Mothers at the Margins

Mothers at the Margins

Stories of Challenge, Resistance and Love

Edited by

Lisa Raith, Jenny Jones and Marie Porter

To my grandmother, Eliza Moule (née Burton), who was left a widow with seven young children when her husband died of the Spanish flu in 1918. She bought a cane farm and became one of the biggest growers in the Mackay district.
—Marie Porter

For Marie Porter, the founder of motherhood studies in Australia. Marie's love, experience, enthusiasm, commitment, and humanity—her motherwork—underpin this collection, inspire and empower women and mothers, provide place and space for their diverse voices, and enrich the understandings and appreciations of motherhood and mothering scholarship. It is an honour and privilege to know and work with her.
—Jenny Jones and Lisa Raith

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Shifting the center 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, 73)

This collection of papers, as the title states, relates to mothers at the margins. Far from being a sentimental, feel-good account of mothering, found predominantly in the stories told to mothers and about mothers, this collection speaks with the voices of mothers, particularly those mothers who feel alienated or stigmatised; mothers who have been rendered invisible; mothers who feel they have been silenced. Mothers who, through a perception that they do not fit the accepted and expected norms of motherhood, have been relegated to the margins! In recovering these "lost" voices, the attuned listener may hear the tones resonate, other times a tone of dissonance may be heard. Likewise, at times, a tone of anger may be discerned; other times joy may be the dominant tune.

The departure point for a rich interpretation of the plights, predicaments and realities encountered in this body of work is an understanding of matricentric feminism and the work of maternal scholars. Matricentric feminism is a particular form of feminist inquiry, politics and theory which is consistent with and receptive to feminist frameworks of care and equal rights (O'Reilly 2011, 25). Like feminism, the primary aim of matricentric feminism is the valuing of women's experience; it specifically seeks to value mothers' experiences and deconstruct those conditions which are oppressive to mothers and maternal relationships. As a framework for interpreting the experiences of mothers, matricentric feminism is consistent with and respectful of the particular, situated realities including the broader familial, social, institutional frameworks in which each mother's life is embedded and her motherwork oriented. Scholars working within this tradition seek to unmask motherhood; they seek to illuminate and articulate a matricentric understanding and appreciation of the diversity and complexity of maternal experiences as well as the commonalities within such experiences.

According to Hilde Lindemann Nelson, "two different sets of stories are used to constitute the mother identity" (Nelson 2001). One set, the

"who" stories, sets out who can mother; the type of person best suited to do the labour of mothering; the motherwork. The second set, the "how" stories, "constitute the job description" (Nelson 2001, 137); they set out how a mother ought to mother. Through these plot and character constructions, women, and in particular mothers, are positioned as the person most suitable to do the work of mothering. By way of maintaining the master narratives' hierarchical seat of power, all mothers are policed through the construction of "good" and "bad" mother stereotypes. The Good Mother is the mother who fulfils the position description and thus resides in the centre with all others falling, or being cast out, to the periphery. As well as being marginalised, those residing on the margin may also experience alienation—the feeling of not belonging or being stigmatised—the marking of an "outsider" (Hall, Stevens and Meleis 1994).

The concept of marginalisation assumes a centre—a space of hierarchical power; a space where the "majority" resides. Indeed, Joanne Hall, Patricia Stevens and Afaf Ibrahim Meleis contend that

'Mainstream' society is depicted as at the center of a community, and those excluded from power and resources are at the periphery. Diversity increases with physical and social distance from the center. (1994, 26)

In terms of mothers, motherhood and mothering the "central" space has predominantly been occupied by "non-mothers"—a homogenous collection of voices which speak in normative tones with predictable values from which and through which master narratives are constituted and reconstituted. The vulnerability of the infant or young child is a predominant theme in such narratives. Plots, sub-plots and easily recognisable character-types are constructed in support of such vulnerability (Nelson 2001). These sub-plots and characters in turn provide guidance for the socially accepted and expected ways of responding to such vulnerability.

In maintaining the centre's power, those who speak "in a different voice", are "cast out to varying degrees from the societal 'center' to its periphery…on the basis of their identities, associations, experiences, and environments" (Hall, Steven and Meleis 1994, 25). Although cast out to the margins those in peripheralised states are not powerless; nor does oppression go hand in hand with marginalisation. Rather, the individual and particular accounts presented in this collection illuminate mothers at the margins who confront the challenges they encounter and challenge the oppression perceived to be associated with being peripheralised or marginalised. They simultaneously resist and liberate their marginalised position; they are both silenced and expressive in the difficulties they

encounter as a result of their marginalisation; they risk the wrath of others whilst attaining satisfaction in the impunity their marginalisation bestows.

