

Book Reviews

What Do Mothers Need? Motherhood Activists and Scholars Speak Out on Maternal Empowerment for the 21st Century

Andrea O'Reilly, ed.
Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2012.

REVIEWED BY BRUNA ALVAREZ MORA

What Do Mothers Need? considers how patriarchal ideology influences the form of motherhood in the everyday practices of mothers, and how empowerment strategies for mothers can be developed to avoid gender discrimination. The aim of this book is to “explore what mothers in twenty-first century North American society need in order to adequately care for their children while living full and purposeful lives” (2).

The volume comprises six sections. Section one, “Redefining Motherhood,” includes six essays that analyze intensive mothering as an oppressive form of mothering. Intensive mothering, which is based on essentialism and a naturalized opposition of the public and private spheres, produces the hegemonic discourse of the “good mother”; the “mommy wars” between stay-at-home mothers and mothers who work outside the home; “helicopter” mothers who never relinquish the mothering role; and, finally, “matroreform,” a resistant and conscious mode of mothering.

Section two, “Empowering Mothers,” includes four essays that explore varied and specific realities of mothering—military mothers, aboriginal mothers, South Asian mothers, and those who pay for mother work—and how they are influenced by the discourse of intensive mothering.

Section three, “Mothers, Children and Families: Health and Well-Being,” includes three essays that address global aspects of mothering: the need to

attend to the well being of mothers and children; natural birth and the role of midwives; disabled mothers and how disabilities affect “successful mothering”; and how to be a “good mother” to children with food allergies.

Section four, “Mothers, Education and Social Change,” includes three essays that consider the experiences of Latina women/mothers; the personal stories of two aboriginal/scholar mothers; the evolving mothers’ movement; and how pollution, energy depletion, government corruption, and overpopulation will affect the future lives of children.

Section five, “Mothers, Partners and Parenting,” includes four essays that show the importance of gender equality in childcare; the value of shared parenting to women’s self-development; the need for mothers to pursue their own life projects; and what black single mothers expect from the fathers of their children.

Section six, “Mothers and Work,” includes five essays that consider why some mothers opt out of the labour market; the experiences of stay-at-home African American mothers; the social construction of the work-life balance myth; the real needs of mothers and early childhood educators; and the need for work place flexibility by mothers and the impact of mothers on labour market policies.

Unsafe Motherhood: Mayan Mortality and Subjectivity in Post-War Guatemala

Nicole S. Berry.

New York: Berghahn Books, 2013.

REVIEWED BY DIANA G. PALMERIN VELASCO

Set in the aftermath of the more than three decades long Guatemalan civil war, Nicole S. Berry’s rich ethnography presents a detailed picture of the unintended effects of the global campaign on maternal mortality on the Mayan village of Santa Cruz. Through participant observation, as well as a variety of research methods that give her access to privileged information, Berry constructs an appealing narrative with a convincing argument: that “the global campaign to decrease maternal mortality has actually created barriers to reducing deaths and also threatens to make some of the very communities that it is designed to help even more vulnerable” (1).

Berry begins with a critique of the western biomedical reductionist approach through which “life and death become the only outcomes by which