myself in this way. "What will you do with it?" "How will it enhance your life?" My answer could be phrased rudely or I could draw upon the words in The Ethics of Our Fathers and paraphrase Hillel. "Why not me, and if not now, when." I submit the following in answer to the paraphrased Hillel and in answer to another question, "What are you going to be when you grow up?"

Reflections on Being a Grandmother

Now that I am a grandmother
And working toward
Becoming a crone
I count ten grandchildren
Soon to be eleven
Who call me
Grandmother.

Now that I am a grandmother
And working toward
Becoming a crone
I know that I
Shall wear red
And I shall wear purple
And I shall
Grow old
Outrageously
Graciously

As the poet said,
"I grow old.
I grow old.
I shall wear my trousers rolled."

Now that I am a grandmother
And working toward
Becoming a crone
I shall
Study forever
Write forever
And learn from books
And learn even more
From living and experiencing
This life
My life

And the lives
Of other women
Around me
And I shall
Enjoy
My grandsons three
Sons of the oldest daughter
And my grandson
Who is the
Youngest son
Of my middle son
And
Listen to them
Rail against their
Collective six sisters.
Doomed to be
Outmanoevred
manipulated
How much sympathy
Can I extend to them?
For my heart lies
With their sisters
Final Reflections

Reflecting upon what was, I can only state that I honestly tried to raise sons and daughters to maturity as free thinking adults who would not be tainted by the gender binary. My template was not modeled after that old nursery rhyme that teaches us that little boys are made of "snips and snails and puppy dog tails" while little girls made of "sugar and spice and everything nice." My girls never wore pink frilly dresses and my sons were placed in the same pink bunting bag for the first weeks of their lives that their sisters used. Throughout my early childhood, my grandmother raised me in a fatherless home while my mother worked as a sportswear operator on Spadina Avenue in Toronto in the heart of what was then the "shmatta" trade. I understood that women worked, relied on their own good efforts and was taught by my grandmother not to await the knight in shining armor to arrive at the front door.

Nevertheless, that gender binary insinuated itself into my very being through the vessels of popular culture and I, too, at times, wanted sturdy, manly sons who were sometimes heroic. I accepted the responsibility for child rearing as a given in motherhood, although I also understood, or rather intuited, that patriarchy's reach was all-pervasive and made it my imperative to demonstrate that women do matter. As a result, not only do my sons cook, sew, wash clothes and clean house, they are supportive of their wives' careers and understand the pressures that are brought to bear on a woman's self/selves through the

multiplicity of roles thrust upon her. One of my daughter-in-laws who is abloom with child speaks about the blessing of my son's calm nature. (This is the one who broke his thumb making a bad fist.) Their pregnancy has been eased by his calm demeanor.

And finally I come to the end of this reflection on Mothers and Sons and Mothers and Daughters, unable to pass on words of wisdom about my experiences raising five children. I can only share my narratives of experience with you and I can share my understanding of what I perceived, what I thought was the truth. But, all truth is fiction.

Finally...

This is the end.
There isn't anymore
I have to say
About sons
But to say
That
They grow up
And move
Out of the house
And come back
To the house
And move
Out of the house
And
Come back
To visit
With their girlfriends
Who become
Their co-vivants
Who become
Their wives
And eventually
They bring
Their children.
And there isn't anything
More that
Can be said.

Reprise

As a woman who married "up," I bear the label "privileged." Yet the ethnic diversity from whence I came has influenced my life's choices and I have always worked in an enabling profession. I stayed the course of femaleness through

early marriage in the silent fifties, child bearing and rearing in the sixties, feeling that I had missed something. My sons, the beneficiaries of my privileged status, have positions in the "sexy" areas of computers and information management. Each has two degrees and one is working on a third one. Whatever influence I have had on them is now part of their own persona and I can do no more.

Having babies is no longer a consequence of marriage and I am no longer capable of having babies. I no longer need bear the responsibility for other men's choices or desires. I love my sons and daughters deeply, but am offended by some of their decisions. I am still learning to let go, still learning that, as Adrienne Rich maintains in *Of Woman Born*, altruistic maternity is a cultural construct and not a biological imperative. Now that I am swimming in the stream of glorious cronehood, I wish to be free of the responsibilities of motherhood; I wish to throw off the shackles of conventional wisdom that has informed me lo these many years that being a mother is a life choice forever and ever.

> Ultimately the most liberating
> Piece of information a woman
> Could have is that her infant can
> Attach to anyone.
>
> —Erik Hesse, 1996

Jaime M. Grant

Gendering Reilly

People tell me that he doesn't really have a gender yet, at this age.

I wonder when he will have a gender, and what it will be.

The world already has such designs on him.

Eight Weeks.
I am breast feeding on demand, which means every hour and a half. He's huge (10 pounds at birth), famished, constantly on the breast. I respond to him immediately. Pick him up whenever he cries. "He's already got you on a string," I'm told. Also (pejorative): "He's going to be a Mamma's boy!"

Three Months.
He is off the growth chart according to the pediatrician. A big, burly sumo-wrestler-ish infant. I dress him in jeans and dark colors and I am told repeatedly that he's going to be: (1) a football player, (2) a bruiser, (3) a heartbreaker. Men and (feminist) women both ruffle his hair, toss him into the air, chuck under his chin.

Four Months.
On the elevator at work, me in my girly work shoes, him in a purple cotton dress. A woman who gets off on six, who never speaks to me, turns to us and says: "She has a perfect head!" Reaches out, so gently, caresses his cheek. He beams back at her.

Five Months.
Still not sleeping through the night. I'm told (by friends, the pediatrician, relatives): Stop letting him sleep in your bed! He'll do better in a crib. You have to let him cry it out at some point.

Six Months.
Woman in the lobby at work: Sucks her teeth. "Dressing him like that! It will just confuse him!"

"About what?" I ask her, in all seriousness. "What do you think wearing a dress will confuse him about?" She is too angry to reply.

Eight Months.
The man at the beach asks me if he is a boy or a girl, and when I say boy gets instantly angry: "What have you got him in pink for?"

"He likes pink," I say, venomous.

Eleven Months.
The (former) day care provider, on the day that I bring him in red leggings and a soft yellow top. "You can tell Reilly's a boy, regardless of what he's wearing. He's so strong."

Later that night, picking him up at her in-home day care center she reports: "My daughter just loves to help me with the babies. My son never has." Reilly is dragging a Barbie around by the hair, and I realize I haven't bought him a single dolly yet.

Marybeth Holleman

Joint Custody

It's three in the afternoon and I'm driving home alone, except for my dog Keira. That's why I got the dog, so that I would never be alone. Rick comes and goes on his business trips. And Jamie comes and goes, too, from his father's house to mine, back and forth every few days.

Most of the time, Jamie doesn't seem to mind this back and forth. I had worried so much about how he'd deal with having two homes, but maybe its easier for him because it started when he was only three years old. He doesn't remember anything else. He doesn't have any memories of me living in that house with his father.

I had worried, too, that neither house would feel like home, that neither would be referred to as "home," but only as "Mom's house" or "Dad's house." But he calls them both "home;" he also calls them "your house" and "Dad's house," too.

Home. What a loaded word. What a big and important concept, one most of us rarely consider. Most of us have just one place we call home. Think of it: to have two places to call home. Two bedrooms, two beds, two addresses and phone numbers. How does that feel? Is it expanding or splitting?

When Jamie is older, perhaps having two homes will be harder. When his things and his friends are more important than they are now, he might have a harder time going back and forth. Years ago, when his father and I were still together, I had a conversation with a student who had just split from her husband, putting her two daughters in Jamie's position of having two homes. She said it was traumatic for them, having to live out of a suitcase, always wanting something that was at the other house, forgetting homework, favourite clothes, all the bits and pieces that make up one's home scattered along the roadside from Mom's house to Dad's house.

I did not want that for my son. But here I am, and there Jamie is at his father's, and now her story comes back to me so clearly, all the chaos and resentments that children should not have to bear. So I vow to let Jamie have two of everything, to drive to his father's any time of day or night to get what was left behind. I keep lists, I leave messages for his Dad several times a week reminding him of soccer practice, of homework, of what kind of medicine to buy for Jamie's cough. It's a lot of extra work, but I would have it no other way. It's the least I can do for my son.

"I want to do the best that I can for him," I say to Andy when we are having some discussion about, say, whether or not to sign him up for a summer camp. "I want to make decisions in his best interests, not in ours."

And sometimes Andy will come back with the zinger, "We're not doing what's best for him, because we're not together. If you wanted what was best for him, you would have chosen differently. But you didn't. This is not the way I would raise my son. It's screwed up."

That's his attitude. That I messed things up, and so anything we do from here on in is just some poor second to what should have been. So if Jamie misses summer camp because we both want to spend time with him, or if Jamie has to go to the YMCA on school mornings at 7:00am so that Andy can have him on school nights, well, then, that's just reality.

But I don't believe it has to be this way. I think joint custody requires that the parents try even harder to make things work out for their children, that they have to be even more vigilant about sorting out their desires from their children's. I often feel that Andy isn't making decisions in Jamie's best interests, but in his own. I know he needs Jamie, needs to spend time with him; I know that without him he is lonely. I know it because I feel the same way. But to deny Jamie the simple childhood delights of summer camp or going to a friend's house because of his parents' needs feels just plain wrong.

It's just so damn hard. It's hard to figure out, it's hard to think about, it's hard to explain to someone who has not had to deal with joint custody. It's hard for me to be friends with many of the other Moms; I often feel like they are either judging or pitying me, pitying my son. And I don't want that. It's no surprise that three of my closest women friends are divorced with children.

Jamie had his end-of-the-school-year class picnic a few days ago. I went, carrying my requisite two dozen sandwiches. It was five hours long, but for me it was even longer. All around me were happy families, mothers who got to have their lovely little first graders with them every single night. Mothers whose children called only one place home, whose children were just there every day and night, expected, taken for granted. Every night the mothers tucked them in without thinking "Oh, how wonderful, my child will be here tomorrow night, too." Every night they tucked them in without having to think, "Oh, no, my child will go to his father's tomorrow. Tonight is the last night I'll have him here for a few days." That thought brings a feeling that makes you want to sit and watch your child sleep, to wake him up and keep him up all night, even if

tomorrow is a school day. When I say "I love you, Jamie, more than anything," it feels huge, as if I'm going to burst, and I have to hold back the other part of the thought: "I wish you could be with me always. I can't stand the thought of you not being here tomorrow night."

Having my son only half the time brings out a different intensity of mother love. It is fierce and deep, but it is also dark. When he is with me, there's an added intensity like the sharp brilliance of sunlight after weeks of gray skies, because I am aware every single minute that he is not always with me, that this moment is so precious, so full, simply because he is here.

It's dark, too, because there's a looming thunderhead of dread, knowing this time together won't last. Right after he was born, I found in a parenting book a pie chart that showed the span of a human life. The slice of pie that represented a person's childhood was so small. So small. I remember talking with my sister, happy mother of four, about the precious early years, and we agreed that the more time we could spend with our babies, the better. Now I think of that chart with dismay, knowing that thin slice is cut in two.

All I can do is make the most of our time together. All I can do is make it as full as possible. What I'm doing is trying to raise a child in half the time, so every moment is vital. I never get baby-sitters; when he is with me, I do Jamie things. He may miss having baby-sitters. The few times we've had one, he has loved it. It's the opposite of the usual story, "I don't want to stay with the babysitter."

"While you're at your dad's this weekend, I'll get all my work done, so we can play when you come back," I always tell him, reassuring him that he won't miss anything here while he's gone. I'm careful about what I do when he's not here. I spend most of it working—writing and grading papers. I won't do anything that he might find fun, from planting the garden and changing the frog's tank to going to the bank that gives out suckers. I don't want him to feel that things are happening here without him. I would just shut down, go into stasis, if I could. I would live half a life.

No. I must be a model for him of living life fully. This was a main reason I left my marriage; this is why I thought it would be better for all of us. I must model a fulfilled life. Even when he's not with me, I'm parenting. So I do my work, I take the dog for long runs and steep hikes, I go see grown-up movies.

Lately when he goes, I find myself reading parenting books and magazines, thinking about certain instances with him, of how I could have done it better. In a way, this is torture, because I sit there and realize how to parent better and then I can't do it until he gets back. Or I realize how I screwed up with him, and I can't apologize or try again. Once I did some reading in a child's self-esteem book and realized that I needed to respect his right to choose his own friends, and not make judgments about them to him. Another time I recognized a pattern of getting impatient with him instead of letting him figure things out himself. The reflection time is good, I suppose; it just leaves me feeling so bereft.

If I only get him half the time, I ought to be a really good parent. I ought to be more patient and understanding and open. I don't have the excuse of never having time to myself or of just getting exhausted from parenting. I have plenty of time to myself, plenty of breaks from his wonderful presence.

A good friend of mine also has joint custody of her son, but she has had him most of the time because the father is not very involved. She kept telling me how lucky I was to have time for myself; I kept telling her how lucky she was to have her boy with her so much. Recently the father has started keeping her son half the time, and she told me, "You're right. It is hard. I was lucky."

He's only gone one night this time, so it shouldn't be bad. But it always is. It's been three years since we started doing this; you'd think I'd have come to grips with it by now. But every time he goes to his Dad, it feels like I've been hollowed out, like I'm just the sloughed off skin of a molting snake, or the husk of the corn. I could blow away in the slightest breeze. I am not.

At least it's only one night this time. I know he's fine without me for one night. Sometimes, when it's more than a couple of nights away, he'll ask me during our good-night call, in such a small voice that it feels like it's coming from my own womb, "When am I going to see you again?" And it makes me want to reach through the phone and pull him to me, to go to him right away. It makes me feel like the world's worst mother.

He goes to his father's and I don't know who I am. I am his mother. But how can I be, if I am here and he is there? What kind of a mother am I?

Last summer I worked on a story with a photographer who shares his two sons with his ex-wife. The boys, teenagers, spend two weeks with one parent, two with the other. He likes it that way, says it's better than going back and forth more often.

"When they arrive, it takes me a week to remember how to be a Dad, and then I have a week where I'm really good at it. And then when they leave, it takes me a week to remember who I am besides a Dad."

That's it. That's the feeling of loss. It's a loss of self as much as anything. I don't have periods of transition when Jamie returns; I am Mom immediately. I never stop being Mom, even when he's gone a week. I only have periods of transition when he's gone.

The feeling of loss is like the empty nest syndrome, over and over and over. And with a six-year-old, not an 18-year-old. Over and over to feel that loss, that cutting off of the right arm, that energy drain and heart break.

Sometimes I wander about the house and find myself in his room. Sometimes I just sit and stare out the window. Sometimes I just cry. It hasn't gotten easier, even in three years. I keep hoping that it's all temporary, and if I can just get through this weekend without Jamie, then he'll be with me forever. It keeps my life in a kind of limbo, so that I only know what's happening a few days ahead.

The night before last, he was supposed to go to his Dad's, but I was feeling blue and Rick was out of town, so I asked if I could keep him, and Andy agreed.

I knew even as I asked that I shouldn't need Jamie like that, but I did, I really did.

It was a Godsend. We went to our favorite trail, and I ran with the dog while Jamie biked alongside us. The sun shone high in the sky, and the slightest breeze ruffled the treetops. It was one of those times where Jamie and Keira and I were all perfectly synchronous, just enjoying each other's company and the lovely summer day. And that night, Jamie slept with me, and I stared at him long after he'd gone to sleep, stared at that beautiful little boy face, and I could have stayed up all night just looking at him, I would have been happy had that night lasted forever, just me and him and Keira here, together, in our home.

Robbie Pfeufer Kahn

Family Strut

Maybe because I'm often here alone, families on vacation seem to me displays of power. For the moment I have my own. A striking couple in their midtwenties, my son Levin and his fiance Simone attract peoples' regard while I go unnoticed, having passed into the invisible realm. My feminist side finds the change not entirely unwelcome after decades of unwanted gazes. Like other families we order slithery shiny oysters on the half-shell at Larsen's fish market in Menemsha, and sit on the picnic bench outside to eat them. On the wharf where Levin once stood as a child, young boys drop weighted fish lines from armatures of wood, hoping to catch squid. I watch them, remembering the beginning time as a single mother, that pared down feeling I had as he and I stood on the damp gray wharf where more abundant families also gathered for early night squid fishing.

This evening Levin's dad, Eric, joins us for Levin's Bastille Day birthday, and now I even have what appears to be a husband by my side. Like a family of hunter gatherers—a heritage contemporary witch Starhawk claims accounts for modern-day consumer browsing—we wander the streets of Oak Bluffs. Unlike hunter gatherers, in this warm summer evening our browsing seems dazed and aimless, kind of daffy, salt-water taffy daffy. Not even walking in a straight line up and down the streets, we look idly in clothes shops, go into the fudge store eyeing with a mixture of desire and revulsion huge irregular congealed chunks cut from the recently created lava flow of fudge—strawberry, pistachio, chocolate and vanilla. I engage in these pursuits though I have no money for clothes nor can I eat fudge or the earlier raw oysters. I chit-chat with Levin's father about the aging process. We agree that the impulse to reproduce drives human behavior and are glad to be free of it, though I note to myself that he recently had a child with his second wife. We almost walk arm in arm.

At Oak Bluffs' "Flying Horses," the oldest carousel in the country, the newly restored horses, nostrils flaring, glass eyes gleaming with readiness to plunge forward to the music, draw my attention. But no one shares my interest to sit astride a gaily painted horse and feel the soft salt air blow against my face as the carousel slowly turns to tinny music. Twenty years ago Eric photographed Levin and me astride the original, hundred-year old unrenovated horses, their once-thick manes thin, coats chipped, glass eyes clouded with scratches. We each are wearing Flying Horses T shirts, green as new leaves. In a blur of motion Levin, then five, looks back at me, his fresh, bare arm extended as if touch worked the way eyes do. My then long hair streaming, I reciprocate his effort and belief, though my gray horse races ever behind his white one.

Now, I allow Levin's tall form to herd me good naturedly into the video corridor, a space so narrow that I begin to breathe more shallowly than usual. "It's okay, mom," Levin says in a kindly manner looking at me with his gray-green eyes. His expression—as if no debris obstructed those sea-colored depths, allowing a clear regard of the present moment—draws me out of myself. I am used to him being aware of my moods even without knowing their source, in this case my fear from childhood of being shut in. "Nothing bad will happen," he adds, putting his large hand on my shoulder, the smile folds under his eyes signaling wellbeing. Way at the back of the constricted space is a pinball game "Twilight Zone." Delighted I've never played pinballs, Levin encourages me as I flip the stumpy lever that propels the ball up the board to make lights blink and flash, and unleash popping and beeping sounds. Except for my first try, I can't keep my wits and the silver ball rolls down the trough between the impotent levers. Eric and Simone, who had been looking at another game, rejoin us and we leave the carousel building.

Eric had come down to the Vineyard on a motorcycle he bought in his late forties, a vintage BSA, stylish as a 1950s car. Earlier that day we followed him in a car down a bumpy dirt road. A top-heavy shiny black helmet protected his head but Birkenstock sandals covered his naked feet showing his graceful ankles, while his thin shirt and slacks billowed in the wind. A tall well-made man of six foot three just like his son, he nonetheless seemed frail and quaint to me on the cycle, dressed so lightly and giving left and right hand turn signals with a certain stiff righteousness as if to say, "These are legitimate signals, even if out of date."

