

LANDSCAPES OF MOTHERING:
CREATING MATERNAL IDENTITY THROUGH STORY

by

Cynthia M. Miller



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To my father, Jim Miller, who ignited my passion for photography,
my mother, Marion Miller, whose experiences and identity have inspired me,
my husband, Habib Saidane,
and our children, Leila, Ali, and Sami,
who make me a mother and an artist.

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This creative dissertation is comprised of a photographic exhibit entitled “Landscapes of Mothering” and a scholarly apparatus that situates the exhibition in the evolution of contemporary photography theories. The photographic exhibit is an illustration of my lived maternal experience which has created my identity as a mother, consisting of eight large-scale digital prints. The accompanying chapters examine maternal feminism, the formation of maternal identity in novels and photographs, and the creation of meaning in a post-documentary culture.

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INTRODUCTION

My dissertation addresses the question of how we define motherhood in the twenty-first century, especially when that definition needs to cover a great variety of mothers. How does a mother find her identity as a person? How do we put ourselves into the work and create images and texts that are honest and inclusive? How does postmodern documentary practice allow for the inclusion of subject, viewer, and photographer, and a creation of meaning through discourse?

The purpose of my creative project is to investigate maternal identity through a series of images depicting my experiences of motherhood. Through documenting my life, I am claiming the right to define myself as a mother and connecting to the broader conversation of what being a mother is, as well as engaging in elevating ordinary motherhood above the conventional stereotypical images.

In 1976, the French writer and feminist Helene Cixous exhorted women to write, telling each to “put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement,” breaking new ground to create a space for discourse (Cixous 1976). This “space for discourse” is where women can become agents in their own identity creation. Identity is a project always in progress, based on past and present experiences and heading toward our future hopes. With the acknowledgement that there is no universal identity of woman, we include voices which tell of different experiences based on culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and appearance.

My photographs owe much to the community of women artists and writers over the past 50 years who have resisted objectification, this colonizing of our bodies with patriarchal ideals. The forerunners of the feminist post-modern tradition in the visual arts, including Eleanor Antin, Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, Faith Ringgold, and Mary Kelly, gave form to gender and

political consciousness in theory creating works which elevated the domestic arts like sewing and photo album keeping, and also motherhood and child care. Through art and storytelling, we create our identities, not alone, but linked into a network of conversations that weave across cultures and time, acknowledging the social construct of identity by inviting the listener and viewer into the discourse (Reese). The conversation grows with each voice added to it; there is no one maternal feminism. Instead, to borrow sociologist Patricia Hills Collins's description of black feminism, maternal feminism is lived experience, varied, self-defined, and dynamic, and leads to social action. Most importantly, maternal feminism is created and exists in relationship.

Deborah Siegal describes third-wave feminist theorizing as “an activity that encompasses different spheres, sites, and constituencies” (50). Black feminists such as Barbara Christian and Patricia Collins identify storytelling and music as sites of theorizing, contrasting them with the abstract logic of Western patriarchal form. Thus, academic writing becomes but one product of theorizing. Excluded voices, using different ways of theorizing, are admitted into the circle of authority. Other ways of theorizing include narrative writing, spoken word, activism, and visual art, including photography, which is especially suited to maternal feminists in that it is experience-based, quotidian, and practical. These activities weave together into a quilt which reveals the many realities of motherhood. This photographic project is my contribution to that quilt. My photographs voice my lived experience in a way that empowers me and links my experiences to those of other mothers who document their own families. In creating our images, we are creating theories of motherhood.

Maternal feminism is not one story; it is a conglomeration of many voices creating a dynamic narrative, and my voice adds a new thread to this narrative. Maternal identity in my

images is created not through the comforting physical presence of the mother in the image, but through my implied presence as photographer and witness outside of the frame. The work is about the experience of motherhood, not the image itself, and the viewer shares my vantage point and thus my experience.

The technical process I follow mixes low and high technology through the use of a plastic camera, and then the transference of analog to digital. In addition, I challenge and blur the categories of documentary and fiction, creating work in the style of creative non-fiction literature, which uses the tools of fiction while “maintaining allegiance to facts” (Gutkind). While this is becoming more common in film and literature, it is new to photography. In postmodernism identity is unfixed and multi-faceted; therefore, it cannot truly be viewed in a two-dimensional way. Instead, the images require that the viewer look beyond the surface and live with the ambiguity found there. I invite the viewer to engage in the dialogue about motherhood and partner with me to create meaning. The meaning of the work no longer fixes at the moment of creation, but is newly made at the moment of viewing. Henri Cartier-Bresson’s idea of the “decisive moment,” which references the place and time of a photograph’s capture, is replaced with the *transactional moment*, the point at which the viewer engages with the work, converging with the photographer and the subject.

