

centerpiece, if it weren't stylistically divergent from the rest of the volume which is more scholarly in tone and depth. Less familiar names were chosen, undoubtedly, for both their readability and the rigors of their research claims. Elizabeth Rose's historical analysis of Day Care and Nursery Schools, for example, is an excellent preview for her own upcoming book. Here she explains the class-based distinctions in the 1920s and 30s that influence perceptions of the "bad" mother, the working mother who is forced to "neglect" her child and the affluent mother who "smothers" her child with attention.

While many of the articles approach the politics of blame in important but predictable ways, citing the tension between "experts" with power and voiceless mothers, Annalee Newitz confronts women who speak out, act out and even resort to murder to upset motherhood as a defining category. She uses recent examples of filicide to "begin thinking about the kind of woman who does not need violent crime in order to choose childlessness, and who does not think of childlessness as a violent crime." Newitz's piece works well beside articles like Umansky's on the Karen Carter breastfeeding case, and Annette R. Appell's on contemporary child welfare which also feature mothers "out of control" on some level.

None of the authors "mean to downplay real violations of parental duty," as the editors put it, but all work to illustrate how a system of power and control over the domain of motherhood can prevent some healthy choices and enable destructive alternatives. Exploring how and why we evaluate women as mothers in this century, can help to unpack the ever-contentious debate around the American family and the role of women in the next—some old issues for a new century.

When Mothers Work: Loving Our Children Without Sacrificing Ourselves

Joan K. Peters
Addison-Wesley, 1997

Reviewed by Denise Bauer

This book's subtitle is what attracted me; its promise was fulfilled. Joan Peters, a doctoral candidate, journalist, novelist and college teacher of writing and literature, persuasively and for me, reassuringly argues that working mothers *should* work. Working and having an identity and life independent of familial responsibilities, she claims, creates "freer mothers, stronger marriages (and) happier children (131)."

In a penetrating cultural analysis, Peters reveals the ways that motherhood is romanticized and mythologized in contemporary society and outlines the psychological and social effects these often institutionalized myths have on women and their families. For example, she points out that one of the central reasons for the divorce rate reaching 50% is the “tendency for partners to backslide into traditional roles” after having children (131). Fathers must take on more responsibility for childcare, although she admits that often when couples can afford help, mothers wind up coparenting with their daycare providers and nannies instead of their husbands. Peters claims that in order to effect serious social and political change, mothers must insist that fathers share equal responsibility for raising children. She provides portraits of real life families that demonstrate what some of these cultural problems and ideals look like and how traditional families can successfully be restructured.

At the heart of the conflict between working and mothering is a powerful “sacrificial mother” ideal which Peters describes as an outdated social artifact that needs to be radically revised. The cultural value of the “sacrificial mother ideal” creates conflicts for today’s working mothers who have been raised to participate fully in public life and contribute economically to the family. Peter writes, “the nuclear family, in which mother is the linchpin of family life...rarely works anymore” (137). Instead she argues for equitable parenting, “extending family” so that parents are not isolated and alone caring for their children and that mothers replace traditional motherhood with “self-nourishing motherhood” as a way of caring most completely for themselves and their families.

In her final chapter, “Mothering, Growth of Self and Soul: A Philosophical Conclusion” Peters offers further inspiring reasons why mothers should work and not exclusively care for their children. While acknowledging that most middle class women are loath to leave their children in someone else’s care, she argues that the overwhelmingly positive results show that working mothers live more balanced lives and “more fully experience how much children enrich life” (204). “It may even be that the psychological and social wealth of a woman’s life contributes rather than detracts from the jubilation of mothering” (Peters 208).

While these truisms might be applicable to educated middle class women who have had the opportunity to find satisfying, not to mention adequately paying work, it remains less true for working class, less educated and single parent mothers. For example when Peters writes, “The most fundamental maternal tenderness often exists in inverse proportion to the amount of motherwork a mother must do” (209) she provides a good argument for why childcare should not be the province of one person, but does not acknowledge the fact that for many women this is not an option. Many poor and working class women cannot afford to pay for child care, many mothers are distanced from family and/or are isolated in inhospitable neighborhoods and communities. Similarly, the availability and quality of childcare is a huge variable that colors these solutions and complicates the attainment of these ideals. While

Peters addresses many of these caveats, the overall focus of the book is on middle class mothers. Ultimately, as Peters consistently point out, the final solution to the problems facing all mothers today is radical social and political change in the workplace and in business and government responsibility towards families.

Mothering and Ambivalence

Wendy Hollway and Brid Featherstone, Eds.
London: Routledge, 1997.

Reviewed by Astrid Henry

Motherhood, it is often noted, poses a problem for feminists. From the repudiation of motherhood found in early second wave texts such as Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, to the celebration of it that followed only shortly thereafter in books like Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, feminists have struggled with how to theorize the experience of mothering. As these earlier works suggest, feminism has not escaped the tendency toward either denigrating or idealizing motherhood that characterizes so much of popular discourse about mothers. *Mothering and Ambivalence*, edited by Wendy Hollway and Brid Featherstone, forcefully argues that both the impulse to denigrate mothers and the desire to idealize them spring from the same source: an inability to recognize ambivalence, whether the mother's ambivalence about her child, the child's ambivalence about her mother, or society's ambivalence about motherhood generally. As Featherstone writes in her introduction to this anthology, "Mothering is not all joy, but it is not all sorrow either. Let us hold on to both; let us not deny the ambivalence, either in practice or in theory" (1997: 12).

The eleven new essays which make up this volume address a wide range of issues pertaining to mothering, including: mother-daughter relations; the role of fathers; the ways in which race, class, and nationality reflect the experience of mothering; single parenting; mothers who are violent and abusive; and the psychodynamics of divorce. Written primarily by therapists and social workers about their clinical experience, these writers persuasively argue that psychoanalysis—and by that they mean primarily object-relations theory—is the one theory that can help us get beyond the cultural and psychological impasses blocking a more complete and complex understanding of motherhood. One of the most interesting aspects of this book, in fact, is its insistence that we must, as feminists, reclaim psychoanalysis in order to transcend the polarization that typifies so much of the debate about mothering.

The theorist whose work is perhaps most central to this volume is the American psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin, whose writing on maternal subjec-