Out again in the crowded streets, I can't help returning in my mind to a game, which consisted of shooting lizard aliens, in a video palace we'd visited before the carousel. Watching Levin and Simone shoot pistols at the menacing figures, I suddenly remembered my very early childhood drawings, full of mysterious fleshy v's which could be hearts or swollen labia transgressively touched by a grownup. In later drawings, the fleshy v's became pistols. The pistols appeared in recurrent images of shooting and dying cowboys, their horses weeping over them the way Achilles' immortal horses hung their

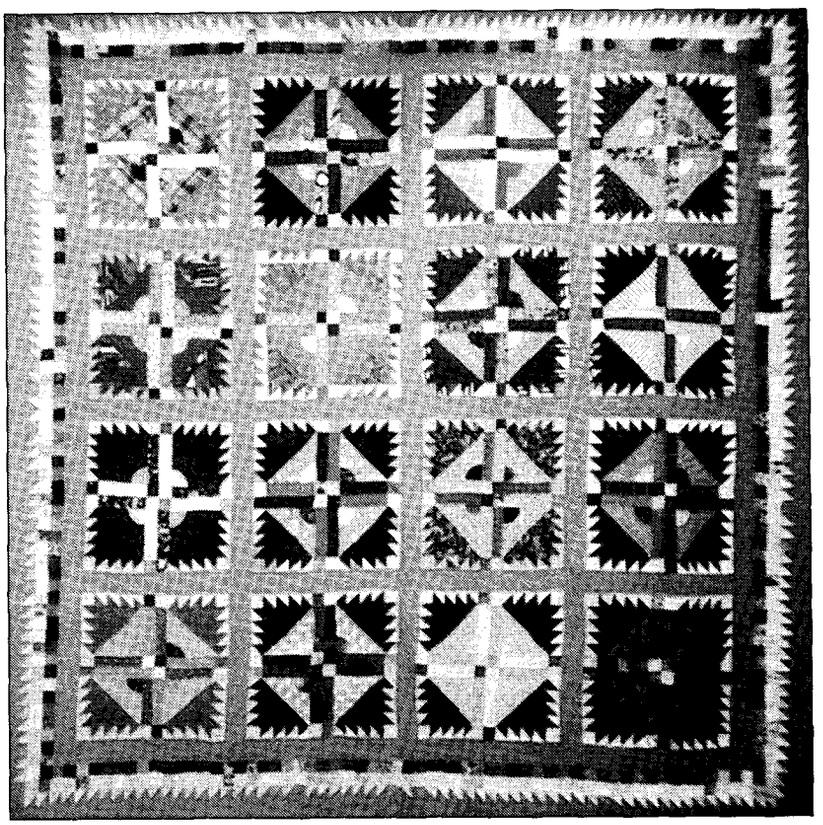
beautiful heads so that their manes streamed down, weeping in lamentation over the dead Patrocles. When Levin offered that I try a round, I declined. I now realize that I'd refused to shoot out of a fear that I might really "get into it," as the saying goes, and disrupt the image everyone has of me (or I that imagine them having) as unsuited to these riotous acts. I wish that I had pushed myself to do it, feeling too much like my mother who declines carousels and swings because they make her dizzy. I want to be able to shoot like Simone, to be tough and sexy at the same time. But I don't ask that we return to the video palace, and go on acting old and momish.

Eric and I leave the two young ones, who run into a friend, agreeing to meet at a dress shop. When Levin and Simone arrive, Simone tries on a tight beige and black floor-length dress Levin picks out for her. Size four at the most. I admire her girl-woman body, shiny black hair, soft smooth face. According to family lore Simone is twenty-fourth generation to Ghengis Khan and she delights in the "parallel" between Khan and Kahn. Though tall and slender, I've always felt out of scale. My generation had to stand in "size places" in grammar school, and it remains true that our culture expects women to not take up too much space. Some commentators associate eating disorders with women's attempts to ease their emergence into the public sphere by appearing diminutive. "I love her taste in clothes," Levin says, leafing through the dress rack, which is a taste for the simple in hues of beige and black. There I am in my faded jeans cutaways and baggy tank top, Birkenstocks and rubber sock around my sprained ankle feeling like a fifty-five year old ten year old. Not at home in this world of slinky dresses. I finger a baggy white linen jacket, something I could imagine trying on without humiliation, and check out the earrings, an item I know about. "Do you like hats?" Simone asks trying on a tight-fitting straw hat with a little round brim. "I like my green baseball hat," I say which is the only hat I wear except for winter ones.

Since Eric treated us to dinner, I buy ice cream for everyone at Mad Martha's. Leaving the store, Levin says unexpectedly, "I think I'm done with ice cream. It's like drinking a pint of half n' half, or cream. I like sorbets now. I can get ices in my neighborhood on the upper West Side, mango or coconut." Clearly New York, where he recently moved, offers opportunities not available in the Cambridge, Massachusetts of his childhood or in Burlington, Vermont, where I now live. "That sounds great," I say, feeling a part of our life together discarded as casually as an unfinished sugar cone. Long ago when Levin was little, we ate a two-toned Softie in Oak Bluffs waiting for the ferry. It tasted so sweet and cool in the heat rising off the sidewalks that we got a second one and the woman who served us said, "I never saw people eat ice cream so fast."

Though I don't eat ice cream myself anymore because of my health, and though the evening is warm, I observe Levin withdraw from a communion food related to the primordial milk he once took from me, which I so gladly gave. Rubbing my bare arms, which were suddenly cold, I wonder whether all the dazed browsing families have similar invisible moments of attachment and loss,

whether any other person refused to shoot lizard aliens imagining it would disrupt the family image of her. Or did she dare that night to break free, the way Levin did of ice cream? In the light of street lamps and shop windows the people I see wandering the soft night look simply content, as I'm sure we did, Oak Bluffing like anyone else.



Judy Martin, "Family Life," 1989. Bear's Paw Pattern. Recycled family clothing, cotton machine-pieced and hand-quilted embroidered journal on white cotton.

"My family's names, along with these words, "art, a good mom, family life, fragments, a diary, joining, connecting, power, moments captured, confusing" are quilted into this piece's sashes and borders." —Judy Martin

Jennifer Harris

"The More You Look, the More You See"

Josephine Baker, Motherhood, Nation, Race and Identity

The title of this paper, "the more you look, the more you see" has been lifted from one of Josephine Baker's better known numbers, "Don't Touch My Tomatoes." Costumed as a Creole produce vendor, Baker would fend off unwanted customers on stage, all the while tossing fruits and vegetables to audience members. Her song proffered a warning to a potential customer who might attempt to "squeeze" her merchandise:

> Mister, take advice from me
> The more you look, the less you see
> But if you must have your way
> Twice the price you'll have to pay.

It is this cautionary note from Baker that resonates most strongly today. As Josephine Baker experiences a resurgence in popularity, critics and scholars would do well to heed her warning that "the more you look the less you see." Much contemporary criticism around Baker has fallen prey to this reductionary tendency. Her racialized body is central in much of this work, as various critics consider the implications of the reception of her early dancing in Europe, particularly France; the various representations of her body by different artists; and the function of her body as a signifier for a series of cultural moments and movements, including modernism, primitivism, and jazz.[1] Central to these inquiries is Baker's performance of the "exotic savage" (a construct she exploited in the dance routines that made her famous) and French anxieties around both race and colonialism. However, with the exception of Andrea D. Barnwell, there appears to be little interest in considering Baker as an active agent in the production of her image. Nor does there appear to be much interest in

contemplating Baker's attempts to complicate and develop her own public persona in response to this early European perception of her. Contemporary critics remain as transfixed by the potency of Baker's banana skirt as the audience of her own day. Writes Barnwell:

> [C]onfining Baker to the realm of a performer who was solely preoccupied with satisfying colonial fantasies does not acknowledge her self-agency, autonomy, or ability to influence European perceptions of African women. (85)

By extension, confining the study of Josephine Baker's self-production to the study of her performance and reworking of the "comic piccaninny," the "exotic savage," and the "glamorous chanteuse" ignores an equally important public persona she constructed for herself: the "Universal Mother" who presided over a "Rainbow Tribe" of twelve multi-racial, multi-ethnic adopted children. My intention here is not to write the definitive analysis of Josephine Baker and her complex relation to motherhood, but rather to signal some potential directions deserving of exploration if Baker criticism is to continue to evolve.

Baker's rise to fame has been well documented, though each version still bears the marks of her tendency to self-mythologize the events of her life. Born in 1906 in St. Louis, Missouri to an African American mother and an absent but assumed white father, Baker's early life was spent in poverty and subject to racial prejudice (Baker and Chase 16-17). While it is uncertain whether or not she witnessed the three-day East St. Louis race riots of early July 1917, their impact on the city and its inhabitants was inescapable. Martial law was declared as between forty and two hundred blacks were killed, and historic black neighborhoods burned (Bennett 520). Baker, who would have been nine at the time, cites this event as formative in her understanding of racial politics. Married just four years later, by age fourteen she left her husband of a year and joined a group of African American performers at a local theater. A year later Baker found work as a chorus girl in the legendary all-black revue, "Shuffle Along." Through a combination of talent, dedication, self-promotion and mastery of a minstrel tradition that many audiences still applauded, Baker assured her prominence in "Shuffle Along." It was her success as a comic actress in the United States, often in blackface, that brought her to the attention of a producer seeking to mount an all-black show in France. In 1925 Josephine Baker traveled to Paris as one of the featured stars of "La Revue Negre." The sexually and racially charged "La Danse de Sauvage" featured a topless Josephine in a skirt of feathers, and a similarly unclothed Joe Alex. Their performance of an assortment of seemingly spontaneous and certainly sexually explicit movements—the most memorable of which apparently involved Baker's ability to move her bottom—ignited a Parisian fascination with her that was to last for decades.

While Baker exploited this Parisian fame and fascination for her own ends, she also struggled to redefine herself as something more politically and/or socially relevant. This is first evident in her work with the French Resistance during the Second World War when she smuggled information encoded on her sheet music, and passed off an Allied spy as her accompanist. For these risks she received the Croix de Guerre, France's highest honor. Yet Baker rarely mentioned her work in the Resistance, either publicly or privately, instead locating her most significant political activism in her decision to adopt children of different nationalities as a means of proving that ethnic and racial divisions were false distinctions.

Baker claims her idea for the adoptions first occurred to her during a transatlantic crossing on a French "Liberty Ship" after the Second World War. Physically incapable of having children, Baker combined her desire for motherhood and family with a belief that war was unnecessary as individuals of different races, religions, ethnicities and nations could co-exist peacefully. According to Baker:

> It would be my own experiment in brotherhood, and I would use a unique formula. I decided to adopt as many children as I could, and to segregate them from the environments that they were in; and not only would I teach them, but I would bring in people to teach them all sorts of things I did not know. As they grew up with each other in close harmony, not knowing anything about what life was really like in the outside world, as they grew up they could go out as emissaries of peace and brotherhood themselves, and pretty soon their children, and even *their* children, could spread the word of brotherhood. I figured that if somebody didn't start all this no one ever would, and I decided then it would be me. I would get children from every race, every creed, every religion. They would be every color of the rainbow. Then it hit me all at once. They would be the Rainbow Children of Josephine Baker. (Papich 135)

Baker originally planned to adopt a little girl (Papich 134). Now, with this grand vision, the imagined girl was abandoned in favor of an army of boys, as Baker believed "it is so much more important for men to get along than women" (Haney 269). That Baker, herself an international symbol and star—and in this incarnation, a "world ambassador" through her assumption of the role of universal mother—did not see women as capable of enacting her vision raises several question. Was Baker acknowledging the ongoing difficulties of women in gaining access to political arenas? Did she see men as more effective and capable political agents? Given her politicization of motherhood, did she not see potential daughters as capable of continuing that tradition? After all, the African American rhetoric of racial uplift had long emphasized the role of women as important as simultaneous reproducers of children and racial uplift

ideology. Or did she simply prefer boys? Regardless of her reasons, she did eventually adopt two girls (although the second girl was adopted at the urgings of the first, tired of being one sister with ten brothers).

In 1953 Baker initiated her plan. Miki Sawada, the head of a Japanese orphanage for the children of American soldiers and Japanese women, received a letter from her friend. It outlined a course of action, and effectively "ordered" her first child. Wrote Baker:

> I would like you to find for me a Japanese baby of pure race, a healthy one, two years old. I want to adopt five little two-year-old boys, a Japanese, a black from South Africa, an Indian from Peru, a Nordic child, and an Israelite; they will live together like brothers. (Baker and Chase 326)

Baker found not one but two children in Sawada's orphanage. They were not "of pure race," as per her original request, but Eurasian babies fathered by American soldiers. It is significant that while Baker encountered the children of African American soldiers, she did not consider adopting them. While doing so would certainly have been philanthropic, given Japanese prejudices against blacks, it is unlikely that they fit Baker's vision of her "Rainbow Tribe." It would be easier, after all, to present mixed white/Asian children as representatively Asian to a white audience, than it would be mixed black/Asian children.

From the very beginning then, it is obvious that Baker's ideal audience for her experiment was most likely a white European, or possibly American, male. This "implied audience" suggests that Baker's own ability to challenge the centrality of discourses that privileged whiteness or masculinity was limited. Clearly Baker engaged in European ethnocentric discourses when she, as Phyllis Rose observes, took "racial children" and used them "for white purposes" (238). Indeed, it is impossible to read Baker's grocery listing of ethnicities to Sawada without noting that it engages in the very process of racial objectification that she might seemingly want to disprove. Ultimately, ample evidence exists that Josephine Baker's Rainbow Tribe experiment was not intended to disprove racial differences, but instead to demonstrate that *despite* their differences, individuals from various backgrounds could co-exist in "worldly brotherhood" (Papich 159). As their mother, it was Baker's duty to facilitate their progress. As the supervisor of the experiment, it was her duty to document it. An eager Josephine shared her research with her unofficial "thirteenth son," a young man she had formed an attachment with, and who eventually adopted her name. According to Jean-Claude Baker, Josephine revealed:

> I have kept a file on each child. You will not believe it, but as they grow up, they develop the characteristics and faults of their race. Look at Aiko. Like the Japanese, he'll smile at you and knife you in the back.

> And Luis, have you noticed what a beautiful black boy he is? He will drive the girls crazy, and in the end he will fall in love with one who drags him around by the nose. (Baker and Chase 442)

The stereotypes invoked remain recognizable today. It is apparent that Baker interpreted the characters of her children according to a pre-scripted plan that emphasized essentialized differences. To *not* believe in essential differences or racial characters would have in fact rendered her plan redundant.

There was, therefore, a vested interest in the notion of "difference" among the Rainbow Tribe. Baker, not content with the mix of her first five children (representing Japan, Finland, Columbia—Luis was the first of two black children— and France), actively sought a Jewish child. Upon Israel's denial of her request to adopt a male child (Israel was a new nation anticipating conflict and was reluctant to relinquish a potential future soldier), Josephine simply "manufactured" one. Selecting a child at a foster home near Paris, Josephine changed his name from Alain Jean-Claude to Moise, gave him a yarmulke, and announced he would be fed only kosher food. As her wardrobe mistress observed: "She wanted all races, all religions, and she would give them the religion she wanted on the spot" (Baker and Chase 336). And so, when after the massacre of an Algerian town two children were found hidden behind bushes, Josephine adopting them both, decreed one would be Catholic, the other Muslim. Jeannne (the first girl) became Marianne and Jacques became Brahim (Baker and Chase 339), acquiring names symbolic of the racial/ethnic categories they were intended to represent. Later, when politically strategic, Josephine would claim she had adopted a Turkish child (Baker and Chase 461)— she hadn't—and that one French son was actually French-Canadian—he wasn't (Haney 301).

This deliberate manufacturing of difference has several implications. It suggests that Baker felt that a proliferation of difference added credibility to her project by purportedly extending its scope. It also implies that methodology was not her primary concern, nor was the integrity of the "experiment" as Baker titled it. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the project of manufacturing difference reveals the curatorial impulse behind the Rainbow Tribe. Implicit in this curatorial impulse is the desire to exhibit. After all, if the Rainbow Tribe experiment was solely for Josephine's own benefit, then there would be no reason to fabricate a Jewish child. Clearly, the Rainbow Tribe was intended to be a parade of difference, a stunning visual statement that conveyed an implicit ideological statement to a larger audience. And as a performer, Baker recognized the importance of props, visual display, and spectacle. She also most particularly understood the fascination for racial difference on the part of the French public.

Baker's children then, became subjects for public consumption, their allure ironically enhanced by the very things they were supposed to overcome: their plurality of "differences." From the initial conception of her idea, Josephine had

decided that her experiment would be located at Les Milandes, a large chateau she had purchased with proceeds from her performing (Papich 135). With her then-husband, bandleader Jo Bouillon, Baker set about transforming the chateau into a suitable environment. A local electrician recalled of the time:

> At the beginning, she put billboards along the road saying 9COME SEE LES MILANDES AND ITS RAINBOW TRIBE. The people all around protested, "You don't show little children like monkeys," so she had the billboards taken down. (Baker and Chase 331)

Baker did exhibit her children, however. Between 1954 and 1959, Les Milandes averaged five hundred thousand visitors a summer (Haney 272). Apparently,

> [W]hen the youngsters were indoors they could be observed through a picture window. They were washed, reprimanded, fed in full view of anyone willing to pay an extra five francs for the spectacle, and the cameras never stopped. (Baker and Chase 333)

The Baker family also endorsed products, including a French soft drink (Hammond 206). Postcards bearing their images and programs reciting their individual stories could be purchased at the Les Milandes gift shop. Baker even approached Disney, suggesting they make a film about her family (Baker and Chase 345). Recalls her fifth son:

> For outsiders we appeared to be little princes, living in a chateau surrounded by governesses and tutors. But for us it was more like a prison. A prison with golden bars for sure. (Hammond 214)

Another child, the third son, remembers "To visit the chateau... the people would come through the big iron gate, and in the courtyard was a chain with a sign that said FORBIDDEN TO PASS ... and Maman would push us out a little, so the visitors could see us." With what seems like resignation, he adds: " We could not understand her spirit of brotherhood" (Baker and Chase 334).

While Baker's display of the children was ostensibly to spread her message of "worldly brotherhood," and provide the financial means of supporting her children, the manifestations of this message, there appears to be a certain shallowness in her actions. Her mixture at Les Milandes of elements of the "high" (her ideals) and the "low" (the cows' names were written in lights) occasionally resulted in the ridiculous, if not carnivalesque. Additionally, in light of her construction and marketing of the identities of her children, Baker's claim in her 1964 "treatise" on "The Ideal of Brotherhood in Les Milandes as Seen by Josephine Baker" suggesting that she was a vessel for divine intervention, reflects a certain self-aggrandizing strain in her mission:

> My opinion is that I was blessed to have been chosen by God to be exactly the one bestowed with such a responsibility. I will never have given enough of myself to please God, and have done my duty, in giving a "world symbol of brotherhood" as true and beautiful as that of my children. (Papich 154)

Clearly, Baker's deliberate construction of her family and her mission reflects an investment in a corresponding construction of her own persona as "mother."

