Interdisciplinary Research in Motherhood

REFIGURING MOTHERHOOD BEYOND BIOLOGY

Edited by
Valerie Renegar and Kirsti Cole

Refiguring Motherhood Beyond Biology

This book unpacks and interrogates dominant constructions of mothering, making use of interdisciplinary, ideological and theoretical perspectives to investigate how new rhetorics of mothering can expand the realm of maternal care-givers beyond the biological definitions of motherhood.

This diverse collection is at the cutting-edge of rhetoric, feminism, and motherhood studies, and the chapters challenge the confines of biological parenting as heteronormative within the neo-liberal nuclear family. The contributors examine, how despite the diversity of parental relationships, many are excluded by the understanding of mothers biologically tied to their children. The volume seeks to expose the underpinnings of biological primacy and argues that 21st-century families and familial circumstances are ill-served by biological ideology. Topics include Re-Imagining Queer Black Motherhood, Chicana Feminist approaches to reproductive justice, the commercialization and medicalization of infertility, and ableism and motherhood.

This is a unique and fascinating book suitable for students and scholars in gender studies, sexuality studies, communication studies, sociology, and cultural studies.

Valerie Renegar is a Professor of Communication Studies at Southwestern University, and the holder of the Herman Brown Chair. Her research focuses on feminist rhetoric as well as the role of rhetoric in social change. Her work appears in several outlets including *Hypatia*, *Women's Studies in Communication*, *Communication Studies*, *Howard Journal of Communications*, and the *Western Journal of Communication* as well as chapters in a number of edited collections.

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Valerie: For Payton and Declan, who are extraordinary humans, and Jeremy who makes it all, and there is a lot, worth it.

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For all the different people who are engaged in resisting hegemonic maternity, and all those who are helping refigure motherhood, we appreciate you. Courage, friends.

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Introduction: Resisting Rhetorics of Mothering, Intensive Mothering, and Biological Determinism

Valerie Renegar and Kirsti Cole

Introduction

In May 2019, the Rhetoric Society of America held its annual summer institute at the University of Maryland, College Park. One of the workshops, led by Professors Sara Hayden and Jennifer Borda, was Motherhood Rhetorics. The intensive workshop included scholars from Communication, Composition, and Rhetoric who were interested in exploring, challenging, and understanding motherhood rhetoric. We met in a small basement room each day to theorize the directions that motherhood studies might advance in our fields of academic inquiry and struggled with the ways motherhood rhetoric tends to be treated as a niche in the field even though it is increasingly relevant in our current culture. Communication scholars and rhetoricians have worked in the past several decades to understand, explain, and expand how motherhood is rhetorically constructed. A rich space for feminist rhetorical inquiry, motherhood rhetorics construct, resist, judge, challenge, and perpetuate various caregiving relationships. However, rhetorics of motherhood rarely move into spaces of mainstream rhetorical scholarship. Like so many other "women's issues," research concerning motherhood rhetoric tends to be published, discussed, and publicized in places reserved largely for women and feminist discourse, and in some cases, not taken seriously as scholarship at all. The global pandemic has helped illuminate the diversity of child-rearing schemas in the United States and highlighted the disproportionate work that many women must shoulder (Lukpat 2022; Moyer 2022). As a result, the need for a wider understanding of the implications of rhetoric concerning motherhood is more present now than ever before (Lenz 2020).

We seek to investigate the way that new rhetorics of mothering can expand the realm of maternal caregivers beyond the biological definitions of motherhood. This book of chapters is at the cutting edge of rhetoric and feminism and is uniquely relevant to current issues that impact opportunities for women. The authors featured in the volume focus on an area of motherhood studies that is rarely discussed in scholarship: mothering and

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motherhood rhetoric that challenges the idea that mothers are biologically tied to their children. We refigure mothering beyond biology to reveal the myriad of mothering relationships that have become common in the 21st century.

The exigency of this book is obvious. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, countless articles, blog posts, and social media interactions focused on the ways that mothering in the United States has become unsustainable. Of course, mothers of every kind already knew that. In the 21st century, mothering happens against the neoliberal backdrop of intensive mothering. Intensive mothering has become the dominant paradigm for any discussion about mothering, in any context. It is an insidious notion that springs from a combination of neoliberalism, patriarchy, White supremacy, and feminism filtered through post-consumer capitalism. Women should do it all, have it all, and can be solely responsible for raising their biological children. In this book, the authors unpack how intensive mothering shapes parenting and how real, lived parenting pushes back against intensive mothering. The chapters in this book argue that biological definitions both limit the possibilities for mothering and reinscribe the expectations of intensive mothering. It becomes clear, when reading these chapters, that the current dominant paradigm around mothering not only reinforces sexist structures that limit women's ability to thrive in U.S. society but also sustains racist, classist, and heteronormative ideologies that spring from White supremacist capitalism. This problem is uniquely American (Hesse 2022) and made transparent in our pandemic landscape (Grose 2021). The predominance of the neoliberal, White supremacist model of mothering in the United States makes issues of intensive mothering more prevalent here because of no federal support for parents, complex race, class, and gender relationships, and the recent overturn of bodily autonomy by the U.S. Supreme Court. However, it is certainly the case that we see these themes across global and transnational landscapes. We see the ways in which intensive mothering in particular, and motherhood generally, sets up women to fail because the neoliberal model of parenting demands more from women than they can ever possibly provide.

Biological Primacy and Intensive Mothering

As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, the need to think beyond biological primacy is a key component of the continued inquiry into mothering, parenting, and child-rearing. These chapters challenge the confines of biological parenting as heteronormative within the nuclear family structure, as well as the scripts that privilege biological primacy and value mothering and parenting work beyond the social and cultural scripts that crowd out other kinds of parenting. We argue that the rhetorics that reinscribe and reify the importance of biology are a product of a patriarchal

culture that does not and cannot reflect real lived parenting experiences. Instead of framing mothering rhetoric according to these scripts, this book highlights parenting that moves beyond the dictates of motherhood as the ultimate accomplishment for people with a uterus.

"Fulfillment" and "mothering" are terms that circulate around each other regularly in social discourse, but they are diametrically opposed. We know that motherhood is a "slippery rhetorical terrain" that can define maternity as an obstacle in some case and as an advantage to employ in others (Buchanan 2013, xvii). In Buchanan's *Rhetorics of Motherhood*, language is used to shape, resist, and reshape motherhood rhetorics. She builds on a history of scholarship that interrogates the very definition of motherhood. As Hansen (1997) argues, the "slippery and imprecisely overlapping" definitions of mother are "at best made visible rather than explained or resolved by the diversity of recent feminist thought" (3–4). Mothering can be rooted in the gestating body, it can be a metaphor, it can be a social position, a familial role, or a gender-specific, or a gender-constructing experience. It is on this slippery terrain, then, that we seek to unpack and interrogate the ways that mother is shaped, codified, reified, and evolved as a term and identity.

It is important to note in this introduction that when scholarship refers to "mothers," particularly intensive mothers, motherhood is exclusionary. Many women do not have access to the social archetype of mother because of their race, nationality, religion, class, skin color, or gender identity. And of course, it is paramount to acknowledge the lasting resistance to intensive mothering. For example, the African American community has historically taken a collective approach to childrearing. The Black community has never believed that the biological mother is the only figure in a child's life that can truly raise the child well, and has long embraced the concept of "othermothers" (Collins 1987). Lesbian mothers have also connected the institution of motherhood to patriarchy. Both Rich (1976) and Lorde (1984) argued that the rhetorics that reinscribe and reify the importance of biology are a product of a patriarchal culture that does not and cannot reflect real lived parenting experiences or the myriad emerging familial situations. Transgender parents, adoptive parents, and foster parents over the past decades have argued that motherhood and mothering should be/are separated from biology. In some instances, during the pre-Roe v. Wade years of the 1950s and 1960s when the state took babies away from unwed birth mothers and put them up for adoption, mothers argued for institutions to honor the biological connection to mothering and to recognize their rights as birth mothers (see Rockie Solinger's *Beggars and Choosers*). There is a level of complexity that is erased in narratives of intensive mothering that provide an important context through which to understand what motherhood is, what it can be, and what counts as good mothering.

While motherhood is both contextual and contingent, the dominant and paradoxical portrayal of mothers is both authoritative and undermining.

Hays (1998) coined the term "intensive mothering" in her study of the ideologies and expectations surrounding mothers: how the term and identity are constructed, the history of expectations surrounding raising children, and unpacking how mothering is culturally constructed. She writes,

> [T]he contemporary cultural model of socially appropriate mothering takes the form of an ideology of intensive mothering. The ideology of intensive mothering is a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children. (x)

From this definition, multiple studies have evolved that focus on various aspects of her definition: ideology (Gross 1998; Taylor 2011), economy and consumption (Wall 2010; Demo, Borda, & Kroløkke 2015), work (Johnston & Swanson 2003; Varallo 2008; Christopher 2012; Lamar, Forbes, & Capasso 2019; Castro, Brady, & Cook 2020), media and social media (Chae 2015; Bowles Eagle 2019), class (Vincent 2009; Reich 2014; Cappelini et al. 2019), race (Elliott, Powell, & Brenton 2015), sexual orientation and gender identity (Budds et al. 2017; Myers 2020; Forbes, Donovan, & Lamar 2020). In the *Routledge Companion to Motherhood* (Hallstein, O'Reilly, & Giles 2020), there are over 40 discreet mentions of intensive mothering in relation to culture, art, economics, globalization, governance, politics, health, and work. Johnston and Swanson (2003) extend Hays's definition of what counts as good mothering and adapt the term "intensive mothering expectation" to reflect the co-construction of the ideologies of work status and mothering activities. As Hays explains, "The cultural contradiction between home and world has a long history" (3).

In the United States, however, intensive mothering has become the prevailing cultural expectation for mothers. It is a "regime" (Vincent 2009) or a set of culturally coded expectations for what good mothers should do, or aspire to be, with no acknowledgment of how variable access to cultural and economic resources may shape the possibilities of mothering, and mothering well. In other words, our scripts for mothering tend to be decontextualized from the lived experiences of adults who raise children, and those scripts impact our own expectations for parenting, as well as how others interpret the parenting they witness. Ennis' (2014) volume on intensive mothering includes 18 chapters that "zero in on the cultural contradictions of motherhood, namely the issue of self-interested gain versus the unselfish nurturance … and explore how it is related to the economic needs of a patriarchal society" (1). Ennis argues neoliberalism significantly impacts intensive mothering because it entrenches what O'Brien Hallstein "a neo-traditional family configuration," one that places the responsibilities of child-rearing solely on the mother (3). It is in her work that Ennis pronounces the most fundamental aspect of intensive mothering. It is a patriarchal institution (1–2). She summarizes the core beliefs of intensive

mothering as: "children need constant nurturing by their biological mothers, who are solely responsible for their mothering; mothers rely on experts to help them mother their children; and mothers must expend enormous amounts of time and money on their children" (5). She adds that mothers must also employ maternal thinking, that is, mothers must "hold their children and their schedules in their minds at all times" (5). Warner (2006) refers to this as the "perfect madness" of parenting in the United States. This "frenzied perfectionism" is an attempt, perhaps, to control an out-of-control world that, in the context of the United States, provides no support structures for mothers at all (Ennis 2014, 8).

And, in the context of the United States as of June 2022, this out-of-control frenzy is only beginning. When the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the landmark case of Roe v. Wade, the biology of motherhood became as important as bodily autonomy. As many have said, including Kiera Butler:

> The fall of Roe could also be disastrous for IVF: Since the process often produces extra embryos, which for the anti-choice movement still constitute life that should be protected, states may decide to impose restrictions on the practice or outlaw it altogether. But regardless of what happens to IVF, there is the question of the fate of the embryos that are currently being stored, and who will pay for that storage if the creators of the embryos can't (np).

In this book, we have several chapters in which authors explore reproductive technologies that enable alternative approaches to parenting. As at least 26 states in the United States work to take away the right to choose, many other rights (LGBTQIA+ marriage, interracial marriage, personal privacy) and medical technologies (contraceptives, IVF/IUI, embryo creation and storage) are also now under the microscope. If anything, parenting and the already fraught possibilities around raising children have become even more at risk than they already were.

It is impossible to tease out the threads of mothering literature without paying particular attention to the ways that the assumptions of class and ethnicity have become inextricably linked to contemporary understandings of biological motherhood. Arguably, intensive mothering has become synonymous with good mothering (Vissing 2014) in the landscape of U.S. motherhood, but it has also become synonymous with White, middle- to upper class, heterosexual, and, largely, Christian-identified mothering. However, this was not the case with Hays' data set which included 38 women, ten of which identified as not White, and seven of which claimed no religious affiliation (xii). We want to highlight, beyond Hays's original sample, that poor mothers, immigrant mothers, and mothers of color have historically rejected this script, understanding that it was impossible to meet (see VandenbergDaves, *Modern Motherhood*). Within the Black, Latinx, queer, and immigrant mothering communities, mothering has been addressed in

ways that move outside of and productively beyond the practical, historical, ideological, and normative efforts of whiteness. We know that in all the ways that intensive mothering reifies good mothering as White, it also renders invisible the crisis of mothering when not White. For example:

> Black women are three to four times as likely to die from pregnancy-related causes as their white counterparts, according to the CDC—a disproportionate rate that is higher than that of Mexico, where nearly half the population lives in poverty—and as with infants, the high numbers for black women drive the national numbers.
>
> (Villarosa 2018)

The statistics on Black maternal mortality are stark and point to the ways in which dominant discursive constructs erase diversity within the regime of intensive mothering.

In this volume, the authors are engaging in a *refiguring* of motherhood that acknowledges, all in one place, the multiplicity of mothering that exists and has been pointed to across scholarship (Gumbs 2016; Lorde 1984; McClain 2019; Nash 2019; Rich 1976; Spillers 1987; Stack 1975). A figure can be understood as a person and a representative of others. In this way, mothers are complicated figures who are often balancing competing demands. In refiguring motherhood, our authors call the biological characteristics associated with motherhood into question and open up space for different versions of motherhood to emerge. Children born from donor eggs or reproductive technology, adopted children, and children never born because of pregnancy loss all challenge the figures of motherhood and argue for more inclusive thinking. A figure is also a shape or a representation. We are refiguring in this sense of the word as well in that we seek to shift the way that people understand the shape of a mother. A pregnant trans man, a stepmother who has never had children of her own, as well as tias, comadrismas, and othermothers all stretch traditional figures of motherhood. All kinds of mothers are trying to figure out how to manage child care in the climate of school closure, vaccine debates, mask mandates, and overt threats to bodily autonomy. This, too, demands refiguring as we look to one another for support and resist the regime of intensive mothering. The dominant tropes around the figure of the mother in intensive mothering erase anything that is not visibly White, affluent, heterosexual, and Christian. The chapters included here challenge each of these figures in what we understand as an iterative and ongoing process of refiguring motherhood.

Book Overview

Although this book was devised in 2019, each of these chapters was written in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. When this introduction was drafted, the United States had just reached 200,000 deaths, and there

seemed to be no end in sight. As such these ideologies, expectations, and cultural scripts around labor, employment, parenting, and mothering are in need of drastic changes springing from necessity. The impact of COVID-19 on women and mothers is significant (Alon et al. 2020; Burki 2020; Cohen & Hsu 2020; Golodryga 2020; Malik & Morrissey 2020; UN Policy Brief 2020).

The rhetoric of mothering, particularly intensive mothering, would have parents believe that the biological mother is the only figure in a child's life that can truly raise them well. Intensive mothering is implicated in social, cultural, economic, religious, and pseudo-scientific arguments that reinforce the notion of a woman "having it all" by creating her entire identity around motherhood. Having it all is framed as an individual venture, one which dictates that only White, heterosexual, middle- to upper-class women can be "good mothers." We recognize and seek to interrogate the neoliberal intersections of economy, patriarchy, and motherhood. Instead of being fixed in place by the rhetorics of mothering, this book will focus on parenting that challenges the script of the "good mother," and is impacted by diversity largely rendered unseen in dominant discourses of mothering. A vital aspect of this work is to amplify the intersections of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, and class. These chapters interrogate racialized scripts of mothering, LGBTQIA+ parenting, and parenting in poverty—as a refugee, as a survivor, and as a parent who simply does not fit dominant discursive constructs of motherhood. Dynamic work is being done at these intersections, so the goal of our book is to put these often diverse foci in one place to fill out a more complete picture of mothering in the 21st Century. These chapters implore us to do more, to work beyond the limitation of intensive mothering, biological determinism, and the bounds of whiteness.

This book is divided into three parts, each posing a challenge to biological primacy and intensive mothering. Through lived experiences, media and cultural artifacts, and rhetorical analysis, the parts of this book build compelling arguments that unpack and tease out the ways in which neoliberal models of parenting reify the ways we are supposed to mother, and offer alternatives models that are more inclusive and equitable.

Part I: Intersections of Motherhood Figures Beyond Biology

In the first part, the authors explore the lived experience of mothering in ways that challenge, counter, or unpack dominant paradigms of intensive mothering: White, heteronormative, middle- to upper-class, Christian, and American. Each chapter relays theoretically informed personal stories that showcase the vibrant diversity of mothering, and the difficulties inherent in being a diverse mother. These chapters categorically redefine what it means to be a mother and the ways in which mothering is a journey that defies the social constructs that attempt to define it.

Lamiyah Bahrainwala's chapter begins the book. In this chapter, she examines how embodied practices in desi Muslim mothering serve anti-racist ends by enabling divestment from whiteness and allowing additional imaginings of marginalized motherhood. Bahrainwala's work is a powerful engagement in the extant scholarship on White mothering, maternity and surveillance, and anti-Muslim sentiment to explore the understudied area of how Muslim practice is inscribed on Muslim children in White contexts. She looks at embodied practices of mother that dislodge western, White practices that are connected with nationalism and U.S. identity such as a love of bacon and dogs, and analyzes the discursive methods desi Muslim mothers adopt to divest from both allows an imagining of non-White parenting in an anti-Muslim landscape.

Natasha R. Howard's autoethnography explores the journey to motherhood through the lens of a single, heterosexual African-American woman over 40. In Chapter 2, she explores life factors leading to the choice to be a single mother, health concerns, as well as the emotional component of undergoing fertility treatments to get pregnant. While more women are choosing to wait until later in life to get married and have children, the reality of that choice for some women is having to face the desire of parenthood in the midst of not being in a relationship with anyone to have a child with. And yet despite this, there is little attention paid to pursuing parenthood without a partner. Elizabeth Whittington's chapter, "Re-imagining Queer Black Motherhood," follows and extends Howard's work. Whittington explains the process of drawing on personal experience and then applying theoretical lenses to generate new insight into the cultural and communicative practices surrounding Black queer motherhood. She examines theories of Black motherhood, queer motherhood, and Black feminism as lenses to unpack her experience and shares these insights in the form of four narratives of her personal motherhood journey.

In Chapter 4, Sarah Steimel analyzes existing literature on pregnancy loss and discusses her in-depth interview project with 14 women who have experienced pregnancy loss, to explore three intersecting rhetorics of motherhood: motherhood as imagined, motherhood as performative, and motherhood as biological. She questions the taken-for-granted assumptions of each rhetorical theme as they frame who is and is not a mother in popular conception. Pregnancy loss, defined broadly as loss due to stillbirth or miscarriage, happens in approximately 15–20% of recognized pregnancies in the United States. Understanding how women negotiate pregnancy loss brings to the forefront the question of what constitutes a "mother" for women who were once biologically pregnant but did not birth a living child.

In the final chapter of the first part (Chapter 5), Sarah De Los Santos Upton and Leandra H. Hernandez, as two comadres, academic hermanas, and lifelong collaborators, develop and trace the contours of comadrisma, an intersectional Chicana feminist approach to mothering and comunidad

through the lens of reproductive justice. Throughout their sister-scholar research agenda, which blends border studies, health communication, and Chicana feminisms, they trace the reproductive violences and inequities that Mexican/American women and Latinas face in reproductive and relational spheres. Situated within a reproductive justice framework and using Chicana feminisms as an intersectional, identity-based locus, they discuss how comadrisma is a framework that challenges heteronormative, White, colonial nuclear family structures by deconstructing biological primacy as the primary indicator of "true" parenthood and familia.

Part II: Refiguring Media Representations of Motherhood Beyond Biology

The second part of this book moves beyond the lived experiences and public/private boundaries of motherhood and expands rhetorical analyses into media studies. Each chapter in this part explores the rhetorical construction of motherhood across media genres including children's literature, fiction, creative nonfiction, popular parenting magazines, and multiplatform social media influencers. The authors in this part expand the lens of cultural texts and cultures, looking at global discourses of mothering across different media. Embedded in these chapters is a careful awareness of the theories of medical rhetoric and the ways in which dominant ideologies around women's health and medicine impact the availability of motherhood and mothering.

In Chapter 6, Rae Lynn Schwartz-DuPre and Stacey Sowards explore the rhetorical construction of parenthood in a limited number of children's books that attempt to narrate and explain how these non-traditional families come to be. A number of children's books explore different family structures, but this chapter focuses on stories illustrating the egg and sperm donor processes. Schwarttz-DuPre and Sowards critically consider both the continued use of anthropomorphized animal narrators and the abundance of independent publishers (suggesting that publishing houses have little interest in such stories), among other themes. Given the market for and the sale of such books, there is clearly a demand and need for these narratives to help parents explain to their children the conception story that led to their current family structure, both biological and non-biological. How such books construct donor eggs and sperm reproductive options have shaped thousands, if not millions, of children and their parents' understanding of parenthood and family.

Catherine Bourland Ross and Bailey Barlow in Chapter 7 take the theory of the discontinuity of the embodied self in infertility and apply it to Silvia Nanclares's 2017 novel as she details her protagonist's experience with assisted reproductive techniques, in order to illustrate the novel's questioning of the idea that a woman must be a mother. The story both elucidates Spain's system in support of fertility treatments and questions the

privileges of biological motherhood. By commercializing the female body and selling products to fulfill maternal desire, society continues to reinforce gendered norms of motherhood and privilege the maternal body as the most womanly. By medicalizing the infertile body and prioritizing the body over the self, medical rhetoric contributes to the infertile woman's sense of alienation from her body.

Mollie K. Murphy's chapter expands from medical rhetoric into environmental rhetoric. In Chapter 8, she focuses on intensive mothering rhetoric in Steingraber's 2011 book *Raising Elijah: Protecting Our Children in an Age of Environmental Crisis*. Each chapter connects public and private spheres by tying daily activities (e.g., bicycling) to larger political issues (e.g., hydraulic fracturing). *Raising Elijah* posits the environmental crisis as a parenting crisis. Murphy uses rhetorical criticism to examine the tropes that give shape to Steingraber's message and to challenge neoliberal calls to mother intensively in an age of environmental crisis, pushing instead for policy solutions that support both mothers and the environment.

In Chapter 9, Elizabeth L. Spradley interrogates the moral rhetorics of "good" mothering as "biologically or medically-abled" mothering. To do so, she employs a critical narrative approach to analyze popular parenting magazines' print and online articles. In popular rhetorics of motherhood, mothering is characterized as "biologically or medically-abled" inscribed. Parents magazine online articles and linked blogs were analyzed to determine the rhetorical constructions of "good" mothers. These primary texts are used to construct and critique the master narrative of intensive motherhood from an ablest lens. Implications for these characterizations of "good" mothering are explored for differently abled mothers, with a keen analytic eye toward invisibly ill mothers.

In Chapter 10, Jennifer Rome Kruse argues that although *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is written for women, by women, representations of women's mental health—specifically postpartum depression—have been medicalized and sanitized from the 1970s to the present. This is a move that is consistent with broader public health discourses, but in direct contradiction to the goals of the feminist movement. Using feminist rhetorical theory, Kruse draws connections between the difference in narratives of women experiencing postpartum mood disorders and how the language used to discuss the emotions and expectations associated with new motherhood. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* contributes to radically different rhetoric of motherhood as it has evolved from the earliest to the most recent editions.

In the final chapter of this part (Chapter 11), Sarah Kornfield rhetorically analyzes GirlDefined Ministry's multi-platform rhetoric (books, blogs, YouTube.com channel, etc.) as the founders, Clark and Beal, discuss spiritual mothering within the contexts of infertility, celibate childlessness, and biological children. She argues that the vision of spiritual mothering that Clark and Beal articulate through GirlDefined Ministry

depends upon a biological understanding of femininity (i.e., sex = gender) even as it carves out a space for spiritual mothering—thus resisting evangelical fundamentalism's insistence on women's biological procreation. This research intertwines and extends three bodies of scholarship: the rhetorical analysis of evangelical/fundamentalist femininity, the rhetorical analysis of women's self-help genres, and the analysis of mothering. Joining these scholarly conversations, Kornfield demonstrates the contemporary political relevance of spiritual mothering in its different evangelical manifestations.

Part III: Refiguring the Rhetoric of Motherhood Beyond Biology

The final part of this book focuses on the predominant rhetorical strategies used by people engaged in mothering beyond the biological primacy of intensive mothering. The authors in this part look at the ways in which othered bodies rhetorically engage mothering when their very presence counters accepted discourses of motherhood. Drawing on themes explored in the previous two parts, these chapters focus on LGBTQAI+, immigrant, and non-biological mothering in order to analyze the ways in which language is used to shape, resist, and reshape motherhood rhetorics.

Erika Thomas in Chapter 12 examines the rhetorical strategies in stories and representations of pregnant trans men and the ways their bodies, actions, responses, and narratives are shifting or challenging understandings of motherhood/mothering in productive ways. Using an ideographic textual analysis, this chapter examines the ideographs of mother, father, and pregnancy as it materializes through the rhetorical characteristics and discourse developed and shared in the public narratives of pregnant trans men. Thomas traces the recurring and paradoxical descriptions that emerge across three sets of narratives, the story told in Thomas Beatie's various mediated appearances, Trystan Reese's interview in *The Longest Shortest Time* podcast, and the storyline featuring Wyley Simpson and Stephan Gaeth in We's, "Extreme Love," to explore how such discourse can queer the institution or notion of pregnancy and parenting roles.

In Chapter 13, Rachel D. Davidson analyzes pro-caregiving advocacy rhetoric through one representative text, the National Alliance for Caregiving's "Caregiving in the U.S. Report." The report outlines caregiving data and proposes several policy changes to expand shared responsibility of caregiver issues. Davidson argues that advocates advance a dissociative argument that defines caregiving as an individual journey made by biological caregivers in the domestic realm. In doing so, advocates perpetuate a gendered disparity in caregiving that runs parallel to an ideology of intensive mothering.

In Chapter 14, Heidi Hamilton shifts the part focus from public and policy narratives to examine how activists used motherhood appeals. She

analyzes the social media activity surrounding the hashtag #MotherofExiles on Mother's Day 2019. Combining representations of the Statue of Liberty as a mother who protects immigrant mothers, the activists discussed here constructed powerful, domestic, and political motherhood while maintaining the representation of the powerless migrant mother. This chapter argues that the framing of gender that occurs through this rhetoric presents conflicting images, bound up in the intersectionality of race, class, and nationality.

To further the conversation on migrant mothers, Katherine J. Hampsten uses qualitative content analysis to situate media reports about migrant families seeking to enter the United States during the summer of 2018 within the literature about both motherhood and migrant families. Her rhetorical analysis suggests that public discourse frames these mothers within polar extremes. The migrant mothers are either irresponsible, thoughtless, and reckless or as brave and selfless. In Chapter 15, Hampsten demonstrates that migrant mothers are entering a culture that is hostile toward mothers. Current, contradictory frames of "good" and "bad" migrant mothers are difficult for the media and public to reconcile. While media reports of foster mothers may serve to reconcile these contradictions, they present problematic implications. Narrow constructions of motherhood are harmful for all mothers but are acutely harmful to those who are most vulnerable.

In the final chapter of this book (Chapter 16), Valerie Renegar and Kirsti Cole argue that while the wicked stepmother stereotype continues to persist, the current political moment also presents us with a new image of the stepmother in the figure of First Lady Jill Biden. Biden serves as an exemplar of the "ideal stepmother" because she fills the role of a deceased mother, practices intensive mothering, and deliberately obscures her status as a stepmother. Renegar and Cole argue that rather than stepmothers embodying the destruction of the nuclear family, they show us another way to parent. However, even the language used to normalize stepmothering is caught up in and fraught with the same social and ideological contradictions that are so present in the wicked stepmother archetype. This chapter explores an emerging version of stepmothering that attempts to, and perhaps successfully does move past the age-old trope of wickedness. They call this the Ideal Stepmother and see it embodied in the way that First Lady Dr. Jill Biden was introduced to the public at the Democratic National Convention in 2019.

Returning to the impetus for this volume, the book concludes with an afterword from Sara Hayden and Jennifer Borda in which they highlight how *Refiguring Motherhood* contributes new ways of imagining the *who*, *what*, *how*, and *where* of motherhood and mothering that refute the biological determinism, whiteness, and dominant cultural narratives that contribute to our idealism of "the good mother." They discuss how contributors to this book offer *practical* insights into the ways maternal practices and appeals

can be used to elevate and empower people who engage in motherwork beyond biological, White, heteronormative boundaries.

The pandemic has helped shine a light on the ways that intensive mothering is not sustainable, and alternative parenting arrangements are emerging from the shadows. This book encourages conversations about how motherhood rhetoric can better serve families by being more inclusive and aware of differences, but may also help us articulate relevant aspects of the fight for inclusion and rights that we face as of 2022. Parents and children will be better served by emerging models of motherhood that foreground women of all sorts who lead rich, complex, interconnected lives that may include caring for children. Scholars in motherhood studies can use this book to theorize more broadly inclusive notions of mothering that unpack and critique the pervasive regime of intensive mothering. Building off of the work done on the rhetoric of motherhood, these chapters engage existing scholarship in order to move mothering studies into a space that more fully embraces the dynamic differences in parenting experiences.

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Part I

Intersections of Motherhood Figures Beyond Biology

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1 Muslim Mothering and Divesting from Whiteness

Lamiyah Bahrainwala

Disruptive Mothering

Mothering in Western contexts, and particularly in public spaces, is disruptive when performed by non-white parents who are pushing back against white norms. In this chapter, I examine such disruptive parenting—and specifically Muslim parenting, which acts as a foil to intensive mothering that is raced white—and how it can serve anti-racist goals. Explicit anti-Muslim racism, which may vary from assault to being singled out for additional security screening, does checker Western Muslim experience, particularly for Muslim bodies marked as poor, black, non-white, unhoused, immigrant, and/or hijabi. However, public moments of Muslim mothering allow fruitful distinctions to be made between such *explicit* Western anti-Muslim violence and the experience of simply existing in and navigating systems that center white, male, and abled bodies and cultures. Therefore, moments of *disruptive Muslim mothering* can expose normalized acts of white exclusion and damage, and offers an entry point into what *routine* resistance against minoritization can look like.

Minoritization demands that the Other shrinks and be scrubbed of distinctiveness, and Sylvia Chan-Malik describes this as the expected consequence of "Muslims being imagined as non-white, and Islam as anti-white" (2018). Given these premises, disruptive mothering becomes essential to equip Muslim children with strategies to resist *systemic* rather than *interpersonal* racism, and insists on a *plurality* of Western Muslim existence. Abdalla and Chen offer the term *didactic avowals* specifically to refer to Muslim parents' actions to "correct consistent and persistent misalignments between their individual avowals and societal ascriptions," or what the authors call "swimming against the tide" (2021). Based on the interviews they conducted, these scholars note that American Muslims, when faced with such "tides," tend to identify themselves as "Muslim first" whether occupying desi, Arab, North African, and/or migrant identities. However, the scholars (and their interviewees) also noted that these Muslim mothers struggled to cultivate "resilience" in their children, while teaching them that black Muslim experience was fundamentally different from

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non-black Muslim experience in the United States (Abdalla & Chen 2021). Sylvia Chan-Malik offers the term *affective insurgency* to reflect how women of color (and particularly Muslims, and Muslim parents in the United States) negotiate the lived-religious experience and racial-form of Islam, all while highlighting the centrality of black experience in constructions of both Islam and the United States itself. Disruptive mothering thus honors the call to affective insurgency by emphasizing how anti-racist training can be woven into Islamic practice to combat anti-blackness and systemic anti-Muslim sentiment. For these reasons, disruptive mothering seeks to make coalition building imperative, across the fights against anti-black and anti-Muslim racism—not losing sight, of course, of the fact that black individuals make up a fifth of all U.S. Muslims (Mohamed & Diamant 2019).

It is worth considering specific instances of what systemic anti-Muslim sentiment manifests as. It is the absence of halal food on college campuses, or in the rejection of modest-swimwear wearing Muslims by staff at water parks and swimming pools. Indeed, trips to water parks are particularly fraught for Muslim families in the U.S, and my own mother-in-law repeatedly runs into issues where pool staff reject her pool-compliant modest swim attire. However, she refuses to opt out of swimming, thus rejecting the missive to shrink herself while disrupting white contexts that cannot, or do not, imagine Muslim women as athletes (Bahrainwala & O'Connor 2019). Her insistence would engage elements of disruptive Muslim mothering when she would advocate for her young daughter to wear modest swimwear at waterparks. However, I should note that while my desi family undoubtedly have to brace for unpleasantness when accessing pools, we do not experience the anti-blackness reserved for black individuals and black Muslims at pools. Swimming pools have long been a site of anti-black violence in the United States, where black mothers have been forced to protect their children from hostile hotel managers and white bystanders (Ebrahimji 2020). The brutalization of black children in the McKinney Incident in Texas (Chiquillo 2019) is one of many repugnant examples of this racism. Undoubtedly, race—and anti-blackness—mediates constructions of motherhood, both simultaneously denied to black mothers while also used as a cudgel against them (Whittington, this volume), which shows that there are much greater risks for black *Muslim* mothers to advocate for *their* children at the pool.

Therefore, in this chapter, I explore mothering from the relatively privileged position of a desi Muslim in the United States to imagine joint action against anti-Muslim *and* anti-black racism. This effort responds to the imperative for racial rhetorical criticism in communication studies (Flores 2016), and more specifically the imperative for studying anti-Muslim sentiment in rhetorical studies (Yousuf & Calafell 2018). Desi, or South Asian individuals in the United States have long been used as props to bolster anti-blackness through "model minority" discourse, which

implies the existence of an undesirable (i.e., black and Latinx) minority. Because the expensive and lengthy U.S. immigration process is designed to recruit the most educated, skilled, and wealthy migrants, desi immigrants tend to have higher levels of education and financial resources. However, within desi populations in the United States, those who are first-generation and Muslim face significantly more state hostility than their second-generation Hindu and Christian counterparts. Given that Muslim individuals (and particularly Muslim migrants) face more scrutiny from the security state, they also experience greater pressure to align closely with Western norms. Muslim parents in particular may experience greater scrutiny at airports given that state surveillance targets hijabs and loose clothing in addition to liquids such as formula, medication, and pumped breastmilk. As Simone Browne notes, airports are unique sites of security anxiety that heighten the pressure for non-white bodies to conform as closely as possible to avoid state punishment (Browne 2015). Given this pressure to conform as closely to whiteness as possible, it is particularly important to examine disruptive Muslim mothering, which demands *intensive* mothering to reject immersive white norms. Given that intensive mothering is raced white (as well as cis and biological) and serves to protect gender and race supremacies, the intensive mothering performed by Muslim parents offers an anti-racist alternative to dominant understandings of intensive mothering.

With these premises in mind, I reflect on my own experiences of disruptive mothering as a Muslim desi immigrant in white contexts with two goals in mind. This first goal is to consider how this disruptiveness seeks to force open anti-racist pockets within white public spaces. The second goal is to articulate how disruptive Muslim mothering can reveal that anti-Muslim sentiment exists as a *grid of intelligibility* informing "common-sense" (read: white) norms in public spaces. I take up a case study that is likely familiar to Muslim readers: how desi Muslim mothers, following cultural practices of Islamic doctrine, cultivate an aversion to dogs in their children. These cultivations, as I will demonstrate, disrupt white nationalisms. The next section offers some theoretical context about the role of maternal rhetorics in anti-Muslim state anxiety; the nationalist role of dogs in militarist U.S. culture, and Islamic doctrine regarding interactions with dogs.

Security Moms Against Muslims

Communication studies scholarship on white mothering and maternity, surveillance, and anti-Muslim sentiment offer valuable entry points into the understudied area of how Muslim practice is inscribed on Muslim children. First, scholars have pointed to how global motherhood is marked by whiteness. Raka Shome argues that white femininity is the international template for ideal motherhood, discursively constructing white women as

saviors of black and brown babies (2011). Das Gupta and Dasgupta note that white women engaging in transnational surrogacy from India, where the Indian surrogate is isolated and surveilled to an appalling degree, center their own experiences in blogs tracing their journey into idealized white woman/motherhood (2015). Such scholarship illustrates how the specter of the white mother is reproduced, and her needs centered, *even in non-white and global contexts*. This means that dislodging white-centering norms is a deeply disruptive imperative for Muslim mothering.

In her 2016 book *Security Mom*, Juliette Kayyem centers herself and white-passing motherhood in narratives of terror: she describes how the Boston Marathon Bombers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev "lived down the street" from her family; "fit in" in her "eclectic" Boston neighborhood; and attended her children's school (pp. 2–4). The kind of homeland security culture that Kayyem discusses, which encourages civilians to "say something" if they "see something," relies on bystanders making sense of their surroundings through internalized anti-Muslim sentiment that calls on (white) mothers to keep their children "safe" by tipping off law enforcement. Indeed, police departments across the United States seek to recruit women and mothers through Pinterest, a social media platform that has become raced white and gendered female. Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz makes the connection between motherhood and nation clear, arguing that the two are inextricably intertwined into a culture she terms "homeland maternity," where mothers and parents are made "relentlessly responsible for circumstances beyond their control" (2019, p. 3). In this way, she articulates how security and intensive parenting intertwine, and that anti-Muslim sentiment, homeland security, and (white, cisgender) motherhood are interdependent.

Bringing together these premises makes visible the outline of the anti-Muslim grid of intelligibility that informs white maternity culture in the United States. Additionally, the anti-Muslim sentiment that animates homeland security measures bolsters U.S. nationalist discourse and helps justify enormous defense and "counterterrorism" budgets. In the following sections, I establish how dogs emerge in such U.S. nationalist discourse as a surprising but prominent trope, as well as how desi Muslim aversion to dogs poses a particular threat to U.S. nationalist values.

The Role of Dogs in U.S. Nationalism

U.S. nationalist discourse, interestingly enough, repeatedly mentions dogs. Even a cursory critical awareness of U.S. political discourse shows that dogs are imbued with nationalist sentiment in the United States. A key example is of the dog, named Cairo, who assisted in the killing of Osama Bin Laden and gained national status as a "nonpartisan hero" (Hudson 2013), even having a book published about its life. Meanwhile, U.S. presidents have a

long history of adopting a "first dog" when moving into the White House, so much so that the term "FDOTUS" (First Dog of the United States) actually exists in public repertoire. Republican Senator Scott Walker's allergy to dander was actually seen as a liability that impeded his 2016 presidential run (Horowitz 2015), and esteemed outlets such as the *Washington Post* critiqued Donald Trump for *not* having a canine pet when he moved into the White House (Farzan 2019). Ironically, Trump's aversion to dogs and alcohol abstinence actually align him with two key Islamic practices, and it is worth noting that a third of all U.S. Muslims (majority men, majority non-black) voted for Trump as recently as 2020 (Fadel 2020).

Finally, just as Muslim presence triggers security state anxieties, trained dogs play a role in soothing those anxieties. Dogs serve important homeland security functions: their *visible* presence at U.S. airports and borders is meant to signal policing, which Muslims in the United States are already disproportionately subjected to. Dogs have also played a pivotal role in anti-black violence, such as when they were unleashed on Civil Right protestors or used to terrorize black individuals attempting to liberate themselves from enslavement (*Washington Post*). This use of dogs to further anti-blackness continues today, as Donald Trump threatened to unleash "vicious dogs" on Black Lives Matter protestors in Washington D.C. immediately after George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police in May 2020 (Balsamo & Freking 2020).

Such nationalist and militarist investment in dogs trickles down to create routine moments of discomfort for U.S. Muslim parents, and more acutely for *black* Muslim parents, who have to dodge contact with dogs while teaching their children to do so in an environment that regards aversion-to-dogs with hostility. However, it also sets the stage for examining how disruptive Muslim mothering reclaims agency in public spaces against an anti-Muslim backdrop. Before I offer some illustrative stories of such disruptive mothering, I discuss Islamic doctrine concerning dogs and their role in Muslim life.

Islamic Doctrine and Dogs

It is worth establishing some context regarding Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic cultural practice related to interacting with dogs. The Qur'an itself speaks positively of dogs and Muslims are permitted to own dogs as working animals (rather than pets) to guard property or assist in hunting (The Qur'an, 5:4). Many Muslims interpret this to include using dogs to assist individuals with disability. However, some *ahadith* (or recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) suggest that the saliva and tears of feral dogs are impure (El Fadl 2004), and contact with dog saliva can undo a Muslim's state of purity required for prayer, thus necessitating ritual cleansing once again. Therefore, a casual brush with dogs in U.S. public spaces can be high stakes for observant Muslims. Given that feral dogs

roam freely in Muslim-populated nations such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, desi Muslim immigrants who were raised with strict rules against interacting with dogs will pass on similar restrictions to their children in the United States. In these situations, as with all religious practice, Muslim responses to dogs become culturally specific rather than uniformly informed by scripture, with some pockets of Muslim desis (and even non-Muslim desis) becoming averse to or fearful of dogs. Consequently, flouting leashing laws can trigger particularly fearful reactions from desi Muslims in U.S. public spaces.

For non-Muslim readers, it is important to note that some Muslims in the United States do own dogs as pets. As with any minoritized group, Muslims are not monolithic and individual Muslims value different Islamic practices differently. Additionally, owning dogs can signal assimilation to whiteness, which offers some security in a hostile anti-Muslim landscape. I will also note that Islam and the *ahadith* lay out extensive rules against cruelty to animals and emphasize the protection of animals, including forbidding hunting for sport, caging birds, hurting animals, or consuming animals that have been killed in painful ways (Rahman 2017). The Prophet Muhammad exhorted followers to treat animals with compassion, emphasizing that they should never be struck or branded on their faces, and noted that treating an animal with kindness was akin to treating a human with kindness (Rahman 2017). Western historian W. Montgomery Watt also notes a remarkable story of the Prophet posting guards to watch over a dog and her newborn litter to ensure their safety (1961). I offer this context for the same reason that Muslims choose to publicly "condemn" acts of terrorism"—to respond to Western assumptions that Islam is inherently violent (at worst) or "unAmerican" (at best).

This culturally embedded aversion to dogs, particularly in U.S. Muslim desi households, manifests as intense bursts of disciplining by Muslim parents with repeated admonitions to circumvent dogs in public spaces. As a result, an intensely threatening situation for many desi Muslims would be being around unleashed, untrained dogs—and owners leaving their animals unleashed in children's play spaces is a quotidian danger in the United States. Given the nationalist role of dogs in the United States, this makes Muslim parenting in these instances particularly conspicuous and disruptive. In the next section, I examine three instances that reflect the evolution of my own disruptive Muslim parenting which charts a shift from seeking to protect or reclaim access to public spaces when encountering dogs.

Brown Children and Unleashed Dogs

This section offers three illustrative incidents of my own disruptive Muslim mothering against this backdrop that valorizes dogs while privileging white ownership over brown individuals' safety. The first incident occurred when

my spouse and I were on a morning hike with our children the morning of Eid-al-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of a month of fasting for Ramadan. There were clear signs throughout the trail indicating that dogs must be leashed. As we walked by a dried-up waterfall, a large dog charged at us, leapt on my daughter and me, ran off, ran back and repeated the cycle twice. Both my children, then five and three, were screaming. I turned and shouted at the white owners who stood, unflustered, about 20 feet away and made no move or attempt to pull the dog away, assuming that we would not only ignore that they were breaking the law but also be delighted by their dog's attention. My shouts of "what the hell" and angry gestures brought frowns and shrugs from them, and eventually the dog left after the 10-second attack. My vocal response was the resistive measure I was able to summon in that moment; elsewhere, I describe how such screaming serves to disrupt casual white violence, particularly in the context of protecting one's children (Bahrainwala 2019). However, this incident marked the beginning of my conscious decision to protect my children beyond simply using my screams to interrupt this casual terrorization by dog owners.

The second incident occurred at a neighborhood park, and marked an escalation in my disruptive mothering. As we were leaving a playdate with another family (who were white-passing), an unleashed dog ran across the park and jumped on the children. While our white friends were shocked, they were not scared as my daughter was, and the incident played out precisely like the incident on the hiking trail—with the addition that the dog scratched and bloodied our friend. The dog-owner, a Hispanic-passing woman, walked slowly behind the dog, attempting to get it on a leash. She mentioned that the dog was new to her and an untrained rescue. I screamed at her to hurry and leash the animal, and that she had no business bringing a dangerous animal to a children's playscape. I put my body between the dog and the children. Eventually, the dog ran away and the other mother walked my children and me back to our car and waited until had I placed them in their car seats, an act of protection that I was extraordinarily grateful for. Once my children were safe, I had a brief conversation with my daughter to let her know that the dog was a danger and that it was our right to demand that the owner leash it. I returned to confront the owner and insist, again, that she leash her dog. As I drove home, I talked to my child about the difference between avoiding contact with dogs and making sure others respected our bodily autonomy. We talked about leashing laws and practiced ways to ask people to respect the law. Unlike the previous incident, this marked increased agency where I demanded greater accountability from the perpetrator and provided specific strategies to my child to reclaim autonomy.

The third incident occurred at yet another public park, and illustrates the most agentive form of my parenting thus far in these situations. My children were at a play structure and were soon joined by a white woman, her white son, and a small, unleashed dog. A few minutes later, a 50-pound unleashed dog came flying across the grass to jump on the smaller dog.

A struggle ensued, driving my children away from the play structure. I asked the owner of the larger dog to leash his animal, and he apologized and did so. The woman made no move, so I asked her a second time from a distance. The third time I said "your dog should be leashed" she snapped "well yeah, but you shouldn't be having a party either," referring to COVID-19 social distancing guidelines. This response was bizarre and irrelevant, but I had to pause to refrain from justifying my family's physical presence in the park. Even in the face of white crime and white entitlement, it is extraordinarily difficult to claim autonomy as non-white individuals in public spaces. I use the term white *crime* because it was, in fact, a misdemeanor: my city enforces leash laws with fines, and the Parks and Recreation Department is extremely clear about using six-foot leashes around children in parks with designated play structures. Yet one of the comforts of inhabiting a white-passing body involves a complete lack of fear, and indeed acting with aggression, when normalized criminal behavior is called out. I informed her that I would be reporting her, and began visibly filming her on my phone. At this point, she leashed the dog and remained at the structure with her son. In the video, I can be heard explaining to my daughter what I was recording and why, signaling that she—and not the white perpetrator—was the true audience for my act of resistance.

These incidents mark a progression in my own disruptive mothering: from screaming and using my body as a shield to specifically demanding an action (i.e., leashing), to recording with a camera, a counter-surveillance act with a long history of documenting police brutality (Beutin 2017). Let me be clear: I am not comparing the hideousness of police brutality against black individuals to the non-fatal encounters I describe here. However, I want to emphasize that the significance of such recording is not to document a threat to one's life, but to *reclaim space*. Such reclamation of public environments to make them accessible to Muslim children falls squarely within the parameters of disruptive mothering, and reaffirms the connection between environmental claims and mothering established by other scholars (see Murphy, this volume). By recording normalized white unruliness, I was resisting in order to *occupy* space rather than *protect* myself. This is an important distinction because terrorized BIPOC communities record footage to end an act of brutality, or create evidence that can protect them from future brutalization. In this case, it was neither, and I made the decision to *visibly* record the offender's behavior to model that resistance for my older child.

Another noteworthy point is that I *communicated* my intention to call the authorities—in this case the city Parks Department, since the number was printed on signs around the park. I did not mention the police, but I did tell the woman I would "report" her while holding my phone in my hand. One reason I felt safe doing so was my own proximity to whiteness as a non-black, non-hijabi, proficient English-speaking Muslimah. Ironically, in this situation I was not unlike the non-black individuals in the United States who routinely call the police on black individuals performing everyday

acts like barbecuing, napping, or swimming. In these instances, the police are unleashed—and I use that word intentionally—to commit harm to black individuals whose crime is to exist within white supremacy. Popular discourse dubbed these false and problematic reports "white caller crime," and Annie Hill describes them as "calls to harm" (Hill 2020) which is often only countered by the person of color recording their own footage to protect themselves. And it is no coincidence that one of the most egregious instances of "white caller crime" by the now infamous Amy Cooper involved her calling the police on a black man who asked her to leash her dog, taunting him that she would tell the police he was "a black man" who was "threatening" her (Amy Cooper: Woman Sacked after Calling Police on Black Man 2020). Thus, my own move to make such a call to report normalized white crime is an extreme departure from how non-white Muslims are supposed to behave in public spaces.

Disruptive Mothering and Coalition Building

These instances of disruptive Muslim moethering offer anti-racist lessons. The first is teaching non-white children how to act to *claim*, and not just defend. As I mentioned earlier, recording and reporting the offender was my attempt to (re)claim space rather than simply defend my children. The act of holding up my cell-phone so visibly was just as much for my child to observe as it was for the offender to. A second strategy is teaching non-white children to report *normalized* acts of white unruliness. Such unruliness, which is routinely committed by non-white-passing individuals as well, ossifies into norms that shrink freedoms for minoritized individuals *despite being illegal*. These shrinking freedoms mean Muslim families end up leaving public parks when they are filled with unleashed dogs, or avoiding public spaces where owners routinely leave their animals unleashed.

There are many other incidents that have left scars: a white man following and threatening me down a secluded path after I asked his partner to leash their aggressive dog; a realtor deceiving my in-laws into purchasing a home that housed dogs by having the tenants hide the dogs during the showing; uncomfortable interactions with friends who could not understand why I didn't want their dogs on my property. These incidents did not involve my children, but they illustrate how normalized this discomfort (at best) and terrorism (at worst) is for U.S. desi Muslims when dog owners casually break the law without consequence. And finally, disruptive mothering that progresses from confrontation to recording cell-phone footage serves to protect *and* model resistant behavior to Muslim children.

These moments of mothering are grounded in my own experiences being surveilled as a non-white and (therefore) irresponsible mother in affluent white spaces. Some years ago, an employee at a children's museum called security on me because I was "sitting too far away" from my three-year-old daughter, who was making art 15 feet away from where I sat with my

infant. Such moments illuminate how the security state acts against brown mothers and denigrates brown mothering. This became the impetus for developing my own forms of resistance where the state might be accessed *by* brown and Muslim mothers to protect their children, particularly when those mothers are gendered woman and raced non-black.

Part of studying anti-Muslim sentiment as a *grid of intelligibility* involves understanding harms to Muslims in spaces outside of mosques; in discourse that doesn't mention Muslims; in systems that purport to be "colorblind"—a better term for which, of course, is color-mute (Pollock 2006). Recognizing the violence of unleashed dogs, interrupted by disruptive Muslim mothering, is one way to expose this grid of intelligibility. Understanding how Muslims, and Muslim women in particular, are denied access to bodily autonomy is another way to understand this grid of intelligibility. For instance, anti-Muslim laws in France permit policemen to strip Muslim women off of their niqabs even as the government has mandated face-coverings during COVID-19. Similarly, a refusal to touch and be touched by dogs is also, at its core, an issue of bodily autonomy made visible only by examining the invisible norms put into place to deny Muslim agency, exposed by disruptive mothering.

Such a focus allows fruitful distinctions to be made between overt anti-Muslim violence and the experience of simply navigating landscapes built to exclude, or simply overlook, Muslims. However, public and disruptive interruptions of white norms can build coalitions and movements across minoritized communities, thus responding to calls for coalition building *led by Muslims*. Disruptive Muslim mothering is well-suited to protect the freedoms of many minoritized groups. For instance, advocating for vegetarian options to substitute pork-gelatin-based snacks (like pudding) in schools benefits Jewish, Hindu, Jain, vegetarian, and allergic students. Advocating for a range of swimwear to be accepted at recreation centers can create safer access for queer, trans, non-binary, and disabled individuals. Insisting that dogs be leashed protects developmentally and culturally diverse children at parks, and scrupulously bagging dog feces ensures that individuals in self-propelling wheelchairs do not have to touch excrement. Disruptive Muslim mothering involves asking for things assertively, and publicly, and is successful when it serves the needs of diverse minoritized children.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge my silence on Muslim co-parenting and fathering in this essay. There are two reasons for this absence: first, it falls outside the parameters of this largely personal reflective essay. Second and more importantly, the mechanics of disruptive mothering rely on gender-passing; frankly, screaming at irresponsible white and women dog-owners would be profoundly dangerous for brown and Muslim men. The weaknesses the United States heteropatriarchy associates with feminine genders serve to protect me and other non-black Muslim mothers, who seek to reclaim their rights in public spaces.

Examining disruptive mothering is a useful method for identifying otherwise invisible minoritizations. Such mothering is marked by short, intense bursts of disciplining, and in my own particular efforts, followed by resistive measures. Disruptive Muslim mothering particularly resists pressures from white contexts to shrink, retreat, and self-efface; instead, it calls on conspicuous forms of resistance to reclaim access to public space, which is historically marked white in the United States. Ultimately, such disruptive mothering seeks to model resistive behavior for one's children and bystanders, creating intergenerational repositories of resistive strategies and building coalitions across minoritized communities. It seeks to make Muslim children not just safe *from* anti-Muslim virulence but also safe *to* play in spaces that are theirs.

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2 SBF Seeking Motherhood: An Autoethnographic Journey Toward Pregnancy

Natasha R. Howard

Introduction

According to a report by the Pew Research Center, approximately one in five children in the United States is living with a single mother (Livingston 2018). While some may see that statistic and think of women who became single mothers by circumstance, there is a growing number of those who are referred to as "single mothers by choice." While there is not an exact count of how many of those women chose to be single mothers, the number of women who have chosen to become mothers but done so without a partner is on the rise. In fact there is a national trend of more and more women choosing to wait until later in life to get married and have children and then finding themselves facing the reality of desiring parenthood in the midst of not being in a relationship with anyone to have a child with (Khazan 2018; Livingston 2020). Yet despite this, representation and conversation about the experiences, decisions, and issues that women who choose this path face are not widely seen presented.

