LIVING FEMINISM:
PEDAGOGY AND PRAXIS IN MOTHERING

BY

FIONA JOY GREEN

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

Absent from the feminist discourse on mothering is a sustained examination of the interconnection between feminism and mothering. Also missing in this discourse is an exploration of the lived realities of women who are mothering as feminists. My work addresses these deficiencies by exploring how feminist mothers view motherhood, how they choose to parent from a position informed by that understanding and how their mothering influences their feminism.

By conducting intensive interviews with sixteen self-identified feminist mothers living in or around Winnipeg in the mid 1990s and by using a feminist, experientially-based research methodology, I uncover how feminist mothers understand conventional notions of motherhood and create alternatives in their mothering that transform their lives. As agents who consciously name, define and construct themselves as feminist mothers, these women purposefully bring their understanding of feminism to their parenting. In their struggle to reject the more restrictive aspects of motherhood and to create positive, alternative meanings and practices of mothering, they adopt elements of teaching frequently identified with feminist pedagogy. These feminist mothers engage in the simultaneous act of thoughtful reflection and action (praxis) in their relationships with their children. In doing so, they unite their feminism and mothering to transform the meaning of mothering and contribute to the development of feminist theory and activism.

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PROLOGUE

I told myself that I wanted to write a book on motherhood because it was a crucial, still relatively unexplored, area of feminist theory. But I did not choose this subject; it had long ago chosen me. (Adrienne Rich,1986:15)

Like Rich, I am compelled to write about a particular subject – in this case, feminist mothering – because of the lack of research and academic discourse on the topic. I, too, feel I have been chosen by the subject matter because of my personal engagement with feminist mothering. It is "rooted in my own past" and continues to be present in my life as I "enter the open ground of middle age" (Rich, 1986:15).

The beginning of this journey coincides with the birth of my son and my new identity as a feminist mother. Just over thirteen years ago, my experience of pregnancy started me thinking about feminism and mothering. I realized that the choices I made, both as a pregnant woman and shortly thereafter as a new mother, were influenced by my feminism. While pregnant I was writing my MA thesis, "The Development of a Mother-Centred Model of Childbirth," and reading feminist scholars on pregnancy and birthing. My research and my ever-developing feminist consciousness gave me the courage to exercise my own agency with medical professionals. Rather than being a passive patient, I was an active participant in medical decisions about my body, my fetus and the birth of my child, first when I underwent an emergency caesarian section in hospital and later when I recovered at home.

Thinking about feminism and mothering became integral to understanding my experiences of pregnancy and giving birth. The feminist literature I had read profoundly influenced my understanding of the medicalisation of pregnancy and its repercussions for

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women; it had also strengthened my ability to make sense of my pregnancy and birthing experience and to act as an advocate on my own behalf. Through the process of researching and writing my MA thesis and becoming a mother, I made meaningful connections among my life experiences, feminist analysis and theorizing which continue to the present day. For example, like some other feminist mothers, I chose, with the full support of my partner, to hyphenate my son's last name to honour both his maternal and paternal ancestry. In naming my son this way, I put my feminism into action. I refused to support and reproduce the patriarchal practice of naming children only after their paternal family. In his name, the maternal family line of my son is visible. Just as I had kept my "maiden name" upon getting married to demonstrate symbolically my continuing connection to my heritage, my son's name illustrates his connection to both of his parents, not just to his father.

As my son developed, I realized for the first time that males, just as females, were under pressure to conform to gender specific stereotypes, and I began to reflect on my feminism in new ways. As a girl, teenager and young woman, I had felt pressure to behave in gender-specific ways, and as a university student, I came to understand how female identity is socially constructed to foster subjugation and how that social construction of identity also constructs patriarchal power. I was not, however, cognizant of similar pressure on boys until I experienced, first hand, the insistence by others that my son conform to socially-sanctioned and accepted standards of "masculinity." The type of clothing my child wore, the toys he played with, the activities he was involved in and the ways he interacted with people were all restricted by notions of what boys should be

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doing and who boys should be. I recognized how my feminism had helped me to interpret the effects of sexism and misogyny on girls and women, yet it had not helped me to recognize the influence of sexism, misogyny and patriarchal gender roles on boys and men.

I observed the pressure my son was under to conform to gender stereotypes as a five-year-old kindergarten student in an independent school. Because of the many conversations I had about my son's appearance with people that year, I was acutely aware of the confusion and unease people had with my son's gender. My most vivid memory of that time is of an exchange I had with the mother of a child in my son's class. As we waited to pick up our children after school she questioned why my daughter, who had shoulder length hair sporting a colourful hair wrap, was wearing the standard uniform for boys. When I explained that the child she assumed was my daughter was my son, she responded with the comment, "Oh but she's – I mean he's – so pretty." Shortly after this comment she queried the school's policy regarding the "uniform and dress code." Her turning the conversation to official school practice regarding boys' hair styles suggested to me that she considered my son's hair length inappropriate and that it should be cut in a fashion more fitting for a boy. It also suggested to me that she thought that the school should ensure that my son comply with an image of the stereotypical boy if I would not voluntarily do so. Although the beginning of our conversation had started out with a fairly gentle inquiry about my son's appearance and gender, she had shifted to the idea that the school should regulate my decisions as a mother by the end of our discussion. Because I had allowed – or even promoted – my son to grow and decorate his hair in a way that was

presumed suitable only for girls, my mothering abilities were questioned.

This interaction, along with others regarding my son's appearance, made me think more deeply about the expectations placed on me as a mother. Before being a mother I knew I would feel some pressure to raise my child according to social expectations, yet I had not fully understood the degree to which those expectations included replicating and promoting patriarchal values and practices. I had not been prepared for the intense social pressure to raise my son in ways that duplicated patriarchal notions of masculinity. I now saw that mothers were required to pass patriarchal perspectives and behaviours onto their children, and I felt the disapproval that mother's met, even from other mothers.

These revelations – that the socialization and development of males are influenced by patriarchy and that mothers are strongly encouraged to reproduce and advocate patriarchal expectations – now appear naive. They did, however, show me how my feminist analysis was limited and how mothering could broaden my knowledge and understanding of feminism. As in other areas of my life, mothering had become a site where personal actions were political and where general societal values were reflected in personal experience. I saw how mothering had become a location where my feminist activism could challenge, rather than reproduce, patriarchy. For example, by choosing to support my son's decision to have longer hair rather than forcing him to cut his hair to conform to a style considered suitable for boys, I countered the expectation that I would reproduce a "masculine" boy in the way patriarchy deemed acceptable. That simple action of supporting my son's wishes regarding his appearance and identity challenged patriarchy. And in doing so, I refused to reproduce it.

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Realizing that mothering had become a site of feminist activism for me, I wondered if other feminist mothers also found mothering to be a place where their feminism was alive for them. I wondered how they understood feminism, what they thought of motherhood and if their feminism and mothering influenced each other. More specifically, I wondered if feminist mothers distinguish between the potential power of women as mothers and the idealized concepts and practices of motherhood that attempt to suppress women's power as Adrienne Rich (1986:13) suggests. These personal revelations and questions about other feminist mothers prompted me to embark on this investigation into the interconnections between feminism and mothering.

INTRODUCTION

The complexities of being both a feminist and a mother are a reality for many women, however these experiences are only beginning to be investigated.[1] Yet, still absent from the studies on mothering and on feminism is a sustained examination of the lived realities of women who are mothering as feminists. Such an examination could open up a second area that is almost un-researched and yet of critical significance: the implications of the interconnection of feminism and mothering. My work here addresses these absences by exploring, from the perspective of self-identified feminist mothers, how feminist mothers view motherhood, how they struggle to parent from a position informed by that understanding and how their mothering influences their feminism.

The main argument of my research – based on an analysis of in-depth interviews with sixteen self-identified feminist mothers – is that feminist mothers are challenging motherhood and creating alternatives in mothering that transform the lives of mothers and of children and change the meaning of both mothering and feminism. As agents who consciously engage feminism in the everyday realities of their mothering, feminist mothers consider mothering to be a site for resistance and social change. In choosing to name, label and define themselves as feminist mothers, participants make sense of the meaning of mothering, motherhood and feminism in ways that reflect their understanding

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[1] It is only in the last few years that the experiences of feminist mothers have occasionally been addressed. In the late 1980s a conference on mothering hosted by the Fort Gary Women's Resource Center was held in Winnipeg, and in 1997 an academic conference on mothering was hosted by the Women's Studies Department at York University in Ontario, Canada. The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) formed after this conference and has since hosted annual academic conferences focussed on mothering. For examples of publications regarding feminism and mothering see Collins (1994); Everingham (1994); Glenn et al. (1994); Hamilton (1990); Reddy et al. (1994); Smith (1995); and Trebilcot (1983).

of feminist mothering. Regardless of whether women begin parenting as feminists or mother as feminists once they become parents, they purposefully choose to mother in ways that are informed by and embody their feminism. Living their feminism in their mothering, these women sustain practices in mothering that yield possibilities for social change as well as new ways of seeing and theorizing feminism and mothering.

My approach to this research is interdisciplinary, with the disciplines of Women's Studies, Sociology and Education bringing particular perspectives not found in one discipline alone together in a view that is useful to the development and implementation of this research. I use these disciplines as a series of interchangeable lenses that permit me to focus on different parts of women's accounts and experiences. It is not just that the disciplines allow me to see the realities of women better, the women's accounts and experiences also challenge the disciplines. Women are no longer objects to be studied, but rather are subjects and participants in research, subjects who can influence academic knowledge.

Central to Women's Studies is the feminist premise that women and men tend to lead different lives and have different experiences living within patriarchal cultures and societies.[2] Briefly put, patriarchy is a historical force with a material and psychological base that gives rise to a system in which men in general have more power than women and greater access than women do, to whatever society esteems (Flax, 1993:82).

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[2] Feminist movements and Women's Studies have been strongly linked since the late 1960s in North America and continue to be integral to each other. See, for example, Bowles and Klein (1983), Hunter College Women's Studies Collective (1995). Although there are a multitude of feminisms, there are also a number of primary features of women's oppression that feminists agree upon. As Code (1993:19) notes, "Feminist theories work to develop analyses of how, in patriarchal societies, women and men tend, generally, to live different lives and have different experiences."

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Women's Studies is concerned with women's realities within patriarchal cultures and focuses on developing theories and methods for understanding and changing women's position in society.[3] "Deriving ever more subtle descriptions of the effects of patriarchy, defining the problems that must be faced, and evaluating strategies for change" are central to the work of feminists, feminism and Women's Studies alike (Code, 1993:21). The meaning of feminism is neither static nor monolithic. Rather, it is multi-dimensional, fluid and ever-changing as feminisms are created by women who are analysing the oppression of themselves and other women with the purpose of social change. Feminism, therefore, is a matrix of feminisms that are in constant motion. Because my project focuses on a number of ways these mothers live their feminisms, it contributes to developing understandings and meanings of embodied feminisms within this moving and ever-changing milieu.

Discerning how women's experiences are different from those of men continues to mean placing women at the centre of inquiry to gain knowledge of, and make changes to, women's oppression. Women have to be at the centre of the inquiry because that is the location of meaning making. A woman centred inquiry also provides an alternative to establishing women as the object of men's inquiries, of being subjected to men's priorities and perspectives. The point is not to find out how women are different from men, but for women to find out about themselves, to make sense of their own experiences and knowledges. Feminists do not assume that there is one single, pure, essential woman's experience out of which universal analytical categories can be developed.

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[3] See, for example, Bowels & Klein (1983), and Hunter College Women's Studies Collective (1995).

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Rather, documenting and analysing the diversity of women's experiences, often due (but not limited) to ethnicity, race, religion, class, geographical location, sexuality, age and ability are vital to building theoretical constructions of gender that include a variety of meanings and interpretations which inform the experiences of women.

By following the approach of placing women, as active participants, at the centre of both inquiry and analysis as advanced by Women's Studies and by feminist methodologies, I am able to gather the subjective and subjugated knowledges and analyses of feminist mothers and I am able to theorize the broader question of feminist praxis in feminist mothering.[4] Using one-on-one, intensive interviews facilitates this approach. It permits an investigation into the subjective knowledge of feminist mothers regarding their feminisms and their experiences of mothering and educating their children. Research that is by, for, with and about women is characteristic of research and methodologies within Women's Studies.[5]

Sociological investigation opens the possibility for the exploration of the broader social influences on human behaviour, thus allowing for an understanding of the particular ways people behave. This "sociological imagination" makes connections between the personal experiences or the "personal troubles" of individuals and their relationships to social institutions or the "public issues of social structure" (Mills,

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[4] Subjectivity here refers to "the description or interpretation of an experience from the perspective or position of the person engaged within the experience" while subjugated knowledges refers to "the trivialized or discredited knowledge that is lost or silenced as a result of circulating outside of the accepted boundaries of the master narrative or universal discourse (patriarchal)" (Abbey & O'Reilly, 1998:334).

[5] For example, see Waring (1994). Chapter Two on the methodology of this project considers these factors in more depth.

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1977:8). To understand the personal afflictions of people, or the "personal as political" as feminists would say, sociologist C. Wright Mills (1977:8-10) suggests looking beyond the character of individuals and their immediate relationships with others and their local environments to structural changes caused by the interconnection of various social institutions in a particular historical period, that is, how the general is situated in the particular. Because the private experiences of individual feminist mothers are influenced by social institutions such as the family, educational systems, political and economic structures, and legal and religious institutions, a sociological perspective is useful in examining their individual actions as feminist mothers within a broader social context.

Sociologists Juliet Corbin, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss provide an approach to qualitative research, named grounded theory, that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively-derived grounded theory about a phenomenon with the purpose to build theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:24). Relying heavily on the work Glaser and Strauss (1967), sociologists Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna (1989) create a research methodology informed by grounded theory methodology and by feminist methodologies to address the life experiences of people who continue to be considered peripheral to academic research and society. [6] This "research from the margins" advocated by Kirby and McKenna proposes ways for researchers to gather, make sense of and act responsibly with information that is shared with them by individuals who suffer injustice, inequality and exploitation. New

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[6] For a fuller discussion of grounded theory methodology see Glaser (1992, 1998) and Strauss and Corbin (1994, 1997) and for feminist methodologies see Fonow and Cook (1991), Harding (1987), Reinharz (1992) and Stanley (1990).

understandings are generated and developed through the continuous interplay of the data collected through research projects that focus on the participants' voices and experiences, contextualizing the research and engaging in a process that strives for social equality. My central contention – that for particular feminist mothers, feminism and mothering are united in ways that change their lives and the meanings of mothering and feminism – is developed directly from interviews with women who experience marginalization and oppression both as feminists and as mothers. Without the discussion and accounts provided by the participants in this study, we would not understand the contributions feminist mothers have to make to feminist praxis, pedagogy and activism, nor the ways in which they are transforming their lives and the lives of their children by challenging various restrictive aspects of motherhood.

The discipline of Education is also relevant to the discussion of feminist mothering because teaching is both implicit in mothering and a central component of the work that mothers do. The education that mothers provide their children is most often seen as preparatory teaching for students before they enter the school system, or as supportive teaching as their children travel through the formal education system. Although scholarship on feminist pedagogy within the field of Education addresses some concerns about the quality of education for girls within the school system and proposes ways of improving schooling so that girls receive a more equitable education to boys, it does not specifically address the education that mothers provide their children – both girls and boys. It does, however, grant a framework within which to develop a theory about the ways feminist mothers teach their children. Approaching feminist mothering through

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Education acknowledges the conscious work that feminist mothers undertake, whether or not they "home school" and become teachers in a way the system of education recognizes. Feminist pedagogy is useful in understanding and theorizing feminist mothers as educators.

Combined together, the three disciplines of Women's Studies, Sociology and Education provide the necessary tools to examine the lived experiences of feminist mothers and to consider the implications of the interconnections of feminism and mothering. Following the practice in Women's Studies and in feminist methodologies of placing women and their subjective knowledge and analysis at the centre of the investigation, I reveal how feminist mothers experience feminism and mothering, as well as how they understand the interconnection of the two. Placing feminist mothers within a broader social context illustrates how the private experiences of feminist mothers are influenced by social organizations and how feminist mothers make sense of and live their lives. The use of the "sociological imagination" helps make connections between the lived experiences and practices of feminist mothers and their relationships with social institutions, ideals and practices. Theories of feminist pedagogy provided by the discipline of Education contribute to an understanding of what and how feminist mothers teach their children. This lens helps to clarify the ways feminism informs the teaching and parenting of feminist mothers and to recognize elements of feminist pedagogy practiced in feminist mothering. Through the contributions of each of these disciplines the interconnection of feminism and mothering is made visible, as are the implications of feminist mothering for mothers, children, feminism and mothering.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. The first, "Laying Out the Framework," situates my work in the broader context of feminist theorizing on mothering and motherhood and establishes the terrain that has not yet been explored and the questions that need to be asked. It also explores the methodology I use for my research and analysis. The second, "Making the Connections," focuses on the experiences of the participants and my analysis of how feminism and mothering are interconnected in the lives of particular self-identified feminist mothers.

Since this investigation is unique, literature specifically examining the practices of feminist mothers and feminist mothering is extremely limited. To provide a context for my study, Chapter One, entitled "Situating Feminist Mothering in the Feminist Literature," highlights some of the trends in feminist theorizing on mothering over the past thirty years and examines the existing writing on feminist mothering. Attention is then given to the work of Adrienne Rich, Patricia Hill Collins and a number of feminist scholars whose research focuses on lesbian (feminist) mothering to illustrate a number of key concepts and theories that are central to my study. In particular, motherhood is understood as a complex site of women's oppression where heterosexuality and patriarchy intersect and a location where where mothers can find empowerment and agency to challenge restrictive aspects of motherhood.

In Chapter Two, "Bringing Feminist Mothers into View," I explain how I use specific elements of feminist methodologies and the experientially based methodologies of grounded theory and research from the margins to develop a methodology that fits with my research. I also explain why I use the method of intensive interviews and the constant

comparative method in my analysis. Adopting elements of grounded theory methodology

developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in conjunction with aspects of Kirby and

McKenna's (1989) methodology of "research from the margins," I listened to the voices,

experiences and analyses of the feminist mothers I interviewed. I found commonalities

and themes within the interviews with participants which generated the analytical

framework for this study. The four themes that emerged from my analysis of the

interviews with the feminist mothers are explored in greater detail in the second half of

the dissertation.

Part II: Making the Connections begins with Chapter Three which explores how

respondents identify and name conventional ideals of motherhood, as well as negotiate,

and at times, break customary rules of motherhood. How participants think of

motherhood determines, to some degree, the ways in which they choose to mother and

raise their children and provides a context for their mothering strategies. Chapter Four,

"Consciously Mothering," explores how participants challenge notions of motherhood

and mother in ways that are personally meaningful. Here I document how feminist

mothers break the rules of conventional motherhood and parent in ways that are

appropriate for them.

Chapter Five, "Practising Feminist Pedagogy," illustrates how feminist mothers,

without naming it, have used feminist pedagogy in their mothering. This finding, that

feminist mothers work with elements of feminist pedagogy within their relationships with

their children, broadens feminist theorizing and practices of feminist pedagogy; no longer

can theorizing about feminist pedagogy be confined to formal educational settings.

Chapter Six, "Keeping Feminism Fresh," considers the ways in which mothering has shaped the feminism of feminist mothers. Participants show, through concrete examples, how mothering children has informed, challenged and broadened their understanding and practice of feminism. Our understanding of feminist praxis, like that of feminist pedagogy, expands when we include the realities and experiences of feminist mothers.

The final chapter, "After Word(s)," brings a positional and provisional ending to the dissertation where I comment on findings that do not appear in the body of the dissertation, primarily those discoveries that the women and I made by being involved in the research project together. I also reflect on the main contribution of this investigation – that feminist mothering is a feminist act where feminist mothers break the rules of conventional motherhood to transform the lives of mothers and change the meanings of feminism and mothering – and discuss its importance to further research on both mothering and feminism.

Part I: Laying Out the Framework

CHAPTER ONE

Situating Feminist Mothering in the Feminist Literature

As part of the contemporary women's movement – a movement that uses feminist theory and practice to foster social change – feminist scholars have been involved in the collective enterprise of unpacking and explaining the concepts of motherhood and mothering. An investigation of this literature demonstrates the ways feminist writers have generated a theoretical base from which inquiries and language around mothering and motherhood have been built. By examining publications from the 1970s to the present, I establish what has already been studied, verify the kinds of questions feminists have asked, witness the particular perspectives they have taken regarding mothering and motherhood and consider the complexities and contradictions that are emerging from the new area.[7] While this appraisal acknowledges the work of others in the field, it also points to the terrain that has not yet been researched, to the questions that have not been asked and to the perspectives that still have to be investigated. An analysis of the literature also allows me to situate my own work within the context of contemporary feminist theorizing on mothering and motherhood, to contribute to it and to extend it.

The first section of the chapter opens with a brief outline of the general trends of feminist writing on motherhood since the 1970s and is followed by a discussion of writings by Adrienne Rich, Patricia Hill Collins and specific feminist scholars who write about lesbian mothering. I focus upon these particular works because they theorize

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[7] While feminists have been concerned with mothering and motherhood prior to 1970, I begin with this time period because of the significant shift in feminist attitudes, research and theorizing on motherhood, and the fact that the participants in this study are more likely to be influenced by the feminist theorizing of this time than of any other because of their age and lived experience.

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motherhood to be a complex site of women's oppression and a potential location of women's creativity and joy for women who parent. By exposing the debates within this literature, I show how assorted authors theorize the diverse ways in which mothering is understood and experienced by women when their class, race and sexuality are taken into account. Drawing from the analysis of the concepts and ideas explored by these writers, I raise questions about how these theoretical and experiential aspects of mothering relate to feminist mothering.

In the second section of the chapter, a review of research into the realities of feminist mothering will reveal that work specifically addressing my concerns is on the periphery rather than at the centre of feminist inquiry. My three main concerns are: how feminist mothers understand motherhood, how their feminism informs their child-rearing and how their mothering informs their feminism. The few studies that address elements of these three areas are not specifically aimed at them but include them as a minor portion of larger studies focused on other aspects of feminist mothering. These studies do, however, affirm the relevance of these three areas in the lives of feminist mothers and lay important groundwork for understanding how self-identified feminist mothers may conceptualize and understand the tensions between motherhood and mothering. Additionally, they introduce the concept of mothers as educators and therefore provide a foundation for further investigation into the interconnection of feminist pedagogy and feminist mothering in the child-rearing work of feminist mothers. Theorizing from these studies leads to questions about the participants' views of themselves as educators of their children and about their teaching strategies. My review of these studies establishes some

questions that have been left unasked and unanswered about the theoretical and practical

implications of feminist mothering for feminism and/or mothering.

I.   Feminist Literature on Mothering from the 1970s to the 1990s

Living in contemporary North America at the turn of the twenty-first century has

meant enduring the constant financial slashes by governments and agencies to programs

supporting women and the work of feminists. With the breakdown of the postwar

consensus about the role of the government and its welfare philosophy, the national debt

crisis of the early 1980s, the electoral successes of neo-conservative political parties and

the advent of the neo-liberal state, there was little financial or social support for feminism

and alternative family forms.[8] In the 1980s, American feminists grappled with the

Reagan era's proliferation of "family values" that was part of a right wing agenda to

reinstate patriarchal, monogamous nuclear families and to discredit any other family

form. Canadian governments made financial cutbacks to health care and women's

programs in order to pay down the national debt (McQuaig, 1993). The minor advances

made in the 1970s and early 1980s to women's reproductive rights were continually

threatened into the early years of the twenty-first century with perpetual contestation and

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[8] See Brodie (1995) and Luxton (2001;1997a) for further detail on the challenges feminism and families
faced due to neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and the financial restructuring in Canada. The bold move
by two same-gender couples to marry in a religious ceremony performed in a Toronto church in January
2001, for example, was not recognized by the provincial government, leading the newlyweds to join other
gay activists from B.C. and Quebec fighting for their rights in provincial court (Green, 2001:8).

the erosion of funding and access to legal abortions (Maher, 1993).[9] During the 1990s, for

example, abortion clinics were targeted by bombings and hostile pickets, while doctors

performing abortions and abortion clinic staff in Canada and the USA were methodically

shot, wounded and killed (National Abortion Federation, 2001).

Feminists writing on mothering and motherhood responded to the political climate

of the latter decades of the twentieth century by focusing on women in relation to the

divisions and conditions of mothering, including women's reproductive rights, in its

many shapes and forms. Emphasis was often placed on the various connections children

and mothers experience depending on their specific realities, life circumstances and

situations.[10] According to Penelope Dixon's annotated bibliography, Mothers and

Motherhood, more than 350 feminist works focusing on various topics related to

mothering were published in North America and Europe between the 1970s and the late

1990s. According to Dixon (1991:ix), feminist scholarship on motherhood focused on ten

general categories: "mothers and daughters, mothers and sons, single mothers, working

mothers, lesbian and black mothers, mothering and the family, children, feminism,

psychoanalysis, abortion and new reproductive issues as they relate to mothering." While

there were a number of articles and books published under the heading "feminism," these

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[9] While the newly re-elected Canadian Liberal federal government of 2000 tried to ensure accessability to abortion services for Canadian women by punishing provincial governments that did not provide abortion services or fund free-standing abortion clinics, the first executive order made by George W. Bush as US President in 2001 was to block and halt abortion funds for worldwide family planning.

[10] Authors such as: Ainslie and Feltey (1992); Anderson (2000); Arnup (1988, 1989, 1995); Bouvard (1994); Collins (1991,1994); Crawford (1987); Dally (1982); Glenn et al. (1994); Gordon (1990); Grupo Feminista Miercoloes (1980); Hill (1987); Hoffnung (1989); Knowles and Cole (1990); Lewin (1994); Lorde (1987); Maroney (1985); McMahon (1995); Polikoff (1987); Pollack (1987, 1990); Richardson (1993); Rowland and Thomas (1996); Shaw (1994); Thurer (1994); and Wearing (1984) deal with the personal experiences of mothers.

volumes generally addressed the relation of mothering to patriarchal society, biological

theories of mothering and pro-natalism (Dixon, 1991:179).

Writings reflecting an increasing interest in the realities and experiences of

women whose voices remain silenced and whose experiences are marginalized continued

to be published in the latter years of the 1990s.[11] Some of these works were critical of the

limitations of previous feminist theories of motherhood, arguing that the realities and

experiences of non-white women, lesbians and working-class women have been

misrepresented or even ignored.[12] Focus was placed on the various connections between

children and mothers whose specific realities, life circumstances and situations were

different from the experiences and realities of white, middle-class, heterosexual women.

Reflecting the diversity of mothering experiences, this scholarship explored the realities

of mothering for single or lone mothers, lesbian mothers, mothers with disabilities and

mothers of various racial ethnicities.[13] The contribution of the voices and experiences of

marginalized mothers subsequently broadened the research field and strengthened

feminist theorizing of mothering and motherhood.[14] Publications and scholarship

specifically addressing the interconnection between feminism and mothering remained

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[11] Coll et al. (1998:6) define marginalization as "the social phenomenon of being diminished and devalued in comparison to others, or of having one's ideas, feelings, practices, or actions rendered less valid or useful in relation to a dominant ideal."

[12] See, for example, Mothering: Ideology, experience, and agency edited by Glenn , Chang and Forcey.

[13] Collins (1994:62) defines racial ethnic mothers as women who have been targets of racism and who "experience solidarity with men involved in struggles against racism."

[14] Bouvard (1994); Coll et al. (1998); Glenn et al. (1994); Reddy et al. (1994) and Segura (1994) provide excellent examples of scholarship in these areas, as do various editions of *The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering.*

absent from feminist scholarship until 1990.

I. Theoretical Foundations

During the 1970s feminist theorists were engaged in an extensive analysis of

patriarchy.[15] While patriarchy has been defined as "government by the father or eldest

member of the family; a family, tribe or community so organized" since 1632 (Oxford

English Dictionary, 1971:2099),[16] feminist theorists clarified their understanding of

patriarchy by looking at the different ways in which it works within various conditions.[17]

In trying to understand and explain patriarchy, Rich and other feminists radically

simplified it in order to draw the outlines of a different structure of power than had been

previously acknowledged. They theorized that patriarchy is a more complex social system

than originally supposed; patriarchy is based on social relations through which men

dominate, exploit and oppress women, with the household form of patriarchy merely

being one aspect or expression of patriarchy (Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1993:449).

Like Gerder Lerner (1986), Rich (1986) provides a historical discussion about the

construction of patriarchy in Of Woman Born, while also developing an analysis of

patriarchy by demonstrating the role mothers play in maintaining and perpetuating it in

their mothering. By placing women as mothers at the centre of feminist investigation and

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[15] See, for example, Daly (1973) and Millet (1970).

[16] Notions of patriarchy have been evident since the time of the early Romans, who referred to the rule of the father as Patria Potestas (Maime, 1954:81).

[17] This practice has continued since the 1970s. For example, theorizing of patriarchy has moved beyond early theories that held men alone responsible for patriarchy and for women's oppression to a recognition that patriarchy also constructs and controls most men.

by declaring motherhood a patriarchal institution, Rich significantly changed the direction of feminist thinking and scholarship about mothering and motherhood. It is for this reason, and for the contributions she has made to the development of feminist theorizing on motherhood and mothering, that I focus on her work.

i.   Adrienne Rich's <u>Of Woman Born</u>

<u>Of Woman Born</u> was published at a time when a number of feminists had begun to use this new and distinctive approach of placing women at the centre of inquiry to address the question of differences between women and men. Hester Eisenstein (1983: xi-xii), for example, notes that:

> Instead of being considered the source of women's oppression, these differences were now judged to contain the seeds of women's liberation. . . . The woman-centered perspective located specific virtues in the historical and psychological experience of women. Instead of seeking to minimize the polarization between masculine and feminine, it sought to isolate and define those aspects of female experience that were potential sources of strength and power for women, and, more broadly, of a new blueprint for social change.

Biological differences between women and men were no longer considered to be at the root of the subordination of women. Instead, some feminists began to concentrate on the social construction of differences as a force in women's oppression. This new theorizing was critical of the previously held account of autonomy – understood as equality with men – for being patriarchal and damaging to the nurturing ties that women as primary caregivers have with their children (Everingham, 1994:3-4). Feminists were beginning to realize that:

In rejecting the hegemonic patriarchal construction of femininity whole hog, women were also led to deny the importance of motherhood as such and to devalue any specialized skills or values associated with this admittedly limited sphere of feminine practice. (Maroney, 1985:42)

With this in mind, some feminists began to probe "the social and subjective meanings of motherhood" (Ross, 1995:397). Instead of throwing out the baby with the bath water, these feminists began to look at both the everyday experiences and the social construction of mothering. In countering the call that women's autonomy be equated with childlessness, this theorizing critically investigated the realities and experiences of motherhood and mothering from the perspective of mothers. Consequently 'maternal revivalism,' or the emphasis on motherhood as a source of power and pleasure for women, became popular during the late 1970s and early1980s (Gordon, 1990:42). Placing the experience of women at the centre of her inquiry allowed Rich to focus the disjunction between women's perspectives on mothering and society's expectations and limits. By taking seriously what women say, Rich (1986) was able to make the arguments that patriarchy has alienated women from themselves, from their own power and from the power of their procreative capacity and that centuries of patriarchal rule have shaped motherhood into an oppressive institution.[18]

a)   **Motherhood as Institution**

According to Rich (1986:274-5), motherhood is an institution that cannot be touched or seen because there is "no symbolic architecture, no visible embodiment of authority, power, or of potential or actual violence." The real and harmful stresses of the

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[18] Rothman (1989:26-27) also makes this argument.

institution of motherhood are nevertheless felt by women in various locations:

> Rape and its aftermath; marriage as economic dependence, as the guarantee to the man of "his" children; the theft of childbirth from women; the concept of the "illegitimacy" of a child born out of wedlock; the laws regulating contraception and abortion; the cavalier marketing of dangerous birth control devices; the denial that work done by women at home is part of "production"; the chaining of women in links of love and guilt; the absence of social benefits for mothers; the inadequacy of child-care facilities in most parts of the world; the unequal pay women receive as wage-earners, forcing them often into dependence on a man; the solitary confinement of "full-time motherhood"; the token nature of fatherhood, which gives a man rights and privileges over children toward whom he assumes minimal responsibility; the psychoanalytic castigation of the mother; the pediatric assumption that the mother is inadequate and ignorant; the burden of emotional work borne by women in the family – all these are connecting fibers of this invisible institution, and they determine our relationship to our children whether we like to think so or not. (Rich, 1986:275-6)

Rich argued that while the institution of motherhood is invisible, it is nevertheless tangible to women. Women are aware of the restrictions placed upon them and of the punishment for not staying within the bounds of the prescribed ideal of motherhood.

Rich's analysis of motherhood as a social institution has been a pivotal point for feminist theorizing of motherhood and mothering. Many feminist theorists from the early 1980s onward followed Rich's initial theorizing and conducted careful historical and sociological work to demonstrate how motherhood is an institution.[19] Other feminist theorists addressed the patriarchal control of women and mothers in psychology, medicine, popular culture, literature and social policy.[20] Dialogue and research exploring

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[19] See for example, Arnup (1990, 1994), Barrett (1988), Kaplan (1992, 1993), Lewis (1990) and Ursel (1992).

[20] See Apple (1995); Arnup (1994); Badinter (1986); Dally (1982); Davin (1978); Glen et al. (1994); Lewis (1980); Oakley (1986); Richardson (1993); Rothman (1987); Schutze (1987); Thurer (1994); Weiss (1977) for detailed discussions on the social construction of patriarchal motherhood, historically and

numerous myths, ideologies and social policies that support the institution of motherhood have also been influenced by Rich's work.[21]

What is significant here that Rich theorizes motherhood to be an institution and that this analysis became important to feminist research, assumptions and theorizing around mothering and motherhood. Central to understanding women's experiences of mothering, then, is recognizing that motherhood is not simply bearing and/or caring for children, but rather the culmination of social structures and meanings that create conditions and thus prescribe and shape the circumstances of women's lives.

Motherhood and mothering are socially constructed, although different women may experience them differently. Women are not free to mother in ways they may consider suitable or appropriate for their children. Rather, women mother within socially prescribed ideals and conditions that are often restrictive and damaging. Constructed through and by the development of other institutions (such as the gendered economy, religion, business, medicine, education, law and the media), motherhood is patriarchal. The family and socialization within the family also contribute to sustaining the social construction and practice of motherhood.

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currently.

[21] See, for example, Anderson (2000); Barrett (1988); Collins (1991); Crawford (1987); Dally (1982); Davies and Welsh (1986); Ferguson (1989); Gieve (1987); Glenn et al. (1994); Gordon (1990); Grupo Feminista Miercoloes (1980); Hill (1987); Hoffnung (1989); Kline (2000); Knowles and Cole (1990); Lorde (1987); Maroney (1985); Oakley (1986); Pollack (1990); Richardson (1993); Thurer (1994); Ursel (1992) and Wearing (1984).

b)   Heterosexuality, Motherhood and Patriarchy

Although the patriarchal family unit has taken many shapes, the man – the father – is always in a position of power over the other members of the family, ensuring male power over females and children.[22] According to Rich (1986:60), the patriarchal individual family unit – which originated with the idea of property and the male desire to see one's property forwarded on to one's biological descendants – is at the core of patriarchy. Rich (1986:64) submits that "through the control of the mother, man assures himself of possession of his children; through control of his children, man insures the disposition of his patrimony and the safe passage of his soul after death." The present-day patriarchal family which developed "at the crossroads of sexual possession, property ownership, and the desire to transcend death" (Rich, 1986:61) is characterized by

> its supernaturalizing of the penis, its division of labor by gender, its emotional, physical, and material possessiveness, its ideal of monogamous marriage until death (and its severe penalties for adultery by the wife), and the 'illegitimacy' of a child born outside wedlock, the economic dependency of women, the unpaid domestic services of the wife, the obedience of women and children to male authority, the imprinting and continuation of heterosexual roles. (Rich, 1986:61)

The patriarchal family is therefore a model of male control of females and children.

According to Rich (1986:57):

> Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

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[22] Lerner (1986) discusses in detail the creation of patriarchy and the link between compulsory pregnancy and motherhood and the oppression of women. Rothman (1989) also addresses the role of patriarchy in motherhood.

Patriarchy requires women to be heterosexual beings who reproduce the human species within the patriarchal family unit, with maternity and sexuality being channelled to serve patriarchal and male interests.[23] Rich (1986:43) asserts that:

> Patriarchy could not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality in their institutional forms; therefore they have to be treated as axioms, as 'nature' itself, not open to question except where, from time to time and place to place, 'alternative life-styles' for certain individuals are tolerated.

The institutions of the patriarchal family, of motherhood and of heterosexuality depend upon the subordination of women and children.[24]

c)   Internalizing Patriarchal Power

Due to their societal position, women learn to internalize patriarchal forms of power that often link power with maleness, with the use of force or with both. Women experience patriarchal "power over others" as victims of men's power and/or as appendages to that power as wives and/or mothers. Rich (1986:45) argues that women as mothers come to serve the interests of patriarchy by exemplifying "religion, social conscience, and nationalism" in one person. Patriarchal motherhood demands that women imprint their children with patriarchal values in the early years of the mother-child relationship through to the later years when they encourage children to move beyond the mothering circle to participate in other patriarchal institutions. For Rich (1986:61):

Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence,

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[23] I recognize that men, too, are conscripted by patriarchy and forced to act on behalf of patriarchy, just as women are conscripted and forced to act on behalf of motherhood.

[24] See Rich (1980) for a fuller discussion of the institution of heterosexuality.

imprinting future adults with patriarchal values even in those early years when the mother-child relationship might seem most individual and private; it has also assured through ritual and tradition that the mother shall cease, at a certain point, to hold the child – in particular the son – in her orbit.

Women learn to feel and exercise their power within this patriarchal model and to use their authority as mothers to control children. Rich (1986:70) asserts that because the patriarchal construction of power is "power over others," women never gain power without indirect attachment to a male.[25] Women's power within patriarchy is gained through women's participation within heterosexuality and the patriarchal family unit. Institutional motherhood, Rich (1986:61) contends, reinforces the conservatism of motherhood and renews male power.

d)   Motherhood as Experience and Institution

While motherhood is oppressive for women, Rich asserts that it is not all-encompassing and that the powerlessness that mothers feel is not absolute. She shows, through her own accounts of pain and suffering, joy and tenderness, that mothers can break the silence and speak of the mixture of feelings they have for their children. For example, Rich (1986:279) states:

> What is astonishing, what can give us enormous hope and belief in a future in which the lives of women and children shall be mended and rewoven by women's hands, is all that we have managed to salvage, of ourselves, for our children, even within the destructiveness of the institution: the tenderness, the passion, the trust in our instincts, the evocation of a courage we did not know we owned, the detailed apprehension of another human existence, the full realization of the cost and precariousness of life. The mother's battle for her child – with sickness, with poverty, with war,

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[25] Other feminists, such as Bishop (1994) and Kuyek (1990), have further developed theorizing of "power over."

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with all the forces of exploitation and callousness that cheapen human life – needs to become a common human battle, waged in love and in the passion for survival. But for this to happen, the institution of motherhood must be destroyed.

Women's potential relationship to the powers of reproduction, Rich (1986:280) posits, is the source of energy and strategy that will destroy institutionalized motherhood and therefore liberate women as mothers; patriarchy will change as the institution of motherhood is abolished. Motherhood, therefore, has two meanings:

> ... one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential–and all women–shall remain under male control (emphasis in original. Rich, 1986:13).

Through claiming the knowledge of their own experiences, women are becoming aware of the dual meaning of motherhood and conscious of alternatives and resistance.

e)   The Significance of Rich's Work

This argument – that the relationships women have with both their reproduction and with their children are housed within but not completely determined by patriarchal motherhood – is revolutionary. Contrary to what some feminists had previously argued,[26] Rich shows how biological reproduction need not be perceived as fundamentally oppressive to women. Rather, it is the social construction of women's reproductive power and the configuration of her relationships with her children and family that are burdensome and overbearing. Rich theorizes that to destroy motherhood , women did not necessarily have to abolish mothering. Instead, they could challenge the oppressive conditions of motherhood through their power as mothers in their relationships with their

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[26] Most notably Firestone (1970).

children and with others.

Building on the work of other theorists, Rich engaged a reciprocal development of theory. For example, she commented on and drew attention to other theorists working within the field, even though she may have disagreed with aspects of those theories.[27] Reflecting on the insights of other scholars and her own knowledge, Rich develops an analysis of how the oppression of women as mothers actually works. Part of the location of power in mothering is the potential, the imaginary, the possible. In un-covering the complexity of motherhood, Rich shows how the massive structures regulating women as mothers coincide with women's strength and perseverance to resist and counter those restrictions. Rich provides a new vision of motherhood: motherhood need not be completely oppressive to women, it can be a place of resistance, empowerment and social change.

In spite of Rich's early contribution to feminist theorizing and research on motherhood, only recently are researchers developing their analyses of the importance of heterosexuality to social constructs of motherhood.[28] Few scholars have paid attention to and/or developed Rich's analysis of the potential of motherhood as a site of both women's strength and women's resistance to patriarchy. It is worth considering why the development of Rich's theorizing in Of Woman Born has been so slow in coming.

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[27] Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (1963) and Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex (1970) are examples of theoretical positions that Rich builds upon.