The concept of Josephine Baker as "mother," particularly as mother to a large racially diverse group of children has a series of implications of which she was no doubt aware. Firstly, it is unlikely that Baker would have been allowed as a cabaret singer and performer to adopt this many children in her native United States. Baker's claim that she would have been killed in the U.S. for attempting to carry out her vision of a multi-racial family is perhaps exaggerated, but it stands that as a wealthy Black woman it is unlikely that she would have been legally permitted in her birth country to adopt white children. In the 1950s many whites generally still saw black women as potential "mammies" for white children, not mothers. While Baker's adoption of Jari, a Finnish child, was ostensibly initiated to disprove Hitler's thinking by proving that a black woman could effectively raise an Aryan child (Bouillon and Baker 207), it was obviously also a response to the racially charged attitudes of the United States.

The excess and spectacle of Baker's adoptions also assured attention for her assumption of the role of motherhood, disrupting traditionally limited roles assigned by the public to women in entertainment. Mainstream media was generally unwilling to disrupt the marketable image of a sexual woman with the less commodifiable image of her as mother. Black women found themselves doubly disadvantaged in this respect; as the repositories of culturally racialized desire, and the repositories of white fantasizing about the racial "other." African American film star Dorothy Dandridge, subject to this representational rut, lamented that "she was not allowed to portray the domestic aspect of her image on-screen" (Rippy 26). That Baker was able to portray motherhood with an excess of agency is at odds with the mainstream American tendency to represent black women as either sexual predators or asexual mammies. Certainly Baker discontinued her habit of taking well-known lovers once she had adopted her children. But it is hard not to read this decision as a moral one within the framework of the 1950s. Stating "Now that I am a symbol of motherhood it would not be fitting for me to take lovers" (Haney 289), Baker did not by extension relinquish her sexuality. Both sexual and maternal, she in fact utilized her sexually and racially charged persona to support her children.

Yet Baker also fought against the glamour of her public image, wanting to be taken seriously as a mother. In an age where stars were photographed with their children for the purposes of showcasing their perfect lives, or in contrived moments of "spontaneity," some of the photos of Baker are almost shocking.

Sanitized 1950s images of motherhood replete with starched skirts and aprons are dismissed in favor of more realistic scenarios. Baker, like any mother of twelve, has bags under her eyes, and resembles more an exhausted working class woman than an international star. Wrote Baker: "I am not complaining. On the contrary I have a kind of gratefulness to God for having made me suffer morally, physically and spiritually for the ideal that Milandes represents (Papich 155).

But to what degree is this too a performance, a construction on Baker's part? The preservation of Les Milandes from its creditors on more than one occasion depended upon public pleas to the masses for their financial support (Baker was an acknowledged terrible money manager). Central to the success of these public appeals was the image of Josephine Baker as the self-sacrificing, self-effacing mother/martyr, a role her treatise on brotherhood, intended as a fundraising document, invokes. Performing motherhood was as important as performing the image of Josephine, and in some instances they became inseparable. In the 1950s and 1960s she would end each public performance with her number "Dans mon Village" which catalogued and described each of her adopted children (Hammond 209). A "tear-jerker" this number was guaranteed to garner sympathy alternately for her vision, her children whose mother was forced to work to support them (something she emphasized), and herself. Motherhood then, was an integral part of not only her private life, but also the carefully constructed persona she presented to her public audience. Her acknowledgement of motherhood as something commodifiable further suggests a playfulness and savvy not usually attributed to Baker in her later years.

Whether or not Josephine Baker's Rainbow Tribe satisfied her initial vision we will never know. For who will dare to speculate what it was that she really wanted? The contradictions in her self-representation might be read as flaws or alternately, as refusals to conform. However, without a doubt they demonstrate the complexity of a woman whose "body of criticism" has not yet caught up with the opportunities for study that she represents. Josephine Baker deserves to be re-read as an active agent whose carefully crafted and ever evolving image represented her awareness of and engagement with national and international discourses around race, nation, identity and finally, motherhood.

[1]The exception to this vein of criticism around "Baker's-body-as text" is Mary L. Dudziak's "Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War," which examines the impact of her outspoken condemnation of United States racism, and her reception in—as well as her ability to enter—the country of her birth *(Journal of American History*, September 1994).

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Ivan Younge

Sewing Lesson

Mother stitched ring quilts,
made me test the seams,
made me hold the threads
as she sewed her words
into her grandmother's image.

She laced pie with cinnamon
as her fingers worked shapes in moist flour,
pulled threads of fragile crust into the lie
of lattice work.

She sang the hymn of canning figs,
the mistakes of making wine,
watching it wash away in water as she
mopped it from a pantry wall.
She passed on the catechism of roses,
the ritual of clabbered milk,
the rites of fresh morning biscuits.

These were the shadows mother sewed.
She wove a woman
in words, in the craft
her fingers had learned. These
are the only memories I have of Granny
beyond the one

of her in a nursing home,
paper napkin laid soft against her palms
like fine silk, touching her fingers to it
as if stitching the machined imprint,
saying to me *This is for you,*
I made this for you.

Mary Valentich

Mothers and Sons in Croatian Songs

When friends give me parenting advice, often in the form of "here's what I did when ... " or "my parents would always ... ," I hear an internal voice saying "yes, but." I am now able to complete my sentence of rebuttal: "yes, but I'm a Croatian mother." I am a second-generation Canadian of Croatian heritage, born in 1941 and coming into adulthood in a period of great flux in women's roles. I am a feminist, a partner and a parent, the mother of a 20-year old son who is on the cusp of adulthood, having just moved into an apartment with a friend.

His major reason for moving out is that I meddle: I ask too many questions, I am overly helpful, and I nag – about his room, his late hours, the importance of being responsible. You name it, I can nag about it! I recognize that the repetition of reminders and requests can be overdone and serve to irritate rather than facilitate appropriate behavior. Yet, as will be argued later, mother's nagging may be an expression of love and concern for her son's welfare rather than simply an insensitive, ineffectual admonishment, as suggested by the unfortunate stereotype of the nagging mother. I regret that at times I am not meeting my son's expectations regarding mothering, but he knows that I care. His Dad is also very much a support for our son, but is more relaxed about his comings and goings. At times our voices are raised in conflict, but I have no question of the strength of the loving bond between us.

The intensity of the mother-child bond is no secret. I particularly like Andrea Schluter's (1994) comments:

> Perhaps this mother love should not be compared to the love of a partner but should even be called something different. It is a biological love, and embraces an unconditional and an eternal nature that no other love can claim. (A20)

The intensity of the mother-son relationship within a Croatian-Canadian or United States immigrant context intrigues me. What is the source or basis for this intensity? Further, how does one weave several strands into one's parenting style, in particular, Croatian cultural norms, my socialization into young womanhood in Southern Ontario in the late 1950s, my professional knowledge and skills as a social worker and professor, and feminism, an ideological perspective closely linked to my personal and professional roles? The purpose of this article is to examine aspects of the relationships of Croatian mothers and sons, in particular, when the sons have left the homeland—*stari kraj*. Given that there are a goodly number of folk and more recent songs about Croatian mothers and sons, I have chosen this lens in order to gain insight into the dynamics of these relationships. As Croatians are a highly musical and expressive people, especially loving to sing, I believe their songs will reveal what is truly important to them.[1] The outcome of this exploration will be a greater understanding of the dilemmas experienced by Croatian mothers and sons as well as a contribution to the scarce literature on the Croatian immigrant experience in Canada and the United States.

Method

The first set of ten folk songs consists of words and/or words and music that have been popular in the United States and likely Canada since the 1930s and possibly earlier. An additional three songs touch on the mother-daughter relationship. The source, a musician of Croatian nationality had sung and played in a tamburitza orchestra in the United States since his youth. While I do not have information on the origins of the songs, the content of three suggests that they were written by emigrants to the United States whereas the other seven songs may have been written in Croatia. The ten songs all could have been sung by Croatian men, most of whom came to Canada and the United States in the waves of immigration during the early 1900s as single men (Rasporich 1982). They lived mostly *na boort*, in boarding houses run by Croatian women who cooked and washed for them. Their lives as steel workers, miners and labourers of all types were, in a word, hard. To sing and party with their countrymen was one of the few times when they could believe that truly this was a "better life"or it would be if they could only stay healthy, work hard, and the times were good.

The second set of sixteen songs are not, strictly speaking, folk songs that have been handed down through an oral tradition and sung by the "common people." They are songs currently popular in Croatia and in North America, provided by two sources, one born in Croatia and the other in Canada, a second generation Canadian of Croatian descent. Both of these individuals have had considerable experience in offering a weekly Croatian radio show, much of which involves music. Eleven of the songs focus on the mother-son relationship, from the perspective of the son. Another addresses the mother-son relationship, but in the voice of a mother. Two could be sung by either a son

or daughter, and two are sung by daughters and deal with aspects of the mother-daughter relationship. Many of these songs have been hits in Croatia within the past 15 to 20 years. Words and audiotapes of the songs were provided.

After translating each song, I noted my immediate reactions to the content. There were at least three more readings of each song and a more systematic identification of the themes of the songs. By the third reading, I also listened to the audiotapes, noting my sense of the nature of the feelings conveyed by the musical rendering.

I also consulted literature that addressed the mother-son relationship or the mother's role within the Croatian context. The literature in the English language was modest, but in one instance, was a classic study and provided considerable insight into the background of some of the Croatian mothers whose sons had departed for North America prior to World War II.

Findings

In presenting the findings, I cannot comment on the population of songs from which these have been selected. I asked my sources to locate as many songs as they knew that addressed the mother-son relationship. All songs examined do so. A few additional songs were provided by all sources that focus on mothers from a daughter's perspective or which could be sung by either daughters or sons. However, my findings derive primarily from the songs that are from the sons' vantage point and the few that express how mothers feel.

Folk songs from pre-World War II

The older songs fell into three categories in terms of their dominant emphasis.

1. Songs of unhappiness

These were, at least, four songs of misery and general unhappiness with one's lot in life, whether it was one's lack of good fortune in love or in enduring the relentless struggle to survive in the new world where newcomers soon discovered that the streets were not paved in gold. Thus, in "Dear Mother, What are You Doing?" our young fellow sings:

Ej dear mother, what are you doing, what are you doing
That the young woman doesn't marry me, doesn't marry me?
Ej joj joj – kasha and beans
Salted turnips and corn meal mush—that's my life!

Mother responds by telling him to wait until autumn and he asserts that he will find himself a young woman, with raven eyes, a blonde, fair-haired one. But the reality of his life is in the refrain: "*ej joj joj* (words of wailing) kasha and beans, salted turnips and corn meal mush." These were the ordinary foods of the people, whether they were in Croatian villages or working in the steel mills.

Was there an escape into the happy state of family life, having a pretty wife and being your own master? There is a hint that somehow mother is to blame, that she hasn't come through as she might have in Croatia by arranging a marriage with a suitable young woman.

There is a stronger sense of blame in another song of outright misery entitled "Mother, Mother." In this song, the man's love relationship does not work out and he bids goodbye to love. Tomorrow his heart will cry and his dreams will die. Then the refrain that reflects the essence of his state of being:

Damned be my fate,
My misfortunes are my destiny.
O mother, mother, why did you bear me
When I don't have any luck!

He finds no solace in the tavern though he drinks until dawn, with an old gypsy drowsing beside him, playing on the tambura, undoubtedly songs of melancholy.

Well, mother did give birth to him. And stopped there, according to the third song of unhappiness:

"My Mother has only one." In this song, not only does she just have one offspring, in his view it would be better if she had none. Thus he effaces himself as a source of joy for his mother. Why? Because everything he earns, presumably in the new world, he spends foolishly and sends nothing home to her. When a husband or a son left a wife or mother, her status in the village was diminished, but if either sent her letters and money, then she could regain her position as someone with worth. She had someone out there who cared and who would either come back or send for her. Usually, sons would send money or goods if these could be received without a horrendous customs duty. This son declares that he loves his mother but he loves his partying life more, his "becarku." It is as if he sees her—his mother, his mother, old and grey, but his social life sweetly beckons him. The strain and pull is evident:

My mother, my mother
Scolds and abuses me, but the bachelor life
Extends its hot lips.
And he concludes, this lost soul:
I'll grieve and I'll grieve (the loss of)
My father and mother, but I can't get over,
But I can't get over the fiery carousing life.

And what can mother do with all of this wanton behaviour? In the last song of misery, "Mother is Cursing Me," there is not much recourse. In the first verse, or stage of life, mother is railing against her son for once again staying out until dawn, asking how long will he continue, where is it leading? She bemoans

her fate in terms of what she has brought forth into the world. He responds by telling her not to weep or to stir up her sorrows; he'll shape up, he still has time. In the second verse, or stage of young married life, his wife greets him in the morning upon his arrival home, with a Bible in her hand. Like his mother before him, she berates him as a hard-drinking scoundrel, a rake. He dismisses her wild woman's talk and proclaims that he will rehabilitate himself, he still has time. In the third verse, the children cry that he is drinking more than he should. This hurts him—that the children should be trying to send "smarts" to him, the father. But he asserts:

> Give it up children. You'll be better,
> And I'll drink according to my wishes.

It would have been difficult for the men to acknowledge their faults directly, but in song they could, and in company with other men, with whom they sang these songs in drinking places or the Croatian Hall or "Dom." In a way, they even acknowledged that they were the authors of their own misfortunes to their wives and children who likely felt unable to make any changes in their husband's and father's lifestyle.

I am not suggesting that all male immigrants during the earlier waves of immigration to Canada and the United States lived dissolute lives, but likely many could identify, in some degree, with the words and sentiments. I know that my father never forgot that he had to borrow money from a family friend in Croatia to pay for his passage to Canada in 1925; his own father, living and working in Pittsburgh for years, had no savings, but there was always time and money for song and drink.

2. Role of mother

The second category of songs pertains to mother's role. One aspect has already been identified in the song, "My Mother has Only One," namely, to scold and to remonstrate with her son about his foolish, self-destructive behaviour, which is causing grief to him and his family. This function is highlighted in "My Mother Curses Me," not only in the title but in the first verse when the mother scolds her son for partying until dawn. The task of the mother to shape her son's behaviour into more appropriate ways is also prominent in the song, "I'm Hiccuping." Our hero is struck by the hiccups; then he exclaims that his mother is thinking of him, asking where is he from dawn to dark? He acknowledges that he is having a good time with the "girls" and he tells his mother not to scold him, whereas she complains that she has been scolding for three years now. The unidimensionality of the mother's role is evident: she is charged to shape her son into more mature ways, but she seems to have only one technique at hand—her nagging which only angers and tires her, and frustrates her son, who doesn't seem to change his ways.

A more comprehensive delineation of the mother's role is found in the

song, "Mother." She rocks the cradle and sings a quiet song, acknowledging that the sleeping angel is part of her. She is there for him in early childhood when there are various childhood ills: she is on guard, day and night, listening, with her heart full of woes (for unspecified reasons). When her little flower begins to go farther afield into the big world, she will take out of her own mouth so that he does not go hungry, or be lacking in whatever. And when he grows up as all do, and leaves with a partner, mother hugs him but is bursting with wounds. The song concludes with a blessing for all mothers—an acknowledgment of the encompassing nature of their caring, throughout their lives and throughout all the stages of their son's development. Only later, perhaps when the sons have their own families, do they openly thank their mothers and show some understanding of her sacrifices.

Mothers aren't asking a lot in these songs: only that their adult sons give up their rakish ways and act responsibly, that is, take care of themselves and then meet their other obligations to wives and children. In this sense, mothers are simply affirming traditional values about the importance of the welfare of the family. With respect to sons, mothers are to keep their lads on the straight and narrow, presumably with support from others in their community. With respect to young women, as presented in at least three of the other songs, the mother also acts to affirm traditional values of morality: the mother is to guard against her daughter being taken advantage of sexually, sometimes to the daughter's dismay. How well mothers succeed is uncertain as daughters show themselves to be strong-willed, but at least two songs end with the daughter safely promised in marriage.

3 .Songs of return to the homeland

The third and final category, songs of longing and return, has only one selection from the older songs.[2] In the song "Mother, Dear Mother," the son tells his mother that he is thinking of her and his heart knows that without her, he is lost. He anticipates her joy when he returns: she will escape the status of being alone. He looks forward to the moment when they can both smile and laugh. With some anxiety, he implores her, mother dear mother, to wait for him. In other words, please don't die. Probably the yearning in this song was almost universal for these male immigrants, most of whom never returned. Many comforted themselves for years with the idea that they would return. The fantasy was important to keep alive. Else why would one put up with the toil of everyday life!A sub-theme in at least four of the older songs is that there is no escaping one's destiny. Whatever one's fate is, so be it – whether it is to be without fortune, to not find a suitable marriage partner, to be hardworking but poor, or to be caught up in the bachelor's life. Who can get away from what has been predestined? Perhaps this was a belief that helped one accept what seemed too difficult to change. One could feel melancholy but one was not alone. There were others and together they found some solace. Singing together was a great pastime, whether it was in one's own home with friends or with the other men

in the Croatian Hall or at the picnics in the *suma* or woods.[3] That was when one felt "at home" again, even in this new land.

Popular sngs of the 1980s to present

The second set of songs have been popular within the past 20 years, both in Croatia and abroad. They include nine that would be sung by sons, two by mothers, four by sons or daughters, and one by a daughter. Five of the songs fall into the category identified as songs of longing and return: another four may be categorized as sad or unhappy songs, either about the separation or more generally, about life. Three fall into a category of gratitude and appreciation of the mother. Two songs have a political emphasis, and one is about the mother's role.

1. Songs of return to the homeland

The songs of return, the wished for realization of a dream, are similar to the earlier song of return. One is entitled "Return" and it could have been sung in any era of immigration. Its language, like that of several of the more recent songs, is poetic:

> Night is descending and snow is falling,
> My cry is lost beneath the mountain.

But the mixed sentiments of joy and anxiety are the same: the man senses that his mother is dozing, the fire is out. He tells her to open the door to her son: "I am returning to your home." The night is quiet and no one awaits him. Is it too late?

In "To You, Mother, My Thoughts Fly," the son's thoughts fly across the fields and mountains. From afar, the one and only son sends his greetings. Fate has separated them and he wonders if he will ever see her again. He won't ever forget her, her gentle eyes, her dear hands that nurtured and raised him. In "Tears of My Mother," a son tells his mother how he remembers her words and he curses the fate that separates them. Now he doesn't have his one and only mother any more. He damns those who took her and asks who will pay for her tears. There is clearly anger directed at those who are responsible. Similarly, in "Mother" the son curses the poverty that has cast Croatians around the world. He asks the faraway star to lead him back to the doorstep where his mother waits. He asks that the door be opened to the son: "there is only one home." He, like others, implores her to keep the home fires lit:

> The hearth is too dear
> Tend it, mother
> For it is our destiny.

Two songs in the this category have the same title, "Write to Me, Mother."

One son sees himself as the only one awake in the city: he asks his mother to write, to ask him to return. He asserts that she will never know how he suffers. In a play on words, he asks her to write about his *kraj*, his region or homeland. But no one will know of his unending sorrow—*beskrajnu tugu*. Only the stars know. In the other song, the son asks his mother to write to him of the Adriatic Sea:

> With each wave
> I sit up on it.

He wants to see the old laurel, smell the pines, hear about the boats that arrive, the neighbours ... He wants her to write about everything, for her words nourish his heart and soul.