The project consists of an exhibition of 20 large scale images, 24 inches wide by 60 plus inches long. These are made using a plastic Holga camera, which allows me to arbitrarily advance the film. Layering the negatives through double exposure and mis-winding the film takes control of the image away from me, countering the tight control available with a digital camera, and echoing my loss of control as a mother. Chance becomes a player in the images.

Unlike with digital photography, I cannot immediately check and re-take the picture but must wait for the film to be developed. Indirectly, through the use of a low-tech tool like the plastic Holga, I also challenge the patriarchal demand for mastery inherent in using ever newer and more advanced technical processes. The snapshot quality of the work mimics the family photograph album, while the large size of the prints take them out of the domestic sphere into an engagement with contemporary art dialogues. A sense of the family home movie comes through in the overlapping frames. These sequences are meant to tell a longer narrative than most still images.

I term my photographs maternal landscapes in part because of their extended horizontal format; landscapes are traditionally horizontal panoramas that extend beyond the standard proportions. In addition I am inspired by landscape critic J. B. Jackson's quote: "I suspect no landscape, vernacular or otherwise, can be comprehended unless we perceive it as an organization of space; unless we ask ourselves who owns or uses the spaces, how they were created and how they change" (150). While Jackson is writing about the physical landscape, this idea relates to the spaces created through mothering as well, and these questions of ownership, creation, and change apply to the project of creating maternal identity. Mothering is a physical space we inhabit- it is the landscape of our days. To take ownership of that space and to think through how this space is created and used and changed allows us to name our identity rather than waiting for someone else to name us.

The first chapter of the scholarly component of my creative dissertation explores postmodern documentary and photographic creative non-fiction. The role of documentary photography has changed from representing truth to the more ambiguous role of representing

possibility. The viewer does not trust the image as he or she used to, having been educated to understand that the power behind the image shapes our perceptions. Instead, the photograph as document has become a point of engagement where the photographer, the viewer, and the photographic subject enter into a dialogue from which meaning emerges. The photographer's authority has been displaced by equality with the participants. Photo-based creative nonfiction complicates the relationship between reality and fiction, privileging the familiarity of experience and re-siting the viewer as subject.

The second chapter examines how maternal identity has been created by women writers since Cixous's call to action in 1976, which also corresponds with the rise of postmodernism and conscious construction of feminist identity through writing. With these texts, women have taken control in creating images of mothers that reflect their own realities. Through telling stories, authors such as Margaret Atwood, Barbara Kingsolver, Julia Alvarez, and Jamaica Kincaid create identities for themselves and their characters.

The third chapter turns to photographic narratives, detailing how women photographers create identity through image narratives of motherhood. In taking on the role of family record maker and memory keeper, mother artists have elevated the family story, creating art that heightened awareness of the constructed maternal image and expanded the definition of mothering beyond media stereotypes. Whether the mother photographer is inside or outside the image, maternal identity is created through these family documents.

Finally, an artist's statement will bridge this exploration of theory and artistic practice with my own work. An explanation of the process will include how the representation of time and the effects of chance move the work beyond the snapshot. Without the luxury of a "room of

my own,” part of my artist statement will deal with the challenges and joys of creating in the midst of the chaos of family life, for, to paraphrase Alice Walker’s description of Nora Zeale Hurston, I am an artist because of my children, not in spite of them.

CHAPTER 1

CONSIDERING POST-DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

The history of documentary photography is one of gentle but continuous shifts which have switched the positions of subject, viewer, and photographer, and opened up new ways of understanding the image. This chapter describes the shifts in documentary photography and proposes that we are living in a post-documentary culture, which affects both the way that photographers create images and the way that viewers understand them.

Documentary photography, while lacking an exact definition, is generally recognizable for certain criteria. Documentary images are meant to reveal the photographer's social awareness of an issue and ignite a similar awareness in the viewer. The photographer and writer Gretchen Garner says that while all photographs are a document in some way, documentary photography is "a particular kind of practice focused on social reality and on human life, informed by the strong feelings of the photographer" (47). Documentary images do more than just present facts to the viewer; they are "communicating *conclusions* about facts" (49). The viewer trusts the message of the document because of the photographer's connection to the event. That the photographer was there to witness the event as well as record it gives the photograph an arguable veracity in the eyes of the viewer. Photographer Arthur Rothstein explains that the "power and impact of documentary photography results from its acceptance as pictorial evidence of the eyewitness photographer," and the viewer is moved as he/she identifies with the "photographer's eyewitness concern for the subject" (Rothstein 77; 34). The photographer's presence at the event where the image is taken tangibly connects the viewer to the event being documented, which in turns causes the viewer to trust that the image is a true depiction of reality.