With the starting point for maternal scholarship being first and foremost mothers' experiences, Adrienne Rich's distinction between motherhood as a patriarchal institution and motherhood as "the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children" (Rich 1995, 13, italics in original) provides a further framework of interpretation. As a work of maternal scholarship, this collection of papers counters the prevailing discourses and cultural narratives of motherhood, mothers and mothering by focusing on the experiences and representations of mothers at the margins. Studying mothers in such peripheralised space allows us to continue the tradition of examining motherhood as it is experienced, in its own terms, that is "in [its] social context, as embedded in a political institution, in feminist terms" (Rich 1995, ix). Furthermore, by drawing on Patricia Hill Collins' understandings of marginality, and in particular her belief that "one cannot use the same techniques to study the knowledge of the dominated as one uses to study the knowledge of the powerful" (Collins, cited in Hall, Stevens and Meleis 1994, 36), examining the experiences of mothers at the margins through a matricentric lens assists in countering the homogenous collection of voices which speak of predictable values and in normative tones on the subject of motherhood and mothering. Recovering the marginalised voice of mothering and the voice of marginalised mothers reveals not only structures of alienation, oppression and marginalisation but also "the strengths and innovative strategies for survival that such persons and their social networks create" (Hall, Stevens and Meleis 1994, 36). Despite these differing tones, we believe that, through a matricentric feminist lens, these diverse voices come together as symphony.

The collection arose from the conference titled "Mothers at the Margins" hosted by the Australian Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement in Brisbane, Australia in 2011. The book specifically aims at expanding academic knowledge related to mothers, motherhood and mothering and is directed towards maternal scholars. Maternal scholars engage with and support the discipline of Motherhood Studies which, despite being located within the broader field of Feminist and Women's Studies, is a particular form of feminist inquiry, politics and theory. As this collection of papers is composed of the experiences of mothers from broad and diverse cultural backgrounds, this publication not only challenges the narrowly constructed maternal identity, it expands understandings and appreciations of the diversity and complexity of maternal experiences. The diverse multidisciplinary nature of maternal

scholarship further enriches this collection of papers with the authors situated within disciplines as diverse as literature and cultural studies, law, sociology, religious studies, nursing and applied ethics, across the geographical regions of Australia, New Zealand and Japan. As a symphony of situated and contextualised voices, this collection seeks to shift the centre so that

> like concentric circles of witness, the dialogue...will thus be expanded rippling into corners where one might both imagine, and least expect. Possibilities, then, are vast; the future exciting. (Smith 2007, 397)

Chapters 1-3 explore and counter the dominant characterisation of the good mother as a white, married, middle-class mother. In Chapter One, Nombasa Williams draws on her own experiences, questioning the construction of motherhood as identity and the construction of black motherhood on the margins of good mothering by exploring the ecology of black mothering as transient and evolving in nature. It is often marked by protracted relational experiences associated with the following domains: socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-economic; constructions of gender and identity; familial and socialisation experiences, as well as acquired educative experiences or the lack thereof. The paper presented here aims to utilise Williams' (2011) ecological model to conceptualise and unpack the black mothering narrative of the author. Utilising and adjoining the contested spaces of both the academic and narrative voice this paper seeks to define marginalisation; its implications on the author's health, wellbeing, professional pursuits and parenting. The outcome of this paper aims to inform and posit some of the author's ideas of what marginalisation will come to mean over the course of the twenty-first century.

Following William's discussion of black motherhood as a relational embedded experience, Liz Mackinlay, in Chapter Two, explores the conceptualisation of good mothers in terms of race, drawing on Patricia Hill Collins' (1994) call for a critical, racialised theorising of motherhood in feminist thought, to consider what it means to be a non-Aboriginal mother to Aboriginal children. Through the use of the metaphors of tripping, swaying and dancing across racial borders, Mackinlay takes an autoethnographic approach to ask questions about discourses of whiteness at play in her everyday experiences of mothering and how her white race power and privilege manifests as motherwork with her children. By exploring the ways in which her understandings of motherhood have shifted across the "colour line" (Dalmage 2000), Mackinlay shares the lingering uncertainties she holds about essentialist categories of race by

asking whether being a non-Aboriginal woman makes her a "good enough" mother to her Aboriginal children and leaves us with the question: is it possible, as Irigaray (2002) asserts, "to be two" in this context, and what kinds of racing and e/racing of self and m/other take place?