There is still a level of taboo in discussing the idea of choosing to become a single mother, and particularly with choosing to do so as a Black woman. More broadly there are the judgments in public opinion that come along with choosing to create any family that is outside of the standard family model. In fact, a 2015 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 66% of those surveyed believed that women having children without a partner was bad for society (Livingston 2018b). Being a Black single mother, however, comes with additional judgment due to the historical precedent of stereotypes and vilification of Black single mothers (Harris-Perry 2011). This is despite, or perhaps in the face of, the fact that it is estimated that 47% of U.S. Black families are led by a single mother (Livingston 2018b).

Between the judgments of being partnerless, facing the question of infertility at an advanced age, considering various approaches to motherhood, and all the vulnerability that comes with this, this topic is often one I've found that many women stay quiet about. I've personally found that this topic is one that I've avoided discussing publicly until now for some of these same reasons. However in doing so, that just adds to the silence about

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a topic that affects so many. In seeking to make sense of some of the phenomenon regarding this topic, I examine the subject of becoming a single Black mother by choice via an autoethnography.

Methodology

The methodology of autoethnography was chosen as a way to explore some of the questions, judgments, and revelations that I—as a single Black woman—and other women I know, have experienced along the journey of trying to become a mother in an effort to make sense of them. As Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2015) point out, "autoethnography offers insight into how a person makes sense of cultural norms, experiences, and practices" (27). By using my own experiences, observations, and conversations with friends, family, and doctors as a point of inquiry, the goal with this project was to explore the perceptions of how becoming a single Black mother by choice contends with cultural norms and assumptions.

Ellis (2004) defines autoethnographies as being a research method that connects "the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (xix). As a qualitative method, autoethnography explores the motivations, experiences, thoughts, and emotions of people in order to present knowledge about the nuance and complexities of specific groups of people (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis 2015). While autoethnographies generally feature components of first-person narratives reflecting the author's thoughts and feelings, their goal goes beyond being just for storytelling purposes. As Chang (2008) notes, "autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self" (48–9). So the ultimate goal is using personal narratives as a point by which to examine more deeply themes and phenomena inherent in society in order to make sense of them. As such, autoethnographic work is particularly valuable for its ability to allow scholars to explore the multiple standpoints inherent in the intersectionality of their identities. This correlates with Weick who posits sense-making as the process of examining one's personal life, via taking their own stories and examining them.

Adding context to this autoethnography is the fact that this also leans on Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality Theory. Black feminists place great value on the importance of Black women sharing their personal narratives, recognizing that the commonalities that can be found within this can lead to a growing consciousness and united effort to address the shared issues that Black women face (The Combahee River Collective 1995, 233). In particular, as Black women face discrimination and deal with experiences as a result of their identity's intersections of race, class and gender (in addition to other factors such as sexuality, education, ability status, etc.) Black women have a unique standpoint (Crenshaw 1989). As such, with my goal being to explore the experiences of trying to become a mother as a

single (never-married), middle-class, Black woman, over the age of 40, exploring the connection to these intersections and how they have played out in my experiences is key.

The data for this study came from journals kept in the 9 month to 1 year leading up to and during my initial fertility treatments. Featured within these journals were reflections on experiences and conversations with doctors, family, and other single Black mothers who have also undergone fertility treatments. Through these reflections specific themes emerged: beliefs about the Single Black Mother trope, the truth about fertility and fertility treatments for Black women, and questioning of routes toward motherhood.

Findings

Beliefs About the Single Black Mother Trope

In terms of being a single Black mother, the question also comes about why someone is single in the first place. There are of course the stereotypes of being a Jezebel and being hypersexual, of being asexual, i.e., like a Mammy. But then there is that of "Black lady" which as Collins (2009) describes is like a modernized version of the Mammy, but is the career-focused, hard-working Black woman, often highly educated woman, whose focus on her career has made her unattractive as a partner to other men. Their accomplishments often have them considered to be too assertive and less feminine, and therefore not desirable. In the end, as Collins (2009) notes, "despite the fact that the middle-class Black lady is the woman deemed best suited to have children, in actuality she remains the least likely to do so … and no one except her is especially disturbed if she does not" (93).

There is this idea that without a man present there must be something inherently problematic with me if I am having a child by myself. It can never be that I'm happy and complete and know this is the best time to have a child, regardless of if there is a man around or not. Before, I was meeting men already trying to figure out if they wanted to have kids. That kind of pressure is no way to start a healthy relationship. And I do hope to have a relationship one day. As one of my friends (also a single mother, via intrauterine insemination [IUI]) and I discuss, doing this does not mean we've given up on love.

In many ways, the Black Lady is symbolic of the many Black women that have put off parenthood due to their careers. Facing this reality of being considered less desirable by many that she may have otherwise partnered with, she instead chooses to create her own family by herself. Despite the fact that there is a growing trend of women choosing to become mothers without a partner due to having put motherhood off (Khazan 2018; Livingston 2020) when Black women decide to do so, it seems to still be turned around as though it is a sign of there being an inherent problem with

them. In some ways, it seems as though there is always going to be something that is found wrong with being a single Black woman. If you choose to not have children you are criticized, and if you choose to have children without a partner you are as well.

Additional assumptions and myths about the reasons Black women end up becoming or choosing to be single mothers harkens back to the precedent, and subsequent treatment, set by the 1965 Moynihan report. This report essentially painted Black mothers as "domineering household managers whose unfeminine insistence on control both emasculated potential male partners and destroyed their children's future opportunities" (Harris-Perry 2011, 95). This poor characterization of Black mothers spread this idea of Black motherhood being equivalent to bad motherhood. The myth of Black single mothers as the face of the "welfare queen" Ronald Reagan promoted during his campaign for and terms of presidency, just added to the stigma already attached to Black single mothers as unfit mothers. Additionally, the stereotype of the welfare queen set the tone for the idea of Black women's fertility being a danger to the country due to their poor parenting ability and drain on the country's resources.

This stigma about Black single mothers and the assumptions of Black mothers overall play a big part in how many Black mothers are still treated and regarded. A study conducted by Mehra et al. (2020) interviewing a group of Black pregnant women aged 21–45 about their experiences with racism while pregnant found that their participants faced a number of generalized assumptions about them due to their race. For example, the participants were generally assumed to be single mothers even if they were not, and that they had multiple children, which was judged negatively. In fact, correlating with the stereotype of Black women as hyper-fertile, the women in the group that were having their first child were assumed to be lying and possibly hiding other children if they said this was their first pregnancy. Additionally, regardless of their actual income, the participants encountered assumptions that they had low incomes and received government assistance. Overall, a common sentiment was that the participants felt as though, based on their experiences, they were not respected or cared for as pregnant women due to their race. In addition to the real adjustments that come along with being a single mother, there is an added stigma and discrimination that Black single mothers face.

The Unspoken Truth About Black Women's Fertility and Fertility Treatments

I grew up reading women's magazines talking about all kinds of things I had no business knowing about as a kid, but nothing about motherhood and pregnancy (with the exception of warnings about teen pregnancy, of course). Even now I can talk to people about the benefits of breastfeeding just from the things I've read. But actually getting pregnant? That's another

subject. And yet I thought getting pregnant was just something you could snap your fingers and take care of. I have to laugh at how I actually thought this would be the easiest option to become a mother.

This fertility journey—I refuse to add the "in" to the beginning of fertility because I am not trying to speak that into existence—is not for the faint of heart. I really wish people would talk about this more. Until I started looking into it I did not realize how common it is for many women, even those younger than me, to have to go through multiple rounds of treatments in the attempts to get pregnant. And I also didn't realize until I started asking my mother questions about it, that this idea of it not always being easy to get pregnant is not a new phenomenon. Yet every time I have an appointment at the fertility doctor's office, I can't help looking around the waiting room and observing the diversity in the room. There are different races present, different ages, and also some women by themselves while others are with their partners. And yet the common thread with all of us is that we are searching for the same thing. The whole thing really makes me reflect on this idea of the "miracle of life." Like one of my nurses said to me once, so many things have to go right just for a pregnancy to take place. If I could do this all over again, I would have looked into freezing my eggs earlier.

There is a historical context to many perceptions of Black women's fertility. During slavery, Black women were looked at as breeders, with their offspring being added to the property count of the slaveholders. In fact in comparing their fertility to animals, Black women [were] described as being able to easily get pregnant. Characterizing them this way, along with the myth of them being hyper-sexual, was a way for slaveholders to justify the need to interfere in their reproductive lives. Unfortunately, the idea from slavery of Black women as being hypersexual and fertile breeders has lingered on and effected how they are looked upon in society today (Harris-Perry 2011, 69). An additional consequence of the "welfare queen" trope being used to describe young, poor, Black mothers has been the idea of ease in which pregnancy is achieved for Black women. That is not to say that Black women have always believed or fallen for this trope. But the idea that getting pregnant is something that is supposed to be easily achieved, seemingly evidenced by the stories and images painted with this trope, has endured.

Despite the fact that studies have found that Black women are twice as likely to face infertility in comparison to Caucasian women, they seek treatment half as often (Wellons et al. 2008). But in recent years that trend seems to have changed, with more Black women now seeking fertility treatment. One factor that has brought the topic more to the forefront in public spaces amongst Black women was what is known as the "Michelle Obama Effect" (Kindelan 2019). This refers to the revelation by former First Lady Michelle Obama, in her 2018 memoir *Becoming* that she underwent in vitro fertilization (IVF) in order to become pregnant with her two daughters. Within a year of that publication, different fertility centers across the country reported an increase

in Black Female patients, with Shady Grove Fertility Clinic—who have offices in Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New York, Virginia, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania – noting that their mid-Atlantic centers saw a 50% increase in the year after the book's publication (Kindelan 2019; Shady Grove Fertility 2019).

I'm grateful that I have two friends, both also Black women, that have undergone IUI and IVF treatments respectively, that I can talk to about this stuff. One is married and the other is not. It just feels comforting to personally know people that know this journey so I feel like I'm not alone and someone else gets it. However, Black women are still less likely to discuss their fertility struggles (Ceballo, Graham, & Hart 2015). This is likely due to the expectation that getting pregnant will be easy and having to navigate the accompanying pain when it is not. This expectation is partly influenced by a lack of communication in society about the various issues that can affect fertility, and also internalized tropes about the fertility of Black women. According to a University of Michigan study focused on Black women and infertility, 32% of those surveyed said they did not feel complete as women because they did not have biological children (Ceballo, Graham, & Hart 2015) This ties into the idea pushed in our society that says that to be a mother a woman must have biological children. Additionally, as noted by Janelle Luk, a medical director and co-founder of Generation Next Fertility in New York, with the stereotype of Black women being more fertile than other women, struggling with fertility issues can also cause feelings of inadequacy and shame among Black women which leads to even more reluctance to discuss fertility treatments (Braff 2019).

Questioning Decisions of Path to Motherhood

Interestingly, it seems like there would be more of an acceptance of adopting or fostering a child instead of actually going through the process of giving birth. With the commonplace practice of taking in family members that so many Black people I know are familiar with, that would not be looked at twice. It would be accepted as and considered no less valid than biological parenting. In my family, I have cousins who have been taken in by other relatives, I have friends that have taken in nieces or nephews. The role of an "auntie" or "Godmother" is so real to Black folks that we don't think twice about it. But it is as if going through the process of giving birth and being pregnant is something that is supposed to be shared and only done alone if you did not have a choice. This idea of agency—it's okay if I become a mother via being selfless and taking in a kid. But it's somehow selfish if I give birth without a partner. I don't get it because regardless I'd be a single mother.

Within the conversation of creating and defining family, taking on a role of motherhood without literally giving birth seems to be more easily

embraced and accepted when you are a single woman. There is still this idea that when you are unpartnered and having a child that instead of creating a family being this empowering positive thing, it is instead "a deviation from the model … seen as second best or underachieving. Adoption is something you do after pregnancy doesn't work out. Being a single-parent only happens when you can't keep or find a partner". And yet none of those myths are accurate because they leave out all the complications and nuances that are a part of most of our realities.

While there may be an argument made that there is a push from society to be a biological mother and become a mother via pregnancy with other methods—such as adoption, foster-parenting, or even surrogacy—are not as valid, I see it differently when it comes to single mothers. For women who are seeking to become single mothers it seems like the desire to become pregnant and experience that without a partner is looked at as out of the norm, while these other options, and even taking on the role as an "othermother" are more accepted. The ultimate destination is motherhood, so the choice of which route to take, seems to be one of preference and choice as it relates to their own financial and physical circumstances. Ultimately, studies have found that the most commonly cited reason given for women to want to become a mother is to be able to raise a child and to give and receive love from said child (Langdridge, Connolly, & Sheeran 2000; vanBalen, Verdurmen, & Ketting 1997a). Whether that be through pregnancy, and the aids of medicine and technology to achieve said pregnancy, or via adoption, which is the popular second choice for many women, the goal is the same (vanBalen, Verdurmen, & Ketting 1997b). I am no different. With the final goal being that of motherhood, going the adoption or fostering route toward motherhood still ring as options because it would provide that goal. For me, pregnancy is the route I am trying first because of my desire to have the experience, not because I think it is more valid or ranked higher.

I considered adoption a few years ago. At the time I was not fully settled and did not feel ready to be any kind of mother. I remember a man I knew at the time dissuading me from it unless I was adopting a baby, referring to how a member of his family adopted a teenager and how the trauma the teen had experienced in their life made it a difficult experience for teh adopted parents. The way I see it, there is not a right or wrong way, or an easy or hard route. There are bound to be unique heartbreaks, setbacks, and an overall journey to motherhood regardless of the way you choose. And yet the dynamics of how that is perceived are so different.

Part of my openness to eventually looking into adoption, and also becoming an "othermother" in the community I am building, is because of the friends I have who have been adopted and the people I know who have adopted. While some studies have found that adoptive family bonds were viewed as not being as strong as those of biological families and that motherhood was viewed as needing a biological bond to be valid, in

some cultures this mindset is not the case. In the Black community, for example, the idea of extended family stepping in to raise a child or be part of the proverbial "village" that helps in the rearing of a child, is quite common (Lempert 1999; Stack 1974; Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2003). Correlating with that is the idea of non-formally "adopting" people as family members—and in turn non-formally adopting children—and referring to them as family regardless of the existence of biological or genetic ties. Stemming from African traditions, Black communities historically have noted that child-rearing is not something that works best, if at all, with just one person doing all of the mothering. The long-established wisdom is that parenting takes more than just 1–2 people. As a result, "othermothers," or women that may be relatives, or even just extended family or friends, have held important roles in child-rearing. Regardless of men being present, the roles of women being present as part of the family unit has been key for child-raising. The role of "othermothers," sometimes referred to as "aunties" or "godmothers" or "play mothers," has always been valued and respected. As Collins (2009) notes, "women-centered family networks and their willingness to take responsibility for Black children illustrates how African-influenced understandings of family have been continually reworked to help African-Americans as a collective cope with and resist oppression" (197).

Similar creations and establishment of family have been found in the LGBTQIA+ community as well. Birdsong (2020) writes about how in the LGBTQIA+ there is a history of creating community and chosen family. In comparing this tradition to the Black community, she notes how for many in that community the building of family has served to be a place of love and acceptance. Altogether, regardless of the circumstance, families are being created and nurtured. The role of "othermothers" is often a crucial part of those families. Biology is not the most important part of being family.

Conclusion

This study set out to make sense of phenomena that correlate with making the choice to pursue motherhood as a single Black woman. The findings of my study revealed that the themes that recurred the most were those of having to confront stereotypes and thoughts about the Single Black Mother trope, having certainty about one's path to motherhood questioned, and confronting the realities of fertility treatments. Being a single mother comes with its own misrepresentations and assumptions even outside of the race factor. But factored in, choosing this role means facing deep-seated stereotypes and the treatment that comes along with it, as this study reflected. In fact, the prevalence of how ingrained some stereotypes are, even amongst those who are members of the stereotyped group was a key finding of this study. Many of the reflections that focused

on questions about my certainty about choosing to become a single mother, were based on discussions where there was a negative connotation attached to being a single Black mother. These discussions often reflected a fear, on my behalf, of being grouped this way or having a life that was deemed to be unnecessarily hard. This therefore resulted in disbelief and attempts to dissuade me from this course of action.

As Birdsong (2020) stated,

> Single mothers – are among the most demonized, shamed, and penalized family structure in America because of the misogynist idea that a woman with a child but without a man is a slut … and those negative are multiplied if she is poor and Black. If heterosexual, white, middle-class families with kids are America's gold standard, then poor, unmarried Black mothers are vilified as its disgrace. (111)

Additionally, it comes with the realizations of the fragility of fertility, particularly with women of specific demographics. Although the topic of Black women and infertility is becoming talked about more in society, the more that is addressed could help keep younger Black women aware of the issues that exist for their own future decision making.

Correlating with the ideals of Black Feminist Thought, sharing the experiences one encounters are crucial to add to the multi-layered narratives crafted about Black women. Additionally, acknowledging the intersections of one's identity should also be considered so as to honor the fact that there is not one set experience of Black motherhood despite some common concerns. For example, as noted in this study, this autoethnography centered on the experiences of a middle-class single Black woman. As such, there were certain privileges present—such as access to insurance coverage of fertility treatment and income to pay for out-of-pocket expenses—that make this perspective different from someone without said privilege. Still, if there are more conversations focused on Black women and their experiences trying to become and being a mother, the taboo and silence around this topic can decrease.

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3 Re-Imagining Queer Black Motherhood

Elizabeth Y. Whittington

Introduction

Recently, as I have tried to start dating again, I have been met with various responses by different women when they find out I have kids. One woman said, "you know it would be easier if your ex was a man." Another woman said, "You are the first woman I have met who has children with another woman." It seems even in the Queer community my mothering is an anomaly or difficult to process because it does not follow the traditional way of conceiving and parenting. I have discovered that at my age, it is still somewhat unique that my children were not conceived from either an ex-husband or ex-boyfriend. In dominant discourse, motherhood traditionally results from a cis-gendered man and a cis-gendered woman having intercourse and the woman conceiving a child. In the last few decades, there has been a rise in same-sex couples or single parents choosing to have a child without having a partner (Roberts 2017). Throughout this chapter, I explore my various journeys to motherhood.

Autoethnography

As a critical autoethnography, it is important to position myself in this piece. I am a Black, Queer, non-heteronormative, cis-gender woman who was raised in an extremely religious household. I grew up like many being told that being a mother consisted of marrying a man and having a child. However, this would not be my story. In the following chapter, I explain the process of drawing on personal experience (through journal and memories) and then applying theoretical lenses to generate new insight into the cultural and communicative practices surrounding Black queer motherhood. When compiling these narratives, I realized Patricia Hill Collins' book that discussed Black motherhood themes and realized many of the themes were presented in my own narratives. I examine these theories of Black motherhood, queer motherhood and Black feminism as lenses to unpack my experience and share these insights in the form of four narratives of my personal motherhood journey. Autoethnography is "a critical

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methodology or approach to doing critical cultural examinations that might shape the mode of investigating experience, but not establish a standard of experience" (Alexander 2012, 141). Eguchi (2015) reinforces "that autoethnography is a powerful and radical method to disrupt normative systems of knowledge production to investigate historically marginalized experiences" (29). They continue "autoethnography is about the way in which the self-implicates the complexities and contradictions of ideological and material environments" (29). "Autoethnography focuses on personal experiences in order to critically and performatively investigate social, cultural, political, and historical concerns" (Eguchi 2020, 111). Although more traditional scholars regard autoethnography as less rigorous, it actually becomes a place of transparency for the scholar and disrupts the reader's ideals on how traditional research is analyzed and discussed (Boylorn 2008; Eguchi 2020). I specifically use Patricia Hill Collins themes of Black motherhood to analyze my own queer Black motherhood experience. I use Hill Collins as she was the first Black feminist scholar to explore Black motherhood in depth. Using this technique, I disrupt how mothering is seen in a largely heteronormative society that does not always understand the lens of queer Black motherhood or unconventional ways of mothering.

Based on my experiences as a queer Black mother, and with the aid of critical reflection informed by theories of Black motherhood, I share four narratives that will help lend insight to the particular challenges of growing up queer amid the assumptions of heteronormativity, the importance and challenges of Black motherhood. These distinct, but interconnected narratives work together to demonstrate how queer Black motherhood is framed and challenged by the dominant discourse. The public discourse of motherhood does not leave space for the mothers who are not biologically mothers, those who become mothers through reproductive assistance without a male partner, or other mothers. Even within the queer community, motherhood is questioned when it is not the result of traditional male and female sexual intercourse. The assumptions of the dominant discourse on motherhood are based on biologically conceiving a child with a male partner and going into labor to deliver the child. When these assumptions are made, queer people both biologically carrying and non-carrying partner are seen as a deviation from the norm and ostracized from the conversations between "real parents." For my ex-wife, she struggled with her role as the twins' mom because people would ask who was she when we would go to any events that were not specifically for queer people. I was once asked by a cis-gender heterosexual male, if I had become pregnant with twins "naturally" after he found out I was married to a woman. He seemed to be asking if I conceived through a process called in vitro fertilization (IVF), in which some couples chose to transfer two embryos and if they both implant, it results in twins. He was referring to people wanting twins and using IVF to make it happen. First, I was taken aback because no matter who the person is, going through fertility treatments is stressful and

financially taxing so for him to be so cavalier about it was offensive. And second, even if I did conceive my twins via IVF it was none of his business because regardless they were twins, but I also realized my own defensiveness in wanting to prove the validity of my twins to this stranger. The whole experience had me question how strangers determine the validity of how I became a mother especially to multiples and the audacity that it must have been result of medical intervention that I had twins even though twins run in my family because we were a queer couple.

The audacity of some non-Queer people in their ability to define what motherhood should look like for people has led me to recognize the need for discourse that outlines the problem that exists for queer people and parenting. "Queer autoethnography is an intellectual and political commitment that destabilizes and denaturalizes the normal and ordinary sustaining the heteronormative logics of present-ness" (Eguchi 2020, 112). In other words, through my narratives I will create conversations that will hopefully allow for non-normative ways of mothering and queerness to "no longer [be] an ideality" (Eguchi 2020, 112). Through this methodological lens, I explore my journey to motherhood both nonbiologically and biologically but neither in the traditional sense. These narratives will highlight the heteronormative responses and interactions with both heterosexual and queer communities. In critical research establishing a historical perspective illustrates how the past can impact the present and future.

Historical Perspective

Black Motherhood

Historically, Black women in the United States as slaves were not seen as the traditional mother. They were forced to mother and nurse slave owners' children. Their own children were raised by the older slave women. They were seen as property and many times separated from their children as soon as they were old enough to work in the fields or the house. Dani McClain, author of *We Live for the We*, stated in an interview about the political power of Black motherhood, "We have centuries of experience trying to build family and support family and support our children in a place that's often inhospitable" (quoted in Jeffries Warfield 2019). From slavery, Black women were not allowed to mother their children in the traditional dominant discourse. There was no such thing as being a stay at home mom, a working mom, or a housewife. They were forced to create new ways of mothering, creating spaces using other slaves to help raise their children. The idea of it takes a village comes from African countries to raising children during slavery (Hill Collins 2000).

From there, during Jim Crow, Black women were forced to work outside of the home as neither their husbands nor they could afford to survive

without both incomes. Many times, Black men were forced to work jobs that barely put food on the table, Black women were regulated to service jobs, cleaning and taking care of White people's homes. The images of Black women as mothers are relegated to the "controlling images of the mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother" (Hill Collins 2000). From the Moynihan Report, "Black mothers were accused of failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminizing their daughters," Black women were often blamed for the destruction of the Black family (Hill Collins 2000, 173). This report was created in the 1960s as a way of blaming Black women for that destruction.

White Feminist in the 1970s and 1980s described traditional motherhood in ways that lacked an examination of race and class. Motherhood was seen as White and middle class (Hill Collins 2000). Black women were not seen as mothers in this traditional realm even though it was Black women who were taking care of the children in many White households. Feminism has been one of the "few discourses advancing important analyses of motherhood, the combination of its perceived Whiteness and anti family politics limits its effectiveness" (Hill Collins 2000, 175). Without understanding the unique intersections of Black motherhood, traditional feminism has left Black women largely dismissed as a voice within motherhood discourse. Black women are going to have to find their own discourse for motherhood. Hence, this chapter adds another layer to the voice of Black motherhood in ways that challenge the dominant discourse of motherhood by adding to the narratives of what Black motherhood entails through the narratives told. For many Black feminists, motherhood becomes a cite for "personal and collective empowerment" (Baade 2019, 44).

On the other side, the Black community tried to combat these negative stereotypes but at the detriment of Black women. Hill Collins (2000) states, "The controlling image of the 'superstrong Black mother' praises Black women's resiliency in a society that routinely paints us as bad mothers. Glorifying the strong Black mother represents Black men's attempts to replace negative White male interpretations with positive Black male ones" (174, 175). Recently, research on Beyonce and Black motherhood examines how she has worked against these ideas of controlling images and how her work complicates "the binary frames of celebrity motherhood and pathologized Black motherhood" (Moss 2016; Baade 2019, 44).

Black motherhood has continued to try and fight the stereotypes of both sides to find their place in the definition of motherhood. From the images in the dominant discourse to the images within Black communities, Black women have had to learn how to re-imagine motherhood in authentic and realistic ways. Cox (2009) describes how since slavery the boundaries of gender have caused a tension for Black women not seen in White motherhood with having to balance the role of motherhood in the domestic arena and having to work outside of the home. This places a greater strain on Black women threatening the dependency of women on men in White

patriarchy. The presence of Black women had no choice but to dismantle these ideas and threaten racial and gender oppression. This chapter adds a Black feminist analysis through autoethnography to the discourse of Black motherhood through a lens of queerness. The next section explores the history of queer motherhood.

Queer Motherhood

The Puritanical Christian position that marriage was between a man and a woman and that sex is for procreation, means that the thought of a queer person becoming a parent is unnatural (Clarke 2000, 192). Puritans believed that marriage was for procreation and practical survival necessary during that time. There was not an emphasis placed on love. Many queer people and/or families were not even allowed to adopt until the legalization of same sex marriages. Although every state adoption law for same sex couples are different, some states will allow religious adoption agencies to not let same sex couples adopt (Vile 2020). This and the loopholes within the law have caused queer families to seek other ways to create a family. With the creation of reproductive assisted technology, the rise of more queer families having their own children seemed feasible. However, this technology was created to "complete a traditional nuclear family by providing a married couple with a child" (Roberts 2017, 248).

Laws were created through legislation regulating the use of artificial insemination to a husband and wife and some courts going as far as allowing parental rights to the sperm donor because "a child needs a father" (Roberts 2017). In this context, Roberts means that based on the cultural belief that children need to have a father in their life even if it is technically just the sperm donor. The path to motherhood for queer women as been fraught with many complications and legal and financial hindrances. Personally, I have never had an insurance company willing to pay for any fertility treatments, although I do not have a diagnosis of infertility. Many companies, especially in the South, chose to not allow this as part of an insurance package because of the opportunities it would afford queer women. We are forced to find ways to afford these procedures and many end up in debt trying to afford the ability to mother. Radical feminists have argued that "the new reproductive technologies serve more to help married men produce genetic offspring than to give women greater reproductive freedom" (Roberts 2017, 248). Queer families are deemed unnatural and therefore face the difficult tasks of how they become mothers. Rather it is through adoption or through reproductive assistance, becoming a mother is a well thought out and wanted plan. However, due to stereotypes of the dominant society, queer people are deemed unfit to parent as they are labeled as pedophiles or raising more "gay" children. The path to motherhood is not seen as the traditional path that many seek when becoming a mother, it is often met with difficulties and obstacles. For some, they find

other ways to "mother" by unofficially adopting other LGBTQ+ youth whose families of origin have disowned them. Regardless of how mothering happens, for many it is not an easy journey. Many times, queer individuals must reimagine what motherhood and family mean in the LGBTQ+ community. The following narratives explore what it means to reimagine Queer Black motherhood through a Black feminist and queer lens.

Theoretical Framework

Black Feminism

A brief explanation of Black feminism lays the foundation of each of the narratives providing a theoretical framework. The Combahee River Collective was a collective of Black feminists and laid the foundation for the work of Black feminists. Their politics included:

> actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.
>
> (The Combahee River Collective 2000, 232)

They also discuss how the nature of our (Black women) lives is political, leading to the personal is political. "There is also undeniably a personal genesis for black feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual black women's lives" (233). It is through our personal lives that we realize we are the only ones that can liberate us. "Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community, which allows us to continue or struggle and work" (234). In essence, their personal is political.

"As a critical social theory, Black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions" (Hill Collins 2000, 22). Hill Collins describes, "Black woman's standpoint as 'centered in the experiences and ideas shared by African American women that provide a unique vision on self, community, and society and the theories that interpret these experiences'" (Richardson & Taylor 2009, 250). The difference between feminist theory and Black feminist thought is that the experiences of Black women are at the center instead of all women, which many times focuses on White women as seen with the issues in studying motherhood. However, Black feminist thought is rooted both biologically and ideologically and can be used by non-African Americans (Richardson & Taylor 2009). Black feminist thought will support the understanding of my personal narratives of motherhood. Situating my experiences as a Black feminist illustrates

how my personal experiences are also political. Walker states, "I believe that the truth about any subject only comes when all sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings make one new one" (quoted in Hill Collins 2000, 38). Motherhood has been researched from the perspective of a White feminist lens, a Black feminist lens, but little research explores the experiences of Black queer motherhood. In fact, many times Black lesbian and/or Black queer experiences have been erased from the research (Combahee River Collective 1995). "As political Black people, we bear the twin responsibilities of transforming the social, political, and economic systems of oppression as they affect all our people—not just the heterosexuals—and of transforming the corresponding psychological structure that feeds into these oppressive systems" (Combahee River Collective 1995, 201). Using Hill Collins (2000), two of the five themes on Black motherhood—(1) Bloodmothers, Othermothers, and Women-Centered Networks; (2) Mothers, Daughters, and Socialization for Survival—I incorporate my narratives to understand how these themes are similar or need expanding to understand Black queer motherhood from a non-heteronormative lens.

Narratives and Analysis

Mothers, Daughters, and Socialization for Survival

The sexual politics of Black motherhood hold many contradictions in understanding the Black mother-daughter relationships (Hill Collins 2000). "U.S. Black mothers are often described as strong disciplinarians and overly protective; yet these same women manage to raise daughters who are self-reliant and assertive" (185). This section discusses how Black mothers raise their daughters for survival by any means necessary. Growing up, I had what I now know were romantic crushes on different girls. My mom dismissed the first one as genuine concern for my best friend when I tattled about her having a boyfriend, when the real reason was, I was jealous that she did not want me to be her girlfriend. My mom explained away the second girl I had a crush on by saying I wanted a big sister, and that was why I gave the girl special notes, cards, and flowers. My mother dismissed my sexual exploration as harmless platonic interests. She did not know how to help me survive as a queer Black woman, so she dismissed it all. When I started dating a woman, she assumed it was a phase that could be ignored. When I married a woman, I did not talk to her for six months because she refused to acknowledge my wife. When I became a mother, she only acknowledged me as the mother as I was the one who birthed my twins. And now as a divorcee, she constantly talks about my future husband and tells me to count my blessings that I have twins and that I do not need more children, even though my desire is to have more children regardless of if I have a partner. My mother (and many Black mothers) ensure our physical survival at the expense of emotional destruction

(Hill Collins 2000). "African American women have long integrated economic self-reliance and mothering" (184).

> Black mothers are considered deviant for teaching their daughters how to fit into the sexual politics of Black womanhood. By learning the politics of Black womanhood, future Black mothers are learning to prevent sexual assault, wage, and occupation discrimination. White hegemonic society disapproves of this motherhood because it brings threat to their power.
>
> (Landeros 2017)

There however is an absence of sexuality in this learning of sexual politics. The assumption is identifying as heterosexual.

For traditional White motherhood, "paid work is defined as being in opposition to and incompatible with motherhood, work for Black women has been an important and valued dimension of motherhood" (184). For my mother, she had to ignore my sexuality in hopes of showing that part of survival means following the heteronormative way of motherhood. Her blatant disregard to my family dynamics when I became a mother as an adult was her way of continuing to place a "strong emphasis on protection, either by trying shield" me "as long as possible from the penalties attached to" her "derogated statues or by teaching" me "skills of independence and self-reliance so that" I "will be able to protect" myself (185–6). My mother was strict, extremely religious, and narrow-minded. The struggle to explain any emotional experiences I experienced was met with "you just need to pray about it."

This theme acknowledges that Black mothers are complicated and that as a daughter, "growing up means developing a better understanding that even though she may desire more affection and greater freedom, her mother's physical care and protection are acts of maternal love" (188).

Bloodmothers, Othermothers, and Women-Centered Networks

I started my first journey to motherhood in 2001, when I became a nanny to my little cousin. I was with her from the time she woke up till the time she went to bed. I gave her baths, I fed her, clothed her, and even nursed her back to health when she was sick. She went to college advising appointments with me, the movies, the grocery store, and other errands throughout my day. I was the first person she walked to. I was more than a nanny; I was her other mother. "An 'othermother' is a woman who assist blood mothers by sharing mothering responsibility" (Landeros 2017). People would tell me "wait till you have your own child, you will love that child even more." I could not comprehend it because my heart felt like it would burst, I loved this child so much. She meant the world to me. I loved her deeply and for people to dismiss that love or lessen it because she was not biologically mine left me feeling as my role was cheapened.

I was also the "nanny" for my cousin's daughter. I planned my classes in the evening while in college so that I could watch her during the day. This is part of Hill Collins's (2000) Othermothers and Women-Centered Networks theme. Although, there has been research done on other mothers in lesbian parenting, none of these researchers have situated there research crediting Hill Collins who was one of the first to research other mothers in the Black community (Hayman et al. 2013; Brown & Perlesz 2007; Morrow 2001). This concept comes from African communities (and then slave communities) where the phrase "it takes a village" first originated. Many times in research, Whiteness situates a term and forgets to credit marginalized groups for their start with coining the term and concept. Thus, for the purpose of my research I credit Hill Collins for her research on the concept where Blackness is centered.

Instead of using an online system or an agency, my cousin reached out to my mom and then to me to see if I would be interested in taking care of her newborn daughter. My cousin was overwhelmed with working full-time, being a new mom, and a new wife. Within Black communities, cooperative childcare are ways that Black mothers can still figure out mothering with the help of an othermother to do the caring for when the bloodmother (biological) cannot or has other responsibilities in addition to mothering (Hill Collins 2000). My little cousin took her first steps toward me, she read her first book to me, she said her first words to me, I was a part of all the intricacies of motherhood, but biologically I was not her mother.

When I was in graduate school, I had a group of four Black women friends. One of the women had a child and together, we all became her caregiver. We would create a schedule based on all of our schedules so that her mother could take her classes and work without having to pay babysitting fees. "Historically, within Black diasporic societies, community-based childcare and the relationships among bloodmothers and othermothers in women-centered networks have taken diverse institutional forms" (Hill Collins 2000, 180). There was a certain pride in knowing we each had a role in ensuring the growth and well-being of this child. Adopting the African centered way of childrearing illustrated the importance of mothering of this child regardless of biological ties. "The traditional family ideal assigns mother's full responsibility for children and evaluates their performance based on their ability to procure the benefits of a nuclear family house" (Hill Collins 2000, 182). With the erosion of these women-centered family networks due to the "changing institutional fabric" of the importance of achieving the more traditional White American way of parenting has shown the decline in ways of supporting Black children (Hill Collins 2000, 183).

My second journey to motherhood happened when I was dating my now ex-wife. She decided to adopt a baby when we first decided to start dating, so I came into the child's life as an infant. I was there for the sleepless nights, the late-night feedings, and all the other moments in between.

My ex-wife adopted her with her ex-partner. In fact, they are the first case in Georgia to legally adopt a child while being separated. It was not possible for me to have any legal rights to this child, but it did not lessen how much I loved her. She was also my whole world. However, when it came time to legitimize my role with her, many people dismissed my role as her parent because legally, I had no claims to her. I struggled with feeling like a mother but not being validated as a mother by our culture because the child already had two mothers and my role seemed confusing to outsiders. Again, I took on the role as an othermother. In many Black families, other mothers serve as a secondary provider that comes from the network of women known in the community (Hill Collins 2000).

Bloodmother (Biological Motherhood)

The rise within the motherhood becoming more prevalent in queer communities, there is a return to this woman-centered network, especially as queer Black women. When I decided to conceive, I sought out other Black queer women on their experiences conceiving and raising children. I joined a Facebook group full of queer women trying to conceive and a group dedicated to Two Mommy families. I started to seek out and create spaces full of Black queer women. The reason for this was at the time my family (two women raising through co-parenting one adopted child and planning on using reproductive assistance to have another child(ren) was not seen as normative to society. I wanted my children to be protected and loved by women who understood and appreciated our family dynamic. When a family is regarded as unnatural in a community, it is vital that there are people around them that value their existence and that requires other queer people. The homophobia that plagues the Black community leaves these woman-centered networks being more queer women-centered networks or ally women-centered networks. The value seen in these networks from my own experience made me realize that I was already disrupting the heteronormative version of motherhood that adding queer women-centered networks was another disruption to the capitalistic ideals of parenting. Meaning that these children were not my property and I did not think of them in that way. "Under the property model that accompanies the traditional family ideal, parents may not literally assert that their children are pieces of property, but their parenting may reflect assumptions analogous to those they make in connection with property" (Hill Collins 2000, 182).

My children were conceived via medicated intrauterine insemination (IUI). This means that I took fertility medicines to ensure the ovulation process was as timed as possible. I think took a trigger shot (which triggers the eggs to be released), I went in every few days to monitor my follicle growth to ensure that my follicles were growing at the appropriate size and lastly a doctor inserted a catheter inside of me with sperm received from a sperm bank and injected it. I stayed laying down for 15 minutes and then waited two weeks to

see if I was actually pregnant. I went through three rounds of this trying to align things correctly. Finally, on the third try, 14 days later, my wife and I took a pregnancy test and it was positive. Once, I had a positive pregnancy test, I called the doctor's office to set up a Beta test (a blood test to determine how much of the pregnancy hormone is present). Because of the trying to conceive group I was in on Facebook, I knew that the test numbers could range from low to really high. When we got our beta numbers back I thought "Wow, this is really high." After the first test, patients have to go back for a second test a week or so later and the numbers need to double in order for it to be a viable pregnancy. My numbers almost tripled and I remember thinking this was so odd. I never thought it could be twins because there were women with high numbers and I only had one follicle that was big enough when we inseminated. Around six weeks, I was able to go in for an ultrasound and there were two sacs, which meant I was having twins. A lot changes, when it is twins, I would need to see maternal fetal specialists for all of my pregnancy, but first I needed to graduate from the Reproductive clinic which did not happen until I was 12 weeks. Most of my conceiving took place in a clinic and was controlled as much as possible, which most feel is unnatural. However, my body still had to accept the sperm and make the baby and that one little follicle that should not have made it wanted to make it and it did. My body went through the same process as a woman does who has sex with a man but instead the sperm was inserted via a catheter. The chances are not much higher than traditional conception. I felt all the anticipation and disappointment just like couples who have to pee on a stick month after month.

Living in the margins of what society deems as "normal" leaves the outsider to start to critically examine how these definitions are not effective for people. For mothering, Black mothers found a way to raise Black children as healthy and productive adults despite how society treated them. "The resiliency of women-centered family networks and their willingness to take responsibility for Black children illustrated how African-influenced understandings of family have been continually reworked to help African-Americans as a collective cope with and resist oppression" (Hill Collins 2000, 183). The lack of discussion of where queer Black women fit in this theme is a necessary discussion. I have had Black women not acknowledge that my children have two mothers. Or have seen Black queer women being passed over as suitable caretakers for families simply because of who they love. Black women are willing to help but not accepting the homonormative dynamics of my family is problematic as well as not accepting me as part of the network because of my sexual orientation.

The Reality of (Queer) Black Motherhood

The reality of my motherhood may seem complicated, but what journey to motherhood is ever easy. The reality of motherhood is that our journeys are unique and different and special. Black motherhood is hard and fraught with

complications, contradictions, and struggle, but this journey I am still on has had so many wonderful deviations from the norm of how some feel motherhood should happen. My patience was learned through being a nanny, my unconditional love was grown with a child that was not legally mine, and learning how to "mom" happened through learning how to care for children through the hard times. The reality of my queerness is that my children get to see so many different ways family can exist and realize that love does not always come from those related to them. My reality is MY reality and no one else's. This journey is how I define my motherhood.

Hill Collins does not acknowledge the troubling of deviations to when daughters do not follow the heteronormative path to motherhood. My mother does not acknowledge my bonus daughter as part of me because she does not acknowledge my ex-wife as part of the twins. My ability to survive was not created through my mother's socialization. I discovered that my own path to motherhood could not follow the socialization of survival without acknowledging the importance of the emotional well-being of my daughter. That her survival also means understanding motherhood in non-heteronormative ways. Survival means understanding race, gender, and sexuality of my children in order to reimagine Queer Black motherhood.

Conclusion

Motherhood has long been seen as a heteronormative task. When seen in the traditional terms of motherhood, motherhood is a daunting and thankless task. Research keeps showing that there is an increase in women choosing not to become mothers as birth rates continue to decline every year. However, when motherhood is studied through the eyes of a non-heteronormative lens, motherhood is not just about a woman birthing a child. Black motherhood has bloodmothers, othermothers, and women-centered networks that highlight the real work of a community of women to mother children regardless of their biological attachment to them. However, Black motherhood is fraught with complications when they leave out an analysis of sexuality as a part of motherhood.

For Black queer mothers, there is a movement back toward more ancestral ways of mothering. Mothering is not limited to one form or type, but to numerous ways of mothering that deserve validation. This chapter explores my experiences as a Queer Black mother in various spaces with both biological and nonbiological children. By looking at two themes of Black motherhood, I began to unpack and re-imagine how Black motherhood can be expanded and disrupted from traditional Black motherhood troupes. I expanded on the idea of queerness in Black motherhood as a way of revising some of the contradictions in Black mothering. Although, this is just one experience it brings to light experiences of a Queer Black mother. Hopefully, this begins the conversations of queering mothering through a Black feminist lens as a way to re-imagine motherhood.

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4 Rhetorically Constructing Motherhood in Pregnancy Loss

Sarah Steimel

As Renegar and Cole argued in this volume's introduction, motherhood rhetorics construct, resist, judge, challenge, and perpetuate a wide variety of care-giving relationships. In this chapter, I examine communication at the intersection of motherhood and pregnancy loss in order to identify three rhetorics of motherhood—motherhood as imagined, motherhood as performative, and motherhood as biological – that each contribute taken-for-granted assumptions about who is and is not a "real" mother as women communicatively negotiate the physically and psychologically fraught experience of pregnancy loss. This chapter draws on existing research on communication and pregnancy loss, as well as parts of a larger interview study to explore how the unfortunately common experience of pregnancy loss brings to the forefront the question of what constitutes a "mother" for women who were once biologically pregnant but may have had a miscarriage or still birth. This construction of who "counts" as a mother has critical implications for the health of women experiencing loss, as well as for broader social conversations about the connections between motherhood and biology, motherhood and performance, and motherhood and abortion.

Pregnancy loss—defined broadly as loss due to stillbirth or miscarriage—happens in approximately 15–20% of recognized pregnancies in the United States (Rossen, Ahrens, & Branum 2018). Previous research demonstrates that women who have pregnancy loss must cope with the unexpected loss of the child, uncertainty about the cause, ambivalence about their future as a mother, as well as the stigma of discussing miscarriage (Bute & Brann 2015; Frost et al. 2007). As such, pregnancy loss is often associated with heightened grief, depression, anxiety, loneliness, and suicidality (Lok & Neugebauer 2007). Additionally, pregnancy loss is often isolating, socially stigmatized, traumatizing, associated with negative feelings (e.g., shame and guilt) and depression, and it is difficult to disclose to others (Silverman & Baglia 2004).

Despite the pervasive health issues of pregnancy loss, it remains a taboo topic, frequently avoided or hidden from public view (Frost et al. 2007; Bute & Brann 2015). Simultaneously, lack of communicative support from

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others can contribute to a sense of stigma and may increase the risk of depression and other negative physical and mental health effects in the wake of a pregnancy loss (Stinson et al. 1992). Thus, the rhetorical negotiation of pregnancy, loss, and motherhood matters for women's physical, psychological, and social health (Bosticco & Thompson 2005; Silverman & Baglia 2004).

This chapter argues that pregnancy loss exists at the intersection of three public rhetorics of motherhood: motherhood as imagined, motherhood as performative, and motherhood as biological. These rhetorics involve overlapping discourses of what constitutes a child and what constitutes a mother. These rhetorics have serious implications for women experiencing pregnancy loss, but also for rhetorical constructions of motherhood more generally.

Women's Stories of Pregnancy Loss

When a person suffers a loss, they often need to "make sense" of the impact of those happenings on their life. Communicative sensemaking involves others in actively structuring events and imposing meaning and order on them, particularly in situations perceived to be highly complex, ambiguous or contradictory (Weick 1995). Importantly, sensemaking is primarily social and therefore always communicative (Weick 1995). People create and tell stories in order to create meaning of experiences, develop a sense of control over problems, and lessen the negative effects of suppressing emotions and thoughts. Women who have suffered the loss of a pregnancy use communication with others to help them make sense of their loss.

This chapter draws, in part, on a larger interpretive study which sought to explore how women engage in sensemaking after experiencing pregnancy loss. As part of that study, I interviewed 15 people who self-identified as having experienced pregnancy loss while working full time. A semi-structured interview protocol was designed to elicit participants' sensemaking about and around pregnancy loss. All 15 respondents self-identified as female. The participants' ages ranged from 28 to 54 years, with a median age of 36 years. Overall, the interviews averaged 42 minutes in length which produced 179 pages of single-spaced transcripts for analysis. The data were analyzed using data reduction and interpretation by following a grounded thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke 2006; Corbin & Strauss 2008). All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. This chapter draws on those interviews as well as existing published research on communication and pregnancy loss to articulate three public rhetorics of motherhood—motherhood as imagined, motherhood as performative, and motherhood as biological—and how they may affect women's identity construction and sensemaking after pregnancy loss.

Motherhood as Imagined

Motherhood as imagined rhetorically recognizes a woman is a mother, before a woman has a birthed child, because she is imagined (by herself and others) in that future role. As Legge and Jenks (1995) explain, women who become pregnant expect to become mothers. These expectations are fostered, shaped, and reinforced by dominant cultural rhetorics. Lovell (1983) notes that during their pregnancy, women's identities are shaped by those around them and that those encounters are defined by dominant cultural norms. This social process of identity construction is built up gradually over months in conversation with healthcare professionals, family and friends, and even strangers. In the U.S. context, pregnant women are certainly called "mother-to-be," but are equally likely to be referred to as "mother." For instance, "From the start, health professionals talked about the 'baby' and referred to her as 'mother'" (Lovell 1983, 760). OB/GYN forms typically ask for the "mother's" name. Popular press articles refer to the pregnant woman as the "mother" or "mama." In her interview, Kimberly explained that "because I had shared with so many people that I was expecting … I would be on the phone with them and they are like, 'Well, how are you future mother-to-be?'" Through those conversations and others, Kimberly began to think of herself (and saw herself perceived as) a mother. As a result, studies have found "integrated representations of self-as-person and self-as-mother even in the second trimester of their pregnancy" (Ilicali & Fisek 2004, 16).

Unfortunately, the motherhood as imagined rhetoric creates significant challenges for women who do not experience the birth of a healthy child. If the child is not born, this raises difficult questions—is the woman still a mother of a lost child? No longer a mother? Was she never a mother? When the imagined role of motherhood is truncated due to pregnancy loss, the women experiencing loss, as well as their partners, family and friends, often must reconcile their imaginations and expectations with the reality they have experienced (Legge & Jenks 1995). For instance, Lovell (1983) found that from the moment it was discovered that the baby was lost, there was an abrupt cut-off in the imagined identity construction process. There was an "instant unravelling of a woman's lived experience and the rapid de-construction of her motherhood" (760). As Elizabeth describes,

> And I think that's what most people don't understand is that you are planning a life and there is all of this content that you have cultivated in your brain and if you and your partner are talking about the future, when you lose that pregnancy it's … you're losing a whole history that's been created between you for all of the things that was supposed to be.

This sense of struggle, loss, and even embarrassment at having embraced the "mother" role in imagination with others dominated the sensemaking narratives of the women I interviewed about pregnancy loss. For instance, Tiffany explained that, "There's a strange feeling that I had. I'm a very anxious person, and I tend to worry a lot about what other people think of me, which I know I shouldn't do, but I do. When I found out that the baby had died, I felt … like I was a fool for having told people." Kimberly similarly explained that all of the kind comments and questions asking about how she was doing as a "future mother-to-be" became acutely painful in the loss. She explained that when she was enjoying talking about pregnancy with others:

> You don't think about that. You don't know what happens when you lose the baby halfway through. Yeah, so, and because of how, because I had already told everyone at work I was expecting, I couldn't say, not say that we lost the baby. It was awful.

Amanda elaborated that while she felt her imagined motherhood identity was lost, she wasn't sure what to replace it with. She noted:

> You are ready for how to work this whole thing with the baby at the end. There are lots of books about that but when you lose a baby you don't know what the rules are. And that makes it that much more awkward and that much more uncomfortable.

As Jessica continued that in that moment "you're not only just saying goodbye to your baby, but you're actually saying goodbye to his entire [imagined] life that's gone." In this rhetoric of motherhood as imagined, losing a pregnancy presented challenges in some ways even beyond the terrible loss of a child who was born. Lovell (1983) noted that in prevailing cultural scripts, unless the child was born, the child (and by extension the motherhood) does not count. The result was that "mothers whose babies had lived, even fleetingly, seemed better able to make sense of the tragedy … These mothers were better able to mourn" (759). Thus, losing the motherhood as imagined was in some ways even more challenging than the terrible loss of a child who was born alive.

Of course, it is important to note that not all women construct themselves as parents during pregnancy or as having-been parents after a pregnancy loss. However, in part because of public rhetorics of motherhood as imagined, a salient aspect of pregnancy loss for many people may be the lost access to already adopted motherhood identities (Layne 2003a). Thus the rhetoric of motherhood as imagined may position women who have lost pregnancies as "not mothers" or "not real mothers" in a way that exacerbates their loss and damages their identities and sensemaking resources.

Motherhood as Performative

Motherhood as performative rhetorically asserts women are mothers if they engage in tasks of nurturing a child that society has deemed "motherly." The well-documented rhetoric of motherhood as performative argues that motherhood itself exists in "performances [that] are enacted through words and embodied actions" (G'sell 2020, 3). Oh (2009) explains that in popular understanding, motherhood involves demonstrating acts of "feeding, clothing, cleaning, holding, educating, and other innumerable, incessant acts of emotional, intellectual, and physical work to ensure the survival—if not flourishing—of the young" (3). The rhetoric of motherhood as performative then focuses on what mothers do to be mothers, rather than who they are.

This positions women who experience pregnancy loss in one of two ways: either they are not a "real" mother experiencing a "real" loss (because they never performed motherhood for a child outside the womb) or they are a failed mother (e.g., because they are "at fault" for the loss) and thus they have not ensured the survival (in Oh's terms) of child(ren). For instance, Layne (1990) argues that in many cultures, including the United States, pregnancy is treated as a rite of passage, especially if it is a first pregnancy. Layne continues, "As a condition that marks these transitions, pregnancy has a liminal status and represents a temporary condition which places the woman between two structural states" of mother and non-mother (73). In this rhetorical construction, women become mothers when they "mother" a child outside the womb. The implication, however, for people experiencing pregnancy loss is that they may feel trapped in that liminal social position. One participant in Layne's study noted "that there is a Limbo, but it's not for the stillborn babies. It's for their parents … we gave birth-sort of. We had a child-sort of. Our child died-sort of" (Layne 1990, 74). Without a "live" child to care for, many women felt as if they never fully transitioned to motherhood because they never outwardly performed mothering.

This liminality was echoed by several of my own interviewees. For instance, Kimberly noted "It's such a difficult … I guess it's such a difficult topic for people because a lot of people don't even see it as a death." In this construction, if the child never lived to be mothered outside of the womb, it wasn't fully a child and the parents were never really a mother and father. Similarly, though pregnancy loss is legally protected under federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) laws, McKell noted that her workplace was not immediately sure if she should be allowed maternity leave after her pregnancy loss. She noted that she felt like many people felt, "Oh well, you don't have a baby to care for." However, despite never having mothered the baby outside the womb "postpartum is still postpartum and it happens with miscarriages." McKell still experienced being postpartum (a term literally meaning after-pregnancy) and

she still had physical, hormonal and emotional changes in her body, caused by pregnancy, to recover from. However, without the presence of a live child to mother, McKell felt that many of her coworkers no longer recognized her as having been pregnant, as if the lack of performative mothering negated her lived pregnancy experience.

This tendency to deny that motherhood has happened if a woman has not performed motherhood for a child outside the womb may be reinforced by the existence of public rites that mark motherhood and the lack of similar rites surrounding the transitions of pregnancy loss. For instance, Layne (1990) notes that when a pregnancy ends in live birth, a woman is gradually reintegrated into society in her new motherhood role through rites of reincorporation (e.g., flowers in the hospital, visits, gifts, or meals from relatives and friends, being addressed as "Mom," etc.). However, when a pregnancy ends without a live birth, there are no similar public rites to reincorporate the woman or to recognize her as having held a mother role. In the context of biomedicine, in particular, maternity units are geared to the production of live babies. When this "goes wrong, there is the practical problem about what to do with the maternity patient—is she a patient?—who has no baby to be weighed, bathed and fed. Such a mother—or is she a mother?" has to be figured out (Lovell 1983, 757). In these instances, hospitals often seem to have no physical or psychological space for such a person, leaving the woman without a legitimate "role" in the maternity ward (Lovell 1983). Women may be quietly transferred to other wards or may simply be released from the hospital without typical fanfare or rites of passage celebrating a child's birth. This rhetoric of motherhood as performative denies women experiencing pregnancy loss the role of motherhood as they do not fulfill the cultural transition to a "real" mother if they never enacted a performance of motherhood for a child outside the womb.

