choose healthy mothering of self alongside the mothering they bring to their relationships.

What fascinated me about the conference at York University was the earnestness and honesty transcending the confines of an academic setting. Yet, there seemed to be covert assumptions about the nature of motherhood, as most of the proceedings focussed on biological motherhood. I found myself increasingly disenfranchised by such exclusive messages for a most complex identity.

If, as Jean Baker-Miller points out, women’s relational traits are indeed foundational for humanity, how then can we broaden our definition of mother? A feminist conference can be a tremendous vehicle for not only exchanging investigations of role, definition, and intention of what mothering was, is, and can be.

I was fortunate to meet up with women at the conference who shared my sense of disenfranchisement. I was particularly moved by Gayle’s work on “infertility” and “involuntary childlessness” and Deborah’s work on DES (diethyl-stilbestrol, an old reproductive technology which had reproductive health consequences for offspring exposed in utero), and was struck by the limited attendance at their presentations. We speculated that these issues just aren’t “sexy” enough. Feminism at its root is simply the validation of women’s experience. We felt included, but not validated. It was our conversations about this shared sense of feeling disenfranchised that sparked the idea to advocate for inclusiveness of non-biological definitions in the ongoing feminist discourse about motherhood.

Final thoughts

This article has not been too easy to write. Communicating across continents, whilst coping with various personal and work-related demands and distresses, we have tried to express in writing the issues that dominated our discussion during our first (and hopefully not our last) lunch together. Despite the limitations of our work-

References


SHARRON CHATTERTON

Her Handmade Gloves

Your hands belong in these,
Your baby fingers tapered now
Like dancer’s legs,
Conductors’ wands,
The slender tips
That side by side lay
Children in the snow
To fan and flex, snowangels
In the kid, for fit,
Will hold them up like mirrors
Catching sundogs in the East
To find the flaw,
The line of beads,
An emerald felt,
A parchment welt
Pulled tight against the cold,
To keep a walking woman warm
However far
On winter’s eve.

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