

positions herself as a researcher *and a mother* who cares deeply about her subjects', as well as her own, emotional experience of parenting. She crosses the divide between those who do and those who don't homeschool. Figuring that crossing in her work offers opportunities for collaboration and perhaps, with careful listening and conversation, even the possibility of collective resistance to those troubling dominant narratives of good mothering.

Mothering and Literacies

Amanda B. Richey and Linda Shuford Evans, eds.
Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2013.

REVIEWED BY TATJANA TAKŠEVA

In the current North-American socio-cultural context, where recent reports reveal that a staggering 42 percent of Canadian adults between the ages of 16 and 65 have low literacy skills, and a similar percentage of Americans are at either basic or below basic levels of proficiency with text, a book about mothering and literacies is a welcome publication. As difficult as it is to measure literacy, and as contested the definition of literacy may be, these statistics reveal that something is profoundly amiss in the North American public school system, as well as in the culturally dominant discourses about literacy. Although neither the editors nor the contributing authors situate their discussions within the context of these recent statistical findings and their implications, the book contributes to a body of existing scholarship that problematizes easy definitions of literacy and the role of parents, mothers specifically, as main transmitters of literacy skills and attitudes toward reading.

The editors posit an understanding of literacy that is "multiple, local and contextual" and situate their approach in the context of "larger contested stories of institutional and sociocultural relationships of power, privilege and meaning making." The book contains sixteen chapters divided into five sections: "Literacies of Pregnancy, Birthing and Adoption," "Literacies and Schooling," "Mothering and Visual Literacies," "Mothering and Literacies in Cross-Cultural Contexts" and "Public Discourses of Literacy and Motherhood." The section on mothering and literacy in cross-cultural contexts is overall the strongest in the quality of essays it contains and offers the most in terms of new ways of thinking about mothers and literacy in global contexts.

Seven essays from the collection as a whole deserve special mention as providing new insights into the relationship of mothering and literacy. Stacey Crooks' chapter on the construction of maternal subjectivity in family literacy

programs in Canada engages with the iconic literacy mantra addressed to mothers in particular, “you are your child’s first teacher.” She explores how this “first teacher” narrative works to create the disconnect “between the understanding of family literacy programs as empowering spaces for families and mothers and the role that family literacy programs serve in regulating mothers and prescribing a narrow set of idealized behaviors” (103).

Jessica Smartt Gullion and Ariel Cooksey show that the practice of documenting family life through art journaling and combining visual and written elements, an activity that many mothers engage in, provides for mothers a way to synthesize important events and emotions in ways that deviate from the usual written diary entries. The authors make a case that these journals offer non-traditional ways for “reading motherhood” as well as a means of dissemination of knowledge through symbols that can improve communication skills.

Using a feminist poststructural lens, Blair Willson Toso’s chapter analyses Latina immigrant women’s use of hegemonic mothering and literacy discourses in family literacy programs in the U.S. It demonstrates that mothering and literacy discourses simultaneously constrain and offer new opportunities for recognition and development to this group of mothers. Toso shows that discourses embedded in educational programs both support and undermine the mother’s new and old identities, choices and community participation.

In counterpoint to Toso’s study, Cinthya M. Saavedra and Cara L. Preuss illuminate the ways in which Mexican *mujeres* are “disciplined, domesticated as well as erased through dominant ideas of literacy development and literacy research” (182). Their theoretical aim is to seek the (un)learning and de/colonizing of literacy research as tied to larger political and social contexts. The context of marginalization is also relevant to Masako Kato’s discussion. She asks what mother tongue literacy means to Japanese immigrant mothers, how they understand their literacy skills and their capacity to transmit it to their children in a foreign country where their native tongue and even their existence is constantly marginalized, and their Japanese language skills are rendered irrelevant. Her findings indicate that Japanese mothers in the U.S. find ways to contest both the dominant ideology of language and gender and the traditional ideal of the Japanese mother as gentle and obedient, thus “asserting validity and vitality in the bilingual situation” (212).

Elizabeth Howells’ and Teresa Winterhalter’s chapters both reveal the extent to which traditional discourses of motherhood are still firmly embedded in contemporary society. Howell shows that narratives of domesticity permeate the virtual space of motherhood, “mommyblogs,” and that far from being spaces that can redefine motherhood by contesting the myth of a naturalized idealized version of mothers, mommyblogs reinscribe tra-

ditional assumptions about motherhood and conventional codes of mother 'surveillance.' The significance of Winterhalter's argument extends beyond the scope of literacy. She makes the insightful claim that "the linguistic economy" that surrounds women in general today constitutes a "cultural literacy of motherhood, arising out of a habitual way of understanding women and filtering the broad field" of their "perceptions and attitudes about their legitimacy." She advances the thesis that "women, both as mothers and non-mothers are read through a relationship to concepts of motherhood, a relationship that polices their points of entrance into the public sphere, where the pervasive discursive constructions of western society cast "good" women and motherhood as synonymous" (254).

Some of the chapters gesture toward a critique of what is defined as "skills-based, production-oriented demands of standardized teaching" (Bryant 86), and testing, but no systematic analysis of the operative dynamic behind this philosophy, and its implications for the successes or failures glimpsed through national literacy rates is ever offered. The collection indeed shows that literacy is "multiple, local and contextual," and its value lies in opening up spaces for continued scholarly dialogue that would seek to address these and similar issues as they pertain to women and mothers.

Bottled Up: How the Way We Feed Babies Has Come to Define Motherhood and Why It Shouldn't

Suzanne Barston.

Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012.

REVIEWED BY DIANA L. GUSTAFSON

Suzanne Barston's expressed purpose is to challenge the "one-size-fits-all strategy" for infant feeding (7). She poses the question, "Is breastfeeding really so superior that it justifies the guilt trip we heap on all these women, essentially scaring them into nursing?" (6) She argues that choosing not to breastfeed or being unable to breastfeed is considered a maternal failure because the breast-is-best or breast-is-normal mantras are used as the "yardstick by which parenting prowess is measured" (3). Her goal is to inform the conversation so that women's health and well-being and their confidence as mothers are not undermined by their infant feeding practices.

I admit that as a breastfeeding proponent, I was skeptical about the author's agenda. Barston addresses that concern early in the book stating that she is