

within an English literary context.

I was most stunned and awed by the epigraphs which are interspersed between chapters. Here Dever shows her meticulous research into the actual causes of maternal death or madness in Victorian England, and her poignant epigraphs, taken from contemporary medical records, manuals, and journals, show just how far removed the picture of the fictional idealized dead mother was from that of the real dying or diseased mother. But these corpses remind us, as Dever's study suggests, that the Victorian novels are really not "concerned with the woman behind the mother they mourn" (35).

### **A Tradition That Has No Name: Nurturing the Development of People, Families and Communities.**

Mary Field Belenky, Lynne A. Bond and Jacqueline Weinstock.  
New York: Basic Books, 1997.

#### **Reviewed by Anna Mae Duane**

As the title suggests, *A Tradition that Has No Name* deals with a maternal mode of experience largely unarticulated in established scholarly discourses. The authors argue that nurturing feminist leadership has been practiced for centuries, but the tradition's alternative methods and largely invisible clientele have kept it from getting the recognition it deserves. Through the description of their own work and that of various feminist organizations, the authors hope to elucidate this nameless tradition, and expand its capacity to empower the lives of marginalized and silenced people. Building on the insights gained from Mary Belenky's 1986 *Women's Ways of Knowing* in conjunction with the epistemological theories of Carol Gilligan, Paulo Freire, and Theodor Adorno, the authors delineate a comprehensive leadership model for families, communities and organizations. This alternative model privileges inclusion, discussion and empathy rather than the hierarchy, argument and competition that pervade mainstream thought.

The book's first section describes the Listening Partners project, a public service program the authors created to bring impoverished and undereducated women "into voice" through verbal and written dialogue. The authors describe individual cases (such as a rape victim who moves beyond shame and silence to finally confront her rapist) and—in so doing provide an overview of the project itself to present a pedagogical model with striking interdisciplinary potential. The study represents a particularly significant contribution to the fields of social

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work and/or public policy, but the project also offers a worthy model for educators. For instance, writing instructors will likely be struck by the centrality of narrative and revision to the project's mission. Perhaps most important, the authors link the evolution of the way one thinks to a parallel progression in the way one relates. For instance, the study suggests that a mother "who perceives herself as a capable collaborator in the construction of knowledge will be more likely to engage her child in the active and collaborative creation of ideas" (Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, 1997: 151).

In the second section of the book, Mary Belenky provides a succession of laudatory portraits culled from interviews with leaders of various feminist organizations. Unfortunately, Belenky here abandons the rigorous attention to detail that makes the first half of this book an important interdisciplinary resource. Although intended to elucidate a previously unarticulated tradition, the language used to describe the nurturing model in practice often slips into distressing generalizations.

In short, *A Tradition That Has No Name* is an important book that often works at cross-purposes with itself. The success of the Listening Partners project argues strongly that a nurturing, maternal pedagogy deserves inclusion in standard public policy. But instead of claiming the territory this model deserves, Mary Belenky's overly simplistic treatment of the philosophy itself provides scarce opportunities for practical application, and does little to bring this silenced tradition into the professional conversation. The book is at its best when it specifically addresses the struggles of marginalized women to claim the power of their own minds, but the rose-colored glasses the authors use to examine the tradition of female leadership often renders the pertinent details blurred and unreadable.