

Book Reviews

Feminist Mothering

Andrea O'Reilly, ed.

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008.

Reviewed by Kristen Abatsis McHenry

Feminist Mothering sets out to critically analyze and build on the existing scholarship of motherhood. Specifically, this book offers a theoretical investigation into the conceptual interconnections of mothering and feminism. It seeks to articulate what feminist mothering means, how it is sometimes practiced, and the barriers facing feminist mothers. The articles gathered here centre on themes of motherhood, family, childrearing, and activism. The authors represent a wide range of mothers, including lesbian mothers, older mothers, professional and non-professional mothers, activist mothers, Hispanic mothers, and African American mothers.

Editor Andrea O'Reilly builds on Adrienne Rich's foundational work in the field of mothering to draw important distinctions between patriarchal motherhood and empowered mothering. O'Reilly argues that empowered mothering focuses on women's experiences of mothering as opposed to the institution of motherhood. Feminist mothering is much more than raising children in a gender-sensitive manner. It also means mentoring and providing an image of the strength and power of women, while challenging patriarchal motherhood.

Much of the literature on motherhood focuses on personal narratives and individual experiences of motherhood. In contrast, this volume discusses the important but understudied subject of feminist mothering. It provides critical analysis of concepts informing motherhood, such as feminism (including third wave feminism), the multiplicity of oppression, and intersections of identity. At its core, this book is also a feminist undertaking precisely because it uses

feminist theoretical concepts to push the dialogue of mothering. Moreover, the articles included here model feminist methodologies and research design, including interviewing techniques and qualitative data analysis.

Feminist Mothering is an informative book. It will appeal to a wide readership of academics, feminists, motherhood scholars, and new mothers alike.

Pushing for Midwives: Homebirth Mothers and the Reproductive Rights Movement

Christa Craven.

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Michelle Walks

Focused on midwifery supporters, *Pushing for Midwives* offers a historical and cultural perspective on the struggle for legal access to direct-entry midwives (DEM) in the state of Virginia. Author Christa Craven approaches her study as an anthropological researcher *and* supporter of midwifery and homebirth. Throughout her book, Craven asserts that race and class have a significant impact on the public understanding and private experience of reproductive rights in the United States. She masterfully deploys contextual analysis, incisive critique, and accessible language to engage readers who might be more interested in the status of or struggle for midwifery elsewhere, grassroots organizing, and/or mothering studies.

Craven situates her research within feminist ethnography, “consumer rights,” neoliberalism, and interdisciplinary activist scholarship. She begins her book with a brief history of the status of midwifery and the involvement of homebirth mothers in the legalization of DEM in Virginia. The remainder of the book outlines the historical struggle to legalize DEMs in Virginia and the opposing perceptions of the visible and vocal midwifery supporters—mostly homebirth mothers themselves—whom Craven studied. Her historical overview—which may seem to overshadow her participant-observation research—traces the reproductive rights movement in the United States. The latter chapters, however, are undoubtedly the “guts” of the book.

These latter chapters show how “practices and values [that] constitute respectable motherhood can shift over time” (6). Craven highlights how the