These statements describe documentary photography as it was viewed in the first half of the twentieth century, but as the position of the photographer, subject, and viewer began to shift, these descriptions no longer expressed the complete range of documentary photographic practice. Further, the rise of the internet and the increased awareness about how images can be manipulated has made the viewer distrustful of the photograph as evidence. The conclusions that the photographer or the editor wishes to communicate are no longer considered fact, but are perceived as opinion or one perspective of a more complicated truth.

1.1 Early Documentary

Early examples of documentary photography had strong social purposes. Lewis Hine's images of poor working conditions and child labor were meant to initiate needed reforms. In a 1909 presentation at the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Hine uses his series of photographs of newsboys to illustrate the role photography can play in the fight to better working conditions. The photographs show the extreme youth of the newsboys, the long working hours, and their exposure "to public life with its temptations and dangers" (Hine 355-359). Hine sees the need to move the public to sympathy, and with his images, invites the distant viewer to approach the picture and to be moved to resolve the problem. Arthur Rothstein describes Hine as "the most eminent social documentary photographer of his time" because of his belief in the educational power of photography, which could show the viewer the value of life (Guimond 85). The photographers of the Farm Security Administration continued this kind of social documentary work, employed by the government to document the hardships of the depression. The images of suffering and poverty taken by Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, Walker Evans, and the other FSA photographers highlighted the problems of the country and promoted the

power of the government programs designed to provide jobs and feed people. While the images' apparent primary function was to advocate for policies and interventions to end the hard times depicted, they also served as propaganda for the state.¹

The use of photographs as propaganda continued in the United States and intensified after the end of World War II and into the Cold War. However, the images were no longer strictly documentary. They did not portray life as it was, but as the United States wanted to be seen. *Life* and *Look* magazines as well as the government published carefully composed and edited photo essays, which portrayed an ideal life of prosperity and visual and social order. This exploitation of documentary required the complicity of photographer (publisher), subject, and viewer. Unhappy with this strict control, some photographers deliberately rejected being told what to photograph in favor of choosing topics and subjects of interest to them, which became the first shift in documentary.

1.2 Personal Documentary

One of these photographers was Robert Frank, who traveled around the United States “discovering the significance of the tacky, nondescript, scruffy bits of reality that most middle-class Americans ignored or thought of as ephemeral or totally insignificant at the time” (211). As a European, he was an outsider to the culture of the United States, and thus freer to see these bits of reality than someone immersed in them. His work is a good example of the power of the outsider to observe and record. Like Frank, Diane Arbus and William Klein rejected the

¹ Throughout the history of photography, those in power have used documentary images for their own purposes, often equating the documentary nature of the photograph with an official state document.

idealized subjects of contemporary photography and created their own tradition which investigated “the darker side of reality “in order to criticize American social values (211). Arbus used her camera as a way to gain entry to subcultures in the margins of U.S. life, photographing people who were considered abnormal– a giant, twins and triplets, transvestites, people with dwarfism, circus performers. Arbus saw the camera as giving her “license to go anywhere and look at anything” (Arbus 51). Arbus’ photographs do not depend on the happenstance of street photography. Instead, they are “deliberate descriptions of the people she photographed and her relationship to them as witness” (Arbus 51). Klein’s work showed his “contempt for American way of life,” in part through breaking with widely held notions of aesthetics to create blurred and unbeautiful images (Guimond 226).

These three photographers were not concerned with portraying facts as earlier documentary photographers had been, and did not use photographs to verify and illustrate results– more important to them was “the degree of intensity and commitment that the photographer applies to the subject” (242). Rather than seeking to effect change, they sought to open the mind of the viewer to new possibilities of reality. Certainly, these photographers were reacting to the idealized Technicolor images of propaganda campaigns and exhibits such as *The Family of Man*, which celebrated the greatness of humanity and the United States. The work of Frank, Klein, and Arbus did not focus on the positive aspects of the United States, but attempted to portray a more realistic vision.

This kind of photography has also been called “personal documentary,” a term Garner uses to describe Robert Frank’s images of American life (60). While a personal element exists in that the artist is photographing that which he or she chooses to photograph, and with a personal

viewpoint, the artist is still outside of the frame. The work has shifted to the personal, away from the institutional, and the purpose is to relate a personal vision, not to inspire social change.²

Although the photographer may be, as Frank was, “driven by a desire to see *himself* reflected there,” the photographer and viewer still stand outside the frame, separated from the subject, who is on the inside (Garner 42). However, by choosing the moment to photograph, the photographer gives it significance, thus putting a glimmer of him or herself into the image.

1.3 The Privileged Insider

This shift to a personal vision increases as photographers in the 1970s turned the camera on their immediate surroundings and loved ones. With the camera now aimed at the photographer’s domestic milieu, the photographer moves from the outside of the image to the inside. The distance between the photographer and the subject lessens or disappears, and the image becomes a personal revelation of the photographer.

