

role of scientific discourse in reinforcing dominant masculine power structures. Grant is aware that her linking of maternal dominance and the sex ratio not only (re-)naturalizes sex roles many feminists have sought to deconstruct but also identifies mothers as the “natural” perpetrators of those sex roles: “There may be an irony here,” she writes toward the end of the book, “in that it appears that women themselves, by their very nature, are the ones who maintain psychosocial sex differences” (180). As a result, she encourages women “to develop those potentials that are unique to women,” to embrace their psychological-social-biological role in evolution (196). In the maternal dominance scheme, differences in mothers’ personalities “ensure the continuation of psychological sex difference, thereby laying the foundations for interpersonal relationships and maintaining the basic structure of human society” (198). This “basic structure” seems to be women’s dominance in the family and men’s in society. At the heart of Grant’s hypothesis lies unspoken, politically conservative assumptions about the role of women in human society as well as in human evolution.

Going to an Aunt’s: Remembering Canada’s Homes for Unwed Mothers

Anne Petrie
Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1998.

Reviewed by Jeanne Marie Zeck

Feminists, sociologists, and historians will be pleased to know that Anne Petrie has researched a significant and often neglected phenomenon: homes for unwed mothers. Petrie’s book is a social history of such homes in Canada focusing on the period from 1950-1970. Balanced, intelligent, and well-researched, this book offers a view of the sometimes well-meaning, but often judgmental and punitive culture that found it necessary to hide unmarried pregnant women. This is a well-integrated study: Petrie draws on the work of historians, sociologists, and psychologists; she cites documents and administrators from the homes; and, most effectively, she interviews the girls themselves. Petrie’s greatest offering is the voices of these women, some of whom have never before told their stories. Nearly all of the dozens of women Petrie interviewed were coerced into giving up their children for adoption. In her book, Petrie focuses on seven women, including herself. She tells each story sequentially beginning with the relationship that resulted in pregnancy through to the days and months after each baby’s birth. Theirs are powerful voices of

authority in this important volume of personal, national, and world history.

A most salient and disturbing truth that Petrie describes is the dearth of information about sexuality, birth control, and child birth available during the middle of the twentieth century. Until 1969, distribution of information about contraception and contraception itself was illegal (Petrie, 1998: 120). Although the pill was developed earlier, doctors only prescribed it for married women. This was the era immediately before the Women's Movement and the sexual revolution transformed our lives. Petrie's book recovers a time when "an unwed pregnancy meant a girl's life was over in many ways. She couldn't go back to school, she would be ruined for marriage" (Petrie, 1998: 45). Many girls were thrown out of their own homes. After telling her parents she was pregnant, Allie F. of Vancouver found "a note [from them] saying that she wouldn't be expected for dinner again, ever" (Petrie, 1998: 44). Yet Petrie resists labeling these young women as victims; instead, she records each individual woman's story and circumstance. The seven young women who are the focus of the book come from a variety of ethnic and class backgrounds and geographic locations from British Columbia to Newfoundland.

Most of the homes for unwed mothers were run by churches: Roman Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, and Pentecostal. Others were run by government agencies and still others by individuals. Petrie states, "Like the circles in Dante's inferno, there is a kind of descending order of homes.... [Yet they] saved many [young women] from far worse fates" (61). She explains the social mores that resulted in the girls being shut away: "These girls had fallen ... from the evil inherent in every [woman].... She was the fount of original sin. Historically, it was this demonization of women that informed and undermined much of the charitable Christian rescue work" (Petrie, 1998: 78). Petrie illustrates how the patriarchal order robbed these women of their self-esteem and identities. Without the last name of the baby's father to legitimate her status as a mother, the young woman lost control of her identity. In the home she was stripped of her last name (her father's name) and, in some cases, assigned a new first name. Ostensibly these acts were performed to protect the girls; yet it was the girls' families who were actually spared the humiliation with which their "wayward" daughters threatened them. The girls were shut away from "decent" society, restricted from looking out windows and using the front door of the home. They learned the price of non-conformist individualism" (81). While some girls felt they were imprisoned in the homes, for others, the homes were welcome havens from alcoholic, abusive families (Petrie, 1998: 55). Through interviews, Petrie offers portraits of several compassionate, well-loved directors of homes including Sister Frances Cabrini at Misericordia's Edmonton home and Molly Breen, who opened her own home in St. John's, Newfoundland "to girls in trouble."

Expertly, Petrie reveals the commonalities of the experience: the lack of judgment or responsibility society placed on the fathers of the babies and the lasting effects of the experience on the young women: depression, loneliness,

shame, rage, and the years of grieving for their lost children. *Gone to an Aunt's* is a scholarly work that is accessible to undergraduate students. This is an excellent text for women's studies and sociology courses, students as well as general audiences and readers.

**"Bad" Mothers:
The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America**

Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, Eds.
New York: New York University Press, 1998

Reviewed by Jill R. Deans

This recent anthology is an amalgam of social and historical criticism useful to researchers, students, and anyone interested in the culture of blame that taints twentieth-century American motherhood. Editors Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, whose own accomplished scholarship appears in the book, have gathered some impressive contributors, many well-known, others emergent, speaking from a range of disciplinary view points from the historical to the legal, the personal to the political.

Divided by era (early, middle and late twentieth century), the volume demonstrates how ideas and stereotypes—like Philip Wylie's poisonous concept of *momism*—took hold and shaped public and professional opinion. It provides origins for the culture of expertise that continues to influence perceptions of "good" and "bad" mothers today. Different articles often refer to the same culprits—the Philip Wylies, Margaret Mahlers, social workers, therapists, and more recently, the courts, fetal rights groups and the media. Overlap between articles, however, builds consensus that the power of "choice" to determine and define motherhood, as Rickie Solinger describes it, does not always belong to mothers.

While the anthology consists primarily of critics, it also contains a short selection of actual mom-bashing, presumably to historicize from a more primary angle. This section, however, offers a mere taste of what the critics are reacting against. Individual articles work better to prove the injustice of those who blame mothers for everything from violent children to communism.

Widely-published scholars like Elaine Tyler May, Katha Pollit, and Betty Jean Lifton contribute overviews which are more thoroughly explored in their own books. Still, they represent important touchstones for such issues as childlessness, fetal rights, and adoption, respectively. Paula Caplan's "Mother-Blaming," an excerpt from her popular book *Don't Blame Mother*, might be a