The rhetoric of motherhood as performative can also cast women experiencing pregnancy loss as a failed mother or as an unfit mother. Legge and Jenks (1995) note that many women perceive that a pregnancy loss reflects negatively on their abilities to be mothers and their ability to fulfill what is constructed as a natural and expected role. As a result, many women experiencing pregnancy loss feel they must restore their images as women and as (potential) mothers. For instance, Elizabeth noted that her pregnancy losses made her constantly question her choices, her ability and her worthiness as a mother. She explained,

> But it's hard and you question yourself like, "If only I hadn't done this one thing." I'm not a big drinker by any stretch of the imagination. But I actually remember having one beer … But it's not going down the rabbit hole because you're already in it. And so what if I had eaten differently? What if I had exercised more?

Ultimately though, Elizabeth noted that she turned in on her own body and wondered "What's so wrong with me that my body can't do this thing that is so natural for everybody else?" These judgments were not always internal. Elizabeth was told by many others that "Well, your body will miscarry if there's something wrong with the baby." Right? "So this is a good thing." This was unfortunately a common sentiment, Michelle similarly shared having people tell her that "this is for the best." Amanda noted she heard messages that "this is God's way of correcting a mistake or fixing a wrong or maybe there was something about the baby that wasn't quite right and this is God's way." However, to Elizabeth, Amanda, Michelle, and other women who heard this message, these sentiments confirmed that others saw them as unable or unfit to mother as their bodies were failing to produce healthy, live children to mother. Elizabeth summed up,

> So when people say things like, 'you work too hard. You really need to slow … You can't do all of the things.' [Those] are subtle ways of sending the message that it is your fault and that you could have done something different and had a different outcome.

In this version of the motherhood as performative rhetoric, if women are not able to successfully birth and "mother" a live child, they are failing motherhood in some fundamental way. Thus, the rhetoric of motherhood as performative may position women who have lost pregnancies as "not mothers" or as "unfit mothers" in a way that deepens their loss and damages their identities and sensemaking resources.

Motherhood as Biological

The rhetorics of motherhood as imagined and motherhood as performative both foster challenging contradictions for women who do not birth live babies as their motherhood is interrupted or denied under those rhetorics. However, the rhetoric of *Motherhood as Biological* argues that women are mothers if they have a biological child. In some ways, this rhetoric can and is adopted by women experiencing pregnancy loss to respond to the previous two rhetorics by recognizing a woman as a mother at the point at which she has biologically been pregnant. However, the biological moment at which a woman is a mother is rhetorically fraught. Many pregnant women identify the biological child as real and thus motherhood as real/meaningful at the point in which a woman learns of her pregnancy. Yet, some women recognize that this complicates rhetorics of personhood and abortion/choice. The very rhetorics of biological motherhood that validate pregnancy loss (e.g., the child is "real" and motherhood is "real" at conception) unwittingly argue against women's agency over her body and feed anti-abortion rhetorics by asserting that motherhood begins at conception rather than birth (Layne 1990).

In their most simple form, rhetorics of motherhood as biological assert that women are or become mothers in terms of a biological identity. Women become mothers when they bear children (Oh 2009). These biological discourses of motherhood have rightly been criticized for oversimplifying and excluding many forms of motherhood constructed through communication, including nonbiological lesbian motherhood (Ben-Ari & Livni 2006), step motherhood (Sanner & Coleman 2017), adoptive motherhood (Weller 2019), and surrogacy (Majumdar 2014), among other motherhood relationships. In addition, scholars (for instance, Renegar and Cole in this volume) have rightly noted that rhetorics that reinscribe and reify the importance of biology to mothering are a product of heteronormative and patriarchal culture which does not and cannot reflect real lived parenting experiences.

In addition, the actual assertion of biological motherhood is far from straightforward. While it may seem like a simple scientific fact that women become mothers when they birth children under this set of discourses, science cannot and has not definitively answered at what point embryos/fetuses become children or the moment at which bearing an embryo/fetus makes the woman a mother. As Rubenfeld (1990) articulates, for instance, the answers to the question of when the fetus is an *actual person* have implications for motherhood as well as for debates about reproductive choice and abortion.

In analyses of pregnancy loss experiences, scholars have regularly recognized the struggle many women articulate in fostering social recognition of an embryo or fetus as a "child" and by consequence of oneself as a "parent" (Layne 1990). For instance, Kimberly noted,

> I think because the baby that's not born, it's not real to others. So, they don't think of it as a human being … Maybe this is something that we need to educate people. Because yeah, I understand it's hard to see a baby that's not born yet, as someone important, but to the parents definitely is the case.

As a result, many women interviewed in this project felt strongly that embryos were "real" children at conception and they took actions to legitimize them as such. For instance, Elizabeth described writing down due dates as "birthdays for every single one of those babies." Specifically, Elizabeth kept a "drawer in my nightstand and it has all of my embryo pictures and their birth dates on it." By keeping pictures and recording birthdays for each embryo, Elizabeth felt strongly that she was remembering them as "real" children. Melissa described that after she experienced her pregnancy loss, she sent out a group email message to her coworkers that included details like "Hey guys, this is what happened. Here's her picture. Here's the story—I sent her obituary actually." Melissa indicated that these efforts, like including the obituary (which

would be standard for the death of a "real" person) were helpful because "it made the situation [her baby's presence as a daughter] so much more real for them." Thus, despite the very real limitation of the biological script of mothering, some women who had experienced pregnancy loss drew on those discourses to establish themselves as "real" mothers and their loss as "real" children.

However, the attribution of personhood to embryos and fetuses from the moment of conception can be read in a way to strengthen anti-abortion rhetorics (Layne 2003b). Despite her assurances that she thought of each of her embryos as children, Kimberly did recognize, "I can't really say they should because there's so much debate right now about abortion rights and like, is the fetus a baby?" Yet, she immediately continued with,

> To a mother, well, and I don't want to speak for everybody because everybody experiences it differently, but to me, my babies were babies since I knew I was pregnant. So, I didn't think, oh it was a fetus. There was a baby to me, and baby was very real.

So, while she recognized her assertion of her baby's personhood status might complicate debates about abortion, to her recognizing their personhood was essential. Not only is the biological moment at which a person becomes a "child" at issue, but by extension, so too is the biological moment at which one becomes a mother.

Perhaps because the issue of pregnancy loss is so closely related to issues which inform the abortion debate, "the appropriate position to adopt regarding pregnancy loss is a thorny one for feminists" (Layne 1990, 82). Stephanie echoed this tension in her interviews as she struggled both with her feelings of grief after the loss of her pregnancy and with how others described pregnancy loss as the loss of a child. Stephanie noted:

> I guess I struggle a little bit with some of those comments just because … I don't even know how I fully feel, I suppose about when does life begin, and thinking about the miscarriage as a baby versus just something went wrong in the biological process, and again, I think that that is something that is very personal to people in terms of how they think about that. Everybody has a different perception in terms of that question, and it hasn't … I don't know that science can really answer that in terms of like, when does life begin? Does it begin at conception? Does it begin at birth? Is it somewhere in between?

As a result of these tensions between biology, science, personhood, and abortion, many secular healthcare providers (social workers, counselors, psychologists, etc.) hold the position that it is not for them to define the

status of what was lost but only to aid bereaved women in identifying and processing their pregnancy loss feelings (Layne 1990, 2003a). In addition, as others have pointed out, motherhood can be enacted in many ways, many of which do not require having been biologically pregnant with the child(ren) or people that are being mothered. Biological rhetorics of motherhood have rightly been criticized for their heteronormative structures that crowd out other kinds of parenting. Thus, at first glance, it seems easy to eschew biological rhetorics of motherhood. Yet, to women whose imaginative and performative opportunities for motherhood have been denied by pregnancy loss, rejecting biological conceptions of motherhood which might legitimize their identities as mothers is not consequence-free. Thus, the context of pregnancy loss provides one instance in which to understand why biological definitions of motherhood may have some lasting appeal to women who are attempting to engage in sensemaking and identity construction surrounding pregnancy loss.

Ultimately then, pregnancy loss exists at the intersection of three public rhetorics of motherhood: motherhood as imagined, motherhood as performative, and motherhood as biological. These rhetorics involve overlapping discourses of what constitutes a "child" and what constitutes a "mother" in the context of loss. This construction of who 'counts' as a mother through imaginative, performative and biological lenses has critical implications for the health of women experiencing loss as many of these rhetorics structure and confine her sensemaking resources after a loss. These rhetorics also reinscribe broader social conversations about the connections between motherhood and biology, motherhood and performance, and motherhood and abortion. As a result, critically interrogating these rhetorics is crucial for both individual and community health in the context of motherhood.

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5 Comadrisma, Mamás, and Tías: An Intersectional Chicana Feminist Approach to Comunidad and Reproductive Justice

Sarah De Los Santos Upton and Leandra H. Hernandez

> *My most revolutionary act as an activist-scholar is one that bridges my family (as community) with my labor in the academy.*
>
> (Torrez 2013, 136)

In October 2014 at the annual conference for the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender (OSCLG), Leandra was presenting on a panel about Mexican-American women's prenatal testing experiences and the ways in which such experiences are impacted by cultural and familial influences. At the end of the panel, Sarah introduced herself to Leandra, they admired each other's curly hair, exchanged contact information, and the rest is history. Four years later, they published their first book together and have crafted *una hermandad* that has led to several publications and collaborative pedagogy works.

Although we would have eventually met each other later in life through shared connections and the NCA Latina/o Communication Studies Division and La Raza Caucus, our chance meeting in 2014 provided us the opportunity to craft a meaningful relationship that has sustained us in the midst of racial/cultural strife, academic stresses, adjusting to parenthood, and more. In this chapter, as two *comadres*, academic hermanas, and lifelong collaborators, we develop and trace the contours of *comadrisma*, an intersectional Chicana feminist approach to mothering and *comunidad* through the lens of reproductive justice. Throughout our developed sister-scholar research agenda that blends border studies, health communication, and Chicana feminisms, we have long traced the reproductive violences and inequities that Mexican/American women and Latinas face in reproductive and relational spheres (Hernández & De Los Santos Upton 2018, 2019, 2020a).

Situated within a reproductive justice framework and using Chicana feminisms as our intersectional, identity-based locus, we discuss how *comadrisma* is a framework that challenges heteronormative, White, colonial nuclear family structures by deconstructing biological primacy as the primary indicator of "true" parenthood and familia. Instead, our

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autoethnographical approach highlights the importance of comunidad through the role of *comadres* and *tías* as a Chicana feminist approach to *maternidad* through mindfulness, support, and solidarity. Borrowing the concept of *tejer*, or weaving, as a strategy from the Chicana M(other)work collective, in this chapter we bring together the threads of the theories and concepts that sustain us, such as comadrisma, motherwork, othermothers, and Chicana M(other)work, and weave our lived experiences as comadres throughout. With Sarah as a biological *mamá* and Leandra as a *comadre* and *tía*, we discuss the development of our relationship, our roles as *comadres*, and the ways in which *comadrisma* serves as an important strand of reproductive justice that can lead to more equitable health experiences and richer cultural and relational value in constructing communities of care (Caballero et al. 2019). With our chapter, we also seek to normalize this approach to *maternidad* in diverse cultural and academic spaces. An age-old Latina/Latin American *dicho* says, "Por que sin madres, no hay revolución," and the essence of our chapter extends this *dicho* by adding "Y también sin tías, no hay revolución."

Comadrisma

The concept of comadrisma is central to understanding our friendship, peer mentoring relationship, research collaboration, and approach to reproductive justice. As De Hoyos Comstock (2012) explains, comadre is a powerful term that invokes meanings and practices unique to Latinx culture. The most common understanding of the term is rooted in female friendship and camaraderie; your comadre is part of your support system and you lean on one another for help and advice in personal and/or professional settings (De Hoyos Comstock 2012; Scholz 2016). Comadrisma is embodied, and we first learned about this term by observing the women's friendships held by our abuelas and mamás. We learned which friends earned the label and status of a comadre from the matriarchs in our lives and what types of support and cariño those friendships entailed. Leandra's mom Ernestine (Ernie) said that comadres and madrinas (godmothers) are so close in the family unit and network that they are *literally* surrogate mothers; in other words, per Ernie, madres are "*very* careful when they pick comadres and madrinas." It is the process of "bringing the person into the 'family orbit''—it is a space of honor and respect because comadres and madrinas are responsible for the children's well-being in case something happens to the biological mother. Comadres and madrinas become part of the family, regardless of traditional, biological definitions of family creation and structure. Sarah first learned about the distinction of comadres by observing her abuelita Isabel's relationship with Rosie, a work colleague and friend. Though Isabel had many friends from work, and from the neighborhood, she reserved the term "comadre" for a select few, including Rosie.

Sarah noticed that Rosie was supportive of her abuelita in the school cafeteria where they both worked; however, their relationship extended to spending time together outside of work, laughing during visits in Isabel's sun-filled living room, and during pláticas on the phone. When Isabel passed away, Rosie was able to offer a special form of support to the family, because as a comadre she was witness to Isabel as a full person, a coworker, friend, abuela, madre, and so much more, and she understood the depths of the family's loss in a way not accessible to just any coworker or acquaintance.

Similarly, Leandra's first introduction to comadrisma was observing her beloved abuela's relationship with her best friend, Margaret, whom the family refers to as Comadre/Madrina Margaret, even long after her abuela's passing. Margaret is the official church godmother for Gloria and Daniel, Leandra's tía and tío. However, all of Leandra's family members (aunts, uncles, children, and grandchildren alike) refer to her as Madrina Margaret as she holds an important role in their extended family. Comadre Margaret and Leandra's abuela, Maria del Pilar, were friends for decades (70+ years), and their relationship served important emotional, mental, and physical purposes. Comadre Margaret gave Maria del Pilar life-saving blood transfusions when she was pregnant with Ernie, Leandra's mom, and several of her tías. Even though Abuela Maria del Pilar passed away in 2014, Comadre Margaret still lives near several of Leandra's family members, and now Leandra's mom and tías take care of Comadre Margaret. Even though she is not biologically related to Leandra's family, she is a deeply rooted and respected member of the family, especially because the role of the comadre/grandmother unites children, as well, through the process of becoming "godsiblings."

Leandra and Sarah also witnessed the power of comadrisma through relationships their mothers cultivated with women friends. Sarah's mother Dalia worked to complete her undergraduate degree when Sarah was a young child, and as an older student she found comfort in a study group she created with other women her age, some with children and some without. This group of women supported one another through their studies and collectively cared for the children of the group during tailgate parties, gatherings at one another's homes, and large family-style trips. To this day, Dalia maintains close bonds with many of these women, and as Sarah has gotten older she's formed her own special friendships with them as well. Leandra's second introduction to comadrisma was her mother's relationship with her Aunt Ora. Even though Aunt Ora is not her mom's biological sister, Aunt Ora has held the "Aunt" title for as long as Leandra could remember. Together, Leandra's mom, Ernie, and Aunt Ora have had a lifelong friendship since the early 1970s. When Leandra was in her high school church confirmation training, this is also when Aunt Ora became Leandra's confirmation godmother, thus institutionally, formally cementing that angle of the extended comadrisma relationship. Together, Aunt Ora

has accompanied Leandra, Ali (Leandra's biological sister), and Ernie on several family trips, holiday gatherings, and more, and they have a fulfilling familial relationship that is not confined to biological bounds or definitions.

Our first encounter with comadrisma as a theoretical concept in academia was through the work and comadre relationship of Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating. Keating (2015) explains that Anzaldúa surrounded herself with a group of trusted writing comadres and in the confines of these relationships she was able to share unfinished work with women she trusted and incorporate their advice and feedback into her writing process. As co-authors, we understand the profound vulnerability and trust that goes into such a practice and we have benefitted from the solidarity that it creates and witnessed how it improves the quality and depth of our work. While working on our co-edited book *Latina/o/x Communication Studies* with Diana I. Martinez and Amanda R. Martinez, we chose to approach editing from a place of comadrisma, incorporating trust, vulnerability, honesty, and an ethic of care and love and "pushing each author to take their work to new places while doing so con cariño y respeto" (Hernández et al. 2019, 5). This experience helped demonstrate the activist potential inherent to comadrisma as it allowed us to question and push back against the norms and assumptions of our discipline and engage in citation activism to make our edited volume a space of resistance (Hernández et al. 2019).

Comadrisma as a Manifestation of Othermothering

The concept of comadrisma is deeply connected to Black feminist thought and the practice of othermothering as theorized by Collins (2000). While biological mothers are often assumed to have sole responsibility in raising and caring for children, Collins (2000) explains, "othermothers—women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities—traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood" (178). Othermothers accept responsibility, both formally and informally, for children that are not their own biologically (Story 2014), and in some cases may offer support to bloodmothers struggling with their preparation and/or desire for motherhood (Collins 2000). These othermothers include grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and "fictive kin" who are not biologically related but help to extend "women-centered networks of community-based child care" beyond the nuclear family and biology (Collins 2000, 179).

Modern constructions of U.S. American middle-class life make women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers harder to sustain; however, nurturing these relationships holds the potential for resistance (Collins 2000). Othermothering is ultimately activist in nature, allowing Black mothers to resist the "hegemonic and racist notions of mainstream society's idea of them" and in turn create "different types of mothering within Black communities that were not only revolutionary but creative" (Story 2014, 5). For Collins (2000), the practice of othermothering guides

Black women's political activism, as they may draw from their experiences being nurtured by othermothers as children and being responsible for caring for the children or relatives or fictive kin to create an ethic of care and personal responsibility toward all children in the Black community. This ultimately translates to an ethic of social responsibility to the larger Black community and lays a foundation for political activism (Story 2014). The activism inherent to othermothering is especially meaningful in the context of hostile political and economic surroundings, urging us to reject individualism and instead work to create the communities we hope to inhabit:

> the connectedness with others and common interest expressed by community othermothers model a very different value system, one whereby ethics of caring and personal accountability move communities forward.
>
> (Collins 2000, 191–2)

While "othermother" was not part of our vocabulary growing up, our Chicana upbringings also instilled in us this practice of communal mothering and an ethic of social responsibility that we understand as comadrisma. For example, for much of her childhood, Sarah and her mother lived with her maternal grandparents, and her abuela and abuelo cared for her while her mother was in college and later when she began working full time. This child care arrangement was beneficial for everyone. Sarah developed and sustained a close relationship with both of her grandparents, and her abuelita remained one of her closest confidants until her passing in 2017. Her grandparents also enjoyed the extra time spent with their grandchild, and her mother had access to childcare from the people she trusted the most. Similarly, Leandra's maternal abuela lived with her, her sister, and her parents her entire life until her passing when Leandra was in her mid-20s. Leandra often refers to her grandmother lovingly as her "second mother" and is thankful for the relationship she was able to develop and sustain with both her mother and her grandmother simultaneously. Since Leandra's parents both worked full time, Leandra's abuela also provided important childcare for her, which provides some of their richest memories and the best times spent together.

When Sarah entered graduate school, moving away from the comfort of her mother, abuelita, and community othermothers, she was able to understand the depth of this ethic of care, and the ways it had been instilled in her. Once, when a classmate shouted "who will be there to rear your children!?" attacking Sarah for planning to earn her Ph.D. and pursue a career as a college professor, it was baffling. Sarah had always expected to draw on communal mothering, assuming that her mother would care for her children while she worked, the same way her grandparents had cared for her. While writing her dissertation, Sarah found that the flexible hours awarded her the opportunity to serve as a comadre, caring for a close friend's new baby when her maternity leave ended. This care work was

reciprocal, it not only helped her friend, but also brought a sense of fulfillment and balance into Sarah's life as she worked to complete her Ph.D.

Many women of color have drawn on the concept of othermothers to make sense of their experiences of motherhood, and in our case, comadrisma in academia. For example, Collins (2000) explains that the relationships that form between Black female teachers and their Black students becomes a "mothering of the mind," drawing from communal practices of othermothering to teach with an ethic of care that surpasses traditional forms of mentorship. In the following section, we describe the ways in which we experience, and engage in, othermothering through Chicana M(other)work and comadrisma in the academy. Similar to the relationships between Black female teachers and Black students that Collins (2000) describes, we, too, have developed important relationships amongst our Latina/x colleagues and with our Latina/x students that sustains us and provides important mentorship by us and for us. As we have noted elsewhere, Latina/o/x faculty members are highly underrepresented in academia, and such a comadrisma mentoring approach provides sustenance for faculty and students alike (Martinez et al. in press).

Comadrisma in the Academy

Research continues to demonstrate that academia can be a hostile space for families, especially for mothers of color (Castañeda & Isgro 2013; Caballero et al. 2019). Torrez (2013) explains that even the people she hoped to lean on for support, Chicana faculty members, were sometimes the first to express their judgment of her motherhood and their disapproval of her academic pursuits that incorporated family and community; she stated, "Instead of providing models that could guide and refine my work overlapping family, community, and scholarship, these academic women had sacrificed community betterment for an isolated research agenda" (131). While made to feel that she was the exception for being a successful scholar and mother, Torrez (2013) argues that by working together, mother-scholar-activists can carve of spaces for all faculty, staff, and students to show up as their full selves and transcend the binaries between home and school, ensuring that all mothers can enjoy the same success and fulfillment she has been able to find. Chicana M(other)work is both a collective and a theoretical framework that takes up this call to action.

The Chicana M(other)work Collective draws on Collins' (2000) conceptualization of motherwork and othermothers to engage in "layered care work" that responds to the multiple forms of oppression that Mothers of Color experience in the United States (Caballero et al. 2019, 5). Chicana M(other)work helps build community within and outside of academia, transcending the binary between academic and domestic spaces by honoring the work done in classrooms, in communities, with other members of the collective, and with their children (Caballero et al. 2019). As a framework that specifically examines and resists the confines of

motherhood in academia, Chicana M(other)work stresses that the goal is not to assimilate into or diversify academia, and instead encourages us to transform it "for instance, by choosing not to hide our children, instead including them in our work for social justice" (Caballero et al. 2019, 5). This work is intergenerational, it carves space, it involves healing ourselves, it is an imaginary, and it makes the labor of mothers and othermothers in academia visible (Caballero et al. 2019). The founding members of this collective draw on the metaphor of a rebozo to make sense of how Chicana M(other)work enables them to make sense of their intersectional, fragmented identities. As the rebozo is woven together, thin, fragile strands of cotton become stronger, much like fragmented identities of Chicana, mother, and scholar. Once the rebozo is completed, this shawl is strong enough to pull hips back together after giving birth, it can hold babies, and it can be used as a protective cover to keep us warm or shield us as we nurse our babies (Caballero et al. 2019). This metaphor is also meaningful for understanding how we, as comadres, hold one another and "support each other through the layers of our actual lives" (Caballero et al. 2019, 14). For Sarah and Leandra, it is this element of support that illuminates comadrisma both personally and professionally.

Herrera and Mercado (2019) explain that "Being an othermother is an act of love" (160). Using testimonios, they describe their own personal experiences as an othermother and a mother in academia, and argue that their supportive relationship with one another has been not only affirming of these identities, but also key to their survival in academia. Herrera described her othermother identity accordingly:

> This pride in my othermother identity, my insistence on visibility as a Chicana feminist academic who supports, loves, and cares for children, my students, and other Chicana mothers, is my fierce commitment to cultivating an environment that recognizes the work we, as othermothers, do, all in the name of love.
>
> (Herrera & Mercado 2019, 160)

Such an othermother identity informs Leandra's practices in academia, as well, with Sarah, her fellow Sister-Scholar comadres, and even her students. For example, Leandra teaches at an institution where over 30% of students are characterized as first generation and nontraditional students; moreover, almost 20% of students at Leandra's institution have children or other dependents. Part of her reproductive justice praxis informs syllabus construction, course policies, and assignments that are mindful of parenting students and those with extended life expectations and responsibilities. One of her greatest joys was holding her advisee's toddler during class in the Fall of 2019 when the student could not find childcare and did not want to miss class. Leandra's academic identity—an unapologetic Chicana feminist, anti-racist/anti-sexist educator invested in reproductive justice—provides

space for students to be their authentic selves and to see their identities and families as bringing value to the classroom. In other words, honoring students' vivencias (or lived experiences) normalizes parenthood in academia and also serves as a form of love, connection, and support (Hernández & De Los Santos Upton 2020b).

As we have described elsewhere, Leandra's decision to become a comadre nonbiologically drove her to reproductive justice as an important area of praxis (Hernández & De Los Santos Upton 2020a). Conversations about her choice to not mother abound, as they did with Herrera and other Chicana feminist scholars who do not have biological children:

> As a Chicana scholar without children, I am constantly reminded that my decision to remain child-free must be a sign of my acquiescence to academe's harsh treatment of mothers, particularly Mothers of Color. I'm doing the work of racist patriarchy, it would seem. But these accusations and false assumptions could not be further from the truth, and my claiming an othermother identity as a radical and political act of love works alongside my refusal to be categorized so simply and incorrectly. My words here also free me and potentially other Women of Color academics from racist and heteropatriarchal academic norms that work to silence our experiences and lived realities.
>
> (Herrera & Mercado 2019, 160–1)

However, together with Sarah, sister-scholars, comadres, and other feminists, Leandra has found what Herrera refers to as "radical acceptance" as an othermother. Together, we are able to create radically subversive *and* transcendent forms of family and connection with our biological family members, our colleagues in academia, and our students who often serve as our "academic niños." We work to continuously dismantle heteronormative, heterosexist, and essentializing definitions of family, sisterhood, and parenthood. We advocate for each other, build alliances together, and ultimately perform and make visible the "empowering possibilities of love" (Herrera & Mercado 2019, 162–3).

Mercado's testimonio of motherhood, which accompanies Herrera's othermother testimonio referenced above, vividly highlights the "time and energy walls" that accompany parenting young children on the tenure track, and the haunting messages about the "out-of-placeness" of a "young Brown mother in academia" (Herrera & Mercado 2019, 164).

After becoming a mother of two children while on the tenure track, Sarah has also struggled with fears and anxieties surrounding productivity. She is often mentally and physically exhausted, and time has become a precious resource. Though they have not lived in the same city (or even country at times), Leandra has supported Sarah as an othermother, holding her up from afar. They began writing together when Sarah was pregnant with her first child, turning in their book manuscript the day before her son Diego

was born, one week after Sarah's beloved abuelita Isabel passed away. During this time, Leandra was a compassionate co-author, maintaining "breathable" time lines and leaving room for extensions (Herrera & Mercado 2019, 168). She was, however, much more than that. She held Sarah in her grief, and helped her negotiate the delicate balance of simultaneously experiencing the most painful and most joyous moments of her life.

When they are able to be together in person, Leandra has been a comadre to Sarah's babies, holding them during conference presentations and playfully distracting them when necessary. She has also mothered Sarah by supporting her as a full person and affirming her identities as a Chicana, mother, and scholar. For example, mothering two exclusively breastfed babies has meant that Sarah brings them along to academic conferences and feeds them when they are hungry, whenever that might be. Well aware of the hostility directed at breastfeeding mothers (Mercado-López 2013), Sarah was nervous; however, with Leandra by her side, prepared to defend her against anyone who dared to make a negative comment, she found the bravery to feed her babies during meetings, at restaurants, and even in the middle of giving conference presentations when necessary. Like Mercado-López (2013), for Sarah, the ability to feed her babies has fed her body and soul, and receiving support from comadres has significantly contributed to her "feeling of satisfaction as a mother and a scholar, which further enhanced [her] scholarship and productivity" (35). Our comadre experiences demonstrate the ways in which mothering can be reimagined as sustaining, promoting a productivity that is meaningful, and empowers us emotionally (Herrera & Mercado 2019, 167). Like Herrera and Mercado (2019), Sarah and Leandra have worked to negotiate their complex lives in ways that sustain scholarship, challenge and maintain their places in the academy, and most importantly allow their friendship to flourish. While their writing collaborations and friendship have illuminated comadrisma as an embodied practice for Sarah and Leandra, they have found that it extends to their network of peer-mentors, or sister-scholar comadres.

Leandra has found great joy in othermothering with Sarah. She has comothered Sarah's children—Diego and Isabel—at annual NCA and WSCA conferences. Together, Sarah and Leandra have presented with both of Sarah's children, and Leandra has helped Sarah during NCA business meetings by taking care of Sarah's niños during important business meeting matters. The othermothering circle Leandra and Sarah have created with other comadres[1] has not only provided important forms of social support across distance via shared group chats, collaborative writing sessions, alternating authorship order depending on life circumstances, and organizing collaborative work according to family schedules; the othermothering circle has also served as an important form of collective activism by normalizing motherhood in academia, especially at national and regional conferences,

which serve as one of the most visible forms of academic presence and performance. Together, we fiercely advocate on behalf of academia mamás in our discipline and hope to show younger parent-scholars that they are welcomed and supported, as well.

Informed by Black and Chicana feminisms, comadrisma transcends traditional academic peer mentoring and scholar-student mentoring relationships by forging new families both within and outside of academia. From a comadrisma perspective, such families *literally* enable survival within academia and serve as political modes of alliance and solidarity. Together, Leandra and Sarah are thankful to have cultivated such a Sister-Scholar comadre space over the past several years with hermanas who have become trusted friends and co-mentors. In addition to co-writing, collaborating, and sharing ideas, this space has also provided emotional and mental sustenance amidst academic and nonacademic stressors. Moreover, from within this comadre space, we have collaborated on several edited volumes, book chapters, and journal articles. For us, the writing process is about much more than simply publishing an article or a book. Rather, it is a communal process of vulnerability and support of each other's ideas. Together, we have cultivated a space of support and production, our own academic family of academic *madres*, *hermanas,* and *tías*—we cultivate and support each other's thoughts and ideas, each other's path to tenure and administrative/academic fulfillment, and each other's children and families along the way. Our space of support and cultivation is a feminist act that renders motherhood visible *and* acceptable in academia, dismantles academic norms of hypercompetition and siloing, and enables our survival in personal, professional, and academic spaces.

Comadrisma as Repro-Justice

As we have described earlier in this chapter, comadrisma informs our feminist praxis, as it influences the courses we compose and teach, the writing and collaboration that we do with each other and with hermanas in our discipline, the research through which we mentor our students and advisees, and also the ways in which we practice reproductive justice feminism in academia and in our communities. As we have written about elsewhere, for Leandra, uncertainties about motherhood drove her to reproductive justice as a personal passion and formal topic of inquiry, one where she can explore other forms of motherhood and community through her role as a tía and comadre, an aunt that serves as a source of social support for fellow friends and family members who have children.

> In Latinx families, the age-old saying 'It takes a village to raise a child' illustrates the importance of both blood-related support, such as from

> an aunt, or nonblood-related support, such as from a comadre who serves as an unofficial godmother.
>
> (Hernández & De Los Santos Upton 2019, 1046)

From a reproductive justice perspective, familial and nonfamilial support is an invaluable tool in child-rearing and maternal mental and physical support. In our own relationship together as authors, sister-scholars, and long-time friends, Leandra is a "comadre and tía to Sarah's children, a relationship that further fuels our commitment to reproductive justice in all spheres" (Hernández & De Los Santos Upton 2019, 1046). This chapter serves as an embodied manifestation of and representation of our *comadrisma* approach, one wherein we illustrate and explore the significance of comadres and co-mothering as both a method of writing and also a mode of academic survival within a reproductive justice framework. *Con madres y tías juntas, sí, hay revolución*.

Note

1 We would like to thank the comadres that have mentored and mothered us: Stacey Sowards, Amanda Martinez, Diana Martinez, Diana Leon Boys, Shantel Martinez, and Bernardita Maria Yunis Varas.

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Part II

Refiguring Media Representations of Motherhood Beyond Biology

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6 Donors and Disclosures: Rhetorical Explanations of Assisted Reproductive Technology and Parenthood in Children's Literature

Rae Lynn Schwartz-DuPre and Stacey K. Sowards

I [Rae Lynn] remember walking into the in vitro fertilization (IVF) clinic. I had hung up my Vermont-hippie beliefs and was ready to embrace any option science had to offer. I watched mostly heterosexual couples awkwardly find their seats. I presumed they too had failed. Together we sat in group detention, about 25–30 people in shame, waiting for the details of a new chapter in our hidden world of infertility. It was then I noticed two women sitting together with a giggly glee about them. For these women, and many other queer couples, IVF, rather than signifying failure, presented possibilities previously restricted by law, regulations, and biology.

For me [Stacey], using a sperm donor as a single mother was about relationship failure, rather than the failure to become a mother, although it was really about both. I went through four cycles of IVF, and my sense of failure was that I was already 40 and might not be able to conceive. Like Rae Lynn, I witnessed heterosexual couples in the waiting rooms, and felt a sense of dismay as well as hope that I would become a single mother on my own.

In 1983, the first U.S. American child was born by assisted reproductive technology (ART). Since then, the explosive growth of reproductive technologies has helped more than a million women[1] conceive babies (CDC 2016). In vitro fertilization (IVF), a type of ART that is often enabled through donor eggs and sperm, has allowed thousands of people to become parents outside of reproductive heteronormative sexual intercourse. The documentation of sperm donation has a history dating back to 1779 ("Sperm Banking History"). Available data estimate 20,000–60,000 babies are conceived through sperm donation per year, although the first documentation of egg donation was not reported until 1984. Now, close to 10,000 women give birth to donor egg babies per year (Hammond 2018; Fairfax EggBank 2019).

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Each of us, as authors of this chapter, has our own experience using IVF to become pregnant, one of us with donor sperm (Stacey) and one of us with donor eggs (Rae Lynn). For us, such measures were last resorts to become pregnant when other means were not viable; for others, such as queer or non-heternormative families, these approaches are one of the only options available for viable pregnancies and pathways to parenthood. While ARTs have become somewhat normalized through media news coverage and a few storylines in popular culture, our everyday experiences reflect societal expectations of traditional, nuclear, and biological families. Encountering expectations of the cisgender, two-parent heterosexual household or the biological mother, for example, has meant that we have had to explain to our children, from a very young age, the roles of parenthood that other children do not encounter. Questions such as "where is her daddy?" and comments such as "your daughter looks so much like you!" have encouraged us to seek out children's books that address these non-traditional paths to parenthood as tools to explain our families' differences to our children. This chapter analyzes children's picture books surrounding donor sperm and eggs as ways to explain what we call "coming-to-be stories"—narratives that support non-traditional parenthood that are unrecognized and little understood by broader populations.

To that end, we explore the rhetorical construction of parenthood in the limited genre of children's picture books that attempts to narrate and explain how these non-traditional families come-to-be. We begin with an exploration of why children's books are important to donor families. A number of children's books explore different family structures, but this chapter specifically focuses on stories illustrating the egg and sperm donor processes. Next, we critically consider four themes both egg and sperm donors picture books share: (1) privileged, white, and upper-class status of families who can "shop" for their donor; (2) a depressed mother figure who grieves her inability to conceive a child; (3) a donor characterized by anonymity and their generous "gift"; and (4) anthropomorphized non-human animal protagonists and characters. We conclude by taking up how books are marketed to different kinds of families, particularly the nuclear (non-biological) family and the single mother, and suggest a rhetorical move away from a divided discourse of exceptions as an omnipresent rule of parenthood toward an ideology that embraces the multiple ways in which children come-to-be part of their families.

Reproductive Scholarship and the Biology of Parenthood

In the last decade, there has been an expansive body of reproductive studies scholarship devoted to the cultural impact of reproductive technologies (Gürtin & Faircloth 2018), including the study of how some mothers become single parents by choice (Hertz 2008; Mattes 2013). Parenting studies also seek to understand how parenting is intensified "during precisely the

same period as the 'explosion' of technologies of assisted reproduction" (Gürtin & Faircloth 2018, 244). For example, in her book *Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice*, Hertz (2008) explores at length women's counternarratives to the traditional family path of love, marriage, and babies. Many of the women in her study are situated in between the single mother by accident on one end, or the female figure who never had children either because she could not or because she waited too long. In more contemporary terms, we also recognize the changing nature of motherhood/parenthood as gender nonconforming individuals and couples also take on parenting roles, which reproductive studies literature has not fully addressed.

While very little scholastic attention has been given to children's books about sperm and egg donation, a few scholars have attended to the images of assisted reproduction in advertisements for donors. Hobbs (2007) argues that in these ads, cultural modes of biological parenthood—including the role of childbearing in marriage–are adopted to construct reproductive technology as the search for a donor in emotional, but not financial terms. Thus, rather than a technology, donors are all too often incorporated in a traditional language of marriage, childbearing, and parenthood (Hobbs 2007). Excluded from these narratives are the diverse types of donor conceived families including single, queer, trans, co-parenting, co-habiting, and communial parenting.

The literature that documents how non-biological parents tell adopted children at a young age how they came to be part of their families is extensive (Tartakovsky 2018). The narratives differ, but therapists agree stories should be age appropriate and a regular routine, emphasize that they are in a "forever family," and warn against forcing gratefulness by telling children they are lucky or special (Tartakovsky 2018). The idea of a forever family means that each child should come to understand that no matter how they were conceived, they are similar to other children and their parent(s) will love and care for them unconditionally even though they may not look like their parent(s). Adoption specialists advise that parents should provide young children with reading resources to better understand their adoption. There are so many books about adoption that publishers, such as Tapestry Books, are devoted entirely to adoption reading and resources. Therapists studying donor children have far fewer families to study and thus have taken a cue from adoption literature. They recommend that parents of children conceived with donors tell children as soon as possible how they came to be. Yet an important difference between adoption narratives and donor narratives is the figure of the donor and what role, if any, that person might play in the child's life. The term donor itself is somewhat problematic, as many donors are paid for their services, which often involve invasive procedures (especially in the case of egg donation). Yet the term donor implies the voluntary giving of a gift, which is not necessarily an accurate description of the egg and sperm donor for-profit industry.

> While families take different approaches to (non)biological parental disclosure to their children, many parents (the two authors included) have told their children about their biological backgrounds well before they understood the basics of reproduction. Nancy Freeman-Carroll, a psychologist with a specialization in fertility, explains these challenges: … for parents of a child conceived with gamete donation, these first questions about how families are made can be especially challenging. The questions may seem designed to reveal a parent's guilt or shame about infertility, delayed parenting or whatever circumstances led to the choice of assisted conception. They engage a parent's anxiety about their child's origin, including fantasies of the future when the child might know and reject the story of their conception. Children in families created by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) parents or by single parents by choice are more certain to learn about donor conception when they start to ask questions about where they come from. (2016, 40–1)

Freeman-Carroll's recommendation is that all narratives shared with children of donor conception need to (1) share the struggle to have a family; (2) imagine the donor; and (3) incorporate the choice of donor conception into family life.

We personally chose to tell our children their "coming-to-be-story" through books and our own explanations, which we unpack and explain in the rest of this essay. Most picture books are short, 24–35 illustrated pages in length, and are for children who are not literate, or are just learning to read (Kennedy 2019). In picture books about donors, the didactive details of these thematic books are similar: a female figure is sad because she wants a baby and cannot have one (the details of why vary); she goes to a doctor who offers a solution; then a "nice man," "special lady," or "kind donor" gives her a gift (often literally pictured as a wrapped gift box); she then has a baby, and lives happily ever after. The abundance of independent publishers (suggesting that large publishing houses have little interest in such stories), the poor narrative structure, and overly wordy texts provide few acceptable picture books to share with children. Yet, given the market for and the sale of such books, there is demand for these narratives to help parents explain to their children the coming-to-be story that led to their current family structures. How such books construct donor eggs and sperm reproductive options have influenced thousands, if not millions, of children and their parents' understanding of parenthood and family. In what follows, we examine how donor stories erase privileges, present motherhood tropes, employ gift-giving donor metaphors, and anthropomorphize animal protagonists. Such themes shape children's (and their parents') understandings of donors that both normalize and simplify such practices in problematic ways.

Erasing Privileges of Whiteness and Class Status in Donor Stories

Of the several rhetorical themes that egg and sperm narratives share, one of the most prevalent is the overwhelming representation of whiteness and upper class standing of the families involved. None of the most popular books in this limited genre (we reviewed twelve) included any mention of the costs and/or racial and class privilege embedded in donor assisted fertility treatment. Though the multibillion-dollar donation industry is relatively new in the formal sense, the use of reproductive technology has an extended and divisive history. Embedded in any discussion of fertility assistance, Roberts (2009) contends, is a long history of population control, sterilization, and genetic selection as privatized remedies for illness, social inequality, and racism. The ideology of population control affirms reproduction as the sole responsibility of women and legitimizes punitive regulation of (often poor) women of color or white women who cannot live up to these neoliberal standards (Roberts 2009). This reproductive hierarchy especially regulates women of color and their childbearing decisions. And, in the case of people with disabilities, many are denied the choice entirely. In our picture book archive, it is worth noting that all the mothers are able-bodied, and if human or semi-human, are white. In one book, the characters are green (representing peas), but the blond hair of the mother figure suggests whiteness. There is also little or no discussion at all of the high costs of ART and IVF.

Though "choice" as an ideological framework has morphed, when it comes to fertility assistance and egg or sperm donation, ART is targeted to economically and racially privileged potential parents. "According to the University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital each cycle of IVF costs $12,000 to $17,000 on average" (National Conference of State Legislators 2019).[2] In the United States—factoring in donor compensation and agency fees, cycle fees, medication costs, legal fees, and other miscellaneous costs—the price of donor assisted technology can be as high as $30,000 per cycle (Silbergleid 2013). In striking contrast, millions (if not billions) of women globally lack access to safe and basic reproductive care. Roberts explains that racial hierarchies are reinforced by: images associated with reproductive technologies dominated by pictures of white healthy babies; divisions constructed around genetic testing regulations; and various laws and policies that discourage poor, disabled, non-white, and/or queer women from having children at all.

In the children's picture books we analyzed, there is an overwhelming presumption of whiteness and affluency. For example, in Linda Stamm's (2016) *Phoebe's Family: A Story about Egg Donation* and Sheri Sturniolo's (2018) *You Were Made for Me*, the family consists of two white heterosexual parents and one light-skinned, white appearing child. In Stamm's tale, Phoebe, the child, is concerned because her red hair is not like her

parents. Then after talking to her mother, she learns she is similar to her family in other ways. Though not specifically mentioned in the text, everyone in the book appears white and Phoebe's extra-large bedroom and her extravagant backyard suggest her family is financially secure. While it may not be appropriate to discuss how much IVF and donors cost in picture books for children, it is also problematic that the parents in the stories are overwhelmingly white, access medical assistance with ease, and find effortlessly a donor who helps the parents conceive. Similarly, in Georgy's (2011) story, *Little Treasure*, the mother is missing something in her life, so she goes around her town's stores to buy something that will "fill my heart with love" (2). She realizes, while sitting at a park bench that what she is missing is a child; she eventually makes her way to the doctor's office to seek assistance to have a baby. This story literally features the mother shopping around for her "little treasure," yet fails to exhibit any kind of class, race, or ethnic consciousness, suggesting that the expense is of no concern. None of the books we reviewed explicitly discuss the medical or financial process of ART and IVF, simultaneously reinforcing the classed and racialized privileged nature of ART options as well as financial, medical, and emotional decision-making for so many potential parents.

Desperate to Deliver: Longing to Be a Mother

The featured women, in donor story picture books, are presented as sad, depressed women who cannot conceive or find a life partner to have a child with, and thus must pursue the donor path. The sadness and struggle described in Georgy's and Sturniolo's books (featured in the previous section) are echoed in almost every book we reviewed. Georgy's *Little Treasure* suggests that the main character, Natalie, is sad because she is missing something in her life, even though she has "a loving family, good friends, and an interesting job … She had been DREAMING OF THIS TREASURE for a long, long time" (2011, 2). Kluger-Bell's multi-series book, *The Pea That Was Me*, addresses multiple types of families that used sperm and egg donation. Yet most of her books feature a sad blonde-haired female figure. Metaphorically she is an adult pea pod, that is, the future mother of the baby pea. One of the stories starts with the question "But where did the pea that was me come from?" followed by a brief and simple explanation of "When you put the egg from the lady, Together with the sperm from the man …" (2013, 2, 7). However, the woman in the sperm donation version of these books does not have a man, so she has to go to a doctor. In this part of the story, the female pea pod appears sad because she cannot have a baby (nor does she "have a man in her life"). In Elizabeth Weiss's (2020) *Mommy and Me*, the potential mother is always smiling, but the child says "She may have a special man in her life to help, and he may become the daddy. Or, with the help of a doctor, a mommy can get help from another kind of special man called a donor" (6–7). While most of these narratives

do not overtly emphasize the female character's sadness, it is clear that the stories frame single and childless status as something that needs to be changed, especially when read in the cultural milieu of ubiquitous children's and adult narratives of heterosexual, nuclear family structures. That is, the constant exposure of compulsory heterosexual, nuclear family relationships means that these stories are read and understood in the trope of the sad, depressed single woman who cannot have children. As we noted in our opening stories, shame also becomes part of this trope.

Egg donation stories are similarly framed. For example, Carmen Martínez Jover's (2005) book features Pally, a rabbit mother-to-be in bed sobbing with lots of tissues because "she felt very sad." In Julie Marie's (2018) *Happy Together*, the male and female bear went to the doctor because they could not have a baby. Yet "as the seasons passed by, The Medicine didn't work" and they were "so sad" (11). In Carolina Nadel's (2007) *Mommy Was Your Tummy Big*, the elephant mother was in physical pain as she "took many medicines" but "no baby came" and they "were so disappointed" (13–4). While these stories present infertility as a sad experience, they can also create pressure or situations in which children are supposed to resolve a parent's sadness. As Freeman-Carol explains,

> … young children will accept the facts of their conception in the same way they accept other facts of their life, such as where and how they live, and who lives with them, loves them, and takes care of them. It is also possible that young children can have an anxious reaction to descriptions of parents' pain and physical vulnerability, and it is clear they do not need this information in order to be introduced to the basic facts of assisted conception. (2016, 44)

In our opinion, children's coming-to-be stories should be centered on the child and not the struggle of parents. Young children want to know how they came to be part of the family, free from guilt, fear, or anxiety. Of course, this is further complicated when read against the saturation of stories that depict a normative structure of heterosexual, biological, nuclear families in children's literature.

Donors and Gift Giving

Coming-to-be stories require not just parents and children, but the mysterious donor. What he or she looks like varies although in both egg and sperm donation accounts, the donor is anonymous (although that is not always the case in reality) and gift bearing. Almeling explores the different embodied experiences of U.S. American egg and sperm donors. Although both are paid, she found that egg donors saw donation as a gift, while sperm donors perceived it as a job even though the difficulty of providing such "gifts" or "work" is quite different for egg and sperm donors.

"The difference between sperm and egg donors' understanding of donation has to do with the different and gendered ways that donation is framed by egg agencies and sperm banks" (Hammond 2018, 268), even as the gendered experiences of actual donors play out differently in the form of gift versus work.

In children's books, the donor offers a "gift." The term donor itself suggests a gift or donation, eliding the costs and payments associated with donor work. In many of the stories we analyzed, the donor (whether egg or sperm) actually gives a gift, that is, a wrapped box with a bow on top (e.g., in Kimberly Kluger-Bell's series and in Elizabeth Weiss's (2020) *Mommy and Me*). In George Anne Clay's *Why Don't I Have a Daddy?,* the mother lion explains to her cub,

> A donor is a lion who helps another lion by giving a gift … one of the rules for receiving this special gift from a donor lion is that both the mother and the cub are not able to meet the donor father. Also, your donor father does not even know about us … So, my dear sweet cub, you were created out of my strong, deep love for you and the generous gift of a special lion. (2008, 15–7).

In donor egg narratives that feature two parents, the gift giver is never referred to as a "mother" but rather a "special lady" to avoid biological confusion. The kindness of such donors is inherent in such stories, even as the reality might be quite different, and often focused on the donor's financial incentive. The donor also provides the "gift" of releasing sadness for women. In our experiences, however, the emotionality tied to infertility, relationship failure, and single status is more complicated and is not simply eliminated by being impregnated through a sperm or egg. Even years later, reflecting back on both of our own experiences, the idea of a gift seems reductionistic and does not simply resolve the deeply emotional issues surrounding ART and IVF using donor sperm and eggs.

Anthropomorphism in Donor Stories

As is the case with many children's books, coming-to-be stories also depict non-human animal characters to play the role of parent, donor, doctor, and baby. Leonard S. Marcus, a children's literature scholar, explains that animals in children's picture books provide the fantasy and fun of the story (1983, 2008). Lynley (2012) argues that certain animals come with "prepackaged character traits: wolves are evil, foxes are cunning, bears like honey" (para. 1). These archetypes can be helpful to explain stories to children. Expressions of an elephant's memory or the fertility of rabbits are associations that children learn early on (Marcus 1983). Moreover, Lynley explains that animals are direct speakers, a trait that is useful for children who may not understand figures of speech or metaphor. Maria Nikolajeva

contends that the "depiction of a character as an animal (or toy or inanimate object) allows the writer to eliminate or circumvent" several important issues such as age, gender, race, and class (2003, 104). Giving animals human attributes, as Nodelman notes, enables them to leave their sometimes-scary instincts and attributes behind and become a hybrid figure child can associate with. Marcus (1983) explores six common themes in non-human animal depictions in children's stories: taming the animal (e.g., *Curious George*), capturing the animal (e.g., *Dumbo*), functioning as a doll (e.g., *Winnie the Pooh*,) playing nonsensical roles (e.g., *Dr. Seuss*), symbolizing private obsession (e.g., *Where the Wild Things Are*), and appearing as human or misfit. This last theme of the misfit is especially important when considering the discourse of donor narratives. The animal is an outsider, but not able to conceive without the help of others. Yet as is the case in most animal outsider picture books, these characters are also understood as displaying strong individuality and agency.

Non-human animals have important connotations that inform our discourse. For example, elephants are the central character in Carolina Nadel's (2007) *Mommy, Was Your Tummy Big*—a story of an elephant family that needed a donor egg to have a baby. In Nadel's narrative the biggest of all creatures requires help to have a baby. The bear, the protagonist in Julie Marie's (2018) *Happy Together: An Egg Donation Story*, is a Native American symbol of strength, family, courage, and powers to heal. The symbolism of Marie's spirit bears (read as a white bear) wearing human clothing and riding a tandem bike pulling their cub gets taken up by children through anthropocentrism. Taking the advice of their brown bear doctor, they accept a gift from a fair skinned/furred "special lady called a donor" (Marie 2018, 15). Eventually, Mommy bear gives birth to a very fair skinned (furred) cub. The obvious privileging of white over brown is inescapable and, in Marie's book, even the mighty bear needs the help of generous others to have cubs. In contrast, there is the overly fertile rabbit, the central character in Carmen Martínez Jover's (2005) *The Tiny Itsy Bitsy Gift of Life: An Egg Donor Story*. Pally, the female rabbit in Martínez Jover's donor narrative, was sad because she had no more "itsty bitsy seeds" to make a bunny. Yet a "rabbit lady knocked on her door" (pictured through fertility symbolism with at least eight bunnies in tow) to give Pally a "gift" (Martínez Jover 2006, 11). Pally put the gift in her tummy and a "beautiful bunny girl" was born. Here, the most fertile of creatures needs help. Even some rabbits, young readers learn, accept help to become a "Mummy." Each animal, the powerful elephant, the strong bear, and fertile rabbit need the gift of a donor to have babies.

For sperm donor recipients, George Anne Clay's (2008) *Why Don't I have a Daddy?* uses lions to explain donor conception. The story opens with a mother lion and her cub comparing lion families to zebra, elephant, leopard, and monkey families, with the mother lion telling her cub, "no two families are exactly the same, just as no two animals are exactly the same."

The cub then asks, "Mama, why don't I have a daddy?" (2008, 9–11). The mother explains that there was a "donor lion" and that she had never met him; the cub asks "what am I supposed to say when other cubs ask about my daddy?" to which she responds, that "we don't have a daddy in our family. My family is my mom and me" (19). However, children do not always have the courage, strength, and/or authority that the lion symbolizes. Thus, it is essential that children learn early how to navigate the questions donor children encounter with confidence and sense of familiar belonging especially considering the dominant and pervasive storylines of the biological, nuclear family in children's literature and popular culture.

In addition to stories of non-human animal families, one popular coming-to-be story tells the story through the voice of a green pea. Kimberly Kluger-Bell's eight picture book collection stars a green pea and adheres to the four themes we discuss—neglect of race and class, a sad female figure, a happy gift giver, and anthropomorphized character, in this instance a green pea. Yet this collection differs in that in each book the situation differs just so slightly. The books all have the same title *The Pea That Was Me*, though subtitles differ to refer to a unique population—*An Egg Donation Story* (2012), *A Sperm Donation Story* (2013), *An Embryo Donation Story* (2013), *A Single Mom's Sperm Donation Story* (2013), *A Two Moms/ Sperm Donation Story* (2014), *A Two Dads' Egg Donation and Surrogacy Story* (2014), *An IVF Story* (2014), and *A Single Mom's Sperm and Egg Donation Story* (2017). Each story is made of a pea drawing on the metaphor pictured on the covers of "two peas in a pod," although the cover has four peas in the pod, each smiling, the connotation is that the peas and pod belong together. The narratives have the same format, in fact most pages have similar (if not exactly the same) text and illustrations. Though Kluger-Bell's books are marked by their lack of racial and class difference and awareness (at least for us), they simultaneously provide possibilities by proliferating the type of gendered families that can benefit from donation.

Conclusion: Moving Beyond Simplistic Donor Disclosures

The themes presented here—racial and class privilege, depressed mother figures, generous gift giving donors, and anthropomorphized non-human animal protagonists—explain how children's books that narrate stories of egg and sperm donors simplify and reduce experiences to make them easily understood and palatable. However, the stories of egg donation in heterosexual couples is divorced entirely from that of sperm donation for single mothers and each of these is divided from the narrative experiences of queer parents, not to mention potential parents without the financial resources to pursue sperm and/or egg donation. This divide suggests to young children that their situation is unique and different instead of connected to a larger discourse describing the many ways children come to be part of their families. While other children's books explore different kinds of families,

these books try to unpack the complicated aspects of ART and IVF as well as egg and sperm donations. Yet, they fail to convey the U.S. obsession with biological parenthood and how children of donor eggs and/or sperm are likely to face challenges in addressing the dominant narratives of heterosexual, nuclear families that they see in their friends' and classmates' families and broader media representations.