[28] Many lesbian feminists have taken on the challenge of giving voice to the experiences, struggles and joys of lesbian mothering (see, for example, Arnup, 1995; Griffin and Mulholland, 1997; Lewin, 1993; Nelson, 1996; Wells, 1997). Some also address the role of compulsory heterosexuality within the institution of motherhood, such as Crawford (1987), Polikoff (1987) and Pollack (1990).

Perhaps some of the answers emerge when we look at the research that has followed Rich's work.

Feminists have generally concentrated on the form of the family and the role of mothers within that form rather than attending to the interrelationships of mothers with people within the family. The family has been viewed primarily as a patriarchal institution, an approach that overlooks and has yet to focus on the complexities of personal relationships within it.[29] This raises the question of whether we can have a patriarchal family form that does not have patriarchal social relationships.

Limited research into the realities of women's experiences in motherhood may also be related to the scarcity of venues, until this time, for women to talk about mothering and motherhood. Women may not have had the opportunity to speak about what they do in their mothering and to build on the knowledge and research from that talk. In order to survive, they have got on with the necessary work of raising children, struggling against a constructed motherhood with their own practices of resistance, without necessarily speaking about it. Moreover, many women may not have been asked about their experiences of motherhood and mothering. Therefore, their voices are missing from the research into these areas. In order to expand upon the work of Rich and other feminist theorists, researchers need to ask women about their realities, experiences and encounters while mothering. Through developing methodological and theoretical

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[29] While feminists such as Benjamin (1988), Chodorow (1978) and Dinnerstein (1976) have addressed the relationship of mothers to children, their focus has been primarily on psychoanalytical theories of human development and not the emancipatory potential of the relationship between mother and child for women, children or feminism.

means to retrieve women's replies as knowledge, researchers ensure that the authority of women can be recorded, recognised and shared.

In their analyses of motherhood, feminist theorists Sally Crawford (1987), Nancy Polikoff (1987) and Sandra Pollack (1990) address the significance of heterosexuality to patriarchal constructions of motherhood and explore the ways some feminist lesbian mothers perceive their mothering to be political work because they are challenging narrow concepts of motherhood. Their findings establish that mothering can be a location where lesbians feel empowerment and create positive alternatives through confronting erroneous and harmful myths about themselves. Through using language that identifies their relationship with their children and their partners, lesbian mothers demonstrate the ways in which they question assumptions of heterosexuality. Using the term "comothering," for example, makes visible and acknowledges the work of both mothers involved in raising children together.

Likewise, Patricia Hill Collins (1987, 1989, 1991, 1994) adds to feminist theorizing of motherhood as both a social construct and an experience in her analysis of the "motherwork" that African-American women engage in. Through addressing the experiences of racial ethnic mothers, Collins demonstrates the significance of the contributions these women make to feminist theorizing on motherhood and mothering. She contends that the experiences of "racial ethnic women committed to feminist struggle aimed to distinguish their history and issues from those of middle-class, white women" add to our understanding of how the work of mothering can be a source of empowerment for both women and children (Collins, 1994:62). These mothers, for

example, teach their children how to thrive as racial ethnic people within a white-supremacist culture without giving up their identity, heritage or self-worth.

While their approaches to motherhood vary according to their sexual and racial ethnic locations and identities, these women nevertheless contest assumptions about mothers and mothering that are proscribed by patriarchal motherhood. The contributions that Collins (1987, 1989, 1991, 1994), Crawford (1987), Polikoff (1987) and Pollack (1990) make to the feminist analysis of motherhood provide theoretical insights for my research. They document how mothers understand and challenge the patriarchal construction of motherhood and how mothers have created space to raise children in ways that are politically challenging. Mothers, for example, may use specific language when referring to themselves as mothers that challenges assumptions about who and what mothers are. Mothers may openly support their children to be who they want to be (regardless of race, gender and sexuality) or deliberately teach their children to analyze the world in which they live.

ii. Heterosexuality, the Institution of Motherhood and the Relevance of Lesbian Mothering to Feminist Theories of Motherhood

Lesbians reside in a society that is homophobic and heterosexist. They encounter, on a daily basis, stereotypes and myths that include the belief that lesbians are sexually maladjusted, promiscuous and liable to harm children sexually and that children of lesbian parents grow up having confused sex-role identification and will be gay or lesbian (Pollack, 1987:319-320). These and other stereotypes are often held by and acted upon by

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members of the judicial system,[30] and can be seen, as Polikoff (1987:328) notes, under US law where many non-parents, including grandparents, have obtained custody from lesbian mothers. The message seems to be that lesbian mothers who wish to gain and retain custody of their children are forced to keep their lesbianism hidden and pass as heterosexual women. Polikoff (1987:49), for example, recounts how, in custody cases during the 1980s, "the political activist, the outspoken sexual outlaw, the proud lesbian, and the butch will all lose. The mother who goes straight will win." Ellen Lewin (1993:192) speaks of the lesbian mother who realizes that motherhood allows her to claim "membership in the group known as 'woman' on the same basis as heterosexual single mothers." Katherine Arnup (1988; 1989; 1994; 1995) and Ruthanne Robson (1992; 1992a) also provide evidence of the constrains on lesbian mothers to stay in the closet if they want to win or retain custody of their children.

Additionally, lesbians feel pressure to conform to compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood as most family members assume that they are heterosexual and will be mothers.[31] Rich (1980) coined the term "compulsory heterosexuality" to refer to the social ideologies, policies and practices that assume that people are heterosexual, and that not to be is deviant and wrong.[32] Like many heterosexual women, lesbians talk about the demand reflected in the media and popular culture for women to mother, the influence of

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[30] See, for example, Arnup (1988); Crawford (1987); Polikoff (1987); Pollack (1990) and Robson (1992, 1992a).

[31] Lesbian mothers and gay men continued to struggle to have same-sex parents acknowledged under Provincial legislation in Manitoba at the end of the year 2001 (Mitchell, 2001).

[32] Rich (1980) posits that there are at least eight methods by which male power over women enforces and maintains women's sexuality as heterosexual.

the "biological clock" and the growing industry of new reproductive technologies. Polikoff (1987:49-50), a lesbian mother, verifies this when she describes how she chose to have a child partly because of a desire to be "normal," to have something more in common with other women and not to have to live on the margins of society. Lewin (1993) also found these motives expressed by some of the lesbian mothers she interviewed.

For various reasons – such as isolation, safety, internalized homophobia, financial concerns, issues of alternative insemination and dealing with families of origin and friends – lesbian mothers are often not explicitly open about their lesbianism and, thus, pass as heterosexual mothers.[33] This action hides both the presence and realities of lesbian mothers and families, and ensures that at least, temporarily, lesbian mothers and their family units continue to be constructed and perceived as heterosexual. The constructions are complex because of the daily negotiations of regulatory regimes for people whose energy and power are being regulated. Even the perception that they are heterosexual is doubtful, full of suspicion. Lesbians may produce elaborate stories to conceal their identity or remain silent about their private lives in conversations with coworkers. Patriarchal notions of family and motherhood are therefore perpetuated within the lives of women and their contradictions and regulations remain unchallenged. Passing as a heterosexual mother, Polikoff (1987) notes, continues to promote stereotypes of lesbians and thus weakens support for those individual mothers and for feminist communities.

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[33] See, for example, Crawford (1987); Pharr (1997); Polikoff (1987) and Pollack (1990).

The invisibility and secrecy that lesbian families carry out for their self-preservation are related to problems and stress occurring for individuals within those families. Crawford (1987:207) notes that lesbian mothers must not only deal with their own hardship of living within a heterosexist and homophobic culture, they must also help their children negotiate the painful dilemmas and experiences the homophobic culture forces upon the children of lesbians.[34] Raising children in isolation and without the support of others only adds to the secrecy, invisibility and stress experienced by members of lesbian families. Crawford (1987:202-203) notes that:

> When the relationship between [lesbian] parents is unrecognized, either because they choose to hide it, or because others choose to ignore it, then no matter how defined the system may be internally, ex-lovers, ex-husbands, and members of the couple's family of origin can often walk in and out at will, as though the family unit does not exist.

Motherhood does not function differently simply because lesbians are mothers. Paradoxically, conventional expectations of motherhood remains intact even when the mothers are lesbians, but function differently from the perspectives of the women: there are particular contradictions and patterns which present identifiable double binds.

Some lesbian mothers deal with the realities of living in homophobic and heterosexist cultures by openly mothering as lesbians. Using the term "comother" as an identity and definition, Polikoff (1987:327) argues, helps incorporate the roles, responsibilities and realities of lesbian mothering into everyday language. The adoption and use of "comother" may both assist lesbian women when dealing with issues and dilemmas of "comothering" and provide lesbian mothering couples with an alternative

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[34] Ainslie and Feltey (1992) also address this aspect of lesbian mothering in their research.

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model to heterosexual families. Having a definition and framework of "comother," theorizes Polikoff, benefits lesbians who are dealing with the judicial system regarding family matters because it makes them visible. Demanding the practice of legal parenthood for women under the law and in legislation pushes for recognition of legal parenthood for both mothers, based on a definition of comother, and thus challenges patriarchal notions of motherhood and harmful stereotypes about lesbian mothers. Polikoff (1987:328) maintains that this new legal definition may assist women to retain relationships and rights to their children (should the relationship end) and may also prevent lesbian families from being torn apart. This strategy of legal recognition for lesbian comothers thus aids lesbian family members with legal concerns and presents an alternative to heterosexual family forms.

Women who mother openly as lesbians encourage opportunities for public discussion where perceptions about lesbians and lesbian mothers can be challenged. Polikoff (1987:330) posits that:

> The strength and value to all lesbians of some lesbians choosing to have children is that we mothers are pushed to be out to the world, that we challenge at home and in public the transmission of patriarchal values, and that we offer the opportunity to explore the significance of equal power between two mothers. In our time, we may be able to offer our children significantly different models from those that are patriarchal, because we can build a community of lesbian families that will include substantial numbers of women who have chosen motherhood outside the context of heterosexuality. Realization of this potential depends on our resistance to the pressure to blend our families and our community into mainstream heterosexual society.

Lesbian mothers struggle against the material conditions of frustration, fear, invisibility, inappropriateness etc. in their daily attempts to reposition heterosexism both

inside and outside their homes. As they do so, they bring into view some of the

"*potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and children..." that

Rich (1986:13, emphasis in original,) theorizes.

Lesbian mothers live in, and are in tension with, a homophobic and heterosexist

society that holds and supports patriarchal notions of motherhood. Like Rich (1986), who

imagined an alternative to patriarchal motherhood, these open lesbian parents envision

and live their lives as mothers in ways that defy conventional notions of motherhood

within a culture that promotes heterosexism and homophobia. They know that social

change is possible through renouncing patriarchal constructions of mothering within

motherhood. Through their relationships with their children and support from their

communities, lesbian mothers are empowered to live their lives and raise their children in

ways that do not replicate ideals and practices of motherhood held by mainstream society.

Lesbian mothers demonstrate how motherhood does not have to be structured or

based upon narrow and harmful socially prescribed ideas. Through 'comothering,'

creating 'families of choice' and being 'out' as lesbian mothers, they question restraining

assumptions and practices of motherhood. They provide a vision of motherhood and

mothering that is different from one based on compulsory heterosexuality and the

internalization of patriarchal power over others. Though motherhood is shaped by

heterosexism and homophobia, lesbian mothers have nevertheless transformed elements

of mothering to suit their personal identities. They may, for instance, live in 'chosen

families.' These examples draw attention to the space some lesbian mothers carve out

within motherhood through their acts of resistance and creativity within mothering.

iii.   Patricia Hill Collins

The work of Patricia Hill Collins has been influenced by and instrumental in

furthering Rich's understanding of motherhood as institution and experience.[35] Her

analysis and writing is informed by a Black feminist perspective which she defines as "a

process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist

vision of community" (Collins, 1991:39). Feminist writings on motherhood, Collins

(1994:62) believes, have "emerged in specific intellectual and political contexts" with

theories appearing to be universal when they are actually "partial perspectives reflecting

the white, middle-class context in which their creators live." These feminist theories

commonly assume that a relative degree of economic security exists for mothers and their

children and that women enjoy racial privilege to see themselves "primarily as individuals

in search of personal autonomy, instead of members of a racial ethnic group struggling for

power"(Collins, 1994:48). By shifting our attention to the varying placements of mothers

in systems of privilege (whether race, class, sexuality or age), we are able to generate

divergent understandings of the varied experiences of mothering.[36] Through examining

how African-American, Native American and Hispanic women experience motherhood

and mothering, Collins (1994) demonstrates the ways in which multiple perspectives can

uncover the multiple ways in which women experience and theorize motherhood and

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[35] Specific writings by Collins addressing the institution of motherhood are "Mammies, Matriarchs, and other Controlling Images" (1991); "Black Women and Motherhood" (1991); and "Shifting the Centre: Race, Class and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood" (1994).

[36] While Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) also address the ways in which socio-economic class influences the expectations placed on mothers and their experiences of mothering, I focus on the work of Collins because it includes an analysis of racism which is absent from that of Walkerdine and Lucey.

mothering.

a)   Motherwork

In describing and theorizing the work racial ethnic mothers in the United States do

in their mothering, Collins (1994) highlights how previous feminist theorizing on

motherhood ignored the realities of women who live in alternative family structures

and/or occupy different locations within society. In using the term 'motherwork' to

demonstrate the ways in which racial ethnic women practice their mothering, Collins

(1994:47-48) attempts to "soften the existing dichotomies in feminist theorizing about

motherhood that posit rigid distinctions between private and public, family and work, the

individual and the collective, identity as individual autonomy and identity growing from

the collective self-determination of one's group." Collins (1994:49) believes that

"specifying the contours of racial ethnic women's motherwork promises to point the way

toward richer feminist theorizing about motherhood." She cites, for example, how "the

subjective experience of mothering/motherhood is inextricably linked to the sociocultural

concern of racial ethnic communities – one does not exist without the other" (Collins,

1994:47).

> Whether because of the labor exploitation of African-American women
> under slavery and its ensuing tenant farm system, the political conquest of
> Native American women during the European acquisition of land, or
> exclusionary immigration polities applied to Asian-Americans and
> Hispanics, women of color have performed motherwork that challenges
> social constructions of work and family as separate spheres, of male and
> female gender roles as similarly dichotomized, and of the search for
> autonomy as the guiding human quest. (Collins, 1994:47)

> Working and taking responsibility for children, whether as a bloodmother

(biological mother), othermother (women who assist biological mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities) or a participant in women-centred networks are considered motherwork.[37] The motherwork of providing for the physical survival of children holds a different meaning for racial ethnic people where many children are "physically starving" with infant illness, disease and mortality rates much higher than those of middle-class white children. The incidence of poverty, drugs, violence, crime and industrial pollutants are also higher for people of racially ethnic populations (Collins,1994:49). To ensure the survival of children, mothers must guard the health of individuals and the community. But this extra work often means "the loss of individual autonomy and there is a submersion of individual growth for the benefit of the group" (Collins, 1994:50).

Collins (1994:60) theorizes that through "emphasizing the importance of self-definition, self-reliance and the necessity of demanding respect from others," mothers help to ensure the survival of children. Intentionally teaching children the realities of being a racial ethnic in a white-supremacist culture is a strategy mothers use to promote their children's identity (Collins, 1994:60).[38] Without the skills of self-reliance and one's own self-definition to survive in a sexist, racist and class-biased society, children lose their identity and their connection with their communities and become superficially assimilated into the dominant culture.

Mothers, too, struggle against being assimilated into the dominant culture. Collins

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[37] For further discussion on bloodmothers and othermothers who have traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood see Collins (1991).

[38] See Sands and Nuccia (1989), Shaw (1994) and Collins (1991) for further discussion on the socialization of Black children.

(1991:118) acknowledges:

> An ongoing tension exists between efforts to mold the institution of Black motherhood to benefit systems of race, gender and class oppression, and efforts by African-American women to define and value our own experiences with motherhood. The controlling images of the mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother and the practices they justify are designed to oppress. In contrast, motherhood can serve as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women's empowerment.[39]

The struggle by racial ethnic women for empowerment may include control over their own bodies and reproductive health; choosing whether, when and how to have children; and often resisting sterilization abuse. Maternal empowerment extends to keeping wanted children and wrestling against the systemic physical and psychological separation of mothers and children designed to disempower both individuals and communities. Maternal empowerment means combating the pervasive efforts of the dominant group to control the minds of children in the educational system, which generally uses Eurocentric perspectives and approaches in teaching that ignore the realities and denigrate the experiences of non-European people (Collins, 1994:54-55). For example, the struggles of Black mothers over bilingual education are often more about

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[39] Mammies are seen as faithful, obedient domestic servants who are "good" mothers due to their supposed inherently loving, caring and nurturing nature toward all (white) children. Black women who fail at being mammies may be labelled matriarchs. Matriarchs, allegedly aggressive and unfeminine, are "bad" mothers because they work outside the home and are believed to emasculate and push away their men, thus not providing nuclear families for their children or socializing their children properly. Black single mothers who do not work outside the home are identified as welfare mothers who are "bad" mothers because they are unwed, "lazy" and supposedly socialize their children to shun work. Welfare mothers are assumed to be overly fertile and irresponsible, as they produce "too many economically unproductive children" (Collins, 1991:77). The patriarchal response to these stereotypes is the social control of all Black women's fertility in order to ensure that they do not become matriarchs or welfare mothers. Black mothers, Collins asserts, are considered more acceptable when they remain asexual mammies who are ideally suited to being domestic servants for members of the elite dominant group.

ensuring support for the realities of African-American mothering that is grounded in a strong, dynamic and Afrocentric culture than about learning a second language (Collins, 1994:55).

Many racial ethnic women reject the separateness of the individual from the community by modelling an alternative system that treasures the connection of individuals to the common interest of the community. Collins (1991:132) contends that mothers, whether bloodmothers, othermothers or community othermothers, serve as symbols of power and empowerment, and that "community othermothers become identified as powerful figures through furthering the community's well-being."[40] Mothering for Black women, for instance, is often an affirmation of women in a society which denigrates Blackness and womanhood (Collins, 1991:137).

In some ways, Collins builds on Sara Ruddick's (1983) theory of "maternal thinking." Including the complexities of mothering for racial ethnic women and children in the theme of survival, Collins broadens Ruddick's maternal practice of preservation and growth of children. Collins' theme of identity preservation is also more fully developed (due to her analysis to racism) than Ruddick's (1983) explanation of mother's concern for the acceptance of children by the culture. Motherwork for racial ethnic women includes teaching children the realities of the world and the skills required to participate in it as well as the tools and competence needed to resist becoming subordinate to, or assimilated within, the dominant society. Collins' discussion of

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[40] A paper presented at the ARM Women as Educators conference by Arlene Edwards (1999) addresses the active presence and work of various types of mothers within Black communities in the United States.

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empowerment within motherwork adds to Ruddick's theory of maternal thinking and provides examples of how raising children with a political consciousness can assist in the development of self-assured and self-reliant children and mothers. Ruddick hints at this by noting that feminist consciousness is needed to challenge the perpetuation of patriarchy in mothering, but does not clearly specify how this is to come about.

The experience of mothering – of doing motherwork – is a source of power and empowerment for both women and children. Through observing the skills and behaviour of their mothers, and/or through direct instruction, children learn not only how to survive, but how to thrive in white-supremacist, patriarchal capitalism. They develop a consciousness and an awareness of the dominant culture that helps assure that they have a good chance of remaining alive and growing as part of their community. Mothers, too, find empowerment through responding to the needs of their children and the needs of their community; mothering affirms racial ethnic women in a society that disparages non-whites and women.

b)   The Significance of Collins' Work

Collins contributes a detailed materialist analysis of interlocking oppressions to the analysis of patriarchy. Her analyses of motherhood argues that mothering occurs within a system that is made up of various forms of interlocking oppressions. By addressing the issues of racism and class bias, Collins exposes the limitations of feminist theories of motherhood that posit motherhood as part of the binary split between public/work/ community and private/home/individual. Mothers – regardless of race, class or sexuality – live their lives across the boundaries of the public and the private and

contend with various forms of domination and oppression.

By shifting the centre of investigation from white mothers to racial ethnic mothers, Collins adds the discernment of social location to understanding motherhood as both a patriarchal creation and a personal experience. Theories of motherhood, she asserts, will continue to be partial perspectives until the diversity of mothering experiences are acknowledged and at the centre of investigation.

> Varying placement in systems of privilege, whether race, class, sexuality, or age, generates divergent experiences with motherhood; therefore, examination of motherhood and mother-as-subject from multiple perspectives should uncover rich textures of difference. Shifting the centre to accommodate this diversity promises to recontextualize motherhood and point us toward feminist theorizing that embraces difference as an essential part of commonality. (Collins, 1994:62)

III.   Research on Feminist Mothering

A few feminist scholars have taken up Collins' call to shift the centre of inquiry when investigating motherhood and mothering to accommodate diversity by focusing on the realities of feminist mothering. In the last decade of the twentieth century a handful of publications focused on this particular group of mothers. Cumulatively they provide, for the first time, evidence that feminist mothers have been concerned about and involved in challenging myths associated with motherhood. These studies also establish that feminist mothers have depended upon their feminism to assist them in their parenting and, at times, have recognized that their mothering has informed and shaped their feminist perspectives. The following section presents an analysis of how these studies have contributed to my research into the interconnection of feminism and mothering by

drawing attention to the contradictions that feminist mothers experience and the challenges they face in their parenting.

i.   Feminist Mothers

Tuula Gordon's <u>Feminist Mothers</u> (1990) was the first study specifically to explore what mothering has meant for women who identify themselves as feminist. Through interviews with fifty-two mothers living in England and Finland, Gordon analysed how feminist mothers managed to balance their feminism and their motherhood in relation to their lives as paid employees.[41] While the primary focus of the book is on the subjective experiences of feminist mothers who combine their lives in the labour force and at home, Gordon's study provides insight into two areas central to my research: how feminist mothers understand motherhood and the influence their feminism has had on their child-rearing practices. Furthermore, she seeks to identify characteristics that are common to women who define themselves as feminist mothers.

While investigating the participants' subjective experiences of mothering, Gordon found that mothers often felt tension between their experiences of mothering and conventional notions of motherhood. They recognized that motherhood is based on a narrow and limiting ideal and that the "social construction of motherhood does not encapsulate the complexity of the experience of a woman who has children" (Gordon, 1990:60). The women Gordon interviewed enjoyed a certain degree of esteem as mothers,

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[41] Throughout the book Gordon assumes that work is paid employment and not the unpaid labour women engage in while rearing and caring for children or providing other domestic labour.

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while also experiencing a great sense of responsibility for their children and conflicting feelings of both power and powerlessness. Some women sensed tension between the social codes they were expected to follow as mothers and their desire to mother differently as feminists (Gordon, 1990:62). Other participants said that they felt guilty when they were unable to balance their paid work outside the home and their time with their children in the home in ways that suited social notions of motherhood (Gordon, 1990:108).

In her brief presentation of the interpersonal relationships between mothers and their children, Gordon provides evidence of the interconnection of feminism and child-rearing practices in the lives of feminist mothers. She cites, for example, cases of mothers fostering personal decision making, individual subjectivities and self-determination in their children. According to Gordon (1990:90), their "emphasis on autonomy was connected to a general radical orientation, involving attempts to 'revision children' as subjects and considering the implications of feminism for how 'children' are constructed." These observations lead Gordon to theorize that "the need to foster autonomy in children was connected to the ideological and political outlook of the mothers" (1990:92).

Gordon also establishes that mothering for many of the women was connected to their commitment to broader political struggles. She notes, for example, how several women believed that children must have an anti-sexist and anti-racist upbringing in a "racially structured, patriarchal, capitalist society" (1990:90). Ensuring that children of mixed-heritage had an opportunity to participate in activities with other mixed-raced

children where they were supported in their diversity was a priority for a number of mothers.

In the last chapter of the book, Gordon ventures to "disentangle what exactly is 'feminist' about the women in this study" (1991:149) and attempts to define the characteristics of a feminist mother. She notes that if any particular factors are to be singled out to define feminist mothers, they would be:

> The way in which they challenge and criticize myths of motherhood; the way in which they consider it their right to work [in the labour force]; the anti-sexist (and anti-racist) way in which they try to bring up their children; the way in which they expect the fathers of their children to participate in joint everyday lives; and the way in which many of them are politically active. (Gordon, 1990:149)

While Gordon does not elaborate on these characteristics, she draws attention to the fact that we can discern common attributes and experiences of women who identify themselves as feminist. Gordon's work, in essence, provides a starting point from which to think about some of the ways in which feminist mothers may identify themselves and some of the common features they may share. Her research provides insight into the influence of personal locations on an individual's understanding of motherhood and the experience of mothering. For instance, we see how the role of wage labour influences the ways in which feminist mothers understand motherhood and their experiences of mothering. This understanding raises the question of whether the characteristics commonly shared by these women are also shared by feminist mothers who do not work for pay. Asking self-identified feminist mothers about the meaning and the development of their identity as feminists broadens our comprehension of the ways in which feminism and mothering are interconnected.

Gordon's study also brings to light some of the contradictions evident in the lives of feminist mothers. She demonstrates, for example, how particular feminist mothers are aware of the discrepancies between the social construction of motherhood and their own experiences of mothering. She theorizes that the critiques participants have of motherhood myths come from their feminist perspectives and personal analyses of motherhood. Insight into the subjective mothering experiences of women points to the ways in which the personal is political and, in this particular case, how their "political orientation has been significant in the construction of their careers" (Gordon, 1990:150). This understanding raises the question of how the political orientation of feminist mothers informs their personal experiences as mothers. Undoubtedly, there are many ways in which feminist mothers comprehend and engage in the contradictions of motherhood and mothering. Further research is required to fully explore this understanding.

Gordon's theorizing about the link between feminism and mothering provides insight into the complexity of this unique relationship. Most notably, we see how the feminism of some mothers influences the way they view motherhood and how their feminist beliefs about autonomy influence the way they interact with and educate their children. Showing how various feminist mothers view their children as subjects who can determine the course of their own lives advances our understanding of how the feminism of some mothers informs their mothering. Gordon's observation that feminist mothers comprehend the systemic stratification of people and the interconnection of oppressions in the lives of individuals on a daily basis makes visible how the political concerns of

feminist mothers are incorporated into the lives of their children. Through making the complexity of the relationships between feminism and mothering explicit, Gordon opens up our thinking about the implication of feminism for mother/child relationships. For example, are mothers able to see the influence of their feminist teaching in the development of their children? If they are, what are the implications of incorporating feminism into the parenting of children for those families and for feminism in general?

Gordon's research corroborates my personal experience of challenging concepts of motherhood I find unreasonable and my efforts to teach my child to be aware of and to critique social systems and people who discriminate on the basis of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, age, sexuality and socio-economic class. The descriptive accounts of how feminism has informed the child-rearing practices of feminist mothers confirms my assertion that feminism informs the mothering of some feminist mothers and validates my supposition that feminism and mothering are interconnected for particular feminist mothers.

ii.   **Lesbian Feminist Mothers**

Insights into the meaning of feminist mothering to women who identify

themselves as feminist mothers is found in the research of Julie Ainslie and Kathryn

Feltey (1992) who explore the meanings of motherhood and family for lesbian mothers

and show how these meanings are maintained within lesbian communities. Ainslie and

Feltey (1992:69) found that the seventeen lesbian mothers in their study uniformly

expressed a conscious attitude towards mothering that they saw as "a politicalization of

motherhood."

Participants spoke of trying to "organize their family life according to feminist

values" which often entailed "explicitly teaching their children feminist values and

principles, as well as attempting to live those values as role models to their children."

Motherhood for these women was seen as "transformative" because of the radical

potential they believe they have as lesbian feminist mothers to challenge "the

assumptions and stereotypes of patriarchal, heterosexist society" and "re-create

motherhood" according to their own "feminist vision" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:65).

Families became "families of choice" where membership was "achieved, not ascribed,

based on self-identification and mutual agreement rather than biological or legal

definitions of family" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:82).

Mothering for this select group of lesbian feminist mothers was a way to "effect

social change by raising politically aware, open-minded children and to direct change

outward into the world" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:69). They believed their lesbian

identities strongly influenced their mothering and their commitment to teaching their

children about oppression and inequality. Knowing that their children would learn about

the realities of oppression from being the children of lesbians, these mothers openly

discussed their own, and their children's, experiences of homophobia. They taught their

children feminist values and principles, provided them with role models, and lived

openly as lesbians with support from other lesbians in their communities. For example,

they replaced the self-sacrificing mother of the patriarchal family with the understanding

and practice that a mother who cared for her own needs is essential to caring for the

needs of children. Family members were seen and understood to be individuals in their

own right, rather than people moulded to take on specific roles within the family (Ainslie

& Feltey, 1992:70). Lesbian feminist mothers who had more egalitarian relationships

with partners and family members provided their children and others with alternative and

non-traditional role models of mothering and motherhood.[42]

Living openly as lesbian feminist mothers is not without struggle because, as

Ainslie and Feltey (1992:64) note, the identities of mother and lesbian are seen by

heterosexual society to be in opposition to each other. Many of the participants in the

study spoke of the tensions and challenges of being openly lesbian mothers in a society

that has internalized dominant ideas about who a mother is and how she should mother.

Some mothers talked about their fear of having their children removed from them

because of their sexual identity. Others addressed the difficulty of finding language that

accurately conveyed their family relationships and the roles of the women as co-parents

since there is no single word that conveys the relationship of a woman's female partner to

her/their child. This conundrum has been creatively addressed. One couple in the study

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[42] See Ainslie and Feltey (1992); Hill (1987); Lorde (1987) and Pollack (1987) for further discussion on
the socialization of children of lesbian mothers.

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created a language of their own to refer to the two mothers in the family, while others used terms like "co-mother," "co-parent" and "other-mother" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:75).

Lesbian feminist mothers often find support for their mothering from other lesbian feminist mothers or lesbian communities. In one instance, an "extended lesbian family" rallied around a mother who was at risk of losing her child to its father, while in other instances lesbian communities have provided childcare at community events (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:73). Members of lesbian communities also play an important role in legitimizing the role of "co-parents" in the lives of children and in language, thereby acknowledging and validating lesbian family structures. This is not to say, however, that conflict between lesbian feminist mothers and their families and members of lesbian communities is not a reality. Several participants spoke of the difficulties they had when their feminism did not concur with the feminism of the other women in their community. Some expressed discontent with the restrictiveness of the "normative functions of lesbian networks" noting they "felt that they could be kicked out of a family network for being politically incorrect, for doing something in contradiction to the feminist principles that were current in their group" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:79-80).

Most respondents, however, "expressed a strong belief in the transformative power of their alternative family structure, supported by the communities in which they live" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:80). They believed, for example, that they successfully defied elements of contemporary motherhood by "organizing themselves into 'extended family networks' that perform many of the same functions as networks based on marriage

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and kinship" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:81). Creating 'families of choice,' they concluded, has been an effective strategy in providing "both refuge from the hostile world, and a way to transform that world" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:81).

Some lesbian feminist mothers understand motherhood, as Rich (1986) theorizes, to be both a restrictive social location and "a positive forum for social change" where they can "actively attempt to socialize their children into a feminist world view and to give their children explicitly feminist values" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:81). Within motherhood, they are able to "forge new forms of the family, in which the institution serves the individual" (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:72). Mothering, then, is a place where lesbian feminist mothers feel empowered to break old patterns and to form new ones. Creating motherhood as a site of resistance to patriarchy and heterosexism also means that lesbian feminist mothers consciously and deliberately teach their children that it is possible to challenge patriarchal norms and values. These lesbian feminist mothers saw themselves as teachers who were in a position to educate their children about the world. Through direct discussion with their children and through role modelling, they actively attempted to socialize their children into a feminist world view and to give their children explicitly feminist values (Ainslie & Feltey, 1992:81). Lesbian feminist mothers believed that they were able to create positive social change in the lives of their children (and others) through teaching them about the world around them from a feminist perspective.

While Ainslie and Feltey's study focused primarily on how lesbian feminist mothers define motherhood and the dynamics of family within lesbian communities, much of the discussion around these two areas provides insight into how some feminist

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mothers viewed motherhood and mothering and how they saw themselves as teachers of their children. Because of their feminist perspectives, lesbian mothers were critical of the restrictive nature and conditions of motherhood – specifically the expectation that mothers be heterosexual and self-sacrificing for their children and their families. They also saw how their roles as mothers included a commitment to teaching their children about oppression and inequality. Their own experiences of discrimination because they were lesbian and feminist informed their mothering to the degree that they could openly discuss their feminist values and principles with their children.

Understanding how lesbian feminist mothers comprehend motherhood, how they view themselves as teachers and how they educate their children significantly contributes to the growing feminist literature on motherhood. Their particular experiences as lesbians and feminists informs their understanding of motherhood and their mothering practices. Arising from this insight are the questions of how the specific locations of feminist mothers inform their analysis of motherhood and how their positioning influences the ways in which they understand being mothers to their children.

This research also suggests that feminist mothers are not only engaged in theorizing and critiquing motherhood, they are using that analysis to create different ways of mothering. It further suggests that feminist mothers accept their position as teachers to their children and consciously educate them about the world in ways that are informed by their feminist analysis. I develop the concept of mothers as educators in the latter chapters of the dissertation.

iii.   Feminist Mothers Mothering Sons

Featured in a special edition of the British journal *Feminism and Psychology* (1996), "Mothering Sons: A Crucial Feminist Challenge" addresses the lived realities of feminist mothers raising sons and uncovers the interconnection between feminism and mothering in the lives of particular feminist mothers. Of interest to authors Robyn Rowland and Alison Thomas is how lesbian and heterosexual feminist mothers who live in Western, English-speaking countries have responded to the challenge of raising sons in efforts to "create a generation of men who can live in a world where women – feminist or not – will no longer put up with the old version of masculinity" (Rowland & Thomas, 1996:93).

The article is developed from the responses of twenty-five feminist mothers to questions on their initial reactions of discovering the sex of their child, how others (especially feminist friends) reacted to the sex of their child, how they felt about their son(s) now, what they felt had been particular rewards and/or difficulties of having a son, how having a son had affected their feminist politics, and how their feminism had affected the experience of mothering a son (Rowland & Thomas, 1996:99). Thirteen of the participants provided written personal accounts, while twelve contributed to the research by supplying written responses to short, open-ended questionnaires.

Evidence of the interconnection of feminism and mothering in the lives of these feminist mothers is indisputable. A number of women spoke of being consciously critical of and resistant to patriarchal culture and how, as feminist mothers, they encouraged their sons not to replicate attributes of masculinity that were harmful to themselves or to

others. This practice was so common among participants that Rowland and Thomas (1996:147) identified it as a theme among respondents and named it "Sabotaging Masculinity?" Some mothers had difficulty managing the tension they felt between their feminist principles to raise sensitive and caring children and their fear of jeopardizing their sons' ability to be accepted by their peer groups. One mother, for example, admitted that she had "worried about the psychological impact of a domineering mother" on her son, and another spoke of the difficulty she had encouraging her son "to be sensitive and caring, whilst knowing his peers might then see him as a 'softie' or wimp" (Rowland & Thomas, 1996:147).

Knowing their sons had to live their own lives in a patriarchal society that valued a "brutalizing masculinity," feminist mothers often worried about their feminist influence on the ability of their sons to develop a confident self-image of themselves as potential men (Rowland & Thomas, 1996:148). At times, mothers found it difficult to challenge aspects of masculinity they considered deplorable without making their sons vulnerable to heavy criticism and alienation. They recognized that by constantly contesting masculinity they ran the risk of their sons rejecting all attributes, including positive ones, associated with masculinity (Rowland & Thomas, 1996:148). One mother, for instance, noted that at times she felt the need to "bite her tongue" because she was fearful that too much intervention would be damaging to her son (Rowland & Thomas, 1996:149). In their discussion, Rowland and Thomas reveal how some mothers draw on their feminism in their attempt to raise their sons in ways that do not replicate patriarchal standards of masculinity.

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The discussion of feminist mothers balancing their feminism with child-rearing practices acknowledges and advances our understanding of how feminism informs mothering practices of feminists and, conversely, how mothering shapes the implementation and practice of their feminism. Under the theme "Putting Feminism Into Practice," Rowland and Thomas (1996:149) comment on how most of the respondents spoke of the lessons they had learned from mothering sons and how their feminism had been altered because of this experience. The majority of women involved in the study "felt their experience of bringing up sons had itself affected their feminism," with a number of mothers remarking on how having sons taught them to see, for the first time, "the complexity and hazards of growing up male" and to understand "how fragile masculinity was" (Rowland & Thomas, 1996:149). Some mothers noted that their feminism became more inclusive after having sons and that their feminism was no longer purely women-centred but had been broadened to also include children and men (Rowland & Thomas, 1996:150). Two mothers spoke of how mothering sons directly taught them about feminist theory in relation to men. One recognized that her son taught her the connections between gender roles and social behaviours, while the other credited her son for making her "think hard about feminist theory" because she was constantly having to "try to understand the cultural expectations of being a man" (Rowland & Thomas, 1996:149-150). These observations add to an understanding of the ways in which personal experiences, such as parenting sons, are connected with theoretical understandings and practices, such as feminism.

While this study is specifically focused on the experiences of feminist mothers of

sons, it nonetheless reaffirms Gordon's work and illustrates – in a different way – how feminism influences the mothering experiences of some women. We see, for instance, the complicated position feminist mothers find themselves in as they navigate their way in the world. They are both cognizant of their feminist analysis of patriarchy and masculinity and engaged in supportive and loving relationships with their sons. When women equally honour their feminism and their children, the dynamic between mothering and feminism is complex.

The work of Rowland and Thomas demonstrates, for the first time, how some feminist mothers recognize that mothering influences their thinking and understanding of feminism. Until this point, feminist literature had not addressed the idea that mothering children could shape and influence the feminism of women. Rowland and Thomas provide a valuable starting point from which to raise questions regarding the ways in which feminism and mothering inform one another. For example, what is the influence of the gender of children on the feminist theorizing, practice and action of feminist mothers? Is the feminism of mothers of sons influenced in ways that differ from the feminism of mothers of daughters? If so, how and why? How is the feminism of mothers who parent both daughters and sons influenced by raising children of both genders? Through establishing the influence of feminism on how mothers raise their sons, Rowland and Thomas demonstrate the need for further investigation and analysis into this area.

iv.   **Feminists Mothers Write About Mothering**

In response to the lack of feminist voices speaking as mothers in the feminist

literature on mothering and motherhood, Maureen Reddy, Martha Roth and Amy Sheldon (1994) edited an anthology of feminist writing about mothering. Contributors to <u>Mother Journeys: Feminists Write about Mothering</u> were asked to relate what it is like to be a mother, what the experience of mothering means to them, how mothering affects their lives and how mothering relates to their politics (Reddy et. al., 1994: back cover). Themes running throughout this collection of essays, stories, poems and art include: "violence; conflict with majority values, especially as represented by children's schools; sadness at children's inevitable contact with racist, misogynist culture; and pride in self and family for doing things in feminist ways" (Reddy et. al., 1994:2). The aim of Reddy and her colleagues was to put together a non-academic collection that would reach a wide audience of readers who were "feminists mothers, feminists who are not mothers, mothers who are not feminists, and people who are neither feminists nor mothers, but interested in the topic: in life, in growth, in choice, and in change" (1994:3). The rich description of the diverse ambiguities and struggles these feminist mothers contend with in their daily lives chronicles the many ways feminist mothers attempt to live with the contradictions they often feel between the expectations of motherhood and their mothering. Several writers, for example, acknowledge how they have come to understand their bodies as both a source of oppression and a source of celebration and power through birthing (1994:7). Some women note how they learned simultaneously to relax and to be in perfect control during childbirth and how their bodies can seem to be sexual yet also vessels during childbirth (1994:61). Other mothers write of how they "chafed against

their mother's strictures and struggled to free themselves in order to create a choice of whether or not to follow their mother's examples" when parenting (1994:213).

The second section of the text, "Discoveries Through Our Children," explores some of the lessons feminist mothers have learned through their experiences of parenting. Women share stories about how mothering has made them reflect upon their own knowledge through the various experiences introduced to them by their children. They reported that parenting often widens their emotional range, tests their convictions and leads them to a deeper self-understanding (Reddy et. al., 1994:84). One mother, for example, was pushed to think more deeply about life after the early death of her child. Another mother, while being attentive to the observations and questions her children asked about the world around them, found herself reflecting on her own assumptions and beliefs. Helping children understand injustices based on the inequities of gender, class and race in our society also provided some mothers with an opportunity to reflect on their own understandings of themselves and the world. These observations made by feminist mothers encourage me to think about the influence of mothering on the analysis of feminist mothers and on their understanding of the world.

"Race-ing love," written by Maureen Reddy, speaks directly to how mothering can influence one's personal understandings of feminism. Reddy, a white woman married to a Black man, notes how her mothering has sensitized her to the "interdependence of social changes and to the absolute fallacy of separating racial, sexual, and economic justice" (1994:91). Reflecting on the lessons she has learned from her two biracial

children, she notes that it was only through answering her son's "hard questions about race and gender" that she learned that people are always raced and that she and her husband had "taken too much for granted, including the notion of race itself" (Reddy, 1994:87). She credits her analysis of what her "whiteness might mean – socially, personally, politically, symbolically" to the practice of responding to her son's questions, as this exchange pushed her to interrogate herself (Reddy, 1994:87).