Nan Goldin’s work explored marginalized people in the U.S., but her work was more personal than Arbus’ images. Goldin’s subjects were her roommates and friends, her surrogate family, and herself. The photographer becomes an insider, having been given access by her subjects. The purpose of Goldin’s photography was to record real life. She writes, “I don’t select people in order to photograph them; I photograph directly from my life. These pictures come out of relationships, not observation” (Goldin6). “[The camera] enables me to remember” (6). Only the specific person of Nan Goldin could make these images. As an artifact of her memory, they

² A political element can still exist in personal documentary if that is part of the photographer’s personal vision. Frank’s work, for instance, comments on the McCarthy era.

were intrinsically hers and wholly connected to her lived experience. However, the photographs are more than just a record. Through these behind-the-scenes images of drag queens and transgender people, Goldin “demands that her viewers deal with the genuine, often bewildering, complexity of sexual desire and practice” (Goldin 144). She gave her transgendered subjects a space in which they could be seen in the way that they desire.

Goldin’s insider position, or privileged observer status, is clear in her intimate images of drag queens, for example. The drag queens allowed her to record them backstage, in the process of becoming. According to Abigail Solomon-Godaeau, though, these photographs still run the risk of voyeurism. The photographer cannot control the viewer’s reaction to the photographs. “The risk is that the subject—irrespective of the photographer’s intent— becomes object and spectacle. Where the subjects are in reality so often victimized, marginalized, discriminated against, or even physically attacked—as is the case with drag queens—the political and ethical terms of their representation are inseparable”(55). Goldin seems to view her work as a way to move the position of drag queen from the margins of society to the center. This is key to redeeming the images from mere voyeurism, for Rosler says, “Without a sense of the social, only the personal remains, and a look at the merely personal is an invitation to voyeurism” (Rosler 229). Social documentary gives the viewer a context in which to view the image, a place in which to stand, but personal documentary invites the viewer to enter the frame with the photographer.

Bea Nettles also made work that was personal and autobiographical using family snapshots. With the birth of her children, she says, “my perspective changed forever” (Kogan). While her work had previously been narrative in nature and incorporated elements of “women’s work” like sewing, the narrative now revolved around her daughter and her experiences of

motherhood. Like other women photographers of her time, Nettles' work begins to show a feminist consciousness, reawakened by writings such as Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Images moved from the personal to the political realm, not because the image changed, but because of the growing awareness of how an image functions (Rosenblum 259). This feminist consciousness elevated not only the domestic arts like sewing and photo album keeping, but also motherhood and childcare.

Nettles was not simply documenting her daughter's life, though that was part of it. Rather, she was privileging the mother/daughter relationship and revealing the experience from which she drew in order to create the image. The images in this series go beyond traditional documentary in that they are not just a witness to her daughter's life, but a way of "investigating the problems of childhood, parenting, and being a woman." This element of investigating rather than claiming a truth is also evident in Nan Goldin's images of drag queens in the process of transforming. Being caught, but by their own volition, in half drag permits the viewer to see beyond the surface to the creation of the final, polished queen. The investigation does not begin or end with the print, but continues as the piece is viewed and reviewed.

1.4 The Space Between

A further shift happens with Martha Rosler's work, which moved the subject outside of the actual image, leaving a space there for the viewer to fill. She demonstrated this in *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* from 1974-1975. The Bowery was a neighborhood frequented by documentary photographers in search of scenes of poverty and alcoholism. Rosler wanted to systematically record every detail of the street itself in a documentary way, without including any of the destitute people who were so often

photographed. Rosler arranged these pictures in a grid, paired with text which Rosler had gathered from spoken and written sources describing drunken people. The words begin as “a series of metaphorical, adjectival terms” and finish with “outdated and contemporary noun forms” (Blazwich 4). This post-conceptual equalization of text and image functioned to reclaim documentary and create an alternate photographic aesthetic that did not value the single photographic image, but critiqued both documentary and conceptualism (Buchloch).

The coming together of visual and linguistic representations in Rosler’s work deauthors the image and gives the viewer the job of finishing the piece. If these two systems are inadequate, then our varied responses to the piece might be adequate systems in creating meaning (Alberro). By re-representing the Bowery not through images of the homeless and drunkards who populated it, but through words and images of places, and by inviting the viewer to take up the discourse for which these systems of representation are inadequate, Rosler advocates for transformation. She defends documentary photography, saying, “Documentary’s best course, it seems to me, is to provide a balance between observing the situation of others and expressing one’s own point of view—which ought to include some form of analytic framework identifying social causes and proposing remedies”(Rosler 240). Having created a work that pushes her out of the picture, we find her on the outside, with her subject and the viewer, paralleling the place of her art piece outside of the category of traditional documentary photography.