Sarah Kornfield, in her chapter in this volume, explores evangelical resistance to biological motherhood, in claims of spiritual motherhood. However, the dominant narratives of biological parenting are everywhere, both in children's literature and media, as well as most media for adults. Reframing how we understand biology and motherhood is essential for resisting such dominant ideologies. Regrettably, the stories we reviewed are most likely only read by the children of donors and their parents, are excluded from traditional children's books and thus they have little effect in changing the broader cultural narratives of compulsory heterosexuality and the nuclear family.

Notes

1 Most ART and IVF literature refers to women as those who were born biologically as female and identify as women as adults (cisgender); however, we recognize some transgender people to use ART and IVF to conceive children.
2 Fourteen states have laws that require insurance companies to cover infertility treatment and two states—California and Texas—have laws that require insurance companies to offer coverage for infertility treatment. Yet the laws are unique and of those 14, three California, Louisiana, and New York, have laws that specifically exclude IVF (National Conference of State Legislators, 2019). To maintain competitiveness, in 2014, Apple agreed to pay for their female employees to freeze their eggs to allow employees to have children at a later date (Freeman-Carroll 2016, 45). Several other multinational companies have begun to cover reproductive technologies, yet each with their own rules and stipulations.

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7 Las No-Madres: The Commercialization and Medicalization of Infertility in *Quién quiere ser madre*

Catherine Bourland Ross and Bailey Barlow

Behind every woman without children is a story and we need to start telling those stories; hearing those stories.

—Jody Day

So begins Silvia Nanclares's novel about infertility, with a quote by Jody Day, the founder of *Gateway Women: United By and Beyond Childlessness*. *Quién quiere ser madre* (Who wants to be a mother)[1] narrates the unsuccessful journey of the protagonist through the increasingly medicalized and commercialized experience of infertility treatments. According to a study done by the World Health Organization and published by *PLoS*, an estimated 48.5 million couples worldwide were affected by infertility in 2010. Nanclares's novel elucidates Spain's system in support of fertility treatments and questions how Spanish culture privileges biological motherhood. Spain has, from the American perspective, a generous state-sponsored family leave (16 paid weeks) and state-supported fertility treatments for women under 40, which makes such treatments fairly accessible.[2] The theme of childbirth as a necessary part of being a woman infuses the tale told by Silvia, the narrator, who shares the author's name. By showing the protagonist's struggles to accept her state as a non-biological mother, Nanclares's narration emphasizes Spain's cultural portrayal of the non-maternal female body as biologically and socially deviant. First, we situate the novel within the cultural context of Spain. We then summarize the theoretical perspectives of infertility and motherhood. After situating the novel both culturally and theoretically, we move to an analysis of how the medicalization of a woman's body and the commercialization of infertility lead the protagonist to reject the mother/woman binarism and give up the search for a biological child.

Silvia Nanclares (b. 1975, Madrid) is a Spanish writer, editor, and activist. Her first novel, *Quién quiere ser madre*, published in 2017, is an autobiographical novel that narrates a fictionalized version of the author's experiences with fertility treatments and assisted reproduction. In an interview with *Pikara Magazine* (Nanclares 2017a), Nanclares said that she

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wrote the book to fill a gap she saw in the topics covered in published fiction. The lack of books that addressed infertility and assisted reproduction contributed to her sense of loneliness during the experience. She wrote *Quién quiere ser madre* to begin to open that dialogue for herself and other women experiencing similar challenges (Nanclares 2017a). Nanclares addresses the idea of motherhood being socially tied to womanhood, as well as the constructed binary of those who are mothers and those who are not. When asked about the dichotomy mothers/not mothers, Nanclares responds, "Maternities are complex, combining material, emotional and even philosophical aspects. Then why do we have to catalogue ourselves as mothers or non-mothers?" (Nanclares 2017a).[3] The concept of attaining a blood-related pregnancy is carried throughout the entire novel, which begins with the death of the narrator's father. His death prompts the narrator, Silvia, to embark upon a quest to become a mother, despite the biological challenges presented by her age. The novel, set in Madrid, Spain, chronicles her challenges as she, alongside a group of women friends, seeks to become pregnant.

The novel *Quién quiere ser madre* illustrates the difficulties experienced by Silvia as she tries to become a mother. Through the theoretical lens of embodiment, we see how the experience of medicalization of women's bodies affects Silvia and makes her question her connection to her body. She begins to see her body as a non-productive machine, while trying to reject being reduced to a uterus and hormones. While struggling with the concept of being sterile, she also embraces the term and questions why women must be defined by their choice to become mothers or not. Throughout all of the experiences narrated in the novel, the medicalization of the female body and the commercialization of fertility products stand out in stark contrast to the emotional and philosophical wonderings of the narrator. The mother versus non-mother binary construct continues to influence the protagonist and cause her great consternation, even as she seeks to reject this binarism.

Spain provides an interesting example of how cultural shifts affect infertility. Under the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), Spain's total fertility rate (TFR) was one of the highest in Europe, at 2.8 children per woman. By 1996, it was 1.16, one of the lowest in the world (Kohler, Billari, & Ortega 2002). In the most recent survey by the Instituto nacional de estadísticas (INE) in 2015, Spain's TFR was 1.23. By the end of 2015, the mean maternal age at birth of the first child in Spain was 31.9 years, well above the EU average of 28.8 years (INE 2016). In their article "On Reproductive Work in Spain," Marre, Román, and Guerra (2018) explain that Spain changed quickly from an authoritarian, conservative, Catholic country under the Franco dictatorship to a liberal, democratic country with some of the least restrictive assisted reproduction laws (160). They suggest that the "trend of fertility postponement has occurred at the same time that parenting has become increasingly intensive" which results in smaller families and higher rates of infertility (160).[4] While the term intensive

motherhood comes from *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* by American writer Sharon Hays (1998), the concept is widely used in Spain as a defining factor of the neoliberal aspect of mothering.[5]

Nanclares's novel illustrates how the diagnosis of infertility affects a woman's interpretation of herself and her societal role. In order to analyze how infertility is represented in Nanclares's narrative, we must first understand the clinical definition of infertility and the associated theory. According to the International Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecology (FIGO), infertility is the inability to conceive a child after a year or more of unprotected intercourse, or the inability to carry a pregnancy to term. That definition, however, does not take into account the varying physical and emotional impacts of the inability to conceive or carry a child to term. Sandelowski (1990), in her article "Failures of Volition: Female Agency and Infertility in Historical Perspective," delves further into the ways infertility can be interpreted:

> Infertility has been variously described as a syndrome of multiple origin, a consequence or manifestation of disease rather than a disease entity itself, a biological impairment, a psychosomatic disorder, a condition characterizing a couple rather than an individual, a failure to conform to cultural prescriptions to reproduce, and a failure to fulfil the personal desire to beget a child. (477)

Sandelowski's statement draws attention to the variability of how infertility can impact those who experience it as well as how society interprets this inability to reproduce. In her book *With Child in Mind: Studies of the Personal Encounter with Infertility*, Sandelowski (2016) also tells us that "[t]he line between reproductive capacity and incapacity, between health and disease, and between normality and deviance has always been unclear in the matter of infertility, varying with individual reproductive choices, social circumstances, and cultural norms" (10). Nanclares contemplates the concept of the non-mothering body in Spain in order to understand how Spanish cultural norms and expectations view biological motherhood as normal and non-mothers (infertile women) as deviant.

The experience of infertility is gendered, as motherhood is central to the social understanding of womanhood. Although Sandelowski's previous quote from her article mentions that infertility can be seen as a condition that affects a couple, most commonly we see that infertility is a woman's problem, because women's identity is so closely tied to being a mother. Oliver's (2010) article "Motherhood, Sexuality, and Pregnant Embodiment: Twenty-Five Years of Gestation" presents a summary of feminist thought on the connection between women and mothers, explaining that "pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing have traditionally been the ways that women could gain recognition, such as it is, from a patriarchal culture that values them only insofar as they reproduce future citizens" (765). While Oliver speaks from a

historical perspective, she recognizes the close ties between how women, especially feminists, interpret themselves within the concept of women as mothers. Letherby (2002) expands on this concept, explaining that "motherhood is valued rhetorically (even though it has little material and social status) [and] non-motherhood is defined as lesser" (285). Therefore, women who are unable to become biological mothers struggle with defining themselves within these societal norms.

The pressure to achieve motherhood causes women to search out medical options for obtaining their goals. Spanish feminist theorist Esther Vivas (2019), in her book *Mamá desobediente,* when talking about the decision to start treatment for infertility, describes

> [t]he pain, the emotional unease, the feeling of failure, the uncertainty. Not to mention the loss of control over your own body and the hypermedicalization that these assisted reproduction techniques mean, along with the contradictions that being part of the infertility business implies. (32)[6]

Vivas clearly situates the experience of infertility within the constructs of commercialization and medicalization, and mentions the emotional cost of participating in fertility treatments. She talks about a new generation of Spanish women "who reconsider the meaning of maternity as emancipatory and an experience that is worth living" (72),[7] but she also points out that "we were not aware of the social, economic and environmental factors that would make [motherhood] difficult" (30).[8] In our analysis of the novel, we point out how these factors affect Spanish women in their journey to become pregnant, and how the protagonist decides that the cost—both monetary and emotional—is too high. This conflict between wanting a child and not wanting to participate in the soul-nullifying process of infertility treatment illustrates the loss of a sense of self and the discontinuity in what it means to be a woman when faced with the decision not to become a mother.

Women perceive the biological failure of infertility as personal. Researchers on the subject find that there is a "relationship between an infertile person's sense of self and the perception of the female body as a dysfunctional machine" (Hurd Clarke, Martin-Matthews, & Matthews 2006, 96). The authors focus on how "[w]omen tend to experience infertility as a devastating stigma that jeopardizes their sense of self of being 'complete' women" while "[m]en perceive infertility as a threat to their masculinity and sexual potency" (97). The way that women perceive their infertility leads to an embodiment of this failure, as women come to see "the infertile body as a malfunctioning machine" that instills a "perception of loss of control over the body" (99). Women see their bodies as failing them, when many of these women "have been socialized with the assumptions that they are in control of their lives, that their successes and

failures are the result of their abilities rather than the social context" (109). The inability to change their outcome causes frustration and sadness, underlining their inherent inability to control their bodily selves. For those women who seek treatment for their infertility, the pathologization and medical treatment of infertility cause them to experience a sense of alienation from their bodies, where the women feel "hostages to their bodies, infertility and infertility treatment" (104). Women have "the perception of the embodied self as deviant, shameful and inadequate" (103), and "the loss of control of the embodied self that they experience through infertility is often devastating and difficult to reconcile with their socialization and the dominant social constructions of femininity and womanhood" (109). Overall, the article suggests that women interpret their non-reproducing bodies as deviant, experience anger at their inability to control their bodies, find themselves alienated from their bodies through the medicalization of infertility, and strive to attain a pregnancy in order to fulfill their so-called maternal desires. We take this theory of the discontinuity of the embodied self in infertility and apply it to Nanclares's novel as she details her protagonist's experience coming to terms with her own infertility. The medicalization of her infertile body connects with the theme of the centrality of the mother/woman question.

Medicalization, defined as "the process by which scientific and medical expertise becomes valued over experiential knowledge and is used to categorize aspects of social life in terms of disease and abnormality" (Conrad 2007, 4), prioritizes scientific observations over lived experience and erases the person, leaving only the patient. Federici (2004) explains that since childbirth left the oversight of women to become a procedure facilitated by male doctors, women's "wombs became public territory, controlled by men and the state and procreation was directly placed at the service of capitalist accumulation" (89). These same controls exist today for women's infertile bodies that are medicalized, pathologized, and treated as if sick, contributing to a sense of distance between the women themselves and the bodies that they gradually come to see as deviant.[9] Infertility, like childbirth, has been deeply medicalized, and is a field dominated by people who lack the experiential knowledge of those they are treating. According to Jensen (2016), by the 1930s "rhetoric circulating from and around the new field of reproductive endocrinology defined sterile bodies as chemically activated machines in need of technical intervention" (2). Bodies were mechanized and medicalized: women's bodies came to be perceived as machines whose sole desired output was pregnancy. By insisting on pregnancy as the ultimate ideal outcome, "women who are deemed 'infertile' face nothing less than a technological mandate to alter their behavior—sometimes endlessly—to achieve pregnancy and parenthood" (6–7). Dysfunctional machines require technological fixes, and there is no shortage of products and behaviors being sold and promoted as solutions to the perceived "dysfunction" of infertility. Due to the wide variety of

options available, "infertility clinics, products, and services have become a thriving international 'baby business' into which billions of dollars are devoted each year" (7). As women delve deeper into available fertility products, they become more separated from their bodies, leading to a feeling of alienation. Contemporary medicinal practice allows for the mechanized machine-body to be deconstructed, understood, and controlled. Mechanization further separates the concepts of body and person by dehumanizing the body (Federici 2014, 138–40), so that when pregnancy is medicalized, the woman becomes detached from her physical embodiment of fertility or infertility. *Quién quiere ser madre* echoes this internal struggle as the protagonist Silvia processes her experience with the medicalization and commercialization of biological motherhood.

The novel follows the narrator's journey of trying to become a mother, closely following the author's own experience. With multiple doctors, a variety of attempted assisted reproduction techniques, along with alternative treatments to try to make medical intervention more successful, Silvia repeatedly comes up against medicalized infertility. From the beginning, her medical professionals treat motherhood as simply another piece of medical history (62). She creates a notebook to detail her experiences, and it quickly fills up with new medical terms: "Bleeding, ovulation, hormone, test, symptoms. Technical terms that take up space in my vital new 'Getting Pregnant' notebook" (72).[10] All of these terms are, she is told in the early parts of her odyssey, critical to maximizing fertility and the chances of a successful pregnancy. It does not take much for her to become tied to a medicalized conception of her own fertility and potential pregnancy, despite previously distancing herself from a naturalist definition of her body and her experiences: "I, who had rejected biology as supreme determinant, now kneel before its manuals and look for the indices that make my body a well-greased machine" (74).[11] She references the machine imagery that is used, mostly negatively, to describe fertility treatments and assisted reproduction, and that creates a dehumanized image of a body whose sole purpose is the attainment of motherhood and the production of children. As the protagonist continues to seek out solutions to her inability to become pregnant, she discovers that "[i]nfertility shatters previously held perceptions of the body and self as healthy, whole, and normal" (Hurd Clarke, Martin-Matthews, & Matthews 2006, 110). This shattering of perceptions increases a woman's sense of alienation from her body, causing her to experience a feeling of distance from who she was previously, a feminine identity rooted in reproductive potential.

Depersonalization of the female body creates a sense of disconnection from the body, which is defined as other and separated from the woman herself as her body and her desire to become a mother are medicalized and defined in disembodied terms of cycles, hormones, and medical history. Silvia describes how "even though my cycle is predictable and punctual like a 28-day clock, its arrival has almost always caught me by surprise.

It has to be another indicator of the disconnection between my body and me" (Nanclares 2017b, 119).[12] In the middle of all the tracking, measuring, and planning, her body no longer feels like her own. This sense of alienation is typical when treating infertility, as patients "tend to see the body and the self as engaged in a dynamic tension in which the body exercises moral authority over the self" (Hurd Clarke, Martin-Matthews, & Matthews 2006, 110). The body becomes a broken machine, separated from the embodied self that had previously been connected to it. This rupture of the body and the self challenges the woman's identity and self-definition.

Substituting lived experiences for their medical equivalents also contributes to medicalization. A doctor tells Silvia that she should avoid stress, because "cortisol is very bad for our process"[13] of maximizing fertility and becoming pregnant (Nanclares 2017b, 88). The experience of stress—emotional by definition—is reduced to its hormonal products, an obvious example of medical essentialization of lived experience. It becomes clear that "the objective of the odyssey [is] to modify the cycle in order to be able to manipulate it like a piece of clockwork" (107).[14] Medicalization and mechanization take control of all aspects of the lives of Silvia and Gabi, her partner, and everything they do becomes dedicated to the goal of pregnancy and control of Silvia's body in order to create the best possible probability. Silvia says, "I resist becoming only a brain and uterus" (156),[15] as all things not related to the medical science of those two organs are pushed aside. When the female body is reduced to only a few of its parts, the person is no longer prioritized, which means that she becomes disconnected from her body. This is what causes the "births without mothers" (Varela 2019, 341)[16] that take place when women become patients instead of people. The same risk exists with medicalized fertility treatments that ignore the person behind the medical condition.

The pathologization of infertility treats it as an illness, a failure to produce and reproduce. Martin (1997) discusses how the viewing of menstruation and menopause as a failure contributes to the negative societal perspective of them (29–30), and the same idea of illness and failure applies to infertility. Sandelowski (1990) claims that "the prevalent view that reproduction is part of the natural design of the human species … make[s] infertility an undesirable condition, plac[ing] it outside of the boundaries of health and normality" (11–2). While not technically a disease, infertility becomes pathologized because fertility is the norm. In the novel, Silvia challenges this dominant perspective as she resists the idea that the most important goal for a woman is to become a mother. She attends a group meeting for "Maminfértiles" (Infertile Mommies) (Nanclares 2017b, 194) but she finds that she doesn't fit in with the way they talk about their infertility. She tells of her desire to not "describe [herself] as a sick or useless person. Or blame [herself]" (204).[17] The book concludes with her realization that "[t]his battle doesn't represent [her]. It could be that motherhood is not the most important project of [her] life" (201)[18] and that to

move forward, she must "reformulate [her] dreams" (211)[19] and stop viewing her infertility as a failure. She might not become a mother, she says, but she will be something else, whatever that ends up being (212). Until she decides not to continue her pregnancy quest, the external market continues to pressure her into making different fertility choices. The constant cycle of new products, hope, and disappointment follows her throughout her quest for pregnancy until she can finally tear herself away from the influence of the market.

The concept of the baby market—marketing products to people with infertility—appears throughout the novel as the commercialization of the female body, suggesting that if women buy certain products, they will have the sought-after outcome of pregnancy. Purchasing these products disguises the fact that these non-mothering women inhabit deviant bodies. In the novel, Nanclares mentions how women feel pressured to buy into the next step, from fertility apps and fertility tests to more invasive procedures, such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and egg donation. By marketing products to women to help them in the process of becoming pregnant, the fertility industry moves what was once a personal aspect of a woman's life and makes it marketable, consumable, and (seemingly) necessary. Ducre (2015) explains how the market capitalizes on maternal desire and "how aggressively those who are unable or unwilling to have a child by conventional means have been courted and wooed by those in the baby market" (52). By appealing to women's desire to become mothers, advertisers sell products to women to encourage natalist tendencies. Nanclares's characters discuss many ways in which they become consumers of the fertility industry. While talking to her co-workers, Silvia recalls a song from the 1990s, whose lyrics say, "El Predictor se pinta de rosaaa en tu cuarto de bañooo y te dice que vas a ser madre a finales de mayoooo" (The pregnancy test turns piiink in your bathroooom and it tells you that you'll be a mother by the end of Maaaaay) (Nanclares 2017b, 81), referring to the Predictor brand of pregnancy tests that allow women to determine pregnancy in the comfort of their own homes. The lyrics of this song demonstrate the ubiquity of the pressure not only to become a mother but also to purchase items that promote pregnancy and fertility. Along with pregnancy tests, Silvia's friends tell her about the ovulation tests that are available: "I get my digital ovulation test, obediently following my friends' instructions"[20] from "the pharmacist who sold us Clearblue, the digital ovulation test, fifty bucks" (77).[21] Not only does the protagonist feel pressured by her friends to follow their instructions on how to get pregnant, she must also buy the right products, the name brand 50€ ovulation kit that contains "magic strips, all my friends who use them get pregnant" (102).[22] She and her friends become part of the baby market mechanism, each one pushing the others to try something new and spend more money.

Along with these purchasable items to help with the process of becoming pregnant, technological applications also focus on women's desire to

become mothers by marketing apps that collect freely given data. Silvia's friends discuss the utility of various fertility apps, where you tell "your tablet what you wouldn't tell your best friend" (74–5).[23] In addition to the conversation about which app works best, the women discuss what happens to the data they provide, the secrets they share with the app: "What the hell do you suppose they do with the data?"[24] asks one friend, to whom another replies "I'm sure there are some entrepreneurs in Denver, Colorado, getting rich off of us" (75).[25] Both the women's need to rely on technology to help them get pregnant, as well as their awareness of the fact that they are taking part in a capitalistic system where others benefit from their desires, appear in this scene clearly. Their discussion and recommendation of different products to each other shows that even though they are aware of the market using them, they are still influenced by it. When they continue to encourage one another to take the next step in the commercialized path to motherhood, they hope that participating in these data-driven products will eventually give them the success they seek in order to become "normal," child-producing women.

Friends impact consumerist choices about overcoming infertility, but the medical system also reinforces the capitalist market of consumerism. As Thompson (2002) explains, "[t]he market for new reproductive technologies" intended for wealthy clients, meant that "the cutting edge of the field developed more like a consumer-oriented business than a state-sponsored social service" (58). Ducre (2015) emphasizes that "[w]hile the issue of money exchanges for children is a very uncomfortable topic for most, it is the basis for exchange for all ART services and private adoptions," which illustrates the commercial nature of the baby market (54). While Spanish socialized medicine does provide women under 40 with access to fertility care, these public clinics generally have long waitlists.[26] Therefore, many Spaniards opt to use private clinics and pay out of pocket for their fertility treatments.[27] For Silvia, since she is over forty, she must finance her own fertility journey, and she and her partner choose a low cost franchise fertility clinic called Lilith because "it is the one that had the lowest prices" (Nanclares 2017b, 173).[28] After their first visit to a private clinic, Silvia can only think of the cost of IVF, "between five and six thousand euros, let's say seven thousand, to round off" (139).[29] At each clinic they visit, the price of the intervention becomes a central part of what they learn. At the Lilith Clinic, they have a deal for their patients: "a financing plan that's affordable for those who sign up within a month" (174).[30] The plan includes monthly payments, without interest, for up to a year, if they make a down payment of 2,500€ (174). The prices include "the first appointment, analysis of the two people in our own lab, egg withdrawal, ICSI [Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection], vitrification of the eggs and implantation"[31] but do not include the prescription medicine, which costs around 1000€ without insurance (175). The marketing of the clinic, from offering no-interest financing, to

affordable monthly plans, along with colorful brochures and packets to take home, alludes to the consumerist aspect of fertility treatments. Silvia describes the private clinics as "a Harrods of fertility: we have the product that's right for you, whatever your pathology or condition" (108).[32] By relating private clinics to Harrods, the world's leading luxury department store, Nanclares suggests not only that these clinics are selling products to fulfill dreams of normalcy but also that anything is accessible—if you have the money to pay for it. Women are not just asked to choose a method to try to become pregnant—they are given the chance to shop for one. Awareness of the monetary cost of motherhood is made an integral part of the experience, and in this way, the fertility industry preys on women's desires to become biological mothers at any price. Each new product is presented as another stepping-stone toward becoming pregnant, making women feel like they need to make that next purchase to be successful.

In her 2017 interview with *Pikara* magazine, Nanclares speaks to the commercialization of fertility treatments in Spain. The interviewer posits that "[w]hen we approach assisted reproduction, many of us fear compromising our physical and emotional health, along with our savings to try to become mothers 'at any cost.' But then it's hard to put on the brakes."[33] Nanclares responds that she and her partner decided to only do one round of IVF, but she agrees that it's hard to stop:

> It could be that I get hooked and end up in debt and pumped full of hormones. It's true that there's an addictive component. I know people who have done up to seven tries. It seems crazy to me but I can't tell you that I won't end up doing that, too. I believe that we have to recognize the danger and break out of the idea of "at any cost."[34]

By providing a smorgasbord of fertility treatments from which to choose, women begin to experience purchase momentum: if we've already spent 4,000€ on this, why not spend another 4,000 to try again? Even if these steps leave the customers in debt, the clinics provide easy financing and low payments, allowing customers to assume the debt as part of the experience of becoming pregnant. Any price becomes acceptable as long as the woman achieves this desired state of normalcy in pregnancy.

The novel clearly shows how each step of the fertility process leads to the next step: if I just try the next thing, maybe I'll be successful. The protagonist writes a blog post about the levels of reproduction: level 1: unprotected sex; level 2: monitoring your cycle; level 3: ovulation test; level 4: semen; level 5: a little push (visit your gynecologist); level 6: analysis; level 7: artificial insemination (AI); level 8: IVF; level 9: egg donation; level 10: betaespera (waiting for pregnancy test) (144–50). There is always the next level, or trying again at certain levels. There are always experts waiting to give more options, such as dietary changes,

acupuncture, meditation, or yoga (209). The dietary expert Silvia visits tells her to wait for eight months for the diet to make a change to the toxicity of her body (180). She then tells them about a Japanese technique called mini-IVF, in which "instead of hyperstimulating you hormonally to multiply the production of ovocytes, it looks to produce fewer but of better quality" (181).[35] The dietician suggests that few offer this procedure in Spain because "it's much less invasive and more affordable … For that reason they don't want to publicize it in the fertility clinics, for fear of bursting the bubble of the classic IVF" (181).[36] The medical "knowledge" along with the never-ending supply of advice and alternatives, from friends and experts alike, leads to a system that perpetually commercializes women's experience of infertility and preys on women's desires to fit into social constructs of a mother-based womanhood.

As the novel ends, the protagonist becomes aware of how medicalized and commercialized her experience with infertility has been. She questions her desire to become a mother, asking "Why do I want to be a mother? Why now? Is it only because I don't have much time left?" (85).[37] When connecting this current desire to become pregnant to her past experiences, she remembers that first menstrual cycle, when at "eleven years old I became a woman. Or that's what they told me. Becoming a woman meant being able to have children. Suddenly, my life related to the phenomenon of fertility and reproductive capacity. At eleven years old" (95).[38] The connection between a woman and her reproductive ability comes early and makes a lasting (and monthly) impression. One must be a mother to be a woman, says society, and moreover, a child should ideally be of your own blood. The structures surrounding assisted reproduction and IVF support this ideal, teaching women to pursue biological motherhood at any cost. Nanclares's narrator reflects on her experience and the price she was asked to pay for just the chance to give birth to a biological child—not only monetary but also personal and emotional. She describes the growing disconnect between her and her body and the personal discomfort that led her to refuse the dominant narrative about infertility and motherhood. She rejects the quest for biological motherhood and challenges the idea that privileges biological mothering and instead focuses on living her life child-free. The novel provides an important counter-cultural perspective on the patriarchal script that sees motherhood as the ultimate accomplishment for women.

Notes

1 All translations of the original Spanish are the work of Barlow and Ross.
2 For more information about Spain's state-sponsored system, see Ramirez and Escobar (2019).
3 "Las maternidades son muy complejas, cruzadas por condiciones materiales, emocionales e incluso filosóficas. Entonces, ¿por qué nos tienen que catalogar como madres y no madres?"

4 For a discussion of intensive mothering, see Katherine Hampsten's chapter "'Good' Mothering and the Question of Migrant Mothers at the Border."
5 For example, see Carrasco, Cristina, Cristina Borderías, and Teresa Terns (eds.) (2011): *El trabajo de cuidados*. Madrid, Catarata, and Estivill, Eduard and Silvia Béjar (1995): *Duérmete, niño*. Barcelona, Plaza y Janés.
6 "[e]l dolor, el malestar emocional, el sentimiento de fracaso, la incertidumbre. Por no mencionar la pérdida de control sobre el propio cuerpo y la hipermedicalización que significan las técnicas de reproducción asistida, así como las contradicciones que implica ser partícipe del negocio de la infertilidad."
7 "que se replantean el significado de la maternidad en clave emancipadora y de experiencia que merece la pena ser vivida."
8 "no éramos conscientes de los condicionantes sociales, económicos y ambientales que nos lo dificultarían."
9 For a further discussion of the medicalization of women's physical and mental health, please see Kruse (Rome)'s chapter.
10 "Sangrado, ovulación, hormona, test, síntomas. Términos técnicos que abultan mi nuevo cuaderno vital de «Quedarme embarazada»."
11 "Yo, que negué la biología como condicionante supremo, me arrodillo ahora ante sus manuales y rebusco los indicios que hagan de mi cuerpo una máquina bien engrasada."
12 "[a] pesar de que mi ciclo es previsible y puntual como un reloj de veintiocho días, su llegada me ha pillado casi siempre por sorpresa. Debe de ser otro indicio de la desconexión entre mi cuerpo y yo."
13 "el cortisol es malísimo para nuestro proceso."
14 "el objetivo de la odisea [es] modificar el ciclo para poder manipularlo cual mecanismo de relojería."
15 "[m]e resisto a convertirme solo en cerebro y útero."
16 "partos [que] no tienen madre."
17 "contar[me] como una persona enferma o inútil. Ni culpabilizarme."
18 "[e]sta batalla no me representa. Puede que la maternidad no sea el proyecto más importante de mi vida."
19 "reformular los sueños."
20 "Adquiero mi test de ovulación digital, siguiendo obedientemente las instrucciones de mis amigas."
21 "la farmaceútica que nos vendió Clearblue, test digital de ovulación, cincuenta pavos."
22 "tiras mágicas, todas las amigas que las usan se quedan."
23 "tu *tablet* lo que no le contarías a tu mejor amiga."
24 "¿Qué mierdas harán luego con los datos?"
25 "Seguro que hay unos emprendedores en Denver, Colorado, forrándose a nuestra costa."
26 The typical wait at public fertility clinics is anywhere from 18 to 24 months (Martín Arroyo 2019).
27 There are 307 fertility clinics in Spain, 96 of which are public (which only treat women under 40 years of age). The other 211 clinics are private, where a round of IVF costs around 8,000 euros (Martín Arroyo 2019).
28 "es la que tiene precios más bajos."
29 "[e]ntre cinco y seis mil euros, ponedle siete mil, para redondear."
30 "un plan de financiación muy asequible a quien lo subscriba antes de un mes."
31 "primera consulta …, análisis de los dos con nuestro laboratorio de confianza, punción ovárica, ICSI, vitrificación de óvulos e implantación."

32 "un Harrods de la fertilidad: tenemos el producto adecuado para ti, da igual tu patología o tu condición."
33 "[c]uando nos acercamos a la reproducción asistida, muchas tememos llegar a comprometer nuestra salud física, emocional y nuestros ahorros por intentar ser madres "a toda costa." Pero luego cuesta echar el freno."
34 "Igual me envicio y acabo endeudada y hormonada hasta las cejas. Es verdad que hay un componente adictivo. Conozco a gente que ha hecho hasta siete intentos. Me parece una locura pero no te digo que yo no vaya a llegar a eso. Creo que hay que reconocer ese peligro y romper un poco el 'a toda costa.'"
35 "en vez de hiperestimularte hormonalmente para multiplicar la producción de ovocitos, lo que se busca es producir algún óvulo menos de calidad asegurada."
36 "es mucho menos invasivo y más barato … Por eso no lo quieren publicitar mucho desde los institutos de fertilidad, por miedo a pinchar su propia burbuja de la FIV clásica."
37 "¿Por qué quiero ser madre? ¿Por qué ahora? ¿Será solo porque no me queda mucho tiempo?"
38 "los once años me convertí en mujer. O así me lo dijeron. Convertirme en mujer significaba poder tener hijos. De pronto, mi vida se relacionaba con el fenómeno de la fertilidad y la capacidad reproductiva. A los once años."

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8 The Limitations of (Privileged) Maternal Appeals: Sandra Steingraber's Constructions of Mothering in a Toxic Environment

Mollie K. Murphy

Sandra Steingraber is a biologist, award-winning activist, and environmental writer. She has written a trilogy of books including *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment* (1993), released in a second edition in 2010 alongside a feature-length documentary of the book. Working in the tradition of Rachel Carson, Steingraber writes scientific information for a public audience. Yet whereas Carson's work focused on pesticide usage, Steingraber addresses a multitude of environmental issues in her writings and activism. Her third book, and the subject of this analysis, is *Raising Elijah: Protecting Our Children in an Age of Environmental Crisis* (2011). *Raising Elijah* covers environmental issues that affect parents and children; topics reviewed include toxins in breast milk and the impacts of toxins on children's reproductive development. Throughout the book, Steingraber weaves scientific information with personal narratives about her experiences mothering her son, Elijah, named after Civil Rights activist Elijah Lovejoy.

Raising Elijah connects private parenting practices (e.g., breastfeeding) to the larger environmental contexts in which they are embedded (e.g., an environment in which toxins trespass into mother's bodies). In *Raising Elijah*, Steingraber (2011, xii-xiii) posits the environmental crisis as a parenting crisis; in the foreword, she states that, "because the main victims of this unfolding calamity are our own children, this book speaks directly to parents." While calling on parents to protect children from toxins is a sensible strategy for connecting with lay audiences and personalizing political issues, Steingraber's appeals to parents throughout *Raising Elijah* are gendered in that they are linked to her experiences as a mother. As is well documented in academic scholarship, maternal appeals are sometimes invoked in ways that oppress women and mothers. For example, maternal appeals can echo the ideology of intensive mothering, which holds mothers uniquely responsible for every facet of their children's well-being (Afflerback et al. 2013; Hayden 2017; Wolf 2011). Intensive mothering is

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an impossible standard for all mothers but is especially unachievable for poor mothers and mothers of color (Ladd-Taylor & Umansky 1998). Steingraber's arguments in *Raising Elijah* are evidenced in large part through her privileged experiences as a White, highly educated mother with expertise in environmental issues. While *Raising Elijah* does include arguments for structural solutions to environmental problems, Steingraber's personal experiences are key to her efforts to galvanize parents—and, implicitly, mothers in particular—to engage in environmental advocacy.

Given Steingraber's large platform, it is important to consider how her rhetoric shapes the relationship between motherhood and environmental issues. I argue that, in *Raising Elijah*, Steingraber conveys her privileged maternal experiences as metonymic representations of the impact of environmental toxicity on parenting. In doing so, she recuperates harmful ideologies of motherhood. For Steingraber, environmental toxins threaten the "good" mother's intensive role at the same time that fighting the environmental crisis necessitates intensive mothering. Because Steingraber's experiences are shaped by her privilege, they cannot serve as representations of the implications of environmental toxicity for parenting, nor can her admirable efforts to fight for change serve as a blueprint for others. This analysis ultimately expands understandings of the ways in which definitions of motherhood as ideally and innately intensive function oppressively.

This chapter begins by situating Steingraber's rhetoric in the extant literature on maternal appeals, neoliberalism, and intensive mothering. Next, I explain metonymy and illustrate its usage in *Raising Elijah*, showing how Steingraber's use of personal experiences as metonyms reinforces intensive mothering as a cultural ideal. I conclude by urging against neoliberal calls to mother intensively in an age of environmental crisis and press instead for intersectional rhetorics that advocate environmental welfare for all living things.

Maternal Appeals, Neoliberalism, and Intensive (Total) Mothering

Throughout history, maternal appeals have figured prominently in social justice activism including environmentalism (Peeples & DeLuca 2006), anti-war protests (Murphy 2020), and arguments against gun violence (Hayden 2003). Many activists have employed motherhood in ways that are highly strategic, nonessentializing, and enabling; women rhetors have utilized the maternal trope creatively to navigate the fact that women's public advocacy is deemed most acceptable when linked to traditionally feminine activities (see Buchanan 2013; Hayden 2003; Thompson 2002). Although there is a rich body of scholarship analyzing productive uses of maternal appeals, for the purposes of this analysis I focus on rhetorics of motherhood that reify harmful gender norms. These interrelated oppressive rhetorics include neoliberalism, intensive mothering, and total motherhood.

Neoliberal ideology emphasizes the free market as the primary guide of individual behavior and figures in some rhetorics of motherhood (Asen 2017). In the context of environmental toxins, neoliberalism encourages individual approaches to curbing toxic threats to human health; this strategy works to discourage regulation of industries that produce toxins. Rhetorics that situate mothers as those most responsible for protecting children from toxins reinforce neoliberalism. Cara Okopny (2014) argues that popular women's lifestyle magazines individualize environmental action while characterizing it primarily as "women's work" (53). In lifestyle media stories of environmentalism, "women are maternal figures who recognize their responsibility as women to protect their families from environmental threats and accept additional unpaid labor accordingly" (53). This framing extends beyond magazines, figuring in messages encouraging women (and mothers and expectant mothers especially) to practice "precautionary consumption," or shopping more carefully so as to minimize exposure to toxins (Mackendrick 2014). Narratives of precautionary consumption construct pregnant bodies as uniquely vulnerable to toxins, thus erasing the fact that pregnant people are vulnerable to toxic exposure because of the presence of toxins in consumer products and the environment more generally (Mackendrick 2014; Murphy 2017). Further, in comparison to other advice given to expectant mothers (e.g., avoiding alcohol), precautionary consumption requires extensive financial, emotional, and physical resources, making it available almost exclusively to the highly privileged (Mackendrick 2014; Okopny 2014).

By indicating that "every single thing in a woman's life can conceivably be made more green" (Okopny 2014, 60), appeals to precautionary consumption that target mothers participate in the ideology of intensive mothering. Intensive mothering references the pervasive belief that caring for children is *the* most important aspect of a woman's life; it suggests that a good mother must know all they can to protect their children from harm and must take independent responsibility for reducing any possible risk to children's health and welfare (Afflerback et al. 2013). Sara Hayden (2006, 7) describes intensive mothering as a paradoxical ideology; it posits women and mothers as naturally motivated to devote all of their time to childcare, yet they must also seek expert advice to do the job well. Rhetorics of intensive mothering place enormous pressure on mothers to find, read, and understand information on how to reduce risk. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that Rima Apple (2006) describes contemporary parenting as "virtually synonymous with worry" (1).

In anti-toxics advocacy, rhetorics of intensive mothering can reinforce what Joan Wolf (2011, 72) describes as "total motherhood," an ideological combination of intensive mothering and "scientific motherhood." In her explication of scientific motherhood, Apple (2006, 2) explains how, in the mid-19th century, scientific advice came to characterize modern motherhood: "Instinct and tradition in childrearing were replaced by all-important

medical and scientific advice." Being considered a "good mother" required knowledge in scientific and medical issues that applied to child-rearing. Wolf (2011) argues that total motherhood aligns with intensive mothering but incorporates an amplified emphasis on scientific motherhood. Total motherhood "stresses the near ubiquity of science and risk analysis to prescriptions for good mothering in a risk culture" (71). Like intensive mothering, total motherhood is raced and classed; it assumes both a feminine whiteness and upper- to middle-class status (Hayden 2017; Wolf 2011). Indeed, the good mother has historically been defined *against* poor women and women of color (among other oppressed mothers) (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998, 2). Toxins impact everyone at the same time that they disproportionately affect the marginalized, yet rhetorics of total and intensive motherhood minimize structural threats to children's well-being and instead target mothers as naturally responsible for and capable of mitigating toxic exposure.

It is critical that activists avoid recuperating neoliberal ideologies of motherhood that exacerbate oppression. Speaking to mainstream Western feminist and environmental movements, Norie Ross Singer (2020, 280) argues, "A commitment to intersectionality is … vital to overcoming not only essentialism, but also how these social movements have inadvertently helped perpetuate oppressively organized material conditions, such as those in colonialist, racist, and sexist late-capitalist societies." When environmental advocates fail to address the ways in which issues of toxins and climate change intersect with other arenas of social justice, they risk contributing to a White, privileged notion of environmentalism that has long oppressed those inhabiting more precarious positionalities (Agyeman 2008).

Steingraber's body of environmental writings is extensive, and elsewhere I have argued that her second book, *Having Faith*, promotes both environmental and gender justice (Murphy 2017). I argued that Steingraber's depiction of the maternal body and "outside" environment as synecdoches of one another enabled her to promote a policy approach to regulating toxins. By depicting the health of the maternal body as representative of the health of the environment (and vice versa), Steingraber's rhetoric in *Having Faith* illustrates the environment—not pregnant people's bodies—as the arena that must be regulated, as what exists in the larger environment will inevitably trespass into all bodies. I ultimately argued that her use of synecdoche challenged intensive mothering and total motherhood as means through which to manage toxic threats to maternal and infant health.

As in *Having Faith*, Steingraber focuses on child and maternal health throughout *Raising Elijah*. In both books, she weaves personal narratives with scientific research on the relationship between toxins and human health, and in both books she discusses the importance of collective action and policy change. However, in *Raising Elijah* Steingraber relies primarily on metonymy—not synecdoche—to convey her arguments.

Although Kenneth Burke (1969) describes metonymy as "a special application of synecdoche," the distinction between the two tropes is important (509). Both tropes function by representing something large or abstract (e.g., the environment) through reference to one of its concrete "parts" (e.g., the ocean). Yet whereas in synecdoche the "part" clearly represents the larger whole, in metonymy the whole is *reduced* to the part (Burke 1969). As I have argued elsewhere, synecdoche enables activists to highlight the context surrounding injustices whereas metonymy can confine issues rather than contextualize them (Murphy 2020). In *Raising Elijah*, Steingraber conveys her privileged experiences of parenting in a toxic environment as metonymic representations of the ways in which the environmental crisis threatens parenting. By relying heavily on her privileged experiences as evidence, Steingraber reinforces confining notions of motherhood that are not only sexist but also available almost exclusively to those with privilege. As Wolf (2011) argues, rhetorics that encourage mothers to engage in healthier, less risky behaviors to protect themselves and their children are not intrinsically problematic. Rather, "[t]hey become problematic when proponents do not adequately consider the complex social environments in which they are pursued, as if their desirability could be challenged only by the ignorant or nefarious" (139). In parts of *Raising Elijah*, Steingraber makes clear arguments for policy solutions to the environmental crisis. For example, she asserts that, "Believing that we can buy safety for our children with money and knowledge leaves those with neither in harm's way" (Steingraber 2011, 134). Yet as I explain next, her reliance on privileged maternal experiences throughout the book inadvertently undermines her efforts to elevate policy solutions by naturalizing total motherhood as a cultural ideal.

Reinforcing Intensive Mothering Through Privileged Appeals

Steingraber portrays her experiences as metonyms that represent mothering in an environment permeated with toxins. Burke (1969) likens metonymy to reduction. Once again, unlike synecdoche in which the whole (e.g., environment) can represent a part (e.g., rivers) and vice versa, in metonymy the whole is crystallized into a reductive part. Rhetors often draw on metonymy to simplify complex issues for audiences, but reducing complexity can come at the cost of minimizing or even erasing the nuances of systems, ideologies, or challenges (Murphy 2020).

In *Raising Elijah*, I suggest that metonymy creates what Burke (1973) calls a rhetoric of debunking. Debunking through metonymy occurs when anecdotes chosen to illustrate abstract concepts are not representative of a larger point. Burke (1973, 171) summarizes the method of the debunker: "He [*sic*] discerns an evil. He wants to eradicate this evil. And he wants to do a thorough job of it. Hence, in order to be sure that he is *thorough enough,* he becomes *too thorough*." The debunker inadvertently "*covertly*

restores important ingredients of the thought that he has *overtly* annihilated" (171). For example, a person advocating against the principles of hierarchy and status might inadvertently achieve an ironic status of their/her/his own. In her larger body of rhetorical works—and even in *Raising Elijah*—Steingraber has argued against an individualized approach to managing environmental toxins. Yet, to demonstrate the *need* for policy, Steingraber turns to her individual, privileged experiences. In *Raising Elijah*, metonymy "covertly restores" an individual approach to toxic regulation by reducing rather than emphasizing the contextual factors that constrain parents' agency to take individual action.

Toxins as a Threat to Intensive Mothering

Narratives of breastfeeding figure prominently in *Raising Elijah*, wherein Steingraber details the impacts of toxins on pregnancy, breastfeeding, and child development. Such toxins include polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), polyvinyl chloride (PVC), heavy metals, pesticides, asbestos, benzene, and dioxin, a chemical that, "at vanishingly small concentrations, can cause developmental problems as well as cancer" (Steingraber 2011, 20). While the ubiquity of such toxins is a serious matter of environmental, social, and reproductive injustice, I argue that Steingraber's efforts to detail toxins' impacts on breast milk function in part to reify the ideologies of total motherhood and biological motherhood. As she weaves scientific information with her personal, privileged narratives of breastfeeding, Steingraber depicts contamination of breast milk as a problem in part because it interferes with a mothers' "natural" ability to (intensively) protect children from harm.

Steingraber portrays her attitude toward breastfeeding as one that is—or at least should be—shared by all new mothers. This is evidenced when she explains how her attitude toward breastfeeding shifted between her first and second child. She states, "With the first baby, you realize that you would sacrifice everything for your child. With the second baby, the impulse is toward self-preservation" (Steingraber 2011, 16). Following this logic, she explains that the benefits of breastfeeding for infants—including lessened risk of asthma and stronger immune systems—convinced her to breastfeed her first child, Faith. With Elijah, the benefits of breastfeeding for nursing mothers—including decreased risk of certain types of cancer and type 2 diabetes—persuaded her to breastfeed. Steingraber (2011, 17) summarizes that, as a mother of one, she was determined to "*breastfeed if it kills me*," indicating that as a new mother she was willing to make great sacrifices to ensure her daughter could reap the benefits of breast milk. In contrast, with her second child she refocused to "*breastfeed to stay alive*" by directing her attention toward breastfeeding's health benefits for her own livelihood (17). In both cases, she argues that the risks of not breastfeeding can lead to "supremely inconvenient events" (e.g., increased risk of

health complications) (17). For Steingraber, the inconveniences of not breastfeeding outweigh the inconveniences of breastfeeding, a conclusion she draws from her privileged positionality as someone with the resources and physical ability to breastfeed. Ultimately, Steingraber's efforts to generalize her own experience as a breastfeeding mother re-entrench definitions of mothers as biologically driven to mother intensively.

Steingraber repeatedly frames breastfeeding as an individual, moral choice, thus erasing the constraints on mothers' ability to "choose." After arguing that breastfeeding is both more convenient and beneficial than bottle-feeding, she offers a refutation to counterarguments:

> Critics who complain that breastfeeding advocacy creates guilt in mothers who choose not to nurse are missing the point. The choice is not between a gold-plated but sometimes tricky, painful, and inconvenient way to feed a baby (breastfeeding) and the perfectly adequate standard model that offers ease and convenience (formula) … According to a 2010 study published in the journal of *Pediatrics*, low breastfeeding rates in the United States kill 911 infants per year and cost $13 billion. That's the choice.
>
> (Steingraber 2011, 17–18)

Steingraber does not discuss the complex factors that constrain and enable the ability to breastfeed, which, rather than inducing guilt, is of key concern to many feminist critics (see Afflerback et al. 2013; Hausman 2013). As Paige Hall Smith, Bernice Hausman, and Miriam Labbok (2012, 281) explain, viewing breastfeeding as a choice undermines the fact that "most women do not have a source of unbiased information, or the economic, social, and clinical support and resources needed to freely choose whether or not they will breastfeed." Even more, Wolf (2011, 16) compellingly argues that advocates for breastfeeding over bottle feeding exaggerate the science supporting its benefits. Discourses of breastfeeding—including scientific research—exist within and are thus influenced by "a risk culture committed to total motherhood" (16). By generalizing her privileged experiences and perspectives, pressing breastfeeding as beneficial and even moral, and ignoring structural constraints, Steingraber's breastfeeding advocacy reinforces the ideology of total motherhood.

Steingraber further draws on her privileged experiences to frame breastfeeding as more convenient than bottle-feeding, again erasing structural constraints. In an attempt to appeal to new mothers' need for convenience, she states that breastfeeding "allows you to make crying children fall asleep on demand" and takes only one hand, whereas bottle-feeding takes two (Steingraber 2011, 18). "With your free hand you can—read a story to a toddler, analyze data, make dinner, give interviews over the phone, draft a grocery list, write a book" (18). This passage exemplifies another reason why some feminists are concerned with breastfeeding advocacy.

Erika Kirby et al. (2016, 77) argue that the good working mother in contemporary public culture is characterized as a "juggler" who performs three cultural ideologies at once: intensive mothering, domestic womanhood, and ideal worker. Moreover, good working mothers are expected to perform two contradictory identities: "the privileged, full time, 'stay-at-home' mothers versus frantic professional mothers working outside the home" (Kirby et al. 2016, 82). By portraying breastfeeding as a practice that enables this type of good mothering—feeding while working and performing domesticity—Steingraber makes herself susceptible to the very criticisms she seeks to refute.

By drawing generalizations from her experiences with breastfeeding marked by her privilege, Steingraber reinforces total motherhood as a cultural ideal. Wolf (2011) argues that breastfeeding is "imperative in a risk culture committed to total motherhood." In *Raising Elijah*, narratives of breastfeeding are indeed caught up in the rhetorical, ideological contexts of intensive and total motherhood. While Steingraber uses narratives of breastfeeding to build a case against toxins, her arguments hinge upon constructions of breastfeeding as a critical component of "good" intensive mothering. Thus, protecting intensive motherhood—which Steingraber's privilege allows her to practice—serves as a key warrant for banning environmental toxins. In failing to attend to the contexts that shape her experiences, Steingraber creates a rhetoric of debunking.

Mitigating Toxic Exposure Through Intensive Mothering

Steingraber's use of personal narratives in *Raising Elijah* indicate that the presence of toxins demands intensive, total mothering. Thus, she constructs toxins as threatening intensive mothering at the same time that she forwards intensive mothering as a logical response to toxins' ubiquity. In the following examples wherein she discusses the presence of arsenic in her daughter's nursery school playground and organophosphates in children's foods, Steingraber reifies a rhetoric of individual choice that once again erases the contextual factors that constrain and enable choice itself.

In her discussion of pressure-treated wood as a threat to child welfare, Steingraber again draws on privileged experience that reinforces total motherhood as both an ideal and a choice made naturally by "good" mothers. Injected with copper and arsenic to protect from rotting and insects, pressure-treated wood is poisonous and ubiquitous (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2022, n.p.). It supports outdoor decks, playgrounds, staircases, railings, and bridges. In a reflection in *Raising Elijah*, Steingraber notices that the outdoor play structure at her daughter's nursery school is constructed with pressure-treated wood. She works with other parents to get the soil beneath the structure tested, estimate levels of exposure, and move playtime to another area. Ultimately, she is defeated; the teachers and majority of parents decide that creative play is more important than protecting the children from seemingly miniscule levels of carcinogens. Steingraber traces the problem in part to a lack of

structural support. Whereas the government of Norway protected its residents against pressure-treated wood by removing it, "along with the soil it had contaminated, from 40,000 schools and parks and from 6,000 daycare centers," the U.S. government has taken no such action (Steingraber 2011, 48). Without government oversight, many parents affiliated with the nursery school decided to return children to the playground. Yet a few—including Steingraber and her partner—refused, opting to switch schools instead. After acknowledging that the problem of carcinogens in playgrounds warrants policy change, Steingraber (2011, 50) states,

> And yet, I could not watch my three-year-old narrate stories about herself while climbing around on a structure that contained carcinogens. … It was my job to keep my children safe. Whatever I could do to prevent my daughter from entering the world of biopsies, ultrasounds, and phone calls from the pathology lab, I would do. It wasn't even a choice. If I couldn't remove the play structure from the community, then I would have to remove Faith from the community.

Of course, removing Faith from the community *was* a choice, made available to Steingraber through her knowledge, resources, and access. Meeting the demands of "total motherhood" in a risk society, Steingraber uses her knowledge of science to identify, evaluate, and take measures to reduce risks to her daughter's welfare. As the example above demonstrates, for Steingraber, environmental toxins necessitate total mothering. While Steingraber is clear that it is unfair to place the demands of managing toxic exposure on parents, her anecdotes nonetheless convey intensive, total mothering as the only appropriate response of a good mother in an age of environmental toxicity.

Steingraber also draws on the ideology of total mothering to bolster her arguments for wide availability of healthy, organic foods free of pesticides. Although biologists and nutritionists still debate whether organic foods are healthier than conventional foods, Steingraber (2011, 65) chooses to interpret scientific research through her maternal knowledge when it comes to her children, noting that her job as a mother is "to avoid situations that seem inherently dangerous." She combines her scientific knowledge and her maternal inclinations to draw a conclusion: "All pesticides are inherently poisons, and all organophosphate pesticides are, inherently, brain poisons. So I don't feed my children food grown with pesticides. Period" (65). She further explains that she follows nutritionists' advice for feeding children healthy foods, feeds her family "an all-organic diet, with foods drawn as much as possible from local farms," and shops at a local co-op (69). Unlike in some other personal narratives throughout the book, here Steingraber notes that she is privileged and points to the need for structural solutions (e.g., community gardens, affordable produce, urban and organic farming). Yet her personal, privileged examples of parenting illustrate intensive, total

mothering as both a necessity in the case of toxicity and a role threatened by the presence of toxins. Further, after demonstrating how she chooses to feed her own children, she states "there is no special secret to making it all work" and notes that her Crock-Pot enables her to "cook while I sleep and cook while I work" (79–80). In her discussion of organophosphates as well as throughout *Raising Elijah,* Steingraber recuperates the intensive role of the good, total mother as a juggler.

In these examples, Steingraber draws upon her privileged experiences to convey the implications of toxins for caregivers of infants and young children, especially mothers. In *Raising Elijah,* the good mother views environmental toxins as threats to intensive mothering and utilizes intensive mothering practices to mitigate children's toxic exposure. I have argued that metonymy is key to the rhetorical process that implies this message, as metonymy reduces rather than emphasizes context. In Steingraber's case, this leads to the de-emphasis of factors that constrain parents' agency to protect their children from toxins; such factors include but are not limited to time, money, access, knowledge, and energy. When Steingraber illustrates environmental threats to parenting through the reductive, metonymic examples of her own experiences, she inadvertently recuperates a confining notion of motherhood available to only those with equal levels of societal privilege.