Mothering her ten-year-old son and her two-year-old daughter has made Reddy (1994:90) "constantly aware of race" and "alive to the byzantine workings of race in everyday life through loving and feeling responsible for children who lack the privileges that protected [her] own childhood." Through parenting, Reddy (1994:87) lost what she calls the dubious privilege afforded to white women – a lack of racial consciousness. She notes that "becoming the mother of black children demonstrated in practical terms the interrelationship of race and gender" and points to the instance of being asked by her two-year old son, "Why do white people have vaginas?" (1994:88). It is only through raising her children that Reddy (1994:91) has been able to experience "the link between feminist politics and anti-racist politics" and has been pushed to reassess her understanding of feminist and anti-racist politics.

The work of Reddy and her colleagues, like the research by Rowland and Thomas (1996), confirms my personal experiences as a feminist mother and documents how mothering can encourage feminist mothers to think differently about their feminism. Several articles in this anthology profile the ways in which the thinking of feminist

mothers has been challenged through the experiences of mothering, and feature the insights mothers have had regarding the influence of mothering on their feminism. The accounts do not, however, discuss the changes feminist mothers make in their lives to accommodate their changing knowledge and understanding of the interconnection between their mothering and their feminism. This omission raises the question of how feminists, who reconsider their thinking about feminism because of their mothering, deal with new concerns or insights from this reflection.

Like the previous studies, the work of Reddy, Roth and Sheldon (1994) invites further investigation into the interconnection between feminism and mothering in the lives of feminist mothers. They prompt the question of how raising children can influence the feminist perspectives and understandings of mothers. This work also suggests the kinds of concerns feminist mothers have had regarding their feminism based on their experiences of mothering. For example, how does feminism address the multiple experiences of the female body during pregnancy, birth and mothering? Or how can feminisms explain the complexities of gender and race in patriarchal societies? In addition, their collection provides useful information on which to construct questions that directly address the effect of mothering on feminisms. How, for example, does the gender and race of children influence the way in which mothers understand feminism?

These studies, like my own experiences of mothering, suggest that feminist mothers are aware that motherhood is a complex location where social expectations of motherhood and the personal experiences of mothering are frequently at odds with one

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another. Additionally, they propose that feminist mothers are aware that their child-rearing is informed by their feminism and, conversely, that their feminism is informed by their mothering. Further investigation into the interconnection between feminism and mothering in the lives of feminist mothers can develop the concerns and questions raised in these studies. It may also contribute to a deeper understanding of the repercussions of feminist mothering for motherhood, for mothering and for feminism.

Reviewing feminist critiques of motherhood allows me to chart the development of the deep theoretical understanding and the useful concepts feminist theorists have cultivated in their analyses of motherhood. In this examination, I am also able to record the debates and movement within the literature, pointing to spheres of contention within the field as well as to the ground that needs further inquiry. For example, how race, ethnicity, sexuality and class are significant to the concepts of motherhood and the realities of mothering. Furthermore, this investigation provides a base from which I develop a fuller explanation of how feminist mothers understand motherhood, how that understanding is connected to their feminism and why feminist mothers challenge conventional models of motherhood. These themes are explored in the second half of the thesis.

III.   Concluding Remarks

An investigation into feminist research on motherhood and mothering over the

past three decades indicates that while there is a rich literature on motherhood and mothering, there are still gaps within the discourse. Research and theories about feminism and mothering, for instance, are in their infancy. Collins (1994:48) notes that feminist theorizing and understanding of motherhood and mothering will continue to remain partial until "we distinguish between what has been said about subordinated groups in the dominant discourse, and what such groups might say about themselves if given the opportunity." Rather than seeking models of research that claim totality, we require models of research that open the understanding of motherhood and mothering to a celebration of the multifarious realities of these two experiences for women. We need to move, as Collins (1994:48) proposes, from "simply consulting the existing social science sources" to honouring and placing at the centre of research the "ideas and experiences" of mothers who have been kept out of feminist research and discussion. In doing so, we continue to develop research into the complexities and contradictions that have been emerging from this field of research and determine where to go from here.

Researchers have verified that motherhood is a ubiquitous, yet complex, institution that influences the experience of mothering for women.[43] They detail how motherhood is restrictive to women and the ways in which the experiences of mothering differ for women depending on factors such as social status, relationship status, sexuality, race/ethnicity and ability. The interconnection of patriarchy, class location, racism and heterosexuality within motherhood shape the circumstances, expectations and practices

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[43] Ainslie and Feltey (1992), Collins (1991, 1994), Crawford (1987), Gordon (1990), Pollack (1989), Polikoff (1987), Rich (1986), Rowland and Thomas (1996) and Reddy et al. (1994).

of mothering differently. For instance, a Black, heterosexual woman, a white, lesbian woman and a white, heterosexual woman will most likely experience motherhood differently because each woman is located in a different position according to her sexuality, race/ethnicity and class. The interconnection of women's particular social location with their individual experiences of motherhood and mothering make up or constitute the complex reality of being a mother.

Feminist theorists have established an inherent contradiction in motherhood: while motherhood is strongly associated with access to and internalization of patriarchal power, it is simultaneously a place where women can create their own mothering strategies to challenge various dominant power structures such as capitalism, heterosexuality, homophobia, racism and patriarchy. The writers discussed here,[44] for instance, observe how mothers are critical of motherhood through the ways they question and contest dominant notions and practices of mothering. Aware of the pressure to comply with assumptions of motherhood, the mothers in these studies challenge heterosexist ideals of motherhood and stereotypical practices of masculinity and Eurocentric models of assimilation and education. Scholars show how the appraisal and critique of motherhood by mothers are invariably informed by their distinctive social locations and positions. Their feminism, sexuality, class, ethnicity and race, as well as the gender, ethnicity and race of their children inform their analyses and experiences of motherhood and mothering.

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[44] Collins (1991, 1994), Crawford (1987), Gordon (1990), Polikoff (1987), Reddy et al. (1994), and Rowland and Thomas (1996).

These studies demonstrate the complexities of mothering for women who are aware of the contradictions between the socially accepted and approved notions of motherhood and their own realities of mothering. They also reveal that mothers understand the theoretical analysis of motherhood as institution and experience proposed by Rich. Mothers who do not replicate patriarchal standards of mothering do not reproduce patriarchy. Rather they redirect the power that reproduces patriarchy to challenge that model and to constitute a real force for social change.

The findings of these researchers also help to map out the terrain that has yet to be studied. While there are some publications written by women who are marginalized because of their sexuality, race, ethnicity and ability,[45] there are multiple groups of women who have yet to speak of their experiences of motherhood and mothering from their particular locations. How, for instance, do various Aboriginal, Chicana, Jewish and Mexican women understand motherhood and mothering?[46] What do mothers who live with disabilities have to say about their experiences of motherhood and mothering? What are the struggles and issues specific to feminist mothers raising children with disabilities? How does poverty influence the understanding of motherhood and the practice of

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[45] See, for example, Ainslie and Feltey (1992); Anderson (2000); Arnup (1988, 1989, 1995); Bouvard (1994); Collins (1991,1994); Crawford (1987); Dally (1982); Glenn et al. (1994); Gordon (1990); Grupo Feminista Miercoloes (1980); Hill (1987); Hoffnung (1989); Knowles and Cole (1990); Lewin (1994); Lorde (1987); Maroney (1985); McMahon (1995); Polikoff (1987); Pollack (1987, 1990); Reddy et al. (1994); Richardson (1993); Rowland and Thomas (1996); Segura (1994); Shaw (1994); Thurer (1994); and Wearing (1984) and various editions of *The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering.*

[46] While authors such as Anderson (2000); Chang (1988), Kline (2000); Segura (1994) and Shaw (1994) deal with these particular groups of women, further research is needed to develop a more extensive understanding of the realities of motherhood and mothering for these groups of women.

mothering for feminist mothers? How do feminist mothers perceive motherhood to have

elements of both confinement and independence? Seeking responses to these questions,

and paying attention to others that arise, develop an understanding of the contradictions

and complexities of the institution of motherhood and the experiences of women as

mothers.

The writings of Collins (1994) and Ainslie and Feltey (1992) advise us that we

need to investigate further the interconnection between home and community in the lives

of mothers. Where do mothers find support for their mothering? What role do feminist

groups play in the lives of feminist mothers? Are there times when mothers feel isolated

and alienated from their milieu? Asking and investigating these questions furthers an

understanding of the particular struggles and support that mothers find in their specific

communities, as well as of the links and/or gulfs between them. A deeper understanding

of the ways in which mothers are connected to or disconnected from their communities

and the implications this may have for mothers is also developed. Investigating how

mothers manage to exercise self-governance within an institution that is restrictive also

contributes to the existing research and fosters a broader appreciation for how mothers

may understand motherhood and how that understanding may shape their parenting

practices. This investigation may develop an analysis of whether and how feminist

mothers understand the division between public and private as it relates to motherhood.

Another aspect of mothering introduced by feminist scholars that requires further

analysis is the contention that mothering influences the political perspectives and

behaviours of feminist mothers. Reddy et al. (1994) and Rowland and Thomas (1996) provide examples of how raising children influences, and at times alters, the understanding of feminism for some mothers. This documentation is important in developing a further theorizing around feminist mothering. For example, is there a connection between the feminist theory of praxis – the integration of knowing and doing – and mothering? If there is, how does it contribute to an understanding of feminism and mothering? What are some of the ramifications of feminist praxis in mothering for feminism, mothering, mothers and children?

The research of Ainslie and Feltey (1992), Collins (1991;1994), Gordon (1990) and Rowland and Thomas (1996) verifies that mothers often see themselves as educators who deliberately teach their children to be critical of dominant and systemic forms of power. The introduction of accounts of mothers as educators raises important considerations for the development of feminist theorizing on motherhood and mothering. How, for instance, do mothers view their role as educators of their children? What strategies do mothers use to teach their children and what lessons do they teach their children? Are they based on feminist understandings? What can we learn from the strategies these mothers use? What are the implications of these lessons for understanding the concepts of motherhood, mothering practices, mothers and children?

These studies signify that a number of researchers are concerned with both the theorizing and experiential aspects of motherhood and mothering. They also draw our attention to the terrain that has yet to be researched. If we are to enlarge the field of

feminist theorizing around motherhood and mothering, we need to consider the various questions raised here (as well as others) and examine the directions for future studies. For this research I limit my investigation to how the feminism of mothers informs their understanding of motherhood and mothering, how feminist mothers teach their children to survive the contradictions in their lives and how parenting informs the feminism of mothers. To follow these avenues of inquiry I must first develop a methodology that allows for the voices, experiences and theorizing of feminist mothers to be and remain central to the research process. It is to this project that I now turn.

CHAPTER TWO

Bringing Feminist Mothers Into View

This dissertation focuses on the interrelationship of feminism and mothering in the lives of feminist mothers. My interest in this research stems from my personal revelation that mothering is a site of feminist activism for me. I am curious how other feminist mothers experience the interconnection of feminism and mothering. Of particular interest is what can be learned about feminism, mothering and pedagogy from feminist mothers.

My exploration of how various feminist theorists have addressed motherhood and feminist mothering in the first chapter gives rise to more specific and more defined questions than my initial inquiry. The theorizing of Rich (1986) – that motherhood is both an individual experience and a social institution – raises the question of how feminist mothers understand and engage with motherhood. How, for example, do feminist mothers experience the conflicts and constraints motherhood places on their individual experiences of mothering? The work of Collins (1990, 1994) and theorists addressing lesbian mothering prompt questions of how various social locations of mothers influence the experiences of motherhood and mothering. Of interest is whether feminist mothers, like some other mothers, find mothering emancipatory.

The purpose of this chapter is to map out the research methodology and research methods I use to explore the questions raised here. I follow the suggestion of Collins (1994), Rich (1986) and others that we need an approach to researching women's

experiences of motherhood and of mothering that is women-centred and honours the voices and experiences of women. The first section of the chapter details elements of various methodological approaches I find useful in developing such an approach. I then combine these components to create a research methodology useful for investigating the interconnection of feminism and mothering.

The second section of the chapter describes the methods I use to bring feminist mothers into view and to keep them central to the research process and analysis. I explain why I conduct interviews and how I locate the participants for this research. I also describe the interview process, detail the way in which I analyse the data and introduce the participants involved in this study. The chapter concludes with a reminder of the kind of knowledge this study contributes to research.

I.   Research Methodology

All research, as Sandra Harding (1987:3) reminds us, is founded on a methodology or "a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed." Intent on investigating the knowledge of feminist mothers, I develop a research methodology that keeps feminist mothers at the centre of my investigation and analysis. In doing so, I combine distinct aspects of feminist methodologies with specific components of two other experientially based research methodologies.

i.   Feminist Methodologies

Although feminist methodologies are continually being formed and informed by the complex connection of feminist theories, principles, practices and methods, there are nevertheless several elements central to the ways in which data are gathered and analysed in feminist research.[47] The following elements of feminist methodologies are useful to my study, as they advocate and support women-centred research and also ensure that women's voices and experiences remain the focal point of the research process.

Some researchers note that a fundamental component of feminist methodologies is that the research is about women.[48] Shulamit Reinharz (126:1992) notes that feminist methodologies attempt to draw women out of obscurity, to repair the historical record, to create new material about women, to validate women's experiences, to enhance communication among women, to discover women's roots and to develop a previously denied sense of continuity. According to Sandra Harding (1987:7) a distinctive feature of feminist research is how it "generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences" and how it uses these experiences as a "significant indicator" of women's realities. By placing women at the centre of inquiry and investigation, women's experiences are honoured as a valuable resource for social analysis.[49] Intent on

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[47] See, for example, Code (1993); Cook and Fonow (1990); Frye (1992); Mies (1983); Reinharz (1992) and Stanley and Wise (1993).

[48] See, for example, Nielson (1990) and Reinharz (1992). While research on men can be the focus of feminist methodologies, the majority of research concentrates on women.

[49] See, for example, Code (1993); Cook and Fonow (1990); Driscoll and McFarland (1987); DuBois (1983); Frye (1992); Harding (1987); Klein (1983); Nielson (1990); Oakley (1981); Smith (1987); Stanley and Wise (1992) and Tomm (1987).

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legitimating the subjugated knowledge of women and revealing the invisibility and distortion of female experiences,[50] feminist methodologies provide a visible and audible place in which women's experiences can be researched and known (Rose, 1993:58).

By focussing on the experiences, needs, interests and lives of women who have been kept out of the written record,[51] feminist methodologies aim to make visible and to improve women's lives.[52] Harding (1987:8) theorizes that when one begins an inquiry with a "problematic from the perspective of women's experiences, one is led to design research *for* women" (emphasis in original). The purposes of feminist research and analysis are therefore not "separated from the origins of the research problems" but rather are directly related to them (Harding, 1987:8). Feminist research is about – and for – the liberation of women.[53]

Another central feature of feminist methodologies is the relationship between the researcher and the subject of the research. Since feminist theories and methodologies are based on the feminist principle that women are both "subject matter and creators of knowledge" (Moss, 1993:49), a reciprocal sharing of knowledge and experience is fostered between researcher and participant. Research subjects are encouraged by the

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[50] See, for example, Frye (1992) and Stanley and Wise (1993).

[51] Danica (1990), Lerner (1986), Mies (1983), Rich (1986), Robson (1992) and Westcott (1990) all address how women have been kept out of historical records.

[52] Cook and Fonow (1990), Klein (1983), Moss (1993), O'Brien (1989), Rose (1993) and Shields and Dervin (1993) all address this point in their work.

[53] While the intention of feminist research is to liberate women from various forms of oppression, results from such research can and have been used by others to support or promote restrictive policies or measures against women. The misuse or non-intended use of results is not limited to feminist methodologies, but can and does occur with other types and approaches to research.

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researcher to become active participants in the research project (Shields & Dervin, 1993:67). While there are different approaches and degrees to which 'the researched' is encouraged to be part of the research process, power differentials between the parties in the research process are recognized and attempts are made to break these down (Stanley & Wise, 1993:32). In doing so, the experiences of women subjects are less likely to be overshadowed by those of the researchers.[54]

Feminist methodologies also pay attention to the role of the researcher in the research process. Rather than remaining hidden from sight within the research, the researcher must be on the same "critical plane as the overt subject" and "must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint" (Harding, 1987:8-9). Stanley and Wise (1993:58) argue that the researcher must be made visible because the experiences and the consciousness of the researcher are an integral part of the research process and outcome. Within feminist methodologies, the beliefs and behaviours of the researcher are viewed as part of the empirical evidence and therefore must also be open to critical scrutiny (Harding, 1987:9). This practice of keeping the researcher's contribution and participation visible helps to reveal influences the researcher may have on the direction and interpretation of the participants' knowledge and on the research findings (Baker, 1998:38; Skeggs, 1995:200).

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[54] Glaser and Strauss (1967:107) acknowledge the role of researchers in the research process, particularly their personal sensitivity. Kirby and McKenna (1989:32) note how the researcher becomes "another subject in the research process and is left vulnerable in a way that changes the traditional power dynamics/hierarchy that has existed between researcher and those who are researched."

Like Collins (1994) and Rich (1986), who recognize that women's knowledge of motherhood and mothering is crafted out of their personal experiences, feminist methodologies acknowledge that women's knowledge and meaning making come out of their own experiences and through their own voices. Since women's knowledge is valued and research subjects are encouraged to become partners and participants in feminist research projects, the realities and experiences of feminist mothers remain central.

Investigating the ways in which feminist mothers understand and experience motherhood and mothering and the ways in which they practice their mothering may reveal ways in which feminist mothers are making sense of their lives and are changing their lives for the better.

ii.   Experientially Based Methodologies: Grounded Theory and Research From The Margins

There are two other research methodologies that I find useful in my investigation into the interconnection of feminism and mothering in the lives of feminist mothers: grounded theory methodology and research from the margins. Like feminist methodologies, both of these methodologies are experientially based; the experiences of participants are the foundation of the research and remain present throughout the entire research process.

Grounded theory methodology was first developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) and has since been elaborated upon by Glaser (1978; 1992; 1998) and by Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990;1994;1997). I find grounded theory methodology useful because, unlike other approaches that start with a theory or

hypothesis to be tested, it develops or "discovers theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:2). Rather than imposing a formulated theory to be proven on the research, this approach allows theory to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:23). Grounded theory methodology keeps the experiences of the participants central throughout the research process, from the investigation through to and including the analysis. Since I find the constant comparative method of grounded theory most useful to my research, I return to grounded theory in my discussion of analysis later in the chapter.

"Research from the margins," advanced by feminist sociologists Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna (1989), is also useful to my work. Kirby and McKenna's (1989) approach is similar to that advocated by grounded theory methodology because they are committed to advancing knowledge through a process of exploration grounded in people's experience. Their approach, however, differs in their insistence that "research must begin to reflect the experience and concerns of people who have traditionally been marginalized by the research process and by what gets counted as knowledge" (1989:22). This approach is appropriate for my research because feminist mothers, as demonstrated in Chapter One, have not bee prominent in feminist research or studies. The strength of "research from the margins," then, is that it provides a rich data base with great detail and descriptive power that is grounded in the lived experiences of people who have historically been left out of the research process.

Since research from the margins is by, for, about and with those who are on the periphery of research (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:28), considerable effort is made to ensure

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that the voices and experiences of participants are accurately represented and that the research process is a collaborative one. Doing research, as Kirby and McKenna (1989:25) note, "is a human activity" where researchers are involved in a process in which they "construct meaning" and involve themselves "in the process of revealing 'possible knowledges.'" As in feminist methodologies, the experiences of both the researcher and participants are acknowledged as contributing to the research and attempts are made to ensure that priority is given to the voices of participants throughout the research process (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:129).

iii.   A Feminist and Experientially-Based Methodology

The knowledge and experiences of feminist mothers seldom appear in research or in published scholarship. By using a research methodology that combines the elements of feminist methodologies, research from the margins and grounded theory, the understandings and experiences of feminist mothers can be placed at the centre of the investigation. My research methodology foregrounds the role of participants as subjects who are integral to the research project.

This methodological approach does not end here. It continues to inform my selection and use of a research method and to influence the way in which I conduct my analysis. The question is, how am I able to keep the knowledge and theorizing of feminist mothers central to the research process during these two procedures? It is to this question that I now turn.

II.   Research Methods

A research method is generally understood to be "a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence" (Harding, 1987:2). Kirby and McKenna (1989:33) would add to this definition that it is also the way in which researchers analyse the data they have gathered. The following section describes how I gathered and analysed information from women regarding their experiences as feminist mothers.

i.   Intensive Interviews

In order to recognize and address the knowledge and experiences of feminist mothers, I conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen self-identified feminist mothers. I follow the method of intensive interviews, detailed by Kirby and McKenna (1989:74), whereby a researcher who has a general understanding of the research topic (feminist mothering) asks highly detailed, exploratory questions that vary somewhat with each research participant. This research method allows me to investigate the realities of feminist mothering from the perspective of feminist mothers.

Like other feminist researchers, I value "the goal of allowing/encouraging/ enabling women to speak for themselves" (Reinharz, 1992:131) and believe that interviews can "provide an invaluable means of generating new insights about women's experiences of themselves in their words" (Anderson & Jack, 1991:11).[55] Moreover, I expect, as do Anderson and Jack (1991:11), that this approach to "gathering knowledge

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[55] Baker (1998) and Skeggs (1995) concur, noting that interviews help to make women's lives visible and women's voices heard.

as well as the spontaneous exchange within an interview offers possibilities of freedom and flexibility for researchers and narrators alike." Through the use of intensive interviews, I place the voices and experiences of feminist mothers at the centre of the investigation.

To help formulate the core questions for the interview, I followed the advice offered by Harding (1987:9), Kirby and McKenna (1989:32, 66) and Strauss and Corbin (1990:35). I seriously considered my own personal experiences and understandings as they related to my area of study.[56] In an attempt to enhance my insight and understanding of feminist mothering, I reflected upon and recorded my thinking and experiences as a feminist mother. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:95), being aware of personal biases, assumptions, patterns of thinking and knowledge gained from personal experience and reading about the research topic not only facilitates my own understanding of my knowledge and perceptions of feminist mothering, it also helps me to be more theoretically sensitive in the later process of analysis.

I also took up the suggestion of Kirby and McKenna (1989:21) to conduct a tape recorded self-interview to investigate my own understanding of feminist mothering. Together, Dr. Keith Louise Fulton (my PhD advisor and a feminist mother) and I talked about our experiences of being feminist mothers. She asked me questions I had prepared for the interview that were developed from my previous reflections and notes, as well as questions of her own that came up during our conversation about my experiences as a

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[56] Kirby and McKenna (1989:32) name the recording of thoughts and ideas about the research at the beginning and throughout the research process "conceptual baggage." The personal assumptions that researchers have about the topic and the research process, they suggest, add a dimension to the data that is always present, yet seldom acknowledged.

feminist mother. I reflected upon my own memories and understandings as a feminist mother and we considered conversations and discussions we had with others around the topic. Together we posed questions about feminism and mothering and the inter-connection of the two.

I also had discussions about my various experiences and thinking about feminist mothering during meetings with my entire PhD committee. Dr. Elizabeth Comack and Dr. Rosa Bruno-Jofre (who are also feminist mothers) and I spoke many times about our understandings and experiences of feminist mothering. These discussions, which were always tape recorded, have also been influential in helping me draw out areas of interest and importance as a feminist mother and researcher. Referring to themes, observations and questions of these tape recorded discussions helped me to develop many of the initial questions for the interviews.[57]

ii.   Locating Participants

Knowing the types of questions I wanted to ask, I canvassed for participants who would meet my research criteria. Interested in women who were both feminists and mothers, I approached groups, organizations and facilities I knew to be supportive of feminists and mothers. In the fall of 1996 I placed announcements in a local feminist newspaper, on bulletin boards in a number of women's organizations and at health clinics

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[57] Many of these questions are included in the interview guide found in Appendix C.

in Winnipeg.[58] I also spoke with people working and volunteering in these establishments and encouraged them to invite women to participate in my study. Within two months of placing the advertisements, eighteen women responded to my call; the contact and first conversation occurred over the telephone. I explained to each respondent the general purpose of the research (to explore how mothering and feminism are interconnected and influence each other), along with the procedure of the research (voluntary commitment, signing a consent form, being interviewed twice on audio-tape for approximately two hours each time). One woman declined to participate in the project due to the time commitment required and another woman did not meet the requirements of identifying herself as a feminist. Since this research examines the interconnection of feminism and mothering, identifying one's self a feminist and a mother was necessary.[59]

iii.   Interview Process

Over the course of two years I interviewed each of the sixteen respondents twice. Interviews took anywhere from one and a half hours to three hours and were conducted in either a seminar room at a local university or in the homes of participants.[60] I did not show the women the questions prior to the interview because I wanted clarification and

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[58] See Appendix A for an example of the advertisement and a listing of where ads were posted. Two participants heard of the research through word of mouth – one through a conversation with me, and another through speaking with another participant. All participants were acquaintances or strangers to me at the beginning of the research, as I did not include close personal friends or relatives in the study group.

[59] The woman who did not meet this requirement was not contacted for a second interview and subsequently was excluded from the research.

[60] Before engaging in the interview process I again reviewed the purpose of the research project, addressed any concerns with participants and asked them to sign a consent form as seen in Appendix B.

negotiation of words and ideas to be part of the interactive personal exchange of experiences, ideas and information. Introducing questions for the first time during the interview opened up discussion regarding the meaning of questions and reduced the potential of participants de-constructing the meaning of questions ahead of time. In using this process, any differing understandings of questions, concepts or experiences were brought to light in the interview process and were discussed openly.

The flexibility and space made within the interview process to discuss the meaning of questions encouraged participants to draw on their reflections and narratives regarding the dynamic between feminism and mothering and its influences on their mothering practices.[61] This process also enhanced what Strauss and Corbin (1990:95) describe as theoretical sensitivity. Hearing and responding to questions without any prior knowledge of their content fosters the potential for various interpretations and understandings of words, concepts and questions. This open discussion helps us to be in-tune with personal biases, assumptions and patterns of thinking related to our own experiences.

The initial interview opened with general questions considering personal demographic and biographical details of interviewees. This was followed by open-ended questions concerning the self-identification and self-definition of participants, their familial experiences as children and their experiences as mothers and feminists.[62] These open-ended questions guided the discussion and gave respondents an opportunity to bring

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[61] Fulton (1996) and Kirby and McKenna (1989) suggest this technique.

[62] See Appendix C for a fairly accurate list of questions asked throughout interviews.

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forward their own ideas, thoughts, concerns and experiences to the interview and to the research project. Self-directed comments from participants added a richness to the investigation by "maximizing discovery and description" that might have otherwise been missed (Reinharz, 1992:18), and encouraged a relatively open dialogue that often made space for the elaboration of questions, responses and new understandings.[63] As Reinharz (1992:21) notes, the reality of participants' lives is more likely to be reflected if the interviewer actively listens to participants and asks new questions as the interviews proceed. Moreover, asking questions when new information or discussion emerges helps to clarify and add depth to the women's accounts and analyses of their realities of feminist mothering. Likewise, it is more likely that the analytic framework of the research will arise from the ways the women negotiate the questions and meanings (Fulton, 1995).

Most of the discussion during interviews developed around clarifying, elaborating or explaining ideas and thoughts that arose from open-ended questions. This practice ensured that two essential components of research from the margins were promoted: intersubjectivity or the "authentic dialogue between all participants in the research process in which all are respected as equally knowing subjects" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:129), and critical reflection or the "examination of the social reality in which people exist" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:34).

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[63] See Cook and Fonow (1990); Currie (1988); Dubois (1983); Dyck (1993); Fine (1994); Flax (1993); Frye (1992); Griffith and Smith (1987); Harding (1987); Klein (1983); Mies (1991); Nielsen (1989); Oakley, (1981); Olesen (1994); Smith (1987); Stanley and Wise (1993); Tomm (1987) and Westkott (1990).

Because we shared our knowledge and experience reciprocally, the women participants and I became collaborators in the research, actually inventing and producing together new understandings of everyday events. Through this process we became partners in furthering knowledge about feminist mothering.[64] For instance, we discovered together that mothering is a political act. Although participants understand that their mothering is informed by their feminism (which they defined as political in nature), it was our discussions that helped some mothers see their mothering as a political act. The interactive process that we engaged in throughout the interviews helped us produce new understandings and meanings of feminist mothering. Furthermore, we stayed focussed on the project, ensuring that the data collected were relevant to the research.

Shortly after the completion of the first interviews, the audio tapes were transcribed and returned to participants for their comments and feedback.[65] For many of the participants, being involved with this project was the first time that they had been interviewed. It was also the first time they shared their thinking about the realities of being a feminist mother. Receiving a transcript of the interview granted participants an opportunity to clarify their thoughts and a chance to elaborate, change or clarify the record. This occasion often led to the further elaboration of ideas, concepts and experiences shared in the first interview and again gave participants an opportunity to

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[64] This type of collaboration, according to Kirby and McKenna (1989:31),assists the researcher to focus on and keep various stages of data gathering in order, as well as avoid pitfalls and remain honest in compiling data.

[65] All participants are aware that the audio tapes were transcribed by a professional secretary familiar with the ethics of research. To ensure the anonymity of participants, the actual names of the respondents were not included in the interviews or in any information given to the transcriber.

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become collaborators in the research by keeping the research contextualized and focussed.

The second interview opened with a discussion of the transcription of the first interview, giving participants a chance to verify whether the first interview was an accurate reflection of our previous discussion. This discussion also provided a space for us both to clarify or address any questions or developments that had emerged from the first interview. By focussing on any reflections or changes in attitudes, beliefs or actions that may have occurred since the first interview, this second interview provided an opportunity to delve more deeply into the recollections of the experiences of participants and for me to ask questions to clarify my understanding of their experiences.[66]

As in the case of the first interview, participants were given a transcript of the second interview for their feedback and approval. By checking and re-checking with the participants for accurate representations of our discussions in the transcriptions, I was able to ensure that the women remained subjects in the research process and maintained governance over their words and the documentation and use of their voices. This process also provided a check on the validity of the information and exchanges during the interview, enabling me to attest that what I describe as a researcher was recognized by the research participants to be so.[67] Through confirming the accuracy of the interviews and their perspectives and viewpoints in the recorded texts, I am assured that the interviews

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[66] Participants were again reminded that they were able at any time to withdraw from the research, and select text for summation, and not quotation. See consent form for further information in Appendix B.

[67] The constant checking with participants to ensure that the interviews reflect the life experiences of the women attests to the validity of this method. See, Kirby and McKenna (1989), Ristock and Pernell (1996) and Sandelowski (1989).

are more likely than not to be grounded and substantiated in the experiences of the participants. Furthermore, through making space and occasion for participants to tell their stories in the interviews, I was able to facilitate the subjectivity and analyses of these women.[68] Many feminists note that the feminist strategy of placing women at the centre of research helps to correct the invisibility and distortion of female experiences.[69] By placing feminist mothers at the centre of my inquiry I attempt to develop a rich understanding of the interconnection of feminism and mothering not available through previous feminist literature and research.

iv. Analysis

To keep the experiences, reflections and analyses of the participants central to the research, I followed Kirby and McKenna's (1989:128) recommendation of simultaneously living with and making sense of the data as I analysed the interviews. Living with the data entailed listening to the interview tapes, reading the transcriptions and constantly reflecting on the interviews (based on memories of the interviews and on the audio and written transcripts) while giving priority to the voices of the participants.

To make sense of the data I observed the constant comparative method central to grounded theory methodology first introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967.[70] Simply

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[68] Subjectivity here refers to "the description or interpretation of an experience from the perspective or position of the person engaged within the experience" (Abbey & O'Reilly, 1998).

[69] See, for example, Danica (1990); Fry (1992:63); Lerner (1986); Mies (1983 and Rich (1986).

[70] While the process is detailed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later by Glaser (1978; 1992;1998) as well as by Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1994; 1997), I find the explanation of Kirby and McKenna (1989) to be the most effective for the purposes of this research. For this reason, I rely upon their work, and to a

put, constant comparative method is a particular way to make sense of the large amount of information collected through research. According to Kirby and McKenna (1989:130), constant comparative method:

> consists of examining how data items and groupings of data items generate specific and general patterns. This is done primarily through the constant comparison of data items with other data items until sections that 'go together with' or 'seem to help describe something' can be identified.

In the first step of this process I coded passages from the interview transcripts that, when separated from the context of the interview, stood on their own. Kirby and McKenna (1989:135) name the product of this first coding a 'bibbit'. An example of a bibbit would be a participant's observation that there are myths about mothering. I coded this information and looked to see if this understanding emerged from any of the other interviews. In comparing the original bibbit with any others, I confirmed the presence or absence of this understanding with other participants.

In the second step of the process, I examined each bibbit for further details, themes or characteristics that participants provided that would explain their understanding of the bibbit. These identified and coded themes are known as properties. In my case, a property consists of thoughts, feelings or descriptions a participant has regarding myths about mothering. For instance, a participant may comment that she finds the myths of mothering to be unrealistic or contradictory. I compare this property to other properties identified by other participants concerning the same bibbit. In doing so, I gain a deeper understanding of how these sixteen feminist mothers understand the

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lesser extent that of the others, to discuss the process of constant comparative method so central to grounded theory methodology and to my analysis.

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myths of mothering.

The third stage of the process is to group bibbits that have similar or "common properties and seem to 'go together'" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:137). These groupings are known as categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:106) and help to describe and to explain the research focus. In this case, particular feminist mothers identify myths associated with mothering and have various understandings of them.

Through asking questions about the data and making comparisons for similarities and differences between each incident and event, I labelled similar events and incidents and grouped them together to form categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:74). These categories were identified by the conditions that gave rise to them, the context and specific properties in which they were embedded, the action/interactional strategies by which they were carried out and the consequences of those strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:97).

The procedure of paying vigilant attention to the women's stories and voices and of using the constant comparative method of grounded theory enabled me to locate the categories and their properties in each interview and to compare them with the categories and properties found within interviews of other participants.[71] By utilizing this constant comparative method as I lived with the data, the categories and concepts of the feminist mothers eventually developed into theories or themes that describe and explain the realities of feminist mothering.[72]

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[71] See, Glaser and Strauss (1967:105-113) and Kirby and McKenna (1989:137) for further discussion.

[72] Bunch (1987:244) also addresses the significance of description and analysis in theorizing.

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Four main themes about these particular feminist mothers and their feminist mothering emerged from the comparative analysis. The first is that participants understand motherhood to be an institution and an experience. Secondly, they consciously mother as feminists. A third theme is that these feminist mothers practice elements of feminist pedagogy. And finally, they engage in feminist praxis while mothering. These findings concur with my own experiences of mothering as a feminist and with the research of Ainslie and Feltey (1992), Collins (19887, 1994), Gordon (1990) and Rowland and Thomas (1996). Each of these themes is discussed in greater detail in the proceeding chapters.

By following the perspectives of the women throughout the research process, my analysis remains focussed on their understanding of feminism and mothering, thereby moving them from the periphery to the centre of research on feminist mothering. In providing participants the opportunity to tell their stories of being feminist mothers through intensive interviews, the private, subjective and subjugated experiences and accounts of particular self-identified feminist are brought into the open. My listening to and paying attention to the realities of feminist mothers means that the experiences of feminist mothers are no longer muted, that their knowledge is no longer invisible and that their experiences are no longer as marginalized as they have been in the past. Placing feminist mothers at the centre of the investigation, the research process and the analysis ensures that I lift the veil of silence around the lived realities of feminist mothering to reveal the ways in which feminist mothers bring about changes in their own lives and to the lives of their children.

Before proceeding to the findings and analysis of my interviews, I first introduce

the participants who participated in this research. In doing so, the reader has a

preliminary understanding of the make-up of this select group of feminist mothers and

some idea of who they are encountering before the discussion of the specific contribution

each woman has made to this research.

III.   The Participants

Fifteen of the sixteen participants lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba at the time of the

interviews. At the beginning of the study, one woman was living temporarily outside of

Winnipeg in a small rural community and returned to live in Winnipeg with her children

shortly after the first interview. Participants ranged in age from twenty-nine to fifty years

and all were temporarily-able-bodied birth-mothers raising biological children.[73] One

woman was also mothering an adopted child along with two biological children, and a

second woman was parenting an adopted a child, three non-biological children from a

previous relationship and a biological child.

At the time of the interviews, half of the participants were caring for children

alone, while the other half were raising children in partnerships. One woman identified

herself as bisexual, two participants identified themselves as lesbian and thirteen of the

mothers identified themselves as heterosexual.

The racial and ethnic ancestry, sexuality and class location of the women in this

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[73] I use the term temporarily-able-bodied to draw attention to the reality that most people become "disabled," whether through old age, through accident or other life experiences. Wendell (1989) addresses this perspective of (dis)ability.

group is diverse. One woman is African, one woman is Métis and two women are of Jewish/Polish decent. Two participants converted to Judaism, two women are of Columbian/European ancestry and ten respondents are of European heritage. The birth place of participants is diverse as well. One woman was born in Guyana, two were born in England, two other women were born in the United States of America and eleven were born in Canada. Four of the women described themselves as poor, while twelve mothers viewed themselves as middle-class. All of the women had some university or college education or professional training.

Table 1 (on page 95) provides a quick reference to the basic demographic and biographical information on participants. More detailed information is provided on each participant throughout the text in the following chapters.

IV.   Concluding Remarks:

It is important to remember, as Elizabeth Comack (1996:13) stresses in her book, Women in Trouble, that all forms of knowledge are partial. The knowledge produced in this study depends upon the particular approaches I have taken. The selection and investigation of particular feminist theorists and the questions opened up from that inquiry, for example, provide a distinct knowledge that informs this research. The method of interviews also provides a specific kind of knowledge. Additionally, what participants are willing or able to tell me at the time of our interviews contributes to the partiality of the knowledge generated from this research. What each participant shares with me is dependent, to some degree, on the kinds of questions I ask and the type of

information I choose to evoke from them (Comack, 1996:13). The knowledge gained from this research, too, is partial because of the particular themes I have chosen to concentrate on and develop from my analysis of the interviews.[74]

Without acknowledging the partiality of knowledge there is a danger of imposing an "artificial uni-dimensionality to the lives of participants" (Comack, 1996:13). While this research focuses on the interconnection of feminism and mothering in the lives of feminist mothers, participants do not limit their identity or knowledge to that of feminist mother. This is simply one aspect of their subjectivity and their knowledge base. The feminist mothers involved in this research are also concerned with and are knowledgeable about many other aspects of life. Feminist mothering is one element of who they are and one aspect of their knowledge and life experience.

It is also important to recognize the contribution this partial and particular knowledge has to inform our understanding of the connections between feminism and mothering. What becomes known by listening to the stories of the women has the potential to open up current debates and controversies around the issue of feminist mothering. This research provides a particular approach to foster the much needed discussions around feminism and mothering. This research, then, is not a definitive summary of feminist mothering, but is rather a contribution to widening the subject area.

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[74] See Baker (1998) and Skeggs (1995) who elaborate on the importance of representation and partial knowledges.

Table 1.
Demographic and Biographical Information
of Self-Identified Feminist Mothers (N=16)

Name, Age	Birthplace	Nationality/ Ethnicity	Sexuality	Relationship Status	Children #/Gender/Age
Andrea, 31	Winnipeg, MB	Scottish/Icelandic	Heterosexual	Married	1 girl, 2
Beverly, 44	Winnipeg, MB	Ukranian	Bisexual	Single	2 girls, 17, 20
Carol, 45	Thunder Bay, ON	Ukranian	Heterosexual	Single	2 boys, 10, 18+ 3 girls, 13, 18+
Deb, 35	Dauphin, MB	Ukranian/Russian English/Scottish Irish	Heterosexual	Common-Law	1 boy, 7 ½
Francis, 45	Vancouver, BC	Jewish/Polish	Heterosexual	Single (Divorced)	1 boy, 9
Jackie, 41	Neepawa, MB	Métis	Heterosexual	Single (Widow)	1 boy, 11
Jody, 36	Winnipeg, MB	British	Heterosexual	Married	1 girl, 2 1 boy, 4
Kim, 36	Winnipeg, MB	Mennonite Scottish/English	Heterosexual	Common-Law	2 boys, 4 & 6
Laura, 38	New York, NY	Jewish/Polish Russian/German	Heterosexual	Married	2 girls, 1 ½, newborn
Lynette, 29	St. Paul, MN	German/Swedish	Heterosexual	Married	2 boys, 1& 3
May, 40	Guyana, S. Am	African	Heterosexual	Separated (Married)	2 girls, 13 & 15
Neire, 41	Essex, England	French/Scottish Irish/Jewish	Lesbian	Lives with (Divorced)	1 girl, 13 2 boys, 6 & 10
Paula, 40	London, England	Colombian Australian	Heterosexual	Separated (C-Law)	2 girls, 4 &11 1 boy, 8
Shar, 50	Winnipeg, MB	English/Irish	Heterosexual	Lives alone (Divorced)	2 girls, 21, 27 1 boy, 24
Tammy, 37	Toronto, ON	Australian Colombian	Heterosexual	Lives with	1 girl, 9 1 boy, 7
Willow, 37	Winnipeg, MB	Jewish	Lesbian	Single	1 girl, 10

Part II: Making the Connections

CHAPTER THREE

Understanding Motherhood

Some women involved in this study have consciously chosen to become mothers, others never imagined they would be parents and others, ambivalent about the decision of having children, had not given much thought to being mothers. Not in spite of their particularities, but through them, each woman has become a mother. Five of the women have one child (two have daughters and three have sons). Seven mothers have two children (three have two girls, two have two boys and two have a girl and a boy). Three of the participants have three children (one has one girl and two boys, and two have one boy and two girls). And one women is the mother of five children (one biological son, one adopted niece/daughter and an adult son and two adult daughters who are the biological children of her long-term male partner). Regardless of the number of children these women have, their understanding of mothering and of themselves continues to develop as they live and reflect on their life experiences.