Completing this exploration of dominant racial characterisations, in Chapter Three, "Natsume Sōseki, Mother and Gender", Miyuki Amano explores the recurring theme of "the marginalised mother" in the novels of Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) who is regarded as the father of the Japanese modern novel. Amano suggests that all the women, including mothers in Sōseki's novels, are marginalised by a patriarchal ideology and the good wife and wise mother ideology. Furthermore, Amano contends they are marginalised not only at the social level, but also on a psychological level—Sōseki had both love and hatred towards his mother, and his distorted mental state and preoccupation with his mother have a great influence on the creation of characters in his novels and their relationship with mothers and women.

With continuity and consistency being recurrent themes within the master narratives, chapters 4-10 examine the marginalisation of mothers through loss of, or disruptions to, mothering/motherhood. Chapter Four by Bronwen Levy considers the disruption to mothering presented in Amanda Lohrey's novels. Lohrey writes maternal plots: maternal desire and what to do about it being the key question facing her women characters. By asking how modern women aged thirty-something seek and claim the maternal sphere, Lohrey places the maternal body as an erotic body and maternal desire as erotic desire at the centre of her plots. In placing the maternal at the centre of her fiction, by writing the maternal quest and romance, Lohrey writes a radical female script which explores the conditions and circumstances of maternity as experienced by contemporary women. In her novels, *Camille's Bread* (1995), *The Philosopher's Doll* (2004), and *Vertigo* (2008), in particular, Lohrey suggests that current expectations of young and younger women, as independent women, militate against their achievement, and experience, of maternity. This chapter considers the disjunctions Lohrey sees at work for women of child-bearing age in Australia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It provides an analysis and critique of the novels' approach to these questions, and asks what they offer us, as feminists, when we consider maternity as a cultural and political question. As a novelist of ideas and as an experimental writer, Lohrey's works are part of the discussion of maternity as a theoretically central, but practically

marginal, part of the current imagining of women's lives in the Western world.

Lois Tonkin, in Chapter Five, continues the discussion of mothering disruption and marginalisation in her examination of the narratives and drawings of twenty-seven "circumstantially childless" (Cannold 2000) women. These women have always anticipated having children but find themselves at the end of their natural fertility without having done so, for (at least initially) social rather than biological reasons. They experience childlessness as an unexpected consequence of choices they have made within a social and institutional context that does not take account of the temporal limits of female fertility. They are in the unusual—but not uncommon—position of being neither "voluntarily childless" (since they would like to have a child), nor "involuntarily childless" (since they were or are still biologically capable of doing so). The lack of a socially acknowledged space or category for their experience—either officially or within their more intimate social spheres—results in a painful sense of alienation and isolation in contexts that often focus on families and children. This chapter concludes that the social and psychological processes that establish and maintain the boundaries between mother and not-mother are still very powerful.

The theme of disrupted mothering is extended through the examination of the effect of the loss of a child or children on a mother's self. Christina Houen's compelling memoir in Chapter Six tells the story of a series of near-death experiences, diagnosed as panic attacks, suffered by the author while completing her Master of Creative Arts degree in 2001. The traumatic experience of revisiting, narrating and theorising the loss of her three young children, abducted to the USA by her husband twenty-eight years earlier, triggered the attacks. The attacks and their context are narrated, followed by reflections on their meaning. Cathy Caruth (1996) and Dori Laub (1992) extend Freud's theorisation of trauma, reasoning that the repeated return of the repressed memories is caused by the incomplete and unexpected nature of the original event, interrupted mothering, which could not be assimilated or understood at the time. This gap or void in witnessing demands return and resists healing, unless the sufferer is able to unearth, rather than avoid, the buried truth. The author's survival of these attacks, and successful completion of her master's dissertation, allowed her to bear witness to her original traumatic loss, to work through it and move beyond the void of loss.

Chapter Seven by Tamara Walsh and Heather Douglas further explores the effects of interrupted mothering through the impact of child protection intervention on mothers. Removal of children from the care of their

mothers is one of the most fundamental forms of intrusion the state may have in the lives of mothers and children. In recent years, child protection intervention has increased dramatically in Australia. Drawing on focus group discussions with community workers who assist mothers in their dealings with child safety authorities, the authors consider a number of issues confronting mothers interacting with child safety authorities. Participants in the focus groups emphasised that many mothers had insufficient information about processes and found it difficult to communicate with child protection workers. Participants were also concerned about the link between poverty, domestic violence and child protection intervention and the lack of support available for mothers trying to care for children in these situations. Walsh and Douglas highlight the need for a strengths-based focus and the role of parent-advocates in the child protection system.