There is an additional song of return sung by a mother. Simply titled, "Son, Return," it is an impassioned plea by a mother to her son not to let the distance separate them, nor the waves to carry him to a foreign sea. Return, she implores him, when all are thinking that he will never return; return because of those who love him, on our blue sea. She tells him to return to his most dear country where his mother and his heaven await him.

2. Songs of unhappiness

The second category involves melancholy songs about aspects of mother-son relationships. In "Something for Goodnight," the son wishes or even, bemoans the fact that his mother didn't do everything she could to see him off: she could have kissed him, stroked him with her lips, said goodnight. He, the little boy, wonders how can he tell her what hurts him? He repeats what she might have done, so that he might have peace, not his troubled sleep. In another, entitled "Mother," the son is desolate as he faces his mother's death. He recalls the last time that she called him, when she breathed her last, and he cries and cries the whole night. He never fully understood what a mother was; earlier he had seen the world with different eyes than now, when he is in pain. In "Old Mother," the son asks his mother to listen to his song, for he has no tears to cry out his woes: "It hurts, it hurts, for tonight the soul dies." He emphasizes that he, her only son, will be suffering tonight.

3. *Songs of gratitude*

There are three songs of gratitude and appreciation to the mother. "Thank You, Mother" is all encompassing. The son returns after many years to his mother and wants to know everything: how she sleeps, does she worry about the same things? He thanks her for everything she gave him, and the sun, his existence, the tears on her pillow, his good luck. He assures her that every night he dreamed of her and wanted to kiss her face and grey hair. And now, it may be too late: the torch may die.

The other two songs could be sung by either men or women. In "To You,

Mother," there is a recognition of all the waiting that a mother does, the worrying, the following with her eyes of hundreds of trains, the lights she has lit, and the tears. And in "A Thousand Songs to Mother," the mother, as usual, waits alone. The same depth of appreciation is found in "Happy Mother's Day," a song in which the adult child recognizes that it wasn't always easy for the mother, but she managed to provide a carefree, joyful childhood for her children. And when they return as adults to the same house where they grew up, everything about it is the best, because of the mother and what she gave them. These same sentiments are echoed in the song of thanks by a daughter to her mother, "Mother, Thank You."

4 .Role of mother

The mother's role is directly addressed in only one song: "Mother," which could be sung by either a son or daughter. Essentially, the mother is in spirit with the adult child in a land or home that is a wasteland, where no one knows him or her. Mother is the only source of comfort and the adult child asks the mother to watch over the sleeper, undoubtedly as she did when the child was frightened at night by a bad dream. The role of the mother in keeping the home a stable and welcoming place is recognized in several other songs. She is also the source of information about all that is newsworthy and pertinent to the faraway son. And she stands for the loved land or sea that is "home," for in one breath, the singer yearns for mother and the terrain or sea he left behind.

5. Political songs

Finally, there is a category of political songs. One is entitled "Croatian Mother." She is likened to a mother hawk who won't let anyone take her children. The son responds that a Croatian mother gave birth to him and Croatia raised him: "A Croat he was, and will be." The mother gives her children a chance to fly free, but she will protect them. The sons affirm their allegiance: "Zivjela Hrvatska (Long live Croatia)!" The other song, "My Son," is a timeless one of all mothers who wait for their sons who are in battle. The old mother waits on her doorstep; she waits for her one and only, dear sweet son, She is sad and prays every day for him; yet she is proud of him, for he is willing to sacrifice his life. She knows that Croatia will survive while there are sons like hers.

Discussion

What do we learn from these songs about Croatian mothers and sons that span nearly a century? First, mothers and sons find themselves in a loving relationship that transcends barriers of time, distance, troubles, wars, and the oppressive and alienating conditions of survival in Canada and the United States in years when only the strong and fortunate could eke out a living. Second, mothers and sons both yearn for each other; this is not a one-sided love. The intensity of the bond is undoubtedly intensified by the separation due to

the son's leaving. We also learn that sons will stray, whether it is in Croatia, much to the dismay of mothers, wives and children, or in the new world where they were not alone in their carousing. There is a bone-headedness to the sons' insistence in the earlier songs to stay committed to their bachelor life, despite its self-defeating nature. And there is a profound depth to the sorrow experienced by mothers and sons who were separated.

By maintaining their yearning for each other, mothers and sons could comfort themselves by believing in reunion. Thus, each was strengthened to deal with life's travails. The picture that emerges is that of mothers as lifelines for their distant sons. The mothers, themselves, seemed to experience many troubles but these are their secret woes. Sharing, perhaps, would have been shameful for these women, and avoidance of shame or *sramota* is very important for Croatians.

It is fair to conclude that Croatian mothers in the homeland, or in North America, occupied a revered position, although their advice might sometimes be disregarded by their errant sons. One could always tell one's troubles to mother, as nothing could sway her love. Fathers, on the other hand, have been known as disciplinarians. In Croatian songs, they have received little attention. One of the sources of the current set of songs noted that it is always difficult to find songs for the radio program on Father's Day.

The religious context within Croatia provides a base for the intensity of the mother-child relationship and for the worshipful attitude of children toward their mothers. During the years of Communism in the former Yugoslavia, from 1945 to 1989, the Catholic Church in Croatia was not prominent, but neither was it outlawed. After the fall of the Communist leadership, Catholicism emerged reinvigorated and with it, worship of Mary as the mother of God, the Blessed Virgin. The Blessed Virgin was long revered, in prayers and pilgrimages to her well-known church, Marija Bistrica. And many local and foreign visitors are drawn to Medjugorje, a shrine honouring the sighting of Mary.

Political songs affirming Croatian national identity were suppressed during the Communist era but gained prominence during the period of Serbian aggression and occupation of nearly one-third of Croatian territory, 1991-95. The alliance between mother and Croatia, both highly valued entities, undoubtedly served to strengthen the resolve of its people in establishing their independence as a country.

Despite Croatians' reverence for the mother, Croatia has been highly patriarchal in its gender roles and family configurations (St. Erlich, 1966). Yet the mother is seen as pivotal with respect to promoting cherished values and child rearing. Thus, St. Erlich, in her study of 300 Yugoslav villages (1937-1941) writes:

> In all the regions investigated, we observed particular love and tenderness toward the mother. Here we are not thinking of the mother's attitude toward the children—tenderness in this relation-

> ship is universal—but a special tenderness of the children toward the mother. The mother occupied a central position in all her children's deeply felt emotions as a sort of protectress. In love songs about the yearning of a young man for a girl, or the longing of a girl for a boy of her choice, behind the loved person, we find the mother. We constantly hear the words, "ask mother," "tell mother," "mother will not let me," "mother likes you." (St. Erlich, 1966: 94)

St. Erlich explains this markedly affectionate attitude, which is very congruent with the findings from the old songs, in terms of the patriarchal arrangements: the mother is never high in status, and thus, has no need to be aloof or to maintain her authority with the children. She could just give unhindered expression to her affection. Our more cynical and modern mentality suggests that she runs the risk of being a doormat or virtual slave to her children. Certainly, this is a viewpoint I have heard in many Croatian circles regarding how mothers and grandmothers act and are expected to act, in particular, toward the son. Croatian children joke that mothers would cut the food up on your plate in order to encourage you to eat it, food being a major medium for the expression of love (and control, the children would echo).

St. Erlich (1966) also suggests that there were dilemmas in the mother-child relationship, indeed, within every mother-child tie, a seed of tragedy. Why? Because the mother is vulnerable, loving her children so much without any defense against animosity or alienation on their part. And in her study, many of the troubles that did develop pertained to the son's finding a wife, and mother becoming mother-in-law and a threat to the young woman who has entered the household.

Alliances of mothers with their children against the fathers were not uncommon in this study, with some regions of the former Yugoslavia reporting this finding more often than others. A more consistent finding pertained to the mother-daughter relationship: St. Erlich found that "in all regions, there was a great bond between mother and daughter" (1966: 98). There is a suggestion that in pastoral and some other regions with a "tribal culture," the mother-son tie is closer. Was it the "heroic tradition which in the mother's feelings created greater concern for her sons?" (1966: 98). It could be that the departure of the sons to Canada and the United States amplified the feelings of the mother and son, and her concerns. A case of absence makes the heart grow even fonder!

It would be useful to consider how this Croatian adulation of the mother compares with other immigrant groups. Additionally, one could explore Margolis' argument that understanding why mothers have been put on a pedestal necessitates taking into account the larger social and economic context, for example, the demise of the self-contained household economy, the isolation of the living unit, and the segregation of the home from the workplace (Margolis, 1993).

Conclusion

It is not surprising to find so many songs affirming Croatians' sense of commitment to their homeland. Although nationalistic feelings were inflamed by politicians for political purposes during the Balkan Wars of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, Croatians, for centuries, despite the period of Communist rule, have had a strong and positive sense of their identity as a people.

What have I, as a feminist and Croatian mother, learned from this investigation of Croatian songs? First, there are some incongruities in the Croatian mothering ideologies as depicted in these songs and feminist ideals for self-development: how can one be so self-sacrificing and yet make a major commitment to one's own pursuits? Can one be so absorbed in the mother-son (or mother-daughter) relationship without losing one's own sense of self?

Second, children born to immigrant parents occupy an enormously important position in the family: they are the reason for the parents' sacrifices and the source of their joy. And the extended family is usually not present. Hence, the bond between parents and children is very strong and parents are ever watchful over their children.

Third, to what extent do Croatian boys and young men in North America grow up with an image of women as persons in their own right? If and when they hear their mother's reminders, are they ready to dismiss them, only later to realize the validity of their mother's case, often when it is too late to make amends? Do they expect mothers to be self-sacrificing and if so, how does this expectation influence their own relationships with female partners? St. Erlich (1966) also explored whether Croatian mothers and sons had difficulty in developing or maintaining satisfying intimate relationships with husbands and partners and found considerable variation in the alliances of the mother, that is, with husband, son or daughter.

A final incongruity, especially for a second generation Canadian or American mother, is between the "doing for" aspect of the Croatian mothering style delineated above and feminist ideals of self-determination. I believe that Croatian sons of the earlier waves of immigrants received considerable catering. The "doing for" easily gives way to a control scenario in which mothers may feel it is very appropriate to stay very involved throughout their son's lives, until death, maybe even later. The idea of separation, propounded by earlier psychologists, is definitely not central to the Croatian dynamics between mothers and sons. Croatian mothers do, however, set expectations and sons respond, for the rewards of pleasing mother are great! Of course, there are other rewards for doing well at school and work, but it is almost universal for Croatian children to want to please their parents all their lives. For some mothers, however, a major technique for shaping the son's behaviour has been through scolding and reminding, not the most respectful or effective of intervention approaches, as sons will attest.[4]

There is some hope, I believe, in finding a balance between giving all to one's children and giving to oneself. The two need not be so separate. With

awareness, a mother can temper her inclination to be so involved as to interfere with the son's emotional and social growth. Finally, with discussion and review, mothers and sons can work their way through the more difficult spots in parent-child relationships. With luck, they can listen to the songs together and even sing.

I *am very grateful to Joseph Valentich who provided the folk songs and Dunja Lukatela and Ida Poropat who provided the more recent songs. Their information and feedback was very helpful, although I take responsibility for all the content and analysis*

[1]While conducting the research for this paper, I found the following reassuring quotation in the *Zajednicar* editorial of May 10, 1995, p. 2: "Country and western singers sing about their wives and girlfriends, their dogs, their four-wheeler, their motorcycle, etc., rock 'n roll and popular crooners sing ballads about their present and lost loves, but Croatians sing more about their mothers and the Blessed Mother than any other attraction" (2).

[2]My sense is that there are likely more songs yet to be found that would fall into this category. Further, some of the recent songs may, in effect, be versions of the older folk songs. This is a matter for future exploration.

[3]Women also sang in Canada and the United States, but I have a stronger recall of more men singing at social events. Another matter for investigation!

[4]Nonetheless, mothers' words may be effective: Brian Brennan (1999) notes that 22 years after his mother's death, her voice still sounds in his head.

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Andrea O'Reilly

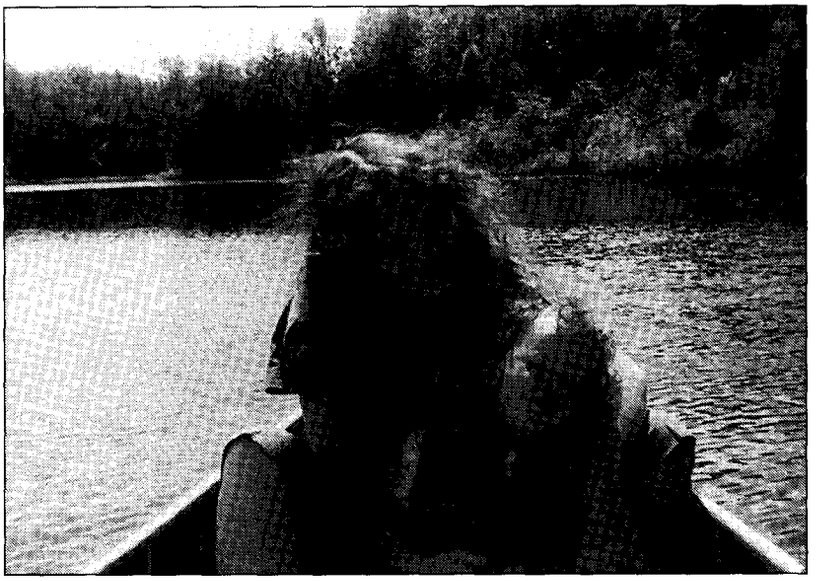
A Mom and Her Son
Thoughts on Feminist Mothering

Over the past year I have been working on an edited volume tentatively entitled *Mothers and Sons: Feminism, Masculinity and the Challenge to Raise Good Men* to be published this fall by Routledge. This book was developed from the conference, "Mothers and Sons: Challenges and Possibilities" that I coordinated on behalf of the Center for Feminist Research and The Association for Research on Mothering, in the fall of 1998 at York University. As I wrote my chapter for this collection, edited the other submissions and wrote the introduction to the volume, I found myself composing in my head, scribbling along the margins of this book another mother and son narrative, that of my relationship with my soon-to-be 16-year-old son, Jesse O'Reilly-Conlin. As I sorted out the book's thematic sections and sought to clarify a particular feminist theoretical position for my own chapter, I would continuously catch myself lost in thought, reflecting upon Jesse and my relationship and quite oblivious to the urgent scholarly matters that awaited me on the computer screen. More often than not, the bright colours of my screen saver would awaken me from my reverie and call me back to the world of research and theory. I think of this narrative—the personal one about me and my son—as a story both of interruption and postponement—while it is a story that demands to be told, it is a story that I have delayed telling.

Feminism, writes Babette Smith (1996) in *Mothers and Sons* "has failed the mothers of sons" (ix) As both a feminist mother of a son and an academic who teaches and researches the mother-son relation, I have often reflected upon this statement by Smith. Have we in our academic and personal interest in the mother-daughter relationship, as I inquired in my *Mothers and Sons* book, wronged our sons, let them down or simply forgotten about them? Have we in our negligence or disinterest, academic and otherwise, given our sons up to

Jesse (at six weeks) and Andrea, September 1984

patriarchy, done to them what we have spent our lives fighting against for ourselves and our daughters? I know that I have spent far more time this past decade thinking about mothers and daughters as I raised my own two girls, Casey and Erin, now 10 and 13. However, as I wrote my articles, edited my books on mothers and daughters, and designed and taught a course on the topic, and as I sought to raise my girls in a feminist fashion, my son and my concerns for him as a male child in a patriarchal culture were always there, hovering, phantom-like, just beyond full consciousness or articulation. As with other mothers of sons and women who care deeply about boys today, I worried about Jesse and wondered whether he was, would be, okay in a world that seemed destined to harm and maim him emotionally, spiritually, and, increasingly, physically as he grew into manhood. As time passed, I became more and more disturbed by the feminist silence surrounding mothers and sons and my own inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to theorize the mother-son relation and my relationship with Jesse as I had done for mothers and daughters in general, and my two daughters in particular. I initiated the "Mothers and Sons" conference and the book mentioned above in an attempt to make sense out of, at least from an academic point-of-view, the disturbing and puzzling silence surrounding mothers and sons and as a way to begin a feminist dialogue on what I felt to be an urgent and timely matter. However, as I worked on the book, identifying and investigating the salient issues of this new and emerging field of inquiry, my own story as a feminist mother of a son, as I mentioned above, kept intruding upon and interrupting, like some post-modern ellipse, the trajectory of my theoretical ponderings. I realized then that my understanding of the mother-



Jesse (at two years old) and Andrea fishing, August 1986

son relation would remain fragmentary and partial until I rememoried—remembered/recollected/relived—to paraphrase Toni Morrison's (1987) term, my own narrative, I needed to sort out for myself how feminism has shaped the mothering of my son and how being a mother of a son has redefined my feminism. I realized that in order to understand the bigger picture—feminist theory on mothers and sons—I needed to sketch my own mother and son portrait. To that I now turn.

This narrative is evidently my own; my son has his own story that I hope will be told at another time and place. I am a 39-year-old woman of Irish, Scottish and English ancestry, a professor of women's studies, and a mother of three children—a son 15, two daughters 10 and 13. Together with my common-law male spouse of 18 years, I have been engaged in what I like to call radical nurturance—a feminist, socialist, anti-racist, nonheterosexist /abilist, and learning/education centred parenting.[1] I was raised in a middle-class family by a working-class mother. My mother, from, what is called in my hometown Hamilton, the "wrong side of the tracks" was a "divorcée" with a six-year-old daughter when she met and married my father—a man from a "good," established Catholic family—in the late 1950s and settled down in the new post war suburbia to start a family. My class affiliation is thus middle-class though I was mothered more in accordance with working-class styles and values of childrearing; my spouse's class identity, in contrast is decidedly and proudly working-class.

I found myself pregnant with my first child, my son, in the fourth year of my Bachelor of Arts at the age of 22. Motherhood was something I had planned

Jesse and Andrea in Vancouver, March 1996

to do at 30-something, only after both the career and the guy were firmly established. I was not supposed to become pregnant this way: young, poor and in a dating relationship. Well, we decided to have the baby and three weeks later I found myself setting up house (if such a thing is possible in student residence) with this man, obscenely happy, eagerly awaiting the birth of this child. I believed my life would go ahead as planned. I reassured my mother that with my child in daycare at six weeks, my studies would resume as scheduled. I did not know then, could not have known then, how completely pregnancy and later motherhood would change, completely and forever, life as I knew it.

In the early months of pregnancy I was horribly ill with unrelenting nausea; in the later months I developed the serious condition of preeclampsia which necessitated the daily monitoring of my blood pressure. I wrote a brilliant paper on the plight of "fallen women" in Victorian literature as my feet swelled and my back ached; the ironies in retrospect are splendid. Labour destroyed any remnants of complacency left over from my pre-pregnant self. I hemorrhaged during labour. I never experienced such pain, terror, or aloneness, nor have I since. When my son was finally born, pulled from my body by forceps, my spouse held him as I watched the doctors attempt to repair my ripped and torn self.