Conclusions

Rhetorical appeals that naturalize intensive mothering figure prominently in environmental rhetoric and are often employed by rhetors who skillfully draw upon the resources of the trope while navigating its constraints (Murphy 2017; Peeples & DeLuca 2006). However, as evidenced in *Raising Elijah*, maternal appeals can also reify harmful ideologies that place the burdens created by toxicity on mothers. When maternal appeals focus on individual mothers and advocate precautionary, intensive measures to protect children, they work within a neoliberal context of total mothering in a risk society. In *Raising Elijah*, Steingraber turns to her own privileged experiences to showcase the impact of toxins on motherhood. Yet as a privileged White mother, her experiences are not representative and in fact exist within and reinforce the larger ideology of total motherhood. I have argued that, in *Raising Elijah*, Steingraber depicts total motherhood as both a means and reason to protect children against environmental toxins. Further, through reliance on her own experiences as metonyms, Steingraber creates a rhetoric of debunking by covertly restoring the problematic rhetorics she purportedly seeks to refute. As she aims to undermine arguments leveled by those critical of breastfeeding, she naturalizes ideologies of intensive mothering, erases the privileges that make breastfeeding possible, and ultimately demonstrates why some feminists are critical of breastfeeding advocacy. She also critiques weak governmental regulation of

toxins in the U.S. by showing how it places an unfair burden on parents, yet to do so she relies on her own privileged experiences as examples wherein she reinforces total motherhood as a necessary and instinctive means to protect young children from toxins. Whereas synecdoche highlights context, metonymy constrains it (Murphy 2020); in the case of *Raising Elijah*, Steingraber's rhetoric of debunking functions in part to erase the racial and class privileges that make her maternal practices possible.

It is critical that environmental scholars and activists attend to the ways in which factors such as gender, race, ability, and class constrain and enable environmental consciousness. While total mothering can, to a certain degree, help privileged mothers protect their children from toxins' effects, such practices are not available to all mothers and, further, are part and parcel of a "toxic" ideological script of good mothering as characterized by a biologically determined drive to devote all of one's resources to child-rearing. In the context of environmental toxins, neoliberal rhetorics of total mothering direct attention away from structural policy solutions while placing the burdens created by toxicity unfairly on mothers. Achieving environmental justice necessitates attention to the ways in which injustices intersect, and environmental activists and scholars alike must work to address the roots of oppression, including neoliberal, capitalist ideology and related ideologies of intensive, total, and biological mothering.

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9 Ableism and Motherhood: Invisible Illness and Moral Implications of "Good" Mothering

Elizabeth L. Spradley

The intensive construction of motherhood has been noted in the literature and critiqued as shifting responsibility for physical, psychological, social, and educational development onto the selfless, affluent mother. Subsequently, intensive motherhood requires mothers to become amateur pediatricians, nutritionists, psychologists, event planners, and teachers in addition to the traditional nurturing and domestic labor expected of them. References to the intensive maternal role are attributed through terms such as *Intensive Mothering* (Hays 1996), *New Momism* (Douglas & Michaels 2004), *Scientific Motherhood* (Apple 1995; Foss 2010), and *Total Motherhood* (Wolf 2011). Intensive mothering rhetoric sets social expectations as to what constitutes "good" motherhood. In their chapter on the "good" mother, Susan Goodwin and Kate Huppatz (2010) explain what is meant by the moral evaluation of motherhood and its consequences for mothers.

> These days few people interpret the phrase 'the good mother' literally, but rather make an association to feminist work on the ideological aspects of mothering and motherhood, and to notions of hegemonic motherhood. Thus the good mother is known as that formidable social construct placing pressure on women to conform to particular standards and ideals, against which they are judged and judge themselves. (p. 2)

In other words, considering the physical, mental, social, and material demands of totalizing motherhood, we ask, "How does intensive motherhood characterize differently abled mothers?"

At the confluence of ableism and motherhood, this chapter interrogates the moral rhetoric of the "good" mother as the "biologically or medically abled" mother. To do so, a critical narrative approach (Shugart 2010, 2011) is employed to analyze popular parenting magazines' print and online articles. Within the popular rhetoric of motherhood, this chapter explores the characterization of mothering as "biologically or medically

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abled" inscribed in the master narrative of totalizing motherhood. "Good" mothering was analyzed in *Parents' Magazine* online articles, which are the primary texts used to construct and critique the master narrative of intensive motherhood from an ablest lens. To explore the construction of the able-bodied "good" mother, 134 online articles in *Parents' Magazine*, which targets mothers with scientific advice on child-rearing (Milkie & Denny 2012; Schlossman 1985), were read, coded, and analyzed to identify verbs of "good" mothering driving the plot of the "good" mother. Implications for these characterizations of "good" mothering are explored for differently abled mothers, with a keen analytic eye toward invisibly ill mothers. While appearing abled, invisibly ill mothers may be identified with "good" mothering superficially, but they are disidentified with "good" mothering experientially – that is through their embodied mothering. Then, to explore how invisibly ill mothers contest and resist ableist constructions of "good" mothering, blogs by mothers with chronic health conditions were sampled for how their verbs of "good" mothering offered counter-narration.

Invisibly ill mothers experience paradoxes of mothering characterizations, agency, and embodiment as their bodily limitations impede the fulfillment of the intensive maternal role while still being associated with the intensive maternal role. For example, invisibly ill mothers may identify with intensive mothering images of mothers preparing seasonal treats for their children's school or food prepping nutritious meals for a week in advance in parenting magazines. Yet, chronic migraine or fibromyalgia flairs may thwart the fulfillment of these behaviors, subsequently affecting attributions of "good" mothering. Identifying as invisibly ill and as a "good" mother is not perpetually paradoxical, but these identities may collide and conflict in the everyday lived experiences of mothers. Given these paradoxes, the chapter attends to rhetoric that resists the master narrative of ableism in mothering and looks to invisible illness blogs that offer degrees of counter characterizations of mothering. Invisible illness blogs authored by mothers demonstrate that ableism is narrative closure that silences differently abled mothers' experiences and representation in popular mothering rhetoric and simultaneously demonstrates decentralized collective action that antagonizes intensive "biologically or medically abled" mothering. Outing themselves and risking social stigma (Rains 2014), differently abled mothers assert their statuses as "good" mothers countering popular mothering rhetoric with ableist bias.

To contextualize the ableist bias in popular mother rhetoric, research on "good mothering" is reviewed, noting its silences with regard to invisibly ill mothers. Following this review of the literature, attention turns to the narrative analytic method used to critically analyze popular mothering representations and their ableist constraints on "good" mothering. In response, attention shifts to counter-narration of "good" mothering asserted by invisibly ill mothers through their blogs. Finally, the chapter culminates

in implications for studying and advancing counter-narratives of "good" mothering that resist "biologically or medically abled" bias.

"Good" Mothering: A Review of Literature

Scholarship on gender and motherhood assumes that "motherhood is central to the feminine accomplishment of gender" (Christopher 2012, p. 74). Despite the plural, complex, culturally inscribed iterations of motherhood, motherhood scholarship critiques the rhetoric of motherhood for developing moral attributions of "good" and "bad" mothering irrespective of the maternal iterations' accomplishment of basic care and nurture of children. Moral evaluations of different iterations of motherhood emerge in the literature chronicling the rise of motherhood rhetoric consistent with totalizing, intense constructions of the "good" mother. Studies demonstrate that mothers achieve positive attributions through adherence to breastfeeding recommendations (Wolf 2011), application of science to their maternal role (Apple 1995; Foss 2010), discipline to achieve fit bodies (Dworkin & Wachs 2004), the personification of tender care for children (Tobin 1990). In its various iterations, the "good" mother embodies an idealized notion of motherhood (Tobin 1990). In some ways, constructions of the "good" mother may empower certain women to derive self-esteem, and empowerment through the positive associations made with the "good" mother (Tobin 1990). This association has been noted in the breastfeeding literature. Women, whose breastfeeding is biologically, environmentally, and socially supported and enacted in accordance with authoritative recommendations, experience the positive outcomes of being associated with "good" mothering practices (Knaak 2010; Lee 2018). Yet, the ideals of intensive mothering, like breastfeeding, are not universally achieved or attributed, subsequently generating tensions around moral attributions of mothering. As in the case of breastfeeding, breast and formula feeding choices may be elusive because of physiological (e.g., medications, mastectomy, etc.) factors affecting milk production, latch, or safety. In other words, the "good" mother ideal generates contradictory and unrealistic expectations.

Most motherhood scholarship recognizes that "good" mothering is a contested social construct. As such, "good" mothering is constructed differently across mothering discourses with resistance to the intensive constructions of mothering. Mothers are faced with rigid or unrealistic role expectations, and resistance to these motherhood constructs emerges. For example, Deirdre Johnston and Debra Swanson's (2003) study of mommy war representation in women's magazines rendered contradictory constructions of motherhood. The scholars noted selfish/selfless, fostering independence/dependence in their children, fail/succeed in domestic/public sphere, and intuition/expert help, which generates double binds for mothers pursuing and evaluating "good" motherhood.

Conversely, moral evaluations of "bad" mothering also emerge. Mothering literature notes the negative moral evaluations of formula-feeding mothers (Marshall, Godfrey, & Renfrew 2007), substance-abusing mothers (Baker & Carson 1999), and welfare recipients (Hays 2004; Kelly 2010) to name a few. Yet, even within work on "bad" mothering, mothers resist dominant constructions of "good" mothering and reconstruct mothering alternatives to intensive mothering. For example, with regard to formula-feeding mothers, formula feeding is constructed as a riskier, substandard method of nutrition than breastfeeding, subsequently affecting moral evaluations of formula-feeding mothers (Wolf 2011). Nevertheless, not all mothers internalize "bad" attributions of formula feeding, and some mothers actively resist negative evaluations. Marshall, Godfrey, and Renfrew (2007) found that formula-feeding mothers in the United Kingdom negotiated between "good" associations with breastfeeding and "good" associations with adaptive, situational feeding that resisted "breast is best" discourse. Carter and Anthony's (2015) study of predominantly middle-class African American mothers in the United States demonstrates how race affects constructions of "good" and "bad" mothering, more specifically identifying infant feeding choice as varied and less important than other practices in assessing motherhood. In a different example regarding substance-abusing mothers, the "good" and "bad" mother is nuanced. In Baker and Carson's (1999) study of substance-abusing mothers, the mothers manage tensions between the knowledge that substance-abusing lifestyles negatively impacted children and the belief in their capabilities as parents. Despite the variations of self-attributions of "good" and "bad" mothering within these examples, dominant discourses of motherhood persist in constructing moral evaluations of motherhood. Statuses that publicly identify mothers as "bad" mothers like formula feeding or poverty are stereotypical caricatures that affect motherhood. In reference to this chapter, questions emerge as to moral attributions of mothers whose health statuses affect their fulfillment of intensive mothering expectations and representation in media.

On another note, the study of "good" mother rhetoric, specifically intensive mothering, privileges motherhood in Western contexts. Exceptions to the Westernized "good" mother scholarship include works like that of Hani Yulindrasari and Katharine McGregor (2011) that examine motherhood rhetoric in Indonesia. Additionally, non-Western motherhood research has theorized similar social constructions to those noted in Western contexts. For example, Lee Kyung's (1999) study of Korean news articles and a national women's magazine identified strands of "scientific motherhood" as "good motherhood" in Korea. Kyung's article explains three patterns in the "scientific motherhood" rhetoric in Korea: the wise mother, the competitive mother, and the professional mother. Like other motherhood scholars, Kyung expresses concern that contemporary motherhood rhetoric may contribute to contradictory expectations. While Kyung's contradictions focus on the tension between maternal resources needed to

navigate motherhood versus the technical information overwhelming mothers, the rhetoric of the "good" mother emerges across time, space, and geography producing maternal expectations that enable mothers in some ways and constrain them in other ways. Thus, there is continued scholarly attention as to the ways that "good" mothering rhetoric impacts maternal role attributions and enactments across different cultures.

While motherhood scholarship problematizes moral attributions of motherhood based on body type/fitness (Dworkin & Wachs 2004), breastfeeding (Knaak 2010; Lee 2008; Wolf 2011), part-time to full-time work, residence/geography (Vincent, Ball, & Braun 2010), socio-economic status (Hays 2004), and more, motherhood scholarship has scantly weighed in on moral attributions related to ableism, which is the impetus for this chapter. The remainder of the chapter explores how the "good" mother master narrative is socially constructed regarding ableist assumptions and the ways mothers, specifically those with invisible disabilities, voice counter-narratives.

"Good" Mother as the "Biologically or Medically Abled" Mother: A Master Narrative

Critical Narrative Analysis

A critical narrative approach is taken to understand the ableist power structures in "good" motherhood rhetoric in U.S. popular culture artifacts. Critical narrative approaches draw on critical rhetorical studies that examine symbolic production, reproduction, resistance, and transformation of power dynamics (Shugart 2010). Concerned that structures of power are taken for granted, critical rhetoric applies an analytic lens to rhetorical artifacts such as entertainment media, news media, public speeches, and more to expose dominating ideologies that suppress or silence certain meanings, people, or entities. In doing so, dominant discourses are identified and their effect on people and groups of people is explored. Specifically, critical narrative analysis is used to examine the hegemony of salient narratives constructed, contested, and transformed through mediated rhetorical artifacts and, subsequently, reveal that certain narrative meanings, characters, plots, scenes, and morals are privileged over others (Souto-Maning 2014). Powerful, salient narratives in society are termed master, meta, or cultural narratives (Pederson 2013; Shugart 2011), as illustrated in Shugart's (2011) work with gender, weight, and media to study the interplay of master narratives in society and the ways they shape people's sensemaking, identities, and behaviors. Because master narratives often grossly mischaracterize and limit/silence alternative meanings (Carroll 2007; Klauk, Köppe, & Onea 2016), scholarship from a critical narrative approach often turns its attention to the ways people counter or resist the master narrative.

Artifacts Constructing Ableist Motherhood

While this chapter has already reviewed various strains of maternal master narratives such as Scientific Motherhood noted by Apple (1995) and Foss (2010), these studies of maternal master narratives have not adequately or directly analyzed ableist constructions of motherhood. Because of that gap in the motherhood scholarship, this section examines artifacts in popular culture demonstrating ableist maternal constructions of the "good" mother that silence and marginalize visible and invisible disabilities. Consistent with other studies examining master or meta-narratives (Shugart 2010, 2011), this study examines artifacts of popular culture—a parenting magazine's online content. Maternal rhetoric disseminated through magazine content is an influential source of master narrative social construction and circulation. Yulindrasari and McGregor (2011) contend that "The media, and magazines in particular through their texts and illustrations, significantly contribute to the process of constructing, contesting, and reaffirming gender" (p. 606). Therefore, I look to media and magazines, specifically *Parents' Magazine* online articles, to study the construction of the "good" mother, which is consistent with Katherine Foss and Brian Southwell's (2006) use of *Parents' Magazine* print articles to study breastfeeding and motherhood, Deirdre Johnston and Debra Swanson's (2003) study of contradictory representations of motherhood, Shari Dworkin and Faye Wachs' (2004) analysis of maternal body politics in *Shape Fit Pregnancy* magazine, and Beth Tobin's (1990) ideological critique of motherhood in *Lady's Magazine*. Using an open, constant comparative method to identify emergent patterns, develop definitions for each code, and document each instance of the code, 134 online articles from the *Parents' Magazine* homepage were read, coded, and analyzed for verbs of "good" mothering. Verbs were coded as narrative actions that move the maternal plot forward, help the mother overcome or resolve plot complications, and achieve positive moral attributions by other characters in her maternity narrative. In *Parents' Magazine* online articles, the "good" mother advocates, celebrates, consumes, entertains, models, protects, reads, resources, schedules, and teaches.

Images and text of the online magazine construct expectations of how mothers should anticipate and respond in ways that promote and safeguard well-being. To that end, mothers *advocate* for their children, even if that requires removing their children from a psychologically risky situation as in the case of Maressa Brown leaving a family gathering when finding out that her children were not in the family photo album (2021 Jan. 14). Mothers *celebrate* by planning parties and purchasing gifts, and they savvily *consume* by choosing healthy, helpful, and trendy products and services. Furthermore, mothers *entertain* by developing or scheduling activities that capture their children's attention and create lasting memories. Mothers *model* the attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors that their children should

learn and enact. Moreover, mothers should *protect* their children from physical, psychological, and other threats, which was illustrated through timely examples related to COVID-19. The maternal role is further fulfilled as she *reads*, voraciously reads, information to stay up-to-date on the latest issues, parenting practices, and popular culture. Mothers also compile *resources*, in that they develop a database of information and sources of information to draw on and reference, which may be a computer application like Cosmic Kids or Headspace (Coppa 2021 Jan. 15) or *Parents' Magazine*. Additionally, mothers *schedule*, maintain healthy, predictable routines for their families, and they *teach* their children so that their children are aware of current events, consequences of choices, and more. With this litany of maternal behaviors demonstrated and prescribed in *Parents' Magazine* online, the label mother may sound synonymous with cheerleader, party planner, personal shopper, entertainer, role model, bodyguard, Google, and teacher.

Consistent with extant research, "good" mothering assumes that the mother has the agency to control her familial story to enjoy the overall well-being of herself and her children. To that end, the "good" mom advocates, celebrates, consumes, enriches, entertains, models, protects, reads, resources, schedules, and teaches. The verbs of "good" mothering characterize the type of activities that constitute moral action in the maternal master narrative. These verbs are consistent with scholarship that documents the intense, totalizing expectations of motherhood. Even more relevant to this chapter are the agency of able-bodies assumed in these verbs. Ableist undertones in the master narrative raise concerns about who is represented in "good" mothering rhetoric.

Ableist Constructions of the "Good" Mother

At the heart of the critical narrative analysis, one reverberating question emerged time and time again, "Where were the visibly and invisibly disabled mothers?" Narrative omissions can be just as revealing as narrative commissions. Of the 134 articles analyzed, only 2 directly resisted ableist "good" mothering constructions. In the article "My Struggle with Depression Has Made Me a Better Mom During the Pandemic," mothers with mental health conditions were featured, normalizing maternal figures with depression and demonstrating how depression may enhance maternal support for children with similar mental health challenges. In a different article entitled "How PCOS Affects Pregnancy," the invisibility of infertility due to the endocrine disorder PCOS was discussed along with behaviors that could help reverse its infertility outcomes.

By and far, the bulk of *Parents' Magazine* articles remained silent on visible and invisible disability and portrayed able-bodied mothers. To illustrate visually, images of thin, smiling mothers squat down to place their foreheads against their child's forehead. Information about health care

visits were framed as the child as the patient rather than the mother, as if the health communication advice would only be used in the context of a child well visit or sickness (Reece 2018 Oct. 2).

Even when discussing disability more directly, the focus was not on maternal disability or invisible disability. For example, in Catherine Newman's article encouraging mothers to teach their children kindness, the author frames kindness as something learned and more difficult for some children in certain contexts, including disability. Newman (2019 Nov. 6) states, "It can be confusing to know how to act with a person who's differently abled, either neurologically or physically" (para. 17). Newman had the perfect setup to direct attention to mothers, but instead, the article reads as if the differently abled are always the Other and never the self. In another example, *Parents' Magazine* writer reviews a Bot Handy prototype (Castrodale 2021 Jan. 14). "It's cool for a number of reasons (who *doesn't* want a robot butler), but especially because of what Bot Handy could do to assist the elderly, the vision-impaired, or those who have mobility limitations" (para. 7). This seemed like the perfect set-up to include a nod to mothers with disabilities—visible and invisible. Yet, the author stops shy of attributing these vision or mobility impairments to mothers and remains completely silent on invisible disabilities. In yet another example, in an article advocating for breastfeeding mothers to take the COVID vaccine, the article briefly references health conditions like heart disease with no elaboration on other COVID risk factors related to other conditions falling within visible and invisible disability. The verbs of "good" mothering, images of able-bodied mothers, and articles omitting disability coalesce to illustrate the subtle othering and silences in *Parents' Magazine's* online content that constructs the "good" mother as the able-bodied mother.

Resisting Ableist "Good" Mother Rhetoric: Counter-Narratives

Where controlling, dominant narratives of the "good" mother emerge, so do resistance to those narratives. While master narratives exert control powerfully over the maternal role and moral attributions of its achievement, counter-narratives resist both the master narratives and the moral attributions associated with them. Motherhood scholarship notes resistance to oppressive master narratives of "good" mothering. For example, Karen Christopher's (2012) work with single, working mothers demonstrated that single mothers in her study resisted social constructions of intensive mothering and idealized workers and reframed "good" mothering as "being in charge" and "delegating" to ensure familial well-being. In another example, Joyce Marshall and colleagues (2007) illustrate how mothers resist conflations of "good" mothering with breastfeeding to adopt more complex, diverse constructions of what constitutes "good" mothering, including formula feeding.

In this chapter, attention turns to the ways that invisibly ill mothers narrate resistance to the ableist master narratives of "good" mothering. To observe and analyze their counter-narrative, the focus could not remain in the popular parenting literature because the stories of invisibly ill mothers were not in the popular parenting magazine analyzed in the previous section. Therefore, health blogs, authored by invisibly ill mothers, were unearthed and analyzed as a source of resistance to ableist constructions of "good" mothering. Several health blog ranking websites/articles were identified and used to narrow the sample down to mothers blogging about their invisible illnesses. Here are the sites/articles used to narrow the sample: Everyday Health's list of arthritis blogs to read in 2020, Healthline's top chronic migraine and fibromyalgia blogs of 2019 and 2020, and Medical News Today's top fibromyalgia blogs in 2018. A sample of 10 invisible illness blogs was analyzed based on how they constructed "good" mothering differently from the master narrative.

Reimagining the Shared Verbs of "Good" Mothering

The "good" mothering action verbs in common between the *Parents' Magazine* articles and the invisible disability blogs included: *advocates, models, and teaches*. However, the counter-narration in invisible illness blogging envisions different narrative actions to fulfill these verbs and directs the narrative action to a different set of characters. Mothers with invisible illness do not just advocate, model, and teach their own children; instead, these mothers advocate, model, and teach other mothers, more specifically, and their communities, more generally, with regard to their chronic illness and mothering. Chronic Eileen sums up her advocacy work with the Arthritis Society, Arthritis Research Canada, Pain BC, CIHR-IMHA, and Doctors of BC Shared Care Chronic Pain Advisory Committee in this pithy comment, "If I am going to be the sick girl, I might as well kick ass at it" (para. 12). Similarly, Brandi of Being Fibro Mom writes about herself and the purpose of her blog, "I created Being Fibro Mom as a way to help other fibromyalgia warriors and to connect with other parents/caregivers living with fibromyalgia" (para. 2), and as an advocate for herself and others with fibromyalgia, Brandi uses her blog to voice and chronicle advocacy work including her participation in Fibromyalgia Advocacy Day (2020 June 1).

Likewise, The Migraine Diva is a self-described "patient advocate" devoting much of her blog to resources, articles, organizational links, and more to advocate for her health, others with invisible disabilities like hers, and to teach the public about the invisible disabilities. The Spoonie Mummy invites readers to a front-row seat of her journey with Crohn's Disease, what it is like to have a stoma, and how she became an AccessAble Champion (2020 Dec. 4). For these bloggers, their advocacy, modeling, and teaching invite the invisible disability community into their

narratives demonstrating how narration through blogging can resist ableism in popular maternal rhetoric. These mothers not only enact their maternal roles in bodies affected by fatigue, pain, and other symptoms that fail them, they enact their maternal roles as patient advocacy role models reaching beyond themselves to a community of partners (e.g., Miles for Migraine, American Migraine Foundation, Shades for Migraine in the case of My Migraine Life) expanding their narrative scope and their narratives' impact. As mothers with invisible disabilities like chronic migraines or fibromyalgia, these women exceed the scope of the traditional "mommy blog" and model for other moms with chronic health conditions that being a "good" mother is not synonymous with being an "able-bodied" or "disease-free" mother.

Counter-Narrative Verbs of "Good" Mothering

The "good" mothering action verbs that diverged from *Parents' Magazine* are summed up in these terms: attends, blogs, perseveres, refrains, and seeks. *Attending* to personal well-being are precursors to invisibly ill mothers attending to the well-being of their families. As Chronic Eileen puts it, "It's okay to put yourself first at times" (2020 Dec. 22, para. 5). Mothers with chronic health conditions may look fashion-forward like The Spoonie Mummy or rocker cool with tattoos like Chronic Eileen, but what people do not see is their need to prioritize their health, which includes their need to schedule appointments, allocate resources to medicines and procedures, learn about different ways to protect their health, and rest. While not all of the blogs sampled have special sections on their blogs for health or mental health, all have posts that discuss their personal approaches to attending to personal well-being. For example, The Spoonie Mummy has sections for health and mental health that feature interviews, tips, and advice for troubleshooting health problems, reviews of products and procedures, and ideas for promoting mental health. *Blogging* is one way that these women attend to their health, often citing their blogs as a "source of therapy" (My Migraine Life, n.d., para. 6). The blog becomes a text testifying to the *perseverance* of the blogger. This is especially evident in the "about me" sections of the blogs that chronicle their journeys as mothers, bloggers, and invisibly ill patients/advocates. Each blogger has a unique set of embodied challenges affecting how she enacts motherhood, and while not always direct, each presents differently abled bodies as "good" mothers *refraining* from moral attributions of mothers. Eileen Davidson of Chronic Eileen advises, "Don't compare yourself to others" (2020 Dec. 22, para. 19). With respect to *supporting*, the invisibly ill "good" mother blogs to support others like her, which in turn helps them see that they are not alone, pointing them to resources and products that may improve their health, and connecting them to advocacy and support organizations.

These women bloggers write and post online narrating alternative "good" mothering characterizations and plotlines. "Good" mothers can be tired and buy store-bought desserts and decorations for their kids' events. "Good" mothers can drag their kids to "boring" medical appointments and procedures. "Good" mothers need not fit the master narrative's mold of able-bodied mothering. In sum, while blogging has multiple functions for the invisibly ill mothers, blogging is often justified in terms of making sense of health experiences, supporting others experiencing chronic health challenges, and taking a private health journey public. The Spoonie Mummy sums up these intersecting blogging functions,

> I started my blog in February 2017. The previous 18 months had been extremely difficult and writing certainly helps me to deal with things. But more than that, I wanted to help others. I want people to see that even with arthritis, you can still have many adventures. That even with an ostomy, you can still look and feel good. That you can still be a fantastic parent, even when chronically unwell. I hope to inspire, support and raise awareness using my blog and appreciate everyone who has supported and helped me with this (para. 2).

Yes, these blogs are about the women writing them, but they are also about their narrative commitments to inspire others "to take the appropriate steps forward for a healthier tomorrow with chronic illness, for themselves and others" (Davidson, n.d., para. 7). Narrating a counter or resistance narrative, chronically ill mommy bloggers are antagonizing the narrative of able-bodied "good mothering" and demonstrating how "good mothering" plots value differently abled bodies.

Conclusions for Studying and Understanding Motherhood Rhetoric and Invisibly Ill Mothers

Miller (2005) reminds scholars that motherhood is a mix of sociocultural knowledge and practices with moral implications that cannot be understood through the biological act of birthing alone, subsequently juxtaposing differences between social constructions, embodied experiences, and biological markers of motherhood. This chapter similarly draws on juxtaposition by exploring ableist rhetoric of "good" mothering and resistant rhetoric that challenges "biologically or medically abled" bias. While popular culture texts like *Parents' Magazine* perpetuate ableist images and words associated with morally acceptable constructions of motherhood, invisibly ill mothers are voicing their maternal experiences and presenting counter-images and words to construct a more diverse and inclusive construction of morally acceptable motherhood. To be a "good" mother is not dependent on health status, and to perpetuate ableist constructions of the "good" mother is to perpetuate stigmas that further marginalize mothers

with differently abled bodies. The value of health blogging for resisting ableism materializes as a benefit for blogging about health experiences, antagonizing moral attributions associated with powerful rhetoric, and taking private experiences public for both advocacy and connection. Invisibly ill maternal blogging capitalizes on the "psychological empowerment potential of blogging for women," especially "for members of marginalized groups" (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012, p. 383) like women with invisible disabilities. Similar to mental health bloggers that expand their social support and community through blogs, invisibly ill mothers connect across space and time through the blogosphere to attend to their own health, advocate for healthier lives, blog as therapy, model a different maternal image, persevere through suffering, refrain from judgment, and support/teach others.

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10 "'But This is Supposed to be the Happiest Time of my Life!': The Neoliberal Turn in Women's Discourses of Postpartum in *Our Bodies, Ourselves*"

Jennifer Rome Kruse

Introduction

Written *by* women and *for* women, the introduction of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in 1971 by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (BWHBC) was groundbreaking. *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, hereafter referred to as *OBOS*, began as a collective grassroots effort that ignited a movement to raise consciousness about women's health issues by bringing real women's lived experiences into public health discourse. At a time when women's health issues were routinely trivialized or dismissed by medical professionals, women sought a way to find support and validation on their own terms. Amidst a rising tide of competing discourses for new mothers, *OBOS* has been a source of feminist self-help for mothers for nearly 50 years, with a refreshing focus on mental health. Starting in 1976, *OBOS* became one of "the first sources of inspiration for a subsequent generation of women who, in the mid-1980s, would launch a self-help movement focused specifically on postpartum psychiatric disorders" (Taylor 1996, 68). Over time, *OBOS* has remained a trusted authority for feminist self-help that women use not only for information, but also to relate to the experiences of other women.

OBOS offers important feminist interventions as integrative medical discourse. Willard argues that texts like *OBOS* are alternative medical approaches that feminize medicine (Willard 2005). Hayden clarifies this concept, illustrating how the BWHBC establishes peer relationships between themselves and readers; relies on personal examples, anecdotes, and experiences; utilizes a personal and tentative tone; encourages audience/reader participation; and practices inductive argument (Hayden 1997). Kline extends this argument as she examines letters from the readers to critique the ways in which the writers translated and interpreted medical information, and how the readers challenged and helped shape those translations and revisions for future editions of *OBOS* (Kline 2005). These critiques lend themselves to a more feminized view of medicine that prioritizes women's experiences and gives women agency in knowing their own bodies. For Willard, the feminization of medicine occurs through the

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rhetoric of the integrative approach, which suggests the need for a more 'feminine' view of medical practice" (Willard 2005, 140). The "feminization" of medicine "also creates a significant place for the role of emotions in health maintenance" in an opposite move of more traditional biomedical models (Willard 2005, 140).

This shift away from the traditional medical establishment has continued to gain momentum in recent decades as women have taken to social media as bloggers, YouTubers, and motherhood influencers. However, at the same time that women have worked to empower themselves to discuss medical information regarding their health, neoliberalism has heaped the responsibility onto women's shoulders in a way that eclipses both the accountability of the medical establishment and the society in which we live. This is made all the more cumbersome for women when neoliberal discourses of health and intensive mothering are paired together, particularly as women are experiencing motherhood for the first time. This larger neoliberal turn is reflected in the decision of *OBOS* to sign on with commercial publisher Simon and Schuster in 1973, which drew criticisms from feminists for "selling out" to capitalism. The founders of *OBOS* argued that a commercial publisher would provide them with the resources and visibility to expand their reach and help more women. While this is a fair argument, feminism and capitalism have always been strange bedfellows, with activists questioning whether feminists can ever really achieve their goals through the tools of patriarchal led capitalism.

In this essay, I argue that representations of women's mental health—specifically postpartum depression (PPD)—have been medicalized, sanitized, and commodified from the 1970s to the present, reframing the discourse as a matter of personal responsibility for mothers and their "choice" to be happy, a move that reflects the neoliberal turn. As a feminist rhetorical critic, I am interested in analyzing social conditions and discourses that construct women—particularly mothers—so monolithically. Using feminist rhetorical theory, I will draw connections between the difference in narratives of women experiencing PPD and how the language used to discuss the emotions and intense expectations associated with new motherhood in *OBOS* contributes to radically different rhetoric of motherhood as it has evolved from 1976 to 2011. Consistent with the larger aims and themes of this anthology, this analysis interrogates how new motherhood is constructed through the lens of postpartum mood disorders and how this has changed from the 1970s until the present day. This work contributes to discourses of new motherhood, mental illness, and the implications for parenting in the postpartum period. Furthermore, this critique attempts to answer questions surrounding the rhetorics of women's mental health, particularly postpartum mood disorders and how these rhetorics transcend biology and operate as culturally constructed discourses. This work of feminist rhetorical criticism is interested in "recording the cultural production of the rhetorical artifacts we consume so as

to uncover patterns through language in which gender [in this case motherhood] is created". I am interested in analyzing the ways in which women have been included in the systems and structures of representation in *OBOS*, as well as the ways in which women have been challenged as neoliberal subjects who can be sculpted into "ideal" mothers.

I use a feminist rhetorical approach that analyzes the way discourses have changed over time, to better understand how specific messages about new motherhood are created and what the implications of these evolving trends in discourse *do* to women. In an effort to respond to the changing times, many of the motherhood discourses found in the most recent edition reify cultural scripts of intensive mothering, which reflect the goals of neoliberalism much more than the lived experiences of women. That neoliberalism has coopted feminism is not a new concept (McRobbie 2009). Navigating motherhood in age of neoliberalism is a consistent challenge that feminist rhetorical scholars have explored, and this chapter contributes to this robust body of scholarship.

Feminist Rhetorical Conversations of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and the Evolution Toward Neoliberal Motherhood

The extensive literature on *OBOS* provides a scholarly pathway into the current conversation about PPD. Scholars have studied *OBOS* as a text, a rhetorical experience, and a movement. Wells argues that *OBOS* was "a rhetorical experiment, an attempt to construct a new space that opened to public discourse issues that had been consigned to individual privacy" (Wells 2010, 3). She calls *OBOS* "a textual crossroads where questions central to writing, gender, and science meet," asking "Can there be a distinctive feminist account of the biology of women?" and "Can a 'lay' audience appropriate and critique the expert knowledge of physicians," questions with which the BWHBC grappled (Wells 2010, 3). This central tension fusing medical knowledge with personal accounts of women's experiences was supported largely by the feminist community and women hungry for knowledge about their own health. The BWHBC exemplified "the radical challenge to professional medical knowledge posed by feminist self-help" (Taylor 1999, 64). In a similarly radical vein, the BWHBC also made the bold move to "place postpartum psychiatric illness in the context of a broader critique of the medical establishment that denied women accurate information about their bodies" (Taylor 1999, 67). Taylor argues that the earlier editions of *OBOS* can be credited with bringing PPD to the forefront in a way that "emphasized the socially defined nature of postpartum emotional disturbances, placing some of the responsibility for women's problems on male bias of the medical profession and some on the societal pressures surrounding motherhood" (Taylor 1996, 93). This progress made by the Collective was monumental, and PPD was portrayed as not only a psychological condition but one that also has roots in socially

constructed ideas of womanhood, which are fueled by a neoliberal culture of intensive mothering.

Undergirding neoliberalism are discourses that emphasize individuality, choice, and personal responsibility. These discourses are deeply ingrained in the American consciousness in that they are normative and taken for granted. Not only does this rationale emphasize "freedom of choice," but also "the *fundamental assumption of the equal capacity* of individuals to make fully 'free' choices," including the choice to be happy (O'Brien-Hallstein 2015, 33). Success and failure are direct results of personal choices based specifically on how a "good" mother should behave. O'Brien Hallstein argues that "it is important to reveal just how much American motherhood now draws on notions of individualism, choice, and privatization of social problems" (O'Brien-Hallstein 2015, 35). O'Brien-Hallstein reveals the connections between neoliberal motherhood and its roots in our social, cultural, and political institutions: "Good daughters of the Reagan Revolution, we disdained social activism and cultivated our own gardens with a kind of muscle-bound, tightly wound, uber-achieving, all-encompassing, never-failing, self-control that passed, in the 1980s, for female empowerment" (O'Brien-Hallstein 2015, 35). O'Brien-Hallstein suggests that second-wave feminist ideas of female independence and self-sufficiency are wrapped up into neoliberal principles and contemporary understandings of motherhood in the United States (O'Brien-Hallstein 2015). The dangerous combination of the "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" mentality, coupled with female empowerment, produces dangerous implications. In an age of neoliberalism, contemporary mothers blame themselves, holding themselves personally accountable and responsible for any difficulty they experience mothering, rather than looking to the systems, structures, and institutions that necessarily guarantee their subjugation.

The neoliberal scholarship on motherhood illustrates the ways in which women are led to believe that they are empowered consumers who make the best "choices" for themselves and their families (Douglas 2004). These "choices" include ways to "optimize" their own functioning, including mental health. Neoliberal imperatives are not just changing the way that mothers must perform in order to achieve often-unattainable standards of intensive mothering, but they are actually re-wiring mothers' brains to accommodate the onslaught of incessant work (Thornton 2014). Women are becoming conditioned to be more, do more, and operate at their peak potential. O'Brien Hallstein argues that neoliberalism also demands that women do "body work," which "requires the ability of contemporary subjects to reflect on their bodies in relation to their identity and to reflect on their 'embodied' identities" (O'Brien-Hallstein 2015, 47). The good neoliberal mother engages in self-care, which may include dieting, exercise, beauty regimens, and even plastic surgery because the body is "now seen as a prized commodity" and "viewed as symbolic of 'healthy identity'" for

mothers (O'Brien-Hallstein 2015, 46–48). There is a provocative emphasis on the need for mothers to have a perfect brain to match the perfect happiness that motherhood is supposed to bring.

A healthy brain is a happy and productive brain. Thornton calls this phenomenon "mommy economicus" (Thornton 2014). By this logic, mothers should choose to be "happy" so that they can be "good." Postpartum mood disorders complicate this stealthy cultural narrative. If *mommy economicus* is not operating at optimal capacity, well then that is *her* personal responsibility to fix it (Thornton 2014). When women do not feel they can operate at 100%, they are encouraged to pursue better living through chemistry, rather than to process the full range of human emotions, transitions, and experiences that the common human condition of motherhood brings. This cycle moves virulently through our culture in a way that has become hegemonic. These discourses are particularly dangerous for new mothers, who are experiencing these feelings for the first time. In the following analysis, I compare the changes in discourse between the 1976 and the 2011 editions, illustrating the neoliberal turn to the medicalization of the postpartum period and the intensification of unrealistic expectations for new motherhood.

Feminist Critique of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* "Coping with Postpartum" in 1976 to "Thoughts and Emotions" in 2011

From the earliest 1976 edition until the most recent 2011 edition of *OBOS,* the conversation of PPD has morphed in ways considerably different than feminist rhetorical scholars and the public may have anticipated. The earliest edition features an entire 15-page chapter on Postpartum, titled "Postpartum—After The Baby is Born," with a subheading titled "Coping with Postpartum." This chapter does not pepper women's emotions, feelings, or experiences with mood disturbances or depression throughout the chapter—it *is* the chapter. In the first paragraph, the BWHBC authors acknowledge the roller coaster of emotions that accompany childbirth and postpartum. They write: "The wonderful highs: "I've done it" … "I've given birth to this beautiful, perfect being" … "I'm thankful" … to the lows: "Help" … "What have I done?" … "I can't take responsibility for a baby" … "I don't want to be a mother" … "I WANT OUT" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1973, 297). Right away they acknowledge the multiplicity of sentiments—especially highlighting how those feelings exist in tension, both simultaneously and in contrast to one another. This chapter of *OBOS* is also categorized and divided into distinct sections that the BWHBC identifies as the stages of postpartum. "The First Stage" includes "the immediate postpartum feelings which we have during our hospital stay" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1973, 297). The second stage lasts one to three months, focusing on how women get adjusted to their new lives with babies. The third stage, which consists of

coping with long-term adjustments of becoming a parent lasts up to a year or more (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1973, 302). The BWHBC is careful to acknowledge the ups and downs during this time. The authors warn of "baby blues" affecting new mothers in the days that follow the birth and offer a testimonial that hints at a more serious episode of depression:

> Immediately after the birth of my first baby, I felt high and exhilarated. But that night I got sad. I cried all night long. During the next few days, I lay on my bed thinking of how I would kill myself. I looked at how the windows opened, and I concentrated on figuring out times when no nurses were on duty. I couldn't sleep at all. I tried to tell them I was depressed, and all they gave me were sleeping pills. I felt like I'd never feel anything again but this incredible despair, that it would never end. I had nightmares. The one I remember best is where I'd be feeding the baby. I would fall asleep and the baby would fall off the bed and be killed. I don't know why I had these dreams and impulses. I have a happy marriage and it was a wanted pregnancy.
>
> (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1973, 297)

The candor and vulnerability with which this piece is written provide a realistic window into the full range of feelings one can expect after having a baby. To have published an example like this—even during a revolutionary time for women's rights—speaks volumes to the commonality of this experience. Women reading this realized that they were not alone and that many others were experiencing similar feelings, thoughts, doubts, and fears.

The 2011 edition of *OBOS* takes a very different approach to postpartum. This chapter is titled: "The Early Months of Parenting." In this 31-page chapter, only 8 pages are dedicated to PPD and mood disorders, tucked away in a section, titled "Thoughts and Emotions" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2011, 451). The majority of the chapter is dedicated to physical recovery, breastfeeding, body image, birth control, sex after birth, and tips on "Being a Mother Today" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2011, 459). They open the discussion of postpartum and the hospital experience in a stark contrast with the woman from the 1970s: "She was placed on my chest, and I began to cry from the overwhelming sense of emotions I felt. I was feeling so many things simultaneously: relief, love, excitement, awe, astonishment, pride, and achievement. When I looked deeply into my newborn daughter's eyes for the very first time, I kissed her softly and whispered: 'Hi, Baby. Welcome to the world, we've been waiting for you'" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2011, 451). A monumental shift in the language used to describe childbirth in *OBOS* has joined the evolution of neoliberal motherhood rhetorics, where modern women are called to be "good" mothers through a range of positive effects like gratitude, love, and pride that promote

cultural scripts of compulsory happiness. The sanitized discourse of 2011 contrasts vividly with the candid, raw emotions that reverberate through the earlier edition, where all feelings were portrayed as valid and normal for new mothers.

From the "Second Stage" of Postpartum in 1976 to the "Early Adjustment" Phase in 2011

In the 1976 and 2011 editions, both texts stress the importance of seeking help through family and friends. The 1976 edition emphasized how physiological changes can factor into overall health and well-being for the new mother. While the 2011 edition does make reference to physiological changes, especially related to recovery from birth and breastfeeding, these are included in separate sections, and they are not mixed in with the "thoughts and emotions" of postpartum. This recent omission works to polarize the mind/body experience as something separate—not existing in harmony. Both editions discussed changing relationships with their partners after the birth of a baby, but always from a heteronormative perspective. Both editions contend that stress in the marriage was related to the division of labor and new roles of traditional motherhood (woman as caregiver) and fatherhood (man as breadwinner). This was disconcerting to note that these myths remained stable and consistent over nearly four decades.

What is remarkable about "The Second Stage" of 1976 versus the "Early Adjustment" of 2011, is the conversation of emotions, feelings, and attitudes toward the baby. Positive thinking and the happy, productive emotions of neoliberal culture are highly privileged in the 2011 edition. Conversely, new mothers more readily embrace the full range of emotions in the earliest edition. One mother admits: "I am supposed to be fulfilled because now I am a mother, but I feel ambivalent; I have to be around all the time to care for my baby's needs—I've lost my independence; I feel scared. Another woman lamented: "I was constantly tired and irritable. I somehow got through each day, but it was certainly no fun for us all" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1976, 298). Still another shared: "The first month was awful. I loved my baby, but I felt apprehensive about my ability to satisfy this totally dependent tiny creature" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1976, 300). Importantly, these various feelings are normalized. In the 2011 edition, the only mention of struggle with a newborn infant comes from a single mother with a disability: "Because I am single and have a disability, I could not and cannot get away with trying to be a supermom. I knew then and know even more clearly now that it does indeed take a village. Asking for help has brought my friends closer to me and my son in a more intimate way. I am grateful for that" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2011, 451). While this story does speak to the importance of family, friends, and paid caregivers, there are problematic assumptions about motherhood here. The choice to include this

current narrative among early adjustment to parenthood may be seen as a way to include a diversity of mothers' experiences. However, it strongly reinforces the idea that unless a woman is single, with a disability, then being a "supermom" should be attainable as a new mother to an infant.

In addition to the "village" that it takes to raise a child, the role of female friendships cannot be underestimated, and this is a thread that resonates time and again. The Collective's emphasis on the importance of female camaraderie and support has remained consistent through the decades. The invitation to collaboration and understanding of mutual experiences is evident in the 1976 edition: "Talking over our ambivalent feelings and fears with other women helps us to put those thoughts in proper perspective. We realize that we don't have to perform perfectly right from the beginning; everyone feels uneasy at first" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1976, 299). Instead of women competing with one another in the "mommy wars" of the 21st century, these women seek out authentic connections based on shared realities. Women in the most recent edition, also speak about the importance of female friendships although in a vague, lighthearted, and idyllic way: "If I could give one piece (or two!) of advice to a new mama, it would be to get together with like-minded mamas often and be patient with yourself. You are doing a great job!" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2011, 452). Although the 2011 edition includes this one pithy quip, the authors do make a larger gesture for support groups, blogs, and playgroups as ways to connect with other mothers. However, all of the comments in the transition to parenthood that characterize the first few months have a really clinical and optimistic zeal—it feels like the things "good" mothers are expected to say about parenthood versus the women from 1976 who says all the things new mothers think but are more hesitant to say. This is an acknowledgment that the authors fully admit in the 2011 edition, when they say: "Many women who experience postpartum emotional difficulties are afraid to discuss their negative feelings for fear of being seen as a bad mother or crazy" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1976, 302). Notions of what constitutes "good" motherhood continue to reveal themselves as a primary theme throughout this analysis.

From "The Third Stage" of Postpartum in 1976 to the "Emotional Challenges" of 2011

I draw the connection from the 1976 edition of the "third stage" to the 2011 edition of "emotional challenges" here because this is the transition point where emotional struggles over a longer period of time are recognized by both texts. This stage of postpartum, which consists of "coping with long-term adjustments of becoming a parent" could potentially last up to a year or more (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1976, 302). The BWHBC characterizes this time in the following way: "Often we remain upset for months after the baby's birth because we expected at some point

to get our lives and our feelings back to 'normal'" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1976, 302). One mother candidly shares her personal struggle:

> "I was angry about everything, it seemed. … During this time, I had obsessive fantasies about hurting the baby, how fragile he was, how easily I could drop him, etc. I hated myself for such thoughts. Postpartum for me was learning to deal with more anger than I've ever felt in my entire life. It felt like one long temper tantrum—unscreamed".
>
> (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1976, 303)

In the 2011 edition, there are clearly some benefits not available in the older version. The most recent edition includes different mood disorders—recognizing posttraumatic stress, anxiety/panic, and obsessive-compulsive disorders, along with the rarest and most serious, postpartum psychosis. The wider range of symptoms and the distinctions between different mood disorders is helpful. Yet the way these emotional states are portrayed as an umbrella of mood disorders is cast in a clinical and less personal way than the earliest edition that did not have these distinctions but had human depth. What has been lost over time is the frankness with which women speak. One narrative from the 2011 edition demonstrates this change over time:

> "I know I don't exude excitement and joy, but I don't know how to process what I am feeling. I just want to have one really good cry and let it all out, but I'm ashamed to. There's so much love going on around me, and all I feel like doing is screaming until my head explodes. I cry alone when I get a chance; just a few minutes here and there" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2011, 455). This woman's testimonial is hardly representative of "postpartum mood disorders" writ large, although its placement at the introduction into this section may lead the reader to think so. Her "story" does not say much about her experience. The updated discourse is much more polite, concise, and sanitized. This may be attributed to or reflective of the way in which humans access information in the Google culture of the 21st century.

The BWHBC writes in the 2011 edition, "through media, books, blogs, and parenting magazines, mothers today have more access to one another's stories and ideas about mothering than our foremothers did " (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2011, 459). However, this could not be further from the truth. As far as self-help medical literature goes, access to women's real stories is more limited than ever. Best-selling books like *What to Expect When You Are Expecting*, say even less about PPD than this most recent edition of *OBOS*. The evolution of postpartum over time as

pathologized is consistent with the modern biomedical model that changed the terminology from "postpartum" to "postpartum depression." What would be considered part of the expected adjustment process to motherhood in the 1970s is now medicalized as a spectrum of mood disorders? On one hand, it is important to give recognition and legitimacy to feelings and emotional states that could seriously impact daily functioning. In some cases, medication and therapy are lifesaving. It is important for women to realize that postpartum mood disorders are common and something for which they can seek treatment and support. On the other hand, the pathologizing of normal human emotions that a woman faces postpartum as a disease in need of treatment has the potential to make women feel abnormal, inferior, isolated, and ashamed. Based on a comparison of the two texts as they have expanded over time, what was "normal" in the 1970s is quite different from today.

A major area of contention visible in both the 1976 and 2011 editions is the general lack of diversity of the experience of motherhood. Motherhood is presented through a white, middle-class, heteronormative lens. With the exception of the single mom with a disability discussed earlier, voices of women who inhabit other intersectionalities like race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, and age, are absent. The choice to privilege certain narratives over others speaks volumes to the problematic way that some feminists still construct motherhood from a dominant perspective where only some mothers are recognized.

In the 1976 edition, the Collective has a 13-point plan calling for change that will prepare women for the possibility of PPD and ways that society can provide all possible measures in place that support parenthood. Interestingly, the Collective recommends preventative care by screening women who are pregnant or who are planning on becoming pregnant. They also make recommendations for identifying factors that could place a woman at a greater risk for PPD based on social or cultural factors. The 2011 edition makes no such recommendation. After analyzing PPD from medical and emotional perspectives and how these perspectives have changed over time, it is important to explore how social constructions of motherhood may contribute to postpartum mood disorders.

Myths of Motherhood—From the "Fantasy" Mom of the 1970s to Today's "Supermom"

In 1976, the BWHBC makes the connection between PPD and society's steep expectations of motherhood. They contend that unrealistic ideals for new mothers help create the conditions for PPD: "Perhaps contributing to our depression is maybe our expectations of what a good mother is or should be. The disparity between the fantasy mother within us (spotless house; floors we can eat from; serene, lovely looking when our man comes home; feeling fulfilled with full-time baby care) and the feelings we have as

real mothers may cause us anxiety" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1976, 310). The comparison of the "fantasy mother" of the 1970s to the "supermom" of today is surprisingly similar.

In the 2011 edition subsection "Being a Mother Today," one woman shares her trials and tribulations with society's expectations: "Everyone's like 'This is the best time of your life, aren't you so happy? There's no room to say no … You're not allowed to have negative emotions. You love and hate your child so much, all together, all at once" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2011, 459). As a society, we should be evolving toward more candid conversations surrounding not only women's mental health issues but also the challenges and realities of motherhood. However, these findings demonstrate this is not the case. Unfortunately, this newest edition of *OBOS* is complicit with neoliberal attitudes and heteronormative approaches toward childbirth and maternity.

In the subsequent subsection "Mommy Wars and Opting Out," the perfection of the "supermom" narrative is pervasive. One woman shares her difficult story: "I'm a single mom. My son's father has just disappeared. My main support is my family, but it comes with a cost. I really wish I didn't have to work, but I have no choice. I would much rather be home with my son, because I just love being his mother" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2011, 459). Again, the reader sees the story of a single mom, struggling because her experience falls out of the realm of the heteronormative married union. This woman would *prefer* to be home with her son, but *has* to work out of necessity—a common falsehood women repeatedly hear. This narrative enforces the idea that stay-at-home motherhood is the best style of parenting, thus reinforcing one of the modern myths of "good motherhood." In an effort to deescalate the tension that the "mommy wars" create, the Collective makes the provocative editorial choice to rekindle this fire—in direct contradiction to feminist values.

Conclusions and Implications

The evolution of *OBOS* over time appears to have an ironically inverse relationship to the way that PPD is treated in popular women's self-help discourses. While publications about PPD have steadily increased since the 1970s, the language of women's mental health in *OBOS* is compartmentalized and sanitized as it moved into the 2011 edition. In the first edition, women were more likely to share candid experiences related to mental health that were intricately threaded throughout the *entire* narrative of the postpartum experience and what it means to be a new mother. However, as time has progressed, so have attitudes toward the postpartum experience. Emotional well-being and mental health are treated as phenomena that need to be justified or explained away, rather than seen as part of the holistic experience of motherhood.

There are several reasons for this shift as seemingly guarded and disingenuous narratives populate women's popular health discourses. Wells notes how the Collective's project became more complicated in the 1980s, "as their critique of medicine broadened: the issue was no longer the problematic relationship between a male doctor and a female patient, but the entire medical system" (Wells 2010, 9). The way that biomedicine was percolated through the public health discourses likely worked in confluence with the goals of commercial publishing house Simon and Schuster. The commercial publishing house needed to not only stay up to date on public health trends but faced pressure to provide readers with a popular press text that is easily accessible to women, reasonably cheap to produce, and reflective of changes in motherhood culture. The new volume ignores, alters, and obscures significant portions of the motherhood experience which now reflects traditional biomedical discourses that emphasize new motherhood as a medical and biological experience, rather than a holistic emotional and human experience. Ultimately this misleads new mothers, stunts the emotional impact of this stage of life, and inhibits those who fall outside of the "norm" from seeking help and support.

While *OBOS* is credited as one of the first texts to bring PPD to light, there was an interesting shift in the political and cultural landscape that worked in direct tension with this goal. In the 1980s postpartum as a social movement was beginning (Taylor 1999). At the same time as the movement was gaining momentum, the neoliberal conservatism of the Reagan administration created political obstacles for the BWHBC in revising future editions of *OBOS*. The ways women described their bodies and experiences through personal narratives, as well as the way that women were encouraged to use the book as a prop through which to explore their own bodies, were practices which became more difficult in the 1980s. The Collective stood by its convictions that *OBOS* produced public health discourse about women's lives. However, as "conservative political backlash intensified; the text became more closed" (Wells 2010, 11). All of these factors working in combination may have contributed to the very different text of *OBOS* that women have today.