Drawing attention to the marginalisation of a mother with a young adult-child with a mental illness, Jenny Jones, in Chapter Eight, draws on the experiences of one of her research participants, Heather, to illuminate the ways in which mothers are positioned while simultaneously revealing the ways in which this particular mother sought to position herself as a good mother. Heather's felt moral obligation and responsibility to her son are clearly illuminated in this paper. Also revealed is Heather's commitment to the social demands of mothering—preserving her son, fostering his growth, and supporting and guiding (training) him to a level of independence which she, her husband and her peers deem to be socially acceptable. Jones purposefully leaves her paper open-ended thereby inviting readers to draw their own conclusion.

In Chapter Nine, "Lost in Disability: Dis-abled by Love", Marie Porter draws on her personal experiences of mothering her third son, who was so severely physically disabled he had life-threatening health problems, to argue that mothers in a similar situation carry the caring load to their detriment. Their work is not acknowledged or validated in the socio-cultural context although these mothers are disadvantaged physically, emotionally and financially. Porter relates how the load she carried damaged her identity to such an extent that she became invisible to herself, and spent many months in a psychiatric hospital. It is also a story that demonstrates the intensity of love a mother can have for her disabled child, and the strength that can grow in the face of marginalisation. Although this is a personal story, it is a story that is familiar to many mothers. It is a story that refuses, repudiates and contests the master narratives of motherhood.

The discussion of maternal commitment and vulnerability is continued in Chapter Ten through Alison McEwen's exploration of mothering in the context of living with an increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer. McEwen's chapter draws on interview data from thirty-two New Zealand women living with an increased risk of ovarian and breast cancer. These women live with the knowledge that they have an increased likelihood of developing cancer and that it may occur at a young age. They mother their children within the context of this increased risk. These women identify a strongly felt responsibility to be there to care for their children. They use their role as mothers to motivate their decisions regarding risk-reducing surgery, with several women having had premenopausal removal of their ovaries and breasts in order to reduce their cancer risk and increase the chance that they will be there for their children. This study contributes further evidence of the motivating influence of motherhood for women living with risk.

Chapters 11-13 shift focus slightly and examine mothers' lived experiences of marginalisation and their negotiations of the troubling waters of modern motherhood. Following the tradition of theoretical and personal contemplation set by Adrienne Rich, Lisa Raith ruminates, in Chapter Eleven, on why mothers are each other's greatest champions and worst enemies. Drawing on ten first-time mothers' thoughts on motherhood and mothering, Raith's discussion reflects on the paradoxical nature of other mothers' support and how this can simultaneously marginalise, and welcome mothers into, the mothers' club. Raith hypothesises that because the early period of motherhood is particularly chaotic, with a myriad of mothering choices and many new and unanticipated experiences, mothering confidence is difficult to acquire. Therefore, first-time mothers are especially vulnerable to feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty, as well as self-regulation and silencing. This provides fertile ground for critique and disparagement as their own, and others' mothering performances, are measured against conventional mothering mores and idealised notions of mothering. Conversely, the conditions are also ripe for the development of strong and supportive relationships between new mothers, where knowledge, commiseration and assistance are common currency. Acknowledging, disclosing and accepting the countless "good" and "bad" experiences of mothering may open the way for appreciating mothering commonalities. By sharing the complexities of the motherhood experience, mothers bring themselves, and each other, in from the cold and unseat the powerful, two-dimensional conception of mothering.

Noting that second-wave feminists called for a more equal and just society by demanding the recognition of issues that were traditionally off the political agenda—so-called women's issues—from domestic violence, contraception and access to safe abortion to affordable quality childcare, Chapter Twelve examines the use of language in policy discussions. In their chapter, Nonie Harris and Beth Tinning suggest that policy discussions are carefully couched in gender-neutral language which renders women's lives as invisible through the disappearance of "women" into "people", "parents" and "families". The authors show that formal childcare policy is an example of a public policy that continues to resolutely ignore the different lives of men and women. Their paper presents qualitative data gathered from women in northern regional Australia, interviewed in two research studies in 2007 and 2009/10. In this research women spoke of their search for quality long day care in a complex and rapidly changing childcare landscape. From this data Harris and Tinning argue that childcare is no longer seen as a women's issue, diverting the public gaze from women's very real struggles in this so-called time of "choice" and equality and ask "was this what feminists called for when we demanded men share the responsibility of raising children"?