Nothing, as any new mother will tell you, can prepare you for the numbing exhaustion and physic dislocation of new motherhood. Nor can anyone warn you about how deeply you will fall in love with your child. Motherhood, as Marni Jackson (1992) so aptly puts it, "is like Albania—you can't trust the descriptions in the books, you have to go there" (3). Motherhood radicalized and politicized me; it brought me to feminism. Though I had identified myself

Jesse, Andrea, and Jean (Andrea's mom), Summer Solstice, Norway, June 1999

as a feminist for a number of years; motherhood made feminism real for me and radically redefined it. At 23 I knew in my gut, though I could not yet fully articulate it, that my feminism was to be centred on motherhood. I believed as well that if feminism required of women, in either thought or deed, a repudiation of motherhood I did not want to be a part of it. If I had to deny or downplay my maternal self (as if such were possible) to "make it," I was not interested in playing the game. Quoting Audrey Lorde (1996), I believed, as I do now, that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (110). Though I now realize, some 16 years later, that had I been willing to cleave off my maternal self and "pass" as a non-mother, my stay in academe—as a graduate student, contract faculty and, more recently, tenure-track faculty—would have been a great deal easier, though far less rewarding.

I became a mother through the birth of a son. All the while pregnant, as I increasingly identified with the radical feminist celebration of sisterhood, I deeply longed for a daughter. As I marched with my girlfriends on International Women's Day, I believed I marched for and with my unborn daughter, Sarah. However, as the days of my pregnancy passed, and as I caressed my swelling belly and talked to my unborn child , I knew with an uncanny certainty that "she" was a boy. Lesbian author and poet Jess Wells (1997), in her appropriately entitled narrative "Born on Foreign Soil," movingly recounts the displeasure and dismay, fear and panic, she felt upon learning through ultrasound and amniocentesis that her assumed-to-be girl was in fact a boy "I was profoundly disappointed," writes Wells, "I wept. I sobbed to my friends" (20). Wells wondered, "What did mothers and sons have in common? What could they do together" and worried, as a "separatist, punk dyke, a radical feminist" that she

Jesse and Andrea, March 2000

would be, in her words, "spawn[ing] a member of the oppressing class" (21). As my son was pulled from my body and I was told that "it was a boy" there was a deep and searing pang of disappointment, but as I came to know and love my son, he was no longer a boy, but simply, for better or worse, Jesse.

With my first pregnancy, I lost what I refer to today as my feminist innocence. I discovered that feminism, by and large, has, at best, an ambivalent relationship to motherhood. When feminist friends and women's studies classmates learned of my unplanned pregnancy, I was greeted with sentiments of pity and concern and when I spoke with joy and pride about my pregnancy and, later my children, my colleagues seemed suddenly suspicious of my feminism and made me feel as if I had in some irrevocable and fundamental way failed feminism—sold out, been duped, gone over to the other side, or, in the language of current feminist discourse —fallen prey to the false consciousness of patriarchal ideology. Being a mother of a son made my motherhood identity all that much more problematic. Once at a union meeting shortly after the birth of our son, a woman with whom I had recently developed a friendship, stopped by to chat and upon learning that the baby she cooed at in the carriage was a boy, looked straight at me and said "what a shame and waste that a good woman like you was now going to spend her life raising a man" and with that, turned and walked away. In March of this year –nearly 16 years later– as I discussed the topic of this journal issue at the Association for Research on Mothering booth at the International Women's Day Fair in Toronto, two women dismissed both me and the topic of sons with a laugh that implied that a feminist would have to be an utter fool to spend her time worrying about boys. While views such as these are, no doubt, rare, I do believe they bespeak a larger feminist discomfort

or disinterest in the topic of mothers and sons. Be that as it may, I can say with complete certainty, after years of teaching and researching the topic of motherhood, that feminists have been far more interested in daughters than in sons, though as of late there has been an emergent feminist interest in sons, due in part to the recent preoccupation with men and masculinity in the popular media.

The aim of this article however is not to account for the silence or to chart the emergence of this new field of feminist inquiry. Rather, I am interested in exploring, from a personal viewpoint, how my identity as a feminist influenced the mothering of my son and how, in turn, my identity as a mother of a son shaped my feminism. I turn now to the first question.

My son Jesse, who will be 16 this summer, would be regarded as a "feminist success story." He and I enjoy a close and intimate relationship; he is as comfortable grabbing my hand, or placing his arm over my shoulders as he is debating with me the finer points of feminism or competing with me at the gym. He is sensitive and kind; wise and gentle, witty and affable; empathetic and thoughtful, reliable and generous, hard-working and yet fun-loving; modeling in both his behaviour and demeanor so-called masculine and feminine attributes. He is adamantly anti-racist, anti-elitist/classist, feminist, and in particular anti-heterosexist in his politics. Occasionally, I am congratulated on raising such a fine feminist son; more often I am asked "How I did it?" This question, each time I am asked it, leaves me feeling baffled, anxious, and strangely off-centre. I don't believe it is possible and certainly not desirable to format a blueprint of feminist mothering; mothers don't need yet another normative discourse of the good mother. Moreover, we know that a whole array of influences—the media, popular culture, genetics, peer groups, schools, extended family and the like—have as much say, if not more, in how our children "turn out." At the same time, however, I realize that my son's feminine sensibilities and feminist leanings are surely no accident in a patriarchal culture that does its utmost to ensure that boys are anything but feminine and feminist.

Today, standing on my tiptoes, to kiss my son good-bye , I saw a young man, wearing his long hair, as he has done since he was nine, in a ponytail, sporting his normal attire of a tie-dye t-shirt and blue jeans, (and not a name brand in sight), carrying in his hand his *Merchant of Venice*, which we had discussed the night before, debating whether the play is anti-Semitic, as it is often assumed. Jesse, with his straight-A grades, basic decency, his love of his immediate and extended family, and so on and so forth, would do any mother proud. But what I marvel at is his determination to be himself, his refusal to give in to peer pressure, and his unwillingness to compromise his principles. Given that he has lived in a very conservative, very white, rural community since the age of eight, and attended a school that is often racist, sexist, and consistently homophopic his conviction and courage are admirable. I remember how he was teased about his long hair; and ridiculed about his odd parents; those leftie, "shacked up hippies on the hill." I also recall the many times Jesse came home

from school or ball practice deeply upset and troubled by the "fag" jokes and queer-bashing he encountered on the playground. But I also remember a son who in Grade 6 wrote and presented a speech about Rosa Parks and won the School Speech award. In Grade 8 he did a major research report on homophobia; this year he wrote for his history assignment an essay on female genital mutilation. No doubt such views are anomalies and aberrations in our very straight (in all senses of the word), conservative "Pleasantville-like" community and no doubt we, his leftie parents, must bear/take some responsibly or credit (depending on who you are) for our son "turning out this way."

However, to return to the question asked above,—the impact of my feminism on the mothering of my son— or the related question "How did I raise him to be a feminist" I still find myself circling the question, uncertain how to proceed. First, I can not honestly say that I consciously raised him to be a feminist nor I am sure that my son would identify himself as a feminist. With my daughters, my feminist mothering was overt, explicit and to the point. With my middle girl, an avid reader, for example, I would buy for her, as she began to read independently, only books by women; a justified censorship, I reasoned, given that she will be reading plenty of misogynist male-authored books in later life. Over dinner, in the car, I informed them of the injustices of patriarchy and catalogued women's achievements. No topic was taboo; a normal dinner conversation in our household, from the time they could sit up in a highchair, would shift from the witch burnings to suffrage in the time it takes to say "pass the broccoli please." Every film, music videos, song, commercial they have seen, has been analyzed "to death," their misogyny, homophobia, racism tracked and exposed. I used to change the endings of fairy tales when I read to the children at night; allowing the princess to "live with the prince only after she got her PhD." This year I temporarily pulled my daughter from her school in an act of protest when the principal prohibited her from wearing a particular top, saying it was "distracting to the boys." The mothering of my girls has been actively and adamantly feminist and my daughters unequivocally identify themselves as feminist, though my 13-year-old would identify more with "third wave grrrl" feminism than the feminism of my generation.

With my son, the relationship between my mothering and my feminism has been less direct and perhaps more complicated. Though Jesse has certainly been a part of thousands of conversations about women, feminism and patriarchy, he has not been schooled and cautioned about patriarchy with the same rigour and thoroughness as my daughters have. Furthermore, his autonomy, emotional, economical and otherwise have not been as emphasized in his upbringing as it was for his sisters. Nonetheless my son, as noted above, has feminine characteristics and feminist political leanings. How did this come to be in a patriarchal culture? The answer, despite the seeming complexity of the question, is, I think, quite simple and straightforward.

My son has a clearly defined feminine dimension to his personality because such was allowed and affirmed in his upbringing. My son, since his

birth, has been an exceptionally sensitive child who needed a great deal of attention and care, emotional, physical, and otherwise. In his first year of life he spent more time in my arms and at my breast than he did in his crib. He could not fall asleep at night without me lying in bed beside him until his early school years. Two-and-a-half years after my son was born, I would watch my newborn daughter sitting in her infant chair alone for hours on end contentedly playing with her fingers and toes; I was convinced there was something profoundly wrong with her. At the tender age of one she put herself to bed and has since. She announced to me at the ripe old age of two that "I am the boss of myself" each and every time I asked her to do something; at the same age my son would not leave my side. I remember one day, I suggested to my son (age three) as we walked past the playground that he should go in and have a play while I nursed his sister. He looked at me quite terrified and, backing away from the playground gate, proclaimed with feigned stubbornness that he would not go in there. When I, quite baffled by his behaviour, asked him why, he explained "because children were in there." (We ended up waiting until the daycare kids left before going in for a swing and some sand play.) This image always stands in sharp contrast to the memory of my youngest daughter, also three, running through the same playground in a blur of winter hats and scarves as I waited to pick her up from daycare.

I do not recall these events to prescribe "what a good mother should do" but rather to illustrate that my son, from birth, was "always/already" a child with so-called feminine sensibilities. But it would be dishonest of me to say that raising such a child, boy or girl, was easy. I believe that with every child there is a difficult, or as the parenting books would delicately put it, a "challenging" age or stage. With my son, it was, without a doubt, his first five years. He needed so much time, care, and attention that his seemingly endless demands left me exasperated and exhausted, trapped in those bad mother days that Mary Kay Blakey (forthcoming) describes so poignantly.[2] However, despite my fatigue, irritability, and anger, I more often than not held/comforted him when he cried, cuddled him at nights, stayed close to him physically/emotionally and honoured and protected his shy and sensitive personality not because I was a "good mother," not even because I was a feminist mother wanting to raise a "good" man, but simply and quite honestly because it seemed to be the decent, normal and only thing to do. When a child (boy or girl) cries, you give comfort; when a child feels lonely, you provide companionship, when a child is afraid you offer reassurance; such was my basic, but looking back now, eminently reasonable, childrearing philosophy at the age of 23 when I first became a mother.

On my son's first day of kindergarten when he asked if I could stay with him, I simply said yes, found a comfortable rocking chair (I had my six-week-old daughter with me), nursed my baby, and spent a morning in kindergarten as I had done a quarter century before. A few years later, when we moved and my son changed schools in December of Grade 3, I went with him, at his

request, to his classroom on his first day and stayed with him. This time my visit was shorter; after ten or fifteen minutes, my son, with tears still falling from his eyes, told me that he would be okay now and that I could go. No doubt we were an odd sight that morning; me, a 30-something mother, sitting in one of those straight back school chairs, kindly provided by the teacher, beside my son, in his place in a row of desks, all the while tears are streaming down my son's face with me trying to act as if my heart was not breaking. I am sure that many people thought in mothering my child this way, I was spoiling "it"; or worse, because he was a boy, I was coddling and emasculating him, tying him to my apron strings and turning him into a "mama's boy." No doubt I worried about that too. But what I remember most about raising a son is loving him and that meant making sure he felt loved, protected, and good about himself. My son grew up with the knowledge that it was alright to be a sensitive boy and indeed quite normal to need your mother.

Today, when teachers, my friends, and other adults, describe my son, what is mentioned more often than any other aspect of his personally, is a sense of groundedness, not necessarily self-confidence, but more specifically a self-acceptance and assurance in being who is his. I realize now that in my resistance to traditional practices of masculization I was modeling for my son the authentic, radical mothering that Judith Arcana (1979), Adrienne Rich (1986), Sara Ruddick (1989) among others, argue is necessary for a daughter's empowerment, and, I would add, makes possible a son's self assurance/acceptance in being different. More than 21 years ago, long before my son was born, Audrey Lorde wrote about the power of such feminist mothering in her now-classic "Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist's Response." It seems fitting to end this section of my narrative with Lorde's words:

> The strongest lesson. I can teach my son is the same lesson I can teach my daughter: how to be who he wishes to be for himself. And the best way I can do this is to be who I am and hope that he will learn from this not to be me, which is not possible, but how to be himself. And this means how to move to that voice within himself, rather than to those raucous, persuasive, or threatening voices from outside, pressuring him to be what the world wants him to be" (1996: 77)

In allowing my son to be who he was, in affirming this difference and doing this despite social demands to the contrary I suppose I raised my son "feminist" or, at the very least, I raised a son comfortable with the so-called feminine dimension of his personality. My son is also, in his political views, and personal ways, very feminist. However, I do not think he would identify himself as a feminist. Rather his feminist beliefs are for him simply the normal way to see the world. Jesse, as with his sisters, has been raised with, what seem to them, quite sensible, but are specifically, socialist, anti racist/heterosexist, feminist, values. All individuals—and my vegetarian daughter would add species—are

deserving of respect and equality; each entitled to a fair share of the world's resources, valued for their differences across race, class, ability, sexuality and gender, and deserving of a full life of meaningful work, good friendships and a loving family. I, along with my spouse, have sought to model in my day-to-day living, and to teach to my children what Carol Gilligan (1982) and others have defined as an ethic of care; or more specifically a world view based on the values of love, respect, fairness, peace, and decency. These values have been fed to them, if you will, since they were babes in arms, served alongside their pablum and later bagels and cream cheese. Feminism for my son is not a politic or an identity but rather and quite simply a lens though which he views and understands the world. When my children started to encounter sentiments of racism, homophobia and sexism they were surprised, incredulous, and indeed quite confused. They could not understand why seemingly smart people, in the lingo of the schoolyard, could be "so stupid"; "all people are equal, good, etc." they reasoned, thus the person saying otherwise must be the fool. Of course, as they grew, they came to realize that what they understood to be the sane and sensible, normal and natural way to be in the world—good, fair, decent to people regardless of race, class etc—was not seen as such by most of the children in our very conservative community. My children now understand that in their community and in the world generally, what seems to them perfectly sensible is, in fact, a particular political stance, and one that is not shared by most. Nonetheless, even today my ten-year-old daughter simply can not make sense of racism; why would someone dislike a person simply because of their skin colour, birth place etc; for her that is just "idiotic." Likewise, my son supports feminism not because he is a feminist per say but because for him that is what any sane and sensible person would do. I could not agree more.

In the conclusion to "Who are We This Time?" Mary Kay Blakey writes:

> If I've taught [my sons] something about women and justice, my jock sons have taught me something about being a sport. In our ongoing discussions of gender politics, I've looked at the issues as urgently as ever, but through the lens of love and hope rather than anger and despair. (forthcoming)

My feminism too has been rethought, reworked and redefined in and through the mothering of my son, most significantly in terms of the way I understand gender difference. Prior to my sons' birth, I identified with a radical feminist theory of gender difference that positioned "the feminine" (meaning the traits normally associated with the feminine: nurturance. sensitivity, intuition, empathy, relationality, cooperation, etc.) and "the masculine" as more or less fixed and oppositional categories with the former superior to the later. Crudely put, I saw the feminine as good; the masculine as bad and women were, more or less, feminine and men masculine as a consequent of patriarchal gender socialization. I defined myself as "feminine" and was happy to do so.

However, as my son grew and he seemed far more "feminine" in his disposition than his two sisters, my complacent and simplistic understanding of gender difference was called into question. My son was both feminine and masculine; so too were his sisters. I learned through being a mother of a son that gender is not pure, essential, or stable, but, as post-modernism teaches us, fluid, shifting and contested. However, as I came to appreciate the inevitable instability of gender, I continued to define myself as feminine and regarded it as superior though I now conceded that these preferred traits were available to men as well as women.

As my son grew and I started to spend more time with him, "hanging out" as it were, I realized that the two of us were alike in many ways and that our similarities were to be found in our so called shared masculine characteristics. This came as quite a surprise as I had never considered myself "masculine" in any sense of the word. However, with Jesse I saw myself in a different light, and came to realize that many of my personality traits are indeed masculine. I am adventurous, assertive, ambitious, more rational than emotional, carefree, usually confident, and often competitive. I pride myself on my independence, resolve, intelligence and resourcefulness, and attribute the successes I have had in life to my drive, tenacity, stamina, resiliency, self-sufficiency, and willingness to take risks. My friends joke that I am type-A personality personified. I realize now that, while I always knew I had this type of personality, I would not self-identify as such because to do so would mean admitting to being masculine. However, over the last few years as Jesse has grown into a man, and has begun to demonstrate many of these traits, I have named them in myself and come to see them as good and desirable as long as they are balanced with feminine characteristics as I believe they are with Jesse and myself. Being the mother of a "good" son I have come to realize that the masculine is not inherently evil and through this realization I have been able to discover and honour dimensions of my personality that were before unknown or shameful to me.

Eight months ago, after much urging from my son, he and I joined the local gym; we now go four to five days a week in the hour between picking him up from school and the time when my daughters' school day ends. Like many women my age, I grew up hating my body. As a teenager I was a compulsive dieter, in my 20s, as I came to both feminism and motherhood, I saw my body as an enemy—an instrument of patriarchal power and control—and by my late 30s I had, more or less, forgotten about, given up on my body, and lived, as do many academics, completely in my head. Working out in the gym I have come to trust, love, respect, challenge, and honour my body as I have done throughout my life with my mind. I feel, in an odd way, reborn as if I have been introduced to a new self; a self more complete and whole; strong and brave. From our time at the gym together, Jesse and I have developed a close bond based on something that is uniquely our own. No doubt many of the young men at the gym, most of whom go to Jesse's highschool, find it odd that a mom and her teen son would hang out at the gym together. But my son and I delight in each

other's company, take pride in each other's accomplishments, and have a great deal of fun doing so.

This week I started horseback riding lessons with my youngest daughter, an activity that I would not have undertaken without this new confidence and trust in my body, particularly because I was thrown from a horse when I was 13, never to ride again. After our first lesson, my aching hamstring muscles let me know that I would have to change my workout routine in order to strengthen these muscles. So yesterday at the gym, I tried some machines that I had not used before. At one point I dragged Jesse over to a machine and asked him to explain how it worked. The machine requires that you lie on your back and, with your legs extended, push up and down a press that has weights attached to it. There is a partial and a complete lift. On my back, with Jesse beside me I did the partial lift and then, at my signal, he released the lever to the full lift. Well the weight came down and my weak hamstrings muscles could not push the press up so there I lay, my thighs almost pressed to my face unable to move. Jesse and I finally managed to lift the weight and release me. I remember both of us laughing out loud, to the surprise and chagrin of the guy jocks who take working out very seriously. At that moment, as I looked at my son, I thought about this narrative and had one of those rare but profoundly wondrous moments of joy and revelation. It felt right and good to be me, the mother of this man. Reflecting upon this today, I realize that what was revealed to me in that moment was precisely the thesis, if you will, of this narrative: that my son has made me a better person and hence a better feminist, and my feminism has allowed him to become the good man he was meant to be.