One of the questions that arose from the feminist literature on motherhood is whether the theory of motherhood as institution and personal experience proposed by Rich (1986) rings true for participants. The first section of the chapter explores how feminist mothers understand motherhood. Using excerpts from interviews with three women, I reveal how participants identify motherhood and how they perceive it to be a repressive patriarchal institution. Through their analysis of motherhood, these women reveal the damaging effects of conventional standards of motherhood for women and children. Their critique of motherhood also uncovers some of the personal repercussions

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women experience when they take up the regulatory forces of the institution of motherhood. They cite, for instance, the guilt and the low self-esteem that women experience as one consequence of internalizing conventional expectations of motherhood.

The second section of the chapter focuses on how four of the respondents critique the restrictions of motherhood and how they use this critique to negotiate mothering. Participants reveal that in critiquing and in refusing to acquiesce to the oppression within motherhood, they engage in the self-reflexive creating of subjectivity; they are able to re-frame mothering for themselves. In the process of paying attention to their life experiences, feminist mothers exercise self-governance.

The chapter concludes with a summation of what I uncover by speaking with and reflecting on the experiences of these seven women. While the central theme of the chapter is that participants understand motherhood to be a social construction and a personal experience, two sub-themes also emerge. First, these feminist mothers go beyond simply identifying the difference between motherhood as institution and motherhood as experience. They are critical of the regulation and harm inflicted on women and children within motherhood. Through their analysis of motherhood and the damaging aspects of it, these women reveal elements of internalized oppression; they recognize the internalization of regulations associated with institutionalized motherhood. Secondly, some feminist mothers are breaking many of the rules of motherhood and are re-defining mothering for themselves. Through their critique of the institution, participants create some distance from it and make space within mothering to become

mothers in ways that are suitable to them.

I.   Identifying and Naming the Institution of Motherhood

The feminist mothers involved in this study are both conscious and critical of conventional ideas about mothering. They comment, for instance, on the promotion of the virtues of the stereotypical 'good mother' and warnings about the dangers of the 'bad mother.' Through unsolicited commentary, advice or personal judgements, participants are told that the ideal mother is heterosexual and married to the father of her children. They are reminded that a 'good mother' is committed to her children's well-being and, therefore, does not work in the labour force. She stays at home to raise her children. Television and radio talk shows use 'experts' to inform women how to mother and standards for both the exemplary and incompetent mother are presented in newspapers, magazines and popular movies. Women hear comments from social workers, law and justice officials, teachers, medical professionals and members of the clergy about the legitimacy of the ideal mother and the righteous downfall of the 'bad mother.' Peers, co-workers, family and friends also perpetuate dominant concepts and expectations of motherhood.

This ideal is far removed from the reality of many women's lives. For example, Statistics Canada (1997:2) indicates that 14.5 percent of all Canadian families in 1996 were headed by a lone parent. This is an increase from 11.9 percent in 1991 when 9.8 percent were headed by women only and 2.1 percent were headed by men only (Statistics Canada, 1991). In 1996, female-headed lone-parent families in Canada represented 19 percent of all families with children. This figure is almost double that in 1971, when 10

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percent of families with children were headed by female lone-parents (Almey, 2000:32). In 1995, the majority of female lone-parents (54%) were either divorced (33%) or separated (21%) from their spouse. Furthermore, Almey (2000:33) reports that a growing proportion of female lone-parents are never-married women raising children on their own. In 1996, for example, 25 percent of female lone-parents were single. This is more than twice as many female lone-parents in 1981 (11%). According to Oderkirk and Lochhead (1994:19), 90 percent of Canadian lone-parent families headed by women are under the age of 25, and 58 percent of those families headed by women aged 25 to 33 exist below the poverty line. They also state that more than a third of these families live far below that line.

While statistics about the sexuality of mothers are unavailable, being lesbian does not exclude women from being mothers. Some lesbian mothers have had heterosexual relations with men, others have used alternative or artificial insemination methods to become pregnant, while others have adopted children. Not all mothers are married, not all mothers are heterosexual and not all mothers stay out of the work force. In fact, the majority of mothers living in Canada work in the paid labour force. In 1991, for example, 65.3 percent of all married women with children participated in the Canadian labour force (Nelson & Robinson, 1999:247). Karen Marshall (1998:13) notes that the percentage of dual-earner families with children under the age of sixteen rose from 34 percent in 1976 to 56 percent in 1997. The number of single-earner, two-parent families with children under the age of sixteen at home declined since 1976 to 3.3 million to 1.8 million in 1997. Over the same period of time, families with a non-earning mother

decreased from 3.2 million to 1.5 million. Marshall (1998:15) also notes that the number

of husband and wife families that have opted to have one parent stay at home dropped

from 3.0 million in 1976 to 1.2 million in 1997. Meg Luxton (2001:321) notes that "by

2000, the vast majority of mothers with young children remained in the labour force."

More mothers are working in the labour force than ever before.

The three participants featured here share their impressions of the 'perfect' or

stereotypical mother and their understandings of some of the conventional expectations

associated with this ideal. They also speak about the damaging consequences inflicted on

mothers and, to a lesser degree, the negative repercussions imposed on children and men

through conventional expectations placed on mothers.

i.   Laura

Laura and I met twice over an eight-month period between the fall of 1996 and

the spring of 1997 to talk about feminist mothering. When we met for the second time,

Laura, aged 38, had recently given birth to her second child and was on maternity leave

from her teaching position at a local university. While her two-year-old daughter enjoyed

the warm weather and sunshine with her father (and Laura's husband) in a local park,

Laura and I sat together in her living room. During our conversation that afternoon,

Laura's three-month-old daughter suckled and slept at her breast. Laura spoke with me

about her understanding of motherhood and why she finds it problematic and

disconcerting. Although her description is peppered with lightheartedness, Laura is

serious about the overwhelming presence of the stereotypical mother and the many

negative characteristics and expectations associated with it. When I asked her about her concept of the "ideal mother," Laura tells me:

> Oh, mothers are, according to the image, nurturing, and they stay home if they're good mothers. Of course, then we can nail them for not making money and being welfare moms, unless they have rich husbands. It's O.K. to stay home if you have a rich husband. They never get mad. They have lots of time to do everything. They keep a pristine home. They make homemade meals and lots of home-baked cookies and breads. They take the kids on outings. It's combined with the stereotype of housewife and that's one of the problems.
>
> So they have dinner on the table for their husbands when they come home at 5:30. They sometimes nag their children, but they're supposed to. It's a kind of a good thing-bad thing. They clean up after everybody. They do all of the house cleaning.
>
> They're sweet. They're volunteers. They go out and drive children around wherever all the children need to be driven. They sit on the PTA. They're active only in family things. They're not politically active. They don't go to Take Back the Night marches, but they'll be involved in things that affect their children.
>
> And the stereotype of mother is they'd rather have the [books] removed from the library, not that they'd stand up for freedom of access to books of which they disapproved. When those issues come up, they want to protect their children and that is their number one goal in life and in everything.
>
> And their only goal, actually, is to protect and take care of and keep a nice, happy, safe home. They don't curse. They don't have sex. How they have kids, I don't know, 'cause they don't have sex. [laughter] They don't do anything for themselves. Everything they do is for their kids and husbands.

Laura understands the 'ideal' mother is a middle-class married woman who takes on the qualities associated with the 'stereotypical' wife. Laura's analysis that perfect mothers are not politically active demonstrates her understanding that the family is to come first for the ideal mother and that all other activities are frowned upon because they draw women away from their child-rearing and familial responsibilities.

I became a listener that afternoon as Laura continued to examine the image of the

stereotypical mother and to critique the harmful aspects of the ideal. She notes:

> Real people should, should take care of themselves. Nobody should value themselves so little that they come behind everybody, including their kids, including their spouse. Real people shouldn't limit their options in the world, so much, so profoundly. Yes, you limit your options to some extent. That's just practical, but not, not so thoroughly as the stereotype.
>
> It's harmful for them, and it's harmful for the kids, [pause] whether they're boys or girls. It teaches girls to be stunted human beings, if you actually live that way. And it teaches boys to expect stunted human beings, and expect a slave.
>
> And, you know, there are aspects of the stereotype that are wonderful. Those are the parts, obviously, that I think I try to live, the nurturing, the caring and that stuff.
>
> But the [pause] the self-abnegation is awful, and the not being out in the world, to me, is not being a full person. And I don't mean necessarily working for money. I just mean being a presence in the world, being active and doing things. And you can't do that when your life is 100% involved around your home.
>
> And, [pause] it's bad for the woman. It's bad for the husband! I don't think having a slave is good for people. I think power corrupts and, and the more you feel that you have somebody at your beck and call, the more corrupting it is. So, I think it's bad for everybody.

Like Rich, Laura understands the power imbalance within the patriarchal family structure. She sees, for example, how treating the needs and wants of other family members as more important than those of mothers creates and enforces power relationships within the family that are skewed to favour men and disadvantage women and children. Husbands and fathers hold economic and decision making authority and have the ability to suppress the needs and desires of other family members. This power discrepancy within the family puts men in a position of authority over women and children. It also puts women in a subordinate position to the desires and wants of their husbands and, to a lesser extent, to those of their children.

Laura believes conventional ways of mothering are harmful to women and

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children. She comments on the self-denial of mothers within this family framework and the ways in which girls are taught to be subordinate to the needs of their fathers. During our first interview (before her second daughter was born) Laura considers the affects of conventional mothering on her eldest daughter and then on herself. In her response to my question of why it is important for her to change the way she mothers from the role of mothering that society has in mind for her, Laura says:

> Because that would be like cutting off her legs. That would be like binding her feet. Um, because of who I am and because I want to give her the freedom to be. Every night that I put her to bed, I rock her, you know, giver her a bottle and rock her. And I mean she's a year and a half, she doesn't need a bottle anymore.
>
> (Oh sure she does if she wants one)
>
> Yeah. And I sing "The Flirtations Lullaby" which goes. Um, I sing really badly, so [singing]:'You can be anybody that you want to be. You can love whomever you will. You can travel the world where your heart leads. And you know I will love you still. You can live by yourself, you can gather friends around. You can choose one special one. But the only measure of your words and your deeds will be the love you leave behind when you are gone.'
> I mean, it addresses specifically gender roles. It goes on [singing] 'Some girls grow up strong and bold. Some boys are quiet and kind. Some race on ahead, some follow behind. Some grow in their own space and time.' It's just wonderful and it's my hope for her.
> To mother the way like, like Betty Crocker wouldn't give her those chances. It would also be awful for her and it would be awful for me. It wouldn't be true to me.

Laura views the expectations placed on women and on children as limiting and damaging. She uses the language of enslavement, victimization and abuse to describe the negative implications of motherhood. She also recognizes that she has the ability to mother differently than the stereotypical standard of mothering she so easily describes.

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She acknowledges that mothering any other way would not be "true" to her.[75]

Other participants agree with Laura's analysis of conventional conceptions of motherhood. They concur with her depiction of the stereotypical mother being strongly associated with concepts of the ideal wife. And, like Laura, they are aware of motherhood being restrictive and of the damaging implications it holds for women. Neire, for example, is not only familiar with the 'ideal mother' that Laura speaks of, she is also critical of its narrow scope and the harm it inflicts on mothers.

ii. Neire

At the time of our interviews, Neire had recently divorced her husband and the father of their teenage daughter and their ten and six year-old sons.[76] At age forty-one, Neire was adjusting to her situation as a divorced woman and to her emerging identity as a lesbian. Shortly after leaving her husband, she began a long-distance relationship with a woman, a relationship Neire hoped would be long-term.

Because of hectic schedules, time constraints and other pressing responsibilities, Neire and I met four times to complete the two interviews. Our meetings took place on a university campus over a ten month period. During that time, Neire experienced many changes in her personal life that informed both her thinking and our discussions. In one of our meetings, Neire spoke candidly about her perception of the social expectations

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[75] Further discussion of how feminist mothers practice alternative mothering is presented in the second section of this chapter and also in Chapters Four and Five.

[76] In 1997, there were 225 divorces per 100,000 population in Canada and 230.9 divorces per 100,000 population in Manitoba (Statistics Canada, 2000).

placed on mothers and of the damages associated with them:

> I think that society still sees mothers as being women who totally devote themselves to their kids. If the kid has a problem, as a mother you are completely tuned into that kid. And I mean, any variation on that is still seen as not being acceptable. In other words, the mother is still very much responsible for her kids and their actions and their behaviours and their whole being. And when your kid does something wrong, the mother is still blamed. That's still very prevalent.
>
> I think it boils down to this whole ideology surrounding the family, that the family has two people, opposite sexes, and the children. And they're fully enclosed, a supposedly fully-functioning family unit. And our society is still predicated on that. So if a woman finds herself in a position where she's not within that structure, the society only pays lip service to supports and that kind of thing
>
> I think it's very harmful, very harmful, because it doesn't give women, as I say, a sense of their own abilities, a sense of their own power. It puts women down. Like I was saying on Tuesday, if you do something that doesn't fit with a societal concept of what a 'good mother' is, you're automatically labelled a 'bad mother.' And [pause], I think there is still this incredible sense of guilt among mothers. We don't talk about it anymore because [pause] it's under the surface like a lot of things are in society.
>
> But I think, given that this patriarchal model is still very much in existence, there are still a lot of women who are falling into this trap, and it just creates a hell of a lot of conflict and a hell of a lot of guilt, you know? I think it's very damaging. It's definitely damaging to mothers because it erodes our self-esteem and our self-confidence in our ability to be good mothers.

Neire's understanding of the restrictive definition of motherhood and the lack of support for women who do not conform to its standards is informed by her personal circumstances of being a divorced, lesbian mother. Neire is critical of the patriarchal model of the family and argues that women who try to meet its expectations are likely to fall into its 'trap.' While she does not explain what she means by 'trap,' one possibility may be how the institution of motherhood, with the help of other institutions, constructs an environment whereby women have little or no support when they do not conform to

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the ideal standards of motherhood, mother or family. Just as Rich (1986) speaks of the violence and threats of violence used against mothers to maintain a designed way of mothering, Neire recounts how labelling mothers as 'good' and 'bad' controls women's mothering practices. Sociologists and feminists have documented the patterns of discrimination that conform to these judgements of mothers as 'good' and 'bad,' citing examples of how children are often removed from lesbian mothers, racialized mothers and economically impoverished mothers.[77]

The 'trap' Neire speaks of may also refer to the unrealistic or inappropriate ideals imposed on mothers through the institution of motherhood. In trying to conform to the patriarchal models of the family and of motherhood, Neire theorizes that women lose their ability to be good mothers. Accordingly, women's self-esteem and self-confidence in their ability to parent are eroded. Rather than confirming their own power and their own abilities, Neire suggests that women feel conflict and guilt for not parenting according to the patriarchal standard.

Neire is not the only participant to recognize and name the damage mothers suffer due to societal expectations placed on mothers. Beverly, too, believes that "the whole system is out of whack" and recognizes how the best interests of mothers and children are not promoted within it.

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[77] See, for example, Arnup (1988, 1995), Collins (1987; 1991; 1994), Kline (2000) and Thurer (1994).

iii. Beverly

Beverly, a 44 year-old lone-parent of two children, speaks candidly about her perception of motherhood and the damage mothers suffer because of it. Like other feminist mothers, Beverly has come to her understanding and critique of motherhood through observing other women's experiences of mothering (including her own mother's), by talking with other mothers about their experiences of parenting and from reflecting on her own circumstances and experiences of mothering.

Beverly is openly bi-sexual and an activist who works for social change, primarily around issues of sexuality and poverty.[78] She lives with the youngest of her two daughters, who is in her late teens and attends high school in Winnipeg. Beverly's eldest daughter, who is in her early twenties, lives in Ontario where she is studying fashion design at college. With frequent long distance telephone calls and visits, Beverly remains close with her eldest daughter.

When we met for our second interview late one winter afternoon, Beverly and I were tired. We had dug our cars out of snow from a heavy storm in order to meet a few hours before Beverly was to pick her youngest daughter up from the airport. Beverly's daughter was returning from her first visit with her older sister. As the snow continued to swirl outside the university classroom window, Beverly explained to me how structural changes in the family and myths associated with mothering contribute to the restrictions and damage women experience as mothers:

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[78] While the results of the 2001 Canadian Census may provide information on the sexuality of Canadian Citizens. However, none were available at the time of this research.

It's a really horrible picture, I mean, with the loss of the extended family. That is certainly what's happened. And the more and more you move to this emphasis on the nuclear family, the more isolation, I think, mothers experience in general.

When we had talked the first time, we'd also talked about self-esteem. And, ah, I think the two are really closely connected, because those feelings of isolation can quickly lead to an erosion of one's self-esteem. You know when you're losing it as mother. You know when you are just not able to cope anymore, and you just want somebody, anybody, to walk in the door and change things, you know? [laughs]

And, it's just so prevalent, I guess, in our society. That we, we seem to think that women have this biological, intrinsic nature that we're supposed to know how to mother. And perhaps therein lies the problem. Because I don't think we do. I mean, you just have to look at the mother of a first-born, you know. I mean, why are our second-born children so much more at ease with themselves than our first-born children? Because our first-born children were being held in arms that weren't entirely sure that they were holding the baby the right way, or that they were feeding them the right way or all those different things, you know?

There's this huge myth that, I think, we've all bought into – that we can do this alone, with no help. And then the myth that your husband's gonna help you, you know? And he doesn't know how to. Another myth is that you're gonna turn to your mother at times when you're stressed, and she's gonna tell you what to do. When you know damn well that the only thing that she's gonna tell you to do is what she did to you, which you don't want to repeat.

So, it's like, this whole [pause] system is clearly out of whack. And it's certainly not promoting the best interests of the children. And it's not promoting the best interests of women.

Beverly, like Laura and Neire, believes that the nuclear family structure is the standard family type that people are expected to live within. She posits that many mothers today experience isolation because of emphasis on the nuclear family and the loss of the extended family. Speaking from personal experience, Beverly theorizes that the isolation mothers experience can quickly lead to the erosion of women's self-esteem. As a mother in a nuclear family with two young children and later as a lone-parent of teenaged and adult daughters, Beverly has experienced the isolating realities of

mothering. She speculates that many mothers experience low-self esteem, especially

when they lack substantial support and get to the point of not being able to cope.

According to Beverly, the isolation of mothers often goes unnoticed because of the myth

that women have a natural ability to mother with ease and because of the lack of support

mothers find within the nuclear family.

In hearing Beverly's description and analysis of the ideal mother, I am reminded

of Rich's theorizing about the institution of motherhood:

> Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal 'instinct' rather
> than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others
> rather than the creation of self. Motherhood is 'sacred' so long as its
> offspring are 'legitimate' – that is, as long as the child bears the name of a
> father who legally controls the mother. (Rich, 1986:42)

Like Rich, Beverly recognizes how the institution requires mothers to be heterosexual, to

be married to men and to naturally want to have children. Mothers are to belong to a

nuclear family and to put the needs, wants and desires of their husbands and children

before their own. Yet, she moves beyond Rich's analysis when she identifies the

regulation of mothers, particularly through their isolation from others. Beverly describes

how the expectations that mothers know innately how to raise children and to do so

without assistance or support create conditions of isolation for women within the nuclear

family. I wonder if this is not another way in which women get caught in the patriarchal

'trap' that Neire identifies. As Beverly attests, mothers who find themselves in the

position of not being able to cope with the conditions of mothering at times feel the need

to be rescued. Maybe the feeling of needing to be rescued is a response to feeling trapped

by the myth that they are innately suited for child care.

Like the other two participants, Beverly not only identifies elements of the institution of motherhood, she demonstrates how it restricts and 'traps' mothers with its unrealistic and damaging conditions. She theorizes, as do Laura and Neire, that the institution damages women's self-esteem with its requirement that mothers be solely responsible for rearing their offspring. Beverly also believes that women are harmed by the expectation that they will devote their lives to their children in the isolating conditions of the nuclear family.

II.   Negotiating Motherhood

Clearly, the pressure to conform to a patriarchal model of motherhood and the consequences for non-compliance are very real. Yet, feminist mothers believe that patriarchal motherhood is not completely oppressive nor non-negotiable. Rather, they see and find room to practice agency, resistance, invention and renewal within it. While feminist mothers are aware of the impractical, unobtainable and harmful criteria associated with motherhood, they are also committed to mothering. Rather than accept conventional ideals of motherhood without reservation, they use their critical analysis of motherhood to negotiate motherhood and to redefine mothering in ways that are more meaningful and acceptable to them. This difficult task often involves conflict, tension and struggle.

Jody, Andrea, Carol and Willow all discuss how they draw on their experiences of mothering to create some distance from the regulations of motherhood. In doing so, they generate space in their mothering to re-shape motherhood in ways that are

compatible with their critique of motherhood and with their vision of mothering. Mothering is no longer confined by the social prescriptions of motherhood for these feminists. Rather, it is a meaning-making activity where they engage in the self-reflexive creating of subjectivity. Parenting becomes a site where mothers engage in the practice of self-governance and mother in ways that are grounded in their own experience.

i. Jody

I first met with Jody in the fall of 1996 in her downtown Winnipeg office. At age 36, Jody had just rejoined the labour force a few months before and was employed by a feminist organization to coordinate an information program and support group for new mothers. Until her return to paid work, Jody stayed at home with her four year-old son and her two year-old daughter. She was the primary child care provider while her husband, and the father of their children, was the sole bread winner. Jody notes that by staying home she made sacrifices regarding her career and her future financial security. Depending on her husband financially meant that she was ineligible for any health, dental or pension benefits.

Like other participants, Jody is aware and critical of the idealized image of mother. In describing the 'perfect' mother, Jody speaks of the pervasiveness of an idealized image of mother, particularly in the media:

> What is the perfect mother, and the concept that society puts on the word mother? She's totally responsible for caring, for nurturing, always has a connection with the baby; never have an ill feeling against your child. You would never do anything to harm that child or have harmful thoughts. And I think you get caught up in what you're supposed to be, you know?
> I think in some ways, it's just kinda placed on you. 'The mother,'

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in every image, everything you read, everything you see. Media, T.V. 'This is a happy, joyful moment. This will be easy for you. Wow, it will be wonderful.' All that kind of stuff and not the reality of what it really is.

So when it's not reality, especially the whole thing about, 'You should never strike your child, you should never harm your child.' And you are really frustrated and you suddenly – you do something. And all you can do is feel guilty. Your child wasn't hurt. But you had that real strong thought, like you might, you could, 'throw this baby through the window at any point.' And you're not suppose to have those thoughts or feelings. Or people say to you, 'Oh, you couldn't do anything like that.' Guess what? [Laughter] Wrong!

It's been internalized in us. From the time you're little. I mean, in the media. Everything is just the mother whose got the perfect dress on and the perfect kids. The kids are always happy, there's never anything wrong with her kids. And if something happens with the kids, it always comes back to the mother. It's her fault. Well, not necessarily [laughter] you know? These are individual people making choices too. At what point can we stop blaming the mother, you know? And I think we all get caught up in that, it's a daily struggle I think.

As for me, I find as a mother, I look at myself and think, 'I thought I'd never do that, I thought I'd never say that!' Because it's been ingrained, that is what a mother is. You know, some wonderful, sweet poem that you read [laughter], to *Mommie Dearest*. Like, there's just never something in-between. It's either you're this god-like figure or you're the devil. And it's got to be challenged, constantly.

Jody's account reveals her awareness and critique of the ideal mother and the role the media plays in promoting it. She also identifies the pressure women experience to internalize expectations of the 'perfect' mother and how she continues to struggle with this herself. For example, she talks about how the media constantly places an image of mothering on her and how she questions and judges her own mothering because of it.

When I heard Jody reflect on how she internalizes concepts and expectations of mothering promoted in the media, I thought of the work of feminist writer Suzanne Pharr. According to Pharr (1997), low-self esteem, self-blame and self-hatred are the consequence of internalized oppression. Internalized oppression occurs when people

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adopt oppressive views and practices as their own (Pharr, 1997:60). For the process of internalized oppression to transpire, people must live within an environment where there is a norm, or a standard of rightness, by which they are judged. Negative images and stereotypes of people who do not comply to the norm or ideal are "backed up by violence, victim-hating and blaming, all of which leads to low self-esteem and self-blame" (Pharr, 1997:59). Consequently, individuals come to accept the norm and to adopt negative messages and stereotypes of others and of themselves for non-compliance to the ideal. When people believe their own oppression and the oppression of others is "deserved and should not be resisted," they have internalized oppression (Pharr, 1997:59).

Jody, like other participants, recognizes that we live in an environment where the media promotes negative images, stereotypes and messages about mothers and supports practices that coerce mothers to conform to a particular standard of mothering. Women who do not conform to the standard of the 'good mother' are named and treated as 'bad mothers.' Women internalize the standard by which they are measured to be 'good mothers' and they develop low self-esteem and blame themselves when they do not meet the criteria associated with this ideal. Having internalized institutionalized motherhood, they believe themselves to be 'bad mothers' for non-compliance to the stereotypical 'ideal' mother. I again wonder if this may be another element of the 'trap' that Neire identifies. Through using tactics such as mother-blaming and labelling women as 'bad' in the media, women are coerced to conform to an unrealistic ideal of motherhood. Mothers are trapped, as Jody points out, between the 'god-like figure' or 'the devil.'

Reflecting on her own experiences and her paid work with mothers, Jody

speculates that mothers, especially new mothers, frequently discover that their experiences of mothering do not match what they are told. Unlike the 'good mother' who finds mothering easy and fulfilling, Jody and other mothers find mothering frustrating and disappointing. Jody believes that feeling unable to cope is a reasonable reaction to the overwhelming responsibilities and isolation of mothering. The ideal image of mother presented in the media does not reflect, nor speak to, who women are.

In addition to being critical of the pressure to take on the trappings of the 'perfect' mother, Jody challenges those messages. As part of her coordinating duties, Jody runs workshops to address many of the daily struggles women face as mothers. Drawing on her analyses of motherhood, she speaks with mothers about the incongruence between their own experiences of mothering and what is expected of mothers by the institution of motherhood. Jody believes that when mothers know they are in a no-win situation because of unrealistic expectations and images, they are in a better position to challenge and redefine mothering for themselves:

> So, what I try and do is to say to women, 'You know, what you're feeling is normal and what they're telling you out there isn't. You're living up to an expectation that you're bound to fail at. And as long as you know that, you can redefine it. You can re-define that definition.'

In her workshops, Jody focuses on the ways women get caught up in what a mother is supposed to be. She encourages mothers to think about expectations placed on them and how these expectations influence their ideas and practices of mothering. To help clients see ways of defining motherhood and mothering differently, Jody encourages them to think and talk with each other about their own experiences and realties of mothering. Together, they realize that they share common experiences of mothering and

that the ideal is fictional. Jody suggests that mothers view children as people who are making their own choices. Instead of blaming mothers when something happens in the lives of their children, she proposes that some of the responsibility for children's behaviour be placed with the child. In going through this exercise, women see how they can change the expectation that mothers are solely responsible for their children and refrain from blaming mothers for the choices and decisions their children make. More importantly, they see ways of re-defining motherhood and becoming mothers in their own image.

Jody's analysis of motherhood is grounded in her lived experience as a mother and in the work she does in her capacity as a coordinator. While she acknowledges that women experience pressure to conform to an ideal of motherhood and suffer consequences for non-compliance to it, Jody believes women have the ability to challenge the construct of the ideal mother. By identifying and then rejecting the internalized expectations of mothering, women can re-define mothering for themselves. Jody has seen, in herself and with mothers she works with, how this strategy works. In paying attention to women's personal experiences and being critical of the standards of mothering, women can negotiate motherhood and mother in ways that reflect concepts and practices of mothering that are in line with their own realities and ideals.

Andrea is a feminist mother who is engaged in a process similar to the one Jody advocates. Through analysing and resisting the internalization of the social definition of stay-at-home mothers, Andrea establishes a way of mothering that is suitable for herself. She mothers her daughter in a way that coincides with her ethos and vision of mothering

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rather than with that of society's.

ii.   Andrea

Andrea and I first met at her home in a middle-class neighbourhood where she and her partner of ten years live with their two year-old child. To be close to Andrea's family and to mutual long-time friends, Andrea and her husband moved back to Winnipeg a few months after the home-birth of their daughter in Toronto. During the three years they lived in Toronto, they were both full-time employees and Andrea also worked on a Master's degree in Women's Studies. After moving to Winnipeg, Andrea could not find a job and stopped pursuing her MA when she realized that she was unable to finish her thesis. Andrea's identity quickly changed from full-time employee and graduate student to stay-at-home mother. She went from contributing financially to the household to being dependent on her husband, whose home-based business supports the family.

Andrea and I spoke in her living room, while her daughter visited with a neighbourhood friend and her partner worked in his upstairs office. Although Andrea is now at peace with her situation, she spent most of the first year-and-a-half struggling with her new identity as as a stay-at-home mom. The most difficult aspect for Andrea was understanding and dealing with the tension between what she knew about mothering and what she had grown up hearing and seeing about motherhood:

> I had to struggle within myself between what I know intellectually and what I feel I'm supposed to do. Because I do really feel like there is incredible pressure and we'd be hard-pressed to put our finger on who it's coming from, but I think it's out there.

And specifically, at this point in my life, I am, for all intents and purposes, a stay-at-home mom with a very part-time job. And, ah, where my identity fits into that is a really big struggle for me.

I'm struggling with my identity as someone who makes no financial contribution to my household and who I am as an individual compared to the Betty Crocker stay-at-home mom stereotype. As I said, between what I know intellectually and my ability to reject the image of what a stay-at-home mom is. And wanting on some level to embrace certain aspects of that and wanting on others to reject other aspects wholeheartedly.

Andrea is aware that she has been struggling with the tension between the pressure to conform to conventional notions of the stay-at-home mother and her desire to mother according to her own beliefs for some time. In fact, we repeatedly returned to the topic of Andrea coming to terms with the change in her identity during both interviews. Andrea explains:

I don't think I had a really clear understanding of this until this summer when I had my little mini-crisis and I had friends in from Toronto at the time, which was really lucky, 'cause we had lots of lengthy conversations. And it was my friend who was able to say very clearly that part of my conflict was arising from the fact that I was rejecting the role of wife, while embracing the role of mother.

And that was a tremendous click for me. I hadn't recognized that what society talks about when they talk about mother is also what they talk about with wife. That for the rest of the world, those two things are intertwined and that, if you are a mother, you *should* be a wife. First and very importantly you must be married. And that you would also, as part of your mothering duties, do things like the laundry and the cleaning and the cooking and the whatever else, take care of the home.

That wasn't what mothering was about for me. And it took my friend pointing this out for me to understand that, in fact, my perception of mothering was really different than what the world's concept is, what society's concept is.

Andrea finds it impossible to conform to the socially prescribed mould of the stay-at-home mother that demands she take on the duties of wife because she separates the identities and duties of mother from those of wife. While Andrea is married, she does

not view herself as a wife. She told me, "In no way, shape or form do I define myself as a wife. I recognize that that's what I am, technically speaking, and I don't have a problem with the fact that I am, officially, a 'wife.' But that's not who I am. That's not what I do." Mothering is about being with her daughter, not about the wiving duties of keeping house and baking cookies. Andrea stays at home to be with her daughter so they can spend time together, playing, learning and getting out to see the world.

Shortly after our first interview, Andrea gave up her part-time job. Doing so enabled her to re-define mothering in a way that she feels good about and to become the mother she wants to be. During our second meeting, Andrea told me:

> I've made peace with the concept of being a stay-at-home mom. I gave up a job I was not happy in and have been thrilled ever since. For me, it was very much an intellectual/emotional issue, that I had to be able to say that 'I choose this, and that it's OK. And that I can make it be whatever I want it to be. But it doesn't have to be what anyone else says it's gonna be.'

In "rejecting the role of wife while embracing the role of mother," Andrea renounces the interconnectedness of the roles of wife and mother and creates a practice of mothering for herself. Staying at home with her daughter is right for Andrea, even though she finds it difficult to mother in ways that reject "the Betty Crocker stay-at-home mom stereotype." Nevertheless, Andrea has been able to become a mother in a way that is true to her own vision by staying grounded in her own experiences and by remaining critical of the pressures to conform to an ideal of mothering that causes her discomfort and stress. Andrea has re-shaped mothering for herself in a way that makes her "happy while doing it."

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iii.   Carol

Carol is another feminist mother who has shaped mothering in a way that is based on her critique of motherhood and grounded in her experience. Carol uses her analysis of patriarchal demands placed on mothers to create an alternative approach to mothering. At the age of thirty-five, Carol became a mother when her sister died and left the legal and practical care of her three year-old daughter with Carol. Five months later, Carol discovered she was four months pregnant with an unplanned pregnancy. She decided to carry the pregnancy to term because she was already the mother of her niece. At the same time, she ended her fifteen year relationship with the father of her fetus. Carol believed he would be an unsuitable father because he was an alcoholic. The next year was very stressful for Carol. Within the span of eight months she had lost her sister, ended a long-term relationship, become the mother of her three year-old niece and given birth to her son. Carol told me that during that time she experienced "a radical lifestyle change" and suffered "profound sadness."

Carol credits the solid relationship she has with her niece for making the transition from single woman to mother less difficult than it might have been. Before Carol's sister died, Carol and her niece spent many weekends alone together. As a result, they had genuine feelings for each other and had a good relationship that carried over after the death of Carol's sister. Carol also credits her passage to motherhood to the deep feelings of love she felt for her son from the moment he was born.

Three years after the birth of her son, Carol met a man who was the lone parent of two girls and a boy, ranging in age from eleven to thirteen years. They decided to live

together in a "big old house" and Carol became the mother of three more children. They lived together for a few years until the teenaged children moved out on their own. Carol thought this was a good time for her son and niece/daughter to live with her in their own home. While the relationship between Carol and the man continues, they live separately because Carol wants to parent her children alone.

I interviewed Carol in her home while her ten year-old son and her thirteen year-old daughter were in school. Carol spoke at length about how she is conscious and critical of the way in which patriarchal society expects women to mother:

> What they would have me do would be to raise my girl children and my boy children in a specific way, so that when they're adults, that's the way that they are. That, to them, is truth. I do not do that. I do not raise my children the way that they would have me raise my children.
>
> I *guide* my children, I do not *raise* them. I guide them to be the people that they are. And, like I say, there are a lot of traits in all my kids that I don't particularly care for. [pause]
>
> But I will not, as patriarchal society dictates to me, 'beat it out of them,' 'cause it doesn't work. You know what I'm saying? It just doesn't work. So, to me, that's not successful. I won't do it.
>
> You just be who you are, even if I don't care for this particular trait about you. And, in fact, it becomes a family joke, you know? Like, one of my daughters is so tight, so cheap, you know what I'm saying? Cheap! Oh, I can't stand cheap! But, what can you do? [laughter] I mean, I could nitpick her for the rest of her life. I never did, right? I never, 'Oh, well, you know, maybe one day you're gonna want money from your brother,' right? And that's exactly what happens, right? All these years, she's been tight with herself!
>
> I'm not going to have my daughter, who is cheap, pretend to be generous when it really bothers her. I mean, when she spends a nickel, it kills her. You can see that it tortures her. So what? So that she can be nurturing for everybody else? I don't think so.
>
> If that's the way you are, that's the way you are! Why torture yourself? If you don't want to spend, you don't spend! (laughs) Put it in the bank, right? I don't care, you know?
>
> So, I mean, her siblings will come and tease her, but she doesn't feel bad. I didn't make her feel odd because of it, although she was certainly the odd one out, 'cause all the rest of them are big shots, right?

But, I will not do that. I will not. I'm not gonna mould my children. No. I'm gonna guide them to be the person that they are. That's what feminism has given me, right? I don't have to mould them into some perceived personality trait. They can be who they are, good and bad, like we all are. And then, they end up feeling insecure? No! They're secure. Every one of them that bounced out of this house with [laughs] chests stickin' straight out, right? 'Hello world!' Every one of them.

And the last two, too, are coming up. And you just would not believe it, right. They're confident, they're healthy, you know? So, no, I got no interest in moulding them into any patriarchal, you know, competitiveness.

You know, one of them's competitive. The other's not competitive! Well, O.K., you won, right? The other one, competitive as hell. Well, good luck to both of them, right? I'm not going to condemn one who's not competitive because the patriarchy says you gotta fight tooth and nail in order to even get a job, right! No, I won't do it. I will not do it. If that's the way they are, then that's the way they are. I can't do it.

Carol refuses to engage in a type of relationship with her children she believes is demanded of her by patriarchal society. While we did not talk about the specifics of how she 'guides' her children, we did talk about Carol's commitment to this approach of mothering. Carol told me that what she promotes in her children is "themselves and their ability to be comfortable with who they are as long as they are not hurting anybody." Since Carol sees moulding children as a "form of manipulation and therefore a form of abuse of power," she consciously rejects the role of authoritarian parent:

I cannot believe the way that some people talk to their children; whether they're two, whether they're four, whether they're fourteen, whether they're forty – it's unbelievable! Feminism has allowed me to treat my children with respect, and to respect them for who they are. It's no longer scary for me that my daughter, as a for instance, was a tomboy. That wasn't scary for me. So, now I've got to spend my whole life picking at her, so that she will be more 'feminine?' 'For God's sake, keep your legs closed!' right? No! Because I was a feminist, I realized that, 'Hey, that's just the way she is, and there's room for everybody.' Right. I don't care for everything of my kids, there's no two ways about that. But they can be who they are, you understand what I'm saying? Because, you know, the point is to have them be good citizens, right. You know, they can just be.

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Carol does not use behaviourism to construct the characteristics of her children. Instead of being in an authoritarian relationship where she demands certain behaviours from her children, Carol accepts their individuality and supports their development. Carol recognizes her children as individuals in their own right who are unfolding as they live their lives. Carol knows that her non-authoritarian approach to mothering is effective. She has guided three adult children who are successfully living and working in the world. With this knowledge, Carol continues to define mothering and her relationship with all five of her children. Rather than meeting the demands she views as patriarchal, Carol relies on her own understanding of her children and on her personal experiences to inform her mothering. Perhaps Carol's approach to 'guiding,' rather than 'raising' her children, ensures that her relationships continue to be close with her children throughout their lives and to challenge the oppression of children throughout the relationship. Carol is re-shaping mothering for herself (and for her children) in a way that fits with her experience of responding to and interacting with her children.

Willow is another feminist mother who is using her own experience and knowledge to re-define mothering for herself. A decade ago, at age 27, Willow decided to become a mother and raise her child alone. In doing so, she challenges assumptions about motherhood and family by creating a chosen family for her daughter and for herself. Through mothering in a way that is true to her knowledge, Willow is able to re-enter relationships that allow her to heal her wounds from childhood.

iv. Willow

Willow and I first met in her home and then again in a university classroom to talk about feminist mothering. On both of those occasions, Willow's ten-year-old daughter was close by, reading, listening or, at times, contributing to our conversation. Considerable time in our meetings was spent talking about Willow's decision to become a mother and what mothering means to her. Willow's childhood experiences within her family of origin have strongly influenced her desire to mother, her approaches to mothering and her vision of family. While she lived with her biological mother, father and sister as a child, Willow suffered great emotional, psychological and physical abuse by both of her parents. She told me:

> Although I was born with both a mother and a father, neither of my parents were able to be parents. And so, in real terms, I'm an orphan and I was raised by nobody.
> Um, they say that motherless daughters question everything, and that's true. I do. So, because I had no role model that was appropriate for me, I completely rejected my mother as a role model because she threw me down the stairs and beat my head against the wall. So, obviously, you can't identify with that, you know. She tells you she loves you and beats your head against the wall. So *everything* was in question. Everything was up for grabs and it's probably the deepest influence, really. The fact that she beat me allowed me to question everything. [laughter]

As a result of growing up without a mother as a role model and developing an ability to question everything, Willow challenges how families are constructed and questions the rules and regulations around mothering. Willow's decision to become a mother was strongly influenced by the damage she suffered as a child and by her ability to ask questions of what mothering might look like if done differently. She notes:

> I had a child because my mother was a profoundly collapsed mother, and part of my work in this life was to reclaim the feminine energy and do it

preferably without violence and do it a little better. And to re-build the family from the inside out. In order to do that, I actually had to divorce my original family.

Willow left her family and developed relationships with other people. As a young woman, Willow's peer group was "feminist and pretty much lesbian." Reflecting on the time around her pregnancy, Willow speaks of the lack of support for her decision from her friends:

> They were not having babies at the time and it wasn't something they knew how to support in any way. They didn't get it. They didn't understand. And in that moment, I didn't care. Somehow deep inside me, I knew that this was the time and this was the place and this was the thing to do. And I was really focussed about what I was. It was not my peer group's thing, and I lost my peer group as a result of it, and I'm not sorry. [laughter]

With the knowledge that conceiving and having a baby were outside conventional practices for lesbians, Willow nevertheless followed her desire and need to be a mother. Estranged from her family and misunderstood by her friends and community, Willow was isolated and alone in her pregnancy and for the first few years of her daughter's life.