The title of the next chapter, "Telling Lies to Little Girls", reflects the complex social landscape that women negotiate when bringing up girls in a post-feminist world where it is assumed that disadvantage for women and girls no longer exists. Noting that young girls and their mothers have been the focus of ongoing public debate about the sexualisation of children within popular culture, Ryl Harrison's Chapter Thirteen presents the preliminary findings of critical feminist qualitative research exploring Australian women's experiences in mothering girls aged between nine and thirteen years. The women's stories revealed three significant issues: sexuality, body image and friendships. Harrison contends that social fault lines have appeared between "how things are" and "what should be" and that women are negotiating these fault lines with their daughters; simultaneously trying to hold emancipatory visions in what they are describing as a hostile social context.

Recalling that mothers at the margins confront the challenges they encounter and contest the oppression perceived to be associated with being peripheralised or marginalised, the remaining chapters in this collection of work shine a light on the ways mothering spaces are being challenged, reclaimed and renegotiated. In Chapter Fourteen, Petra Bueskens, drawing on her own recent experience of being told she was not to breastfeed in a local swimming pool ostensibly for "hygiene and safety" reasons,

examines the feminist scholarly literature on breastfeeding and makes two key arguments: first, that breastfeeding controversies are increasingly defined by "pseudo-mutuality" in the current ideological climate of "breast is best" such that discriminatory individuals and organisations routinely claim to be "pro-breastfeeding" while undermining breastfeeding women's and children's rights; second, that claiming our right to feed in public is part of a broader maternal politics of embodied citizenship shifting extant norms premised on the ideal of the unencumbered autonomous subject. Reconfiguring the image of the ideal-typical citizen as one who may also be pregnant with, birthing and/or nurturing another is part of this matricentric feminist politics. Breastfeeding "in public" is literally a transformative "coming out" redefining extant bodily and social norms.

In Chapter Fifteen, Cristina Gomez's "In From the Margins: Catholic Mothers' Matrescent Experience Reappropriated", attention turns to the spiritual domain and the reconfiguring of concepts which support mothers through the challenging days of new motherhood through. In setting the context, Gomez notes that in trying to make sense of the difficulties and joys of everyday living, particularly those associated with new motherhood, some women turn to their religious faith for approaches to deal with their changed situation. She further notes that the Christian churches have a continuing history of providing spiritual support and guidance; for instance, the Catholic community in particular has paid attention to early motherhood mainly through its maternity hospitals. Gomez contends, however, that whilst helpful for previous generations of mothers, the Catholic constructs now need to be revised as the situations of many mothers differ today. Her chapter shows that a new spiritual pathway can be developed using the work of prominent German theologian Karl Rahner and in particular the key features of his critical theological paradigm which include deep attentiveness to the experiences of daily life in its particular circumstances, the consequent movement towards a more human self, the experience of transcendence in the world, the response to suffering in ordinary living. In this paper, Gomez argues that these key features do not entrap women but rather provide them freedom to explore their own spirituality, a spirituality which opens up a new way for integrating the experience of oncoming motherhood into a holistic life for a woman.

The reconfiguring of maternal relationships through literary texts is the focus of Chapter Sixteen. Here Tomoko Aoyama focuses on two examples of innovative representations of problematic relationships between an ageing mother and her daughter. Shōno Yoriko's *Haha no hattatsu* (The Development of the Mother, 1999) is a post-modern feminist novel with

radical narrative experimentation whereas Sano Yōko's *Shizuko-san* (2010) is a collection of essays on her relationship with her eponymous mother. Each text deals with a tyrannical and abusive mother. In Shōno's novel, the monstrous mother is de-constructed and transformed into numerous mothers through constant wordplay. However, in this "hilarious mother-horror novel" (blurbs of the paperback edition) the mother is ultimately indestructible; she continues to develop and multiply within the fifty-three-year-old single unmarried daughter. Although Sano's text is not as radical as Shōno's in form and style, the mother-daughter conflict in *Shizuko-san* is just as fierce and the challenge against motherhood myths is just as daring. Here the mother's senile dementia makes communication and reconciliation between mother and daughter possible for the first time.