I would like to conclude this narrative by recalling two pivotal turning points in my intellectual travels that lead me to this article. The first occurred in the summer of 1995 when I attended a session on "Mothers and Sons' at a Women's Studies/Feminist conference in Scotland. Presented at the session was a preliminary report of interviews the presenters had conducted with feminist mothers of sons. Though the details of their research are evidently important, what was significant to me was their conclusion and the discussion that followed. The feminist mothers of sons interviewed for this study, the presenters concluded, while they had initially been committed to feminist childrearing, had all, more or less, given in up in their attempt to challenge and circumvent their sons becoming sexist and traditionally masculine. They provided numerous quotations to illustrate the frustration, disillusionment, and resignation felt by these mothers. But all I can remember is the rage and despair I felt when I heard these words.

In the question period, I raised my hand and struggled to put into words the rush of emotions in my heart: "I know that it is hard to go up against patriarchy but we can't give up so quickly and easily. Our sons deserve more ... our world deserves more.... The struggle to save our daughters from patriarchy has been equally as tough but we have not given up on them ... we can't just give up on our sons." My protests fell largely on deaf ears. Most in the audience

agreed with the presenters, some reasoned that our time would be most effectively spent on our daughters, others suggested that perhaps mothers, even feminist ones, secretly take pride in their sons traditional masculinity and thus don't really want to change things and others cautioned that perhaps feminist mothering would turn our sons into misfits, cause them to be miserable.

I left the room shaking and immediately went to a pay phone to call home and talk to Jesse. My spouse answered the phone and before I could get a word in edgewise he relayed the various newsworthy events of our children's final day of school before summer holidays. The most significant news was that our son, our child who proudly and publicly affirmed his difference every chance he got, had been chosen by his classmates in a year-end ceremony as "the person most liked by others." Politically I find these contests offensive, but at that moment I felt vindicated and wanted to rush back in the room—I think I would have had the session been still on—and say "told you so!" Or more reasonably, I would have tried to explain to them that my feminist mothering had not made my son a freak; in fact it had enabled him to take pride in his difference and become, in his uniqueness and his self-acceptance, the type of person people genuinely like.

The second event is more an image than a story. Last summer, my son, my mother and I spent two weeks in Norway and then a week in London as part of my conference/research travels. My son, like myself, is an avid traveler; since he was eight, he has accompanied me on numerous research "road trips" throughout the United States. But this was his first time oversees. My mother, likewise, loves to travel and she and I have traveled a great deal together. However this was the first time we—a 14-year-old son, 38-year-old mother, and a 68-year-old mother/ grandmother—would be traveling together. Our trip would include a weekend jaunt to Svalbard, as close as you can get to the North Pole (a 2 hour flight from northern Norway), a five-day journey down the coast of Norway in a coastal steamer, four days in Tromsö (place of conference) and day in Bergen and Oslo and finally a week in busy London. (I am still paying off this trip, nearly a year later !)

While I eagerly awaited the trip, I wondered whether we were up to each other's company for a full three weeks: bunking together in the same room (on the boat our "room" would be the size of a closet), and all the time moving by boat, train, airplane from place to place. As well I worried that my son, in his youthful exuberance, would wear my mother out the first day and that he would not survive one of her shopping excursions. I need not have worried for though there were the usual upsets as there always are when people travel together, this journey will remain one of my fondest memories of motherhood.

Though there are hundreds of photos from this trip and even more photos in my mind, each more beautiful than the last, I would like to conclude this narrative with just one. It is that of my son, my mother and myself on the top deck of the steamer, as we stood by the railing of the ship, close to breathless in awe of the scenery before us. As we stood there, my son placed one of his arms

around me and the other around my mother and, gesturing to the fjords across the water, said "Isn't it beautiful?" For me the beauty of the moment was less in the fjords than in the three of us together standing arm in arm. While countless circumstances brought us to that moment, I now know, as I conclude this narrative, that what made that moment truly possible was the feminist mothering of my son. That is what I shall write beneath the photograph when it is placed in the photo album.

[1]In this article I refer to our children as my children and explore raising these children largely in terms of my experience of mothering them. I do this because the article is concerned with Jesse and my relationship as son and mother. However, in practice, my spouse is as committed to the parenting described in the article and our children are as fully and completely his as they are mine.

[2]"Every one of my friends," writes Blakely, "has a bad day somewhere in her history, she wishes she could forget, but can't afford it. A very bad day changes you forever" (forthcoming).

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Book Reviews

Harnessing the Power of Motherhood: The National Florence Crittenton Mission, 1883-1925

Katherine G. Aiken
Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1998.

Reviewed by Julie Thacker

Katherine G. Aiken's, *Harnessing The Power of Motherhood: The National Florence Crittention Mission, 1883-1925,* presents the history of the National Florence Crittention Mission (NCFM). This organization provided services for women and children in 73 American cities. It also attempted to change the public policy that created the need for these services. The history of the NCFM is an excellent example of identifying the aporia in society's beliefs and using that space to negotiate change. It provides unique insights for activists seeking to negotiate social transformation. It also models successful social programs for those individuals working as direct care providers to alleviate the oppression of women.

Katherine G. Aiken provides a balanced critique of the NCFM's activities. She shows how this organization identified motherhood as a common experience between different classes of women and used this knowledge to initiate progressive reform and persuade society to support its work of rescuing mothers in need or "unfortunate women." Her work also shows how some women used the organization's resources to meet their own agendas while bypassing those of the organization.

While emphasizing the positive contributions of the NCFM in helping women to adapt to their circumstances, Katherine G Aiken also documents the organization's internal problems. She shows how the common bond of motherhood was not always sufficient to allow volunteers to bridge class differences and develop rapport with their clients. Finally, she shows the tensions that occurred when the NCFM hired women trained in the philosophies of the newly

emerging field of social work which conflicted with those that the organization previously advocated.

The NCFM was ahead of its time in advocating that men as well as women be held accountable for their sexual behavior, that unwed mothers should be encouraged to keep their children, and that their lives should not be irrevocably damaged when they chose to do so. For example, it assisted its clients in taking fathers to court to obtain child support. It also provided job training and daycare for unmarried mothers so that they could adequately provide for their children and themselves and not become a burden on society.

Katherine G. Aiken's book shows how one organization contributed to the feminist agenda of decreasing women's oppression. It is an excellent example of the positive changes that are possible through awareness and acceptance of the common denominators among people. I found this book to be very readable. I recommend it as a positive model for women's shelters as well as individuals seeking to end women's oppression.

Women, Families and Feminist Politics: A Global Exploration

Kate Conway-Turner and Suzanne Cherrin
New York: Harrington Park Press, 1998.

Reviewed by Joyce B. Castle

At a time of increasing attention to the role and place of women in society and of ongoing debates on what it means to be a feminist, a book that deals with the reality of women's lives from a global perspective is welcome indeed. I was anxious to read this text precisely because of its international scope—here was a text promising to address the most important aspects of women's lives around the world.

The introductory chapter proved to be excellent reading. It presents the organization and conceptual framework of the text, and clarifies the perspective of the authors. Conway-Turner and Cherrin claim to be promoting cultural relativism, "the recognition that one culture cannot be arbitrarily judged by the standards of another" (4). They suggest that the major contemporary categories of feminism—liberal feminism, socialist feminism, and Marxist feminism—fail to fully illuminate the diversity among women worldwide and they caution Western feminists to temper their enthusiasm to liberate women around the world and to avoid Western constructions of women by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

The six chapters beyond the introduction deliver the larger message of the

book, that: "women's lives are orchestrated within the confines of family, community, and societal structures" all of which "are part of, and connect to, the larger culture and the world community" (11).

Family structures are the focus of the first two chapters. Chapter 1 deals with traditional meanings of marriage within various societies and the ways in which these subsequently affect women's treatment in the family. Chapter 2 explores diverse structures beyond the monogamous, heterosexual family formation and the different place of women in alternative family formats around the world. The remaining four chapters cover what Conway-Turner and Cherrin identify as the other global concerns of women—reproduction and sexual standards, women's work, health care, and violence. The primary data and the case studies included in all the chapters add reality to the discussions and bring women's voices to the forefront. Taken together, the chapters point out that while women's issues are similar worldwide, they "vary enough to make comparisons informative and useful for a feminist future" (209).

I found the strength of the book to lie in its organization and comprehensive coverage of the key concerns presented. I also found the book sufficiently scholarly to warrant its use in university courses on women's issues. Yet from my position as a professor of education, I was struck by the paucity of attention to the topic of education for women. Beyond a few pages in the chapter on women and work, issues of women's education around the world received minimal attention. I also found the concluding chapter somewhat disappointing; it was too brief, it contained too many over-generalized platitudes, and it failed to celebrate some of the wonderful progress that has been made by women around the world. These reservations aside, I did enjoy this book and I did learn a good deal. I recommend it to anyone interested in women and the future of women worldwide.

An Unconventional Family

Sandra Lipsitz Bem
Hartford/London: Yale University Press, 1998

Reviewed by Rachel Josefowitz Siegel

This short memoir (209 pages) is fascinating, deeply moving, and thought provoking. We are drawn into the 30-year history of a remarkably creative marriage and family.

Sandra Lipsitz Bem is a professor of Psychology and former Chair of

Women's Studies at Cornell University. She is known among psychologists, feminists, and gender scholars for her groundbreaking early work on psychological androgyny. Her Bem Sex Role Inventory, BSIR (1971), is still widely used. Her essays on non-sexist, egalitarian child rearing are frequently cited. The recipient of prestigious awards, she ranks among the earliest and most important leaders in and shapers of the field of Gender Studies. These impressive credentials do not prepare the reader for the impact of her personal story.

An Unconventional Family follows the publication of her previous book *The Lenses of Gender* (1993). In the prologue she states: "If *The Lenses of Gender* is the statement of my theory, *An Unconventional Family* is the statement of my practice. More specifically, it is an autobiographical account of an attempt by a woman and a man to function as truly egalitarian partners and also to raise children in accordance with gender-liberated, antihomophobic, and sex-positive feminist ideals."

Sandra Lipsitz married Daryl Bem in 1965. During their courtship, and with amazing clarity of thought and intentionality, this young couple developed the egalitarian concepts and feminist ideals that they lived by from then on. Pioneers in the early women's movement, they lectured to large popular audiences, teaching other couples how to implement these ideas.

Dr. Bem writes about applying her ideology to child-rearing. The text is sprinkled with humorous anecdotes that convey day-to-day details and the dilemmas in teaching her children Emily and Jeremy to live by standards that set them apart from the mainstream, without causing them to feel isolated or to lose self-esteem. In the process she also taught them to know and understand the value of differences. Dr. Bem's "vision of utopia has always been ... genderless." She taught her children to defy gender norms, to think of same-sex relationships as no more or less normal than relationships with the opposite sex, and to feel positive about their sexuality. Her motto was to "retard their gender education while advancing their sex education." I recommend that you read her book to find out what she meant and how she did it.

The chapter on her unorthodox career before she arrived at Cornell is heart wrenching. We read about the sexist practices that confronted her, when academic gender discrimination was not yet recognized as sexual harassment.

Sandra reports that she and Daryl Bem separated about four years ago. Since then they have both had same-sex partners; their children are now in their 20s. They all continue to be deeply involved with one another and consider themselves family. In the final section Jeremy, Emily, and Daryl speak for themselves in assessing the family "experiment" without minimizing the difficulties and minor imperfections. According to their own account this unconventional family sees itself successful in meeting its goals and in nurturing individual development. Their story challenges many conventional assumptions.

Family Secrets: Gay Sons—A Mother's Story

Jean M. Baker
New York, London: The Harrington Park Press.

Reviewed by Fiona Joy Green

Jean M. Baker, licensed psychologist, widow and mother of two closeted gay sons takes on an ambitious task of attempting to "illustrate how societal attitudes about homosexualitly encourage secrecy, preventing gay children from confiding in their parents and preventing parents from understanding or accepting homosexuality in their children"(ix). Drawing on her own experience of parenting her two children, who both kept their homosexuality secret from everyone, including each other, Baker sets out to dispel various myths and stereotypes about homosexuality that destroy the social and psychological development of gay youth and their families.

Family Secrets, divided into seventeen short chapters over 225 pages, leads us through the young lives of Andy and Gary, Baker's two sons. Gary, the younger of the two boys by four years, is the main focus of the narrative, as he is the first to disclose his sexuality and dies at the age of 27 due to an AIDS-related illness in 1989. Little attention is paid to Andy's sexuality which Baker discovers while accidently reading Gary's personal mail after his death. The main focus of the book, then, is on Gary's life, with numerous chapters addressing his childhood, adolescence, "coming out," becoming a writer, and falling in love. Here Baker successfully uses recollections, often in the form of letters from friends, teachers, and other significant people in Gary's life, to provide insight into who Gary was. A substantial portion of the text also deals with Baker's experience of watching Gary live with the "verdict" and reality of AIDS, as well as her own grief at the loss of a healthy and living son. The final two chapters, where Baker relies heavily on research and scientific findings, as well as her own experience, present arguments for the right to die and strategies to dispel fallacies and negative stereotypes regarding homosexuality

Baker is successful in revealing why some gay men may feel they do not meet the expectations of parents, teachers, friends, and others. She provides excerpts from Gary's personal letters, and published works to illuminate the influence of societal pressures and family expectations on his feelings of shame and inadequacy as a gay youth. Baker also successfully delivers an honest description of how the body, mind, and spirit of people living with AIDS are ravaged and demolished as they succumb to the destruction of AIDS related illnesses. One is left with an understanding of the horror of AIDS, the helplessness of those living and dying of the disease and those loved ones who hopelessly watch as they die.

Unfortunately, *Family Secrets* falls short of meeting the formidable task of providing an in-depth understanding of why Baker's sons, or other gay men, keep their identities as gay males secret from family, friends, and others. What is obviously missing, and most frustrating, is the Baker's analysis of her own role as a mother in contributing to, and perpetuating, the need of both her sons to keep their sexuality a secret. Throughout the narrative Baker provides glimpses of her own homophobia, appearing tolerant and as a therapist, yet feeling devastated as a parent when she discovers that Gary is gay. The continued hope that Gary is somehow not gay is central to the first half of the book and lingers throughout the text. I found her need to attribute Gary's idiosyncracies, and many of his personal choices, to his sexuality alone, a testimony to her homophobia. Human development is much more complex and complicated.

Although I recognize that Baker is strongly influenced by both the psychological theories of homosexuality of the 1970s and 1980s, and the general hatred for and ignorance about homosexuality and homosexuals during the reign of Regan and Bush in the U.S., where Baker lives and practices, I am frustrated. Surely, as a psychologist, Baker can see the necessity for an analysis of her contribution as a mother to the pain and suffering that both her sons experience due to homophobia and the secrecy about their sexuality. The fact that Andy never disclosed his homosexualitly to Baker, even after witnessing her love and support for his brother through his suffering and death, attests to the continued lack of comfort, if not homophobia, I suspect he experiences in the mother/son relationship. It is not until the latter part of book, after the death of Gary, that Baker accepts the tragedy of Gary's life is his death and "the fact of his gayness"(181). This suggests homophobia and attests to the need for self-analysis by Baker. Had Baker done her homework by addressing her personal role in the "family secret" of her gay sons, I think her book would have been much more insightful.

Mother of My Mother: The Intricate Bond Between Generations

Hope Edelman
New York: The Dial Press, 1999

Reviewed by Fiona Joy Green

Mother of My Mother: The Intricate Bond Between Generations, part memoir and part reportage, comes on the heels of Hope Edelman's international bestseller *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss* (1995). In the introduction to this

second volume, Edelman shares with the reader her journey to comprehend the centrality of the interconnection of grandmother-mother-granddaughter. Only by being attentive to the unexpected, persistently gentle interruptions of her mother in her own memories of her grandmother, is she able to recognize how "every grandmother-granddaughter relationship is connected by two mother-daughter bonds" (10). The strength of *Mother of My Mother*, I believe, comes precisely from this insight. Had Edelman not attended to the inter-generational connection along maternal lines, the book would not be as comprehensive or as rich in its exploration and analysis of the grandmother-granddaughter bond. By eloquently drawing on her own recollections, the remembrances of over seventy other granddaughters, and on research in the field of Psychology, Edelman successfully illuminates the three-generational triad from which women develop their female identities.

The book is well organized, with twenty chapters divided into four parts, taking the reader through various relationships granddaughters have with their grandmothers as the younger women mature from childhood through to motherhood. Part I, grounded in the childhood memories and experiences of Edelman and a number of other granddaughters, explains how the kind of influence grandmothers have on the development of the emerging self in granddaughters is shaped by the type of relationship the grandmother has with the mother, and whether the granddaughter's relationship with the grandmother is primary or secondary. Part II delves into the push and pull often associated with adolescent maturation and the process of developing a sense of self that frequently draws daughters away from their mothers. Here Edelman uses the dynamics of the three-woman triangle to demonstrate the role grandmothers play in both the development of granddaughters and in supporting and caring for them as they move from girlhood to womanhood.

Part III focuses on the centrality of maternal grandmothers to many families and explores four specific archetypes of matriarchs that emerge from Edelman's research. The Autocrat is the grandmother who rules her extended family like a tyrant, with members acting out of fear of her anger, or loss of her affection. Edelman describes her own grandmother as a Benevolent Manipulator, "whose love for her family is matched only by her desire for control" (148). A different kind of elder, who possesses a quite, behind-the-scenes power and whose very presence elicits awe and respect, is the Gentle Giant. The final matriarchal figure described by Edelman is the Kinkeeper, who acts as the family's social, cultural, or religious core and offers a sense of cohesion to the extended clan. Not all grandmothers fit succinctly into a singular category, as many share characteristics of two or even three archetypes. Regardless of where grandmothers fit into this schema, it is clear that the family's power dynamics and the granddaughter's opinion of her grandmother are closely related to the type of matriarchal power the grandmother assumes.

The final section of the book addresses the changing relationship between granddaughter and grandmother as both women mature. Granddaughters in

their 20s and 30s frequently switch places with their grandmothers, with the younger woman becoming the nurturer, care giver and confidant of the older woman. Edelman speaks eloquently of the emotional discomfort and pain that "greying" granddaughters experience as they see the health and strength of their grandmothers fail, and how a granddaughter's grief over the death of her grandmother does not have a forum. The death of a maternal grandmother means not only the passing of an era and the realignment of the female line, it also brings the loss of a multifaceted relationship, the loss of the granddaughter role and the loss of a direct connection to one's childhood.

Before reading this book I had not thought much about the triad of my mother, my grandmother, and myself, or of the ways in which this trinity has influenced each of our lives. Like many of the other granddaughters in the book, I too was distanced from my grandmother, and often experienced a difficult relationship with my own mother. But, unlike Edelman, I did not have the good fortune of spending time with my maternal grandmother, who lived across an ocean, and died almost 25 years ago. We only saw each other for very brief periods of time once every few years, and my lone recollection of my Granny is of my last visit with her just before she died when I was 15. Although I did not have a strong relationship with my grandmother, reading Edelman's book has provided insight into my relationship with my own mother, and the significance of the triad I am in as a daughter and mother. I am more aware of the role of each one of us in my child's development and sense of self.

Overall this book is beautifully written, and Edelman braids her own memories with those of other granddaughters and with psychological research, making her book a smooth and easy read. My only criticism, which is minor, comes from my position as an academic. I found Edelman's citation of sources to be unclear. Although she provides a good bibliography, the notes at the end of the book are not obvious in the text. It is not until I reached the end of the book that I found notes corresponding to references made within the text. Having said this, I strongly recommend *Mother of My Mother* to anyone interested in her own development as a woman, daughter, and mother, and to the role she may have in the development of future generations.