While this was a difficult time for Willow, it was also a time of growth, self-governance and empowerment. She spoke of how she has been able to understand how she had missed bonding with her mother in her childhood. In the process of mothering her daughter, Willow uncovered a clear picture of what her mother did to her when she was a child. When her daughter was a baby, Willow had what might be considered 'flashbacks' to her own experiences as a child. Through these moments, Willow re-claimed what her mother had done to her:

> It was really scary sometimes when she was a baby, 'cause she cried a lot. And I got these images flashing through my head of hurting the child. And

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the images were very graphic and it didn't come from TV, and it didn't come from my own conscious thoughts. And so I began to realize that what I was doing when I was going through this was re-claiming what my mother did to me. So I had a very clear picture of what my mother did to me, 'cause it's written on my body.

I think it was the only way for me to re-claim the body memories of my abuse. I had to become conscious of what happened to me. But they came because I was a mom. Because I walked through every moment of this as a mother, I was able to re-claim those pieces of myself that had been fragmented by abuse. I could not have done it any other way. I couldn't have accessed those memories in any other way.

Willow explained to me how the acts of birthing and solely raising a child, without any connection to a man, are about self-governance. Willow's decisions are mindful actions of resistance to dominant conceptions and practices of mothering:

I mean basically, in order to do this, I broke all the rules and I went about this in the most conscious manner that I knew at that time. Although, to be honest with you, because my consciousness has changed, I'd probably go about it differently now. But back ten years ago, I broke all the rules by making a choice to be a mother.

Nobody told me I had to be a mother because I was married or that I had to get married in order to do this. I made choices for myself.

So in the late '80s and '90s there are particular ways that you're suppose to be a mother and they include either: be married to somebody who is relatively wealthy and can allow you to stay home, or putting the kid in day care at the age of six weeks or as soon as your maternity leave runs out and paying attention to the money issue more than to anything else and run out to work. And I did not do that.

I did not let myself be subjugated, as it were, by men. I'm not married now, and I never have been and no man ever called the shots in my home. Nor did a man ever support me in any way. So that is really breaking the rules in the patriarchy. It is clearly the most holistic act of resistance that I have ever done and the most difficult.

Mothering for Willow is not only about giving birth to and mothering a child, it is also about re-claiming bonding with other human beings, challenging patriarchal constructions of the family and breaking the rules of institutionalized motherhood.

Willow has experienced hardship, as well as great pleasure, as a mother. Since

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she wanted to raise her baby without the interference of others and was without the financial means to do so, Willow decided to live on social assistance for a few years. As a result, Willow experienced insolation and dealt with the social stigma of living on social assistance. She often bartered with others, exchanging reading/singing lessons or child care arrangements for goods and services. When her daughter reached school age, Willow chose to educate her at home, partly because she has a teaching certificate and partly because she felt home schooling was the best option for her daughter at the time.

At age eight, Willow's daughter went to public school after expressing a desire and a need to. Willow also returned to the work force, part-time. Within the past five years, Willow has become a member of an "alternative" or "chosen family" that is made up of several individuals and groups of people who are not necessarily biologically related to each other, but who care for one another and are committed to supporting each other. Most of the members of her family are women with children; some are feminist, some are not. During our second interview, Willow told me how she had recently found it difficult to deal with some of her pre-teenaged daughter's behaviour. Instead of handling the situation alone, Willow decided to call upon her 'chosen family' for support:

> I went to these people and I said, 'I need some help. And if it isn't you, it's nobody, because there's nobody else for this child to perceive to be her family and I need help.' So I said, 'I'm sorry, but you gotta help.' And they did, because I demanded it. [laughter].
>
> I've also had to remind them that what I want here is to be backed and I don't want any judgement or any blame or anything else like that. I want them to take responsibility as well, because I can't do this by myself anymore.
>
> I am inventing it as I go along because I had no mother in the first place, and no mothering. And my community is tremendously important to me at this time because I can't possibly do this by myself.

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With the help of one particular family member (a close friend and a feminist mother), Willow was able to deal effectively with the unwanted behaviour of her daughter. For a few months, the two women shared the parental responsibilities in caring for Willow's daughter, allowing Willow and her daughter to remain strongly and positively connected. For a few days or occasionally up to a couple of weeks at a time, Willow's daughter would live with her social mother, allowing much needed space for both Willow and her daughter. Since both households were in the same neighbourhood and the lines of communication were open, the women and the child were able to be in touch with each other on a regular basis. Family meetings were held frequently to discuss and work through the situation. Within four months, Willow and her daughter were living together again, and the behaviour had been dealt with in a loving and effective manner. This did not mean that there were not times when Willow's daughter would seek out her social mother. Willow supports this practice and is happy she has a family she could look to for support in her mothering.

Willow, together with others, creates a model of mothering and of family that does not replicate that prescribed by patriarchy (heterosexual, nuclear). By expanding her family to include other people and other mothers, Willow is able to address the needs of her daughter while keeping her relationship with her intact. In doing so, Willow keeps herself from being labelled an 'unfit' or a 'bad' mother. Continually inventing ways to parent beyond the patriarchal standard means that Willow enjoys a level of freedom and strength that she would not have experienced had she conformed to a patriarchal model of family or to the standard method of mothering.

III. Concluding Remarks: Breaking the Rules

As women live and reflect upon their experiences, they develop an understanding of motherhood and of mothering. While the accounts of the women featured here verify what theorists have pointed out, they also open up a dynamic approach to mothering and enrich an understanding of motherhood. Participants are well aware of the distinction Rich (1986:13) makes between the "two meanings of motherhood" that appear to be "superimposed" on one another. They are cognizant of the ways in which they are regulated and expected to conform to an ideal of mothering that does not necessarily reflect their experience. Participants also identify social expectations placed on them and promoted in society, such as the nuclear family and the stay-at-home mother, and recognize the causes and consequences of being labelled a 'bad mother' for not meeting the criteria presented by these authorities.

When participants speak about their understanding of motherhood, they make visible what is often invisible about institutionalized motherhood. For example, they acknowledge the confining aspects of motherhood, such as the isolation and abnegation of mothers, and the effects these have on women. They recognize how regulatory elements of the institution are harmful to women and children, citing as one example how girls are expected and taught to be enslaved to the demands of their fathers and husbands. Feminist mothers also speak of how women feel trapped within patriarchal notions of family and motherhood and how internalizing these institutions damages the self-esteem of mothers.

Relying on their own knowledge and experience, participants theorize that

motherhood is not entirely oppressive. They believe that they can successfully challenge aspects of motherhood they disagree with. For instance, Beverly, Neire and Willow break the rules when they choose to mother outside of heterosexual relationships. Carol chooses to live apart from her heterosexual partner and mother alone, while Andrea is married yet rejects the role of 'wife.' Feminist mothers renounce the belief that women are totally responsible for their children's development, character and demeanour and challenge the assumption that they will raise their children to fit patriarchal moulds. Carol, for example, 'guides' her children to be who they are rather than 'raising' them to be who society expects them to be. Jody councils mothers to think about their children as people who make choices and who are responsible for their own behaviour.

Conscious of the difference between social prescriptions of motherhood and their personal experiences of mothering, participants create space between the two to re-define mothering for themselves. To become the mother she wants to be, Jody draws on her experience of internalizing the media's unrealistic and damaging portrayal of mothers and on her knowledge that women are set up to fail as mothers. Knowing that mothers experience ill-feelings toward their children from time to time, Jody refuses to feel guilty when these feelings are a reality for her. She also uses this knowledge to speak with other mothers about their realities of mothering and how they too can re-frame mothering and be mothers in a way that is appropriate for them.

Andrea creates space within motherhood to parent as she sees fit by not complying with the expectation that mothers take on the duties and responsibilities associated with the role of wife. Andrea is no longer anxious about her identity as a stay-

at-home-mom because she distances herself from the role of wife and embraces her relationship with her daughter. In defining mothering on her own terms, Andrea authors a way of being and a way of mothering for herself.

When defined on their own terms, mothering is a dynamic place for creativity where women can become more themselves. Willow finds that mothering enables her to re-claim the body memories of her abuse and to heal from the lack of bonding with her own mother. Through her powers of reproduction and her relationship with her daughter, Willow is able to re-enter relationships with other people and to create a 'chosen' family where she and her daughter are respected and supported.

These feminist mothers not only make visible the institution of motherhood, they are critical of it. Based on their own knowledge and experience, they uncover the restrictive and damaging aspects of motherhood and the negative repercussions of these for both women and children. In their critical response to the institution of motherhood, participants break the rules and create some distance from it. In the process, they re-shape and re-define mothering for themselves. Chapter Four explores the ways in which these feminist mothers have used that space to parent in particular and distinctive ways, enabling them strive to be the mothers they want to be and to consciously mother their children.

CHAPTER FOUR

Consciously Mothering

By respecting their own experience and knowledge, feminist mothers put in practice Rich's vision of motherhood as a site of resistance and creation. Feminist mothers not only resist the damaging elements of the institution, they create space to mother differently. This chapter explores how participants sculpt the space they have negotiated within the institution of motherhood and created to parent in ways they see appropriate. The accounts of five participants reveal that through developing relationships with their children, feminists parent differently from socially prescribed models of motherhood. They also address a query that has emerged from the work of feminist scholars featured in Chapter One: how do mothers exercise self-governance within the institution of motherhood?

The first section of this chapter acknowledges that all participants are feminist mothers who believe they are influencing the future. I provide accounts of two participants, Kim and May, who reveal how feminist mothers are conscious of the influence they have in the lives of their children and of the responsibility they have in teaching the next generation. These accounts also demonstrate how raising children in ways that do not replicate the patriarchal model of motherhood is integral to feminist mothering.

The second section of this chapter explores how participants develop relationships with their children in ways that honour their commitment to parenting. The accounts of Shar and Tammy reveal how feminist mothers are sensitive to and mindful of

what and how they pass their knowledge onto their children. Understanding that children are subjects in their own right, participants attempt to respect their children's agency.

The third section of the chapter features an account by Francis, who reveals how feminist mothers can teach their children that they have a voice of their own, a voice that can influence others. Cognizant that children are subjects who are engaged in the world, these particular feminist mothers view their children as potential agents of social change. Francis speaks of how her son develops a sense of his own knowledge and an ability to share his knowledge with others. Through his relationship with his mother, he learns that he is able to engage in conversations where ideas and values can be opened up, discussed and at times challenged. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how these feminist mothers practice self-governance when they interact with children in ways that are respectful of the subjectivity and agency of people.

I.   **Influencing the Next Generation**

Investing in the next generation is one of the most political things that you can do, even if it's on a scale as small as your own children. (Tammy)

Every participant in this study identifies herself as a feminist mother. Each woman told me that mothering is a feminist act. Not only are participants challenging the expectations placed on them as mothers, they are also teaching their children about injustices and various forms of oppression. All the women recognize the influence they have in the lives of their children and the responsibility they have as mothers to the next generation. Kim and May, like other participants, reveal their understanding of the importance of their relationship with their children and the lessons they pass on to them.

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i. Kim

My mothering is absolutely a political act. It's the personal is political.
You know, trying to teach my sons my values, my feminist values by
doing, by being. And also, to teach them the ability to criticise the world
and not to just take it for what it is.

Like, I tell my boys, 'Sports are great, but I'm encouraging you to
do this because it's good for you and healthy and there're lots of
wonderful things about it.' Right now it's too early for this, but when they
get older, 'It's also competitive, it often excludes women and you know,
there're all kinds of other problems.' So hopefully to be able to teach them
how to look at a situation and not just take it. To give them tools to
criticise is what I see the political side of it. It's to bring it into the next
generation.

My heartache would be around them not getting it somehow and
treating the women in their lives really lousy. And that's the biggest
challenge I see for myself as a feminist and a mother of my kids. I hope
like hell that they absorb my values and that they don't, as they become
adolescents, reject them all and become skin heads or something, you
know. Uh, but skin heads wouldn't take them 'cuz they're Jewish, so
that's an upside [laughter].

Kim is committed to raising her two sons, aged two and four, with an awareness

of social injustice. She is optimistic that she can teach them to be critical of the world and

often speaks with them about sexism, heterosexism and the importance of democracy and

non-violence. She and her male partner of seventeen years also model an alternative way

of living for their children and for other people; they have a common-law rather than a

married relationship. Kim believes that living common-law is a political choice that

assists the argument that gays and lesbians are legitimate couples:

> When we were first together there was pressure on us to get married and I
> resisted it because of my feminism. I think by not getting married and
> living common-law we provide an alternative. We provide gay and lesbian
> couples with an argument, 'If they can get benefits and they're not
> married, why can't two women?'

Kim converted to her partner's religion of Judaism early in their relationship. Her

parents, who come from Protestant and Mennonite working-class backgrounds and are not particularly religious, did not fully understand Kim's desire to become Jewish. Nonetheless they support her decision. The parents of Kim's partner, who are working-class Jews, also accepted Kim's decision and have supported her in various ways over the years, most recently helping to care for her eldest son who has high needs. Through her conversion to Judaism, which she admits in some ways seems "antithetical to feminism because it's a patriarchal religion," Kim has learned about racism and the difficulties of being Jewish in a predominantly Christian culture. This understanding informs her relationship with her sons and the lessons she passes on to them.

As a graduate student working on a Master's degree in Social Work, Kim took a course from a feminist professor who "really put a lot of holes in the myth of mothering." Kim was introduced to the myth that mothering comes naturally to women and became critical of the ways in which motherhood is talked about in very romantic, loving terms. She realized that mothering is not highly recognized or valued in the dominant culture and that mothering is a lot of hard work. Twelve years ago, at age twenty-four, when she discovered she was pregnant Kim believed she knew what she was in for as a mother. She decided to birth her child at home, partly because of the knowledge she gained from writing her thesis comparing hospital births with home births in Ottawa. Kim also made a commitment to raise her child with an awareness of various forms of oppression.

Kim finds it "hard to provide a positive Jewish environment and a positive feminist environment in a world that really doesn't like Jews and doesn't really like feminism very much." Kim believes that in providing positive role models for her

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children she and her partner are able to challenge this situation to some degree. Together they try to break down some of what Kim names "really rigid sex-role stereotyping" by providing their sons with alternatives. For example, during the morning rush of getting everyone up and organized for the day, Kim's partner helps the boys get dressed and gives them breakfast. In sharing the work of parenting in this way, Kim believes that she and her partner provide a "male role model who is really nurturing and loving and does 'women's' things." At times Kim's partner is more patient with their children than Kim is and their sons learn they can go to either parent when they need comforting. Both parents let the boys know it is acceptable to feel sad and to show pain when they are hurt, and that they will be nurtured when they need consoling. Together Kim and her partner try to illustrate balance in the way they interact as a couple and how they are as parents. Kim believes that their strong relationship also provides an example of a good loving home that differs from other people's.

From the time her sons were very young, Kim has tried to help them develop a critical view of the world by talking with them about various kinds of injustices, including racism, sexism and homophobia. For example, Kim ensures that her sons see television shows and movies, such as *Harriet the Spy*, that focus on female characters because the majority of characters in children's television programs are male. She also talks with her boys, often before they ask, about "where babies come from" and how people are not "necessarily heterosexual." With her background in sex education and counselling in reproductive choice, Kim is comfortable talking about sexuality and reproduction. She tries to teach her sons about their own bodies so that they "feel good

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about themselves, their bodies and their genitals." Wanting her children to know accurate information about sexuality and reproduction, Kim talks about sexuality whenever they want or need to. As opportunities arise Kim speaks about different kinds of relationships and diverse ways of being sexual. She recently spoke with her four year-old about personal relationships after her niece, who is the same age, pronounced she was going to marry her son. Kim responded by saying:

> 'No. You can't really, you're cousins.' And he said, 'But she's a girl and I'm a boy so we can get married.' And I didn't say anything about it right then. But afterwards I talked to him about it and I said, "You know people who are men and men, or women and women [love each other]" and I gave him an example of some friends of ours who are lesbian. And he gives me this blank stare, like 'What the hell are you talking about mom.' But eventually after a few of those, it'll hit him – crash that heterosexist notion that you have to be man and woman to get married.

Through her relationship with her children, Kim is educating the next generation to be aware and critical of various forms of oppression. While her sons are still relatively young, Kim believes she is successfully teaching them to be respectful of women and of diversity. Whenever she can, Kim addresses the various and many ways in which people are living their lives. By discussing the diversity of people's sexuality and the injustice of not respecting this fact, Kim teaches her children about injustice in the world.

Other participants are sensitive to the influence they have in the lives of their children and the role feminism plays in their mothering. May, for example, acknowledges that her mothering is informed by her feminism. Aware of her role in the development of the next generation, she consciously mothers her children "so that they can make their own choices." She pays close attention to her relationship with her daughters and to the values she teaches and models for them.

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ii.   May

May was born in Guyana in the mid 1950s and was raised on a small family farm with her brother and two sisters. Her mother, the main breadwinner, was a farmer and her father was a craftsperson. In her early twenties, May moved to Canada, living for some time in small towns or communities in Ontario and Manitoba. At the time of our interviews, May was working full-time for a non-governmental agency with immigrant women and doing some freelance writing and reporting.

In the summer of 1997, when we met for our second interview, May was forty years old and had recently separated from her husband and the father of their two teenaged daughters. As we sat at her dinning room table sharing a cool drink, she reflected on what mothering meant to her. Mothering for May is place where women can significantly contribute to the world and to social change. Like other participants, May speaks about the role feminism has in understanding the responsibility of rearing children and of teaching them to be critical of the world:

> To be a mother to me is a big thing. As I say, you have the generation in your hand. And we can do a lot to shape that, regardless of whatever is out there, you can still make a big impact being a mother.
>
> I really believe in mothering. It's a feminist thing. It's a very special power that women have that we should not lose sight of. Having children, bearing children, is something, I think, to cherish. We're raising children that will take our place, and they're gonna shape that world. And what we put out in them, that is what they're gonna put out. Children are human beings who are going to be growing up and running this world, doing things in a way that we have taught them to. We have to be careful what we teach them.
>
> Being feminists, we are trying to change society, and being a mother is one of the effective ways we can change society, you know. We can change the new generation. We can help them to think critically on different issues by presenting them with all these ideas.
>
> I'm raising kids for the next generation. I'm trying to give them a

new sense of what it is to be women. I'm trying to give them some understanding of where oppression is, and to encourage them to always seek justice. To fight for that kind of thing, and truth and so on. The way I'm raising them is to resist the current structure, even in the schools. Like telling them, 'You don't feel the teachers are being fair, so speak out, but do it in a respectful way. Just speak out.'

As in other parts of her life, May is engaged in the process and the practice of resisting patriarchy. She understands that mothering entails raising children who will live in and govern the world in the future. May is not interested in supporting patriarchal stasis, but rather in attempting to mother her daughters differently. She told me:

> I am not raising my kids in that same mould. I am resisting that set traditional, patriarchal way of raising kids. To be girls, to be neat and tidy and, you know, or whatever it is that girls gotta be. I think part of our nature as women may be we are the child bearers, but that is not the primary thing. There's so much more we can offer, it's a choice, to have kids or not. And I want my daughters to know that.

Like the other participants in this study, May understands the pressure to conform to a patriarchal model of motherhood and the consequences for non-compliance. And like other feminist mothers, she believes there is room for resistance, invention and renewal within motherhood. Rather than falling into what Neire calls the 'trap' of mothering, she reconstructs it through her sensibility to the importance and influence she has in the lives of her children. She actively resists restrictive notions of motherhood and creates different ways of mothering.

From the first days of being a mother, May felt a close bond with her infant daughter and describes experiencing an "overwhelming feeling of wanting to protect this child." She began to see her role of mother as just as important as being involved in the working world. May quickly understood she could make a difference in how her child

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was socialized and paid close attention to what she taught her and her younger sister (who was born two years later). When her daughters were young, May provided them with non-sexist books and made sure she watched TV with them. She continues to participate and talk with her children about what they see in films and on TV, often making what she calls "direct and informal comments on why things are happening." Over the years May has enrolled her children in workshops within the Black community that specifically address racism and sexism and in seminars and theatre groups that address ways to effectively understand and resist various forms of oppression. Keeping communication open with her daughters is basic to May's mothering, and she discusses with her daughters the work they do in these meetings and how they feel and think about what they are exposed to. She told me:

> I am consciously thinking about it all the time, 'cause I have two lives in my hand and I try to do the best I can to make them understand how the world is. Having kids around and raising kids means always having that thought in the back of my mind, 'What am I trying to pass on to these kids?'

May is aware that as an adult, she can overpower her children. She told me that she still has to watch the instances in which she tends to behave in a domineering kind of way:

> It's a big challenge sometimes, because it's not easy to translate what you believe in when it comes to your own kids. Sometimes there's a little bit of a contradiction there, and they pick it up very easily and tell you. Then you gotta go back and sift through it again, and say, 'Well, how could I do this differently?'

May finds she is "walking a fine line, trying to be a responsible mother, and yet, trying to open up so that they will try to find their own balance." May reminds me of Carol, who

speaks about not taking an authoritarian stance with her children, but rather tries to "guide" them to become who they want to be. Being a "responsible mother" for May means not dominating her daughters but allowing them to find their own way, including making and learning from their own mistakes.

May attempts to be open with her children about some of her own mistakes. She directly tells them that "making mistakes is part of living and learning." May shares her own mistakes with her children and talks about how she tries to learn from her own errors and those made by others. She deliberately tries not to be a "dictatorial kind of person" or duplicate "the same authoritarian kind of mothering" that she grew up with. She encourages dialogue and openness with her daughters, telling them:

> I know you're gonna make mistakes, but don't make the mistakes I have made, learn from them and you make some new ones. We can't go on making the same mistake. Learn from people's mistakes. Maybe you can make some new ones.

May believes that through open discussion and allowing for mistakes, she helps her children understand political systems and how racism and sexism have an impact on women in particular. She maintains that her daughters "are understanding how society treats people differently, and how your class, and all that, can impact on how you're treated and seen in society."

May provides an example to illustrate how her daughters understand her teachings. While recently at home with her daughters, she overheard one say to the other, "Well, I'm gonna get a good job, and I'm gonna take care of myself. I don't want to have children and all this before I can, you know, take care of things." From the comments she has heard both of her daughters make and from witnessing the choices they have

made in their lives so far, May believes her daughters understand that they do not need to accept the stereotype of woman as wife and mother and can see marriage and motherhood as a choice that can be made on their own terms. They do not think about their futures as being married to men who will take care of them.

Aware of the influence mothers have on their children, May is conscious of her relationship with her children. She aspires to have open and honest relationships with her daughters while trying to pass on her knowledge and experience of being a Black woman in a patriarchal and racist world. Not wanting to be domineering or over powering, May is self-reflexive about her interaction with her children. She respects her daughters' ability to think and make decisions for themselves and tries to honour the times they challenge her own thinking and actions.

II.   Children as Subjective Beings

Like Kim and May, other participants believe their feminist values are central to their understanding of mothering and to the lessons they teach their children. They also identify the influence they have in the lives of their children. Because participants accept that people discover their voices when they are treated with respect, they engage in respectful relationships with their children. Mothers encourage their children to speak for themselves and to learn to make informed choices regarding their lives. In their accounts, Shar and Tammy describe how feminist mothers engage in such relationships that assist and honour the development of children's sense of themselves as important people in the world who have a voice and are capable of self-governance.

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i.   Shar:

When we met in the fall of 1996, Shar had just celebrated her fiftieth birthday and had recently become a grandmother for the first time. Shar told me that her hope lies with women and children. Like other feminist mothers, she views mothering as a political act and believes that the future lies in the next generation:

> When I became a conscious feminist, I realized that raising children alternatively was, in fact, a very political act. Everything we do is political. There is no such thing as separating things out and saying, 'This is political and this is not.' Everything we do in society, everything we do in interacting with others certainly has political implications.

Being aware that all interactions are significant and have far reaching effects in the lives of people and on society in general, Shar engages with children differently than the ways promoted by standard models of mothering. Rather than following what she perceives to be conventional practices of "consistently lying to children, telling them to be quiet and ignoring their needs," Shar attempts to make deep and real connections with children.

Children have been part of Shar's life for over twenty-five years. Early in her marriage, at the age of twenty-three, Shar gave birth to her daughter. Within three years she birthed a boy and three years later Shar adopted a girl of Aboriginal heritage. When her twelve year marriage ended, Shar earned a teaching degree and taught children in the public school system. Today Shar runs a child care centre out of her home and spends as much time as she can with her granddaughter.

Primarily because of her own negative experiences within her family of origin, Shar has had definite ideas about how to parent. As a ten-year-old she remembers having

a strong sense that if her parents would give her money and leave her alone she could do a better job of raising her three brothers than they were doing. Shar and her siblings were raised in an abusive family where her alcoholic father verbally, emotionally and physically abused everyone around him, particularly his sons. Shar's maternal grandfather was also an abusive man. His cruelty towards Shar's mother contributed to her mother's intense hatred for men and fuelled her constant barrage of disparaging comments about men, including her husband. Shar told me:

> Because of growing up in an abusive family as a child I formulated an idea of what kind of mother I would be before I became a mother. I don't know if I could have articulated it, but I certainly had *very* specific ideas on what I was going to do and then did them.
> Gentleness is really high on that list. I never hit my children. Never found it necessary, and I've often thought of writing a book about raising children without any kind of what's called corporal punishment. Discipline wasn't an issue. Gentleness and flexibility and playfulness and all kinds of things are definitely high on my agenda.

Observing her parents' unhealthy marriage and other damaged marriages around her, Shar chose to wed someone unlike the people she had grown up with. She married a long time boyfriend who Shar describes as "supportive, gentle and kind." Shar remembers being "fairly controlling about decisions and practices" when it came to her children. She wanted everything to go a certain way and was able to do as she wanted because her husband accommodated her wishes. Shar was happy mothering her young children at home, playing with them and doing housework while they slept. When her husband was not working, they spent time together as a family doing various activities. Shar became solely responsible for their three children after she and her husband divorced and their relationship became "estranged."

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As a lone mother, Shar held a number of part-time teaching positions in the public school system and was active in several feminist organizations. She appeared in local newspapers and on television for her political activism around abortion, anti-pornography, violence against women and women in advertising. Shar believes that she was unable to get a full-time teaching position because she was known as an active and outspoken feminist. She did not hide her overt political activism from anyone, including her children. They often listened to her ideas, overheard her speaking on the phone and went with Shar to feminist marches, rallies and meetings.

When Shar was first a mother, she had what she calls a "gut awareness" that she has since developed. Because she has always abhorred violence, Shar has tried to create a non-violent environment and home for herself and for her children. For instance, she has never allowed violent toys around her children or in her home. She continues to prevent violent interaction between people, including teasing and sarcastic humour, which she thinks is "vicious." Shar told me that as a new mother she did not overpower her children, but rather responded to their needs. She realized that the more she responded and trusted her children's sense of what they needed, the less frustration and aggression they experienced. Together they worked through problems by talking and listening to each other. The needs of her children were met, and they learned to take responsibility for themselves and for their decisions.

The importance of listening to what children are saying comes from Shar's personal experiences as a child and a mother and from her respect for people's knowledge and diversity that she learned through feminism. Shar values each person for

their uniqueness. As a result, she listens to children when they tell her about what is going on in their lives. For example, when her eldest daughter expressed a desire to go to band camp one summer, Shar found money to pay for her to go. She also supported her when she wrote a letter to the editor that was published in a local newspaper complaining about an advertisement showcasing only men skiing when women, including herself, are also skiers. When her youngest daughter had trouble at school in the eighth grade and clearly did not want to be there, Shar listened. Together they talked about the situation and Shar took her daughter out of school to teach her at home. Shar stayed connected with her youngest daughter as she struggled through her teenaged years. She would get up at 3:00 in the morning, "drink Ovaltine and play cards until her daughter came home." Then they would sit and talk. By being attentive to her needs and by listening to what she was saying, Shar helped her daughter understand herself and the decisions she was making.

Shar also listened to and supported her son's desire to play hockey. She bought him good quality hockey equipment and drove him to practices, games and elite team tryouts. While Shar was not keen on her son playing hockey, she encouraged him to do well because he was passionate about playing the game. She also listened to and supported his decision to quit. She understood that the decision to stop playing hockey was a difficult one for her son, as he was on track for being a successful hockey player. She tells me:

> He's an athlete, one of these born athletes, just incredible. When he was playing hockey, there was big hope for him. They go along and they play hockey for all these years, and he was doing really, really well, and all the rest of it and the coaches were really excited about this kid, right? And

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then, the next year was when they start bashing each other around. Well, we had gone out and spent $300 on brand new equipment, and in those days $300 was a lot of money. That would be like $1000 now. I mean, all this new equipment and stuff. Then he came home one day, took off his stuff and said, 'I'm not going to play hockey anymore. I'm not going to hurt my friends.' That was, I mean that's a direct quote. 'I'm not going to play hockey anymore. I'm not going to hurt my friends.' And that was the end of his hockey career.

Shar understood her son was committed to the decision he made and listened as he talked about how not harming his friends was more important than playing the game of hockey.

Shar continues to pay attention to what children are talking about and to listen to what they have to say. In a detailed description of how she interacts with children in her care, Shar describes how she strives to develop relationships that are based on honesty, respect and love:

My daycare children are absolutely aware that they are loved. That's something that I'm able to hold right there all the time. Listening to them is consistent. Even when I'm at my worst moment in the daycare, the child speaks and I hear what they say. And if I don't have time to answer them immediately, I'll say, '[child's name], I heard what you said. Can you wait just a second, 'cause right now I'm doing this other thing and I can't really pay attention. But I know, I heard you and I will pay attention in just a minute.'

I'm trying to acknowledge that they are real. So much of what goes on in the culture is a denial of the reality of their being. It's a wanting to pretend they're not really there, so we don't have to acknowledge their life.

So, we sit at lunchtime and the kids will be talking about something and they ask me lots and lots of things that are incredibly personal.

One of the kids came to the daycare very upset. One of the other kids was going to her daycare and she would talk about the fact that kids were being hit at daycare. And I looked at him and said, '[child's name], I would never hit you because I love you. If anybody hits you, they don't love you.' And I said, 'I would never say to you that I love you and then some other time I would hit you.' And his eyes just [pause], he said, 'I know.'

Shar's explanation to a child of what love means is an example of how she is

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attentive to the feelings of children and how she listens to their concerns. It has taken

Shar years to learn how to interact with children in a way that respects their knowledge

and experiences. Part of the process has included figuring out for herself what is more

and less important:

> I've spent the last thirteen or fourteen years absolutely, doggedly working through what's important, and saying, 'This is something that I want to do. This is something that is fun, or this is something that I feel motivated to do. When push comes to shove, this is not important. You are important. So, this can be left.'
>
> If the kettle is boiling and I can't get to the kettle, the kettle will burn dry. The kettle is a kettle. I don't have to leave this bandaging of your finger or this having fun together or whatever it is we're doing together that's important. To go and deal with the kettle, I don't ever have to do that.

Paying attention to children is central to Shar's relationships with them; she places the

lives of children at the centre and puts other concerns and responsibilities on the

periphery.

Informed by her feminism and by her life experiences and knowledge, Shar

consciously engages with children in ways to foster their self-esteem and their sense of

self-worth. Children who interact with Shar learn that their concerns are of relevance and

that when they speak they can expect to heard. With this knowledge and experience,

children develop a sense of themselves as people who have a voice that is worthy of

being listened to. They learn to be subjects in the world.

ii.   Tammy

Like Shar, Tammy believes children are subjects in the world. She is also aware of the influence mothers have on the development and thinking of their children. Mothering is a huge responsibility that should not be taken lightly because the influence of mothers radiates well beyond the present. According to Tammy, being mindful of what children are taught and being attentive to their developing values and behaviour is a way for mothers to influence social change. As she says, "our society is going to come out of what we teach these children now."

One cold winter evening Tammy and her two children met with me in a university seminar room. Her nine year-old daughter and her seven-year-old son read and drew while Tammy and I talked about feminist mothering. Approximately half an hour into our conversation, Tammy's male partner of three years picked up the children and took them home to where they had been living together for six months. In spite of struggling with a hacking cough and ill health, Tammy insisted on finishing our interview.

As a small child Tammy and her family moved from her birthplace of Toronto to Colombia to be closer to her father's kin. With the support and influence of her paternal Black grandmother, whom Tammy describes as an incredibly strong matriarch, Tammy's mother raised Tammy and her siblings. Tammy recalls visiting her father only once when she was about eight years old. This was around the time she moved back to Canada with her sister, younger brother and mother. Living in downtown Toronto, Tammy was conscious of the ways in which the two countries are so economically and culturally different. She describes the experience of living in Colombia and then moving to Canada

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as the most dramatic event of her young life. Being profoundly influenced by this paradox, Tammy views economic structures as important to understanding social justice.

As a university student in her late twenties, Tammy discovered she was pregnant. After the birth of her daughter, Tammy went through what she describes as a "difficult and complete transformation." To her surprise, she found she did not want to do anything else but be with her baby. Consequently she withdrew from university, the labour force and various activist committees. While she was happy to make this change, Tammy dealt with sleep deprivation, the challenges of caring for a newborn and coping with the stress of redefining herself as a stay-at-home mom. Being a new mother was bittersweet for Tammy. She discovered that she really liked mothering but also realized that she did not really like the father of her daughter.

Two years later, and shortly after the birth of her son, Tammy left the father of her children to raise them by herself. She visited a number of day care centres and witnessed what she describes as "a lot of really bad day care situations." Unable to leave her children in the care of others, Tammy did not renew her contract with her employer. Instead, she collected unemployment insurance and social assistance for about a year and a half while she cared for her two children. Like Willow, who made the same decision, Tammy found it difficult to live on social assistance because of the insufficient amount of money she was given to live on and the class stigma of taking up social assistance. Nevertheless, Tammy re-discovered the wonderful, creative and rewarding work of mothering by staying at home with her children. She saw the influence of the values of parents on children as she observed the play, actions and comments of her children's

friends.

When her children reached school age, Tammy began to spend time in their classrooms. These visits continue to reveal the prevalence of hated for women and how students are unable to see it. Tammy tells me:

> I'm constantly alarmed when I get together in my kids' classrooms, how much there is still out there. It's a complete eye-opener for me 'cause I'm naive, right. I end up being friends with people who are similarly-minded and that's one of the things about children – they thrust you in a broader community and you find things out that scare and remind you. These kids are just, like, it gets to the point where it's not just sexism, it's misogyny, you know. It's not only completely stupid and makes no sense, it's completely illogical. You think they could see it's damaging and hurtful, it's so evident.

Tammy's observations of pre-school aged children and grade school students have shown her the importance of understanding how young people learn their political values:

> I'm taking a look at how I see my children's friends and the kinds of conclusions they come to at a very young age. I'm rethinking that and saying, 'Well, to make any kind of real change, we need to have a really very different early years' experiences, otherwise people are still learning the same hateful values.'

Tammy's greatest interest and primary responsibility is mothering. She views her connection with her children as more profound than her connection with other people, including co-workers at a socialist magazine where she works on politics six to seven hours a day. Tammy views mothering as political because she is able to emphasize values and principles to her children in countless ways and over a prolonged period of time.

Being aware of the huge responsibility and the significant impact she has as a mother on the lives of her children, Tammy consciously teaches them about equality,

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respect and justice. She tells me that children "have a lot of power," particularly "in their decision-making." Tammy talks with her children about the choices they have as well as the consequences of those choices. In "letting them know what their choices are, what consequences of different choices are, and saying, 'What do you want to do?,'" Tammy lets her children "know that they have lots of choices all the time so that something that might seem like it's necessary to you in fact becomes optional." Tammy asks them what they want to do and supports them in their decisions.

During our second interview Tammy spoke about encouraging her children to think for themselves and how she tries not to be too interventionist when doing so. She supports her children to be true to their own values, even when their values may conflict with those of people in positions of authority. Reflecting on a recent incident, Tammy told me how astonished she was to hear about a program at her children's school of instituting "pink slips" to students for inappropriate behaviour and "late slips" for being late. Rather than blindly accepting and endorsing the program, Tammy reminds her children about making choices and the responsibility that accompanies this action. In explaining her thinking to them about the implementation of the "pink slip" program she said:

> What really matters is what you were doing, whether it really was appropriate or inappropriate, not how the teacher saw it or how the principal saw it. If you knew what you were doing was for a logical reason, and it was working towards a constructive end, I don't mind if you get a pink slip. It's a piece of pink paper, who cares?

Tammy teaches her daughter and son that they are socially and politically responsible for being part of a larger society and that they have to be critical and aware of the multiple

realities around them to understand the potential ramifications of the decisions they make. Tammy repeatedly encourages both children to make their own decisions. She finds that giving them space to do what they need to do often builds confidence that comes from the experience of doing what they think is best, whether it is positive or not. By letting children have and make choices, they learn to "feel their own power and agency."

Supporting her children's own decision making and development of values is not always easy because, at times, Tammy and her children disagree. For example, Tammy's son likes to read books written by an author who Tammy does not like. Even though the books have poor plots, little character development and are incredibly sexist, Tammy buys her son the books anyway. She tells him that she can understand why he likes the books because they are about sports, but also adds her analysis of the author being sexist. She asks him to find the parts in the book that are sexist and to talk with her about them when he is finished reading the book. She chooses this tact because her son will not read other books and she wants him to continue reading. Well aware of the rampant sexism in her son's life, both at school and in his peer group, Tammy knows that censoring his reading will not remove him from a sexist environment. Since she does not want him to just accept sexism as though it is normal, she asks him to be aware of and reflect on the sexist elements in the books and to be responsible for talking about them.

Tammy attempts to unite the principles of choice, equality, respect and social justice in her mothering through encouraging her children to think critically about the world around them and to make choices for themselves. For Tammy social justice means

more than just being fair to people, it also means understanding the links between different parts of the world. Using the example of South Africa, Tammy explains to her children that social justice means being aware of and caring about the interconnections of peoples' lives globally. Focussing on the connections between South Africa and Canada, she explains how global economic systems put Canada, and other wealthy countries, in an unfair and unequal relationship with South Africa and other economically impoverished countries. These economic relationships, she explains, privilege the wealthy and exploit the poor. For Tammy, it is important to share with her children an understanding of how global economics are linked with social inequality. She also explains her past decision not to buy produce grown in South Africa and how boycotts send the message that apartheid is unacceptable.

Although she did not know how actively feminist or non-sexist her children would be, Tammy said that "without any doubt, they understand what sexism does to people, they have discussed it and they can identify it." Tammy told me about a conversation she had with her then seven year-old son that solidified this knowledge for her.

> My son, one day out of the clear blue, this is like about a year ago, said to me. Let me think of the words. Um, I think he said, 'What do you think is worse, torturing somebody or being sexist?' And I said, 'Well, they're both kind of horrible. I can't make a decision between, like, one and the other. I think they're both really horrible things that people do.' And he said, 'I think it's being sexist because it lasts a lot longer. It sort of goes inside.'

Tammy quietly cried after telling me this story and told me that she didn't think her children are going to be able to hurt people because they both have a strong sense of

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justice. Her son is genuinely gentle and has a difficult time doing anything that hurts other people. At the time of the second interview, Tammy told me that her son had recently grown out of his tendency to "cry out of frustration when he knows something is not right and that nothing is being done about it." Tammy describes her daughter as "an independent, critical thinker who does not follow a crowd anywhere." Her daughter thinks for herself, challenging people she disagrees with, including her own father whom she often opposes because his values are more traditional than hers. Tammy sees her children's self-governance as really important, not only in terms of their own survival, but also in terms of making contributions to society. Tammy told me her children can identify, discuss and understand the ramifications of sexism. While Tammy is aware that her children may not choose to keep those values in the future, she believes they are likely to because their values are explicit and integrated in their daily lives.

II   Children as Agents of Social Change

Not only are feminists conscious of influencing their children, and hence another generation through their mothering, they know their views reach out into the world both through and with their children. They influence their children through their mothering and influence other people through their children. Furthermore, their children influence others on their own. By not minimizing the agency of their children in their relationships with them, participants foster and allow their children to develop as subjects in their own right. Mothers encourage their children to decide for themselves what they think, how they view the world and who they want to be within that world. Like Carol (featured in

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the previous chapter), these feminist mothers 'guide' the development of their children rather than 'raise' their children to conform to standardized models of boys and girls. Fostering their children's ability to think critically about themselves and about the world around them, feminist mothers encourage their children to be who they want to be. Francis reveals how children who are confident in their ability to think and to use their voice are active agents who can touch the larger society.

i.   **Francis:**

Francis, like others, believes that mothering is instrumental to social change because it reaches beyond the home and family. Francis recognizes that children have their own peer groups and social networks where they engage in discussions with others. Within these interactions children are introduced to other people's ideas and values and they have an opportunity to share their own perspectives. Francis respects the agency of her nine-year-old son and engages him in discussions about many topics. In doing so, she helps him to see that people think differently and that he can think for himself. Consequently, he develops his ability to think and to engage in discussions more fully without being unduly influenced by others.

Francis and I met in her living room one winter afternoon just before the new year of 1997 and again a few months later the following spring. In the intermittent months between our two meetings, Francis withdrew from the labour force because she was recovering from chemotherapy treatment for lymphoma. At the time of our second interview, Francis had just turned "forty-five years young." She was researching medical

and environmental links to cancer and was seriously investigating alternative ways of treating her condition. Much of our discussion was informed by her understanding of these links and her reflection on being both a mother and a father to her son. Although Francis has been a lone mother from the time her son was a baby when she left her common-law husband and the father of their child, living with cancer presents new challenges.