Continuing the focus on literary accounts, Chapter Seventeen by Vivienne Muller challenges the centrality of patriarchy by focusing on the privileging of women's experiences of place in Jay Verney's *A Mortality Tale* (1994). The analysis draws on Julia Kristeva's conceptualisation of the semiotic as a basis for examining the ways in which the narrative calls patriarchal and phallocentric structures into question for their "sins" of omission. Carmen's (the central character) restoration of the place she had loved as a child, and the birth of her own child reinforce the narrative emphasis on valorisation of the mother-child relationship and the repayment of maternal debt (Irigaray 1989). Through its depiction of Carmen's experiences, the text dismantles totalising discourses such as those of religion, patriarchy, geo-social revealing and contesting the power/knowledge regimes in which they are embedded. Verney's novel is often humorous, irreverent and ironic in tone—a counterpoint to the serious subject matter she explores. It resembles the carnivalesque language that Kristeva, following Bahktin, claims disputes the laws of language, "challenges God, authority and social law" (1986, 49). Moreover, in keeping with the original spirit of carnival, such language is more than parody, *it is potentially revolutionary*—"in so far as it is dialogical, it is rebellious" (1986, 49). Verney's narrative participates in this rebellion by inviting us to forgive Carmen's actions in killing Vincent and not confessing to it. By the end of the narrative, Carmen has set up her own space, the restored Golden Mount, borne her child, contributed to the local community, and is contemplating the possibility of life with or without Edward, the father of her child. What is of greater importance than confessing to a crime, is the opportunity that has emerged from the crime to live a life beyond the phallic fortress of the symbolic. In privileging the pre-oedipal (central to the semiotic) and the mother-child relationship, *A Mortality Tale* interrogates the ways in which place (region, space) is often

read as monolithic and fixed, in the process underwriting Whitlock's assertion that "when we speak…we do so as gendered subjects" (1994, 180). Written at a time of significant changes for women, this text largely focuses on female characters whose experiences of urban, suburban and rural spaces provide a gendered story of place. The female protagonist in the narrative is an "unruly woman" for their time in that they disrupt, in both flagrant and nuanced ways, the phallocentric and patriarchal ordering of spatiality and gender.

With large numbers of women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds accessing obstetric healthcare services in contemporary Australian society, quality care that supports varied obstetric needs improves outcomes for mothers and babies. In Chapter Eighteen, Therese Morris explores these women's experiences of marginality and outlines the development and implementation of an education program delivered to service providers within the Hunter New England Local Health District in New South Wales (NSW). With the aim of sharing ideas, promoting tolerance and acceptance of a variety of norms, the module is a positive response to the commitment to the continuous improvement of quality of care and to the NSW Health policy directives which stipulate, in relation to caring for patients from CALD backgrounds, the necessity to provide interpreters and take into consideration patients' cultural practices and religious beliefs. Instead of applying a "monolithic, blinkered approach" (Barclay and Kent 1998) which puts CALD women at the margins, those who participate in this education will be prepared to learn about alternative ways of caring for pregnant women and newborns, to support the women in following their cultural rituals and to assist the women in resolving conflicts arising from different cultural expectations. This chapter highlights that, by including "the client world view" and not just what they need to tell the women in their care planning, service providers assist in bringing CALD women in from the margins of obstetric care service (Morris 2010).

In concluding this collection, Andrea Fox's Chapter Nineteen, "What Does a Feminist Mother Look Like?", examines how people identifying as feminist parents define that identity. The work is based on an Internet questionnaire hosted on the popular feminist blog, bluemilk, since 2007. The questionnaire, which contains ten questions, focuses on exploring whether their motherhood influenced their feminism and/or their feminism influenced their motherhood; the degree to which feminism has made them feel like an "outsider"; their partner's support or opposition to their feminism; and the intersection of attachment parenting with feminism. Over the years the questionnaire has been very successful, receiving

almost one hundred thoughtful, revealing responses while in circulation. A wide variety of respondents replied to the questionnaire from across the world. Some of the results were surprising, particularly the degree to which women expressed a sense of wrestling with and being overcome by their "maternal desire". Feminist parenting was defined by the respondents in a number of ways, including questioning the gender binary with their children (particularly in relation to toys and play); educating their children about oppression and the intersections of disadvantage; preparing their children to be critical viewers of media and marketing; and, role modelling their feminism and self-empowerment.

References

Barclay, L. and D. Kent. 1998. "Recent Immigration and the Misery of Motherhood: A Discussion of Pertinent Issues". *Midwifery* 14 (1): 4-9.

Cannold, L. 2000. *Who's Crying Now? Chosen Childlessness, Circumstantial Childlessness and the Irrationality of Motherhood*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Melbourne: Australia.

Caruth, C. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.

Collins, P. H. 1994. "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood". In *Representations of Motherhood*, edited by D. Bassin, M. Honey, and M. M. Kaplan, 56-74. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dalmage, H. M. 2000. *Tripping on the Color Line: Black-White Multiracial Families in a Racially Divided World*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Hall, J., P. E. Stevens and A. I. Meleis. 1994. "Marginalization: A Guiding Concept for Valuing Diversity in Nursing Knowledge Development". *Advances in Nursing Science* 16 (4): 23-41.