The Reality of Breastfeeding: Reflections by Contemporary Women

Amy Benson Brown and Kathryn Read McPherson, editors
Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1998.

Reviewed by Bernice L. Hausman

In this volume, readers get a variety of short takes on breastfeeding in the latter

half of the twentieth century, mostly by white, heterosexual, middle class American women. The general story goes like this: breastfeeding is painful at the start (detailed exquisitely in the first section, "Latching On"), but in most cases it gets better and moms (and dads) learn to love the experience. The impression after reading the entire volume is of pain, problems, and (eventual) exaltation.

Is this, in fact, the "reality" of breastfeeding? In the introduction the editors write that because "nursing is natural [but] ... not instinctive," "having some initial physical difficulties is therefore extremely common" (6). But these very difficulties are amplified in a culture that promotes bottle feeding, denies that breastfeeding is anything but natural, and, most significantly, assumes an idea of the autonomous person that is incommensurate with the physiology of lactation. As Alice Edwards writes, "The connection between fetus and mother and later between mother and nursing baby belies all our advanced, Western ideas about the self" (68). The question of whether breastfeeding is instinctual is not what is at stake here. Rather, what is significant is the cultural context in which this practice of the parturient female body takes place. For this reason, I liked the final section of the anthology, "Moving On: Family, Work, and Political Issues," as in it the authors develop the most *conscious* discussions of the social contexts of nursing.

Perhaps the editors are right that women need to be forewarned of possible pain and difficulty and need to be highly motivated to persist in the face of common breastfeeding problems (or those that arise in the "special problems and situations" of Part II). But while I particularly liked those essays that represented the specific breastfeeding challenges I experienced—it was like comparing notes at a La Leche League meeting—the insistent reiteration of these makes overcoming them seem like heroism. We are, in fact, dangerously close here to idealizing maternal nursing—part of the pendulum swing of common stereotypes about breastfeeding (it's painful; it's magic). Only when we cease to perceive and experience lactation through these extremities will more women (and men) be able to accommodate it as an unexceptional aspect of maternal experience.

Until then, however, we need *The Reality of Breastfeeding* to make the experience legible for all of us who grew up without a discourse or set of representations to make it real. One of the best essays in the collection describes a mother who pumps and nurses her baby in a NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) in the early 1980s. The nurses screen off the room with sheets and cardboard so that no one can see what she is doing. When she leaves with her healthy baby, she sees an orderly with the electric pump on a cart: "It is covered with a white sheet, like a corpse" (30). Short gems like this make reading through the descriptions of cracked nipples and exhaustion worthwhile.

Boy Crazy: Remembering Adolescence, Therapies and Dreams

Janet Sayers
London and New York: Routledge, 1998

Reviewed by Nancy Backes

Anglican and American cultures are boy crazy, as Janet Sayers convincingly argues in her most recent book. In support of her conclusions Sayers, a practicing psychoanalyst in London, draws on fictions, as well as the stories of patients, friends and colleagues, and graduate, undergraduate, and secondary school students. To her credit, Sayers treats all stories as representations of truth. Indeed, Sayers implicitly states her faith in the primacy of story and notes the disasters, such as schizophrenia and suicide, that erupt when the story cannot be told and the truth cannot surface. Sayers uses these stories to elucidate the destruction and unhappiness of our "boy crazy" culture. And in the end she theorizes how "girl sanity" might supplant boy craziness, although this is no self-help book.

Change will come from a return to the improperly resolved conflicts of adolescence, the source of the "intensification of masculinity." For in these adolescent conflicts, Sayers argues, boy craziness—male valorization—takes root and sustains our androcentric culture. Crucial to our understanding, she says, is an examination of adolescent boys' internal conflicts, which Sayers points out, are particularly acute. Adolescent boys experience divisions of mind and body, truth and falsehood, past and present, fantasy and reality, love and sex—in short, conflicts that are internal. Adolescent girls, on the other hand, experience a love and hate division toward their mothers and others—conflicts more external and relational. Girls simultaneously see their mothers as gender models and as having achieved but secondary status in the world, cause for both celebration and resentment on their parts for their becoming like their mothers. Both sexes, however, escape the torment of these divisions through, as Sayers puts it, "'boy crazily' aggrandising themselves or others as gods, heroes, or saviors" (104). Boys look to heroes: rock stars and superheroes, or fantasize themselves as heroes, thus firmly reinforcing male-dominated culture; girls look to romance with boys as a way out of their conflicting feelings, thus reinforcing male-dominated culture.

The men in Sayers's study report their great distress at being separated from their mothers in childhood, usually around the age of eight, when many were sent to boarding school. Their distress is great enough to carry with them all their lives; Sayers's observation here questions conventional wisdom purveyed by thinkers such as Freud, Jung, and Peter Blos who insist that separation

from the mother is necessary for the development of masculine identity. (The flaws in Sayers's book—a general lack of racial, cultural, and class distinctions; ignoring cultural institutions; a failure to include the subjectivity of the mother; flabby sentences, despite the graceful transitions between ideas—pale in comparison to this courageous challenge.) Once the relational union with the mother is rent, the sense of division between authenticity and inauthenticity, mind and body, develops and persists. In adolescence, for instance, boys resist emotional expression, which they associate with their mothers, in favor of expression of action: yet another splitting. Some psychoanalysts, however, notably John Bowlby, D. W. Winnicott, and Wilfred Bion, stress the importance of the child's emotional closeness to the mother, and her role in receiving, converting, and containing all that is frightening to him, much as Sayers advocates therapists do.

Awareness of the conflicts, followed by re-integration of the extreme, conflicting emotions—re-containing them—is the key for therapists and others. In adulthood, this enables the telling of a new story based on a newly integrated past. The result will be community and closeness rather than individuals divided from themselves. For in the place of an androcentric society's valorization of false gods, heroes, and saviors, new feminist therapies and their resulting stories will locate the mother: a mother from whom it is not necessary to separate spiritually, socially, and psychically.

Girl Rearing: Memoir of a Girlhood Gone Astray

Marcia Aldrich
New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1998

Reviewed by Marion Gold

Every word in Marcia Aldrich's memoir holds the promise that girlhood and growing up to maturity in a gendered, segmented society will be a struggle. Yet there is a note of sweetness about the innocence of childhood spent at the bottom of the garden, secreted away from prying adult eyes. This is the tale of a mother thwarted by her last child, a daughter who will not be molded into conformity.

Aldrich exposes women's rites de passage of marriage and child rearing in the 50s as devoid of meaning and through her expressive language, holds it up for readers to contemplate but not to ridicule. These women, not unlike her mother, ensconced in their cages of conformity, sought to imprison their daughters within those same narrow confines.

From the inauspicious circumstances of her birth in the alley, in the back

seat of the family sedan, a seminal event well-planned and gone amiss, our heroine, M, continues to stray from the paved, walled road of conformity laid out for her. True to her unconventional introduction to the world, M strives to follow her own inner voice throughout childhood. The dialogue with herself about when to acquiesce to parental commands and when not to holds the promise of strife to follow.

The use of split text to add power to the inner and outer dialogue in the chapter on her oldest sister is an exquisite example of post modernist style and is evocative of an era that demanded conformity, control, and obedience of daughters and wives. M never quite lives up to expectations; yet there are small moments of epiphany when we glimpse the promise of a future not predicated by past failures. Mother is a 50s type, obsessive cleaner of a house, a woman who can only control the externality of experience. And this is all the independence that she will permit herself and her daughters.

M's first burst of freedom is achieved through learning to ride horses from a woman who speaks in metaphor. Eventually she loses her favourite mount and stops riding. Young girls must not seek freedom and independence through riding. They must not have crotches.

The underlying theme of rebellion and the search for freedom from constraints imposed from above is echoed and re-echoed through M's narratives of small acts of defiance, culminating in her sexual liaisons with inappropriate father figures in college. She is seduced into the idea of marriage with one such man and suffers a breakdown. The marriage is doomed before it begins.

A second marriage and the birth of a daughter hold forth the promise of redemption. Salvation is hinted at in the flourishing, randomly planted garden and with the birth of her daughter. And yet... "Why did you name me Lily?" "... my mother's favourite flower was lily of the valley." "But we hardly see your mother." This is a well-told tale of a young woman's struggle to emerge somewhat victoriously from the imposition of her mother's will into the light of her own day.

A Better Woman: A Memoir

Susan Johnson
Sydney, Australia: Ramdom House, 1999

Reviewed by Joan Garvan

Reading *A Better Woman* is like talking with one of the mothers at the local playgroup. The difference, however, is that you have all afternoon, free of

interruptions. The mother is a gifted storyteller who can create a scene right in front of you. She is uninhibited in describing graphically the grimy details as well as the personal relationships. She bares all to you and all you can say is, "Yes, yes tell me more." Well that is how I felt when reading Johnson's book. For some reason, after becoming a mother and discovering the reams of paper that are being shed on the experience, I was glued. I wanted to keep reading, and hearing, what others have to say about their experience and practice of mothering and hopefully one day I will have had my full. But not yet. I am in the midst of it and I am wondering how many are out there with me.

Motherland is a physical, emotional, all consuming place that our former selves cannot know we visit. Becoming a mother is like migrating to a foreign place with an unknown language and no return passage. Here you are and what about the history, culture, language, exchange rate, so on and so forth? *A Better Woman* is like a traveler's journal, someone who has been there and is describes her trip. Johnson is one of those who is immersed in the experience of motherhood. She uses her writing, in a sense, to work through her experiences. She says: "I am here to tell you that I can indeed be found in my books and it might even be argued that my deepest, unconscious self lives within them."

In 1999, when the book was published, Johnson's two children were still youngsters under six. It seems there may be at least two more books to follow *A Better Woman.* After all, we have been there with her through her decision to have children, the births, the late nights, the relationship, and the after-effects. If you haven't heard about or experienced a recto-vaginal fistula, Johnson describes the experience graphically in case you woul\d like to know how it feels.

We do not really hear a lot about her children, Casper and Rose. This is a book about Susan. She looks back on her former self and wonders how she could have ever guessed where she would be these years down the road. Her former self would not have believed it; mind you, she would not have changed anything. She would do it all again.

Mothering in the '80s and the '90s has brought forth a multitude of bookss. Women all over are grappling with the experience and publishing their findings. Johnson's is one such attempt but her story is an intimate one. Johnson does not try to understand or explain the experience of becoming a mother; rather, she describes it. I loved reading *A Better Woman* and I am looking forward to the forthcoming editions.

Fearless Girls, Wise Women and Beloved Sisters

Kathleen Ragan, ed.
New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 1998

Reviewed by Joan Garvan

Fearless Girls is written by anthropologist Kathleen Ragan. She grew tired of reading stories to her daughters that only featured male characters and decided to embark on her own journey of discovery. Ragan set out to sift through folktales from around the world, looking for the stories that featured girls or women. After going through over 30,000 stories she found that approximately ten per cent of them were just what she was after. *Fearless Girls* is an anthology of some of these stories.

The book is written for adults and many of the stories would be inappropriate for children. Ragan has drafted a children's picture book version of the stories for which, to date, she has yet to find a publisher.

The book is set out in regions: Europe; North and South America (Native Americans and New World Newcomers); Asia; the Pacific; Sub-Saharan Africa; North Africa and the Middle East and within the regions the countries or peoples of origin are identified.

In all, there are 103 stories and their subjects, settings, and characters are as diverse as their origins. But for me, the fact that in most, if not all, of the stories, the protagonist is female is their greatest value. Ragan states in the introduction that many girls identify with the protagonist in a story, be it female or male. Unfortunately, I am not one of them. I need the protagonist to be female. In moving through these stories I found I was running, hiding, scheming, flying, and I loved the experience.

One of my favourite stories is "Davit" from Georgia. This story is about a girl who has a sick brother and her family has tried everything but he is getting worse. The girl, Svetlana, set out on a journey to "ask the sun, himself, what would cure her brother. On her feet, she put a pair of shoes made of stone. 'Until these wear out,' she swore, 'I will not give up my journey to the sun.'" Along the way she meets various animals and people in trouble and says if she finds something useful she will also bring that back. Eventually she meets a stag on the edge of a forest with antlers so large that it cannot drink from the water hole. She decides to climb the antlers, finds they took her up into the clouds and eventually to a house where the sun lives. During her time at the house, she finds out what she needs to solve her problems and cure her brother which she then takes back with her. The imagery is wonderful and the prospect of climbing through the clouds to the house of the sun enthralling. I hope Ragan soon finds a publisher for the children's version so I can share these stories with my kids!

Le nom de la mère: Mères, filles et écriture dans la littérature québécoise au féminin

Lori Saint-Martin
Montréal: Éditions Nota Bene, 1999

Reviewed by Christl Verduyn

Mothers'names have been lost to daughters. They have been lost to sons as well, but more particularly to daughters, one of three key ingredients in this study by Montreal writer and professor Lori Saint-Martin. Saint-Martin explores relations between mothers and daughters as presented in Quebec women's writing. Her explorations confirm the centrality and vitality of the mother-daughter relationship in this body of literature. To better understand it, and ourselves, Saint-Martin's book suggests, we need to know more about "le nom de la mère" and the maternal legacy. Saint-Martin does an excellent job in providing this knowledge.

The subject of motherhood is vast and Saint-Martin skilfully guides readers through the complexities of recent feminist and psychoanalytic theoretical contributions. For Freud and his followers, the maternal was located outside culture and in silence. This was viewed as a normal destiny for women and how society operated best. Feminists relocated mothers and daughters to the centre of the social and psychological story, as many women writers have done as well.

The first two chapters of Saint-Martin's book detail contemporary theoretical perspectives on motherhood and mother-daughter relations. The range of work reviewed is impressive. Saint-Martin considers the contributions of Americans such as Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, Adrienne Rich, Shulamith Firestone, Tillie Olsen, Karen Horney, and Marianne Hirsch, with the same insight that she brings to the writings of Europeans such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Françoise Couchard, among others. In chapter three, Saint-Martin tackles the tricky and troubling topic of matricide and infanticide, drawing on both psychoanalytic and literary sources, including Suzanne Jacob's powerful novel *L'Obéissance*. Chapter four makes the link between the maternal and the literary through a close reading of Gabrielle Roy's oeuvre. The mother-daughter relationship is much more than just a theme in literature, Saint-Martin asserts. It is a determining factor in narrative structure and style. It is a key ingredient in identity formation and in human ethical behaviour. The mother-daughter relationship introduces values such as respect for difference and co-existence, continuity and cooperation, openness and understanding.

These may be found in the writing of Quebec authors Nicole Houde (chapter five), Anne Hébert (chapter six), France Théoret (chapter seven), Madeleine Gagnon, Louky Bersianik, Jovette Marchessault (chapter eight), Jovette Bernier, Monique LaRue, Julie Stanton, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, (chapter nine), Elise Turcotte (chapter 10) and finally, (in)concluding, Ying Chen. Together, these writers represent a substantial selection of Quebec literature, and Saint-Martin's study of their work provides readers with important insights into this literary corpus.

Le Nom de la Mère is a valuable study. Saint-Martin writes clearly about complex issues and draws due attention to significant writing by women. Most of all, she creates critical awareness of a topic too often reduced to simplistic readings or no reading at all. The mother-daughter relationship is at the heart of women's identity formation and literary expression.

In Silence the Strands Unravel

Sybil Seaforth
Hamilton: Capricornus Enterprises, 1999

Reviewed by Dannabang Kuwabong

Sybil Seaforth once wrote that "a writer of fiction does not ... write to convert, to disturb, to instruct, to reassure, or to challenge readers" (134), but to have her muted experiences heard. She states that her priorities as a writer are to develop a "lucid, simple, euphonic, vivid, sensitive, and harmonious" style in order to achieve a balance between emotion and logic (138) and to validate Caribbean women's experiences that have been "expressly denied" (139) in Caribbean literature. In her recent and fourth novel, In *Silence the Strands Unravel*, published by an up-and-coming Capricornus Enterprises, Seaforth seeks to achieve these priorities. The novel ironically also disturbs, instructs, and challenges the reader (especially the male reader) in the opening scenes with vivid representations of betrayals in husband /wife relationships by husbands among middle-class, middle-aged couples.

The main thrust of the novel centres around the latent consequences of middle-class, well-educated, Caribbean women's choices of marriage over careers. The novel explores the experiences of four friends, Jessica, Norma, Ruth, and Dora, and hence dramatises what Leota S. Lawrence in "Women in Caribbean Literature: The African Presence" theorized as the deliberate stifling of women's "pretensions to a career, lest in doing so she outshines her

male counterpart and thereby ends up an 'old maid'" (4). Thus, the novel opens with Jessica falling into the trap of self-annihilation in the name of fulfilling the Victorian ideal of the role of woman learnt in school and church. Thirty years later, she realizes her mistake as Lionel, her husband, loses interest in her and takes another woman. Jessica's story is a replication of similar stories. The fates of these four women also instruct middle-class Caribbean women to be more aware of the material and psychoemotional dangers to which they open themselves when they choose romantic love, marriage, and service to husbands over personal development and careers.

The novel also dramatizes the nature of women's friendship and bonding. It is sisterhood that enables the four characters to survive their marital tragedies, and helps them to construct alternatives. To reflect the complex nature of the experiences and relationships, Seaforth engages a splendid array of devices including dairy entries, letters, interior monologue, direct and free indirect discourses, flashbacks, and animated descriptions in a language that is lucid in its artistic simplicity. Through this collage of movements, Seaforth has created a collaborative piece in a style that aspires to collective lamentation through storytelling. The novel does not give voice to men, but it sufficiently explores the consequences of the gaps and silence created by mens' actions.

Seaforth, however, redeems the novel from the syndrome of female victimization in marriage through a demonstrated narrative capacity for balance between emotional and analytic perspectives, and between major and subplots. The subnarratives involving Ian and Amy, and the reconciliation of Norma and Dexter, enable the reader to see another side of the picture. This anticipates and eliminates any narrow representation or reading of this novel, where the men are stereotyped as villains and the women as suffering angels. It is a narrative of personal rediscoveries by women later on in life. Seaforth may be saying it is never too late for women, caught in the loop of a bad marriage, to wriggle out and breathe. She disturbs the smug comfort of both men and women entangled in the game of marriage.

Part of the growing corpus of literary works by African woman writers, *In Silence the Strands Unravel* creates aesthetic delight and difference by synthesizing theory and narrative. Sometimes, however, the over-enthusiastic pursuit of psychoanalytic and Euro-American feminist theories hampers the flow of narrative, unless we read some ironic twists into the engagement of these theories by the four characters to analyse the probable causes of their predicaments. Seaforth may be suggesting that these women's tragedies are influenced by their inability to negotiate the polarities between their immediate cultural location from which they seem estranged and the Euro-American notions of ideal wifehood by which they have been betrayed. In *Silence the Strands Unravel* will make a good addition to courses in women's studies, literature by women, and Caribbean literatures. It is a novel of the future with a positive ending.

I highly recommend it.

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Contributor Notes

Nancy Backes is an Assistant Professor of English at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A. Her specialty is contempory American culture and literature written by women, particularly concerning women and age, especially adolescence. She has published articles on women and theatre, girls of color, and growing up female. Her interest in mothers and sons developed when, at age 42, she became a first-time mother of a son, now eight.