Francis has always been close to her Jewish parents and identifies with their human-rights orientation and their focus on equality of gender and race. She credits her mother for contributing to her feminist development, partly because of her strength of character and partly because of her unconventional practices. Unlike many mothers, Francis's mother was independent, returning to work three weeks after the birth of Francis and her twin sister while also maintaining a household. Both her father, an academic and writer, and her mother encouraged Francis, her sister and her brother to be academically and athletically active.

From the time her son was young, Francis has taught him about gender inequality and the ways to challenge gender disparity. For example, they talked about the number of boys depicted in story books, and changed some of the pronouns from "he" to "she" to include girls if the book seemed overwhelmingly focussed on males. At other times they would say "he or she" to include both girls and boys in the story, making the characters both female and male. Francis told me the following story about her son's awareness of gender parity and non-sexist language:

> In my child's first week of grade one he was complimented on his non-sexist language. He looked at me and he said, 'Mommy, what does non-

sexist mean?' He didn't know the term, but he certainly knew to have an awareness of an equality of his and her. And he's got it in terms of Hebrew school. We're not religious, but he's well aware that there's too much he, he, he in religious school. God, he, he, he, you know?

Francis continues to show her son how women and men are depicted and how this portrayal is often based on sexism and racism. For example, she recently discussed with him how females are commonly made out to be the "villains" in cartoons, video games and popular culture, and how a "woman's body's was being used to sell a car in an advertisement."

Francis aspires to teach her son to be aware of the world around him and to show him that he does not have to believe, "what's coming through that set of values and stereotypes." Francis purposely works with her son to develop his awareness of his own emotions. According to Francis, equality only comes with "the full recognition of one's potential as a human being as a female or as a male." She notes that:

> It's not just the potential of women that's been held back. It's the potential of men that has been held back, as well. You can't say that men have been allowed to become all of who they are in this world. That's not true. I mean, men have been restricted into their notions of power and authority and then not being able to develop their feminine, nurturing side as well.

To counter the restrictive and damaging stereotypes of masculinity, Francis tries to teach her son to be aware of himself as "a boy, as a male and what society might typically allow." She encourages him to develop beyond socially defined definitions of male. For example, Francis supports her son's crying as long as he is "not crying to manipulate" and asks her mother to refrain from telling her grandson "not to cry." Being able to feel sad and to express that emotion through crying is often dissuaded in boys while encouraged in girls. For boys to understand their feelings and the feelings of others,

Francis believes they must be able to "cry so that they can know how it feels and what it means."

Anger is another emotion Frances consciously addresses in her relationship with her son. She works hard to ensure that angry words are not left "hanging" or "unattended." Whenever she and her son have what she calls a "hassle," they talk it through or "debrief" until they get to "playing or teasing." Francis believes that by working through conflicts, confusion and vulnerability with her son, he is more aware of and able to address his emotional needs. Francis notes that her son is "learning of the hurt that one might impose, and that people do hurt each other and that you can go and heal that hurt when you talk about it."

When their disagreements come down to a difference of opinion or values, Francis and her son listen to each other's perspectives and reasoning. To build an understanding of their differing values, Francis gives her son a full explanation of why she will not allow him to do as he wishes at the time. Whenever possible, she lets him make his own choices. Francis told me, in some detail, how she and her son negotiate their differing perspectives and how her son is learning to respect his mother's wishes while also developing his own viewpoints:

> I don't want to just be controlling or influencing my child in terms of power. I want him to know why I'm saying and doing what I say. I tell him, 'My opinions and ideas are my opinions and ideas and you may decide not to have those when you grow up and that's O.K. Right now, I limit junk food. I limit T.V. If you want to become a couch potato and eat all the junk food in the world when you get older, that's your choice and you'll face the consequences. But I'm choosing to have us eating in a healthy way.'
> And he knows. I give him the example of his friend buying him chips from a junk machine after sports club and his behaviour became

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really wild that night. And he was able to recognize, later on, after singing at the top of his voice in the shower that the chips made him nuts.

So, he understands my values, that I believe we can eat food as simply and as naturally as possible. And when it's chemical and produced, it affects the body. It affects the mind. And I'm telling him, 'These don't have to be your values and your ideas. But as long as I'm the parent, this is how I'm choosing for us to live.'

He used to get mad at me. But he accepts it. He'll come and ask me before he'll have a second or third piece of cookie or pastry at a dinner. There's dinner and there's sherbet and there's cake. And it's like, 'OK, you can have one bowl.' It's not that I totally restrict him. I can't at a gathering of traditional sweet desserts. And dessert shouldn't even follow a meal. Sugar is incompatible with protein and carbohydrates. And fruit should be eaten totally separately, not with the main meal. But, you know, what can I do if it's happening. If he's somewhere where there's hotdogs, I cannot totally, totally restrict him. I can let him know, 'Well, there's nitrates in hotdogs. They're really not very healthy for you. It's your choice, now, if you want to go and do it.'

He can choose what fits for him and what doesn't, 'cause it is his choice. He'll say, sometimes, 'Mom, you can choose and think such-and-such, but I'm gonna think this.' So, that freedom is there. And I tell him sometimes, 'I give you my opinions, but you don't always have to accept my opinions.'

So, I can only give him the awareness and let him make his choices on some issues. On other issues, I can clamp down and say, 'No.' As long as I give him my reasons why and then hopefully he figures out the why for himself.

Francis has found that these discussions resolve their conflicts and also teach her son to understand that people have different ways of thinking. He learns that there are consequences to actions and that he is held accountable for them. Francis maintains that her continual openness with her son about their personal views, as well as their disagreements, foster positive communication and honest dialogue between them. Treating her son with respect, and expecting and accepting nothing less from him, she believes, encourages a practice of equality central to her feminist mothering:

I'll tell you a story, it was just yesterday, it was so validating. My child and I were presenting Hanukkah to the class at school. I started to talk to the kids about how, you know, Hanukkah talks about the Maccabees and

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the soldiers and the men and the generals, but most of the history forgets about the women's contribution. My kid yelled out, "Ya! There's HERstory!" And I thought that was just perfect. My kid's got a HERstory, and he loved this notion. History. HIS story. HER story. So, I'm sure it's the first time the class has heard the notion of HERstory and he presented it! It was just great.

By offering her son an alternative and more inclusive understanding of his own heritage than is commonly presented, Francis increases her son's understanding that there are experiences and realities not presented in the everyday realm of knowledge. She also encourages him to share alternative knowledge and history with other people. Francis sees her son's strong presence and participation in sharing women in the herstory of Hanukkah with his grade four classmates as evidence that her teachings are successful. This example illustrates how her mothering influences her son and "extends out beyond the home, to the world, the society, the school, to where he is." For Francis, her son's self-confidence and pride in his own knowledge of herstory enables him to convey his thoughts and, therefore, to contribute to the learning of others. The lessons Francis teaches her son at home move beyond that boundary to his peer group in his school and in his community.

Francis believes that her mothering contributes to social change because she is not "a conditioned mother with standard values of how boys and girls should be who is gonna perpetuate those values into her children." The values that Francis's son learns from her do not replicate the standard values that non-feminist mothers teach their children. Francis asserts that her mothering has taught her son a sense of equality and justice and that he accepts boys and girls as equals. She told me that he does not think that "boys are better than girls" and that he does not try to "exclude girls." According to

Francis, her son has a sense of reality around him while also being able to perceive the exceptions of that reality. For example, he understands the relevance of herstory, even though it is excluded from history. He is also aware that sexist attitudes and behaviour, as well as their damage, often go unseen by others.

Through engaging in open discussions with her son, Francis has helped him to develop his own thinking and to practice his skills of sharing knowledge and thoughts with other people. Francis believes that her son has a sense of who he is. He is able to speak his mind, even when his ideas conflict with hers or with others. This ability, she reasons, is central to being an agent of social change. People need to be able to offer and hear various perspectives and to challenge knowledge and ideals when they arise. When her son expresses himself and engages in conversations with others, as he did at school with his peers, he is able to contribute to and challenge their thinking. He is able to educate people about other ways of seeing the world and of thinking about what is presented as knowledge. People may engage in discussions with him and begin to question their own beliefs and values. By engaging people to question the standard view of the world and discuss other ways of thinking, Francis's son is an agent of social change.

IV. Concluding Remarks: The Self-Governance of Feminist Mothers

The experience of feminist mothering, of doing motherwork as Collins (1994) theorizes, empowers mothers and their children. When participants break free from the restrictive elements of the institution of motherhood, they are empowered to parent in ways that respect their knowledge, experience and vision of mothering. Rather than conform to social expectations of mothering prescribed by patriarchy, feminist mothers create different ways to parent. They consciously mother in ways that honour the lives of women, children and their communities and celebrate their experiences, voices and knowledge.

Participants exercise their self-governance by consciously breaking the rules of motherhood advocated by child-rearing experts and by the institution. They rely on their feminism and their life experience to challenge the negative aspects of motherhood and create alternative ways of mothering. Feminist mothers understand that their mothering is a feminist act that informs the relationship they have with their children. They mother in ways that are in harmony with their own analysis and re-framing of motherhood. While participants chose various ways to parent their children, the values participants hold dear are the ones on which they base their mothering. These feminist mothers know, as Rich (1986) theorizes, the enormous potential they have in realizing changes for social justice through their mothering.

The feminist mothers featured here value relationships based on respect, not on domination, and refuse to engage in interpersonal affiliations that are oppressive. They attempt to engage in egalitarian relationships when they interact with their children.

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Shar, Francis and Tammy, for example, respect their children as subjective beings who are able to make decisions and choices for themselves. Francis, Tammy, Kim and May engage their children in open discussions and conversations about their daily lives and about their experiences in the world. In doing so, they talk about various ways of understanding assorted circumstances and what children and mothers think.

Whenever possible, mothers encourage their children to make decisions for themselves. They provide an environment where they can inspire their children to take responsibility for the choices they make and to be accountable for what they do. They talk with their children about the choices they make, be it the books the read, the TV they watch and the food they eat and the repercussions of making those choices. In wanting their children to be independent people who can engage in relationships based on respect, mothers try to abstain from applying the rule of responsibility of children to themselves and to other mothers. Jody, for example, encourages new mothers to think about their children as people who are responsible for their actions.

Since feminist mothers are critical of social definitions and expectations of women and men, they encourage their children to be themselves, rather than endorse gender stereotypes in their children. They point out the range of possibilities of being male and female and do not restrict their children's development according to gender or sexuality. Kim and Francis, for example, speak openly with their sons about the expectations placed on girls and boys and how these are often restrictive and damaging. Encouraging their children to be who they want to be, rather than demanding they be people they are not, feminist mothers directly challenge expectations that mothers raise

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their children to conform to standard gender roles. As Collins theorizes, feminist mothers develop a consciousness and an awareness of the dominant culture that helps ensure that their children have a good chance of developing according to who they are and who they want to be while staying connected with their chosen community.

Mothering in ways that are true to their feminist beliefs is not always easy. For example, in choosing to go on social assistance so that they could mother in the ways they wanted and needed to, Willow and Tammy struggled financially and felt the stigma of being poor. Tammy told me how "somebody who's not contributing economically in a major way is considered a 'bad' mother. Just by being poor or by being non-white or by being something else women are considered poor mothers in that their children don't look middle-class."

In mothering outside the bounds of heterosexuality, Beverly, Neire and Willow have experienced isolation and a lack of support for their choices from their family, friends and community. Andrea has experienced what she calls a 'mini-crisis' in dealing with the tension between her concept of a stay-at-home mother and the 'Betty Crocker' stay-at-home stereotype that she has internalized. Jody, too, contends with the internalized messages of the 'perfect' mother that are promoted through the media.

In refusing to replicate damaging expectations placed on women in the name of motherhood, feminist mothers reveal how they guide their children to be potentially empowered and agents of social change. Well aware of the influence they have in the lives of their children and the potential of their mothering for social change, participants mother consciously. They understand that they can shape the thinking, attitudes and

behaviour of their children through their interaction with them and through the lessons they teach as their children grow and develop. Aware of their influence in the lives of their children, feminist mothers also recognize and accept that their children may not embrace the lessons they teach. As subjective beings, children are able to make decisions for themselves, including questioning and rejecting the values their mothers hold and the lessons they teach.

The next chapter continues to explore the relationship mothers have with their children. More specifically, it investigates the lessons feminist mothers teach their children and the educational strategies they use.

CHAPTER FIVE

Practising Feminist Pedagogy

Feminist pedagogy is about teaching from a feminist world view: from a perspective on the world which is in favour of the sharing of power, privilege, property and opportunities; which recognizes the systematic and systemic oppression of women; which believes in the possibility of change; and which understands the need to organize collectively to make change. By definition, feminist pedagogy challenges what is seen to be the obvious, the natural, the accepted, the unquestioned. (Briskin, 1992:31)

This chapter lays out the pedagogical theories and practices that the women interviewed use in their mothering. Using the insights gained from eight of the women featured in previous chapters, I explore the similarities between pedagogical practices used by feminist mothers in this study and those used by feminist teachers in the classroom. The bulk of this chapter identifies and examines how feminist mothers practice various elements of feminist pedagogy identified by some researchers. The elements to be focussed on include: analysing and providing alternatives to gender inequality, promoting egalitarian relationships that advance collaborative learning, fostering empowerment and self-governance and encouraging collective action. Investigating each of these elements reveals the specific ways in which feminist mothers practice feminist pedagogy and how they incorporate modelling for their children with self-reflexive praxis. The chapter concludes by advancing several questions about the influence of feminist pedagogical practices of mothers on other aspects of life that have emerged from the revelation that feminist mothers are feminist teachers who practice elements of feminist pedagogy in their mothering.

I.   Feminist Pedagogical Practices within Mothering

i.   Thinking Critically: Analysing and Providing Alternatives to Gender Inequality

Researchers who discuss feminist pedagogy claim that highlighting forms of domination and oppression, as well as the ways in which they intersect in people's lives, is paramount to feminist teaching.[79] Teachers who practice making sexism, racism, class bias, homophobia etc. visible reveal how the functioning of structures are oppressive.

Feminist mothers see the world as constructed in ways that give more power, privilege, property and opportunity to men than to women. Aware of the prevalence of patriarchy, sexism and misogyny in the world around them, as well as in their own lives and in the lives of their children, feminist mothers motivate their children to think systematically and analytically about the world. They purposefully teach their children the ways in which women and men are treated differently. Participants speak directly with their children about gender inequality and how females are habitually devalued, discriminated against and oppressed. Mothers engage their children in critical thinking, encouraging them to observe and analyse the world around them, including the power dynamics among people and especially as they relate to women.

Since these feminist mothers are aware of what their children read and what they watch on television or at the movies, they discuss with them how males and females are represented in those media. They point out the use of gender stereotypes of girls and boys in books, news, movies and other media their children are exposed to. Together with their

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[79] See, for example, Briskin (1992); Hoffman (1985); hooks (1988;1994); Spelman (1985) and Washington (1985).

children, they scrutinize the messages associated with these images and engage their children in discussions about narrow and negative depictions of females and males.

Some feminist teachers in the classroom, like these feminist mothers, are committed to generating critical thinking in their students. They prompt students to expand their consciousness and to recognize that they can construct their own personal identities by encouraging them to examine and question the construction of knowledge and, hence, "reality."[80] Thinking critically entails refusing to accept the givens, making connections between facts and ideas that have been left unconnected and constantly retesting assumptions and hypotheses against lived experiences (Rich, 1985:28).

Feminist educators teach people how to think critically by examining and taking apart the underlying assumptions of all thoughts, theories and actions. By raising thought-provoking questions and through ensuring that discussions are organized and focussed, feminist teachers guide others through the process of critical thinking (Ropers-Huilman, 1998). Ideally, "feminist pedagogy should engage [people] in a learning process that makes the world 'more rather than less real' . . . [and] work to dispel the notion that our experience is not a 'real world' experience" (hooks, 1988:51).

Bunch (1987:253) argues that the crux of feminist education is to get students to critique, analyse and think about other people's ideas as well as to develop their own. In attempting to get them personally involved in this project, Bunch (1987:129) challenges students to develop their own ideas and analyse the assumptions behind those ideas and

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[80] Bunch (1987), hooks (1988) and Washington (1985) all address this in their work.

actions and motivates them to think systematically and analytically about the world.[81] To

do so, Bunch (1987:251) introduces and encourages students to use a four-part model of

theory in classroom exercises where they look at the world around them.[82] The focus of

their investigation includes advertisements, magazines, popular movies and television

series. Once students have practised this in class, they often become more confident and

competent at applying this method of critical thinking to everyday experiences and

circumstances outside of the classroom.

Not only do these feminist mothers, like various feminist school teachers, urge

their children to observe and to think systematically and analytically about the world

around them, they also teach their children about alternatives to standard portrayals of

women and girls.[83] By providing examples of positive representations of females and

alternative characterizations of males, feminist mothers show their children that there are

other ways of being female and male than those generally portrayed as appropriate and

accepted as normal. They also teach their children how these limited conceptions can be

challenged and changed.

May, for example, talked with her two daughters when they were young about the

characterization of males and females in books and provided "non-sexist" publications

for them to read. As they mature through adolescence into young women, May and her

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[81] Other feminist teachers, such as hooks (1988), Roper-Huilman (1998) and Shrewsbury (1987) advocate and use similar approaches in their classrooms.

[82] For a full discussion of both the four-part model of theory and its implementation in teaching see Bunch (1987).

[83] Bunch (1987), hooks (1994) and Shrewsbury (1987) advocate that feminist teachers motivate their students to observe and be critical of the world.

daughters continue to watch movies and TV with her, examining how characters are portrayed. They consider "why actors are shown in the way they are and how the audience may interpret the characters." May also challenges narrow social assumptions about women, particularly the presumption that women's primary goal is to be "a wife and a mother." She speaks with her daughters about the responsibilities of mothering and the limitations of only nurturing and caring for other people. Rather than viewing marriage and motherhood as the sole future for women and for her daughters, May suggests alternatives by exploring the choices she has made in her own life and by talking with her children about their own interests and aspirations.

Francis also spent time talking with her son when he was young about the ways in which girls and boys are represented in books. For instance, she engaged him in the activity of counting the number of characters in his childhood storybooks. In doing so, he discovered how male characters are often more frequently represented than female characters. Together they talked about how people may think that the greater number of boys and men in books means that they are more important than girls and women. Francis and her son changed the pronouns and gender of characters as they read to make the stories more equitable and interesting. In doing so, they created an alternative story. Francis often uses the strategy of re-telling stories. She uses this technique, for instance, when she tells the story of Hanukkah in her son's grade four classroom, offering an alternative vision of Hanukkah and of women. Instead of limiting the narrative to the experiences of men, as is routinely done by others, she illustrates how women have also contributed to the survival of Jewish people. Francis's account teaches others how

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including the experiences of women significantly changes "history" where only the experiences of men have been chronicled.

In showing their children how females are often ignored or represented in disparaging and negative ways in books, on TV or in movies, these mothers teach their children how to recognize and critique the oppression of women and to question assumptions about who people should be. Tammy, for example, talks with her children about gender inequality and specifically encourages her son (who likes to read novels based on sports themes that also advocate sexist ideas), to notice and think about the representation of girls and boys in the fiction he reads. She asks him to see if he can "find the parts in the book that are sexist" and talk about them with her. Together they discuss how girls and boys are shown in the stories and how those depictions contribute to harmful sexist attitudes and behaviour.

Wanting to counter the negative representation of girls and women in children's television shows and in movies, Kim limits the amount of television her sons watch. She also provides them with videos that showcase female protagonists and positive female characters, such as "Harriet the Spy." Kim also disputes assumptions embedded in the prevalent ways of viewing women and men. For example, she speaks openly with her children about reproduction and sexual relationships. In challenging notions of heterosexism whenever she can, Kim provides her sons with alternative ways of thinking about sexuality. She explains how romantic couples are not limited to heterosexual people and how gay and lesbian relationships are "practical, legitimate and acceptable." Kim also challenges the presumption that women are primarily responsible for domestic

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labour by equally sharing the cooking, cleaning, child care and other domestic labour with her partner and the father of their children.

Like feminist mothers, feminist teachers in the classroom encourage students to be critical of what is presented as knowledge and reality.[84] Some teachers make statements that are constructed in a particular way and encourage students to examine the implications that those constructions might have. An example may be asking students to "reflect on their own positionalities" and to consider "where they were coming from" when reflecting on and discussion their thinking (Ropers-Huilman, 1998:108). Some educators ask students to challenge their own assumptions rather than adopt a new way of thinking that may be imposed on them by a teacher or by class content (Ropers-Huilman, 1998:103). Teachers encourage students to delve into their own value and belief systems to examine how they have been constructed and to think about how they could attempt to construct themselves and their belief systems in the future (Ropers-Huilman, 1998:104). Teachers also have students think critically about classroom texts by asking them how they interpret the meanings that other people have made (Ropers-Huilman, 1998:105).

To meet the goal of teaching students how to be the theorists of their own lives, feminist teachers show them models and encourage them to interrogate and analyse their own experiences. In doing this, feminist educators implement a strategy of critical thinking that helps students to move "beyond the naming or sharing of experience to the creation of a critical understanding of the forces that have shaped that experience" (Weiler, 1995:34).

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[84] See, for example, Bunch (1987), hooks (1988) and Washington (1985).

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The feminist mothers involved in this study, like many feminist school teachers,

offer their children alternatives to narrow gender and sexual stereotypes when they speak

candidly with them and show them diverse ways of being in the world. They also

demonstrate, as some feminist teachers do, how to recognize and critique the oppression

of girls and women and how to work towards changing this.[85] Feminist mothers show

their children how diversity, while not always prominent, is present and available as an

alternative to the standard. They also teach their children how people can challenge and

change the dominant ways of looking at women and men.

ii.   Egalitarian Relationships that Foster Collaborative Learning

Feminists are critical of relationships based on an imbalance of power. Since they

disapprove of the unjust use of power, opportunities and privilege, participants model the

importance of egalitarian relationships when they interact and connect with their

children. They attempt to foster relationships with their children that are not intimidating

or domineering and relate to their children in ways that are not based on the use or abuse

of authority and power. Rather than exercise power over children, these mothers strive

for relationships based on respect, responsibility and accountability.

Kim, for example, seriously considers her own relationship to the power she has

as a mother and an adult and tries to change the power dynamics between herself as a

mother and her sons as children. She observes how her behaviour towards her children,

particularly when she has "spoken loudly or disregarded their feelings has overpowered

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[85] See Briskin (1992) for an example of this strategy.

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them to the point of frightening them." In an effort to change the interaction between herself and her children, Kim analyses the power dynamic within their relationship. She discusses with her boys how speaking to them in a contemptuous manner is "disrespectful and wrong."

In acknowledging and taking responsibility for her own behaviour, Kim shows her children that domineering behaviour is unacceptable. Together they talk about how they are all responsible for their own behaviour, how taking responsibility for one's actions can be difficult and how mistakes are sometimes made when trying to do things differently. Reflecting on her own interaction with her children and talking openly with them about it, Kim shows her sons that relationships between people can be more balanced than the conventional ideal of parent/child relationships. This is not an easy task and Kim acknowledges, as feminist teachers do, that while change-making can be difficult and scary, it is essential for personal growth.[86]

Francis, too, favours sharing power with her child. She fosters dialogue that is candid and non-judgmental and encourages full discussion about issues and feelings associated with decisions and disagreements. To ensure that discussions are respectful and that each person has the chance to present her or his understanding of the situation, Francis makes certain that both she and her son are "well-nourished and relatively calm before talking." Francis also ensures that both she and her son have the opportunity to speak and to be heard. The practice of sharing responsibility for the dynamics of conversations, conflicts and resolutions echoes strategies used in feminist teaching

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[86] Hooks (1988) makes this argument.

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situations where students are encouraged to speak from their experience and from their point of view.[87]

Carol's approach to 'guiding' rather than 'raising' her children demonstrates how feminist mothers can engage in relationships with their children that acknowledge and challenge the power differentials between them. Carol recognizes that two of her five children do not conform to socially accepted and expected gender stereotypes. One of her sons is non-competitive and one of her daughters is a 'tom-boy.' Carol refuses to speak negatively about her son's "compassionate and gentle ways or to push him to become more competitive in his manner and actions." She also does not make negative comments about her daughter's 'unladylike' behaviour of wearing masculine clothes and sitting with her legs wide apart. Rather than badgering her daughter to wear a dress instead of pants or to "sit with her legs close together or crossed at the knee in order to be more 'feminine,'" Carol supports her daughter's behaviour and fashion sense. While Carol admits she does not care for all of the character traits of her children, she respects each child as a self-governing individual. She resists making disparaging remarks about the qualities she dislikes in her children. Instead, she encourages all of her children to be "themselves and to be confident in who they are."

In not wanting to overpower or dominate her children, May has encouraged her children from the time they were very young to talk with her about their lives and to contribute to open and honest discussions. They speak candidly with May, especially when they are experiencing hardship or challenges. Free to express themselves without

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[87] See, for example, hooks (1994).

fear of judgement, they share their theories, analyses and ideas.[88] May works from the premise that she can learn from people, including her daughters. Like feminist teachers, she sees their knowledge and questions as resources for collaborative and collective learning.[89] For example, when her daughters question her thinking, she seriously reflects on her "own reasoning, motives and presumptions." She talks with her two daughters about their differing perspectives and what they learn from each other. By participating in a relationship based on honesty, respect and accountability rather than on domination and subordination, May and her children practice an alternative to the standard parent/child relationship that is similar to the way feminist teachers challenge the standard teacher/student relationship.[90]

Many feminist educators in schools also try to provide students with a learning environment and experience that differs from and counters teaching practices in conventional classrooms. Rather than take on the role of teacher who is considered to be all knowing and responsible for passing knowledge on to students, some feminist educators construct learning and teaching encounters that are collaborative efforts between teachers and students. They attempt to take into account both their own and the student's situated-ness within a grid of differences. They also aspire to provide an environment of cooperation where students and teachers participate in giving voice to the

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[88] Bunch (1987) and Shrewsbury (1987) address how feminist teachers engage in this process with students in the classroom.

[89] Hooks (1994) theorizes that all people are contributors and are therefore resources for collective learning.

[90] Briskin (1992) and hooks (1994) address the dynamics of this type of relationship in feminist pedagogy.

silenced.[91] Rather than using the "banking concept of education" – whereby active teachers (subject) narrate to obedient listening students (object) who are expected to regurgitate the story when examined – feminist teachers promote the knowledge (subjectivity) of their own students (Ellsworth, 1992; hooks, 1994).[92]

To re-create the classroom into a space that is shared by students and teachers, some feminist educators begin with the theory and practice that everyone is a contributor and that everyone's contributions can help create an open learning community. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992) notes the value of the input from students in teaching and learning in the classroom and the importance of acknowledging that we all have partial knowledge and that no one can know it all. Bell hooks (1988), Frances Maher and Mary Kay Tetrault (1994) and Becky Ropers-Huilman (1998) also address the significance of the enactment of new epistemologies drawn from the viewpoints and experiences of students and teachers. As contributors, all people can offer resources which, when used constructively, can enhance the "capacity of any class to create an open learning community" (hooks, 1994:8).

Like feminist teachers in the classroom who reflect upon and critique their own relationship with power as teachers,[93] feminist mothers are aware and critical of the

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[91] Hooks (1994), Luke (1996), Maher (1985), Russell (1985), Spelman (1985), and Washington (1985) all address the importance of sharing students' experiences and knowledge in the classroom and connecting this to course material.

[92] The "banking system of education" was first coined and theorized by Freire (1970) to describe and theorize how education can be a form of oppression. Hooks (1988; 1994) and Kenway and Modra (1992) comment on the damage of this type of education for girls and other marginalised groups of people.

[93] See Brisken (1992) for instance.

power differentials between children and adults. And just as feminist teachers seek to re-shape the classroom into a space that is shared by students and teachers,[94] feminist mothers aspire to do the same in their relationships with their children. Mothers construct pedagogical encounters that are collaborative efforts, where the positions, experiences and knowledge of mothers and children alike are honoured and taken into account.[95] They provide an environment for their children where cooperation and sharing are central. Children are taught, as are students of feminist teachers, to acknowledge the presence of people involved in discussions and to realize that all people involved in discussions are responsible for the dynamics of that interaction.[96] Through their interactions and conversations with their mothers, children learn that relationships do not have to replicate a relationship of domination and submission; relationships can be more egalitarian.[97]

In the process of discussing their own thoughts along with the various points of view introduced by their mothers, children learn that there are numerous ways of interpreting and being in the world and that people do not always agree. Through disclosing their feelings and thoughts to each other, mothers and children share a relationship based on trust and respect. This relationship is similar to the one that Briskin

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[94] See, for example, hooks (1994) and Shrewsbury (1987).

[95] Briskin (1992), hooks (1988) and Maher and Tetrault (1994) note how this process occurs in feminist classrooms.

[96] See, for example, hooks (1994).

[97] Briskin (1992) and hooks (1994) note how the relationship between students and teachers in feminist classrooms is not one of power and submission.

(1992), hooks, (1994) and Shrewsbury (1987) advocate for feminist teachers to develop with students.

Through sharing their power as adults, mothers demonstrate to their children how power dynamics do not have to replicate a model of domination and subordination and that human interactions can be based on more egalitarian relationships and experiences. They re-shape conventional power dynamics, using strategies similar to those of feminist teachers in schools that help make people "theorists of their own lives by interrogating and analysing their own experience" (Weiler, 1995:34).

iii.   Empowerment and Self-Governance

Free to question and make mistakes with limited judgement, children are urged to think through their ideas. While encouraging their children to participate in critical discussions about their own and their mother's ideas, these mothers respectfully challenge the thinking of their children and offer alternative points of view. They prompt their children to collaborate in difficult discussions where they develop a sense of autonomy and mutuality.

In their parenting, participants promote the independent knowledge and thinking of their children. Rather than dictate their thoughts, mothers acknowledge the experiences and knowledge of their children and encourage them to talk about their own understandings and experiences. These feminist mothers, like some feminist teachers,

refuse to use the "banking concept of education" of telling students what to think.[98] Shar

uses this approach in her interaction with the children in her day care. Rather than telling

children to be quiet, ignoring what they are saying or disregarding what they are asking

for (as many parents and adults do), Shar listens to children and encourages them to

recognize and articulate what they need. She tries to make "deep connections with

children by acknowledging the experiences they have." When they speak, Shar listens.

She talks with them about their concerns, their ideas and their dreams. Shar urges

children to articulate what they are thinking and to make decisions based on what they

know. In respecting the decisions they make, Shar shows them that "their thoughts and

their feelings matter." They learn that they are significant in a world where children are

overpowered by adults and where children's realities are denied.

Like various feminist teachers in the classroom, Shar challenges traditional

patriarchal structures by empowering the subjugated.[99] She promotes the subjectivity of

the children she is engaged with in her child care by being attentive to their realities and

needs. By listening and talking with them and letting them know that their contributions

are important and credible, she supports children's ability to think and to reason. Since

Shar listens to and discusses their ideas and decisions with them, children learn to think

critically about their own knowledge and to be responsible for their thoughts and actions.

Shar and other feminist mothers, like feminist teachers who promote the

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[98] For further discussion on the banking concept of education see Ellsworth (1992), Friere (1970) and hooks (1994).

[99] See, for example, Briskin (1992), Bunch (1987), hooks (1988, 1994), Shrewsbury (1987) and Washington (1985).

knowledge of their own students, encourage the development of children's own knowledge and their ability to be critically aware of the knowledge of other people.[100] Feminist mothers, like feminist teachers "engage students in a learning process that makes the world 'more rather than less real'" (hooks, 1988:51). In doing so, they try to refute and challenge the notion that children's experiences are not real experiences. They attempt to teach children how to recognize the realities of their world and how to act on that understanding with confidence. Shar, for example, speaks with the children in her life about "what went on at school, or how they feel about experiences they had that day."

Providing the conditions for giving voice to children who are often silenced, helps to teach them that they are powerful people who can think and articulate their needs. This approach to teaching correlates with the strategy feminist teachers use when they give voice to students in the classroom.[101] Tammy shows her children that they are "powerful people" who can exercise their power in ways that do not dominate other people by encouraging them to act on their own behalf in ways that do not limit their own power or the power of others. For instance, she makes her children aware of the possible choices available to them in most situations. While trying not to intervene, she persuades her daughter and son to "think about their reasoning for their choices and about the commitments, responsibilities and implications for themselves and for others associated with those decisions." As a family they often make decisions together, working through the process of talking about matters, while respecting each other's self-governance,

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[100] See, for example, Bunch (1990), Ellsworth (1992) and hooks (1994).

[101] See, for example, Bonder (1985), hooks (1994), Luke (1996), Maher (1985), Russell (1985) and Spelman (1985).

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reasoning and ability to think differently. Tammy talks with her children about how and why they make various decisions and how the choices they make are not always going to be understood or viewed as reasonable by others. Knowing why they make the choices they do, Tammy's children are confident and empowered. They are assured in the decisions they make, even when other people disagree with them (as in the case of behaving in ways that guaranteed a 'pink slip' at school, for example).

Shar and Tammy encourage and support the development of their children's leadership potential to think, understand and act for themselves. This strategy is similar to the one feminist teachers use to "provide students and teachers with a sense of their own agency in the world" (Briskin, 1992:34). Shrewsbury (1987) notes that the goal of teaching leadership is to increase the power of all without limiting the power of some. In this way, leadership is a special form of empowerment that empowers others. Children of feminist mothers are empowered in their relationships with their mothers to make their own decisions based on their own reasoning and to be accountable for those actions.

Beverly and Willow recognize and foster the self-governance of their children. They trust the ability of their children to make and take responsibility for their own decisions and behaviour. Both of these mothers have engaged in thoughtful discussions with each of their daughters when they have expressed a need to change the direction of their education. Since they respect their children's ability to think, reason and articulate their own sense of what is appropriate for them, these mothers take the requests of their children seriously and discuss the many implications of making such a change. While Beverly had reservations about her eldest daughter "leaving a French immersion program

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to enter a technical vocational school to take courses in fashion technology in grade nine," she treated her daughter as an "equal, listening carefully to [her] daughter's reasoning." She realized that her daughter "knew her own mind" and that this was a decision she had thought through, was committed to and was right for her. Her daughter went on to study fashion design at a college in Toronto. Beverly went through the same process when her youngest daughter came to her with the proposition that she go to "a private Catholic school in grade seven." Again Beverly was not sure about the change, but as she listened to her youngest daughter's explanation and reasoning she understood that her daughter knew what she needed and that she was committed to pursuing her educational goal. Four years later her daughter returned to public high school, again with the support of Carol, when her needs were not longer being met.

Willow, too, fosters and supports self-governance and leadership in her daughter. When her daughter was eight years-old, she asked Willow if she could go to a public school rather than continue to be home-schooled by her mother. While Willow had decided to teach her daughter at home instead of sending her to school, she recognized that there "may be a time when it would be more appropriate for her [daughter] to be taught in the public school system." Together they talked about why her daughter wanted to go to school and what the implications of that decision would be. Through the duration of their discussion Willow could see that her daughter was ready to go to a public school and supported her request and desire to do so.

As seen in these accounts, mothers and children share ideas and experiences in ways that are respectful of each other's thoughts and feelings. Since feminist mothers

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continually validate their children and urge them to link their personal experience to what they know, children contribute to discussions, their own learning and their own empowerment. Recognizing that their children are often silenced by a culture that does not respect or appreciate them, mothers give voice to their children by showing them how to speak with authority about their own lives and knowledge.

Participants foster the self-governance of their children in their relationships with them when they respect their knowledge and experience. Through conversations about their own and their mother's concepts and ideas, children are encouraged to engage in critical thinking, take responsibility for their own learning and respect diverse thinking. They learn to consider and critique various perspectives and understandings. Children of these feminist mothers learn they are independent, self-governing people and that their decision making and behaviour are powerful. They develop a sense of their own agency in the world and discover how they can think actively about their own interests and needs through their relationships with their mothers.

Carolyn Shrewsbury (1987:11) contends that teaching students how to take leadership within the classroom not only assists in deconstructing the power dynamic between the student and teacher in the classroom, it offers students an opportunity to practice leadership or the "embodiment of our ability and our willingness to act on our beliefs."[102] She (1987:11) argues that students learn skills like planning, negotiating and organizing as well as how to articulate their needs and make connections between their

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[102] Bunch (1987), Hoffman (1985), hooks (1984, 1988, 1994), and Washington (1985) all examine the usefulness of having students take leadership roles in the classroom.

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needs and the needs of others. Being in a classroom where teachers promote the practice acknowledging everyone's presence and contribution, students learn to incorporate empowerment – "a concept of power as energy, capacity and potential rather than as domination"– in their leadership and learning (Shrewsbury, 1987:8). Leadership, Shrewsbury (1987:8) insists, is learned within the framework of respect and empowerment, where the goal is to "increase the power of all actors, not to limit the power of some." When teachers provide an environment that allows students to develop their own knowledge base and their own way of thinking, students are empowered to take on and practice leadership within the classroom.

Briskin (1992:14) notes that teaching leadership in this way recognizes that "the teacher has something to teach" without depending on "authoritarian practices" often experienced in other classrooms. Rather than rejecting authority per se, this model of teaching "names the power differential between student and teacher and seeks to equip students to use power (for those unused to it), to acknowledge their power (for those to whom power has accrued by virtue of their class, race or gender) and to develop an appreciation of collective power" (Briskin, 1992:14).

> To teach leadership is not only to name, negotiate, and try to change the power relations of the classroom, it is to focus students' attention on their own agency outside the classroom. Emphasizing the importance of leadership rather than rejecting it, teaching leadership instead of assuming it, naming the power relations of the classroom rather than masking them highlights student capacity and responsibility to act as change agents – as leaders – in the world outside the classroom. (Briskin, 1992:15-16)

Like teachers who follow this philosophy and practice, these feminist mothers provide opportunities for children to develop leadership skills. Through their full

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participation in discussions, they learn to take responsibility for their own learning. Children also learn how to use their own agency in creating change when their mothers show them how to think critically about the power dynamic and organization of the world. Some of the children of these feminist mothers develop the ability to challenge and, at times, significantly influence their mother's thinking and actions. As children fully participate in discussions with their mothers, they become empowered, as do students of feminist teachers, to articulate their own thoughts and theories.[103] Through this process of thinking and making decisions for themselves, children develop leadership skills, the embodiment of their ability and their willingness to act on their own behalf (Shrewsbury, 1987:11).[104]

While I only have the mother's reports about how their children develop and the influence of the mother/child relationship and I am aware that the children may also be influenced by other factors both inside and outside of the family, the approaches used by mothers in their interactions with their children are nevertheless analogous to the ways in which feminist teachers interact with and teach their students. The intent of feminist mothers and feminist teachers in the classroom appears to be the same, namely, to foster empowerment and self-government in people.

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[103] See, for example, Briskin (1992) and Shrewsbury (1987).

[104] See, for example, Briskin (1992), Bunch (1987), hooks (1988), Maher (1985), Rich (1985), Shrewsbury (1987) and Washington (1985).

iv.   Collective Action

The feminists I interviewed believe that they are not detached from other people, but rather are connected to the larger collective of humanity where their decisions and actions influence their own lives and the lives of others. They explain and illustrate to their children how people are interconnected with each other and how organizing with others is vital to bring about social change. Similar to Briskin (1992:25), who writes about the use of the classroom setting to develop a sense of collectivity by urging students to be involved in "collective action" through "active involvement in the politics of the school," feminist mothers foster the importance of collective action through their own and through their children's involvement with political organizations and movements outside the home.

These feminist mothers not only talk about the importance of being involved with other people to make social change, they are involved in collective political action. Through their participation in groups and activities, feminist mothers model for their children the significance of collective action. Their children learn the importance of such action when they too participate in groups that organize around issues of social injustice and social change.

May, for example, teaches her children about organizing collectively by being a member of various feminist organizations. Shar's children also learned about the significance of collective action as youngsters when they saw their mother being publically active in feminist demonstrations. They witnessed her speaking openly about the negative depiction of women in the media and the many injustices women suffered

because of sexism, patriarchy and misogyny. They observed her collective activism when she was on television and featured in newspapers for leading an anti-pornography parade of many participants down a main thoroughfare in Winnipeg. They saw how Shar connected herself with other people when she held feminist meetings with other women in their living room and when she developed and made available her "personal library of feminist writing to friends, neighbours and activists."

This group of mothers not only show their children the importance of connections with other people through their own organizing, they periodically take their children to public demonstrations where groups of people unite for specific causes. Shar and Kim, for example, take their children to the annual "Take Back the Night March," protesting violence against women on the street, at work and in their homes. They also take them to public vigils that take place after the deaths of women and children who have been murdered by male violence. Kim also takes her sons to public demonstrations advocating better child care and access to reproductive choice. By being involved in these public collective actions for social change, mothers show their children how their concerns are not isolated but rather are the interests of many other people. They demonstrate how together they can bring their concerns to the attention of other people, including policy makers.

