

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-

ing situation—i.e., the fact that we can't sit together and share tears, laughter, and frowns as we write this—we have done it. In an early draft of her individual contribution Patricia wrote that one of the things that particularly moved her about the conference was "meeting up with women who serendipitously shared" her sense of disenfranchisement. This feeling is shared by us all and has strengthened through the process of writing this piece. Overwhelmingly we feel that it is time that feminism, as Deborah has put it, "face the challenge" of non-motherhood and of different mothering identities. That is, feminism needs to recognize motherhood/non-motherhood as a difference that needs to be integrated in feminist research and theory alongside other more "acknowledged" differences.

Patricia Fontaine has taught a "Mothers and Daughters" course at Vermont Colleges for the past twelve years. As a

daughter she has an ambivalent relationship with her mother and although she does not have children, she has taken a mothering role in her family and through her work. Gayle Letherby is a researcher and teacher who lives and works in the United Kingdom. As a daughter and as a biologically childless woman she has lived with her partner's two sons for the past six years. The lives of women who mother and those who don't continue to occupy her empirical and theoretical work. Deborah Whatley is a student in the Graduate Programme in Sociology at York University. Her work focuses on women and reproduction gone wrong and her biggest accomplishment as a mother is her friendship with her 19-year-old son.

References

Baker-Miller, J. *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

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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