

O'REILLY, Andrea, ed.. MOTHER MATTERS; Motherhood as Discourse and Practice. Toronto, Canada: Association for Research on Mothering, 2004, 257 \$19.95 softcover.

As stated on the cover of the book, this is a compilation of essays that had previously been published in *The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*. The book covers a wide range of issues, as can be surmised from the table of contents, with eighteen contributions from different authors. The contributors to this book are from different disciplines and different continents, which adds to the richness of the data (although all the work originates from first world countries). Even though all the chapters offer insight in aspects of motherhood, they do not all have the same academic depth.

Many of the chapters are concerned with, and are written against a hegemonic picture of motherhood - a picture that does not correspond with the lived experiences and emotions of many mothers. The editor, Andréa O'Reilly, starts her introduction to this book by indicating the long history of this division between 'expectations of motherhood and experiences of it' (p 11). She uses Maushart's metaphor of a mask of motherhood that represents the idealised images of motherhood. In my view, this compilation contributes tremendously to 'unmasking' motherhood.

As the subtitle of the book implies, the chapters are divided into two sections: 'Discourse' and 'Practice'. The chapters under the heading 'Discourse' are particularly wary of pictures of motherhood that are easily accepted and reinforced in settings such as the film industry, children's literature, magazines, art and the judiciary. It is shown how uncritical acceptance of stereotypical motherhood pictures is to the detriment of many women. So, for example, a chapter on "The Impossibility of "Natural Parenting" for Modern Mothers' scrutinises muddled messages from different 'experts' on what should apparently be 'natural' when raising children. Petra Biiskens, the author, conveys the inherent paradoxes in such advice given to women. The work of Jillian Uuquame-Watson on *Working Mother* magazine reveals how so-called 'negative' emotions mothers may feel towards mothering or children are either ignored or women are told to "manage these emotions in such a way as not to harm their children. Thus, mothers with a wide range of emotions, different sexual orientations and different habits are not well represented in the media.

Many of the chapters under the heading 'Practice' explore exciting areas of motherhood that are not always included when thinking of motherhood. More familiar themes, such as lesbianism and the demands of work and motherhood are also included, but with fresh insights. An example of such a new approach is the work of Cassie Steele on 'Tapping the Roots of Black Women's History', which provides a particularly nuanced version on how a young woman experiences her family's history and her own homosexuality through key moments in her life. Some of the other interesting topics include Sara Ruddick's drawing of connections between parenting and peace, and there are stimulating explorations of the 'maternal instincts' in all human beings by Mielle Chandelier.

A striking feature of many of these contributions is how they flow from intensely personal experiences of the authors: Joyce Castle undertakes a study of the effect of the feminist stance on her own and two colleagues' sons' gender identity: Pamela Downe explores stepmothering by reflecting on her own experiences: and biological motherhood is viewed from the vantage point of an experienced childbirth educator, Diane Speier, who became an academic in later life. These lived experiences contribute to unique insights, yet they transcend the boundaries of the specific situations and shift to more general significance.

This book can be used fruitfully in advanced studies on mothers, women and gender. It is, nevertheless, for the most part written in accessible language, and anyone with an interest in the topic will find interesting areas worth exploring.

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