Tammy and Francis show their children the relevance of organizing collectively in different ways. Tammy, for example, discusses the importance of people acting in unison through boycotts to protest apartheid in South Africa. By not purchasing particular products exported by South Africa, she shows her children how they are part of

a collective of people (locally, nationally and internationally) taking action against a government. In being part of a larger collective, she shows her children how they attempt to make a difference to the economic prosperity of the South African government. Frances and her son are involved with a cooperative that sells organic and natural foods and products. Since they volunteer their time along with a collective of people, the store is able to sell specialty items and to prosper without paying the majority of its staff. Francis's son gains direct exposure to and knowledge of how alternative food options and working arrangements are available when people work en masse for change. He sees how creativity, thought and action can successfully challenge the "normal" way businesses are run and how belonging to such a group can challenge the status quo.

Children choose to follow their mother's examples and teachings of collective activism on their own by being involved with others who challenge oppression and attempt to bring about social change. Through attending workshops focussed on understanding and challenging racism and sexism, May's daughters are involved with other people in groups committed to bringing about social change for themselves and for others. They learn that their experiences are analogous to those of other people who share similar social locations and that uniting as a group brings solidarity and support for their analysis and need to challenge systems of patriarchy, racism and class bias. By participating in plays and other activities that educate audiences about racism and sexism, May's daughters are involved with others in providing alternatives to negative and prejudiced attitudes toward women and non-white people.

Shar's two eldest children, also influenced by their mother's analysis and practice

of connecting with other people, include other people in their own activism. At age eighteen, Shar's daughter publically expressed her opinion in a letter to the editor that an advertisement in the newspaper depicting skiers as only male was sexist. In sharing her analysis, she attempted to connect with other people and to facilitate further public discussion about the issue. Shar's son, who works in a licenced child care facility associated with a large organization, has taken it upon himself to "develop and write a sexual harassment policy." Not only does he believe it is essential that all employers have a sexual harassment policy in place, he believes one is particularly necessary in the predominantly female field of child care. Through his actions of outlining safer working conditions for all employees, Shar's son works with others to implement a policy that is beneficial to a group of people.

Children of feminist mothers learn and use "a vision of alternatives and strategies for change" (Briskin, 1992:34) in their own lives, whether they organize with other people (like the children of Francis, Shar and May) or whether they individually challenge people's attitudes and behaviours (like the children of Tammy and Francis). Regardless of their strategies, the children understand through their relationships with their mothers that they are connected with other people in the world. Since they are provided with an education by their mothers that nurtures and values empowerment and social change, children of these feminists – like students of feminist teachers – are likely to link these lessons to the larger world.

II: Concluding Remarks: Feminist Mothers are Feminist Teachers

If, as Briskin (1992:34) posits, "feminist pedagogy is, indeed, about teaching and learning liberation," feminist mothers are feminist teachers who educate their children within their everyday familial relationships. From their mothers, children learn to think critically about the world around them and about their place within it. They not only develop the skills to analyse gender inequality, they learn about alternative visions and how to implement strategies to counter ideas and practices that discriminate against people based on narrow gender stereotypes. Children of feminist mothers understand the difference between egalitarian relationships and unequal relationships that are based on domination and subordination. They have the capacity to participate in relationships based on mutual respect and are able to be active participants in collaborative learning. Empowered as human beings through their relationships with their mothers, children practice self-governance and leadership while honouring other people. Knowing that people are not islands unto themselves, children of feminist mothers value their connection with others and the potential of political change through collective action. Like their mothers, children rely on their own knowledge and experience as the basis for their action. Through the teachings of their mothers, children know that they can and do make a difference in the world.

Uncovering and acknowledging that feminist mothers are feminist teachers who practice various aspects of feminist pedagogy in their motherwork raises some important questions for feminist education and for feminist activism. That feminist pedagogy is practiced by feminist mothers (and not only practiced by professional feminist teachers)

and takes place within the home (and does not exclusively take place within the educational system) suggests that feminist teaching may take place in locations beyond the school and in relationships outside that of the teacher/student. Can and do feminists practice feminist teaching elsewhere? For instance, do members of grass-roots feminist organizations and collectives use components of feminist pedagogy? If so, which ones do they exercise and how? Do feminists use elements of feminist teaching in their places of employment? With which people and in what situations do feminists engage in feminist teaching? Pursuing these kinds of questions may lead to a deeper understanding of feminist teaching practices and reveal locations where feminist education is or could be happening. Recognizing the multiple sites where feminist education take place may also lead to an increase in the availability of feminist education.

Feminist mothers view themselves as teachers. They consciously prompt their children to observe, scrutinize and think about what they see. Participants actively 'guide' their children to be attentive to and critical of what is represented as the "norm" and encourage them to challenge these ways of thinking, doing and being. Feminist mothers rely on their personal experiences and knowledge, as well as the knowledge they have from their post-secondary schooling, from their work in the labour force and from their volunteer experiences to teach their children about the world and their place within it.

Feminist mothers believe that their teaching practices are successful. They cite examples of their children's ability to engage in critical thinking and their understanding and critique of social inequality as proof of their achievements. Do their teaching

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successes encourage feminist mothers to use their teaching practices in other aspects of their lives? If so, how and where do they use them? Do they make adjustments in their strategies to specific circumstances or to the types of interactions they have with people? How effective is this strategy for developing other people's awareness of social injustices and of feminism? It this an approach that may be useful in grass-roots educating and organizing for feminists?

Understanding how feminist mothers view their strategies of mothering to be successful and to be a positive influence in their children's lives raises the question of whether their children also value this approach to learning and teaching. If they do, do they try to engage other people in the same process of learning and teaching that they participate in with their mothers? As they mature, do they attempt to utilize strategies similar to the ones their mother's use in their relationships with the children in their own lives? Should they become parents, will they use teaching strategies comparable to those of their mothers?

Feminist teaching is integrated in the motherwork of feminist mothers. Intertwined in the teaching practices of feminist mothers is modelling and praxis. Feminist mothers not only instruct their children on the various elements of feminist pedagogy presented here, they model or embody them. In their relationships with their children, participants live their theorizing. They participate in teaching practices that are based on their knowledge and lived experiences. When they mother, feminists engage in praxis: the interactive and reflective process where thoughts are put into action, and action become the basis for revised thinking. These women continually model elements

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of feminist pedagogy for their children through the lessons they teach and the ways in which they live their lives as mothers. Mothers introduce their children to a feminist world-view and analysis from the early days of their children's lives. What are the implications of this for feminist activism? Do children of feminist mothers become educated about social injustice and become politically active long before they become politicized through other means (possibly in their youth or as adults)? Does the feminist teaching that mothers engage in mean that their children do not have to wait until they are taught by feminist teachers in the school system or enrolled in women's studies classes or courses to be introduced to feminism?

Surely, feminist activism can only become stronger when feminist mothers teach their children from a feminist world view. Children of feminists, who are critically aware of the world around them, of the intersecting forms of oppression and the resulting damage inflicted on the environment and on people and of their agency in society must undoubtedly contribute to feminism, feminist movements and other progressive movements for social change. The final chapter addresses how mothering influences the ways in which participants understand and practice their feminism.

CHAPTER SIX

Mothering Keeps Feminism Fresh

> I guess it comes down to seeing everything from feminist eyes. And I
> couldn't divorce being a mother from being a feminist; it's all wrapped up
> in the same fabric. I said this about my feminism, it's seeing the world
> through feminist eyes. And now that I'm a mother, I can only see the
> world from mothers' eyes as well. (Andrea)

As seen in previous chapters, feminism is integral to the lives of participants. As

self-conscious feminists, they question anything they perceive to be coercive, dangerous

or oppressive, including restrictions placed on them as mothers. Always critical of power

dynamics and gender inequality, feminist mothers understand how conventional

motherhood sets them up to fail and how expectations associated with motherhood are

unreasonable and unobtainable. At the same time, they discern that motherhood is not

completely determined. They mother in ways that challenge and resist conventional

standards of motherhood by inventing ways of mothering that are more suitable. Their

understandings of feminism (thought/theory) inform the choices they make in their

mothering (action/practice).

Feminism also informs the ways mothers interact with their children. While they

may not name it as such, participants use elements of feminist pedagogy in their

mothering. They try to pass their awareness and critique of social injustice on to their

children by teaching them how to recognize and challenge power imbalances, including

those between adults and children. Through attempting to engage in more egalitarian

relationships with their children, mothers and children share responsibility and decision

making in their families. Through discussions, children are urged to think and speak for

themselves and to take responsibility for their analysis and actions. Mothers show their children how they are connected to humanity, and that alone or with others, they have the ability to question, to challenge and to seek social change. Influenced by their feminism, mothers attempt to raise their children to be aware of, to critique and to resist the various expectations placed on them by patriarchy.

During our interviews, I asked participants whether their mothering (action/practice) influences their understanding of feminism (thoughts/theory). In spite of having not previously thought about this, upon reflection, they told me they believe their mothering affects their understanding of feminism, although many were unable to say how. For example, Shar, a grandmother who runs a child care in her home, responds this way when I ask her if her mothering influences her personal definition of feminist:

> [long pause] I would say yes. I'm not sure if I can really articulate why because being a mother is so central to who I am. It has had to have a tremendous impact on how I perceive feminism.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how mothering influences the feminism of feminist mothers. The first section features the ways in which mothering influences the feminism of five participants. While these accounts are minimal in description, they reveal that feminist mothers are aware of the ways in which their feminism is influenced by their mothering. The second section of the chapter provides a more detailed explanation of how four participants understand the ways in which their mothering influences their feminism. The accounts of Paula, Lynette, Jackie and Deb reveal the interactive relationship between mothering and feminism and expose the ways in which participants, as mothers, are engaged in feminist praxis, that is, theorizing from action

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that is based on theory.

Emerging from the participants' accounts is a recognition that mothering informs the feminisms of feminist mothers. While the ways in which their mothering influences their feminism vary, the process of praxis is fundamental to the motherwork and the lives of these feminist mothers. The chapter closes with a number of questions that arise from what appears to be a consensus about the interactive relationship between mothering and feminism. I also raise some suggestions of the significance of this revelation to further research.

I.   Reflecting on Mothering and Feminism

The few women who speak directly about how their mothering influences their feminism do not provide extensive narratives, possibly because this is their first time thinking or talking about this aspect of their feminist mothering. For many participants, being involved in this study is the only time they have had an opportunity to speak with anyone about their feminist mothering. Not only are there few venues to discuss feminist mothering, the topic of feminist mothering (as demonstrated in Chapter One) is relatively new and has therefore been relatively untouched by feminist writers.[105]

Participants may not break down their thinking about their feminist mothering in the same way as I have. The particular frames I use to outline my questions may be

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[105] While the organization Mothers Are Women (MAW) may provide some feminist mothers with an opportunity to address mothering, none of the participants spoke of this being a support during our interviews. Furthermore, MAW tends to focus on policy development and remuneration for mothers who stay at home to care for their children. Again, this did not appear to be an area of concern for these particular feminist mothers.

inconsistent with the ways participants think about and understand their feminist mothering. Moreover, because the thoughtful reflection and action of praxis occurs simultaneously, it may not be evident to participants. They may be engaging in praxis without analysing the process.

The responses of the women to the question of the influence of mothering on feminisms are diverse. Some women name particular shifts in their consciousness or thinking about their understanding of patriarchy or masculinity, while others speak of ways their feminism has shifted in focus because of their mothering. While a few women give specific examples, they provide limited detail about their changing feminism. Andrea, for instance, recognizes how her mothering forces her to rethink assumptions about men being "inherently dominant and uncaring." As a stay-at-home mother to her one-and-a-half year-old daughter, Andrea spends time with other parents and their children. Consequently, she is introduced to "some pretty decent fathering" by the men in these groups. Observing her own partner's competency as a parent and meeting other "good fathers," Andrea is not so quick to generalize about men as she was before being a mother. She realizes that men are capable of nurturing and caring for children in ways she was previously unaware of. Andrea tells me that her feminism is "enriched" by her mothering and by her reassessment of men. As a result, Andrea has moved away from what she calls "stereotyping and black-and-white judgement calls."

When Kim became the mother of two boys with her common-law husband, she revisited anti-male sentiments and theories central to radical feminism that declare male biology as the cause of male sexual violence against women. While she has always

rejected theories that view men as "rapists due to their biological makeup," Kim finds these beliefs "even more outrageous" as the mother of boys. She told me that she will not assume that her sons are "sexual predators" and that, until proven otherwise, she refuses to see her sons as rapists "just because they have a penis." Mothering has encouraged Kim to reflect on feminist theories of biological determinism and to solidify her resolve that biology is not destiny in the case of male sexual assaults.

Through her mothering, Francis has developed an understanding of men's and women's roles in contributing to patriarchy that she did not have prior to parenting. Since seeing how much influence she has on the values and thinking of her son, Francis believes that women can contribute to raising sons who are not feminist, particularly when they promote "patriarchal attitudes." Francis told me that she can no longer "just blame men for putting forth patriarchal attitudes, women put forth patriarchal attitudes too because they're raised in it and they still believe it." Patriarchal attitudes are learned, passed on and practised by women and men alike. Mothering has provided Francis with a more critical perspective toward women and mothers and a more open stance toward men.

Laura notes how her experience of pregnancy has enriched her feminism by encouraging a different understanding of feminist issues dealing with "control of the body, with reproduction and with support for parenting." Pregnancy gave Laura, a professor and a mother of two daughters under the age of two, a perspective on abortion that she did not have before. During her first pregnancy, she had an experiential awareness that she had not had before. She gained a deeper understanding of pregnancy

that made her feel she "would fight to the death to give somebody else, or [herself], the freedom to end a pregnancy." Since she felt so strongly about the insights she gained, Laura wrote an editorial in a local newspaper vocalizing her understanding about women's control over their bodies as a pregnant woman. For Laura, pregnancy gave her the "power of effect" and "external credibility" to support her feminist concerns about abortion that she lacked prior to conception.

May also recognizes the influence mothering has on her feminism. She told me her mothering gives her a focus that makes her "political contribution more intense and more purposeful." May notes that before having children, her "political involvements were general." Since becoming a mother, she thinks specifically of her two teenaged daughters because she wants "to make a better world for them, as well as for others." May believes her mothering makes her "a stronger feminist" and increases her "commitment to work for change." Mothering, May tells me, "keeps my feminism fresh."

II.   Feminist Praxis in Feminist Mothering

Not only does mothering keep the feminism of participants "fresh," it encourages some feminist mothers to consciously reflect on and change their feminism. The accounts of the following four women reveal the various ways in which the interactive relationship between mothering and feminism is experienced by participants. Paula and Lynette, for example, speak of how their mothering has influenced their feminism. This may be a shift from seeing feminism as "rejecting" to a vision and strategy of "building" or to gaining a deeper understanding of the "structural oppression of women." Jackie reflects

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on the strong relationship between mothering and her identity and ongoing development as a feminist, while Deb talks specifically about the process of praxis itself, focussing on the cyclical and continuous relationship of her feminism and mothering.

i.   Paula

Paula was born forty years ago in England to a father of Colombian ancestry and to a mother of Australian heritage. At the time of our interviews Paula was in the process of leaving her common-law husband and the father of her two daughters (aged eleven and four) and her eight-year-old son. Within six months of the first interview, Paula and her three children moved from a small community a few hours drive outside of Winnipeg back to the city. Because Paula is chemically sensitive, the two years of living in rural Manitoba helped her body to detoxify to a level where she felt safe enough to return to Winnipeg. While struggling financially, she began a massage therapy practice in Winnipeg and tried to live with as few toxins and irritants in her environment as possible.

During our second interview at a local university one snowy evening in the early weeks of 1997, Paula reflects upon the ongoing development of her feminist awareness and how mothering influences her understanding and practice of feminism. Struggling with a cold, sore throat and cough, she shares her memories of childhood with me. Paula explains how she has understood, from very early in her life, that she is treated differently because she was born female:

> I have a really clear memory of when I was six years old playing with my
> best friend who was a boy. And we were playing in this hot tent in the
> summertime and we were playing house. And so he was going out hunting
> and fishing and I would just stay home and wash the dishes. It was so hot

in there!

And I waited and I tried to do my job of staying in there and washing the dishes. And finally, I just couldn't stand it anymore. And I looked out the door of the tent and there he was splashing away in the lake, playing and having a wonderful time. And I said, "None of this for me!"

That is the first really clear line that I drew that would relate to the difference between sexes and their roles.

While Paula "just continued to grow up" after this profound experience, she saw how her experiences as a girl, and later as a young woman, were shared by other women. For example, she was very friendly with a girl in high school who had "lots of brothers and a sisters." Paula describes her friend as a "cool person who was into everything" and someone who could encourage Paula to do almost anything. Together they had a lot of fun. While Paula's friend taught Paula how to bake bread, she did not follow conventional expectations placed on girls. Paula's friend "thought it was absolutely stupid that a person couldn't do something that a boy could do because she knew that she could do it." Through her experience with this young woman and by observing her friend's mother go to university, Paula saw that there were women who lived their lives in ways that did not conform to unfair stereotypical gender roles she had identified as a six-year-old. It was not, however, until Paula began applying for jobs that she realized how elements of feminism fit with her experience:

I remember when I was a teenager. My first name is actually not Paula, it's [name]. And because it's a foreign name in English-speaking countries, no one could tell if I was a man or a woman. So, if I would write a letter away to a company, they would always write back, 'Dear Sir.' And I realized that I was being taken more seriously 'cause they thought that I might be male! [laughter]

As I started to realize these things, like to try and get jobs and to try and be taken seriously, that if I just wrote a letter and they'd only have my name that I would get better response than if I was there in person. Or

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talking on the phone, you know. Those inequities seemed to be true.

I mean, I saw them in my family and in my community. But until, for me anyway, I really experienced it myself, it wasn't sort of clear. I wouldn't have said, 'Oh yes. I'm a feminist!' and put on this robe and become this way. But I think, gradually, by observing what was going on around me, and wanting to be treated with respect, I evolved, I guess [laughter] in that way.

Paula told me that she was not drawn to the term feminist when she first heard it in her twenties because "it was kind of in a man-hating context." This negative attitude toward men conflicted with Paula's experiences of growing up, when most of her friends had been boys. Paula told me that as a child she had "better, safer friendships with boys" because she experienced "less competition, in dealing with boys than with girls." While Paula was originally reluctant to call herself a feminist due to the initial "man-hating context" of the term, she nevertheless identifies herself as a feminist because of her experiences of sexism. She quickly learned that males had easier access to jobs and were taken more seriously than females were. Her own experience of being taken more seriously when people assumed she was a male demonstrated to Paula "how the gender inequalities that feminists speak of seem to be true."

Paula's understanding of feminism changed as she became a mother. When I asked Paula how mothering has influenced her feminism she told me:

> Well, it's expanded it. And I think transformed it from being a reaction to my own oppression to an act of nurturing, for building a new culture, for making that contribution, that more growing and giving than just fighting back. You have to fight, I find anyway, I have to almost always be ready to fight back [laughter]. While you're doing it to protect your ability to do it, but it's much more positive and hopeful to be building than just rejecting.

Mothering has also influenced and shaped Paula's political action. She believes

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she is more publically active since she has had children because public action is a way

Paula is able to teach her children about their connection to the community and the

importance of being socially responsible:

> I've been more politically active since I've had children, partly because
> it's been an important thing to do. [laughter]. When we lived in
> Winnipeg, going to demonstrations, all different kinds, was a really
> important family event. It was a social event, a community-building event.
> And it was just an important thing for us to show our kids to do – to put
> your body where your ideas are.
>
> So, we did quite a bit of that during the Gulf War, and the siege at
> Kahnesetake. Slept in the Peace Village, did Building Peace Through Play
> and Take Bake the Night marches. And for a while I was going to vigils at
> the Leg when women were killed. I stopped going because I didn't want
> my son to hear women's derogatory expressions about a certain type of
> man and men in general which they needed to say, but I thought my son
> needed not to hear. He was two years old and they were very derogatory.
> So I had to stop that.
>
> Mothering has also given me less time to work on other things and
> so these activities were something I could do with my family. And it's
> also really tangible. It's not like writing a letter and months later you get
> back a form letter. You don't know if anybody ever heard your idea.
>
> You were part of the group that got on TV. You get the
> accomplishment that you did something. And I think when you have small
> kids, you really need to have a bit of tangible achievement. So, I guess it
> took a different form.

Paula's mothering has helped her to move her focus from renouncing and fighting

against oppression to inventing alternative visions and strategies for challenging

domination and creating social change. While taking the best interests of her children into

account, Paula engages in feminist political action and feminist pedagogy that interact

with and make connections with the community. The value of building that Paula has

learned through her mothering influences the type of political action she engages in, her

approach to feminist activism and her strategy to educating her children. Mothering

informs her feminism, her feminism informs her mothering and, in turn, her mothering

influences her feminism.

ii. Lynette:

Lynette's mothering has influenced her understanding of feminism in a different way. Through mothering, Lynette has gained a greater appreciation for the magnitude of patriarchy and its profound influence on the isolation and oppression of mothers. While she has been critical of gender inequality since she was a girl, mothering has enhanced Lynette's analysis of the structural oppression of women, especially of mothers.

Lynette was born in St. Paul, Minneapolis twenty-nine years ago, where she lived with her parents of German and Swedish heritage. At the age of twelve, Lynette watched her father become chronically ill and suffer for a long time at home before eventually dying. Lynette's mother worked hard and earned a meagre income to support her husband, herself, her two sons and her two daughters. During her father's illness and death, Lynette began to understand gender inequality and to hear about feminism. By observing her mother try to meet the needs of her husband and children while working for low wages, Lynette saw the asymmetry between the economic value of women's and men's work. After the death of her father, Lynette's mother began to identify herself as a feminist and talk to Lynette about feminism. Lynette remembers this time as "painful and distressing," as well as a time when she gained "great respect" for her mother.

As part of an exchange program, Lynette travelled and lived in Germany for a year at a time when she was seventeen-years-old, and again at age twenty. It was here she learned that people held different values and lived differently than people in North

America. For the first time, Lynette heard others questioning and criticizing the ways of

the United States. Living in Germany offered her an opportunity to think critically about

her life and the world. Upon her return home, Lynette's initial interest in social justice

blossomed when, as a university student, she met people who talked about "political

economy, the injustices of power dynamics and their influence on gender relations and

women's lives." Lynette explains how these experiences influenced her development as

a feminist:

> I was older when I was able to really reflect on my life and look at it and
> some of the circumstances and see that it wasn't the fault of my mother or
> my fault. It was the fact that, as a single parent, it was impossible for her
> to provide money for my education.
>   And I guess that happened more in university, once I started taking
> courses and doing more reading and talking to people Actually, I have a
> friend who teaches at York University. And just talking to him, he would
> sort of point these things out to me. That would have been when I was
> about twenty. The more that I would talk about what's happened with my
> family and with my mother and everything, the more he would point out
> it's the system. It's not so much, you know, the personal circumstances, or
> the fault of the people. So, it was more in university, I guess. But, I knew
> that this was happening when I was younger as well. When you're in it,
> you don't really reflect on it.

Lynette's feminism has been strongly influenced by her ability to see how her

individual experiences take place within the context of other social dynamics and power

structures. She notes, for example, that as a pre-teenager she understood that her life was

unfair and that her mother was suffering, yet it was as an adult and with the help of life

experience and the insights and theorizing of others that she connected her knowledge

and identity with feminism. Lynette finds her understanding of feminism continues to be

informed by her life experiences, especially as a mother:

> I didn't really understand what some of the structural problems of society

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were until I became a mother. I mean, I knew about patriarchy. I knew about all the stuff in theory because I read about it, but I didn't really understand what it meant. Not only until I became a mother.

Having kids has really changed it. Looking at the child care issues in the way that work is organized, and all that kind of stuff has changed my consciousness in that I see that there are more problems than I ever even realized until I had kids.

Once my friends became mothers and I saw what happened to them, it just sort of changed the way that I looked at everything. And the fact that most of the women that I know want to be able to spend time with their children. And it feels like you sort of have this choice that either you decide that, you know, 'I'm just, I'm going to work full-time and I'll take my kids to day care and I'll just be run ragged and still take care of everything on the home front.' I mean, anyone who I know who does that, they're not in good shape. Or, you have to sort of give up that piece of yourself altogether because of the options.

I know for myself even working part-time, there was sort of a higher position in my agency that came open. And there was no way, because I wanted to work part-time, that I could have that job. So, it's like if I make the decision that I want to be there for my children then my options, in terms of what I can do, are just totally cut off.

So, I guess it's just made me see, even in terms of single parent issues, I've thought about that a lot more the last little while. Actually, one of the things that I did, I wrote a proposal and got funding for a project "Senior Mentors for Single Parents." The reason I even thought of it was just being with my kids, you know, and what kind of things I would like. I'm not a single parent, so I don't qualify. [laughter] But, yeah, it's changed my views in many ways.

Being alone at home with her sons (both under the age of three) provides Lynette with a deeper appreciation for the reality of single mothering. While happily married to a man who actively participates in caring for their children, the experience of being a stay-at-home mom helps Lynette see more clearly the "power differences" between women and men. Regardless of being "in a wonderful relationship with a supportive spouse," Lynette feels her work as a mother is underappreciated and often ignored:

I didn't know how difficult being a woman is [laughter] until I had kids. I mean, there were little things that happened that, you know, I could see that there were power differences, but I, it didn't really hit home until I

had my children. Because I realized that the world is not structured so that we can raise our children in what I believe to be the best way to raise our kids.

And that whole idea that, for the most part, you're alone. You're a woman alone with children, maybe in a backyard or whatever, and you don't have much support from your spouse, and you don't have ties to other people. It's horrible. And even now with me being home. I know yesterday I was thinking, I was on the floor, scrubbing the floor, and there was a combination of apple juice and my son's pee all over the kitchen and I was thinking, 'This is not fun [laughter]. I don't know if I want to be doing this anymore.'

And so, in times like that, you really need to feel that people see it as worthwhile and that what you're doing is important instead of just having little people screaming at you and getting absolutely no support for what you choose to do.

Lynette's experiences and knowledge of mothering influence her understanding of feminism. She reassesses patriarchy and its effect on mothers and sees more clearly how social structures provide barriers that impede mothers, both at home and at work. This understanding inspired Lynette, before leaving her employment, to design and put in place a project where senior women mentor single mothers in an attempt change the isolation lone mothers feel. The act of mothering has brought to life the theoretical aspects of patriarchy that Lynette learned about as a university student. Now that she is the mother of two young children, Lynette understands on a tangible and concrete level the difference in power between women and men. She realizes how women's work as mothers is invisible and under valued and how mother's experience isolation.

iii.   Jackie

The dynamics between Jackie's feminism and mothering are slightly different from those of the other participants. Unlike the other women, who simultaneously

developed their identities as feminists and mothers or came to mothering after they

identified as feminists, Jackie identified with feminism following the birth of her child.

Jackie credits mothering with initiating various changes in her life, including her interest

in feminism and her identity as a feminist:

> If I wasn't a mother, I don't know if I would have ever ended up anywhere
> near feminism or feminist values. It was the mothering that really brings
> out feelings and then values. Because when you become a mother, you
> really have to look at yourself and your life, and [ask] 'what's this all
> about?' And I don't know if I would have questioned myself or
> disapproved a bunch of ideas from my mother if I hadn't become a
> mother.

At thirty, Jackie was surprised to discover she was pregnant. Even though she had

thought that she would "never be a mother," Jackie decided to have the baby. Shortly

after Jackie gave birth, her partner died, leaving her to raise their infant son alone. With

the help of friends who cared for her six-week old baby, she returned to work at a seed

plant in Brandon where she had been employed as seasonal staff for ten years. Three

months later she was laid off and lived on Unemployment Insurance for six months.

During this time she thought seriously about what she wanted to do with her life,

because, as she told me, "having a child made me decide I wanted a better life."

Becoming a mother provoked Jackie to think about herself as an independent

person for the first time. Until then, she had lived her life based on what others expected

of her instead of what she wanted. Jackie tells me that she had a very conventional

upbringing and "did almost everything you could think of that would be a traditional

female gender role." She was "quiet, passive and never confronting." Jackie attributes

her stereotypical upbringing to the cultural aspects of her parents. She believes her

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mother's expectations for a docile daughter were "influenced by her Polish line of culture that was very cold and strict," and her father's expectations for servitude were influenced by his "Native, Scottish background." Her father's extended family, with whom they spent most weekends, also influenced the way in which Jackie was raised.

Going to university was not an option that Jackie's family talked about when she was growing up or something Jackie thought about before having a child. Once a mother, however, Jackie believed that "getting educated" was the best way to earn a decent wage to support herself and her son. She therefore enrolled in university as a mature student. Through a course on women's issues she was introduced to feminism and began to read feminist authors. Jackie connected with women in the feminist community and joined a provincial women's organization, where she found support for her developing feminism. For the first time she was thinking, "What do I want? What does my son need? What do we need versus what other people think we need?"

When her son was four years old, Jackie moved from Brandon to Winnipeg to continue her university education, this time in social work. Many of her courses were influenced by feminism. She continued to meet feminist professors and students and to be actively involved with local women's organizations. After graduation she promptly found employment in her field, only to discover that she and social work were not suited for each other. Again, thinking about what she and her son needed and not what other people thought she should do, she decided to make her son a priority and stayed at home with financial support from social assistance.

Jackie told me that living on social assistance is "easy in some ways, and in some

ways it isn't." Sitting at her kitchen table, Jackie told me about an incident a week before

when her son had been called "welfare boy" by a boy who had just moved into the

neighbourhood. This comment upset both Jackie and her son:

> Oh, that just killed me. Oh, I was ready to go, I'm telling you, this is a rich
> kid. Oh, it took me two hours to try and get over that [grrr].
>
> He wouldn't tell me. He was out, out playing, crying away, and I
> said, 'Well, come and talk to me about what's going on.' And later, he told
> me what he had called him.
>
> I was just fit to be tied. I wanted to talk to this kid's dad. It was
> my first reaction. Well, that's probably where it comes from, I'm sure, you
> know.
>
> But that's part of the struggle for just what families that live on
> social assistance have to put up with from the dominant culture. And that's
> the bottom line. Because a mother can make choices she thinks is good for
> her child, and yet, you have to put up with all that bull-shit that's out there.
> Little things like that, oh just the comments I have to put up with, these
> extremely judgmental people, and I know a lot of people think that's fine.

At the time of our second interview, new legislation prohibiting social assistance

to mothers of children over the age of five years had been implemented by the provincial

government. Jackie could no longer stay at home with her eleven-year-old son. Since she

was not interested in returning to the field of social work, Jackie took an accounting

course subsidized by the government in an effort to find work that was meaningful and

well-paid. Attending classes and studying significantly changed the amount and quality

of time Jackie and her son had together. Jackie describes mothering at this time as a

"struggle." Leaving her son before he goes to school in the morning and not being at

home to meet him at lunch or when he returns in the afternoon after school is particularly

difficult. Yet Jackie believes she is doing the best she can for herself and her son by

retraining herself. She also found that she was no longer able to volunteer at a local

women's organization because it infringed on the small amount of time she had with her

son.

Jackie attributes her understanding and practice of feminism to the changes she made in her life when her son was born. She is glad she is a feminist mother, even though she has found it difficult to "make the transfer to feminism." Jackie tells me:

> I think the realities of living day to day, raising kids and living feminist ideals, for me, it's been hard to try [to] live the ideals out. And I don't know if that's a struggle just with my own traditional views coming back to haunt me or [pause]. Like, I laughed not too long ago, 'Can I be a hockey Mom and still be a feminist? Ooh, I don't know about this!' You know, some of the violence that happens when the kids get older, just the whole sports and violence thing makes you wonder. I know there's benefits to sports, but it's a struggle.

Jackie struggles with her feminism because she also grapples with her mother's traditional beliefs on an almost daily basis. Jackie and her mother are close and Jackie depends on her mother for child care and transportation from time to time. Even though she finds it difficult to live out her "feminist ideals," Jackie sees her mothering and feminism as "interconnected with each other" in ways that gave her "strength" to mother her son how she wants to and not how others think she should:

> I think raising a child, I've had to continually catch myself and think about things that, say all the influences in my son's life, and how I feel about the way I want him raised as a feminist. We have to fight a lot of different things. You have to just continually reinforce what you believe and I guess the values that you want him to believe in too.

Like all of the other participants whose accounts appear here, Jackie engages in praxis when she integrates her thinking with her action in her attempts to change her life and the life of her son. Giving birth to and mothering a child has made Jackie think about her reality. Upon reflection, she realized that she could change her situation by going to university. Her introduction to feminism at university led her to think about many things

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differently, including herself and how she wanted to raise her son. Aware of her constant struggle between her own thoughts and ways of mothering and those of others, Jackie continues to reflect on her thinking and her action as a feminist mother to ensure that she mothers in ways that are true to her. Jackie also revisits her understanding and practice of feminism.

iv.   Deb

Deb, too, understands the relationship between her mothering and her feminism and how they continue to grow and influence each other. While Deb has known about gender inequality since her teens, she only identified herself as a feminist after the Montreal Massacre on December 6, 1989 (when her son was eleven months old). She told me that "the world became gendered" in a way it had not been before with the acts of "giving birth to a boy and the gunman in Montreal separating the women from the men and then killing the women." Deb also believes the timing of these two events within a year of each other has had a profound effect on her awareness and sensitivity to acts of gender discrimination.

Deb is a full-time student and a sole wage earner who is supporting her common-law husband and their eight-year-old son. While her partner provides a large share of the child care for their son, Deb is responsible for most of the domestic labour and for arranging family activities. At the time of our first interview, thirty-five-year-old Deb is exhausted. She nevertheless welcomes the opportunity to talk about her understanding and experiences of feminist mothering. She is feeling particularly isolated due to a lack

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of feminist community. She views participating in this research as an ideal opportunity to spend time thinking about, reflecting upon, and talking about her knowledge and experiences of mothering with another feminist mother.

During our meetings Deb speaks at length about her feelings of isolation which are due, in part, to the conditions placed on her by the feminist community. Deb does not feel accepted by other feminists because she insists on including her son in her feminist activism. This lack of recognition by other feminists is painful for Deb and her distress is the focus of much of our discussion during the two interviews. Deb feels a great resistance to her need to integrate her feminism with her mothering from the feminist community. She sees herself as "welcome with limitations" to feminist events such as the women-only Take Back the Night March and Michigan Women's Music Festival:

> There's these restrictions on my son's participation in my life, not as a mother, but as a feminist. If I want to integrate those two things I can't because the community is telling me, 'No, no. You can be a feminist and be a mother, but only until he's (I think the age is) twelve.'
> Well, then, what happens at that point? What happens to me at that point? If my feminism is certainly about wholeness and integration, then why am I being asked to make this choice? I mean, how bloody patriarchal can you get?
> So that's one of my experiences of lack of community, the lack of acceptance of my evolution as a parent. It's OK to have toddler males around but not once they get a certain age. I mean, what are they saying?
> They're saying this thing about essentialism – males are essentially bad, they're essentially evil. They are essentially the enemy, without taking into account, when we're talking about structures and gender socialization, what about those of us who are doing the battle internally, in our own families, in our own homes, you know? There's no allowance made for that, no respect for that. So that's the root, I think, of my lack of community.
> And I think raising children has been considered, I mean it's OK to be raising daughters, 'cause you're raising future feminists, right? But

raising sons is suspect, 'cause it's perceived that there's a limit on how effective we can be when we try to do that.

And I think part of it is because we look at how oppressive the dominant culture is, and how strong those values are, and how hard they are to dismantle and reconstruct.

But give us some credit, we're trying. But if we're getting these limitations imposed upon from our chosen community, then we're certainly not gonna be effective. That's my feeling.

Deb challenges the reasoning behind the rule of prohibiting juvenile males to these events and is frustrated by the inability of some feminists to see her motherwork as feminist. Deb finds support for her concern from another feminist who is the lone-mother of a girl roughly the same age as Deb's son. Together they discuss how they are raising their children in ways that are informed by their feminism and the strategies they use when they are confronted with resistance to their mothering techniques or philosophies. Deb also found meeting with some of the other participants in the study to be a validation of her experiences of mothering and, as a result, did not feel as isolated.

While she would like to have more support for her feminist mothering from the larger feminist community, Deb is optimistic about her ability to unite her feminism with her mothering. She tells me:

What really connects my feminism and my mothering is my ability to transform what I perceive the role to be, to take it on, to claim it, and to just create it. I'm a mother in my own image. In the absence of a role model, or someone who's telling me how to do it, I think I've done an incredible job. In spite of the lack of community and the absence of role models.

Deb speaks enthusiastically about her understanding of how her feminism and mothering interact and change over time:

My feminism has been an evolutionary process and so has my mothering. And so, it's kind of great where we go along. Like, at one time, Take Back

the Night and the crap that's going on there, as far as excluding male children at age twelve, was not an issue for me.

It never occurred to me that this was a problem and when people would ask, 'Well why is it a women-only march and why can't men participate?' And I would have the, you know, the standard response, 'Because the other 364 days of the year, we need men to walk with us in order to feel safe and this is the one night that, god damn it! we're gonna walk as women, alone and feel safe.'

Now that my child inches towards that cut-off, I have to go, 'Whoa, wait a second here. There's work to be done for myself. Even if it's just only about me establishing a level of comfort and accepting that that's the way it is and there's a reason for it or whatever, or challenging it, which ever way that it's going to go.'

But, just the connection between, both things being acts of processing and evolution and they're active. It's not an ideology, it's a living thing. You know, to be the mother of a twenty-year-old man, I imagine, is significantly different than being the mother of an eight-year-old boy. And being a feminist at twenty is gonna be significantly different than being a feminist at forty.

They're so interconnected. If anything leads, it might be the mothering where I'm at in my active mothering. My son is eight and, like I said, when he's twenty-eight then the feminist part might be bigger, or take a larger place in my life. But right now, the mothering leads and the feminism follows, but they're interconnected. They are not separate. But it's my issues that come out as a mother, the need to have my son included, again, using the Take Back the Night.

It's sort of a circular thing, which only makes sense, I think. The feminism informs my mothering, and I will identify this need for wholeness and integration and inclusion as being a product of feminism. So, I bring that to my mothering. But if anyone asked me to separate, that my son is excluded, I'm going, 'Whoa, wait a second now. We're talking about my mothering. My feminism tells me I can have inclusion. I need it. I demand it. You're asking me what? To exclude my son? Not gonna happen.'

So, I just said mothering leads my feminism, but then it cycles back to, 'O.K. I'm a mother who needs to have her son included, and I bring that to my feminism. Now, what's the way, how can I have this?' So, it's a cyclical thing, for sure.

Describing the relationship between her feminism and her mothering as a circular process makes sense to Deb because, as she says, feminism and mothering are not ideologies but rather are living entities that interact with one another. Deb is aware of

how she moves from an idea to decisions that she actually lives out and how she learns from what she lives. As Deb says, her feminism and her mothering, as well as the interconnection between the two are evolving and "living." For Deb, as for other participants, mothering and feminism are not simply ideas, they are involved in an interactive and continuous process. What Deb identifies and describes as "cyclical" in her analysis of the relationship between her mothering and her feminism, Joan Wink (2000) calls "the constant reciprocity of theory and practice." When Deb talks about her feminism informing her mothering and her mothering informing her feminism, she is describing how her theory building and critical reflection inform her practice and her action, and how her practice and action inform her theory building and critical reflection (Wink, 2000:59).

Mothering encourages Deb to reflect on her previous perceptions of feminist practices to determine what she thinks about such actions. The exclusion of males from women-only events is one such example. In analysing this ruling, she challenges her own feminist reasoning and practices and queries those of others. Deb is open to the changing realities of her life and theorizes that her mothering and her feminism are "a living thing" that will continue to change and influence each other

III. Concluding Remarks: Feminist Mothering: 'It's a Living Thing'

"The integration of knowing and doing" that defines praxis, (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:34) does not always take the route Deb describes here. Often times, it is invisible because of its synchronous process or because feminist mothers are in the throws of trying to mother differently. They do not have time to reflect on the process involved in their feminist mothering. Since praxis is ongoing and rhythmic, it is difficult to distinguish which medium is primary. My objective here is not to solve this question or discern which element was most evident to feminist mothers. Rather, it is to highlight how praxis is central to the feminist mothering of participants. Feminist mothers know, as demonstrated above, that their feminism and their mothering are shared and are inseparable.

The point at which people come into knowledge varies; some might come to knowledge primarily through experiential circumstances, while others may very well come to knowledge through something taught in school, or something taught by a parent or a peer. Regardless of how people enter feminist praxis, it often "comes in small group consciousness-raising which connects personal experience to social structures" (Humm, 1995:218). While praxis is a process in an individual's life, it also refers to a process over multiple lives and entails the social reproduction of learning and knowledge, both through time and through interaction with others. As seen here, and in the previous chapters, praxis is central to the every day lives of feminist mothers and, consequently, to the children of those mothers.

Revealing how feminist mothers integrate consciousness and living in their

everyday lives, and in the midst of the lives of their children, raises questions similar to those advanced in the previous chapter about the feminist teaching of mothers. I wonder, for example, how feminist praxis translates in the lives of feminist mothers and their children. Do the lessons learned from feminist mothering inform and influence other areas of the lives of these women? Are the insights about feminism translated into grass roots organizing, paid employment, volunteer work or other interpersonal relationships that feminist mothers have? Does the modelling and the practice of praxis that mothers engage in influences other people? If so, what are the implications of feminist praxis on the work they do and on the people they work with?