Wanda Thomas Bernard, MSW, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Dalhousie University. Her research interests include work on Black masculinity, parenting in the African Diaspora, racism, and oppression.

Sandra Campbell, a psychometrist, has been conducting psychotherapy with children, adolsecents, and adults for over 20 years. Sandra is currently completeing a P.hD. in Psychology, with the focus of her thesis on depression in adolecsence.

Joyce B. Castle is an associate professor at the Faculty of Education, Brock University, where she teaches Language Arts courses and works with preservice and inservice teachers to promote professional development. Her research interests are in literacy development, teacher development, collaboration, and women's issues within these contexts.

Sharon Anne Cook is Full Professor and Director of Teacher Education in the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa. Her publications relate to gender issues in education, teacher education, and the history of education, women and religious movements. She is currently coeditor of a millennial history of women in Canada entitled *Framing Our Past*, due to be published in late 2000 with McGill-Queen's University Press.

Juanita Ross Epp is Associate Professor of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay where she teaches School Law and Race and Gender Issues in Education. She followed Sharon Cook as president of the Canadian Society for the Study of Women in Education (CASWE) and the two of them organized

CASWE's Second Annual International Institute. Their partnership for this project emerged when it was discovered that both had "brought forth male children only." Juanita has also served on the OCUFA Status of Women Committee and Lakehead University's Women's Studies Advisory. Her most recent books are Systemic Violence: How Schools Hurt Children (Falmer Press, 1996) and Systemic Violence in Education: Promise Broken (SUNY Press, 1997). The Falmer book was recently translated into Spanish.

Aileen Fitzke received a B.A. in Biological Sciences from Rutgers University. At time of publication she will have (hopefully) received an M.A. in Feminist Spirituality from Immaculate Heart College Center in Los Angeles. She is a dedicated homeschool mom who resides in San Marcos, California with her husband, Karl and two wonderful sons, Nicholas and Joe.

Joan Garvan is the mother of two small children. She became a mother for the first time at the age of 42. She has a Master of Arts in Women's Studies and Human Geography from UNSW. Her research project was entitled "Gender, Geography and Resistance." She is glued to anything she can find on the subject of motherhood and family, particularly poetry. She is hoping to develop a historical or philosophical research project on the topic of motherhood.

Robin Gearing, a father of two, has worked as a family therapist in various settings, focusing on the parenting roles of mothers and fathers. His current research examines the nurturing bond between fathers and their children. Robin works with families at the Hospital for Sick Children and in private practice.

Marion Stichman Gold is an Ed.D. candidate at OISE/University of Toronto in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Department, Centre for Teacher Development. Her thesis proposal focuses on the reality that her personal life as a wife, mother, daughter and grandmother served as a template for her professional life as a teacher, graduate student and life-long learner within and without the walls of the academy. In the process of revisiting her past, travelling forward to the future and visiting her present, she will be telling and retelling narratives of her lived experiences as an educator, a researcher, a mother and a grandmother. As a grandmother, she will be revisioning aging and exploring the possibilities of empowerment through becoming a griot, a tribal elder, who transmits stories of motherhood and learning to the next generation.

Jaime M. Grant is a lesbian writer/activist with over 15 years of experience in feminist, antiracist and queer movement work. Currently, she directs The Union Institute Center for Women, an academic women's center in Washington, D.C. dedicated to coalition work between scholars and activists. She is a recovering addict who writes frequently about feminism, racism, and sex.

Fiona Joy Green is the mother of a ten-year-old. She is finishing her dissertation "The Politics of Feminist Mothering: The Hidden Praxis of Feminist Pedagogy and Activism" for an Interdisciplinary Ph.D. (Education, Sociology and Women's Studies) from the University of Manitoba. She has been teaching in the Women' Studies Program at the Univeristy of Winnipeg for ten years.

Anna Hagan is gay and "out" for 24 years. She and her spouse have one child each within their 15-year-relationship using the same anonymous sperm donor. She had the first born, a boy now seven years old. Her partner gave birth to their daughter who is now five years old. She is an R.N. specialized in the Operating Room. She writes and publishes *a lot* about issues involving children, parents, and their O.R. experiences. She has just obtained her Masters in Theology, Metaphysics and Ethics, not as a religious quest but more to enhance her knowledge and understanding about choices parents make for their children according to their religious and cultural background. She is a very enthusiastic, 40-year-young woman and when not working in the O.R. spends much of her time writing (one of her truest passions).

Jennifer Harris is a Ph.D. candidate at York University, Toronto. She is an editor at the cultural studies journal *alphabet city: culture theory politics* and the co-editor of a forthcoming issue of *the Canadian Review of American Studies* titled "Blackness and the 49th Parallel." She has published in a number of Canadian feminist journals including *Fireweed* and *Atlantis*.

Bernice L. Hausman is associate professor of English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. She is author of *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (Duke 1995) and is currently working on a book manuscript entitled *Between Science and Nature: Representing Breastfeeding in the 20th Century.*

Marybeth Holleman is a single mother of one eight-year-old boy, James. She teaches creative writing and women's studies at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Her work has appeared in venues including *The North American Review, Solo, American Nature Writing, Orion,* and *National Wildlife*. She holds a B.A. in Environmental Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing—Nonfiction from the University of Alaska Anchorage. She is at work on a book about Prince William Sound.

Robbie Pfeufer Kahn is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Vermont. She won the 1997 Jesse Bernard Award of the American Sociological Association for her book *Bearing Meaning: The Language of Birth*. Her 27-year-old son lives in Brooklyn with Simone and attends Pratt Institute in graphic design.

Dannabang Kuwabong is a part-time instructor at McMaster University whose research interests include postcolonial literature and theory and Caribbean and African women's literature.

Eva C. Karpinski is currently completing her Ph.D. in Women's Studies at York University. Her research focuses on immigrant women's life writing. She has published articles on women's writing, multiculturalism, and feminist theory *in Atlantis, CWS/cf, Journal of Canadian Studies, Canadian Ethnic Studies, and Studies in Canadian Literature.*

Sue Levesque is a doctoral student in the Graduate Programme in Women's Studies at York University. Her major research interests include media representation of violence against women and the language choices men use to explain, understand and justify their violent behaviour.

Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb teaches American Literature at the University of New Brunswick (St. John). Her most recent work, *"This Giving Birth": Pregnancy and Childbirth in American Women's Writing,* a critical anthology co-edited with Julie Tharp was recently published by Bowling Green Press (2000). She is a grassroots feminist and the mother of two young children.

Judy Martin makes art quilts. Some use dyed and over dyed fabrics sewn into abstract patterns. Others use traditional patterns and symbols along with a variety of figurative imagery in order to tell life stories. Many of her pieces employ a unique method of stitching papers or photographs into grids and other quilt like patterns. She has also made several soft books employing the above techniques. She has been exhibiting her quilts and books for 18 years and her watercolour paintings for 20. Her quilts and watercolours are in many private and public collections including those of the Government of Ontario and the Canada Council Art Bank.

Ruby Newman teaches women's studies and humanities at York Universityand is the Faculty Coordinator of the Women's Bridging Program at the School of Women's Studies. She lectures widely in the community and is the mother of a daughter and two sons.

Andrea O'Reilly is an assistant professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University where she teaches courses on Toni Morrison, motherhood, and on mothers and daughters. She has presented her research at numerous international conferences and she is the author of more than a dozen articles and chapters on these topics. She is co-editor of *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns* (Second Story Press, 1998) *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment and Transformation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000) and the special 20th anniversary issue of *Canadian Woman*

Studies/les cahiers de la femme (Summer/Fall 1998) on "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Mothers, Daughters and Feminism." She is the author of *Toni Morrison on Motherhood* (forthcoming, Ohio State Press) and she is the editor of *Mothers and Sons* (forthcoming, Routledge Press). She is founding president of the Association for Research on Mothering (A.R.M). Andrea is the mother of a 15-year-old son and two daughters, 10 and 13.

Ruth Panofsky is a member of the Department of English at Ryerson Polytechnic University where she teaches Canadian Literature. She is author of *Adele Wiseman: An Annotated Bibliography* (1992) and co-editor of *Selected Letters of Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman* (1997). Her articles, book reviews, and poems have appeared in literary journals and major Canadian newspapers.

Christine Peets is a mother, writer, editor, and researcher who lives in Napanee, Ontario. While she has taken paid employment outside of the home, she feels her feminist politics are best expressed through the unpaid and paid work she does from home. Her relationship with her sons continues to be joyful and challenging.

Marie Porter is currently doing a PhD at the University of Queensland. She is researching the experiences of a group of Australian women who were first-time mothers between 1950 and 1965. Her thesis will examine how these women were both constrained by their gender and enriched by their motherwork. Her study began after a period of ill-health made her realize she needed some outlet from the constancy of care she was undertaking with her son, Anthony. These intensive experiences of motherwork have led to a great respect for mothers and an abiding interest in them and their life experiences. Marie is still intimately involved in Anthony's care and his needs override other commitments, so practical mothering continues to be part of her life.

Lisa Bryn Rundle is a recent graduate of York University's graduate Women's Studies program. She is currently working as a freelance writer and was the part-time editorial and administrative assistant at the Association for Research on Mothering and for the issue on "Mothers and Sons." She has recently started a new job as Assistant to the Editor at *Saturday Night* magazine.

Rachel Josefowitz Siegel is a feminist therapist, now retired, in Ithaca, New York. She has authored numerous articles on women and aging and on Jewish women. She is co-editor of four books, the latest, entitled *Jewish Mothers Tell their Stories: Acts of Love and Courage*, will be published by Haworth Press before Mother's Day 2000.

Julie Thacker just completed her M.A. in Gender Studies at the University of

Northern British Columbia. Her thesis entitled, "Mothers Who Live Apart From Their Children," explores the lives of these women and their marginalisation. She will be entering University of Northern British Columbia's doctorate of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies Program in January where she will study the impact of environmental degradation on a group of First Nations Women. Julie has two teenagers, the oldest of whom is in her first year of college.

Nancy D. Tolson is assistant professor at Illinois State University. She specializes in children's, Black, and multicultural literature. Her research emphasis is on African Diaspora folklore and Black children's literature. Publications include essays in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* and *African American Review*. She is the author of *Tales of Africa* and is currently working on a book entitled *My Poems Are Indelicate. But so is Life.* She is the happy mother of three wild flowers: Kenneth, Kinnethia and Kindyl for whom all her work is dedicated to.

Mary Valentich, PhD, RSW is a Professor Emerita in the Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary. Her areas of teaching, practice and research are feminist social work practice, human sexuality, and a range of women's issues, including Croatian women and their roles as wives, mothers and workers. She is a Certified Sex Educator, Counselor, and Therapist and maintains a private practice.

Christl Verduyn ihas taught at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario since 1980, and has chaired both the Women's Studies Program and the Canadian Studies Program. Her most recent book is *Marian Engel's Notebooks: "Ah, mon cahier ecoute ..."* (1999).

Madeleine Wong is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Geography at York University. Her research interests include immigration, gender, and identity, and transnational activities of African immigrants in the Diaspora. Her dissertation examines the experiences of Ghanaian immigrant women in Toronto and the links they maintain with families in Ghana.

Ivan Young is a native of Columbia, South Carolina. Formerly a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at the University of South Carolina, he now works as a free-lance editor and resides in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, where he spends his free time pursuing his career as a poet. His work has been published in *New Review, Yemassee*, and *The Point.*

———*Call for Proposals*———

The Association for Research on Mothering

Mothering and Fathering: Visioning, Creating and Sustaining a Culture of Peace

November 3-5, 2000

Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A

The United Nations has declared the year 2000 a year for the Education for a Culture of Peace and the Decade 2000-2010 a Decade for Education for Peace and Nonviolence. What does history tell us about how mothers — and fathers — nurture a culture of peace in the home? How do children come to experience a culture of peace? In what ways do women and men engaged in protesting and resisting injustice, and educating, promoting and celebrating peace create a culture of peace in their families, their communities and their world?

This Fourth Annual ARM Conference on Mothering will focus on the positive aspects of nurturing for peace and justice. Our purpose is to bring together academic scholars, educators, school and agency administrators and staff, family life professionals, child care workers, public policy makers, religious, business and community leaders, peace scholars and activists, parents and students to explore this important topic from cross-cultural, international, intergenerational and interdisciplinary perspectives. Using a variety of formats, including artistic expression, panel presentations, personal reflections, scholarly papers, and workshops, participants are invited to submit proposals that explore the challenges women and men face today as they work together to create a culture of peace, justice, and nonviolence for themselves and the young.

Please submit three (3) copies of a one-page abstract by June 30, 2000 to:

Jacqueline Haessly; Mothering and Peace Conference,
2347 N. Grant Blvd., Milwaukee, WI, 53210-2941 USA
Email: jacpeace@stritch.edu
Website: http://user3.stritch.edu/~jacpeace/index.html

ONE MUST BE A MEMBER OF ARM TO SUBMIT AN ABSTRACT!
For information about ARM, and/or to request a membership brochure, please contact: Andrea O'Reilly
Centre for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson College, York University,
4700 Keele St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M3J 1P3
Tel: 416-736-2100 x 60366 Fax: 905-775-1386
Email: arm@yorku.ca Web site: www.yorku.ca/crm

The Association for Research on Mothering

in celebration of Mother's Day
is hosting a one day International Symposium on

Becoming A Mother

Harry Crowe Room,
109 Atkinson College, York University,
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON

May 6, 2000

Programme

Pregnancy:

Chair: Lorna Turnbull (York University, Canada)
Carol Brownstein-Evans (SUNY College at Brockport, U.S.A.) "Negotiating the Meaning of Motherhood: Women in Addiction and Recovery"
Lorna Turnbull (York University, Canada) "Bearing Children, Bearing Burdens"
Gill Wright Miller (Denison University, USA) "Performing Pregnancy: Choreographic Fruits of the Womb"

Birth:

Chair: Heather Mains (York University, Canada)
Tracy Kennedy (Brock University, Canada) "Childbirth: Who's Body Is It Anyway? A Woman's Narrative of Giving Birth"
Heather Mains (York University, Canada) "Choice vs. Option: Exploring the Druthers of Pregnant Women"
Jill Deans (Kansas State University, USA) "'Natural' Birth: An Adoptee Becomes a Mother"

Adjusting After Birth:

Chair: Christy Taylor (artist, Toronto, ON, Canada)
Justyna Szachowicz-Sempruch (University of British Columbia, Canada) "Articulating (my) Post-partum Depression"
Christy Taylor (artist, Toronto, ON, Canada),
Sherry Thompson (St. Joseph's Women's Health Centre, Canada),
Grazyna Mancewicz (St. Joseph's Women's Health Centre, Canada) "Postpartum Depression: The "Blues" That Won't Go Away"

Rosie Rosenzweig (essayist, poet and author, Wayland, MA U.S.A.) "Honoring Motherhood: Getting Beyond the 'I-It' Relationship"

Multiple Mothering Identities:

Chair: Kathleen Sorensen (York University, Canada)
Diana Gustafson (University of Toronto, Canada) "'Unbecoming Behaviour': Becoming a Non-Custodial Mother"
Kathleen Sorensen (York University, Canada) "Becoming A Single Mother"
Nancy Salzer (Brandeis University, U.S.A.) "Collectanea: A Presentation" from "The Mother Files"
Laurie Kruk (Nipissing University, Canada) "More Than One, Less Than Two: Canadian Poets Becoming Mothers"

New Mothering and Work:

Chair: Andrea O'Reilly (York University, Canada)
Elizabeth Reid Boyd (The Centre for Research for Women, Australia) "'Being There': Feminism and Mothers at Home"
Roberta Guerrina (Nottingham Trent University, UK) "Mothering in Europe: A Feminist Critique of European Policies on Motherhood and Employment"
Ruth Nemzoff (Bentley College, U.S.A.) "Making Babies, Making Laws"
Gynette Lafayette (McGill University, Canada) "Dinosaurs, Term Papers and Pokemon: Reframing Motherhood in Academia"

Evening Programme:

Mother's Day Celebration and
Launch of *The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* issue on "Mothers and Sons" (Vol. 2 No. 1)

An evening of art, poetry and stories featuring
a reading by acclaimed poet **Di Brandt**!

Nibbles and drinks (cash bar)

For more information on the symposium, or on how to become a member of ARM contact:

The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)
726 Atkinson, York University,
4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
Tel: 416-736-2100 x 60366 Fax: 905-775-1386
Email: arm@yorku.ca Web site: www.yorku.ca/crm

Call for Papers

The guest editorial board is seeking submissions for the fourth issue of the *Journal of The Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM) to be published in Fall/Winter, 2000.

The journal will explore the subject

"Mothering in the African Diaspora"

from a variety of perspectives.

We welcome submissions from students, activists, scholars, policy makers, and artists who research in this area. We accept submissions that take a variety of forms, including academic papers, poetry, prose and artwork.

If you are interested in writing a book review, we have books in need of a review, or if you know of a recent publication that you think would be relevant, please contact Ruth Panofsky, our book review editor at r2panofs@acs.ryerson.ca

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

Book reviews are to be no more than 2 pages (500 words), articles should be 15 pages (3750 words). All should be written following MLA styleguide, in WordPerfect and IBM compatible.
For more information, please contact us.

Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson College,
York University,
4700 Keele Street,
Toronto, ON,
Canada, M3J 1P3

Call us at (416) 736-2100, x60366,
or email us at arm@yorku.ca or
visit our website at www.yorku.ca/crm

Deadline: June 1, 2000

TO SUBMIT WORK TO THE JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH ON MOTHERING, ONE MUST BE A MEMBER OF ARM.

Association for Research on Mothering

Please detach and mail to the address indicated on the back!

ARM 2000 MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please indicate your membership option:

ARM Regular Membership: (includes membership to ARM, members directory, biannual ARM newsletter, listserve, annual conference, and subscription to the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*)

❑ individual $55.00 Cdn/US* ❑ institution $75.00 Cdn/US*

ARM Special Membership: (includes membership to ARM, members directory, listserve, annual conference, and biannual ARM newsletter)

❑ individual $30.00 Cdn/US* ❑ full-time student $20.00 Cdn/US*

Subscription to the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*: (a biannual publication)

❑ individual $27.00 Cdn/US* ❑ institution $47.00 Cdn/US*

Available back issues (shipping costs included in price):
Vol. 1 No. 1 "Mothering and Motherhood" ❑ $15.00 Cdn/US
Vol. 1 No. 2 "Lesbian Mothering" ❑ $15.00 Cdn/US

**Non-Canadian residents must pay in U.S. funds to cover mailing costs. Please make cheque payable to ARM in either Cdn. funds, U.S. funds, or international money orders.*

Please note: ARM membership must be renewed annually in January. For those choosing the regular membership option, this will entitle you to two newletters for the year, the annual Members Directory for the year 2000, and Vol. 2, Nos. 1 and 2 of the Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering. *Regular memberships renewed after January 2000 will receive all of the above and will still come up for renewal January 2001.*

Please indicate the following:

Name_____
Address_____
Telephone_____Fax_____
Email_____
Ten key words to describe interests in the area of mothering/ motherhood:_____
_____

Permission to include in membership directory: ❑ yes ❑ no
Would you like to be added to ARM listserve?: ❑ yes ❑ no

Mail in your membership form today!
Just fold here and tape together.

Stamp

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