This sanitization and erasure of candid narratives about women's experiences strengthen the medicalization of women's emotions. Today, women refer to self-help literature, blogs, and social media influencers for medical advice. When they see narratives that they do not necessarily identify with or that are not representative of their experiences, they may place themselves outside of the realm of what is considered "normal." Seeing these examples of "good" motherhood, women may not voice their concerns, thus leading to feelings of confusion, inadequacy, guilt, and shame, while they suffer silently on the margins. Indeed, discourses on social media platforms frequently display only the most idyllic moments of motherhood, simulating a fantasy and obscuring the reality of the struggles of becoming a new mother.

Feminist rhetorical critics muse about the possibility of neoliberalism existing in tension with feminist activism. That *OBOS* has gone out of print after nearly 50 years is quite telling. Perhaps it has gone out of print because of the pressures to succumb to the biomedical establishment, neoliberal principles of "good" and "happy" motherhood, or the illusion of post-feminism. Regardless of the reasons, new generations of mothers miss out on authentic discourses that could help them at an incredibly vulnerable time. The larger socio-cultural implication is that unrealistic narratives of the postpartum period persist not only in a diverse set of resources for new mothers but also in an allegedly feminist text. *OBOS* is a text that has historically embraced the authentic voices of women and disrupted the established medical "norms." It is disappointing to observe how *OBOS* has reinforced both rigid biological and heteronormative scripts of an unrelenting and intensely unrealistic discourses of new motherhood in the present day as compared with its earliest volumes.

One of the aims of this anthology asks the critic to interrogate how new motherhood is constructed through the lens of biology. This work contributes to discourses of new motherhood, mental illness, and the implications for parenting in the postpartum period. Furthermore, this critique attempts to answer questions surrounding the rhetoric of women's mental health, particularly postpartum mood disorders and how these rhetorics transcend biology and operate as culturally constructed, neo-liberal discourses. The end of *OBOS* marks the end of an era and serves as a poignant reminder that the history of women's lived postpartum experiences is a history worth repeating for new generations of mothers. Women need to hear the voices of other women–the joys and the struggles–to be able to fully experience, empathize, grow, and thrive as new mothers on a physical, mental, and emotional level.

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11 Spiritual Mothers: Evangelical Practices of Mothering in the 21st Century

Sarah Kornfield

Kristen Clark believes God designed women for motherhood; she is infertile. Sarah Bessey believes God offers freedom, not gender roles; she mothers four biological children. Together, they represent opposite ends of the contemporary White American evangelical continuum. Clark falls squarely into the fundamentalist side: along with her sister, Bethany Beal, she runs GirlDefined Ministries—a thriving multiplatform self-help purity ministry for (White) girls and women. In contrast, publishing *Jesus Feminist* made Bessey one of evangelicalism's most famous feminists and while her ministry is thriving among Xvangelicals—women who leave fundamentalist iterations of Christianity—her work is reviled among more conservative Christian organizations (Petersen 2016; Hill 2015). Yet both Clark and Beal resist evangelicalism's insistence on biological motherhood, reframing motherhood from biology to spirituality.

Emerging in the 1970s and often synonymous with the Christian Right's "culture-wars" activism (Noll 2003), contemporary U.S. evangelicalism is a big tent. Twenty-five percent of Americans identify as "evangelical" (Pew Research Center 2019) and Clark and Bessey clearly occupy different corners of this tent. However, contemporary U.S. evangelicalism has no firm boundaries or explicit centerpieces: it is not united by doctrines, tradition, or denomination (Bebbington 1989; Noll 2003; Putnam & Campbell 2010). It encompasses feminists like Bessey, the Southern Baptist Convention which condemns Critical Race Theory as antithetical to the gospel (Schroeder 2020), and American Catholics—such as Mike Pence—who affiliate as "evangelical Catholic" (Michaelson 2017). What is clear and consistent about American evangelicalism, however, is its Whiteness. Black churches and denominations often hold many scriptural beliefs heralded as "evangelical," but they largely reject the label and its politics (Noll 2003). Indeed, those who identify as "born again" or "evangelical" in political polls predominantly affirm "family values" and White nationalist policies (Noll 2003, Gaddini 2019; Pew Research Center 2019; Jones 2020). Analyzing evangelical sermons, Mark Ward, Sr. (2019), argues these churches routinely preach "family values" and patriarchal gender roles—gender roles that I demonstrate revolve around biological motherhood.

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Clark's and Bessey's ministries to White evangelical women are divided on many issues, yet they both separate women from biological motherhood through spiritual mothering. Here, they capitalize on a concept that spans Christian denominations. Catholic theologian Alice von Hildebrand (2015) describes spiritual mothering as listening, loving, and caring for others. She writes that women have "*got* to be mothers!" regardless of whether they have biological children. Similarly, evangelical Beth Moore (2015) argues that God causes women to want children and insists that all women should have spiritual children. Spiritual mothering, however, depends upon the ongoing vibrancy and maturity of one's own spiritual practices—especially prayer, as both Moore (2015) and von Hildebrand (2015) suggest. As such, while biological mothers require only a biological link, spiritual mothering involves nurturing one's own faith as well as nurturing spiritual children. Spiritual mothering, then, conceptualizes motherhood beyond biology, refiguring motherhood within spirituality.

Studying the discourse of spiritual mothering, this chapter rhetorically analyzes first, GirlDefined Ministries' self-help discourse in which Clark and her sister Beal discuss spiritual mothering within the contexts of infertility, miscarriage, and celibate singleness; then second, Bessey's brief self-help eBook, *My Practices of Mothering: The Things I Actually Do to Enjoy Mothering Tinies* (2014). My analysis demonstrates how Clark's and Bessey's formations of spiritual mothering unravel the tight links between women and biological motherhood within White American evangelicalism—and the ramifications this can have for White Christian nationalism and its "culture wars" politics. As such, I begin with a historical account that demonstrates the links between motherhood and White Christian nationalism. Then, I analyze Clark's and Bessey's articulations of spiritual mothering—demonstrating how their discourses weaken the biological determinism through which White evangelical communities literally and ideologically reproduce. To conclude, I situate this analysis within larger U.S. contexts of White supremacy and highlight the potential for spiritual mothering to disrupt White Christian nationalism. Indeed, I ultimately argue that Clark and Bessey's rhetoric of spiritual mothering functions to disassociate women from biological motherhood—and this matters because biological motherhood is a linchpin in contemporary U.S. evangelicalism's White nationalist ideology.

The Christian Cult of True Motherhood

The 17th and 18th centuries saw large political and techno-economic shifts as revolutions and industrial revolutions swept the West. Analyzing this era, historian Stephanie Coontz (2006) demonstrates how two patriarchal ideas emerged to keep women subordinate in the midst of democratic upheaval. First, that women's *nature* is suited for the home and, second, that men and women have complementary *natures*. These ideas maintained gender

hierarchy within marriage and politics by linking gender hierarchy to biology and charting strict gender roles: husbands lead economically, politically, and spiritually, and wives nurture, care for, and provide a pure environment for the children to learn within and husbands to retreat into. Men's and women's newly reimagined "natures" were then cast as what made them "dependent upon each other for 'marital bliss'" (Coontz 2006, 154). These shifts coalesced in America during 1820–1860, helping mold the Cult of True Womanhood (Coontz 2006; Welter 1966).

When Barbara Welter (1966) analyzed the Cult of True Womanhood, she demonstrated that the ideal feminine performance for middle- to upper-class White women in America centered around the four cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter 1966, 152). This womanhood clearly responded to its cultural moment, embodying a rejection of early suffragists' arguments that women could lead public lives in their new democracy (Hurner 2006, 235–336). The Cult of True Womanhood reinscribes the assumption that women's *natures* are naturally domestic and subservient while tying this identity into American Christianity through the virtues of piety and (sexual) purity. Indeed, Welter reports that all four virtues were often framed as women's "Christian Character" in self-help discourses of the day (Welter 1966, 161). These Christian virtues poised White women for *motherhood*. Not only does the virtue of purity ensure that White women's offspring were both legally and biologically linked to their husbands, but Welter notes that "America depended" on these women to "raise up a whole generation of Christian statesmen" (1966, 171). The point of "true" womanhood was, then, a very specific type of White American Christian *motherhood* and directly pertained to the idea of America's political future. And here, there is a direct connection between this motherhood and the production of race in America.

The Cult of True Womanhood was derived out of and reinforced cultural expressions of White supremacy and the hierarchies of enslavement—which denied enslaved Black women the rights of marriage, motherhood, and family (Davis 2002). Indeed, Deborah Gray White (1985) argues that the Cult of True Womanhood's ideal Victorian lady had a clear "counterimage" in the stereotype of the enslaved Jezebel (29). A stereotype which assumed that enslaved Black women were insatiably sexual and unconcerned with modesty, piety, and domesticity. This discourse was regulated by Christian religion: since the earliest colonial days, White enslavers maintained that Black enslaved people could not be Christian (e.g., this was legally codified in Virginia by 1705) and that their supposed heathenism—as a race—was *hereditary* (Goetz 2012, 1–4, 137). This fusion of racism and Christianity rests upon the regulation of motherhood, ensuring that—by definition—White women's children were free "Christians" and Black women's children were enslaved "heathens" with no chance of citizenship (Goetz 2012, 137). Ultimately, then, what was at stake in the

1820s–1860s Cult of True Womanhood was an insistence that the future of America is the future of a White Christian nation (Cone 2017), endlessly reproduced through White motherhood.

This fused race and motherhood discourse serves as a foundation for contemporary U.S. evangelicalism. Evangelical activists Paul Weyrich and Jerry Falwell, Sr., catalyzed this political-religious movement as a backlash in the aftermath of Bob Jones University—a White Christian institution—losing its tax-exempt status after refusing to "rescind its racially discriminatory policies" (Jones 2020, 103). Then, in 1988, White evangelical leaders met at a Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood to codify a doctrine now known as "complementarianism" (CBMW 2020). Widely accepted among American evangelical churches, this doctrine repeats the 17th and 18th centuries' gendered constructions and the Cult of True Womanhood as a scriptural mandate. Complementarian doctrine teaches that men and women equally share in their ability to bear God's image but are "endowed with different natures" and therefore destined for different roles in the church, home, and society (Mannon 2019, 146; Cope 2013, 220). Women's roles involve "submission to male authority or leadership" and typically include the nurturing of the home and children (Mannon 2019, 146). Moreover, women are forbidden "from preaching" and seen as unfit to teach men (Mannon 2019, 146).

It is no coincidence that contemporary U.S. evangelicalism, a political-religious movement catalyzed by racism, found doctrinal expression in patriarchal gender roles: skin color—after all—is largely hereditary, and the historical and ideological links among racial hierarchies, biological motherhood, gender roles, and American Christianity are explicit. White American evangelicalism valorizes biological motherhood in ways that ensure its own generational continuance, making biological motherhood an inherent aspect of White Christian women's role in America. To be a "true woman" is to be a White Christian mother—birthing and nurturing the next generation of White Christian patriots. This is the socio-religious context into which Kristen Clark and Sarah Bessey speak as their self-help discourses chart a path toward spiritual mothering.

GirlDefined: Biblical Womanhood = Spiritual Mothering

GirlDefined Ministries currently spans three self-help books, countless blogs and videos, several social media platforms, an online merchandise store, public speaking engagements, and Christian conferences. GirlDefined is—broadly speaking—a purity ministry designed to mentor girls into "biblical womanhood" (Clark & Baird 2016). This analysis focuses specifically on book chapters from *Girl Defined* (Clark & Baird 2016) and *Love Defined* (Clark & Baird 2018) that discuss spiritual mothering and a series of videos in which Clark discusses her three miscarriages and experiences with infertility—with either her spouse, Zack Clark, or her sister, Bethany Beal, as co-hosts.

Clark and Beal passionately endorse complementarian doctrine and their ministry offers elaborate arguments supporting this interpretation of Christian scripture (for a fuller discussion of fundamentalist evangelicalism and GirlDefined Ministries' rhetoric, see Mikkelsen and Kornfield 2021). However, Clark's experiences with infertility and miscarriage and—to a lesser extent—Beal's experience with celibate singleness create a point of divergence from more fundamentalist teachings about women's roles. Essentially, within a White evangelical community that understands the point of womanhood to be motherhood, Clark and Beal were childless throughout their twenties and Clark remains childless well into her thirties.

In their first book, *Girl Defined*, Clark and Beal define biblical womanhood and advise their readers to take up a complementarian lifestyle (Clark & Baird 2016). After establishing that (White) women are "God's chosen gender to carry, develop, and birth new life" and are "made for this job" (88), Clark and Beal slip a small caveat into this mainstay of White Christian nationalism. They write, "Producing life (both physically and spiritually) is at the core of womanhood" (88). This parenthetical aside paves the way for a shift in thinking. Even as they double-down on the idea that female biology mandates motherhood, Clark and Beal move away from biological children, writing:

> The physical aspects of our design are only an outward symbol of an inward reality. God's original design for the female body was intended to point to something much deeper than just birthing children … it doesn't matter if you are single, married with children, married without children, or past childbearing age, the truth about your life-producing design can be fulfilled in every season of life.
>
> (Clark & Baird 2016, 89)

Here, they introduce the concept of spiritual children, explaining that as women give their time, service, and mentorship they "produce life" (89). Fleshing out this idea, Clark specifically writes that because she is biologically childless, she has time for ministries such as GirlDefined and for "mentoring young women" (100). Similarly, Beal describes mentoring young women, leading a children's ministry at her church, and her work with GirlDefined as a process of "producing spiritual life" (102–3). In *Love Defined* (Clark & Baird 2018), Clark and Beal exhort their biologically childless readers to look for opportunities to mother others. They write, "instead of waiting for opportunities to come our way, let's intentionally go after them," and then they offer recommendations for this life-giving spiritual work, such as bringing meals to overwhelmed young moms and spending time with older widows from church (Clark & Baird 2018, 131).

Moreover, taking the evangelical mantra that *only Christ can satisfy* our hearts' desire, Clark and Beal insist that this theology applies to biological childlessness and singleness more broadly. In *Love Defined* (2018), they

encourage girls not to center their sense of identity in a man's love or affection, writing that no boyfriend or husband can ever "give you [the satisfying love] only God was intended to give you" (107). In a video discussing her infertility, Clark further articulates that, "even if God does give us children someday, I know that's not the end of every— like, I know that's not the end-all be-all. I know they're [children] not going to ultimately satisfy me and fulfill me in every way" (Clark & Beal 2020). This reasoning insists that women's relationships with God matter in-and-of themselves—apart from wifehood and biological motherhood.

In her first video with Zack Clark on infertility and miscarriage (Clark & Clark 2018), Clark powerfully describes how God changed her perspective from thinking that she needed a biological family to be fulfilled to recognizing that her life has purpose in spiritual mothering. She recalls realizing that God was asking them to "pour our lives and hearts out right where God has us serving him" rather than waiting for biological children in order to serve God (Clark & Clark 2018). Clark then lists the ways in which she is ministering (e.g., founding a new church, GirlDefined Ministries, family, discipleship, and so on), and then concludes, "we don't even have margin for anything else right now" (Clark & Clark 2018). Essentially, even as she describes wanting biological children, Clark situates her value, and by extension all women's value, not in childbearing or biological motherhood but in her relationship with God and spiritual mothering.

Clark returns to this premise in two videos (the first with her then pregnant sister and the second with her spouse) made shortly after Clark's surprise third pregnancy and subsequently devastating third miscarriage. Both videos feature Psalm 138:8, "The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me. Your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever" (ESV), and Clark, Beal, and Zack Clark argue that God loves women and that God's purpose for women goes beyond biological motherhood (Clark & Beal 2020; Clark & Clark 2020). Indeed, Clark explicitly contrasts her original plan for her life, a nuclear biological family with a "white picket fence," with God's plan for her life, which—far from centering on biological motherhood—centers on drawing close to God and becoming more like God through service and sanctification (Clark & Beal 2020). This echoes a theme from their first book, where Clark and Beal explain that spiritual mothering "involves the spiritual condition of your heart and your mind-set more than anything else" (Clark & Baird 2016, 90).

Discussing adoption, Clark states that it is something she and Zack think about regularly, and may one day feel called to do. She explains their current reticence, saying their desire to adopt may be a desire to "fix the problem" of missing biological children rather than a heartfelt calling to nurture, discipline, and spiritually guide a fostered or adopted child in their home (Clark & Clark 2020). Essentially, Clark suggests that—for the time being—adopting a child whom she is unready to spiritually mother

would not only subvert God's design for that relationship but would also disrupt the current work of spiritual mothering that Clark sees herself as called to do.

Clark ministers within an evangelical Christian culture and GirlDefined insists that biology predestines women for lives of submissive domestic purity—a 21st century reenactment of the Cult of True Womanhood. However, while the 19th Century's Cult of True Womanhood was a White Christian nationalist cult of motherhood, GirlDefined stands within the clutches of 21st Century evangelicalism and wrenches womanhood away from biological motherhood, insisting that women have value whether their wombs are empty or full and that women's (supposed) call to motherhood can be fulfilled through spiritual practices.

Sarah Bessey: Mothering = Spiritual

Publishing *Jesus Feminist* in 2013, Sarah Bessey joined a small collective of prominent White Christian feminists who call (White) evangelical women out of complementarian doctrine and into egalitarianism (see Mannon 2019). Egalitarian doctrine teaches that scripture mandates equality rather than a gendered or sexed division of authority and service (CBE International 2021). Since *Jesus Feminist*, Bessey has written three additional books, collaborated to produce a book on prayer and meditation, contributed to a study bible, founded and co-leads the Christian conference Evolving Faith, co-hosts a podcast, and maintains several other ministries.

Bessey published *Practices of Mothering: The Things I Actually Do to Enjoy the Tinies* in 2014 when she had three biological children; she has since given birth to a fourth. This brief eBook is written for (White) Christian women who are mothering. Like GirlDefined, Bessey's *Practices of Mothering* clearly fits the generic norms of women's self-help: e.g., written by middle- to upper-class White heterosexual women for middle- to upper-class White heterosexual women; focuses on identity formation; offers individualized solutions to problems; and offers advice based on personal experience or insight (see Ebben 1995; Faludi 1991; Cherry 2008; Renegar & Cole 2019). Stylistically, however, Bessey avoids offering much advice. Bessey simply writes about what she enjoys doing with children and routinely notes that mothers are different and that readers will discover what works for themselves (2014). Rather than "mothering" her readers as Clark and Beal do in their ministry, Bessey explicitly thanks her "community of readers," noting that they "make [her] a better mother," thereby offering her readers a position of authority rather than infantilizing them.

Bessey's eBook describes 14 "practices" she does to enjoy mothering. This, first, signals that mothering can be unenjoyable—her descriptors are "very very hard," "tiring," and "monotonous"—and second, frames mothering as a spiritual discipline (2014, introduction). A spiritual discipline is a "practice" or a habit of devotion (e.g., prayer, fasting, worship, service,

confession, sabbath, and the study of scripture) through which people mold themselves into Christlikeness. Bessey directly explains "practices" as "what us Jesus-people" call "spiritual disciplines" (2014, introduction).

By positioning mothering as a spiritual discipline, Bessey makes a two-part argument. The first pertains to identity: rather than seeing (White) women as mothers or potential mothers, Bessey's framework removes "motherhood" from an identity. Just as one can never be a prayer, one can only pray, so too one can never be a mother, one can only practice mothering. Here, Bessey explicitly counters the complementarian "school of thought" that sees women's identities as their *roles*—sees women as wives, mothers, daughters, and expects women to give "preeminence in all matters even her own spirit to the men in her life or her children" (2014, chap. 5). Rejecting motherhood as an identity, Bessey separates women's worth from motherhood. Offering the "practice of worthiness," Bessey encourages her readers to cultivate a mindset that finds their worth in their spiritual relationship with God. This means that one's worth is secure, not derived from whether one meets patriarchal standards of "good" motherhood (2014, chap. 2). Women have value whether or not they birth biological children and regardless of whether they are "good" at mothering.

Additionally, by rejecting the complementarian logic that teaches (White) women to be mothers, Bessey positions mothering as just one of many things that women enjoy and as one of many spiritual callings a woman might have. Bessey names some of her other callings as "thinking critically about my faith and politics, current affairs and life in general, pursuing justice for others, giving my time and talents to others, worship, prayer, scripture and advocacy" (2014, chap. 5). Here, Bessey offers the "practice of being a person," describing how she finds joy and wholeness by pursuing a variety of vocations and avocations. Bessey refuses to call this "me time," eschewing the implied selfishness of that phrase (2014, chap. 5). Instead, Bessey imagines a whole and integrated life: one with several different roles and practices but that works in a coordinated way to enjoy and glorify God.

The second part of Bessey's argument that mothering is a spiritual discipline pertains to the quality of women's daily lives. Christianity maintains that spiritual disciplines make life better: spiritual disciplines are life-giving practices that offer peace and joy. As a spiritual discipline, then, spiritual mothering offers women peace and joy. In an indictment of intensive mothering, Bessey explains that when she tries to imitate a "50s sitcom life" and "jam" herself into someone else's "version of motherhood," she hates mothering and feels "miserable" and like a "failure" (2014, chap. 1). But when she clings "to the vine," she relaxes into a loving relationship with Jesus that infuses her mothering (2014, chap. 1). The phrase "cling to the vine" refers to John 15, where Jesus teaches his followers that he is the "Vine" and they are the "branches" using this metaphor to explain how God's love flows into the branches, supporting and sustaining them. As such, Bessey's "spiritual mothering" not only rejects patriarchal versions of

motherhood, but helps her audience envision mothering—like prayer—as a practice of receiving God's supportive, joyous love.

Bessey then concretely identifies mothering practices that bring her joy, such as the "practice of a routine" and the "practice of early bedtimes" (2014, chap. 11 and 12). Here, Bessey often notes that these practices are good for children (e.g., well-rested children are generally happier children) but then interrupts her prose by using bold or italics and adding extra paragraph spaces to note that these practices are included because *she enjoys them*, not because they are supposedly good for kids. For example, she writes that keeping children well-rested "is listed here, in the Practices, because of how much *I* enjoy them sleeping well" and goes on to say that she loves the quiet during nap time and the alone time with her spouse in the evenings (2014, chap. 12). The focus throughout the entire eBook is on things that she enjoys—things that make mothering enjoyable and that provide respite from or counteract the more wearying aspects of raising children.

For Bessey, all mothering is spiritual mothering. She encourages readers to recognize mothering as a spiritual discipline—worked out in practices that bring joy and that nurture one's own spiritual growth. Bessey's rhetoric is steeped in "church-speak" and she uses this insider language to shift Christians away from the concept of motherhood-as-an-identity to the idea of mothering as a doing—as a spiritual practice. Disentangling (White) women from identities based in motherhood, Bessey insists that women matter to God—regardless of whether they birth biological children, and that women are people (not mothers) with callings and joys that cannot be contained within the confines of complementarian motherhood.

Conclusion

Kristen Clark and Sarah Bessey minister to American women who are predominantly White. They minister to and within evangelical White communities that routinely define women by the ability to biologically reproduce (Margolis 2020). Although evangelical Churches generally disavow violence, their ideology is closely aligned with violent White supremacist nationalism—which can be summed up in the "14-words" mantra "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children" (Michael 2009) and is often followed by the phrase "because the beauty of the White Aryan woman must not perish from the earth." Indeed, Dylann Roof was a professing evangelical who referenced the "14 words" throughout his writings prior to his massacre at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015 (Jeffery & West 2015). While extreme, this example of White, evangelical, nationalist terrorism celebrates what the larger U.S. evangelical church would prefer to sweep under the proverbial rug—that racism and White U.S. nationalism are linked to Christian institutions (Jones 2020) and linked to conceptualizations of

biological reproduction. Here, both Clark's and Bessey's reconfiguration of motherhood—from biological to spiritual mothering—marks a significant shift within evangelical ministries.

Indeed, White nationalist, evangelical violence makes obvious what more mundane evangelical communities would like to pretend wasn't true: that White Christian "culture-war" politics advance White supremacist policies (James 2020). Both White supremacist groups and—more covertly—evangelical churches are direct descendants from the lineage of White nationalist Christianity that institutionalized American slavery (Jones 2020) and that built the Cult of True Womanhood—with its *nationalist* vision of biological motherhood (Welter 1966). In the American evangelical imagination, then, "true" women are first, White, and second, mothers (or about to be mothers). Or to put it another way, the American entanglement of Whiteness, Christianity, and motherhood is manifested through and upon women's bodies and souls—or at least their spiritual practices.

Clark and Bessey ignore race and racism in their motherhood discourses. They seemingly address a universal audience—but their audiences are White Christian women, especially as Whiteness is "universalized" in their discourses (see Rowe 2000, 65). The point, then, is not that Clark's and Bessey's motherhood discourses are anti-racist, but rather, that they use spiritual mothering to disassociate (White) women from biological motherhood. This matters because biological motherhood is the glue fusing White nationalism and U.S. evangelicalism together: their symbiosis depends on White women's commitment to biological motherhood—to the birthing and raising of White Christian offspring, to ensuring a "future for White children." Or to put it more simply, evangelicalism's patriarchal gender roles make it useful to White nationalism, White nationalism offers evangelicalism political power, and they both depend upon biological reproduction for their generational continuance. Indeed, in both its physically violent and its more mundane "culture war" iterations, the entanglement of White *Christian* nationalism rests on the patriarchal insistence of biological children. Without the assurance of biological motherhood, this White community has no assurance of White children—and thus no assurance of a future. As such, by celebrating spiritual mothering, Clark and Bessey chip away at this evangelical pillar and the White Christian nationalism it supports.

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Part III

Refiguring the Rhetoric of Motherhood Beyond Biology

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12 Reconceptualizing "Maternity" To Recognize Men: Images of Pregnant Trans Men as Visual Argument

Erika M. Thomas

The naming and embracement of gender identities is critical for the survival, well-being, and advancement of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer + (LGBTQ+) community. Judith Butler (2004) explains that the naming and politics of recognition implicate existence and survivability for individuals, arguing, "when we speak about sexual rights, we are not merely talking about rights that pertain to our individual desires but to the norms on which our very individuality depends" (Butler 2004, 33). Rhetorical moves that expand gender identities and monikers, such as a "pregnant man," are vital for subjectivities and self-identification not yet codified in social and medical institutions or widely understood. As such, this chapter argues that identification of bodily/existential state, such as pregnant trans men, can operate as a visual argument when featured in the media demanding social recognition of diverse identities and nontraditional kinship. I contend that publicized images of pregnant trans men—trans men who fit the cultural codes of a pregnant person—serve as an important case study for the way visual argument can index ideological meanings that disrupt normative assumptions of biological mothering and allow for broader queer recognition and acceptance.

In this chapter, I analyze trans family photographs that are circulated in the public. I examine the print photojournalism and the documentary on Thomas Beatie, pictures of Trystan Reese and Biff Chaplow appearing on the website hosting *The Longest Shortest Time* podcast, and the still images and shots featured in the storyline about Wyley Simpson and Stephan Gaeth in We's "Extreme Love." I argue that the visualizations of posed pregnant trans men in family photographs shared with the public operate to disrupt the meaning of the gender normativity in the ideograph, <maternal>, as it is traditionally and presumably envisioned, represented, and accepted in visual culture. The photographs that normally index <maternity> operate to showcase pregnancy while simultaneously recognizing maleness and masculinity. Although such images can still stabilize some gender norms, they also shift and expand identity categories. The images of queer parental roles and embodiment troubling gender categories, e.g.,

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maternal, operate progressively to disrupt and challenge the heteronormative, limiting nature of sex/gender norms, and the nuclear family. Specifically, this chapter reveals how visions of masculine or queer characteristics can offset the visual dependency behind the claims or proof that only a "mother" has a uterus.

Representations and Contemporary Recognition of Reproduction

In order to understand the way trans men's photographs shift normative representations/logics of motherhood, it is helpful to examine how maternity came to operate ideologically. O'Brien Hallstein (2017) argues that a rhetorical concept, like "motherhood," becomes "institutionalized" often due to hegemonic ideologies and the publicly circulated mediated representations that reinforce meanings or assumptions about the identity or moniker. For example, scholars have identified some of the discursive constructions and ideological connotations of maternity, which include "God- and devil-terms" aligned with womanhood (Stanworth 1990), cultural associations to dominant messages of white, heterosexual, gender norms (Reid-Brinkley 2012), and "borders of maternity," repressing bodily agency (Fixmer-Oriaz 2019, 28). Yet, despite the tendencies and normative discourse that stabilize the meaning of <maternity>, conceptions of the maternal are also "contextually defined, contingent, and changeable … forever in flux rather than fixed" (Buchanon 2013, xix). While this shows how pregnancy can be rethought, its rhetorical condition of possibility is limited by representations of motherhood and pregnancy as traditionally belonging in the realm of womanhood.

Further, society fixates on reproductive issues or states of pregnancy, whether it is fascination with some celebrity's upcoming pregnancy or marveling at the science that enables reproductive choices. Representations of pregnancy and reproduction in popular culture are frequent, popular topics because they are illustrative of the cultural politics surrounding families and reproduction, or "the ground zero where the personal meets the political … family values, life, choice, our children's futures" (Poniewozik 2009, 18). For American society still heavily infused with Christian values, the concepts of family, marriage, and sexuality are primarily revered and celebrated when they participate in heterosexual and reproductive norms. Despite years of permeation and mainstreaming of feminist and LGBTQ+ messages in contemporary American culture, the hegemonic ideologies surrounding reproduction, normative sexual relations, and American nuclear families persist in ways that mark debates about nontraditional kinship and use of reproductive technologies in LGBTQ+ communities as "outside the purview sanctifying law" making them "illegible, or worse, untenable" (Butler 2004, 106). The discourses of reproductive justice often are valued until it is applied universally to marginalized groups and identities (Fixmer-Oraiz 2019). Given the risks to survivability and subjectivity,

particularly in queer kinships, parenthood, or identities, the construction and use of individuals and their context as social texts become critical spaces for interrogation. For this reason, I examine the visual representation surrounding a particular embodiment of pregnancy as it operates as a visual argument that can destabilize gender norms and roles and revise meanings of <maternity> restricted to feminine characteristics and biological mothering.

Visual Argument as Method for Indexing Ideographs

Although scholarly skepticism greeted its introduction in the field, the study of visual argument and its growing role in public culture led to an acceptance that "visual arguments exist," establishing them as significant communicative functions (Blair 1996; Groarke et al. 2016, p. 218; Birdsell & Groarke 1996; Birdsell & Groarke 2007). Visual arguments take many forms including advertisements and public service announcements, websites and memes, objects, such as flags, or the imagery on signs used in marches and protest movements (Blair 1996; Hahner 2013; Usher 2009; Hatfield, et al. 2007; Pineda & Sowards 2007; Hayden 2009).

Queer texts, specifically trans imagery, including photography and other forms of digital mediation, have also been examined for visual politics and performative significance (Landau 2012; Cram 2012; Barnett 2015). Prior to the 2008 media attention given to Thomas Beatie, notions of pregnant men existed in "religious imagery, landmark European plays and literature, and in more recent self-help books, science fiction novels, Hollywood films, U.S. Television shows" (Landau 2012, 182). Generally, understandings of pregnant men's images resulted in two ideological interpretations. They were interpreted to "symbolize male takeover of human reproduction at the expense of erasing reproducing women," or fictional subtext deconstructing sex/gender binaries (Landau 2012, 183). Following the second line of thought, I recognize a similar rhetorical potential in the imagery of trans men, beginning with Beatie and his circulation of family photographs. Though Landau does not examine the photograph of Thomas Beatie as a visual argument, her study reveals the cropping, circulation, and responses by American women who examined the photograph resulted in symbolic, ideological, progressive interpretations. Thus, visual analyses of trans pregnancy operating as arguments with ideographic tendencies can reveal both the communication of ideological meanings and also any interpretations representing hegemonic beliefs, motives, behaviors, or actions of public audiences (Palczewski 2005; Pineda & Sowards 2007; Hayden 2009).

Building from McGee's concept of the "ideograph" (McGee 1980), Edwards & Winkler (1997) endorse understanding visual images as ideographs and conclude that such a conceptualization illuminates ideologies and also extends the significance of visual images and their function within social contexts. Hayden notes that extensions of the visual ideograph examine more than "the ways images *function* as ideograph" and instead

"the ways images *index* ideographs" (Hayden 2009, 113). In examples, the visual serves to stabilize ideographs. For Cloud (2004), visual, iconic images/arguments attain meaning in relation to their context and stress the property of indexing verbal ideographic slogans, which produce a linguistic "materiality" and solidify the ideology's meaning, or perceptions of "truth," for the public. In a similar way the definitional qualities or roles of <woman> and <man> are often fixed in visual icons operating as ideographs, disciplining gender norms in society (Palczewski 2005).

Hayden also traces ways the ideographic arguments in US abortion debates index the ideograph of <life> and operate as a "naturalistic enthymeme," or a fallacious claim that photographs are "'true' or 'real' until we are given reason to doubt them" (Finnegan 2001, 135). The possibility of digital manipulation, or the risk of alteration only reinforces the power in truth-status behind a "pure" image. As such, the naturalistic enthymeme fuels epistemological beliefs. I argue that a similar visual argument upends assumptions of femininity in the context of <maternity>. Pregnant trans men destabilize gender by revealing how "naturalistic" enthymemes make a definitional claim and alter ideographic meaning.

Mainstream Trans Photography

In this section, I analyze how specific public photographs of trans pregnancy and kinship relations operate as visual arguments that further trouble the gender assumptions behind <maternal> acts, primarily pregnancy. I explore how they serve to index <maternity> in a specific way that challenges their traditional ideographic and connotative qualities, and the ways images successfully disrupt norms when its enthymematic quality is grounded in "nature."

Thomas Beatie

According to Beatie, the first publication of his most widely recognized photograph appeared on March 13, 2008 when *The Advocate* ran Beatie's story on their website. The photograph shows Beatie in a maternity pose, displaying his body from his waist, cradling his pregnant stomach. He poses with his other arm behind his head and his eyes gazing downward. He has hair growth on his face and reveals his hairy chest, mastectomy scars, and hair under his arms. In the documentary, *Pregnant Man*, Beatie describes his "iconic" and "infamous" image and reenacts the shot, which the narrator describes as the image that "sent shock waves around the world." (*Pregnant Man*)

What makes the Beatie's image (and others) an indexical sign of a <maternity> photo is the obvious performative quality of some elements of posing, which is an iconic reference to the photography genre appropriated from celebrity culture. Stout (2005) explains that in the mid-2000s, the

pregnancy or maternity photograph became "mainstream" and "a rite of passage" for women (D1) after "a few edgy urban artists" modeled their work on Annie Leibowitz's photo of pregnant Demi Moore on the 1991 cover of *Vanity Fair* (Stout 2005, D1). Today, the genre is commonly advertised as part of life or family photographers' repertoires. Nash (2018) likewise traces the trend to the 1990s when western, white pregnant women started to embrace and make visible their pregnancy by occupying social spaces, referencing a "new visual culture of pregnancy" now customary for commemoration (Nash 2018, 594). Today, the norms are reified on profiles on social media sites circulating pictures "that portray the woman's growing belly," a "recurrent visual content used to break the news," and sharing personal stories (Massa & Simeoni 2017, 141).

Following conventional <maternity> images, Beatie cradles his pregnant stomach enacting a gesture that is read as <maternal> since it is regarded as a nurturing and feminine pose. The pose is popularized and made citational by the maternity image that traditionally eliminates nonverbal signs and performances of masculinity. Pregnancy photographs reveal how "women's bodies change over time" (Nash 2018, 593). Similarly, social media narratives surrounding pregnancy construct gender and family roles (Massa & Simeoni 2017). "Pregnancy is "presented as a path of personal disclosure and growth: the woman discovers her real nature, whereby 'becoming a mother' comes out as the ultimate sense of 'being a woman'" (Massa & Simeoni 2017, 137). As such, Beatie's images mimic photographic tropes merely by becoming the focus of the camera's gaze and by documenting his growing stomach. However, other traditionally feminine characteristics are read when Beatie supports his "bump" with one arm inciting qualities of sentimentality and engaging in a photograph genre considered "beautiful," "an object of a voyeuristic, heterosexual male gaze," and similar to a "glamour shot" (Nash 2018, 595–599). In this way, pregnant bodies are interpreted as feminized when performing their state as "natural" or innately nurturing.

While half of Beatie's pose plays upon conventions in expectant mothers' announcements, Beatie upsets the female/feminine norms by maintaining obvious signs of masculinity through his stance/posture/arm gesture, his dress, and other bodily gender cues. Although pregnant, Beatie is a man. Masculine conventions and norms of iconography are present in Beatie's posture and body to signify his identity. As noted, he poses by leaving one hand behind his head, an image frequently found enacted by male models, particularly in iconic print advertisements for well-known fashion brands, like Calvin Klein®. Beatie's pose, commonly identifiable in images of western, white male models, celebrities, or "pin-ups," is a significant and symbolic choice. Beatie's iconic pose is an obvious sign of masculinity because of the normativity relayed in modeling, mass mediated texts, and advertisements. Advertising is a representational system responsible for the reflection and creation of social norms that influences "cultural and individual conceptions of identity," (Schroeder & Zwick 2004, 24).

Such photographic conventions may appear natural and spontaneous in advertising portraits, but are traceable in the historical context of visual representations.

Beatie's image is undeniably eye-catching because of the additional physical characteristics that emphasize his masculine identity. In his photo shoot for *People* Magazine (which basically shoots more stylistic shots of the original photograph), Beatie is shirtless since he can expose his male, flat chest. By raising his arm, he exposes his underarm hair as well as his muscular physique. Though generally lean in his muscular build, Beatie's arms, shoulders, and neck reveal remnants of muscular build-up more commonly characteristic in men than women. Not surprisingly, this is common in advertising since "on the body type dimension, the majority of men have the physique of the traditional male icon—strong and muscular" (Kolber & Albanese 1996, 17). In the documentary, when he reenacts the picture, Beatie stares at himself in the mirror, doing a traditional body-builder bicep flexing pose, shirtless, and with his undeniable third trimester belly. He further confirms his identity by downplaying pregnancy's assumed connection to maternity, explaining that he has spoken to men who say they would carry a baby for their wife if they could and "they wouldn't consider themselves any more female."

Furthermore, Beatie's look is consistent with a common gaze/facial characteristic in advertising recognized as aloofness and detachment, which "are conveyed by the turned heads and averted eyes," performed by male models (Kolber & Albanese 1996, 17). He looks off to the side, with barely a slight smirk, reflecting activity and detachment that is found in male photography and advertising. Such facial expressions are meant to make men appear tough (or stylish) according to Western, masculine ideals. Shroeder and Zwick observe common conventions in photographs as looking off camera at something outside of the range of the viewer's vision. They also explain that male models are rarely directed to look toward their viewer(s): "When then do, they rarely smile as women do so invitingly." They continue:: "Looking up may imply an interest in something more important than his face or body, an "upward striving" that resolves some of the contradiction between masculine identity and male object of desire" (Shroeder & Zwick 2004, 32–33). Given that society is even more immersed with visual images due to social media sites, like Instagram, these photographic conventions are recognizable by spectators.

Beatie's image references <maternal> photographic norms but enacts visual conventions of masculinity. While Beatie's messages maintain maleness, they also assert ambiguity or neutrality as images are reshot against the yellow wall of the Beaties' nursery, thereby challenging the traditional and conservative message that sex/gender is binary. His photograph pushes against intelligible normativity of most gendered performances due to his enactment of a unique and blurred sex/gender identity and supported by his discursive claims.

Trystan Reese

On the website link to the podcast, *The Longest Shortest Time*, the series, "The Accidental Gay Parents," tracks the story of Trystan Reese and Biff (formerly John) Chaplow. The first four podcasts tell the story of how the couple met, become foster parents to Chaplow's nephew and niece, and Reese's experiences as a trans man. In episode 4, Reese reveals his desire to become a parent and carry the couple's biological child, sharing that they were/are trying, did become pregnant, but, sadly, miscarried his first pregnancy. In the fifth installment, the website includes three pictures of Trystan, now pregnant. The photographs are contextualized by the following description: "Yep, he's pregnant again! And this time it's sticking. Trystan is due in July. Tune in to hear what it's like to be a pregnant man, and to share that news with your parents, your children, and the world." Given the description, the pictures serve as the visual proof of the pregnancy, and Reese's affirmation from the first episode of the podcast, "I am a man; I have a female body. I'm able to have a baby and create life." As such, the picture is a visual argument—this *is* a pregnant man—even when viewed independent of the podcast or in circulation.

The particular photograph that serves as the argument is included at the top of the website page for an episode in the podcast's recurring segment, and it is also the thumbnail of the podcast audio file. Reese is shown cradling his belly, a protruding second- or third-trimester-sized stomach. Unlike Beatie, who does not wear a top in his photographs, Reese is wearing covering, a tank top seemingly marketed toward men, given its cut, its colors (white, black, and red), and its design which features comic book pop art words (e.g., "pow" and "boom"). One reason for coverage includes that Reese cannot expose his chest as freely as Beatie since he had not yet had top surgery. However, the tank top still reveals Reese's chest tattoos and sleeves. While assumptions about tattoos are shifting with gender norms, the placement site of tattoos (more common on men than women due to stigmatized reaction to visible tattoos on women) means that Reese's tattoos are read by some as masculinizing (Sanders 1988).

Another notable difference in Reese's photos compared to Beatie's photograph is that Reese cradles his stomach with both arms rather than just one, therefore placing one arm under his pregnant stomach and another over it, this time using another iconic pose common in maternity photography that often represents a loving embrace of the "bump." Nonetheless, this photograph does not crop to only reveal the stomach, as the other picture on the page does. Instead, the first photo shows Reese's face, and like Beatie, contains many of the same visual codes, facial hair, specifically, a short beard and mustache, and a short, masculine haircut. A close analysis of Reese's facial expression and head position also highlights nonverbal characteristics more commonly expressed by men. For example, Reese's facial expression displays a subtle smirk signaling confidence and pride.

Studies of differences between men's and women's nonverbal gender displays in portrait photographs indicate that women smile more and more expensively. Reese's smile is smug, characteristically different from the facial expressions commonly performed in maternity photos, which usually include the wide, genuine or "Duchenne" smile or wistful smiles. Additionally, Reese tilts his head upward, notably different from women who tilt their heads downward, e.g., canting, which is read as submissive and more common in photographs of women (Ragan 1982). As such, Reese's photograph signifies power more common in masculine imagery.

The second and third photographs on the page are different, but still serve as an argumentative representation of the existence of male pregnancy. For example, the second photograph of Reese crops off his head, leaving fewer masculine qualities. Regardless, the style of clothing, his sweatpants, thermal, and t-shirt reflect colors and styles common in men's clothing. Otherwise, this photograph captures elements of gender ambiguity as Reese's torso does not reveal other obviously masculine qualities.

The third photograph, when compared to the second one on the website, reveals more significant gender visual cues by bringing Chaplow, Reese's partner into the frame. Reese is sporting a much larger pregnancy belly, the size that is usually touched or held in a nurturing way, and yet, Reese holds his shirt above the bump to show it off. Like the first photograph, he is masculinized by his facial hair, clothing, and haircut. Compared to other <maternity> photography that includes women with their partners, the couple's positioning in relation to one another is more jovial and silly than romantic and serious. Reacting as if directed to strike a pose with Reese, Chaplow faces Reese and rests his extended arm on Trystan's shoulder, but it looks more like an awkward, forced pose, and has qualities of a push rather than a symbolic position of leaning or supporting. Both Reese and Chaplow smile like they are laughing and mocking their own awkwardness, a juxtaposition against family photographs featuring a pregnant woman and a male partner. Nash states, "The presence of a man disperses the male gaze as the image becomes more of an affirmation of masculinity and virility and not the sexualization of women. This type of photograph helps to sustain heterosexual bodies and relationships and is reflective of a cultural gaze of white national identity" (598). Yet, in this photograph, the male gaze is diffused by the representation of gay men, yet, signifiers of homosexuality *and* heterosexuality are also tamed. While this couple is gay, the photo downplays their romance, which plays up Reese's masculinity. Thus, the photograph minimizes femininity attached to Reese. Instead, audiences gain visibility of two, *masculine* gay men, thereby relaying media mainstreaming of gay representation.

Discussing the tendency to discipline gay/lesbian forms of public affection, Morris and Sloop (2006) argue that such behavior "is currently hampered by the apolitical, incremental, and assimilationist perspective adopted by gay and lesbian cultural agents" for fear of causing "moral

panic," and justifying "disciplinary action deployed to protect heteronormativity" (13). Even though the limited expression between the couple downplays homonormativity, the behaviors captured in this photo highlight Reese's identity as a man living according to traditional or masculine characteristics. The dominating masculine looks and performances solidify his identity as a man more than his visible pregnant state signifies or represents <maternity>.

Wyley Simpson

The last visual representation is Wyley Simpson and Stephan Gaeth who are featured in one episode of *Extreme Love*, an unscripted television docuseries that feature two to three couples engaging in nonnormative love/sex practices. Despite the show's potentially stigmatizing framing which stresses the "unusual," but also "incredible" nature of the featured relationships, the program generally scripts a nonjudgmental and informative documentary-style when discussing the storylines of people featured.

Simpson and Gaeth are introduced as "Bohemian boyfriends" due to their unconventional looks (long hair, dreadlocks), neo-hippie style, and unconventional lifestyle that involves living on a bus converted into a home in Texas. Unlike the previous texts, Simpson is presented to the audience as a man through multiple still photographs and footage leading to his reveal as a *pregnant* man. I analyze the first few minutes of this footage.

Simpson is presented as a gay man before introducing his pregnant state and identity as a trans man. Two pictures of him portray him lying on a blanket on the grass. In both pictures, his long, curly hair is loose, he has a mustache and long, disheveled beard, a chest tattoo, nipple rings, and visible plugs or gauges in his stretched earlobes. He is shirtless and lounging with this hand behind his head to reveal long armpit hair. In a similar picture, his other arm is behind Gaeth's head as they both gaze into the camera with foreheads touching. When the narrator reveals that "they are pregnant," Simpson is filmed coming down the steps of the bus with his noticeable baby bump to greet Gaeth. Simpson is wearing a men's grey t-shirt and ripped men's jeans. He hugs Simpson around his shoulders, while Gaeth hugs Simpson around his waist, and they passionately kiss while embracing. For these brief seconds, Simpson is feminized by his actions despite his masculine visual markers—he looks like he is greeting Gaeth after a long day and his proxemics, posture, and movement is feminized.

Yet, in the next scene, Simpson is filmed doing stereotypically masculine actions in the yard. Despite his late stage pregnancy, he rakes leaves, climbs a ladder, and trims a tree with pruning shears. These actions reify the masculine performance and his identity as a "dad." His interview is then edited with photographs of his younger self as he explains his transition. Two pictures of a younger Simpson show him with short hair, flexing biceps in a mirror while wearing men's clothes and working out on a leg

extension machine. The program also includes a photo of Simpson after his top surgery. I argue that while the introduction of pregnant Simpson momentarily seems to call attention to the pregnancy as a feminine characteristic, the immediate portrayals operate to dismiss the <maternal> qualities and affirm his masculinity and male identity. Though the pregnancy was not planned and Simpson acknowledges his lack of comfortability with his female-born body, he states, "I am a man, and I am actually pregnant."

The footage that follows after Simpson's masculinizing photos feminizes or queers Gaeth's gender performance as the camera captures him coming home, again, but this time, he is wearing a skirt and carrying bags as if he went shopping. Finally, in his posing and interactions with Gaeth, Simpson and Gaeth show mutual forms of public displays of affection allowing their actions to "operate for some viewers as affirmations of identity, for others, those same bodies –/precisely because they are publicly in a state of pleasure –/function as a bodily challenge to a culture of heteronormativity" (Morris & Sloop 2006, 19). Thus, Simpson's identity as a gay man is reinforced, not feminized, downplaying traditional qualities that characterize <maternity>.

Discussion

This chapter interrogates the ways the ideograph of <maternity> can shift or deconstruct due to the indexical properties of visual arguments, in this case, images of pregnant trans men demanding recognition. In particular, <maternal> typically incorporates the state of pregnancy along with feminine markers. Though the act of changing the signifiers that represent <maternal>, e.g., divorcing feminine gender roles and femaleness from pregnancy, can seem far-reaching or low priority on a spectrum of advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, I show that its indexing is a vital step for assuring recognition of marginalized others, expanding the understanding of LGBTQ+ identities, and legitimization of nonconventional kinship relations.

Studying the photographs as specific visual arguments gives credence to the old adage, "seeing is believing." The images uphold a "naturalistic enthymeme" by representing realism of transgender identity, showing the men as they are, and demanding specific public recognition. Even though people understand that photographs are subject to manipulation, or more problematic, critics site pregnancy to deny the "naturalism" of trans pregnancy experiences and manhood, the men's images support Finnegan's claim that "the much-lauded line between photographs and nature has remained strongly entrenched in public consciousness even as Western culture has become more visually sophisticated" (Finnegan 2001, 142). Thus, the overwhelming masculine characteristics or performances reflected in pictures are read as "natural" to Beatie, Reese, and Simpson as the ability of their gonads to reproduce. The photographs and filmed images demonstrate through

physical appearance, nonverbal signs and acts, and masculine traits and behaviors, these individuals are men who are also pregnant. The definitional claims, "I am a pregnant man," index and defend their non<maternal> identity albeit any current status of unintelligibility in contemporary gender norms and among the public. Thus, pregnancy is divorced from female or feminine associations through the exposure to photographs of pregnant transmen, consistent with Landau's findings.

Although, on one hand, I argue that reading photographs of trans pregnant men is positive for expanding recognition, I also caution that the discourse risks reifying normative and, at times, stereotypical male gender roles or even hegemonic masculinity. Nonetheless, even though it risks a tension that further normalizes some ideas of gender, the photographs inherently create instability in visual gender norms that will result in a rethinking or blurring of sex/gender/sexuality especially in relation to <maternity>. Despite <maternity>'s saturation with dominant, cultural, gender codes, its rhetorical space has "the potential to reify, resist, and revise them" (Buchanon 2013, 23). By examining the explicit challenges to definitions and identities traditionally marked as feminine, scholars can question and dismantle the biological suppositions associated with motherhood.

Overall, this analysis highlights that, as society gains additional exposure and understanding of pregnant trans men as an index that changes meaning of the <maternal>, it assists trans recognition and the rethinking of family, reproduction, "motherhood," and gender norms, which challenges "essentialist cultural norms of human biology, transitioning gender, pregnancy, and parenting" (Landau 2012, 196). As Barnett (2015) explains: "For sex and gender to maintain their hegemonic role in society, they must remain stable and legible" (164), therefore a disruption of <maternal> can challenge society's assumptions in a productive way. Furthermore, in the similar fashion that pregnancy photographs are understood for marking the bodily and temporal changes of women, trans men's pregnancy photographs operate as a temporal pedagogy, "modeling a way of seeing and thinking about the human body as a site of change and transformation across time" (Barnett 2015, 156). Thus, the photographs lead to resisting dominant bodily logics generally and become an approach to counter the norms and conventions forced on lives, allowing for more gender queer or individualized identities. The photographs also minimize mainstream cultural scripts, such as the "born in the 'wrong' body" discourse. The trans men's pregnancy pictures as visual argument challenge the notion that transgender/sexuality embodiment only legitimizes trans individual experience if the identity matches a gender-consistent body. While seeing masculine traits in combination with pregnant bellies further unsettles and complicates our understanding of sexuality and identities, the initial impact loosens the strict binaries thinking around mothering.

In short, I have shown that the images of trans pregnant men, combined with discourse and narrative structures, operate to abandon the biological limitations placed on people. Thus, this chapter further supports the volume's challenge to forms of motherhood rhetoric that has historically linked sex characteristics to define individuals according to a binary sex and has resulted in the patriarchal and heteronormative association of mothering to include the biological role of carrying and birthing children. By using optics, the same sensory proof that might reify assumptions to also *disrupt* traditional images, trans men's photography assist society in rethinking and reimagining parenting according to self-identity, LGBTQ+ rights, and broader, homonormative kinship relations. Separating the messier question of the rhetoric's implication on trans rhetoric, I recognize the significance of imagery and counter-discourse in endorsing the fight for universal reproductive justice and demanding an individual's recognition.

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13 A Visual Definition of Caregiving: *Caring About*, *Caring For*, and the Feminization of Care

Rachel D. Davidson and Lara C. Stache

> There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers—Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter (Carter & Golant 1994, p. 3)

Over the past decade, stories about financial, physical, and interpersonal strains facing unpaid family caregivers have steadily increased (Eisenstadt 2014; McSweeney-Feld 2013; Rieder 2012; Tunajeck 2010). Such narratives are becoming more common as the caregiver to care receiver ratio grows increasingly lopsided (McSweeney-Feld 2013). Pro-caregiving advocates championing policy changes for unpaid caregivers have progressively begun to use the term "caregiving crisis" to describe negative conditions impacting individuals who care for others, including, but not limited to chronic illness and financial strain. Of observable concern, is that the primary role of caregiving tends to fall on women who are implicated in a complex history of caregiving rhetoric that centers on motherhood and lack of agency. This complex history has been further exacerbated by the 2020 Covid pandemic, which has disproportionately impacted women in general (Olen 2021; Fox, 2021; Gogoi 2020), and mothers in particular (Grose, 2021; Gross 2021; Leonhardt 2020).

The similarities between the rhetorical presentations of motherhood and caregiving run deep in that both have been assumed to be part of a woman's domain and concerns of the private sphere alone. Many contemporary researchers suggest that gendered connotations accumulate in a way that generates ideological implications for women. Pillemer and Suitor (2006) point out that elder mothers, who are in need of care, expect and prefer their daughters rather than their sons to care for them. Essex and Hong (2005) indicate similar findings and report, "Gender similarity is likely to play a strong role in the selection of the most likely child caregiver, given that older mothers are aware of the potentially intimate nature of caregiving" (440). Bianchi, Folbre, and Wolf (2012) report, "Women provide the majority of care," citing a 1999 National Long Term Care Survey (NLTCS) study that estimates "71 percent of all 'primary caregivers'—a

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category that includes in-laws, other relatives, friends, and neighbors—are female, including 59 percent of the caregivers who are spouses and 77 percent of those who are children of the care recipients" (47). Such statistics indicate that, like mothering, unpaid caregiving is viewed in the context of private familial relationships and occurs along gender lines.