1.5 Documentary as Art

Another change that began around the time of the shifts in photographers’ positions was the site of viewing for documentary. Formerly magazines like *LOOK* and *Life* published

documentary essays. When these magazines ceased publication, photographers had to look for different venues. Diane Arbus was at the forefront of this transition. She developed her own projects, largely photographing for herself, with her own vision, and her work was displayed in a museum setting. While she did shoot for magazines, she had already begun to move beyond them as the only forum for documentary (Goldberg and Silberman 169). Arbus, like other photographers seeking publication, developed book projects as well. Likewise, Rosler created *The Bowery* specifically for the gallery, and not for a magazine.

With documentary photography appearing on gallery and museum walls, the line between document and art began to blur. In addition, in the 1960s and 1970s, artists who did not identify as photographers began to incorporate photography into their work. Jeff Wall says of three such artists, Robert Smithson, Ed Ruscha, and Dan Graham, “I saw their photography as emerging from a confrontation with the canons of the documentary tradition, a confrontation that suggested some new directions” (173). Photography was not seen as a separate art form from other media, and High and Low designations were discarded. As feminist artists in the 1970s showed, the traditional women’s tasks of weaving, embroidery, and sewing, all useful crafts, are art practices and should be honored as such. Photography, too, was able to move from the merely practical document or tool of the advertiser to the artistic arena, both as document and as conceptual work.

A recent contributor to the continuing shifts of documentary photography is the internet, which has created a new venue for publication similar to magazines, though not always of editorial quality. Internet publication ranges from well-respected magazines to personal web pages. Changing camera technology has also brought the rise of the citizen documentary photographer. Different than photojournalists or documentary photographers from outside the

subject community, these photographers are part of the community. Their work shows the very biased viewpoint of the insider who is unable to create critical distance because of proximity to the subject. Insider photographers can go deep into the issue, but are often limited by their cultural interpretations. An outsider, while at a disadvantage in terms of understanding the issue deeply, has the advantage of being able to show both sides. While on the one hand, there is the authority of the insider, on the other there is a lack of critical distance and the possibility of manipulation for the insider's own ends. The viewer and photographer relationship becomes important in the assignment of meaning to the images since the work is based on the authority of personal experience. If the viewer does not accept the photographer's authority, meaning cannot be validated.

1.6 Theories of Post-documentary Photography

What have these shifts, from social to personal, outsider to insider, and document to art created? Can photography still be called documentary? Or has it become post-documentary? The term post-documentary has been used since the late twentieth century to describe various shifts in content, concept, and perspective, but with little agreement as to its meaning.

In the title of the article "Post-Documentary, Post-Photography?" Rosler introduces the term post-documentary, but then argues that despite the lack of objectivity in documentary photography and the "great pressure on the institutionalized methodologies of documentary" making interpretation "a field of perpetual contestation," we are not past the need for documentary (Rosler 230; 240). Instead, Rosler determines that we still need documentary photography, albeit not in a way that creates the "other" or victims, but instead interrogates the institutions and power structures that create imbalances and suffering. She calls for this new

documentary in her essay “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)” and then demonstrates that kind of documentary with *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, as described above. Rather than showing the victims of a social problem, she chooses to focus on the social institutions that perpetuate these problems. This mitigates the problem of voyeurism that documentary photography can create and also recognizes the deeper issues underlying social problems, whereas victim photography may serve more to distract than to offer a solution.³

Her description, however, is only partially helpful. What is central is the change in the photographer’s position and the viewer’s reception of the image. The photograph is no longer “communicating *conclusions* about facts” because of the viewer’s cultural shift (Garner 49). The onus of meaning is no longer on the commissioning publication or government, or even the photographer, but on the viewer, the subject, and the photographer acting together. The image does not communicate facts, but possibilities. The viewer shifts from receiver to co-creator of meaning, and the photographer becomes protagonist rather than mere observer.⁴

1.7 Post-documentary Culture

In order to reflect this shift in the locus of meaning creation, I propose using the term “post-documentary culture” in order to describe contemporary work that incorporates some aspect of the photograph as record. This term is new to still photography. Paul Graham says that

³ Another term for this approach is New Documentary.

⁴This idea of shift from observer to protagonist comes from a description for a class at the International Center for Photography called “The Post-Documentary Project: From Observer to Protagonist” which was to be taught Spring 2014 by Manal Abu-Shaheen, but which was canceled.

“we are clearly in a 'Post Documentary' photographic world now,” which begins to hint at this transformation, but the term itself comes from an article by John Corner about reality television, in which he argues the series “*Big Brother*, which purports to be reality television but blurs fact and fiction, can only be understood when it is viewed within the 'post-documentary' culture of television” (“The Unreasonable”; “Performing”).⁵ I am expanding this discussion to look at photographic images in the context of the broader post-documentary culture in which we live, created by television, the internet, and print media.⁶

There are four aspects to defining images in this way: the first relates to the viewer’s reception of the work from a post-documentary standpoint and the meaning that is created when the viewer engages with the image; the second pertains to the artist creating work within that culture; the third aspect is the participation of the subject; finally, the site of engagement with the image cannot be excluded from meaning creation.