Nelson, H. L. 2001. *Damaged Identities: Narrative Repair*. London: Cornell University Press.

Irigaray, L. 1989. "Any Theory of the 'Subject'". In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 133-46. Cornell: Cornell University Press.

—..2000. *To Be Two*. Translated by M. M. Rhodes and M. F. Cocito-Monoc. London: The Athlone Press.

Kristeva, J. 1986. "Word, Dialogue and Novel". In *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by T. Moi, 34-61. New York: Columbia University Press.

Laub, D. 1992. "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening". In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing Literature, Psychoanalysis, and*

History. Edited by S. Felman and D. Laub, 57-74. New York: Routledge

Morris, M. 2010. "Cultural Integrity in Service Delivery". Paper presented at the NSW Health Forum *Chronic Disease and CALD Communities*, July 29.

O'Reilly, A. 2011. "Introduction, Maternal Activism as Matricentric Feminism: The History, Ideological Frameworks, Political Strategies and Activist Practices of the 21st Century Motherhood Movement". In *The 21st Century Motherhood Movement: Mothers Speak Out on Why We Need to Change the World and How to Do It*, edited by A. O'Reilly, 1-33. Ontario: Demeter Press.

Rich, A. 1995. *Of Woman Born*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Sano, Y. 2010. [2008]. *Shizuko-san*. Tokyo: Shinchōsha, Shinchō Bunko.

Shōno, Y. 1999 [1996]. *Haha no hattatsu* (The Development of the Mother). Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, Kawade Bunko.

Smith, B. 2007. "The State of the Art in Narrative Inquiry: Some Reflections". *Narrative Inquiry* 17 (2): 391-98.

Verney, J. 1994. *A Mortality Tale*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Whitlock, G. 1994. "Queensland: The State of the Art on the 'Last Frontier'". *Westerly* 29 (2): 85-90.

Williams, N. 2010. "Establishing the boundaries and building bridges. A Literature Review on Ecological Theory Implications for Research into the Refugee Parenting Experience". *Journal of Child Health Care* 14 (1): 1-17.

CHAPTER ONE

THIS SKIN I'M IN:
FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTRE—
A BLACK MOTHERHOOD NARRATIVE

NOMBASA WILLIAMS

Introduction

Families and households managed solely by black women have been an integral part of American society since the days of the British colonisation of North America and, as such, have been at the nexus of race, gender and class within the United States (US). Omolade (1987) has argued that because racism permeates all social relationships, economic and political arrangements such as slavery, segregation and desegregation have not operated in the public arena alone, but have seeped into the private arenas of sexuality, marriage and the family, and the personal lives of blacks and whites, both men and women. I concur with Omolade's observation; however, I would make the following alteration.

Omolade's work has profound implications not only for research into black motherhood, in both single-parenting and kinship-parenting households in the US context, but also globally for unravelling, understanding, identifying and sequencing the events that have led to the contemporary positioning of mothers of African descent on the margins of society. There are many useful works available, across genres and disciplines, to inform the narrative presented here. However, given its scope, this chapter narrows its focus in utilising an ecological framework developed by the author (see Figure 1.1)—premised on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) research in the areas of family, human development and the ecology of developmental processes throughout the lifespan.

This chapter adopts the ecological model developed by the author in previous research on refugee parenting (Williams 2010) in order to conceptualise and illuminate the mothering narrative as a woman of

African descent. The conclusions reached suggest the need for a greater presence of the narrative voice—that is, of autobiography—in family wellbeing research, policy development and practice. Spaces are needed in which the parenting narrative is valued, particularly for under-represented groups, to inform the development of culturally competent and relevant family wellbeing early interventions, while simultaneously encouraging client self-efficacy. In this regard, it is indeed a tragedy after parenting for more than nineteen years now, that I can summarily walk into any bookshop, both in the US and across the Asia-Pacific region, and be unable to identify a self-help text that mirrors my journey or offers guidance, insights or, perhaps more importantly, alternative trajectories for a future I can visualise.

Race, racism and other mothered spaces

The narrative voice presented in this paper, while scaffolded by the Ecology of Black Motherhood framework (see Figure 1-1), is woven together by connective anecdotal threads. The use of the "anecdote" (personal experience) here provides a backdrop to unpacking black motherhood (see Figure 1), as well as blending *academic* and *subjective speak*. Throughout my life I have had to single-handedly *construct*, *be* and *enact* my circle of traditional supports; such as, family or social support systems, as well as systemic supports, including therapeutic or institutional support. Consequently, in the absence of traditional support systems, I have independently had to (de)construct, construct and (re)construct a model of black mothering—hence, my interweaving of the academic and narrative voices.