Tronto (1993) and Rummery and Fine (2012) argue that a lack of choice, or agency, in deciding to practice caregiving is what perpetuates the gender disparity that aligns women with caring as a disposition, or *caring about*, instead of aligning caregivers, regardless of gender, with the practices of caring, or *caring for*. Sharon Hays (1996) argues that contemporary, western motherhood, or what she refers to as an ideology of intensive mothering, reinforces that women should be the primary caregivers in the household, which "places unrealistic expectations on mothers" and "serves the interest not only of men but also of capitalism, the state, the middle class, and whites" (xiii). Pro-caregiving advocates must carefully negotiate this complex narrative of caregiving, gender, and lack of choice in their efforts to mitigate the caregiving crisis for the nation's unpaid caregivers.

In 2020, the National Alliance for Caregiving, a nonprofit advocacy group for caregivers, and AARP, a nonprofit organization for individuals over 50, released a "Caregiving in the U.S. Report," which outlines caregiving data in the United States and proposes several policy initiatives to expand shared responsibility of caregiver issues ("National Alliance for Caregiving" 2020). The extensive 107-page full color report conveys data and discussion of the caregiving crisis in the United States, utilizing charts, infographics, and photographs to communicate contemporary caregiving situations to readers. In this chapter, we analyze the visual choices made in the "Caregiving in the U.S. Report," specifically focusing on the photographs used to communicate caregiving in the United States. Batova (2021) suggests that "pictures lead to stronger physiological reactions than texts do and are more salient than texts in the initial stages of perception before deliberate cognitive processing starts" (52). The verbal rhetoric of the 2020 report promotes policy change and specifically details the caregiving crisis as a disproportionately gendered issue for women. However, we suggest that the associative definition of caregiving as presented in the photographic imagery within the report perpetuates the gendered disparity in caregiving in ways that run parallel to an ideology of intensive mothering, where caregivers are framed as familial individuals who give care in the domestic home—a place traditionally understood as the "women's sphere." Ultimately, we posit that advocates are implicated in a rhetorical catch-22 when they choose visual imagery that accurately reflects the current situation, while implementing verbal rhetoric that is attempting to change said situation. We conclude the chapter with implications of our analysis for advocacy efforts centered on caregiving and rhetorics of motherhood.

Caregiving, Motherhood, and Gender

Pro-caregiving advocates champion a cause where the key term, "caregiving," invokes largely positive and emotional associations while it is simultaneously discounted as a social concern in the public sphere. By way of illustration, current and accepted indicators of the strength of a nation are typically measured in economic terms that point to markers of consumer and government spending (i.e., Gross Domestic Product). Some pro-caregiving rhetors point out that such indicators do not take into account relational and unremunerated aspects including the extent to which a nation's citizens help and/or are connected to one another. The Caring Economy Campaign, a nonprofit advocate for caregivers, argues that the GDP "does not show the real condition of our people or our economy and leads to imbalanced and unsuccessful policies" ("What is the CEC?" 2011, para. 7). Such economic emphases produce conditions where caregiving costs and gains are invisible and, as outlined by Gornick, Howes, and Braslow (2012), "[c]are policy" becomes a rarity "in American social policy research" (112).

In contrast to public policy, which is typically evaluated by economic standards and is tied to the public market, unpaid caregiving is traditionally understood in terms of its deep-rooted associations to gender and the domestic sphere. Specifically, caregiving has traditionally and historically been associated with the private sphere as "women's work" and has not been recognized as a shared social responsibility (Tronto 1993; Wood 1994). As such, pro-caregiving advocates confront this complex negotiation between two disparate entities—unpaid caregiving and public policy. This tension contributes to a rhetorical problem facing pro-caregiving advocates wherein championing a cause that carries strong assumptions to the private complicates arguments for policy attention to unpaid caregiving in the public.

The rhetorical problem of addressing what is assumed to be a private issue as a public problem occurs in different forms. A more familiar and better-studied example of this rhetorical problem is encountered in discourses of mothering. Mothering is similarly treated as a private issue because it is gendered and traditionally connected to the domestic sphere. Glenn (2010) suggests, "The paradigmatic care relationship is that between mother and child, which often serves as the template for thinking about caring" (187), but "in this model, caring (mothering) is viewed as natural and instinctive and as women's natural vocation" (187). Many feminist scholars argue that this "natural mothering instinct" is rooted in a separate sphere's ideology where the public and private spheres historically associate gender in the public sphere as male-dominated, which is socially and culturally valued, whereas the private sphere is traditionally female-centered and under-valued (Benhabib 1994; Foss & Foss 1991; Fraser 1994; Ryan 1994). Glenn (2010) connects the "social structure and ideology" of caregiving to "ideologies of home [and] motherhood" to suggest that these

pervasive structures not only "kept [women] out of the public realm of politics," but also constrained them to the private sphere of the family by "exalt[ing] their role as caregivers" (185). In other words, a separate sphere's ideology not only dictates gendered assumptions about mothers, but also keeps a firm grasp on those roles by exalting or rewarding mothers for fulfilling their duties in the domestic sphere. This theoretical separation between public and private is still manifested in the implicit separateness between most public policy, understood in social and economic terms, and caregiving, understood as unpaid women's work in the domestic sphere.

Our analysis begins with the assumption that unpaid caregiving does not have to be understood as "women's work in the private sphere" and that how caregiving is represented in pro-advocacy rhetoric—both in written and visual discourse—is consequential in arguments about shared responsibility for unpaid caregiving. Such rhetoric is currently too often organized "around spatial and conceptual separation between public and private realms" with "the public sphere of the market (economy and politics) and the private sphere of family and household … imagined to be discrete arenas that serve different purposes, perform different functions, and operate according to different principles" (Glenn 2010, 183–184). We contend that pro-caregiving advocates have opportunities to better negotiate the visual/written tension in the representation of caregiving to make caregiving "a community and collective (public) responsibility rather than … purely a family (private) responsibility" (Glenn 2010, 189).

Artifact and Visual Framing Analysis

The artifact analyzed for this chapter comes from the May 2020 Caregiving in the U.S. report conducted by AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving[1]. The organizations have collaborated since 1997, and the 2020 version is the 5th iteration of the report. The full report, published in its entirety, represents these organizations' efforts to energize shared social responsibility for our nation's caregivers advocating that "As the country continues to age, the need to support caregivers as the cornerstone of society will only become more and more important" ("Caregiving in the U.S." 2020, 4). The report implores readers to accept shared social responsibility for this part of the population that "totals an estimated 53.0 million adults in the United States, up from the estimated 43.5 caregivers in 2015" ("Caregiving in the U.S." 2020, 4). The chosen images represent caregiving situations applicable to the data detailed in the report.

The written discourse of the report explicitly advances arguments for shared responsibility; however, this analysis looks at the visual discourse to understand the extent to which the images advance an argument that goes against the advocacy efforts in the written text. As such, in this study, we analyze the 16 visual images that are embedded within the full caregiving report to understand how caregiving in the United States is visually defined.

Rhetorical scholar Dana Cloud (2004) argues, "Photographic images are marked by metonymy, the reduction of complex situations into simpler visual abstractions" (289). Understood in this way, the images chosen for inclusion in the report aim to simplify the complex issues around caregiving via a visual representation of the situation. In order to understand the visual imagery as presented in the report, we individually coded the images using three agreed upon categories: (1) Who are caregivers? (2) What type of relationship is implied between the caregiver and care receiver? (3) Where does caregiving occur? From this coding, we argue that the report first establishes that caregiving is intimate and familial, which advances a visual argument of association between *caring about* and *caring for* that actively masks choice and discourages public auditors from intervening in caregivers' already made choice.

Caregiving is Intimate and Familial

The report advances a visual definition of caregiving as intimate and familial by creating visual associations of closeness in caregiver-care receiver relationships. We use the term "intimacy" to describe apparent closeness within personal relationships. Pillemer and Suitor (2006) explore the relationship status between parent and adult child and find that daughters and daughter-in-laws "are equally likely to consider themselves the primary caregiver" for older adults in the family (484). They suggest, "Research that examines gender differences in elder care consistently shows that daughters are more likely than sons to be primary caregivers and to provide hands on care" (484). The report also utilizes visual associations to heteronormative marriages, reinforcing caregiving as familial.

In our coding of the visual images, women are represented as the caregiver in 10 of the 16 images (63%) and men are portrayed as caregivers in 5 of 16 images (31%). In the written content of the report, it is reported that "Six in 10 caregivers are women (61 percent)" (13). The pictures, then, accurately reflect the statistics in the United States; however, the images also reflect the notion that caregiving is familial. For example, a parent-child relationship is implied in 8 of the 16 photos (50%) and a husband-wife relationship is portrayed in 5 of 16 photos (31%). Although the familial relationships are not made explicit to the viewer, they are visually implied in the associative arguments within the images. For instance, parent-child relationships are implied by the perceived age range and similar race of the caregiver and care receiver as well as the nonverbal intimacy depicted between the caregiver and care receiver. In one picture, two women of Asian descent are depicted in an intimate embrace. The perceived caregiver (a female who appears to be in her 50s or 60s) is embracing the care receiver (a female who appears to be in her 70s or 80s). The caregiver's arms are locked around the care receiver with a side hug. The caregiver has her eyes closed and it appears that her head is leaning on the care receiver's

head. The intimate nature of the nonverbal communication in this image, along with the race and age range of the women, suggests that this is an adult daughter caring for her aging mother.

In another image, an adult caregiver (an African American male who appears to be in his 30s or 40s) is spoon feeding an African American woman who appears to be in her 70s or 80s. The caregiver's right hand is holding the spoon and it appears that his left hand is on the back of the care receiver. Again, the intimate nature of this action, combined with the similar race, and age range of the caregiver and care receiver, implies that this is an adult caregiver caring for his aging mother. Through visual examples like these, the report rhetorically constructs intimacy because the caregiver and care-recipients are engaged in intimate touching and are in close proximity to each other. The intimacy is conveyed nonverbally through the tactile channel and the touch occurs on heads, hands, arms, and back, which suggests a close familial relationship. Additionally, intimacy is conveyed through posture, expressing a sense of accepted nonverbal immediacy, or platonic attraction, between the mostly female caregivers and care receivers. The report presents images of caregivers and care receivers of the same apparent skin color, which, together with conveying nonverbal intimacy, create a metonymic link for the viewer to assume the caregiver and care receiver are biologically related, which is implied in 8 of the 16 images.

The rhetorical construction of marriage is also a significant aspect of the visual images and signifies an understanding of a familial and intimate framing for unpaid caregiver issues. For example, husband-wife relationships are implied in 5 of 16 photos. In one photo, a Caucasian man and woman are reclining in the same bed. The caregiver (assumed to be the wife) is on the bed next to him. One of her hands is on the care receiver's shoulder. Both are looking at each other and appear to be in the middle of a conversation. Based on their location (in a domestic bedroom) and position (reclining in bed together), it is assumed that this is a husband-and-wife relationship.

In another picture, a man is in a wheelchair wearing camouflage pants and jacket. He has one arm around a woman, who has kneeled and has her hands on his knee. The man's other arm is around a young child. The child's arms are on the man's shoulders. Both care receivers (the man in the wheelchair and the young child) are smiling at the caregiver. The caregiver is looking up and smiling at her care receivers, her arm is draped down the torso and leg of the man suggesting an intimate relationship. In this picture, a familial and biological relationship is implied between the caregiver and care receivers because of the domestic setting, lack of a medical uniform on the caregiver, and the physical touch being displayed between them. The man and woman appear to be married, and the young child appears to be their biological son. In these examples, visual associations to marriage help convey a caregiving situation as both familial and intimate.

Some of the pictures depict generational family members, which enhances the argument of association that caregiving is familial. For instance, one image displays what appears to be an adult father and son with a young grandson, sharing the same apparent skin color, and they are smiling as they walk together outside. Similar skin color alone does not convey biological family; however, when similar skin color is combined with other compositional aspects of the images, such as the representation of different generations in close proximity to each other and intimately embracing or touching one another, the images build a set of associations that, in the context of contemporary American culture, suggest a biological family. This image represents a condensation symbol, "which designate no clear referent but 'condense' a host of different meanings and connotations that otherwise might diverge" and are "particularly useful in defining an ambiguous situation because people can highlight different aspects of the symbol yet reach the same conclusion" (Zarefsky 1997, 8). The visual cues from the image of what appears to be a grandfather, father, and son, emphasize the visual definition of caregiving as one that centers within a familial frame.

In addition to defining the relationship between the caregiver and care receiver, the report visually depicts the location of caregiving as primarily domestic. Sixty-three percent of the images (10 out of 16) portray caregiving inside what appears to be a domestic home. Thirty-one percent of the images (5 out of 16) place the interaction between caregiver and care receiver in an outdoor space and only 1 of the 16 images places the caregiver and care receiver in a hospital room. In 10 of the images, caregivers and/or care receivers are partaking in activities that occur in domestic-looking spaces including bedrooms, kitchens, and living rooms. Situating caregiving within a domestic home helps to build the associative argument that caregiving is an intimate and family affair.

Glenn (2010) argues, "The burden of care (including both the responsibility for it and the actual labor) is differentially distributed according to gender, class, race, and citizenship" (184). And, further, the "pattern of women taking disproportionate responsibility for care is so well established that it is largely taken for granted, often not noticed, and when noticed, seen as natural" (Glenn 2010, 184). That these connotations often are unseen and generally accepted as "natural," highlights potential inherent barriers for pro-caregiving advocates to secure public policy changes. Through our analysis, we argue that the report is constructing a visual argument that genders caregiving through associations that imply intimate family relationships. If the goal in pro-caregiving advocacy efforts is to raise awareness for caregiving as a public issue, then these private visual contexts may serve to contradict those efforts by reinforcing the feminization of caregiving. This is particularly important if one assumes the audience for this report includes unpaid caregivers themselves who may embrace the visual invitation being advanced in the report's discourse.

Caring about leads to *Caring for* in Unpaid Caregiving

Rummery and Fine (2012) suggest that *caring about* "denotes the disposition towards the dependent" while *caring for* "is concerned with the physical work of caregiving" (324). Important for this chapter, we suggest these notions of care help to explain ideas of choice and/or obligation in caregiving. Given that pro-caregiving advocates are attempting to expand shared responsibility for unpaid caregiving, it is imperative for advocates to define caregiving in ways that do not limit shared responsibility due to assumptions about caregiver agency (or lack thereof). Although through our coding of the visual images we found that the report associates caregivers with both *caring about* and *caring for*, we argue that the report creates a problematic relationship that feminizes caregiving by implying that *caring about* someone must lead to *caring for* that person.

The visual images in the report rhetorically construct the practices of caregiving (*caring for*) as medical and in the domestic home. One visual image portrays an adult caregiver giving a care receiver what appears to be medicine or food on a spoon in what looks to be a kitchen. The domestic setting is further implied by the dress of the caregiver, who is wearing a casual polo shirt. In another image set in a domestic kitchen, a woman checks the pulse of a care receiver, who appears to be her father. Her facial expression shows concern as she takes his pulse and the proximity of the two suggest an intimate familial relationship. In another image, a man sits next to a woman in a kitchen, sorting medicines. None of the caregivers are wearing medical uniforms, or indicating a strictly professional relationship with the care receiver. By emphasizing the medical practices of care, administered by an apparent family member in a domestic space, the report associates unpaid caregivers who *care about* a loved one will ultimately *care for* that person in this particular way.

In the visual definition of caregiving, the report associates *caring for* with managerial tasks. There are two images that depict caregivers alone without the care receiver. In one picture, an adult woman who appears to be in her 50s shows signs of stress as she looks at what appears to be a pile of bills. Her hand is on her forehead and she conveys a distressed facial expression. In another example, an adult African American man pinches the bridge of his nose with his fingers, his forehead is wrinkled, his eyes are closed, and he is holding his glasses in his other hand as he sits in a home office in front of a laptop. In both examples, viewers are led to believe that these are adults caring for their parents, and are distressed about what is likely a financial issue related to their caregiving role. Because personal finance issues are typically managed by a person within the family, such emphasis on unpaid caregivers being informed of these managerial tasks indicates that *caring about* leads to *caring for* in this particular way. The rhetorical issue occurs when it is assumed that a caregiver who *cares about* someone must eventually *care for* that person, which actively masks choice for unpaid caregivers.

The stressful aspects of caregiving are visually represented as happening behind the scenes, where the worry from the paperwork of caregiving happens in private, but in front of the care receiver, the visual images depict that caregivers need to be loving, nurturing, and positive. *Caring about*, then, is revealed within the definition of caregiving by rhetorically constructing a preferred positive attitude for unpaid caregivers. This is not a new expectation for caregiving, as intensive mothering has produced "the ultimate female Olympics" where "the best mothers are the main caregivers … always smile … always understand … are never tired … never lose their temper" (Douglas & Michaels, 2004 6). Of the visual images, 50% depict caregivers smiling and/or with a pleasing facial expression. For example, in the image of a grandfather, a father, and a young son, all three are smiling as they walk toward the camera. In the image of a woman with her husband in the wheelchair and young son, the caregiver gazes up at her family with a huge smile on her face. In another image, an adult woman and her mother are looking at each other, smiling as they point to a tablet. The positive attitude becomes problematic because it reinforces an appropriate expectation for caregivers and the private problem/solution—that unpaid caregivers will be charged with responsibility to *care for* if they *care about* their loved one and will have a good attitude while doing that challenging care work.

Tronto's (1993) definition of care as a disposition points to the ways in which choice can get undermined because it reinforces that women are obligated to *care about* and to *care for* their care recipients. In this conceptualization, *caring about* seems to predispose people to conform behavior to *caring for*. Rummery and Fine's (2012) conceptualization of *caring about* similarly reveals how choice, or agency, gets discursively constructed within a definition of caregiving. By creating a visual associative argument that suggests if you *care about* someone that you will ultimately *care for* that person, the report emphasizes the idea that public auditors only need to support unpaid caregivers' *already*-made choice, as opposed to supporting unpaid caregivers' right to choose. The visual aspects of the report limit shared responsibility in unpaid caregiving by creating a definition of caregiving that reinforces the burden of *caring for* as directly flowing from *caring about*.

Conclusion

Our coding of the visual images in the 2020 report reveal two primary findings: (1) In its rhetorical construction of caregiving, the report visually reinforces that care is an intimate familial responsibility, as opposed to a social one; and (2) in the visual definition of caregiving, the report constructs arguments of association that emphasize the practices of and attitudes that unpaid caregivers should have about caregiving. Within this definition of caregiving, the report rhetorically constructs caregiving as both

a disposition (*caring about*) and a practice (*caring for*). By rhetorically defining the work unpaid caregivers are doing as inclusive of both the practices and attitudes of care, images in the report imply that these two aspects of care go together which has implications for public auditors understanding unpaid caregiving as a socially shared responsibility and the extent to which they should interfere with the rhetorically constructed "choice" of unpaid caregivers.

Our analysis reveals that the visual portion of the report actively masks choice in unpaid caregiving, thus reinforcing an unstated rhetoric of family, and likely, female obligation. This unstated rhetoric of family obligation keeps the issues of unpaid caregiving out of the public sphere and parallels intensive mothering in ways that "separate the world of motherhood from the larger social world and thereby … make women responsible for unselfish nurturing" (175). Given our findings, pro-caregiving advocates should look closely at the problematic relationship being inferred that *caring about* someone ultimately leads to *caring for* that person. If pro-caregiving advocates were to disrupt or confront the assumption that *caring about* leads to *caring for* (e.g., acknowledge that *caring about* is not a prerequisite for *caring for*), public auditors might also begin to question their own assumptions about who is (and is not) expected to *care for* and might be more inclined to see other possibilities in unpaid caregiving. By doing so, pro-caregiving advocates have an opportunity to challenge instead of reinforcing the gendered assumption that caregiving is women's work in the private sphere.

The visual associative definitions conceal the gendered aspects that reinforce a rhetoric of domestic responsibility charged overwhelmingly to familial female family members. Doing so naturalizes separateness between public and private and contributes to the feminization of caregiving. Furthermore, the implicit separateness makes difficult the public advocacy for substantial change on this issue that is assumed to be private.

There is much rhetorical power that lies in understanding the written and visual definition of caregiving being advanced by pro-caregiving advocates. Zarefsky (1997) insists, "[T]he power to persuade is, in large measure, the power to define" (1). We suggest that pro-caregiving advocates have consequential rhetorical opportunities to harness a definition of caregiving that might invite more shared responsibility for unpaid caregiving as well as challenge deeply rooted attitudinal barriers that suggest unpaid caregiving is an issue most relevant to women in the domestic sphere. Given the findings of this chapter, we suggest that pro-caregiving advocates need to illuminate the social benefit(s) for engaging in unpaid caregiving. In other words, pro-caregiving advocates need to develop shared responsibility in the written and visual definition of caregiving in their discourse. This could be accomplished by disrupting the obligatory rhetorics in unpaid caregiving that imply *caring about* leads to *caring for*.

It is our contention that a change in rhetoric is necessary but not sufficient in pro-caregiving advocacy because of many contextual issues and

material limitations. For instance, we acknowledge that changing the gendered aspects of this rhetoric is an onerous task regardless of the effort on the part of advocates who may be skilled at reconstructing arguments. Although this case presents an uphill climb, we believe that understanding the rhetorical choices—both written and visual—is a first step for the arguments to work toward achieving the advocates' goals as well as challenging normative stereotypes about gender and caregiving as inherent to biological sex. This chapter offers scholars and practitioners a case study to extend applied rhetorical knowledge about public advocacy for issues usually assumed to be "private" and provides a starting point for rhetorical scholars to interrogate the ways in which visual discourse complements or disrupts the aims of social advocates. Additionally, this analysis reveals hidden rhetorics of motherhood that perpetuate gendered assumptions about care. This is a stark reality that has come to light during the most recent pandemic. As such, our analysis provides one way to reimagine biology as a determining factor for care and refigure caregiving beyond patriarchal stereotypes rooted in expectations for gender and mothering.

Note

1 https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/full-report-caregiving-in-the-united-states-01-21.pdf

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14 #MotherofExiles: Gender and Race in Motherhood Appeals to Protest Family Separation Policies

Heidi Hamilton

Rallying around the #MotherofExiles, activists working to end the Trump administration's family separation policy rhetorically expanded and limited constructions of motherhood. In 2019, a coalition of organizations, including MomsRising, Military Families for Peace, and Alliance for Family Reunification, called for a Mother's Day Rally to End Family Separation and Child Detention on May 12, 2019. While the main rally was held at the Grant Memorial in Washington, D.C., rallies were held across the United States (America's Voice 2019). This chapter examines how activists used motherhood appeals, specifically through the hashtag #MotherofExiles, during Mother's Day 2019 rallies. Combining representations of the Statue of Liberty as a protective mother with the need to reunite migrant mothers and children, these activists constructed a motherhood both domestically focused and politically active, while maintaining the representation of the powerless migrant mother. This chapter argues that the framing of biological motherhood that occurs through this rhetoric presents problematic images, bound up in the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and nationality. The native U.S. mother becomes a powerful symbol of inclusive protection welcoming everyone, expanding the scope of a biological mother's care, but is juxtaposed with the mothers needing protection, often portrayed as women of color, thus diminishing the primacy of their biological mothering.

To begin, the chapter provides a brief overview of the family separation policy and the data sources and methodology employed in the chapter. The chapter then outlines how activists previously have used appeals to motherhood. Next, the chapter turns to the gendered invoking of motherhood in the Mother's Day rallies. Finally, the chapter problematizes this construction by examining the racial and socioeconomic assumptions embedded in this rhetoric.

Protesting the Family Separation Policy

The Mother's Day rallies occurred as a reaction to the family separation policy. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2020), the Trump

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Administration began separating children from their parents as part of a pilot program in the El Paso, Texas area.

> Under the El Paso program, begun in mid-2017, adults who crossed the border without permission – a misdemeanor for a first-time offender – were detained and criminally charged. No exceptions were made for parents arriving with young children. The children were taken from them, and parents were unable to track or reunite with their children because the government failed to create a system to facilitate reunification.

This policy was implemented widely with enactment of the "zero-tolerance" program, announced by Attorney General Jeff Sessions on April 6, 2018 (House Judiciary 2020). By June 15, 2018, the Department of Homeland Security "publicly acknowledge[d] that it separated nearly 2,000 children from their parents or legal guardians between April 19 and May 31" (Southern Poverty Law Center 2020). During this time, media coverage of the policy and children being detained increased. An October 2018, report by Amnesty International indicates that the policy resulted in approximately 8,000 family units being separated. Despite the announced end to the policy through Executive Order 13841, reunification efforts were "chaotic and disorganized" (House Judiciary 2020, 18). Additionally, in practice, family separations continued. By May 2019, the Trump Administration reported that 389 families had been separated since court ordered to end the policy (Southern Poverty Law Center 2020).

Public knowledge of the policy and its effects brought widespread protests beginning in summer 2018. On June 30, more than 600 protests involving tens of thousands of people occurred, in major cities and in smaller localities (McCausland, Guadalupe, & Rosenblatt 2018). These protests involved a variety of organizations and people, but two commonalities emerged: a focus on the families, not just the children, and a discussion of the solution rather than the protester's identity. For example, the coordinated June 2018 protests were organized as the Families Belong Together march and included slogans such as "End Family Separation & Family Detention" (MoveOn 2018). Solution wise "Abolish ICE" became a rallying cry (Yoon-Hendricks and Greenberg 2018). While the Women's March sponsored a #WomenDisobey march, it again focused on demands to abolish ICE with signs calling for that and for reuniting families (Thomsen 2018). Those two points are important to note, given the way the rhetoric shifts leading up to and for the Mother's Day rallies. These rallies turned more attention to protecting children, rather than the family unit, and highlighted protesters' identities. This chapter examines this rhetorical shift and its implications.

To approach this analysis, the chapter investigates multiple rhetorical texts. Tweets were downloaded via Twitter's public search application programming interface (API), using #MotherofExiles as the search query,

from January 1, 2019 until May 12, 2019. Images, including memes, statements, press releases, and other textual rhetoric were pulled from the Mother's Day Rally event website, as well as co-sponsoring organizations' websites. These sources also produced supporter statements and links to press coverage of the rallies. Drawing from the literature that examines how activists construct motherhood to suit their cause, this chapter discusses four themes that emerge in these Mother's Day activists' appeals, as well as how the rhetorical use of the Statue of Liberty and the Emma Lazarus's poem, further reinforces a gendered feminine understanding of political advocacy. The second part of the chapter problematizes this construction of motherhood, questioning whose political advocacy is emphasized and how this reinscribes the "White Savior" myth.

Prior Constructions of Motherhood Appeals

Appeals from mothers or appeals to motherhood regularly have been used by activists. These appeals address questions such as what women should do or not do as a mother, who mothers speak for, and should mothers speak in public. Rhetorical studies of these appeals look at the "ways in which women have negotiated the possibilities and pitfalls of motherhood as a political identity" (West 2007, 363). Christine Woyshner (2002) argues that American women often invoked understandings about mothers and motherhood as a basis for social reform. She states, "Essentially, this belief holds that mothers are selfless, caring, and nurturing people" (66). As women's roles became more limited to the private sphere, particularly during the 19th century, motherhood became an important avenue allowing them voice in the public sphere. Meghan Gibbons (2005) points out that "the right to maternal expression and protest" is not confined to the United States, providing examples from anti-war and peace groups in the United States, El Salvador, and Argentina (B3). Case studies have included groups and "mother" figures such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Maya (Fabj 1993), Mother Jones (Tonn 1996), and Cindy Sheehan (Hamilton 2012). Isaac West (2007) in his study of Women Strike for Peace posits that "identity categories are not simply 'descriptive, but inaugurative,' in the sense that the assumption of an identity allows us to enact and recursively transform our identities through their performance" (364). In this way, motherhood status allows one to take actions based upon that status, which further defines one's motherhood.

Additionally, the 2019 use of the occasion of Mother's Day was not unique in either constructing a concept of motherhood or being employed in the service of protest. Julia Ward Howe, known for writing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," argued after the Civil War for a Mother's Peace Day (Handwerk 2017). Anna Jarvis, credited with founding Mother's Day as an annual May holiday, decried the appropriation of Mother's Day for social, political, and commercial causes, although those quickly overtook her

original intent (Antolini 2014). Various activist women have used Mother's Day as a rhetorical site for protests.

> According to holiday historian Kathleen Jones, Mother's Day has facilitated a variety of political and social action. For example, … in 1968 Coretta Scott King led a Mother's Day march to support poor children and their mothers (217) …. a "Mother's Peace Day" parade was held in 1938, and decades later in the 1980s, Helen Caldicott founded the Women's Party for Survival, organized against nuclear arms and proliferation. The Party led demonstrations on Mother's Day. (Dubisar 2015, FN4)

This brief outline indicates how Mother's Day becomes incorporated into the rhetorical construction of motherhood as justification for activist action.

Gendered Invoking of Motherhood in the Mother's Day Rallies

For the 2019 Mother's Day rallies, activists constructed motherhood as encompassing particular qualities and actions. Specifically, four themes emerged from this rhetoric: identity construction through organizational names, appeals to the domestic and feminine, a need for mothers to protect children, and calls for enacting political advocacy. First, activists construct their identity through organizational names. Some of the organizations involved in coordinating or promoting the rallies included Moms Rising, Grannies Respond/Abuelas Responden, Lawyer Moms of America, and Grannies for Peace. In a simple way, the organizational names rhetorically invoke motherhood and proclaim the activists' identity. They are not just rally attendees, not just women; they are mothers and grandmothers. Claiming that title forefronts the importance of motherhood to this particular action.

Second, appeals to action tie motherhood to an explicitly domestic feminine ideal. This rhetoric connects rally support to the home and the family, and can be seen at both the organizational and the individual level. For example, the Mother's Day Rally website (2019) informs "The Mother's Day Rally to End Family Separation & Child Detention began with concerned mothers wanting to make a change to end immigrant family separation and child detention … This Mother's Day we will stand in solidarity with immigrant families and their children and will issue a call to action to homes across the country." It's not a call from mothers to individuals or even to other women; it's a call to *homes*. A local chapter of the Grannies for Peace (2019) urges activists to "Bring your family to stand up for the humane treatment of all families." Assuming an audience of women (given the group), that explicit connection of women to family is being made. One supporter, Jan McDowell (2019), tweets, "Like many

moms, I will be celebrating #MothersDay with those I cherish tomorrow. There's also an opportunity in Dallas tomorrow to rally for detained immigrant moms." In each of these examples, the activist's role as mother is tied to family and home. This tie holds them accountable to their families as well. The "About Us" page on the Mother's Day Rally (2019) website asks "When your grandchildren ask what you were doing when the USA held refugee children and families in internment camps … what will you say? If not us, then who? If not now, then when?" This set of questions not only suggests that mothers are accountable to their children (and their children's children), but it is the mother's responsibility to act on this issue. Furthermore, this is culturally feminized. For example, the Grannies for Peace rhetoric occurs on a poster with a background commonly used as a meme consisting of pink and black rays emanating out from a pink Statue of Liberty.

Third, this construction of motherhood expresses an explicit need for mothers to protect children. Although earlier protests were organized around protecting families, the Mother's Day Rally shifts from this rhetoric. For example, an event invitation states "Join us to shine a light on the irreversible harm being imposed on *our* children sanctioned by the anti-immigration policies of this administration" (italics mine), thus claiming the children being held (Women's March Florida 2019). That impetus to protect children is personalized as well. For example, a MomsRising tweet includes a photo of a woman standing behind a string of onesies, one with the writing, "What if it was your child?" The New Colossus (2019) tweet is more definitive: "To the thousand+ immigrant children imprisoned for profit at #Homestead FL detention facility, I do not know you, but you are my child now. I will never stop fighting for you." Mothers' care and empathy extends beyond their own homes and family.

Finally, if motherhood means protecting children, then mothers need to speak out, thus constructing political advocacy as part of that motherhood. Cheri K. Falk (2019), identifying with Wilton NH Peace Action, tweets out, "We Mother's Day Rally Milford NH We will not be silent." A Grannies for Peace leaflet states "We're here to **call out** more than two years of cruelty and violence–waged by the Trump administration to punish and discourage those seeking their inalienable rights to apply for asylum" (Lynn 2019; bold in original). A Mother's Day Rally poster (2019), which uses the pink Statue of Liberty, but with pink butterflies emerging from its torch, declares "Your voice is powerful. Speak out against family separation and detention. This is not about your politics. This is about your humanity. Join us in solidarity with immigrant families. History will not be kind. They will not wonder if we knew. They will know we knew and did nothing. Now is the time to speak out. This is your legacy." Each of these instances suggests that motherhood is tied to vocal political advocacy, with the final example arguing for its essentiality.

Throughout the four themes, the rhetoric and visual imagery often includes the Statue of Liberty, with the unifying hashtag of #Motherof Exiles. For example, the tweets from Jan McDowell, New Colossus, MomsRising, and Cheri K Falk each included this hashtag. This both further supports the particular construction of motherhood and genders this construction. The hashtag draws from the first part of Emma Lazarus's (1883) poem, which is perhaps less quoted than the end portion. Contrasting with the ancient Colossus, the poem begins:

> Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
> With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
> Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
> A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
> Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
> Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
> Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
> The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

Referring to the Statue of Liberty as Mother of Exiles invokes the idea that she is a mother to all the children coming to her shore. Visual images and memes further gender the statue in culturally feminine ways. It appears as pink (rather than green), with pink rays and/or pink butterflies emanating from it. Another common meme, again outlined in pink with a pink background, depicts the statue from the waist up with a baby in a carrier strapped to its front, reiterating the mother trope. In this image, tears drip from one eye as the statue, now made a mother, cries over the treatment of *her* children (Mother's Day Rally 2019). This use of the Statue of Liberty and the #Motherof Exiles adds cultural credibility to the activists' argument that mothers need to protest the family separation policy because it draws upon a powerful and well-known reference.

Problematizing the Construction of Motherhood: Intersections of Race and Class

However persuasive this construction of motherhood might be, this rhetoric carries some problematic layers of meaning that complicate the gendered construction by drawing on racial and socioeconomic cultural tropes as well. While the gendered construction of motherhood suggests biological mothers have a duty to protect all children, the racial and socioeconomic cultural tropes that are invoked imply that migrant women's status as biological mothers is insufficient. While the voice of rallying mothers is encouraged, in few instances do we actually see or hear from migrant women. Emphasis instead is placed on the exercise of U.S. citizenship rights and preserving what the United States stands for. This is problematic in two ways. Difference becomes grounded in that political agency, and the rhetoric further re-entrenches the "white savior" myth.

First, in the appeals to rally, the action of claiming voice or political agency is part of the construction of motherhood. These women though are presumed already to be U.S. citizens, mobilizing out of their homes. Lack of agency is the basis for inaction on the part of the migrant mothers. Given the family separation policy's enactment primarily at the southern U.S. border, these mothers are presumed to be women of color, Latinx and African predominantly. The migrant woman's story of action (e.g., why they left their home country, what they had to do to even get to the U.S. border, how they have protected their own children) remains largely unspoken. While the Mother's Day Rally website included a page featuring women's stories, the page's purpose appears less to show their agency and more to invoke sympathy on the part of the mothers called to action. The proposed actions are ones based in the agency of U.S. mothers; they are the ones claiming a voice, having conversations, and protecting the children. Particularly as the Mother's Day rally focused more on the children, and less on the families as a unit, the migrant mothers are often (although not always) erased from the rhetoric altogether.

Second, the presence of the "white savior" myth complicates this more. Vera and Gordon (2003) argue that the white savior is "the redeemer of the weak" (33). Schultz (2014) further elaborates, "White saviors, as the term suggests, are those characters who rescue people of color from dire circumstances because, for whatever reason, they cannot seem to do it of their own accord" (206). Even if the intent is to "interrogate systems of oppression" and the actions avoid overt racist action, racist assumptions may still spur the need to step in (Maurantonio 2017). Recent theorizing points out that "saviors" do not need to be white. The myth's close association to American identity may conflate U.S.-ness and whiteness (Hanchey 2018). The "white savior" myth can be seen in the appeals to universal motherhood, in the calls to speak out, and in the use of the Statue of Liberty and the Emma Lazarus poem.

The motherhood appeals that claim children as their own, suggesting the need to protect, move toward the savior positioning. To act on behalf of one's own political emergence from silence shows this need to save others in order to liberate self. Placing women as the saviors, specifically the U.S. mothers opposed to the migrant mothers, further contextualizes the migrant mother as a racialized other. In writing about commodity activism, Daily (2019) argued that "The woman 'in need' abides by a particular archetype of a racialized and exoticized 'damsel' who is a helpless, submissive, and deserving victim in need of saving. The Western woman-savior is no longer a damsel because—like her nation—her Westernness, modernity, and affluence imbue her with civility, privilege, empowerment, and morality" (144). The U.S. mother demonstrates her own empowerment through protecting others' children.

Further, the calls for political advocacy become more about showcasing the U.S. women. Hanchey (2018) noted that a white savior can both

"find herself" and save others because Americans are "exceptional" (147). In the rally rhetoric, the U.S. mothers are fore-fronted. For example, Military Families for Families (2019) posted, "This Mother's Day America's mothers, from all faiths, and all political parties will start a conversation about family separation and detention. Join us!" The "start" wording places U.S. mothers as the originators of action. MomsRising (2019) tweeted, "America's moms are horrified by what this administration is doing to immigrant families," while including photos of women gathered together with protest signs and flyers. This display of photos is not uncommon in the tweets associated with the #MotherofExiles. This centering of the U.S. women again removes the migrant mothers from view. More so, it indicates the goodness of the U.S. women, who act to restore U.S. values versus what the Trump administration is doing. Another tweet proclaimed, "It was wet and it was cold, but that couldn't stop us from demanding an end to family separation and child detention" while showing a photo of five women, and one man (Bnai Sholom Reform Congregation 2019). The women's perseverance despite the weather to speak out (to demand) becomes the point. All three examples, which used the #MotherofExiles, illustrate the privileging of the actions of the U.S. women who are shown acting virtuously on behalf of the unseen others.

The use of the Statue of Liberty and the Emma Lazarus poem also contributes to the white savior myth. In historical context, the Statue's symbolic connection to immigration has been highly contested. Historian Tyler Stovall (2018) points out that "Those who embraced nativism and saw the immigrant masses as a religious, racial, and political danger to the republic feared that they would overwhelm … the country as a whole. Not until well into the twentieth century did the idea of the statue as a welcoming beacon to immigrants become dominant in American society" (19). Anti-immigrant sentiment appeared in images and cartoons, such as a *Judge* magazine cover depicting the Statue with its robe raised away from the teeming immigrants at its feet, coming from "European Garbage Ships" (National Park Service 2015).

This anti-immigration tie to the Statue involves both socioeconomic and racial implications. Immigrants were assumed to be homeless and poor, living in lower-class conditions. Stovall (2018) explains the Statue's connection to whiteness:

> freedom has been closely entangled with ideas of whiteness and white racial identity in modern history, so that to be free has often meant to be white, and vice versa. The Statue of Liberty symbolizes this perfectly: Lady Liberty's European physical features, most obviously, … Moreover, the symbolic role played by the monument in allowing European immigrants to the U.S. to claim white status underscores its racial character, as does its complicated but largely exclusionary or at best irrelevant relationship to African Americans and other peoples of color. (2–3)

Only later does the Statue of Liberty take on the iconic pro-immigration status. But even then, Stovall indicates the limitations of that status, "the Statue of Liberty became a welcoming symbol of immigration when European immigrants became white" (19). The contrast is seen in a *Detroit Free Press* cartoon (Poinier 1941). Here the Statue of Liberty bends on her knees embracing "My Children!" as the children run to her. Each child is labelled by origin, e.g., British Descent, Italian Descent, Irish Descent, Scandinavian Descent, German Descent. Conspicuously absent are non-European countries, and except for Polish Descent, anything suggesting even Eastern Europe.

Turning to Lazarus's poem, the second, more well-known part, warrants closer examination. It reads:

> Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
> With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

While welcoming, immigrants are described as "poor," "homeless," and the "wretched refuse." Thus, the symbolism of the Statue of Liberty and the #Motherof Exiles used in the May 2019 protests may be viewed more critically. While the activists attempt to invoke a singular, pro-immigration meaning as a rallying cry, the complicated history of this symbol enriches an analysis of their rhetoric. As a symbol tied to whiteness, usage by rally organizers further entrenches the white savior myth. The Statue becomes an identifying reference for U.S. mothers to see themselves as beacons for children and women of color.

Conclusion

The 2019 Mother's Day Rally created appeals to mothers in both particular and problematic ways. The gendered rhetoric constructed motherhood as involved in political advocacy. Reinscribing traditional notions of femininity onto this advocacy, the biological mother is linked to home and family even as she speaks out on behalf of other children. However, in tying motherhood to political advocacy and the protection of children, these aspects may not allow migrant mothers to be "true mothers," displacing their biological motherhood. Harris's (2009) work argues that anti-slavery literature constructed an ideal motherhood anyone could meet, including the slave mother once freed. Here, the construction may prove more limiting since the migrant mother will not have the prerequisite agency to unite herself with her children. This performative construction may not only exclude migrant mothers' voices, but define them outside the parameters of motherhood.

Appeals to biological motherhood as seen in the calls to rally become problematic. While these appeals, suggesting mothers should speak out on behalf of all children, expand the scope of a mother's care beyond her biological children, this expansion is limited to U.S. mothers who are called to political advocacy. The biological primacy of migrant mothers to care for their children is absent as U.S. mothers step forward. The goal of the chapter is not to suggest that the mothers were wrong to protest the policy. The desire to be concerned about others and the humane practices of the U.S. government are important. The uncritical use of appeals to mothers and corresponding cultural symbols, however, may regulate who we validate as mothers and who can gain political voice.

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15 "Good" Mothering and the Question of Migrant Mothers at the Border

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Migrant families seeking entry at the southwestern United States border became the subject of intense debate in 2018. In April of that year, then-President Donald Trump signed a "zero tolerance" policy intended to minimize illegal immigration. This policy, which separated immigrant children from their families at the border, drew widespread criticism from religious, human rights, and pediatric groups. The fallout of this policy continues to be reckoned as recently as a governmental report from January 2021. Beyond exposing the deep political chasms surrounding immigration policy, this debate also exposed fissures and contradictions in the national discourse regarding mothering. This project situates media reports during this period within the literature of motherhood and migrant families (Antony & Thomas 2017; Bishop & Medved 2020; Fabegrat, Vinyals-Mirabent, & Meyers 2020; Kam, Torres, & Fazio 2018). Data analysis suggests that public discourse frames these mothers within polar extremes. These poles frame migrant mothers either as irresponsible, thoughtless mothers who recklessly place their children in danger *or* as brave and selfless mothers who are willing to endure incredible hardship to give their children a better life. Yet these binaries oversimplify the complexities of family migration at the southern border. While these binaries may be easier for the public to digest in sound-bite size, they ignore the complexities of the migrant mother's experience. Consequently, policy and public opinion about migrant families reflect these narrow views.

The goal of this project is to connect these discursive constructions to a larger context of rhetoric about motherhood that exists in the United States. Like other chapters throughout this volume, this chapter unpacks the ways in which motherhood discourse dovetails with discussion of race, economics, and feminism. Such polarity is particularly significant against the backdrop of a racist and dominant anti-risk, intensive mothering culture within the United States (Chase & Roberts 2001; Douglas & Michaels 2005; Hays 1998; Williams 2000; Wolf 2010) that relies heavily on access to material resources (Hays 2004; Rottenberg 2018). The limitations of these frames muddy the discourse about migrant mothers, as these mothers' circumstances do not fit either frame well. Rather, migrant mothers' stories challenge the legitimacy of the reliance on such restrictive, raced, and classed frames.

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In this chapter, I examine public discourse about migrant mothers against the backdrop of multiple, competing tropes that are prevalent within American culture. I argue that these tropes oversimplify both the migrant experience and motherhood. Specifically, these tropes include the concept of migration at the southern borders as being dangerous and criminal (Fleuriet 2021) and of maternal behavior as either "good" or "bad" (Perskowitz 2005). I seek to demonstrate how these competing tropes intersect to create stories of migrant mothers in the mass media and, consequently, in the American culture.

Literature Review

Discourse about migrants is problematic in multiple ways. For example, such discourse provides a limited perspective and oversimplifies migrants' experiences. Researchers found that, in an analysis of 55 articles about the migrant caravan in 2018, mainstream media tended to focus on Trump rather than provide insight into the migrants' experiences (Fabegrat, Vinyals-Mirabent, and Meyers 2020). Furthermore, while migration is a complex sociopolitical issue, media coverage often reduces it to one of individual's criminality. This reduction to the individual level is evident in discourse that frames the issue as one of "illegal immigration," which "foregrounds perceived criminality and otherness, prompting the seemingly logical military response to increase border security" (Antony & Thomas 2017, 6). This oversimplification of the migrant experience is evident in the ways in which migrants are labeled as "animals," "criminals," "terrorists," "diseased pollutants," and "economic commodities" (Antony & Thomas 2017, 5). Such discourse exists within a greater context of neoliberalism. This approach centers the market, along with those individuals and institutions that contribute to the market, and further marginalizes those who are viewed as detractors from that market. Under this market logic, responsibility for obtaining healthcare, childcare, education, and employment falls upon the individual rather than the state.

Neoliberalism's impact on globalization, trade, and migration is vast (Harvey 2005), but, as demonstrated below, its impact on racial and feminist issues is particularly relevant to the experience of the migrant mother at the southern border. Neoliberalism presents both racist and sexist implications. This system is "deeply invested in race-based exploitation," relying on people of color to serve as "underpaid and endangered workers" and "scapegoats that justify security spending and the prison–industrial complex" (Dunn 2016, 272). Migrants of color at the southwestern border, who may be unskilled and/or not fluent in English, are prime targets for exploitation and abuse in this neoliberal system. In particular, migrant mothers enter an arena in which neoliberalism has cast all mothers in a vulnerable, defensive position.

This maternal vulnerability is a consequence of neoliberalism's impact on feminism. As Rottenberg (2018) explains, neoliberal feminism co-opted

feminism for its own aims in service to the market. Rather than the original feminist concept of dismantling and rebuilding social and political structures for gender justice, neoliberal feminism centers on the individual woman's personal responsibility instead. Neoliberal feminism posits that mothers have free choices, but the "best" choice is to behave in ways that support the continuation and success of the market.

Under a neoliberal feminist perspective, women's choices around work and reproduction are measured in terms of their contributions to the market. As such, mothers are uniquely positioned in their roles to prepare future generations as consumers; children are human capital in service to the market. Rottenberg (2018) explains that neoliberal feminism frames motherhood in terms of how mothers may make the most economically rational choices around reproduction. While a neoliberal feminist logic includes an expectation for women to fulfill a duty to reproduce, the way that women should "choose" to do so is scripted according to market rationales. For example, it is economically rational for high-potential, aspirational, professional women to delay childbirth (such as through freezing their eggs). Once they have reached a certain level of economic security, it is rational for these mothers to outsource childcare to nannies (Rottenberg 2018). Neoliberal feminism "needs" to outsource childcare to poor, migrant women in order for middle- and upper-class mothers to maintain work-life balance. This arrangement suits the demands of the market, but ignores the ripple effect on the nanny herself, as well as her family and community back home (Hochschild 2003, 2013).

Indeed, neoliberal feminism exists within a greater cultural imperative of intensive mothering (Douglas and Michaels 2005), in which individual mothers are tasked with providing for all of their own child's physical, emotional, and developmental needs. Intensive mothering demands that mothers mitigate risks their children may encounter in daily life to the greatest possible extent (Dubriwny 2013; Fixmer-Oraiz 2014; Wolf 2010). These obligations directly contradict what is expected of ideal workers, who give their resources, such as time, energy, and intellect, fully to their paid labor (Hays 1998; Williams 2000). Such competing logics present impossible contradictions for working mothers. Mothers who work must then negotiate ways to fulfill these competing, contradictory obligations in the public and private spheres.

Together, the logics of neoliberal feminism and intensive mothering combine to create a distinct picture of "good" and "bad" motherhood. Under this framework, "good" mothers have access to vast material and economic resources to fulfill the demands of intensive mothering. When they cannot fulfill these demands personally, they outsource care through paid child care providers, domestic workers, and experts, thus satisfying market demands. "Bad" mothers, on the other hand, embody a polar opposite. They do not provide their children with security, attention, and opportunity. While neoliberalism would frame these two poles as a

consequence of individual choice within a free market, in reality these distinctions are classed and raced.

Mothers of color, particularly those who are poor, have long endured negative stereotypes in the media and popular discourse (Hays 2004). Women who are poor cannot reach the idealized economic aspirations of intensive motherhood, while women of color face racism deeply embedded in national ideas around motherhood. As Guillem and Barnes (2018) explain, the "dominant representations and negotiations around motherhood in the United States have historically normalized whiteness through a set of naturalized truths that are based on, and secure the privileges of, a few" (288). Such logics "construct mothers of color as inherently bad and as signifiers of broader moral and cultural failures" (289); thereby creating a need for women of color "to constantly demonstrate 'good' mothering from an inherently racialized position" (296).

Conversely, White women have long been associated with "good" mothering. This mothering is not only reserved for their own biological children, but also for children across the world. These "global mothers" provide care for racially and ethnically diverse children who are less economically advantaged (Shome 2011, 2014), through humanitarian work or interracial/international adoption. This phenomenon is evident in media reports and images of celebrities such as Princess Diana, Madonna, Audrey Hepburn, and Angelina Jolie engaging in transnational humanitarian work with children in less-developed nations. Shome (2014) argues that such a construction of White women as "global mothers" is an extension of White colonialism. Others, such as Hamilton in this volume, demonstrate how such positioning is part of the "White savior" myth. In this context, the White mother stands in for the biological mother of impoverished children, acting as teacher, nurturer, and carer.

Such framing creates a morality system of its own. The White "global mother" fills a moral gap that empiricism and global capitalism to some degree created. Similarly, neoliberalism creates a moral structure in which individuals, rather than governments or corporations, are responsible for their own ethical behaviors (Bloom 2017). A significant ethical behavior is to work toward ensuring the success of capitalism. The cultural emphasis on work-life balance, and the responsibility upon mothers individually to ensure the success of their own ability to achieve it, is a reflection of neoliberalism's impact on mothers (Rottenberg 2018). Consequently, public discourse about motherhood within a neoliberal culture is subject to multiple myths and contradictions. Mothers are caught between competing obligations to their paid work and to their families.

This "new morality" is problematic for mothers in multiple ways, but its implications are perhaps most concerning for vulnerable migrant mothers at the southern border. These mothers, who are likely to be of color and poor, face multiple intersections of cultural binds. They do not fit neatly into any cultural tropes of what it means to be a "good" mother within this

neoliberal context. Rather, these mothers enter an American culture that is hostile to both migrants and mothers. Therefore, this chapter seeks to respond to the call of Guillem and Barnes (2018), who ask scholars to "constantly and critically expose the white consciousness that lies at the core of postfeminist concerns" and to critically question the "normative stance that clearly situates 'good mothering,' and 'good feminism' more broadly, alongside anti-racist struggles" (296).

Method

To understand these issues better, I conducted a directed qualitative content analysis. This type of content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2005) allows the researcher to code data based on the existing theory. First, I collected articles by using search terms including migration, migrant mothers, and migrant children in both LexisNexis and Google to locate a wide range of articles on the topic that appeared in 2018 and 2019. Following this broad survey, I then isolated articles for closer reading on national news webpages during the same period from the websites for *ABC News, Associated Press (AP), CBS News, CNN*, *Fox News, National Public Radio,* and *The Washington Post*. I selected these particular sources for their national presence and large reader/viewership.

Next, I narrowed the data sample to those that discussed migrant families. My initial examination of these articles did support my hunch that the "good" and "bad" mother discourse appeared in articles about migrant mothers. I then coded those articles within two frames – that of the "bad" migrant mother (Frame One) and that of the "good" migrant mother (Frame Two). However, not all articles about migrant mothers and children fit these frames. In addition to the two "good" and "bad" mother frames, a third frame emerged from the data. This third frame depicted stories of White, American foster mothers who were caring for migrant children who had been separated from their biological mothers.

Frames

Frame One: Migrants as "Bad" Mothers

Overwhelmingly, articles included discourse that frames migrant parents, particularly mothers, as "bad" in multiple ways. This discourse tends to place culpability on parents for making risky and costly choices on the American economy. For example, the *Washington Post* quoted a Trump supporter who exemplifies this frame: "There's one way that the families could stay together – they could stay in their home country. I don't understand why we have to provide for them" (Johnson 2018, n.p.).

Trump staffers also add to the "bad" mother discourse, casting migrants at the border as criminals who had committed illegal acts. For example,

Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen stated, "If you have a family and you commit a crime, the police do not put you in jail because you have a family. They prosecute you, and they incarcerate you. Illegal aliens should not get just different rights because they happen to be illegal aliens" ("Nielsen Blames Child Separation on Migrant Parents" 2019, n.p.). Similarly, Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway insisted that migrant mothers should immigrate in "peaceful and legal ways" ("Conway to Migrant Mothers: 'There Are Peaceful and Legal Ways to Come to This Country'" 2018, n.p.).

Finally, discourse that describes the horrors of migrant mothers' experiences at the border also fits this frame. These reports demonstrate the ways in which mothers have put themselves and their children at risk, regardless of the actual culpability of ruthless governmental policies. These reports include cases of governmental agents tear gassing mothers (Jacobo and Laurent 2018) and of a mother who was impaled on a border fence as her children watched (Brito 2018). Additionally, reports that imply mothers have "lost" their children, due to the government separating the child from his/her mother, further complicate this framework. The "bad" mother frame tends to center migration as a problem to be solved by American political action.

Frame Two: Migrants as "Good" Mothers

In contrast to the "bad" mother frames, counter-discourse frames migrant mothers as "good," although such discourse appears to be less prevalent. While the media reported outrage among political and private individuals at Trump's zero tolerance policy, few articles in the sample examine the issue from the point of view of the migrant mother. These exceptions do, however, present migrant mothers as altruistic and committed to their children's welfare.