1.8 The Viewer’s Engagement

The post-documentary cultural shift parallels the shifts in documentary described earlier in this chapter. One contributor to the cultural shift was the glut of images and a growing awareness of how they could be manipulated to affect the viewer. Artists in the 1970s and 1980s referenced this by appropriating images and demanding the viewer re-read them in their new

⁵ He adds that “We also need to note how, within that culture, the legacy of documentary is still at work, albeit in partial and revised form,” which is also important to still photography.

⁶ Rosler suggests that computer manipulation may have already pushed out both photograph and photographer, creating a post-photographic moment in “Post-Documentary, Post-Photography?” (240).

context. Sherry Levine is one such artist. She photographed Walker Evans's familiar photographs of depression-era families and presented them, with no changes, as her work. They were numbered and untitled, but with the subtitle *After Walker Evans* in parentheses. Levine purposefully chose a well-known artist to appropriate, describing her action and the "after" phrase of the subtitle as being part of the artistic tradition of newcomers imitating accomplished artists (Siegal). Howard Singerman compares an image from *After Walker Evans* with the image by Evans from which it was made, and finds that the difference between the two images lies not in the images themselves, but the space between them— a kind of negative perception created by their likeness. The other difference is in how we as informed viewers look at the pictures themselves. Take, for example, the well-known picture of Allie Mae Burroughs, a dark-haired woman leaning against a paint-bare clapboard house. Her face is serious, her lips closed in a straight line, and she looks directly at the viewer. In the Walker Evans picture, we see the woman. We see a pictorial document of a woman who existed in the past. In Levine's copy of the picture we do not see the woman, but the physical object of a photograph as well as Walker Evans and the tradition of photographic documentary. Levine's photographs do not hold the same social meaning as Evans's photographs, but they carry the political meaning of photographs as images and commodities, and are documents of this (Singerman).⁷

⁷ Linda Hutcheon would label Levine's using Evan's well-known photographs in a "new and ironic context" a typical form of "postmodern photographic complicitous critique," which reveals "the interests in which they operate and the power they wield" (55).

The *After Walker Evans* images are clear examples of post-documentary culture because the two images together— the Evans and the Levine⁸ --look identical, and the uninformed observer would not know there was any difference. So, what is the difference? The image itself has not changed, so we cannot say it is a post-documentary *image*. What has changed is the viewer, who becomes informed, in part, because the work is presented as art, changing the perspective from which the viewer regards the image. Through informing the viewer, Levine created a synthetic post-documentary culture specific to her piece. This example clearly shows us that the viewer and her knowledge are fundamental in creating meaning.

A further complication in the layer of meaning with Levine's work is that we are looking at both images from a perspective further along in time and further into the era of post-documentary culture than when Levine created the work. Indeed, one of the benefits of this new term is that it recognizes that we have no choice but to view images from our perspective, using our worldview. Photographs themselves do not become post-documentary. They still exist as documentary photographs, but we as part of a post-documentary culture view them in a different light. Thus, in order to understand this way of looking at images, we must accept that meaning creation is not sited in the image but in the context of the viewing.

This way of viewing the world is similar to what Rosler proposes, but she places the responsibility for meaning creation on the photographer. However, it is not solely the job of the photographer to create meaning. Viewers perceive the document from a post-documentary standpoint, which means one needs to interrogate not the image in the photograph, but the

⁸and even the Michael Mandiberg work "After Sherrie Levine" at <http://www.aftersherrielevine.com>

institutions behind it, which create the situations that the image documents. Even if photographers are not photographing in the way that Rosler proposes, when we as audience view the photograph from a post-documentary standpoint, with post-documentary eyes, then we accomplish what Martha Rosler asked us to do, which is not to create victim photography, but to look beyond at the institutions which victimize.

Literary theory of the past forty years provides an approach to understand the theory behind post-documentary culture. In his essay “The Death of the Author,” Roland Barthes opens up the space for Reader Response Criticism, which locates meaning in the reader’s experience with the text rather than with the author’s experience. As Barthes says, “the modern *scriptor* is born *at the same time* as his text; he is not furnished with a being which precedes or exceeds the writing, he is not the subject of which his book would be the predicate; there is not time other than that of the speech-act, and every text is written eternally *here and now*” (57). This idea, extrapolated to a reading of photographic images, results in Viewer Response Criticism. The link between writing and photography is further reinforced when Barthes goes on to say that the author knows that what he is using is a “ready-made lexicon” (58). The indexical quality of the photographic image, that the camera captures what physically exists in front of it, means that photography, too, has a “readymade” element.⁹¹⁰

⁹ Krauss credits the artist Duchamp with identifying the link between the photograph and the index in her essay “Notes on the Index.”

