

21st Century Motherhood: Experience, Identity, Policy, Agency

Edited by Andrea O'Reilly
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Andrea O'Reilly's contribution to motherhood studies cannot be overstated: as the founder and director of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement, and the founder and editor in chief of the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, she has provided much needed public forums for interdisciplinary work on motherhood and mothering.

A collection of twenty-three essays on a range of topics that define emerging issues in motherhood studies, the book brings together an impressive array of perspectives that reflect interdisciplinary as well as intercultural breadth. What holds the collection together and provides a coherent theoretical and practical framework are O'Reilly's "Introduction" and concluding chapter, "Outlaw(ing) Motherhood: A Theory and Politic of Maternal Empowerment for the Twenty-first Century." In the introduction O'Reilly proposes four distinct categories for motherhood studies—experience, identity, policy and agency—each bringing into clear theoretical focus an important aspect of motherhood as it is taking shape at the turn of the new millennium. While experience and identity refer to the actual work that mothers do; diversity in maternal practice; and the women's subjective sense of self in relation to mothering, agency and policy refer to the more public aspects of maternal work, encompassing the emancipatory potential of 21st century motherhood but also the continued power of institutions to shape motherhood.

The division of the essays themselves into four sections reflects this larger theoretical framework. While all the essays bring to light important aspects relating to twenty-first century motherhood, I would like to highlight a few that stand out either in the freshness of their approach, their scholarly rigor, or in their thoughtful treatment of understudied areas. For example, in the opening section on experience, Jessica Vasquez's examination of Chicana motherhood and Gail Murphy-Geiss' essay on Muslim motherhood provide a significant contribution to a collection that seeks to define the direction of motherhood studies for a new century that like the last one, remains marked by racial and ethnic tensions. The authors foreground two maternal practices whose difference in North American contexts is marked by ethnicity and religion, as well as the mothers' unique cultural, racial, and social negotiations that must be performed daily in their efforts to mother effectively in settings

that are often inimical to their and their children's ethnic and religious identity.

Deidre M. Condit's "Androgenesis and Mothering Human Identity," in the section on identity, stands out as a thought-provoking but logical extension of radical feminist arguments that see the problem of inequality between men and women as originating in the female reproductive capacity. Engaging a materialist reading of her sources, Condit turns this argument on its head by suggesting that the problem resides in the fact that men do not and never can reproduce within their own bodies. Not being able to reproduce in this way, Condit argues, may be responsible for the creation of "patriarchal consciousness," a consciousness that is distanced from others, abstract and disaffected (187). This argument redefines gender essentialism and its relationship to patriarchy by indirectly pointing to the kind of mainstream discourse that needs yet to be developed to address and potentially overthrow wide-reaching forms of patriarchal oppression of women, one of which is the persistent relegation of the maternal to the private sphere.

The sections on policy and agency contain particularly illuminating work that showcases the intricate ways in which broader social contexts and institutions influence the discourse of motherhood, which in turn has direct bearing on women's lives and their subjective experience of motherwork. For example, in "Mothers of the Global Welfare State: How Neoliberal Globalization Affects Working Mothers in Sweden and Canada," Honor Brabazon analyzes the development of daycare and women's labor market participation in two developed countries in order to introduce new space for a debate surrounding the relationship of welfare state types and global economic policies on the one hand, and the role of mothers in the labor force on the other. The commodification of "breeding" bodies informs Laura Harrison's feminist critique of the implications of racialized surrogacy in "Brown Bodies, White Eggs: The Politics of Cross-Racial Gestational Surrogacy." Harrison demonstrates convincingly that while new reproductive technologies hold some liberatory potential for women, they are increasingly being underwritten by a racist discourse that serves the interests of white American consumers.

All of the essays in the final section, on agency, deserve mention: from Judith Stadtman Tucker's critique of the quasi-feminist rhetoric of maternal choice in "From 'Choice' to Change"; Patrice DiQuinzio's argument for recreating the mothers' movement as a coalition in "The Mothers' Movement"; and Marsha Marotta's empirically-grounded analysis of the process through which the oppressive ideology of the "good mother" is disseminated in political discourse in "Political Labeling of Mothers"; to Camille Wilson Cooper's illuminating unmasking of the evils of colorblind ideologies in "Racially Conscious Mothering in the 'Colorblind' Century," and May Fried-

man's sharp look at new technologies in the context of maternity as both sites of resistance and potential bolsters to patriarchal motherhood in "It Takes a (Virtual) Village." All these essays foreground the political and social dimensions of motherwork. O'Reilly's conclusion "Outlaw(ing) Motherhood" revisits some of her earlier insights regarding the possibility for empowered mothering, and repositions her perspective by putting forward the concept of maternal empowerment as a theoretical framework firmly rooted in the empowerment of mothers themselves. O'Reilly argues that the concept of maternal empowerment more accurately describes an identity and practice of outlaw or "nonpatriarchal maternity," as well as defines the "theory and politics of outlaw motherhood" (368-9). This framework affords the possibility to investigate forms of maternal agency in the context of the mother's own life.

Through the many thoughtful critiques of dominant patriarchal ideologies that surround the institution of motherhood, but also candid explorations of the ways in which the experience of mothering itself continues to be shaped by these ideologies, the collection makes visible the complex connections between motherhood studies and feminism, and makes evident the potential for motherhood studies to enrich contemporary feminist discourses. By exploring the interdependence between the personal experience of mothering and larger political and social realities, the essays in this volume open up much needed space for a serious study of motherhood within a clear feminist context.