> While attending a writer's workshop a participant approached me to ask about my subject matter. After some small talk, she asked, 'What is black motherhood? What makes it different from white motherhood...or motherhood for that matter?' I asked myself, 'What is the sub-context of her question; What is black motherhood?' As a reader, one may imagine someone asking this question simply because they want to know my take on Black Motherhood, and not because they doubt the existence of differential experiences and/or views. I am always having to remind myself of two facts: first, that we do not all share a collective memory, sense of place and space; and second, that I must always see questions as an opportunity to clarify and articulate my own thoughts and ideas.

"Black" is the operative word in the phrase "black motherhood". The journey towards (de)constructing, constructing and (re)constructing

"blackness" is often exhausting, sometimes frenzied, ever beckoning and yet assiduous. More importantly, the purported definitions within mainstream culture and academia, or the commonly held definitions in white society exist without my input. I am simply resigned to (de)constructing words such as "black" and its progenitor "race". In this vein, let us begin with a discussion of the term "race", which is often used by academics, professionals and laypersons to perpetuate and conveniently assign meanings, though they often possess a highly ambiguous or tenuous understanding of the word's etymology.

Race

According to research conducted by Alderman, the word "race" first appears in the "English language in 1508, but without any biological implication; it referred simply to a class or category of persons or things" (Alderman 1985, 129). Alderman identifies the use of the word by the English to define Normans in the seventeenth century. He asserts that the early nineteenth century saw the emergence of theories of racial types. Similarly, Banton traces the origins of the word to more than 500 years ago, and offers a codification of race, as occurring in either a horizontal or vertical dimension. In his vertical dimension, he defines race as distinguishing "a set of persons, emphasizing heredity and genealogy", while the "horizontal dimension identifies the nature of that distinctiveness" (Banton 2010, 129).

There are many theoretical camps that define the term "race". The majority of these are known as essentialists, whose writings are found in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, American studies, Africana studies, and gender and sexuality studies (among others). While it is not the purpose of this chapter to cover the exhaustive material available on the topic of race and race theory, it is important to scaffold only the elements within the literature relevant to the present discussion. For example, there are monogenists and polygenists. Western monogenists believed that humans descended from Adam and Eve, and that we all have a common ancestor; this idea of a common descent (one origin) later became widely referred to as monogenism. Polygenists argue that white people descended from Seth and non-whites from Cain, thereby asserting separate (or multiple) origins. In fact, race as a social construct is often linked to Blumenbach's racial classification system (premised on earlier taxa, developed during the period 1793-1840; 1865), which divided human beings into five distinct races: Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, Ethiopian and the races of the Americas. Alderman argues that the nature and pattern

of genetic variation mean that the world's population cannot be divided into a number of permanent and discrete races that may be hierarchically ordered (Alderman 1984, 130).

The discovery of DNA and the advances of science in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have rendered essentialist arguments about genetics irrational. Dar-Nimrod and Heine (2011) argue that biased theories based on genetic and cognitive essentialism are irrelevant and that such attributes do not predetermine behaviour, condition or social group. I concur with Haslam's opinions regarding Dar-Nimrod and Heine's research, that essentialist theories are "problematic" and have negative "social consequences" (Haslam 2011, 819). Haslam's work forms part of the body of literature that explains how essentialist thinking influences the portrayal of race in the media, electronic media, social organisation and scientific research, which all combine to distort the views held by the average person. Moreover, essentialist theories deepen social divisions and promote forms of social segregation (Haslam 2011). Cameron and Wycoff (1998) suggest that it is time for the health professions to emulate the statements and findings of the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1950-78) on race, which cast doubt on essentialist notions of race.

Racism

According to Harrell (2000), both race and racism are grounded in a system of dominance, power and privilege that shapes racial group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of certain groups who are perceived by the dominant group as inferior, deviant or undesirable; and occur in circumstances in which members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege by maintaining structures, ideology, values and behaviour that restrict the access of non-dominant group members to power, esteem, status and/or societal resources (Harrell 2000, 43). Ample research has highlighted both the explicit and implicit consequences of the concept of race. According to Cameron and Wycoff (1998), the (re)construction of race has led to discrimination and a lack of rights equality among peoples, and justified social inequities and injustices. Moreover, Cameron and Wycoff quote Smedley (1993) in arguing that race is a construct that acts to rationalise or advance the interests of those who maintain the notion of racial difference.

Many researchers believe that the term still holds currency despite the fact that science has failed to produce tangible evidence to validate the existence of race; therefore, whether consciously or unconsciously,