¹⁰ We must acknowledge that the camera does not always capture only what the photographer views, and too, the image can be manipulated to include that which was not there in the original viewfinder. However, the camera as a tool was made to record or document.

While Reader Response Criticism was important to removing the overpowering focus on the author and form of the text, it is not a complete theory due to the exclusion of the author. The author's/photographer's experience must influence the text/image, but the author/photographer is no longer central to the meaning. A more complete theory of meaning creation would be Louise M. Rosenblatt's Transactional Literary Theory, in which both the author and the reader contribute. Once the book leaves the author's hands, it "is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work- sometimes, even, a literary work of art" (Rosenblatt). In a post-documentary culture, the creation of meaning in a photographic work requires dialogue between the viewer, the photographer, and the subject in just such a transactional way.¹¹ John Hilliard puts it well when he describes Marshall McLuhan's use of the term "act of completion" as "to describe the spectator's engagement with a work of art, where their own effort at unraveling leads to a more profound appreciation or understanding than if the encounter was effortless. The creator deliberately leaves some space in which the viewer can 'complete' the work" (qtd. in Bradshaw). This space acknowledges the viewer's participation in the creation of meaning, but is not a final moment; the "act of completion" happens with each new encounter.

Rosenblatt describes two ways a reader approaches the text. Either he or she does an efferent reading of the text in which she or he looks for information, or he or she approaches it from an aesthetic angle. In this kind of reading, his or her "*attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text*" (50). Photographs can also

¹¹ Fred Ritchin likens the breakdown in the boundary between photographer and viewer to the deconstructionist theory of literature where the author and reader work together to create meaning in a "collaborative coauthoring." However, I do not agree that this is deconstructionism. Rather, he is describing Transactional Literary Theory (11).

be approached in two ways— as document or as art. With an efferent reading of the text, the image functions as a document providing information. When the viewer experiences the image aesthetically or emotionally, he or she enters into a dialogue with the subject and the creator/photographer.

The moment in which the viewer engages with the photograph becomes a “transactional moment” in which meaning is created. Each new engagement creates a new transactional moment, with newly created meaning. The decisive moment referenced by Cartier-Bresson has become the moment in which the viewer encounters the image, not that at which the shutter is released. This new definition of the moment is especially apt because in the digital age, photographic images are not always created in a single instant, but are often created through editing and combining multiple images into one, and are viewed in a multi-media context online, in print, and in exhibition with other images, text, and sound.

Garner explains the decisive moment as a style of spontaneous witness in which “the new photographers practiced authentic witness to real moments and ‘intervened as little as possible.’ The viewer’s faith was maintained” (10). The direct connection between the photographer and the time and place of the photograph allow the viewer to accept the photograph as authentic. A consequence of the informed viewing of post-modern culture is the breakdown of the factual contract between photographer and viewer due to the increased awareness of image manipulation and bias, and the ability to easily alter images using Photoshop and other digital tools. What the document says is not perceived as “truth” by the viewer, but as opinion. The problem with Viewer Response Criticism is that the viewer is alone in creating meaning. With Transactional Photographic Theory (the visual equivalent of Transactional Literary Theory), the identity and

experiences of the photographer contribute to the creation of meaning, as is the case with citizen journalists who photograph political events from the center of the action. Those viewers who agree with the politics of the photographer will read the images with one meaning; those on the other side will read it with another.¹² We can look again to Bea Nettles's and Nan Goldin's work to understand how the identity of the photographer contributes meaning to the image. Knowing that Nettles is the mother of the girl in the images and that Goldin is a friend to the transgender people she is photographing results in a different reading than if the photographer is someone disengaged from the subject of the photograph.

To some extent, social documentary photography has always looked ahead from the moment of creation to a future moment of meaning creation. When Lewis Hine created images of child labor, or Dorothea Lange photographed migrant labor camps, and even when Martha Rosler photographed the Bowery, they did so not with the intention of simply documenting a moment, but looking forward to when the viewer would engage with the image and be moved to effect social change.

1.9 The Artist's Role

Importantly, the viewer is not the sole participant in a post-documentary culture. The photographer also plays a role. Literature again provides a stepping-off point from which to look at photography. The genre of Creative Nonfiction describes “the use of literary craft, the techniques fiction writers, playwrights, and poets employ to present nonfiction—factually

¹² . Ritchin points out that the authority of the citizen journalist is reinforced by other images from the same event. Images cannot be read in isolation, but are an accumulation of information from a variety of sources.

accurate prose about real people and events—in a compelling, vivid, dramatic manner” (Gutkind). Photographers who use elements of art photography to document reality are employing “Creative Documentary.” As Ritchin describes it, “many documentary and journalistic photographers departed from the mythic status of the photographic document as ‘fact’ to explore reality as a much more contested and nuanced phenomenon- an implicit critique of traditional documentary function” (Ritchin 17).¹³ Fictional images created in the documentary style can also contain truth. Walker Evans, in an interview in 1971, acknowledged, “The psychological truth in the relation between the documentary and the fictional is suggested” (“Oral History”). Presenting these truths in a fictional manner creates a new site for meaning creation.