"Good" mother discourse focuses on the sacrifice migrants make on behalf of their children. Such discursive perspectives tend to come from those representing nongovernmental NPOs and migrants themselves.

For example, an immigration legal aid organization leader casts migration as "the most selfless act of love," while the leader of another immigration service describes families who were separated at the border as being "incredibly close, strong, tight-knit" (Anderson 2019, n.p.). This discourse takes the perspective of migrant mothers such as Maria del Carmen Mejia, who stated, "I don't want to return. I want a better future for my children" (Stevenson 2018, n.p.). While Frame One engages with the legal and political aspects of migration, Frame Two considers the human, emotional experience of migration. The "good" mother frame centers the personal experience of migration from the individual family's perspective, such as Maria del Carmen Mejia's, as well as the perspectives of those who serve them.

Frame Three: Foster Mothers as "Good" Mothers

In addition to the polarized views of migrant mothers as either "good" or "bad," a third frame emerges in the discourse. This frame includes stories of foster mothers who care for migrant children, emphasizing the safety and security these American mothers provide. While race and class are not overtly articulated here, these foster mothers are presented visually as White and middle-class. In one article, color photographs depict scenes such as a White adult female's arm enclosed with a brown-skinned child's. Another photograph shows a kitchen with polished granite countertops and a large, wooden playground set in a leafy background framed through the window above the kitchen sink (Garcia-Navarro 2019, n.p.).

In Frame Three, foster mothers provide safety across multiple levels, both physical and emotional. They provide physical safety through the comforts that a middle-class home can offer. These physical protections provide a stark contrast to the grim realities of the migrant experience at the southern border. As Christi, a foster mother in Maryland states, "Any kid that's in my house is, at least while they're here, safe. I know that they're safe, I know that they're loved, I know that they're cared for" (Garcia-Navarro 2019, n.p.). Such physical safety is apparent visually, such as through the example of the White woman's hand grasping a brown-skinned child's noted above. These messages imply that, although the migrant child may be physically separated from the biological mother, the foster mother will keep them safe as "good" mothers should.

Yet these depictions of the "good" foster mother do not stop at providing mere physical safety. The foster mother also provides emotional safety as she protects migrant children from anti-immigrant sentiment within the foster mother's community. As foster mother Michelle explains:

> We will get comments that 'you should be taking care of American kids'. Kids that are here already … . They will start rattling off stuff on their opinion on Trump or the wall or their opinion on illegal immigrants. Or they comment that the kids should be learning English … . No matter how you feel about immigration, these are children. Keep your adult comments to yourself.
>
> (Sidner & Flores 2018, n.p.)

In this example, the foster mother transcends political discourse around migration. Although she is actively engaged in the very real events of child separation, this discourse absolves her role as a political actor and instead casts her as the foster children's protector.

Significantly, the migrant biological mother herself is largely absent from this frame. She is discussed only in terms of the harms her absence causes. These harms include migrant foster children being traumatized and confused at their biological mother's absence (Sidner & Flores 2018).

This discourse implies that the absent migrant mother is a "bad" mother, whose actions have caused her children pain.

Conversely, Frame Two centers the foster mother's example as a "good" mother to her foster children. For example, foster mother Christi says, "[W]hen I see these babies, I see their moms and they're not with them, they're with me" (Garcia-Navarro 2019, n.p.). The foster mother stands in to "be emotionally and physically there for the kids" (Sidner & Flores 2018, n.p.) in a way that their biological mothers cannot. Not only does this substitute mother meet the migrant child's physical and emotional needs, she also defends the child against a hostile world.

Frame Three centers the experience and perspective of the White foster mother as a protector. The foster mothers depicted have the privileges of their race and class to care for migrant children, thereby mitigating the external dangers of poverty and anti-immigration politics. These non-biological mothers provide the sort of "good" mothering that fulfills cultural expectations of what mothers *should* do. The implications of this frame, and the ways in which it interacts with Frames One and Two, are discussed further below.

Discussion

Each of these frames demonstrate the ways in which discourse about migrant mothers reflects cultural assumptions about motherhood. While no single frame fully encompasses the complexities of migration at the southern border, these frames together reveal much about cultural conceptions of motherhood. These frames speak to the ways in which the migrant mother's experience is defined by neoliberalist concepts of morality. Specifically, choice and personal responsibility construct this neoliberalist morality.

By framing migration as a choice, Frame One constructs migration as a decision that the "bad" mother makes. Under this line of logic, governmental action against her and her children is morally justified. Her decision should be punished, as her actions are criminal. The discourse about migration reflects this presumption in the idea that mothers should be held accountable for placing themselves and their children at risk. The locus of control is placed on the mother as the (ir)rational decision-maker, rather than on external factors such as poverty, violence, and political corruption that tend to influence migration.

These neoliberal concepts around choice are absent in the discourse of Frame Two, or the "good" migrant mother frame. Rather than centering migration as an irresponsible choice to cross a border illegally, Frame Two centers migration as a selfless choice to leave the dangers and poverty of the home country. Here, the mother prioritizes her children's long-term safety and opportunity, even if it means temporary danger and discomfort. Yet this sort of choice does not fit neatly within a neoliberal concept of

mothering, as its brand of morality is not market-driven. Rather, Frame Two's moral code encompasses the nonmaterial concepts of love and familial bonds.

The foster mother's choices in Frame Three must be understood in light of how Frames One and Two construct the migrant mother as "good" or "bad." The foster mother deliberately chooses to say "yes" when asked to take on a foster child (Sidner & Flores 2018). Her choice is a moral one. For Christi, this decision is part of her "conviction" (Garcia-Navarro 2019, n.p.); for Michelle, it is "a calling" and a "mission" (Sidner & Flores 2018, n.p.). As Shome (2011; 2014) and Hamilton (this volume) indicate, Western culture frequently equates White mothers as angelic saviors. Under this schemata, it is the White mother who ultimately can provide safety, security, and the best care for these children. These foster mother stories may serve as a way for the public to reconcile the messy contradictions inherent in framing migrant mothers as "good" or "bad." The foster mother figure reinforces current discourse about who may be classified as a "good" mother.

While each frame addresses a different aspect of family migration at the southern border, the oversimplicity of each of these three frames presents multiple problems. The discourse suggests that migrant mothers may be "good" or "bad," but ultimately it is White, middle-class mothers who will protect their children. This discourse fails to engage the complexities of mothering within a politically charged environment in which migrant mothers had little-to-no agency once they cross the southern border. Rather, it reveals the inherent contradictions deep within a culture of neoliberal feminism, rhetoric of choice, intensive mothering, and risk. Yet these assumptions, and the ways in which they contribute to White supremacy, must be actively challenged (Moon & Holling 2020).

A more complete version of the migrant mother's story would likely not fit any single frame. Rather, this version would include the economic contributions that immigration makes to the economy ("A Nation Built by Immigrants" 2021). This version would also consider the socioeconomic conditions that lead to mass migration in Central and South America, including the role that neoliberalism plays in creating those conditions. This version would resist the urge to oversimplify mothers and children at the border as being "good" or "bad," but would engage their individual perspectives and stories. Finally, it would acknowledge the limitations of neoliberalism's market morality and rely instead on a more humane morality of love and empathy to understand issues of motherhood and care (Hochschild 2003, 2013).

Conclusion

Narrow constructions of motherhood are harmful for *all* mothers, but they are acutely harmful to those who are most vulnerable. This project demonstrates how discourse around migrant mothers during a period of

family separation at the border mirrors larger conversations about mothering in the United States. Migrant mothers are entering a culture that is hostile toward all mothers, but particularly to mothers who do not fit within the bounds of neoliberalism's version of morality. Rather than valuing what best serves the child or the mother, a neoliberal perspective's view of morality values motherhood in terms of how it may best serve the market. As the chapters within this volume demonstrate, the full meaning of maternity, as well as its value for society, is more complex than neoliberalism allows. Motherhood, in all of its various manifestations, transcends narrow cultural constructions of "good" or "bad."

These "good" and "bad" frames are particularly problematic within the context of rhetoric about migrant mothers. These frames oversimplify the complexities of migrants' experiences, which encompass political, religious, social, economic, and racial issues. Although media reports about family separations could open a much-needed window into those lived experiences of motherhood, the reports within this data set tend to reflect the same oversimplifications about motherhood that exist within cultural discourse at large. These oversimplifications sort mothers into narrow constructions of "good" or "bad," frames which are largely impacted by neoliberalist market values.

Furthermore, reports about migrant children in foster care also have problematic implications. Not only do these stories reflect the constructions of "good" and "bad" mothers, they also reflect raced and gendered ideas about White global motherhood. Although these stories may reassure readers that children separated at the border from their biological mothers are being cared for physically and emotionally, they also present an image of "good" motherhood framed within racial and economic privilege. Rather than providing insight into how immigration policy might support biological migrant mothers, this rhetoric reinforces stereotypical tropes about just who can mother well.

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16 Challenges to Neoliberal Parenting and The Rise of the Ideal Stepmother

Valerie Renegar and Kirsti Cole

Introduction

There are enormous cultural, ideological, and social assumptions about stepmothers and stepmothering, and beyond the fields of family studies, psychology, or literary and fairy tale analysis, little is said about them, particularly in the field of motherhood studies. We have each been stepmothers for over a decade, and we have been researching the rhetoric of and about stepmothers since 2014. Our motivation is, and has been, motivated by our experience. We could not quite understand why our marriages to spouses with children led to such different, and highly negative, experiences than those who had married childless partners. Indeed, part of what drove us to our initial projects in this area was the vitriol (at worst) and the discomfort (at best) with which people respond to stepmothers—to us. We have sought the voices of stepmothers (Cole & Renegar 2016) and texts geared at stepmothers (Renegar & Cole 2019) to begin to understand why stepmothers are, in short, thought to be so wicked. What we realized as we began moving through the literature on mothering studies, is that intensive mothering is more than discourse, it is a powerful "regime" (Vincent 2009), that pervades our cultural understanding of what mothers are and how they should be. This regime of intensive mothering is threatened by and hostile to stepmothers, and this is manifest in myriad ways in our culture. While the wicked stepmother stereotype continues to persist as a result of this hostility, the current political moment also presents us with a new image of the stepmother in the figure of First Lady Jill Biden. Biden serves as an exemplar of the "ideal stepmother" because she fills the role of a deceased mother, practices intensive mothering, and deliberately obscures her status as a stepmother.

Whenever children grow and thrive in blended family environments, stepmothers serve to disrupt the traditional family structure and call the importance of biological relations into question. Fundamental to this disruption is a compounded sense of cultural disdain that is historically grounded in the role of the stepmother. At its very base, the term stepmother is rooted in bereavement and sadness. The Old English prefix "steop-" connotes loss. The Proto-Germanic "steupa-" translates

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to "bereft" (OED np). This context of loss indicates a necessary history of care. Although many stepmothers mother through loss, they are nonetheless expected to mother. However, the very presence of the stepmother in a family resists the biological primacy of mothering. The embodied presence of the stepmother is persistent, ubiquitous, and constructed in a dominant discourse to be an interloper (e.g., Cinderella's stepmother in the Disney cartoon). The disruption to intensive mothering comes from the ways the stepmother represents a challenge to the nuclear family, and the prominence of biological mothers in those families. We understand, in this chapter, the nuclear family in contemporary, neoliberal terms: a heterosexual marriage with biological offspring that is entirely self-sufficient. In this particular cultural construction, a stepmother does not belong.

At the most basic level, the visible presence of a stepmother points to the deterioration of a marriage. While the presence of a stepmother once indicated death, now they usually indicate divorce. The deterioration of marriage is directly linked culturally, socially, and in texts from leading psychologists to the deterioration of the family. But, in these cases, "family" is very narrowly defined. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 1,300 new stepfamilies are formed every day in the United States. Fifty percent of the 60 million children under the age of 13 are currently living with one biological parent and that parent's current partner, and 50% of all women, not just mothers, are likely sometime in their life, to live in a stepfamily relationship (Vespa 2013). This issue is particularly timely because at the time we wrote this chapter, the 2020 U.S. Presidential election was in full swing (October 2020) and both of Democratic candidate's wife, Dr. Jill Biden, and the Democratic candidate for Vice President, Kamala Harris, are stepmothers, as was the First Lady, Melania Trump. Shortly after the DNC, Eleanor Cummins wrote an article for Vox, "Kamala Harris, Jill Biden, and the National Embrace of Stepmothers," that remarked on the cultural significance of this moment and posited that stepmothers were becoming more widely accepted and respected.

We argue that stepmothers do not represent the destruction of the nuclear family, and they may, in fact, illuminate other ways to parent and/or constitute family. As Cummin's article indicates, the stepfamily is long overdue for an update. We need new ways of thinking about family, describing blended families, and engaging in these emerging familial structures. However, even the language used to normalize stepmothering is caught up in and fraught with the same social and ideological contradictions that comprise the wicked stepmother archetype. At the heart of the problem is that stepmothers make visible what intensive mothering cannot allow, namely, that the mother is not the key to a happy, healthy child. Stepmothers demonstrate that children can be raised well by many different individuals who may or may not have a biological relationship to the child and who need not engage in intensive mothering. Most literature aimed at stepmothers describes the role as always/already a losing

proposition doomed to fail. Stepmothers are simultaneously urged to intensively mother by putting their stepchildren first in all family and personal considerations at the same time that they are told that because they have no biological relationship to the children, their relationship will always be secondary to the relationship the children have with their biological parents, and that they should expect to be treated as secondary by the biological mother, extended family, and the larger culture. In other words, stepmothering is framed as a relationship with no positive benefits at all.

One reason we have spent the better part of the last decade researching this issue is that we believe that people who are not stepmothers are not fully aware of how much cultural animosity there is toward stepmothers or how much stepmothers suffer as a result. Cummins' belief that there is a national embrace of stepmothers, does not resonate with our experience. In the video that introduces Jill Biden to the United States during the Democratic National Convention, the cultural disdain for stepmothers is made clear. When discussing her relationship with Joe Biden's children she says "we don't use the term stepmother" (DNC 2019) clearly implying that "stepmother" is a term to be avoided whenever possible. In this chapter, we seek to illustrate how the current social climate casts stepmothers. We couch our understanding of intensive mothering in neoliberalism and use the disruption to neoliberalism as a way to illustrate our examples about how linguistically, ideologically, and socio-culturally, stepmothers are set up to fail. At the end of this chapter we discuss an emerging version of stepmothering that attempts to move past the age-old trope of wickedness. We call this the Ideal Stepmother and see it embodied in the way that First Lady Dr. Jill Biden was introduced to the public at the Democratic National Convention in 2019.

Intensive Mothering

The regime of intensive mothering is culturally coded as the blueprint for what all good mothers do or should aspire to be, with no acknowledgment of how variable access to cultural and economic resources may shape the possibilities of mothering. In other words, our scripts for mothering tend to be decontextualized from the lived experiences of those who raise children, and those scripts impact our own expectations for parenting, as well as how others interpret the parenting they witness. Intensive mothering and its various facets is the subject of Ennis' (2014) volume that seeks to "zero in on the cultural contradictions of motherhood, namely the issue of self-interested gain versus the unselfish nurturance … and explore how it is related to the economic needs of a patriarchal society" (1). Ennis argues neoliberalism significantly impacts intensive mothering because it entrenches what O'Brien Hallstein calls "a neo-traditional family configuration," one that places the responsibilities of child-rearing solely on the

mother (4). It is in her work that Ennis pronounces the most fundamental aspect of intensive mothering. It is a patriarchal institution (1–2). She summarizes the core beliefs of intensive mothering as: "children need constant nurturing by their biological mothers, who are solely responsible for their mothering; mothers rely on experts to help them mother their children; and mothers must expend enormous amounts of time and money on their children" (5). She adds that mothers must also employ maternal thinking, that is, mothers must "hold their children and their schedules in their minds at all times" (5). Judith Warner (2006) refers to this as the "perfect madness" of parenting in the United States. This "frenzied perfectionism" is an attempt, perhaps, to control an out of control world that, in the context of the United States, provides no support structures for mothers at all (Ennis 8).

It would be reasonable to assume, perhaps, that the COVID-19 pandemic could have disrupted cultural narratives around intensive mothering. Surely extraordinary times opened space for mothering to look different than it has in the past few decades. But, as Jessica Valenti so succinctly summarized it: "Since the pandemic started, 2.5 million women have left the workforce, and sexist culture is putting a rosy stay-at-home sheen on a shit-show." According to a February 2021 article in *Fortune*, the pandemic will roll back the gains made by women in the public sphere by decades, and "the response has somehow become about how moms want to be home with their kids anyway. A record number of women have been pushed out of their careers, perhaps irrevocably, but we're meant to believe that women are fine. Relieved, even. It's obscene" (Valenti, np). In blogs, mom groups, and across social media during the pandemic, women have called out the deep inequality around expectations of parenting and work. As Valenti says, "If staying at home with children is so important and rewarding, why don't men do it? We all know the answer" (np).

If intensive mothering is the only way to be a good mother, if it is the regime that women are inducted into, then stepmothers break the rules of the regime. The frenzied perfectionism of mothering is detrimental not only to biological mothers and their families, but it also creates unrealistic expectations of families that move away from the nuclear model. We argue that the reason that stepmothers are punished or corrected is that their presence is disruptive to intensive mothering and this ideal image of family. The existence of stepmothers reminds biological mothers who are married that if that marriage were to end, or if she were to die, she could be replaced and another person may become instrumental in raising the children. This possibility creates fear and competition in biological mothers who have staked their identity in being the irreplaceable, primary caretaker of their children. As a result, stepmothers are made to feel other in a range of big and small ways ranging from "gentle" or passive-aggressive corrections from the community at large to outright hostility and aggression from the biological mother, as well as her friends, family, and coworkers. It is not unusual for a

stepmother to be hated by people who know nothing about her except for her marital status. Stepmothers' contributions to a family are often unappreciated and/or ignored, while their existence is a constant reminder that biological mothers are not the only way that children can be raised.

Mothering in the Neoliberal Context

It is clear that American culture has shifted as a result of the neoliberal ideology that characterizes the 21st century. The steadfast presence of the nuclear family as the defining family unit has a number of important implications. For example, the neoliberal family is wholly responsible for the success or failure of its children. Children who succeed are a credit to their parents, while children who break the boundaries of polite society cause a community to look more closely at the family in order to assign blame. Prior to the industrial revolution, individuals tended to live in larger groups with extended family. Grandparents, siblings, aunts, and uncles all had some hand in raising children along with parents. Even in more recent memory, child-rearing occurred beyond the exclusive purview of parents. Many children of the 1980s remember eating meals with other families, being reprimanded by neighbors for breaking some sort of rule, or generally being left to their own devices until they needed to be home when the street lights came on. These expanded models of child care provided additional sources of support for parents and other sources of influence for children.

The neoliberal ideology that has taken hold since that time, however, demands that parents provide all forms of child care. Modern parents shudder to think of not knowing exactly where their children are at all times and schedule playtime in the form of activities and playdates. The freedom of the generation that was told to "go outside and play" would be considered a form of neglect today (Pimentel 2012). The childhood of many current parents looks nothing like the childhood their children are experiencing. These changes happened incrementally but inexorably. The current neoliberal family is the accumulation of numerous expectations, assumptions, and cultural conditions that have solidified into our current configuration. Stepmothers, by definition, represent a disruption of the neoliberal narrative of the family. As they participate in raising children outside of the traditional nuclear family of a biological father and mother, they challenge the idea that children can only be best served when they are cared for by their biological mother. In the analysis that follows, we shed light on many of the inconsistencies of intensive mothering and also explain why there is deep cultural disdain for stepmothers whose presence challenges the assumption of biological primacy.

Stepmothers: Challenges and Disruptions

Not only do many stepmothers find themselves disparaged by biological mothers, but they are hard-pressed to find any positive representations of

stepmothers or stepmothering in popular culture. The trope of the wicked stepmothers persists across movies, television, and other entertainment media. In our previous research we noted how stepmothers themselves have become complicit in this negative characterization by internalizing and referring to themselves as wicked or monstrous (Cole and Renegar 2016). The ubiquity of this stereotype, along with its fairy tale quality, makes it an easy insult to hurl and then laugh off. Someone who makes a comment about a stepmother's wickedness might well mean it to be funny or tongue in cheek, but it would be difficult for that same person to identify any positive cultural representation of stepmothers. Often it seems like even those trying to move away from using wicked stepmother stereotypes end up reinforcing them by noting "well, you're not really wicked."

We see this persistent cultural disdain for the important work that stepmothers do as a form of backlash largely because stepmothers challenge the basic tenets of biological primacy and intensive mothering. Indeed, stepmothers challenge the idea that the nuclear family is the best or only way to understand family, and they disrupt narratives of intensive mothering by providing another source of care to children. Mothers, then, when held to the expectations of intensive mothering often find themselves making children the center of their lives, often at the encouragement of their husbands, and sometimes at great personal and professional expense. Jessica Valenti explains "The truth is that leaving the workforce hurts women. Stay-at-home moms are more likely to be depressed, isolated, and economically vulnerable. And instead of offering financial and systemic support to these mothers, mainstream culture tells them that they should feel fulfilled and fortunate to do "the most important job in the world" (Valenti, np). If the marriage ends, and the mother is thus only partially responsible for raising the children, the ways she has been disadvantaged by the expectations of intensive mothering become more clear. For example, when mothers consistently put child-rearing ahead of their career and are suddenly forced to find work to support themselves after a divorce, that inequity becomes stark. Women almost always come out of a divorce economically worse off than their husbands do by virtue of the fact that they prioritized their children.

Stepmothers, on the other hand, disrupt the cultural narratives of intensive mothering. Although there are expectations that stepmothers will prioritize their husband's children and demonstrate deference to the biological parents in decision making (Renegar & Cole 2019), there is not always the expectation that a stepmother should sacrifice her career or professional ambitions in order to care for her stepchildren. Thus, stepmothers are parents who exist outside of the intensive mothering narratives and consequently have the ability to expose it for the oppressive sham that it is. Quite simply, intensive mothering is an oppressive construct that often does material harm to those who engage in it. Further, children do not need to be intensively mothered in order to become thriving young adults,

as the children of divorced parents demonstrate. Every successful person whose stepparents had a hand in raising them is evidence that denies the basic tenets of intensive mothering.

Stepmothers Challenge Narratives of Biological Primacy

One of the implications of the neoliberal familial model is that children are the sole responsibility of their biological parents, particularly in the United States, the only industrialized country in the world with no federal paid parental leave and no federally subsidized early child care. In many ways, children are understood as the belongings of their parents, who are responsible for catering to their wants and needs over and against their own (Morin 2017). Intensive mothering demonstrates adherence to this idea most clearly. Intensive mothering holds that the best, most desirable, form of mothering can only be achieved by foregrounding children's wants and needs before all other considerations. Jessica Calarco explains that mothers are expected to be intensive mothers and intensive workers. "Both are social norms in the U.S.: Workers, especially elite professional workers, are expected to devote their whole lives to their jobs. Meanwhile, mothers, all mothers, are expected to devote their whole lives to their children and do whatever it takes to meet their children's needs (usually while being devoted, supportive partners, as well)" (quoted in Peterson, n.p.). These expectations of intensive mothering tend to go unexamined, and ultimately women who have internalized this thinking police their own behavior to stay in line with these norms.

This sense of ownership that neoliberal parents feel toward their children creates and reinforces the idea that biological parents are the best source of parenting. Parents expect and are granted deferential treatment in almost all decisions affecting their children. The neoliberal logic maintains, then, that if parents are the best source of child-rearing, then parents should be completely responsible for it. And in the United States, "parents" tends to mean women (White 2014; Valenti 2018). As a result, mothers who use childcare are characterized as having to make a difficult choice. Stay-at-home mothers are elevated as the optimal form of parenting, even as this model of childcare has become increasingly impossible for most households. When mothers are employed, they are peppered with questions from their friends, family, and larger community about how difficult it must be to hand their child over to someone else while they are at work. Mothers are asked far more frequently about work/life balance since they are expected to be mostly responsible for raising their children. The assumptions built into these questions demonstrate how powerfully ingrained the ideology of intensive mothering has become. Fathers do not face these same kinds of questions because although fatherhood has been shaped by neoliberal ideology, it is not manifest in the same ways as intensive mothering. Fathers are expected to work to provide for their families, mothers, on the other

hand, are expected to raise their children even as they are also often expected to have successful careers.

The deep resonance of the idea that mothers are the best means of raising children creates uncomfortable situations for mothers who either enjoy, or must, work outside the home. Women who become mothers are almost immediately subject to a vast array of communication that serves to convince them that they should do all that they can, although it will never possibly be enough, to raise their children. Even women who enter the mothering atmosphere with the desire to balance their personal, professional, and maternal life often start to heed to the constant onslaught of social pressure in regard to motherhood. The title of "mother" begins to eclipse all other titles so that a woman's identity becomes bound up in this particular relationship. Motherhood status, then, is expanded so that all the other parts of a woman are insignificant in comparison. Examples of this idea abound in popular culture. When women are introduced to the public, their status as mothers is featured far more heavily than their other accomplishments, and references to their motherhood occur far more often than men are referred to as fathers.

Our culture thinks that fathers are important, but they are only as important and valuable to the everyday lives of children as mothers. The biological status of women as mothers both gives women access to credibility when it comes to child-rearing, but also determines their social position. In American culture, mothers are revered and women who are not mothers are almost always considered secondary to them. When a culture embraces the idea that biological mothers are not only the requisite caregivers for children but also the preferred caregiver a hierarchy is created that classifies everyone other than biological mothers as inferior. So, when a divorce leads to shared custody, and the mother is no longer the primary, or only, caregiver, it is not surprising that many biological mothers feel like they have lost something fundamental; a loss they fear will endanger the child.

Although fathers are capable caregivers, many biological mothers will fight tooth and nail in custody negotiations to limit the time children spend with the father because time with him means time away from her. While children being raised by their fathers are not in danger, the idea that any parent can raise a child as well as an intensive mother calls the very basis of intensive mothering into question. Mothers who have invested their identity in this ideology cannot abide that kind of critical interrogation. Although fathers raising children present a challenge to the primacy of mothers, they continue to perpetuate biological hierarchy since the children raised are biologically "theirs". However, when a father remarries and a stepmother now has some parenting responsibility, biological mothers have a target for their aggression and sense of loss. In the early years of our own foray into stepmothering, we both recall numerous instances of friends confiding in us that their "worst nightmare" would be getting divorced, having their ex-husband remarry, and then having another woman play a part in raising

their children. The casual cruelty of sharing a comment like this with a new stepmother is common, and this kind of thinking is rampant. Under the neoliberal, intensive mothering model, children are not to be shared, or raised by a community, and certainly not by another family, even if it includes a biological parent. The nightmare scenario these women describe happens over and over again since divorce and remarriage are incredibly common, and in too many cases stepmothers take the brunt of biological mothers' hostility and ill will. When children who are raised by stepparents, or a figure other than the biological mother, turn out to be successful and thriving young people, the assumptions of intensive mothering are called into question and mothers who embrace this regime can feel threatened.

Stepmothers Challenge Narratives of Intensive Mothering

The negative characterization and/or treatment of stepmothers is not limited to biological mothers. The culture at large subscribes to the biological hierarchy when it comes to child-rearing. This, too, is a byproduct of neoliberal society. The privileged status of biological mothers is a result of a culture that requires mothers to give up so much of themselves for their children and families. This problem is stark in the American landscape because of the inadequate or nonexistent paid parental leave, the abysmal early childhood care conditions, and the lack of resources for parents and children endemic in the United States. And while stepmothers disrupt the neoliberal narrative because they demonstrate that child-rearing can happen outside of the neoliberal family, their presence does nothing to combat the deplorable conditions that American neoliberal values create. However, when a child is cared for by others and does not suffer whatever catastrophic demise that has been predicted by neoliberal propaganda, this serves as evidence that the neoliberal ideology in terms of families is flawed. Indeed, this volume indicates that children do not have to be raised only by their biological parents in order to thrive.

Stepmothers were originally a necessity when the biological mother died. Eleanor Cummins reminds us that "until the 20th century, most stepfamilies were formed in the wake of grief, as widowers often remarried quickly to ensure there was someone to take care of their children. But since the 1960s, when the divorce rate overtook the maternal mortality rate, stepfamilies have increasingly been formed in the wake of acrimony, and the "replacement mother" stereotype persists" (Cummins 2020). Perhaps stepmothers are disparaged because they have disrupted the neoliberal fairy tale. We need stepmothers to assist with childcare, but they are still the object of disdain because they do not belong to a family where the biological mother is still living. Under those circumstances, stepmothers are not only hated because they are stealing time with the children away from the biological mother, but they also are seen as competition for the affection of the former spouse as well as the children. Currently, stepmothers are still

largely understood as wicked and evil (Cole & Renegar 2016, Alhers 2016). In fact, the evil stepmother replaced the archetype of the "witch" in the American imagination in the 20th century. Leslie Lindenauer argues that "Both witches and stepmothers were portrayed as women without their own offspring accused of hurting other women's kids. And both were feared because they rejected the passive role traditionally meant for women by taking action—whether that's over a bubbling cauldron or in another woman's home" (Cummins np). Women stepping beyond their assigned role have been a threat throughout history, but the stepmother is different because she is not stepping beyond her role. She is inhabiting a role that threatens the primacy of the biological mother. Indeed, "stepmothers are tasked with the impossible: They must fulfill the duties of a homemaker and caretaker, without stepping on the biological mother's toes. 'The stepmother isn't vilified for anything other than that she's not the biological mother,' Lindenauer says" (Cummins, np). This is a striking realization for some. Simply by virtue of marrying someone with children, a woman becomes the target of disdain of the culture at large.

There are numerous groups that benefit from women being held to the standards of intensive mothering, most notably men. Jessica Calarco notes that women are targeted by the norms of intensive parents far more than men. These norms serve "men's interests in two ways: Intensive parenting norms push some women to become stay-at-home mothers, which often leaves them financially dependent on their (male) partners and gives those (male) partners more power in the home" (quoted in Peterson, n.p.). Further, intensive parenting demands that women elevate their child-rearing role over their careers, which then makes it even harder for women "to compete with men for top positions because they're seen as less committed to their jobs (violating the intensive worker norms)" (quoted in Peterson, n.p.). In other words, when there is a cultural expectation that women prioritize their family above all else, their workplace contributions are not as valued and they are not well positioned for career advancement.

Not only does neoliberal thinking disparage stepmothers, but it also creates a set of particularly unrealistic expectations. Stepmothers are held to the same standards of intensive mothering that biological mothers face. Self-help books for stepmothers provide a window into these expectations (Renegar & Cole 2019). Some notable example of common advice that we found in our research include: Stepmothers should put aside their own needs and desires in favor of universally supporting their husband's children, even as they should be expected to be treated badly by them; Stepmothers need to be a constant source of support and encouragement for their husbands, but should ultimately defer to him for all decisions about "his" children and their wellbeing; Stepmothers are reminded that they don't get to have a fairy tale marriage. That is for the husband's first family; and Stepmothers should make do with the scraps of happiness she has and accept whatever challenges arise in raising children as something

that she was aware of, or should have been when she married someone with children. In other words, the neoliberal parenting model accepts that stepmothers exist, but reminds them to know their place and to practice intensive mothering out of a sense of sacrifice and the innate desire to elevate the children in the family above all else.

In a number of different contexts, stepmothers are acknowledged as a "necessary evil". After all, the neo-liberal cultural expectation is that women are the best caregivers for children, so men who are no longer married but who are responsible for co-parenting their children have a pressing need for someone to take over that responsibility. Stepmothers are expected to take the feelings and experiences of the children's biological mother into account at all times, and apply proper deference, with no expectation of reciprocity. Naja Hall, the founder of a blended family support group, felt victimized in the course of becoming a stepmother. "As the new person in the situation, she had to empathize with everyone else's emotions, while accepting that no one was really concerned about hers" (Cummins np). Biological mothers are not expected to like their children's stepmother or treat her with any level of kindness, appreciation, or respect. The stepmother is wicked, after all, and wickedness can only be countered with intolerance. These characterizations sound like a gross exaggeration, but ideas like these and advice in line with them appear over and over again in the books and websites directed at helping new stepmothers adjust to their role.

Stepmothers are also held to the demands of intensive mothering when the biological mother has died. In these cases, a stepmother can "complete a family" (Biden, DNC 2019) assuming that she is willing to mother according to the cultural expectations of intensive parenting. Self-help books aimed at stepmothers encourage them to foreground their stepchildren in all things. Putting the children first often means also recognizing and paying deference to the biological primacy of the mother. In a typical example of this kind of expectation is conveyed, Jaqueline Fletcher shares the advice that she was given by a friend about the upcoming wedding of her stepchild. "'You're the stepmother. Your job is to wear beige and smile' Harsh! But the sentiments are right on. A stepmother's place at a wed- ding is to ask her stepchildren what they want her to do and to take a back seat to Mom " (228). Stepmothers who do not engage in intensive mothering are rejected because they do not fit the narrow mold that neo-liberal culture has created for women. Stepmothers who do not follow these expectations overtly challenge intensive mothering. The stepmothers who are accepted, or have any chance of being accepted, in American culture must ultimately fit themselves into intensive mothering by becoming the ideal stepmother.

Ideal Stepmothers as Neo-Liberal Models

Stepmothers have become increasingly common, so it is not surprising that women who are in the public eye might be stepmothers. Dr. Jill Biden is

often presented as an ideal stepmother. In the video recorded to introduce her to the American people during the Democratic National Convention in October 2020, Dr. Biden was framed as a wife, mother, teacher, friend, sister, and someone who can help the American people. Biden's journey, as scripted in the video is an embodiment of what an ideal stepmother can be in the 21st century, one that embraces intensive mothering and solidly rejects the stereotypical wicked role of the stepmother, and invalidates any other kind of stepmothering. Within the first two minutes of the video, the tragic loss of President Joe Biden's first wife and daughter was highlighted, and Jill Biden was framed as their savior, "she put us back together … she gave us a family" (2:17). Biden ""took off time [from work] to establish myself as the boy's mom" (3:46) because "I loved the boys so much" (2:00). Throughout the video, Biden is framed as a mother, President Biden shares that his sons say "we have a mommy and a mom" (3:57). Jill Biden says it plainly: "we don't use the term stepmother" (3:51). When the video turned to the death of Beau Biden, in the clip Hunter Biden says, "Mom, it's your strength that holds this family together, and I know you will make us whole again" (7:09).

In this video, Biden is portrayed as more than a stepmother. She is a mother and a savior. The glue that this family needed to patch their family and make them whole. The video makes no attempt at revising the role of a stepmother, or rehabilitating the image of stepmothers. It is, in fact, nowhere near a national embrace of the stepmother that Cummins posited. The term "stepmother" is quickly mentioned and dismissed by both of the Bidens. It is clear that neither she nor her family think this word applies to her, because she is far more than a stepmother. She sidesteps questions of wickedness by evading the term. Later, she reinforces the cultural dictates of biological primacy by featuring the birth of their daughter bolstering her identity as a mother by adding a biological relationship. By foregrounding his children in her decision to marry Joe Biden, and making note of the fact that she left a job that she loved in order to become the "boys' mom", Biden embraces the rhetoric of intensive mothering and furthers the expectation that good stepmothers center their lives around the wellbeing of their children. There is no acknowledgement of the privilege associated with such a choice or discussion of its impact on her career.

The video goes on to demonstrate her neoliberal attitudes by extolling her commitment to full-time work while simultaneously raising children. She is, by every measure, a super woman: a figure to be envied and emulated. The myth of the superwoman (Wallace 1978) has been proven to harm women by creating impossible expectations. This new image of the ideal stepmother is similarly fraught. Biden is successful, educated, white, upper class, lovely, and charming. Her stepmother journey doesn't challenge intensive mothering or biological primacy in any way. There was no need for her to compete with a biological mother that her stepsons lost when they were just preschoolers (McBride 2019). Very few women will

have the privilege or circumstance to encounter stepmothering situations like this one. Holding her up as the ideal stepmother, the model of stepmothering that is admired rather than disdained just adds to the weight of unrealistic and narrow expectations that most stepmothers face.

Conclusion

The forces that sideline mothers with the expectation of intensive mothering are far bigger than the mothers themselves. Those who benefit from mothers spending inordinate energy raising children are threatened by the existence of stepmothers because they expose the inadequacy of intensive mothering as an ideology. Biological mothers disparage stepmothers for "taking their children away" from them. Indeed, intensive mothers who are part of a nuclear family disparage stepmothers because they pose a threat to their family structure and a glimpse into what alternative family structures might look like. Those who benefit from women being locked into mothering and out of the professional sphere have little regard for stepmothers because they are not following the requisite motherhood script. As such, there is very little cultural pressure to move away from the trope of the wicked stepmothers, regardless of how much damage it may do to stepmothers and their families.

Hating stepmothers is easy for everyone except the stepmother. With blended families on the rise, and increasing numbers of children being raised in two or more families, this kind of cultural disdain is particularly unjust. Stepfathers are not subject to this same negativity (Peterson, n.p.) likely because they do nothing to threaten the importance of a group that has had to sacrifice their other ambitions in the quest to be a good parent. Blended families would benefit significantly from new thinking about stepmothers, and perhaps stepmothers could be freed from the oppression of constant disparagement. As new discourses around stepmothering emerge in the public sphere, it seems clear that the chokehold of intensive mothering remains. Biden is a stepmother, but her family "doesn't use the term stepmother." She saved them by stepping away from everything she was passionate about to establish herself as her stepchildren's new mother. In this case, instead of Cinderella's stepmother being wicked, now the stepmother can also embody the neoliberal ideal of intensive mothering.

Individuals who challenge the biological arguments of intensive mothering risk exposing the whole neoliberal family model as false. As a result, stepmothers and other individuals who are outside of the nuclear family structure could disrupt the neoliberal narrative in productive ways. Biological mothers who embrace the narrative of biological primacy experience an existential threat when faced with the idea that they may only be parenting part-time which in the rhetoric of intensive mothering is harmful and destructive to the child. However, when a child is raised in a blended family model, and especially when a child flourishes, the oppressive nature of intensive

mothering is revealed. If children can be raised competently by an array of people, where does that leave mothers and the countless hours they've spent elevating their children above all else? The presentation of Biden's stepmothering completely sidesteps this question. Competing cultural narratives around different types of mothering erase stepmothering totally, even in the same moment that it is supposed to be embraced (Cummins np).

The 2020 election has allowed some competing visions of a stepmother to emerge. While Jill Biden embodies the neoliberal ideal of stepmother, Kamala Harris presents a different set of challenges that are only just beginning to be understood. In her introduction video, the descriptions of Harris move quickly past her identity as a stepmother and into that of an ally to women. Harris is a friend to women, inspires her stepdaughters, sister, nieces, and community. Harris' role as a stepmother is acknowledged and then quickly subverted to feature more wide-ranging relationships. She has not embraced the tenets of intensive mothering or sacrificed any part of her career to foreground the needs of her stepchildren. Harris is portrayed as a friend to her stepdaughters and has maintained a friendly relationship with their biological mother. Elsewhere we have argued that one way for stepmothers to avoid competition with biological mothers is to find an alternative name that avoids any hint of "mother" (Cole & Renegar 2016). In Harris' case, when her stepdaughter shares that they call her "Mamala" (2:23) she is more relatable and of no threat to the biological mother. The video demonstrates that she's not a mom or a mother, but her stepchildren like and respect her, and softens her threat to the neoliberal order because they didn't talk about any of the trappings of biology in the narrative of the video. As a stepmother, she would probably be judged harshly by others for not focusing more on her husband's children, but as a Vice Presidential candidate this narrative choice helps frame her as more serious and masculine, which in the United States tends to be a requirement of leadership (Fairhurst, 164). Since the traditional motherhood tropes aren't available to Harris, the video uses motherhood-adjacent tropes like "auntie" to position her role as a stepmother as one that is nonthreatening. Many of these roles are available to her as a Black woman, but each of them draws on caregiving as its central tenet. This rhetorical position allows her to escape many of the trappings of the wicked stepmother by featuring her auntie and friend roles more prominently.

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Afterword

Sara Hayden and Jennifer L. Borda

When we were invited to co-lead the "Rhetorics of Motherhood" workshop at the 2019 Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) Summer Institute, we welcomed the opportunity to collectively explore how socio-cultural, economic, legal, health, and political discourse often overlooks, or marginalizes, considerations of the maternal. Mothering, like all human endeavors, is not simply a natural process; instead, it is shaped by, and in turn shapes, the social institutions and cultural contexts within which it takes place. We discussed how ideological scripts *about*, and experiential practices *of*, biological motherhood, othermothering, and mothering outside of heteronormative traditions have rhetorically reinforced, transformed, or subverted these dominant discursive contexts. Though our conversations over the course of that weekend may have inspired this project, the chapters collected in this anthology productively extend that conversation by questioning *who* mothers, *where and how* mothering materializes, *what* is gained through expanding definitions of motherhood, and *why* exploring non-normative motherhood beyond the confines of biology, geography, and ideology is imperative if we are to rhetorically refigure discourse, practices, and structures more inclusively to serve us all.

In the three years since that RSA workshop, much has changed in the world. Even as we write this Afterword, we continue to collectively navigate the uncertainties of a global pandemic, a national reckoning with racial oppression and systemic inequalities, transnational economic instability, the exigency of im/migration across borders, an accelerating climate crisis, and an unprovoked war with tragic implications for millions of innocent men, women, and children. These worldwide events have exposed neoliberalism's myriad failures over nearly half a century, and more specifically the inequities associated with privileging the White, heteronormative, upper-class patriarchal nuclear family in U.S. economic policy and political ideology. Free-market capitalism and an emphasis on individual responsibility leverage the hollow rhetoric of "family values" at the expense of mothers, parents, families, and workers. In the context of these coalescing crises—and at the nexus of dominant cultural constructs of motherhood and the everyday, lived practices of mothering—rhetorics of motherhood

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have been destabilized and require reimagining. This volume offers insight into the ways motherhood makes meaning in this transformational era, and how those meanings must now expand—symbolically, materially, experientially, and intersectionally—to reflect the saliency of motherhood and mothering as institution and agency in the 2020s and beyond.

Gendered norms that place mothers at the heart of the domestic infrastructure, imagining biological mothering as the preferred practice for family caregiving, are more unsustainable than ever in this pandemic context. As work went remote, schools transitioned online, daycares closed, and outdated gendered traditions resurfaced yielding unequal contributions to caregiving and household labor (even in formerly equitable households), mothers were left to *do it all* in ways that made previous debates over whether women could *have it all* seem trite. The work of mothers, both stay-at-home and across professions, multiplied exponentially during long days at home managing expanding circles of care of not only children, but also elderly and immunocompromised friends, neighbors, and family members. The compounding challenges of the pandemic era revealed the interconnectedness of mothers' lives, relationships, and responsibilities while highlighting their ability to recalibrate and adapt to change (see O'Reilly & Green 2021).

For those performing motherwork at home, the hours spent mothering were longer and more demanding, while crucial opportunities for social connection and respite had disappeared. Burnout surged while expectations for motherwork (both domestic and professional) was proven to be an indispensable, yet vastly undercompensated, aspect of the national economy. Many mothers worked front-line jobs with no flexibility, nonexistent childcare options, and significant worry over increased virus exposure and the threat of passing it on to vulnerable family members. Others, especially workers in the service sector (such as restaurant servers, house cleaners, and hotel employees), found their jobs had evaporated overnight adding economic insecurity into the mix of unexpected struggles. During the first six months of the pandemic mothers left the workforce in record numbers, with women unemployed at a rate four times greater than men (Ewing-Nelson 2020). Those who remained at work, either by choice or necessity, were transformed into an amalgam of pre-feminist homemakers, 2020 technology-enhanced workers, and unwitting heirs to an unrelenting model of post-millennium intensive parenting.

At the same time, over the last two years, *what* counts as motherwork and *who* performs it came into clearer focus as sites of care were renegotiated. Over the last two years, the vast network of childcare came into sharper focus; that is, the teachers, daycare workers, religious organizations, youth organizations, home health workers, retired grandparents, neighbors, nannies and babysitters that constitute a safety net for our entire national system of care. The pandemic emphasized why mothers and motherwork are essential, yet it also exposed how *essentializing motherhood* as an idealized heteronormative, cisgendered, White, biological construct

omits rich and diverse conceptualizations of the maternal necessary for recalibrating our health, economic, educational, professional, and domestic systems and practices. The need to reconfigure understandings of *who* can and does mother, *where* mothering happens and *how* is paramount to envisioning a more socially just post-pandemic world.

While the pandemic began unsettling notions of the *who, where,* and *how* of mothering, the Black Lives Matter movement and protests against racial injustice during the summer of 2020 further amplified the need to interrogate the legacies of "othering" and structural oppression foundational to U.S. history, politics, and culture. By grappling with *who has defined motherhood* and *what kinds of mothering* are most recognized and valued, critical cultural scholars have interrogated motherhood as a "complex symbolic interlocutor" central to the formation of gendered and sexual norms, which simultaneously obscures and reinforces racialized and social class-based oppression (Mack 2016, 1). Dominant discourse surrounding U.S. constructs of "good motherhood" and debates over legitimate reproduction are fused with traditions of White femininity as a transnational phenomenon that eclipses the non-white, non-Western mother (Shome 2011). Such discourse often prioritizes U.S. security culture in service of citizenship and nation in the White imaginary (Fixmer-Oraiz 2019). Compounding this issue, contemporary, neoliberal White feminist discourse remains complicit in privileging individual ambition and economic security for *one's own family*, while tolerating insufficient workplace protections and social support programs *for mothers and children on the margins* (Beck 2021).

In response, theorists have reconceived Black motherhood as a source of empowering political education that rejects the patriarchal nuclear family and the neoliberal subject while embracing more complex stories of family formation (McLain, 2019). By forging "political work in, through, and against the rhetoric of crisis," Black maternal politics manifest advocacy, survival practices, and safeguarding strategies into myriad political projects that translate private, affective maternal desire into politically generative action (Nash 2021, p. 6). Redefining a more diverse and inclusive perspective on the value and salience of motherhood continues Bell Hooks' legacy of moving Black feminist theory from the margins to the center (see also Collins 2000; Story 2014). Building on this foundation, theorizing nonnormative and nonessentialist motherhood deconstructs nationalism, ableism, economic bias, and the gendered norms and cisgenderism inherent in the privileged White universal maternal subject of heteronormative family formations (Filax & Taylor 2021; Brant & Anderson 2021; Schultes & Vallianatos 2021; Park 2021; Fischer, 2021; Riggs, et al, 2021). Scholars in this volume, working at the intersections of race, class, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, as well as im/migration, geographical place, and nationhood, exemplify how a diversity of maternal subjectivities will seed the coalitional politics necessary to restructure education, economics, medicine, health policy, and the legal system more expansively.

Refiguring Motherhood Beyond Biology enlightens this conversation while contributing new ways of imagining the *who*, *what*, *how*, and *where* of motherhood and mothering that refute the biological determinism, whiteness, and dominant cultural narratives that contribute to our idealism of "the good mother." Contributors to this collection insightfully intervene into these established motherhood rhetorics by employing anti-racist intersectional frameworks to theorize *disruptive Muslim mothering* as a means of dislodging white-centering norms; by advancing unconventional mothering through biological, familial, and other-mothering relationships in the context of Queer Black motherhood; and by undermining stereotypes of Black women, fertility, and reproduction through the process of voluntary single motherhood.

This volume also advances scholarship at the crossroads of critical kinship studies and reproductive justice scholarship through a communicative lens. Working at the intersections of power and systemic inequalities, reproductive justice focuses on government influence, health policy, and rhetorics of "choice" as they inform the material realities of female fertility and reproductive health (Solinger 2013). Critical kinship studies interrogate the political, discursive, and economic inequalities that undergird how border crossings, accelerated mobility, reproductive consumerism, and the migration of people, technologies, treatments and bodies transform and preserve kinship (Kroløkke et al. 2016). It is within the complexity of these perspectives that the works featured in this volume insightfully theorize new, communicative understandings of motherhood that refigure our image of mothers beyond the bounds of white supremacy, repudiate the relevance of maternal biology, and reveal the mobility of mothering as it spans communities through diverse practices, experiences, and networks of caregiving. By initiating broader social conversations about motherhood and pregnancy loss, fertility journeys, and the challenges of invisibly ill motherhood, contributors to this volume deepen understandings of kinship, intersectionality, and reproductive justice. Scholars engaging the concept of *comadrisma* as a model of co-mothering and academic survival; the pregnancy, birth, and parenting experiences of trans men; media coverage of migrant mothers on the border; and the erasure of mothers in family separation rhetoric and protests also widen the scope of motherhood studies to consider the elasticity of new motherhood rhetorics with the potential to transgress and refigure mothering across gendered, racial, and transnational contexts and boundaries.

In an effort to reveal how constructed scripts of American "motherhood" privilege gendered norms while denying difference, critical/cultural critiques of motherhood rhetorics have sought to transgress, resist, and deconstruct the motherhood "code" that communicates and obscures power relations by naturalizing them as part of the status quo (Buchanan 2013). The status quo of the "good" (read: White, upper-class, cisgender) mother and the ideology of intensive mothering are perpetuated by the intersection of neoliberalism, rhetorical constructs, and political discourse. Despite mothers' location at the

nexus of labor, consumption, care, and reproduction upon which global neoliberalism relies, in the push to prioritize individualized entrepreneurialism motherhood has largely remained absent in neoliberal theorizing (Vandenbeld Giles, 2021). Yet, neoliberalism's organizing principles of individual responsibility, profitability, and free market solutions to public problems are encoded within the tenets of intensive motherhood.

As this volume argues, the pressures of intensive mothering as lived within the domination of neoliberalism are inherently incompatible with the material realities of motherhood as a collective endeavor. The essays collected here grapple with the ways in which idealized motherhood reifies cultural scripts of intensive mothering in the contexts of the problematic privatization and feminizing of care in government reports and through the omission of postpartum mental health and disability challenges in popular parenting and women's health publications. In this way, this collection also contributes to our thinking about *how* mothering happens by reflecting the lived experience of non-normative mothers that transgresses idealized, intensive mothering as a cultural dictate of modern motherhood. Consequently, this work also destabilizes the individualized good mother as a rhetorical construction in the service of neoliberal ideals. More optimistically, authors here also advocate for the potential resistance of these mediated rhetorical scripts by analyzing new inclusive feminist family imaginaries produced through children's literature, transnational literary works, activist memoirs, feminist evangelical childrearing advice, and the embodiment of the "ideal stepmother." These explorations provide a roadmap to examine the symbolic malleability of "motherhood rhetorics" as it reframes motherhood from the biological to the nontraditional, plural, spiritual, and communal.

In addition to contributing to scholarly conversations surrounding contemporary motherhood and its possibilities, the essays in this collection offer significant *practical* insights into the ways maternal practices and appeals can be used to elevate and empower people who engage in motherwork beyond biological, White, heteronormative boundaries. Practical insights emerge most obviously from the several chapters that employ autoethnographic methods. Authors of these chapters describe actions designed to dismantle intensive mothering scripts infused with neoliberal ideologies. Whether it be a Muslim mother who screams and uses her body as a shield to protect her children from off-leash dogs and records and threatens the dogs' owners who are breaking her cities' leash laws, the queer Black mother who intentionally cultivates a community of other queer Black women within which to have and raise her children, or the Chicana feminist friends, collaborators, and colleagues who draw on their ethnic and familial backgrounds to support one another as individuals, scholars, *comadres* and *tias*, these essays illuminate in concrete ways how some people engaged in motherwork resist the demands of intensive, White, biological motherhood while simultaneously rewriting potential scripts for a more empowered sense of the maternal.

Yet it is not only from the autoethnographic essays that practical advice for resisting White, heteronormative, biologically based intensive mothering emerge. Authors of the essays in this volume variously employ rhetorical criticism, literary analysis, qualitative content analysis, and a critical narrative approach to, among other things, explore how Evangelical discourses can push back against the privileging of biological motherhood in Evangelical communities, illuminate how invisibly ill mothers reclaim the term "good mother" for themselves, and describe how images of pregnant trans men disrupt hegemonic assumptions about sex and gender. The authors of these chapters describe concrete actions that offer models for resisting oppressive mothering scripts. At the same time, by employing these various methodologies, the authors bring attention to the voices of mothers/parents who otherwise are unavailable in dominant discourses of motherhood, voices that help us conceptualize the power of the maternal to advocate for social change.

Conversely, other essays in this volume productively critique extant discourses and practices that reinforce the most oppressive elements of White, heteronormative, biologically based intensive mothering, offering insights into how these discourses and practices function and might be dismantled. Moreover, the authors illustrate how these discourses and practices are sometimes found in places one would not anticipate, illuminating the difficulty of untangling neoliberal, post-feminist ideologies even from actions and texts seeking progressive ends. Chapters explore, among other things, a protest designed to express support for migrant mothers that ultimately centers White, western, biological motherhood in contrast to the powerless migrant mother; how a text designed to draw connections between everyday practices and larger political issues around environmental degradation employs neoliberal assumptions about mothers' responsibilities to solve public problems through private actions; and how a report that seeks to expand notions of who can and should engage in caregiving activities ultimately undermines its purpose through images that accurately depict who is engaging in most caregiving activities at this moment.

Taken together, the powerful essays in this collection invite the reader to continue the project of resisting oppressive scripts of motherhood that dominate the contemporary landscape. They illuminate that this is necessarily a two-step process involving descriptions of resistant mothering coupled with critiques of discourses that reinforce oppressive assumptions, practices, and norms. They remind us that resistive mothering discourses can be found in unexpected places and they expose oppressive messages that emerge even when designed with progressive intent.

The three years between the Rhetorics of Motherhood workshop and the publication of this book have been marked by profoundly disruptive events that simultaneously exposed the limitations of White, biologically based, heteronormative intensive mothering in a neoliberal context and opened up possibilities to reimagine what raising children, being a mother/parent, and

member of a global community can mean. The authors of the essays in this volume help make sense of these shifting realities and norms and pave the way for continued conversations and concrete actions designed to challenge oppressive mothering norms while opening up space for all of us to live more just lives. They invite the reader to continue the process of careful critique and resistive action necessary to reimagine more sustainable, humane, and equitable mothering practices.

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