

## Through the Maze of Motherhood: Empowered Mothers Speak

Erika Horwitz.

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### Reviewed by Kathleen M. Pape

Too many mothers in the early twenty-first Western world are plagued by the mythical notion of the perfect mother. Myths of this type arise within a philosophy of totalization and universalism in which diversity is suspect. Totalizing assertions such as “all mothers should...” or “any mother would...” limit the ways in which mothers can effectively mother. These prescriptions also ignore the ways individual children need to be mothered, and dismiss the relationships and unique arrangements that mothers and their children create that benefit themselves and their communities.

In *Through the Maze of Motherhood: Empowered Mothers Speak*, Erika Horwitz describes the complex experience of resisting the dominant discourse of motherhood in the Western world. From her interviews with fifteen mothers, Horwitz presents ways to “redefine our roles as well as our perceptions of what a mother is” (63). In describing and considering the experiences of her interviewees, Horwitz eschews critical judgment. Instead, she acknowledges that the act of resistance is influenced and constrained by one’s socio-historical context. This allows the reader to see the subtlety and courage present in acts of resistance, and the way these acts may lead to new discoveries.

Although encouraged by Horwitz to read with an open mind, I often found it difficult to do so. Horwitz’s interviewees challenge dominant mothering practices. In describing resistance, Horwitz touches upon many of the

entrenched beliefs around mothering within the Western world—including beliefs I embrace even though they may be incorrect. I suspect other readers may feel similar discomfort at times. The anxiety to “get it right” tends to make us tighten our grip on old, known beliefs even as it drives new discoveries.

For Horwitz, resistance is a hopeful act that can effect change. While culture influences mothering practices, mothers also influence the cultural construction of mothering. Horwitz is correct that her interviewees are not passive, but neither are they fully empowered. They must find ways of supporting what they determine to be the general good in mothering and resist external attempts to undermine their practice. The path of mothering is a continual dialogue that can foster historical understanding of who we are as mothers, how we fit into the present, and how we may best prepare for the future.

Respectful dialogue acknowledges a wide range of mothering practices and Horwitz’s book is an essential part of that dialogue. *Through the Maze of Motherhood* will be of interest to readers across the disciplines of psychology, maternal studies, women’s studies, and perinatal healthcare.