Seeing how praxis occurs within the feminist mothering of participants and how mothers model praxis in their parenting for their children, I question whether the children of feminist mothers learn and adopt a consciousness of living that their mothers do? Do they engage in praxis in their daily lives outside of their family structures where they see it modelled? If so, what are the implications for young people who live this way? Furthermore, what are the ramifications for the people these children are in contact with?

The self-reflection that these feminist mothers engage in has broadened their feminism. Paula understands, for example how her feminism continues to change as her life unfolds and she has new experiences. She has moved from viewing feminism as a "man-hating" phenomenon, to a political movement that supports her reaction to her personal "oppression" to an "act of nurturing" and building a new culture." Lynette sees

how her feminism continues to be "informed by [her] life experiences." Mothering has provided her with a deeper understanding the role of "social dynamics and social structures" on patriarchy and the lives of mothers. Jackie continues to see how her feminism is being developed through the struggles and challenges of mothering. Wanting to raise her son "as a feminist" continually pushes Jackie to question what she wants for herself and for her son, and how to balance the tension between her own ways of mothering and those of others. Deb questions her own understanding of women-only events and feminist principles and actions that she and others hold because of her mothering. In doing so she revisits feminism, and like other participants, challenges what she thinks about it and how she lives feminism in her daily life.

Mothering provides an opportunity for feminist mothers to reflect upon and question how they understand feminism, what its strengths and weaknesses are, where its short comings may be and how to develop feminism to incorporate their understanding and experiences of feminism as mothers. I wonder what the lessons could be for feminist movement if the insights of feminist mothers became and remained central to feminist theorizing and activism.

AFTER WORD(S)

I think feminism, like mothering, needs to ideally be a lifetime
commitment. You can't just kick the kid out when he's eighteen and think
you're finished mothering. You can't read a few books and say, 'I'm a
feminist. Now I'm done.' I won't be finished mothering or feministing
[laughter] until I die. (Shar)

I recognize, from my own experiences of feminist mothering, and from speaking
with and listening to the accounts of the women involved in this research, that feminist
mothering is 'a living thing.' Since feminist mothering is a living and ever-changing
possibility that continues throughout one's life (as Shar, the mother of three children and
a recent grandmother notes above), I have chosen to write a provisional After Word(s)
from where I am now rather than a decisive conclusion. As the accumulated realities of
feminist mothers continue to amass over time, the knowledge, theorizing and practice of
feminist mothering will continue to change, develop and contribute to an ever-growing
understanding and practice of feminist mothering.

In this After Word(s), I present tentative conclusions I have drawn from the
women's accounts of feminist mothering. I begin by discussing the role of praxis
throughout the research process, from the formulation of the research question to the
structural development of this dissertation. Building on the previous feminist theorizing
around mothering and motherhood, I introduce the contributions that participants make to
feminism, particularly in challenging patriarchal practices of motherhood, practising
feminist pedagogy and calling for a more inclusive feminism. The chapter concludes with
a discussion of the implications of my findings and suggestions for further research.

I.   Praxis

> Having children, bearing children, is something to cherish. We're raising children that will take our place and they're gonna shape the world. And what we put out in them, that is what they're gonna put out. And feminists should really think seriously about mothering and come up with some kind of dialogue on this because I don't think we talk much about it. (May)

The catalyst for this research has come from realizing that my feminism and my mothering are interconnected and from my curiosity about whether other feminist mothers share similar experiences or understandings. When searching for feminist literature on the subject of feminist mothering, I soon discovered (as does May, the mother of two teenaged daughters), that feminism – particularly academic feminism – seldom addresses feminist mothering. I also saw that more research and discussion is needed in the area of feminism and mothering.

i.   Methodology

Following the suggestion of Collins (1994) and others,[106] I developed a model of research that situates the experiences of women at its centre. I expected that this methodology would help open the understanding of motherhood and mothering to a celebration of the diverse realities of these two experiences for women. In my attempt to honour the ideas and experiences of these feminist mothers, who have been practically absent from feminist research and discussion, I placed them and their experiences at the core of the research. In doing so, my methodological approach and the theoretical

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[106] Placing and honouring the voices and experiences of women is a feminist methodological approach. See, for example, Danica (1990), Fry (1992), Lerner (1986), Kirby and McKenna (1989), Mies (1983), Reinharz (1992), Stanley and Wise (1993), Tomm (1987) and Westkott (1989).

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developments of this project have remained grounded in the everyday experiences of the participants.

Staying away from a kind of research and methodology that tries to show how something "really" happens differently and how it corroborates the hypothesis of the research means I can speak about how feminist mothers attempt to do change work in their mothering. For example, I am able to talk about what mothers see their children accomplishing and how that corroborates, for them, their attempts to change their own lives and the lives of their children.

Although participants do not necessarily have the language or analysis to specify how they engage in feminist pedagogy, they nevertheless give descriptions and specifications in their accounts that provide the substance for the architecture of that analysis. Feminist mothers educate their children in the process of mothering. In doing so, they change their own lives and model and teach their children how to change their lives as well.

I have been able to discover how feminism and mothering are interconnected in the lives of particular feminist mothers because each woman has somehow insisted that what she is offering is a viewpoint that provides dimensions to the whole project. As individuals and as a group, participants advance perspectives that simply are not available from text books. This research is not about moving from general theory to the particulars of these women's lives. It is about how these particular women make changes and how they are able to talk about it and to create a language that reflects their reality. By intentionally and intently listening to and learning from these women, my research

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takes their language creation and analysis a step further. Having reviewed the literature on mothering and pedagogy and having interviewed all of the participants, I am able to make connections among these genres of knowledge to produce this body of work at this point in time.

ii.   Writing

This has not been an easy feat. I have frequently been stuck trying to figure out what it means to do this work, where to go next or how to say something. Yet I have been able invariably to find an example from one of the women's accounts that would provide some insight or clue on how to proceed. Relying on each woman to be a guide in the process of writing made my writing more fluid and fluent. I was no longer trying to be the "expert" locked in a language that prevented me from seeing what I needed to see and from saying what I wanted or needed to say. Listening to the women provided the framework for the work and made writing easier. Consequently, I tended to map out my work less often and to let the process of writing move me forward.

The practice of writing became more relaxed for me when I moved from my office located in a university, to a room of my own at home. It took a while for my family to get used to this new way of living, especially the times I worked throughout the weekends or during holiday times from early in the morning until after my son and partner had gone to bed. I felt simultaneously connected with my family and my writing in a way that was not available in an office located away from home. My son, for example, who was at home for a three week stretch one summer before a number of

activities took him away from the house was very quiet, respecting my need to have near silence while I worked. His gentle humming and cautious movements both reminded me he was there and grounded my work.

Working at home meant I could take short breaks from my writing and spend time with my family. We would have a snack or meals together, which my partner generally prepared and cleaned up. My son and I would take short bike rides together or shoot basketball hoops for a while in a nearby schoolyard. These were special times for us. While I worked long hours which changed the dynamics of our family relations, I was nevertheless able to reconnect with my family on a regular basis.

These little family-breaks from writing often helped my writing process. Feminist mothering remained central to my thinking when I was with my family. With support from my partner and our son, I was able to write without feeling guilty for not participating in family life as I had before beginning this project. Just as I had come to trust the experiences of the women I interviewed, I came to trust my own experience and found strength in accepting that I knew what I needed. I engaged in praxis, making changes in my life by reflecting on my own action and thinking and how they contributed to each other.

While working on this research, I learned how the participants and I, together, are the architects of both the structure and content of this dissertation. Through exploring some of the interconnections of feminism and mothering, we have brought to light the change work and meaning making that feminist mothers do. Feminist mothering is feminism in action, where feminist mothers are engaged in both feminist pedagogy and

feminist praxis in ways that are ongoing, reflective and ever changing.

iii.   Manuscript

The structure of this dissertation also reflects the interactive process of praxis. While the two parts of this manuscript – "Laying Out the Frameworks" and "Making the Connections" – may appear to be separate from each other, they are not. For example, the accounts of the seven participants featured in Chapter Three reveal the ways in which they discern motherhood to be both an institution and experience proposed by feminist theorists in Chapter One.

The theoretical understandings and questions raised about feminist mothers as educators raised in Chapter One are followed up in Chapter Five; "Practising Feminist Pedagogy." Here, eight participants demonstrate how their feminism is central to their understanding of their position as mothers and to the ways in which they interact with, 'guide' and teach their children about the realities of being in the world. In the final chapter, "Keeping Feminism Fresh," four feminist mothers address the question of the influence of mothering on feminism posed in the prologue as well as in Chapter One. Throughout the manuscript, I weave back and forth between theory and practice, developing a greater understanding of feminist mothering than was evident at the beginning of the research.

II.   Contributions of Feminist Mothering to Feminism

In listening to the feminist mothers involved in the study articulate the realities of their lives and the details of their motherwork, I recognize how they not only verify the theorizing of feminist scholars presented in the earlier chapters, but how they also move beyond these theoretical foundations to enrich feminist theory and activism. The accumulation of women's knowledge has broadened the definition and understanding of mothering, pedagogy, praxis and feminism. For example, not only do participants understand (as do feminist theorists featured in Chapter One)[107] the revolutionary potential of the relationships women have with their reproduction and with their children, they also bring together their procreative and creative abilities with their feminist analysis and politic in their mothering. Aware that mothers who are not controlled by patriarchy are not reproducing patriarchal motherhood or duplicating patriarchal values in their children, participants see themselves as, and act as, agents of social change.

i.   Challenging Patriarchal Practices of Motherhood

Through choosing to mother in relationships that do not support or replicate patriarchy, participants challenge patriarchal practices of motherhood. Whether as lone-mothers, as lesbians, as bisexuals or as heterosexual women refusing to unite the roles of 'wife' and 'mother,' feminist mothers provide alternative models of mothering to their children and to others. Using their own knowledge, experience and vision as their

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[107] See, for example, Ainslie and Feltey (1992), Collins (1991, 1994), Crawford (1987), Gordon (1990), Polikoff (1987), Reddy (1994), Rich (1987), Rowland and Thomas (1996),

authority, feminist mothers are empowered to create new family forms, family units and mothering practices for themselves and for their families. Aware of their potential for realizing social change and social justice in their mothering, these feminists parent in ways that do not replicate those promoted by dominant constucts of motherhood or by patriarchal family structures.

ii.   Practising Feminist Pedagogy

The accounts of participants reveal that the ways in which they interact with their children while mothering are similar to the ways feminist teachers engage with students in the classroom. Feminist mothers, like feminist teachers, engage in the practice of pedagogy – "the process of teaching and learning together" (Wink, 2000:59). Interviews with feminist mothers uncover how participants practice elements of feminist pedagogy in their mothering. For instance, they participate in open and egalitarian relationships with their children while also encouraging the skills of critical thinking and analysis, particularly around issues of gender inequality. They nourish self-respect and respect for others in their interaction with their children. They also facilitate an awareness of collectivity and collective action. Through their mothering, feminists model and engage in praxis while promoting empowerment and self-governance in themselves and in their children.

Understanding that mothers are teachers shatters the belief that only professional teachers are bonafide educators of children. By recognizing that feminist mothers practice feminist pedagogy, the definition and understanding of feminist pedagogy is

broadened. No longer is feminist pedagogy restricted to formal educational settings. Rather, feminist pedagogy is practice in a space outside the classroom – namely, in the home. Like consciousness raising groups that were popular in North America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminist teaching takes place in the privacy of women's homes at the grass-roots level. This revelation suggests that feminist pedagogy may also be practiced by feminists in other locations and that there are multiple ways of practising feminist pedagogy.

iii. Praxis: A More Inclusive Feminism

Feminist mothers understand that social change can only come about through praxis – by unifying knowing and doing, thinking and acting (O'Brien, 1981:4). They challenge and change patriarchal practices of mothering by relying on their feminism and they continue to develop their feminism by reflecting on their mothering. A number of the women involved in this study acknowledge the need to have more flexibility, making feminism(s) more inclusive of the contributions that feminist mothers can make. Willow and Jody, for instance, make the following remarks:

> What has happened in this culture is that we have devalued motherhood and, therefore, we don't understand how women are powerful. And if feminists, or anybody else, buys that and chooses not to explore that, to not have that vision, they are buying into mainstream culture. I think as feminists we need to honour people's paths, whatever that is, and I felt that back then [when I chose to become a mother] people said that was a patriarchal choice. They were wrong. (Willow)

> There still doesn't feel like there is a ground for feminism and motherhood, and until that comes together somehow, we will work more in isolation. Like, we will continue to be isolated as opposed to being connected. And I think because of that we end up with more isolated

women. I believe more women [are] in abusive relationships because we don't talk about it and address it. (Jody)

All of the participants believe that feminisms do not address mothering in ways that are satisfying. For example, they voice their disappointment with the response of local feminists, of feminist theorizing and of the feminist movement to mothering. Deb, as noted in the previous chapter, does not feel fully accepted or included by her feminist community. Jody, who has just returned to the work force, and Willow, a member of a 'chosen family,' have felt neglected, isolated or misunderstood by feminists because of their identities as mothers. Andrea, who has struggled with her identity as a stay-at-home mother and with the pressure she feels to personally unite the role of 'wife' with 'mother,' also believes that feminisms do not provide mothers with enough support. She told me:

> I think it's worth mentioning that I think that society constructs a woman – against – woman battle between stay-at-home moms and working moms. I really think there's this ideas out there that we have to hate each other, and that we have to think the other one has it easy. I find that extremely offensive and I don't know if that has really factored into my whole decision.
> But it's this divide-and-conquer thing. If we could just all identify as mothers and as women and recognize that none of us have it easy, that we're all making choices. We could really be a heck of a lot stronger if we got together on certain issues [laughter].
> But it's a really good divide-and-conquer kind of tactic, and I really do see it as that. I think a lot of women buy into it. But I don't think it has to be that way, that we have to hate each other because of the choices that we make.
> I think that feminists rightly fought really, really hard for decades for women to be able to be in the workforce and be able to support themselves, and be able to go as far as hopefully they want to go in work and stuff like that. I think that that was an incredibly important and valid battle.
> But I think, perhaps, what got sacrificed along the way was the acceptance of other choices. And the whole ideology of motherhood as a

patriarchal institution, well then, shouldn't we all refuse to be mothers? Or if you're a 'real feminist' you're not gonna be co-opted by the motherhood institution, that you'll reject that altogether or you'll refuse to play its game.

And you know, that's not everybody's reality. Lots of us become mothers, not so much by choices, and lots of us choose it. Regardless, if that's your reality, it's as valid as anyone else's reality. I mean, if that's your path, it should be as valid as the [male] CEO who has children and barely sees them, you know.

So, I don't think feminists have necessarily, consciously contributed to that divide-and-conquer tactic, but I think it's been a bi-product.

You know, we strive really hard, I'm generalizing 'we.' We strive really hard to be inclusive in so many ways, and I think that we need to be inclusive of mothering choices as well. (Andrea)

Participants are not simply complaining about feeling ostracized or excluded from feminist theorizing and feminist movements. They are suggesting that feminisms could be more inclusive political movements by seriously considering and adopting the concerns and insights of feminist mothers.[108] The accounts of participants in the previous chapter reveal how feminism(s) can expand when they embrace the considerations and theorizing of mothers.

For instance, Lynette, a recent the stay-at-home-mom of two sons, has come to an analysis of patriarchy that she did not have before mothering. She moved from viewing patriarchy as a theoretical construct about power dynamics between men and women to an understanding of how patriarchy constructs social barriers that impede mothers, whether they stay at home with their children or work in the paid labour force. One day, while doing the manual and practical work of washing her son's pee and apple-juice off

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[108] While MAW and child care movements have done so to some degree, there are many concern that have been left unacknowledged or dealt with.

the kitchen floor, Lynette paid attention to her circumstance and to her feelings about them. She analysed her situation and realized that she felt isolated and needed to have her work recognized and validated. She believed the work she was doing was invisible to others. Lynette's motherwork and her reflection on its meaning contribute to a deeper understanding of the longevity, legacy and workings of patriarchy. In the process of living their feminism while mothering, feminist mothers unveil the complexity of women's lives and broaden the meaning and practice of feminism.

Although mothering is at times understood to occur within the social construct of motherhood, mothering is also considered 'natural' and 'normal' for women (Luxton, 1997b; Smart, 1996). Having an appreciation for and an understanding of the complexities of mothering may alleviate this assumption and assist feminist mothers in feeling that their experiences and contributions to feminism are understood and acknowledged. Laura notes how being a mother and a feminist challenges what some may see as the rigidity of feminism:

> Feminist mothering is really, really complicated. A lot of the way many people follow feminism is they see simple rules, they see dogma. Dogma goes out the fuckin' window when you have a real person in your life. And it pulls in different directions and life is a lot of grays.
>
> Being a feminist mother is a lot of grays. And simple answers just don't work. I've yet to find a rule that doesn't have an exception. And it's your life or it's your work, and that's all you're doing. You're dealing with your life, your work and your activism.
>
> It would be easy to have pat statements about what people should do. It's easy to have slogans that you repeat over and over and mantras and things you'd like for to have.
>
> But when you're a mother, those don't work, just don't work. So, the pat feminist answers don't work and the pat mothering answers don't work. None of the pat shit works. It's all, 'the devil is in the details.' It's very complicated, and there's a lot of walking tightropes and getting pulled in different directions. And that's life, and it's experiencing life much

more than before. (Laura)

Feminist mothers come to have few illusions of what is required in the work of parenting children from a feminist foundation within a patriarchal world. Their profound sense and understanding of the oppression that women and children experience in motherhood can augment feminist analysis and strategies for social change. Focussing on the contributions that feminist mothers have to make provides insight into the work of feminist resistance within the context of mothering and enhances feminist analysis, political action and social change. Based on the knowledge they have developed from their experiences of feminist mothering, feminist mothers contribute a distinctive understanding and practice to feminism. The inclusion of feminist mothering into feminist theorizing may develop a more inclusive politic and movement by building on the teachings of mothers who educate children from their understandings of feminism.

III.   Implications of Research

This more inclusive politic encompasses understanding and acting upon the knowledge of the oppressive operation of patriarchy in the lives of women and children. For example, some women (as in the case of Paula and Laura) have shifted their understanding of feminism from being solely focussed on fighting or resisting patriarchy to encouraging the empowerment of people with the choice, self-governance and responsibility at the core of feminism. Others, like May and Tammy, now take into account the significance their feminist political action has on the next generation. Shar and Carol note that as feminist mothers they must consider the implications of their

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actions and the actions of others on women and on children. In most cases, feminist

mothers form a unit with their children where they support their children, especially

when they are vulnerable and in oppressive situations. This unity may prove to be useful

to feminist analysis and strategies for social change.

Focussing on the legitimacy and potential of feminist activism in mothering

(which until now has generally been unrecognized and, therefore, untapped by feminists)

can assist in developing strategies for dealing with women's realities as feminist mothers

and resisting women's oppression in general. A politic developed by feminist mothers

who educate and parent children with approaches that promote self-governance and

choice in their lives, as well as resistance to oppression in its many forms, may alter the

scope and practice of feminism.

Much can be learned from these women. For instance, their lessons may provide

strategies for moving or motivating feminist movements which are presently

experiencing a 'backlash' and a dilution of the galvanizing power of women's authority

as namers, speakers and writers.[109] The practice of feminist pedagogy and praxis in

families may be a strategy that is useful to feminist strategies and organizing. Within

their families, feminist mothers are practising consciousness-raising, one of the strategies

feminists have used since the early 1960s. Through honest reflection and discussion,

mothers share their own experiences and understandings of the world with their children.

Together, mothers and children engage in relationships where each person is free to

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[109] See Faludi (1991), Rebick (2001) and Steinem (2001) for further discussion on the concept and meaning of 'backlash.'

speak about their realities, thoughts and understandings. Feminist mothers are educating the next generation about feminism by using feminist strategies that identify, name and analyse patriarchy.

Strategies such as grass-roots educating and praxis used by feminist mothers may re-charge feminist movements. Through mothering children, these feminists are skilled in interacting with people of the next generation. They view and value children as subjects and agents of social change. Connecting with people of all ages and in various ways may be a useful tactic for educating people about the importance of critical thinking and working collectively for social change.

The experiences and knowledge of feminist mothers are valuable resources for feminist theorizing and feminist activism. As Gloria Steinem (2001) notes, feminists have previously been "so occupied with trying to raise our daughters like our sons, that we are only now seeing how we need to raise our sons more like our daughters so that both of them can be whole people." Feminist mothers are putting this analysis into practice by mothering their sons more like their daughters. For instance, they are teaching their sons the lessons of critical analysis, self-governance and collective responsibility that feminists have been teaching girls and women through organized feminist movements. Feminist mothers are providing practical strategies of how to put into action the theory that sons, just as daughters, need to and can be parented in ways that challenge patriarchy.

Feminist mothers demonstrate the importance of using various strategies in feminist activism. For instance, while Paula recognizes that holding public vigils is a

worthy strategy to acknowledge and make visible male violence against women, she also

recognizes that taking her young son to such events may not be healthy for him. During

these events, women vocalize their anger, frustration, pain and sorrow with male

violence. Hostile and hateful language can be heard. Fearful that her son will generalize

those words and feelings about men to all men, and to himself, Paula stays away from

such gatherings. This does not mean that she does not understand the need for some

women to speak about men and male violence in this way. Rather, Paula understands that

language works in different contexts. Women at a vigil can say things about men and not

have those remarks lifted and generalized as if they refer to a universalizing and

definitive approach to men, patriarchy or violence. As in the case of Laura, who speaks of

dogmatic feminism above, Paula and others offer to feminism an understanding that

particular words, strategies and actions are important in particular contexts but are not

necessarily suitable in all cases or in all contexts.

IV.   Further Research Areas

These feminist mothers speak of how difficult it is to create new practices of

mothering in ways that are respectful of their vision of parenting. In order to mother in

honourable ways, participants have, at times, had to make choices that have left them in

precarious situations. For instance, Willow, Tammy and Jackie have each lived on social

assistance for some time. Being financially impoverished adds to the struggles and

isolation of mothering. Parenting as lesbians, lone parents or bisexuals draws criticism

from others, leading to isolation and lack of support. Laura, a professor and mother of

two daughters under the age of two, understands the significance of social class on the ability of women to parent:

> I think it's easier for me to be a feminist mother, to combine my feminism and my mothering because of my partner and because of my income. I can afford to give my daughters structure and safety and still do my work and at least do some of the activist stuff. That's something a lot of people can't afford.
>
> And I'm very aware that it's a gift, that I do not deserve more than anyone else deserves, but I'm very fortunate for it and very glad that I have it. And I'm also aware there's an intersection there with class that makes it easier to come by. And also an intersection as far as my partner. I am very proud of my choice of partner. I do not call that one luck. That is not luck. I chose him, he chose me. That's a well thought about strategy [laughter].

While the few accounts of the conditions in which feminist mothers parent have been sparse, they flag the need for further research into this area. By conducting further research into the mothering conditions of feminist mothers, a deeper understanding of this often neglected area of study will be developed. What, for instance, are the realities of mothering for feminists who belong to various socio-economic classes? How does class intersect with feminist theorizing, pedagogy and praxis in the lives and the practices of feminist mothers?

During the time of the interviews, three women left their male partners. This phenomenon raises the questions of the role feminist mothering plays in these decisions. For instance, are there tensions between partners that are related to the feminism and mothering strategies of feminist mothers? If so, how do they contribute to the break down of heterosexual relationships? Does this occur in lesbian or chosen families?

While I have focussed on feminist mothering and have discovered how feminist mothers attempt to have non-hierarchical relationships with their children, research into

the relationships that feminist mothers have with other family members is needed. How, for instance, does feminist mothering influence the parenting of other members in the family? In what ways do fathers, co-mothers, female partners and members of chosen families contribute to the care and education of children? How are these relationships influenced by the feminist mothering of the woman?

The ways in which particular feminist mothers understand and implement their feminism while mothering comes from the complex interconnections among their feminist-consciousness, their social positioning related to race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, class, ability and sexuality and their mothering. Further research is needed to understand how these positions are related to women's decisions to become mothers and to their experiences of mothering.

Participants involved in this study had four separate opportunities to meet with the other women involved in the research project. The first time was after all of the participants had been interviewed once. The other three opportunities were after the completion of the second interview. I suggested these informal meetings to participants in response to a number of women telling me that they felt very isolated as feminist mothers and that being interviewed was the first time many had reflected on the meaning of their feminist mothering.

A number of women met over the next two years (either at a local university or in my home) to talk "off the record" about being feminist mothers. These meetings offered opportunities for the women to meet with other feminist mothers and their children and to share some of their experiences, frustrations and celebrations with each other. For

various reasons, not all of the women attended the gatherings. Yet, those who did found them to be worthwhile and rewarding. The women who attended were able to express themselves and to speak with other women who understood some of the complexities of being a feminist mother.

While observing the dynamics and interaction among the women at these informal meetings, I realized how focus groups may be useful in further research – the participants spoke about different aspects and concerns of their feminist mothering in this forum. Using this method would raise different questions and investigate different features of feminist mothering than the one-on-one interviews did. Focus groups is a method that should be considered for future research.

I know for at least two women (who I accidentally met on separate occasions the year following the last gathering) the informal group meetings were personally meaningful. Each woman spoke about how enjoyable the encounters had been and how they had thought about some of the discussion they had during those gatherings. They both told me that they found sharing their experiences of mothering valuable. In an effort to deal with a specific dilemma they were having, each woman reflected on the knowledge and the ways other women in the group mothered. Additionally, one participant was motivated to share the transcripts of her interview and address issues of parenting with her own mother. The other woman was inspired to share her interview experience with a friend, who was also a feminist mother. Together they talked about a number of issues that had been raised for the participant.

Not only did these conversations tell me that this research experience has been meaningful to participants, it also tells me that feminist mothers need to talk about feminist mothering experiences with others. I know I have only scratched the surface with this investigation and that there are many more areas of feminist mothering to explore. For example, how do the children of feminist mothers understand their mother's feminism and feminism in general? How do the children view their relationships with their feminist mothers? Further exploration into the areas of sexuality, work, spirituality, law and education of both mothers and children would also facilitate a deeper understanding of feminist mothering.

Research that pays attention to the theorizing and experiences of feminist mothers may influence the thinking and action that scholarly feminism is missing. For instance, it may begin to bridge the gap between feminist mothering and feminist academe, not only through placing mothering as a topic of investigation within feminism, but also by exploring the connections between what feminist mothers do in their lives with their families and what they do in their lives as academics. Understanding how praxis and elements of feminist pedagogy are practiced in feminist mothering may influence the thinking and action of scholarly feminism.

The reality for participants is that their feminism is exercised daily in their own lives and in the lives of their children while they are enmeshed within the patriarchal structure of motherhood, employment and families as well as state and global economics and governments. Mothering with a feminist consciousness has the potential to modify the world through offering alternative models of mothering and parenting that motivate

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children – and others – to develop and behave in ways that do not perpetuate patriarchal ideals, ideologies and practices. While I have begun the process of uncovering how feminist mothering is feminist activism in action, more research is needed to understand the complex contribution to feminist social change that is made by mothers who practice feminism in their work of parenting children.

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APPENDIX A

Advertisement

What happened to your feminism when you became a mother?

I am doing a research project on how mothering influences feminism (and how feminism changes mothering).

I am a feminist and a mother, and this work is for my doctorate in Women's Studies.

If you have learned some things about feminism and mothering by doing them both, and might be interested in being a part of my study, please call me for further information.

Please leave a message at the University of Winnipeg switchboard (number) for Fiona Green and I will return you call.

* a number of tabs with my name and number were on the bottom of the page.

Advertisement Sent To:

Congress of Black Women	Mount Carmel Clinic
Fort Gary Women's Resource Centre	Morgantaller Clinic
Immigrant Women's Association. of Manitoba	Native Women's Transition Centre.
Indigenous Women's Collective of MB	North End Women's Resource Ctre.
Klinic Community Health Centre	Original Women's Network, Inc.
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre	Winnipeg Gay and Lesbian Centre
Manitoba Action Ctte on the Status of Women	Women's Health Clinic
YM/YWCA Women's Resource Centre	

APPENDIX B

Self-Identified Feminist Mothers' Experiences of Feminism and Mothering:
A Site of Resistance

This research fulfills one of the requirements of an Interdisciplinary PhD program. Through interactive interviews with self-identified feminist mothers, I hope to learn more about the experiences and the complexities of being both a feminist and a mother.

With your permission, one three to four hour and a second one to two hour interview will be audio taped for later transcription, so that I can analyze the data more completely. All information gathered in the course of the interview will be kept completely confidential. The tapes will be destroyed at the end of the project. None of the information you disclose to me will be communicated to anyone, except in a form consistent with standards for publication and dissemination of academic research. If you wish to remain anonymous, your identity will not be revealed in any published reports on this research. You are free to refuse to answer any of the questions you are asked in this research. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time.

After the interview has been transcribed, you will be provided with a copy, which you will be asked to review. If you would like to revise any of your answers (in the light of reflecting on the interview), or select text to be used for summation and not quotation, you will be able to do so during a second interview which will be audio taped. After the second interview has been transcribed, you will again be provided with a copy of the interview to review, comment on and revise.

While there may be no benefit to you as a participant, this research may provide you with insights not previously seen. I hope that this research will help to illuminate some of the experiences of self-identified feminist mothers. Because feminist research into this area is limited, your participation may assist in understanding the complexities and realities of self-identified feminist mothers, as well as further research concerning feminist mothering.

This research is approved by the University of Manitoba Department of Sociology Ethical Review Committee.

Principal Investigator
Fiona J. Green
PhD Candidate
Interdisciplinary Studies
University of Manitoba
284-XXXX

PhD Advisor
Dr. Keith Louise Fulton
Adjunct Professor, Dept. of Education
University of Manitoba
Associate Professor, Dept. of English
University of Winnipeg
786-XXXX

CONSENT FORM

Self-Identified Feminist Mothers' Experiences of Feminism and Mothering

I, _____, agree to participate in the study of self-identified feminist mothers' experiences of feminism and mothering. This study fulfills one of the requirements of Fiona Green's PhD program and has been approved by the Department of Sociology Ethical Review Committee. I understand the general purpose of this research is to learn more about the experiences and complexities of being a self-identified feminist mother.

I have read the attached information sheet on this study. I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time. Participating in this project does not require anymore risk to me than I might experience in the normal conduct of my everyday life. I am not receiving any remuneration for my participation in this project.

I understand in agreeing to participate in the study, I will take part in two audio taped interactive interviews. The first is three to four hours, and the second is one to two hours. I am free to refuse to answer any questions I consider too personal or objectionable. I will review my interview transcript from the first interview and have an opportunity to make alterations to that record the second interview. I understand that I have the right to have parts of the interviews subject to summation and not quotation.

I understand any information provided by me will be kept in strict confidence. My identity will not be revealed in published reports on this research unless I indicate otherwise. I understand the audio tapes will be destroyed at the end of the project. I understand the information gathered in the course of this research will be evaluated for the purpose of an Interdisciplinary PhD dissertation at the University of Manitoba and I will be given a written analysis of this work by the investigator.

I understand that according to the laws of the Province of Manitoba, a report of any ongoing child abuse will be made to the proper authorities.

I understand that should I have any concerns about this study I can contact Fiona Green, investigator (284-XXXX), or Prof. Keith Louise Fulton, PhD advisor (786-XXXX). Any complaint regarding procedure may be reported to Prof. Ed Boldt, Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba (474-XXXX) for referral to the Ethical Review Committee.

_____   _____
(Date)   (Participant's Signature in Ink)

_____   _____
(Date)   (Researcher's Signature in Ink)

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

The first interview is divided into five sections. The interview begins with questions regarding demographic and biographical information. These questions include:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your birth date?
3. Where were you born?
4. Where is your place of residence?
5. What is your ethnic ancestry?
6. How many children do you have?
7. What is your relationship status?
8. Are you legally married?
9. What is the ethnic ancestry of your partner?
10. How would you describe, or name the relationship to your child's parent?
11. How does s/he describe your relationship?

The second set of questions focus on the identity of self-identified feminists and consciousness- raising. Questions for this section include:

12. How do you identify yourself?
13. Is feminist a term that you use?
14. What does it mean to you?
15. When did that consciousness start for you?
16. What does feminist-consciousness mean to you?
17. Did you experience a feminist consciousness-raising event/s?
18. Is there a link between your feminist-consciousness and your family story/dynamics?
19. Has identifying yourself as a feminist had implications for how you understand and participate in your family?
20. How does your feminism fit with your family of origin?
21. As a child, what were the gender roles like in your family of origin?
22. Were there any role models who assisted you in your feminist development?
23. Do you believe women to be socially constructed?
24. Have you ever accepted this definition? When? Why? How?
25. What made you realize that they were defined in this way?
26. Do you see yourself in this way now?
27. Have you rejected this definition? How? When? why?
28. Did you replace it with another definition?
29. How did you replace it, and with what?
30. Did you come to this definition through interacting with other women?
31. If so, who were these women? How did they identify themselves?
32. Has your self-definition changed over time?

33. How do you live out your self-definition?
34. Do you see your self-definition changing over time?
35. If so, in what way and in what context?
36. What are the realities of being a feminist? Are there things that you have to deal with because you are a feminist?
37. Do you feel like an outsider in parts of your life due to being a feminist?.
38. Does your feminist-consciousness change over time?

The third set of questions focus on consciousness, mothering and feminism. More specifically, is there a link between mothering and feminist consciousness, and does mothering assist in the development of a feminist-consciousness? Questions include:

39. Did you have a particular consciousness about mothering prior to becoming one?
40. What was your experience like as a new mother?
41. What are the gender roles in the household in which you mother?
42. Are there links among mothering, wifing and parenting? (Expectations of care)
43. Are there any particular personal cultural aspects that you as an individual have had in your history which have an influence on your mothering?
44. Is part of your feminist-consciousness the sense that a child is a human being and not a gendered human being?
45. Does your feminism affect your ideas about co-parenting?
46. Do you have a support system for your parenting? Describe that system to me.
47. How does raising a child fit with your feminism?
48. Are the principles of your mothering similar to those of your feminism? How so?
49. Are there times when it is difficult to combine your feminism and your mothering?
50. Are you inventing your mothering as you go along?
51. Do you confront learned patterns of mothering that you have been exposed to but that you don't want to have as your own?
52. Is mothering a feminist act?
53. Is mothering a political act for you?
54. How do you understand political here?
55. Is mothering a particular way you can act as a feminist?
56. Why is it so important for you to change the way you mother from the role of mother that society has in mind for you?
57. How is mothering an act of resistance for you?
58. Is the way you mother a way of resisting conventional/patriarchal expectations
59. What are the realities of being a self-identified feminist mother?
60. What are your biggest challenges as a Self-identified feminist mother?
61. Where do the biggest challenges come from in defining as a self-identified feminist mother?
62. Can you change your world through identifying as a self-identified feminist mother?
63. If so, how? Are you successful?

64. Has mothering influenced your definition of feminist? How so? In what ways?
65. Has mothering influenced your feminist political action?

The fourth area of interview focuses on feminism, mothering and society. Questions focus specifically on both the support of and resistance to mothering strategies. These include:

66. How has your family reacted to the way that you have developed your parenting?
67. How has your partner's family reacted to the way that you have developed your parenting?
68. Have you had choices in the educational opportunities for your child?
69. Did your feminism affect your choice of schools?
70. Has the educational system been a place where your child-rearing has been challenged?
71. Has the educational system supported your child-rearing?
72. Do you think your feminist mothering has affected the school?
73. Where do you find support for your feminist approach to child-rearing?
74. Do you find support for your feminist approach to child-rearing from other feminists?
75. Where do you find the lack of support for your feminist approach to child-rearing most evident?

The fifth area of the interview focuses on the results of feminism and mothering. Questions include:

76. What is the impact of your feminist mothering on your child?
77. Do you have several children? How do you handle conflicts?
78. What is the result of your feminist mothering on your partner?
79. Have there been benefits? Difficulties?
80. Have things happened that you would rather not happen?
81. Have there been problems that your feminism has not been able to address?
82. How have your experiences of being a mother changed your feminist consciousness?
83. What are areas that you have been very proud of?
84. What kinds of discoveries have been opened up because of feminism?
85. What kinds of discoveries have been opened up because of mothering?

The first interview concludes with a chance for participants to ask any questions of me, as well make any additions. Questions asked here are:

86. Is there anything that you would like to add?
87. Did you learn anything from this interview?
88. Is there anything that you would like to ask me?
89. How was the experience of the interview?

Second Interview

The second interview provides participants with an opportunity to tell me what they think of the transcript and address any discrepancies or alterations that need to be made. It is also a chance for her to add any further insights to the research. Elaboration and clarification of responses to the first interview are explored in this interview as well.

1. How did you learn about the research project?
2. What was the experience of the first interview like for you?
3. Have you found yourself thinking about it since then?
4. Did you learn anything from the interview?
5. Do you have any comments on the first interview?
6. Do you have any comments regarding the transcription?
7. Does it reflect your recollection of the interview?
8. Are you in agreement with the things you said in the first interview?
9. Are there things you would like to change or add?
10. Is there anything in the transcription that you don't want to have quoted?
11. Do you have a name which you would like me to use when referring to you?

SPECIFICS OF INTERVIEW: FEMINISM

12. You speak of feminism as being about (excerpt from 1st interview). Very specifically in your life what do you know about it, where have you seen it, and where and how have you tried to create it?
13. What has lead you to understand your feminism in this way?
14. You note that having a feminist consciousness means being aware (excerpt from 1st interview). Again, very specifically in your life what do you know about it, where have you seen it and where and how have you tried to deal with it?
15. What has contributed to this understanding of your feminist consciousness?
16. How does feminism fit with your family of creation?
17. You speak of how it is important for you to oppose the dominant culture to bring about social change.
18. What do you understand the dominant culture to be?
19. How/ What do you oppose in the dominant culture?
20. Do you see independence as a personal attribute valued by this culture?
21. Would you say that individualism and self-sufficiency are also a part of this dominant culture?
22. How do you see the value of community fitting in with the dominant culture?
23. Could you speak to how this value of individualism affects your understanding of mothering and feminism?
24. Have there been problems that your feminism has not been able to address, both in terms of your mothering and in other aspects of your life?

MOTHERING:

25. We spoke a bit about this in the first interview, but I would like to re-visit it. Where did you get your original notions about mothering?
26. Was it in response to your own history, for example, how you have been mothered, wished you were mothered or in opposition to how you were mothered?
27. What do you understand societies definition of mother to be?
28. What do yo see as the patriarchal model of mothering?
29. How is it unrealistic and hurtful?
30 How does your definition/reality differ?
31. Do you see yourself having to deal with contradictions in your mothering? What would these be?
32. Could this be an example of your feminism trying to make sense out of the impossibility of fulfilling the mythical model of motherhood?
33. The ideology of mothering is that it is a site of enormous power, the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world. And the practical reality in society is that mothering is a place of intolerable contradiction and powerlessness. And someplace in between those, mothers certainly recognize the power to do harm. I have heard you speak about this in terms of trying to have a family which practices democracy. I believe that figuring out how we can have the power to do good is really hard. Do you find yourself experiencing this power of mothering which can do so much damage?
34. How do you deal with it?
35. Do you find it difficult to do good with the power you have as a mother? How so? Can you give me examples of how you 'do good'?
36. Would 'doing good' be at times trying to prevent things from happening to your children? For example, send them a warning message about something or set up a context in which something won't happen for your children?
Can you give me an example of how you do this?
37. Are there issues that you have come to understand by becoming a mother?
38. You note that you have to invent your mothering as you go along, partly due to the lack of role models. Can you give me an example of how you invent your mothering?
39. Could you feminist mothering be an act of resistance to patriarchy? Why/why not?
40. Do you think that mothers are supported in our society? What types of supports do you believe are missing for mothers? (Feminist mothers?)

INTERCONNECTIONS OF FEMINISM AND MOTHERING:

41. You have agreed that feminism grounds your mothering and that the principles of your feminism and mothering are similar. Could you elaborate on this for me?

42. Are there examples where being a mother has made you question some of the assumptions, beliefs, attitudes you held regarding your feminism? (How does your mothering inform your feminism?)

43. Do you think that feminism allows you to place mothering in a context?

44. Does mothering allow you to place your feminism in a context? Could you give an example of this?

45. I believe that one of the most attractive possibilities of feminism is the possibility of community and one of the most bitter sources of disappointment is experiencing the lack of community. Do you experience a sense of community? With whom?

46. Could you elaborate on how you have experienced this (lack of) community?

47. Do you see mothers as being part of the feminist community? Why/ not? How?

48. Do you see individualism isolating people in a variety of ways?

49. Do you see isolation as a characteristic for most people who live under patriarchal capitalism?

50. You have spoken about the reality of feminist mothering being that of isolation. How do you experience this isolation?

51. Do you see isolation as a reality for others? Is it the same, different, or both?

52. Do you think the feeling of isolation and the lack of community you experience reflect contradictions in feminism and mothering?

53. I think we have already spoken about the contradictions of mothering. And, as we know, feminism is an attempt to create a different identity for the self, or find a way of naming the problems that we can't yet escape.

54. Do you see mothering and feminism as attempts to deal with the insuperable/overwhelming contradictions, complexities of things that just will not fit in life?

55. Does the way you talk about, name and experience feminism help you name and understand mothering? And vis versa?

56. Do you experience resistance to your feminism from your children? From others?

57. Has your feminist mothering had a impact on your partner?

58. Is there something that you want me to be sure to understand about your accounts that you really want to foreground here? that you want to have conveyed?