One form of Creative Documentary is staging or creating the moment to be documented, making it both real and fictional. The artist Sophie Calle creates fabricated pieces with an element of truth. The artificiality arises from her deliberate creation of the story. The only real element is the image itself. For *Detective (1980)*, she had her mother hire a detective to tail her. She then combined the written report and the photographs taken by the detective, with her own written record of events to show the various perspectives involved in creating truth.

Jeff Wall uses a form of mock documentary, in which he photographs staged events that did not happen in real life. Though the events are scripted, the documentary format allows the viewer to perceive them as reality and then to interrogate the truth behind the fiction. For

¹³ Coming from the field of journalism, Ritchin uses the term “New Photo-journalism,” comparing this to “New Journalism,” in which reporters use novel writing techniques in their writing. Since I am looking at documentary photography as a whole, not just journalism, I prefer the term Creative Documentary.

example, in *The Volunteer*, he hires an actor to mop the floor. He photographs this event for several weeks before creating this piece, which looks like an unplanned, split-second capture of a lived moment. It is a lived moment, but only because Wall ordained that it should be so (Blessing 14).

Jennifer Karady also photographs staged performances. In her pieces, soldiers reenact parts of traumatic events in a new scenario. The images show the contrast between the realities of conflict zones and safety. In *Former Sergeant Jeff Gramlich, U.S. Marine Corps Infantry, 3/6 Lima Company, veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, with parents, Eileen and Larry, and sister, Jackie; Buffalo, NY*, we see a soldier in combat fatigues peeking out of a second story bedroom window at his family standing on the lawn below. The room is fortified with sandbags and a used weapon stands ready for combat (Ritchin 86). The bedroom set is staged, but reflects a reality of the soldier's life while deployed and that reality's effect on his psyche. Jennifer Karady's work with soldiers goes deeper than just a collaboration to create the photograph, and is meant to function as therapy for the soldiers and to allow them a method of sharing their experiences with their families.

In the series *Ausencias (Absences)*, Gustavo German stages events mimicking earlier photographs. The original photograph is then paired with German's image in the exhibit. In *Omar Darío Amestoy, Mario Alfredo Amestoy, 1975*, two young men leap down a grassy slope. In the paired image, *Mario Alfredo Amestoy, 2006*, an older version of one of the men leaps down the same hill alone. The other man was "disappeared" in Argentina's Dirty War. The photographer and survivors work together in creating these images to tell the story of loss engendered by the Argentine government's war against political dissidents (Ritchin 96, 129).

Because there were no graves, no bodies, and no evidence of this war, artists have had to reach beyond traditional forms of documenting the governmental abuse. By highlighting the relationships of the people in the original photographs, the missing people in the reenacted images are made more real to the viewer.

Digital collage and image manipulation play a major role in post-documentary culture image creation. The ability to stitch and blend elements of different photographs together seamlessly allows photographers to document imaginary events, and often condense into one image evidence of movement and the passage of time. This form of creative photography reveals the possibilities for photographers in this new age: “to be able to knowingly shape the subjects that intrigue them, conscious of the heritage of the imagery into which they are entering, and to see the contemporary world through the pictures we already know” (Cotton 215). Knowledge of what came before is crucial to a creation of a present-fabricated reality.

Artists fabricate these images using various techniques. One of these is combining several photographs using software. For example, in *Untitled (2002)*, Evelyn Latteier shows a woman sitting on a couch surrounded by ten dogs in various positions. Further inspection reveals that only two dogs are pictured. A black dog looks at the viewer from a chair to the side, sits on the woman’s lap, perches on the end of the sofa, and sits looking up at a white poodle on a chair. The white poodle stands on the sofa next to the woman, crouches on the floor, disappears into the frame on the side, walks towards the back of the room on the other side, sits down, looks at the black dog perching on the sofa arm, and sits on the chair in the back of the room. All of this is compressed into one still image through digital technology, creating an image more like a painting than a film-based photograph (Lipkin 96). H. Jennings Sheffield also combines

photographs shot in the same place at different times together, but her photographs result in abstract images, composed of slices taken from each photograph and stitched back together using digital software. Each strip gives a glimpse into a working mother's day with its repetitions and variations. The full piece mimics the fractured nature of the maternal identity (Sheffield). Sheffield references video and stop motion photography rather than painting or traditional photography.

Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie, of the Seminole/Muscogee/Diné tribes, combines images to create a more traditional collage effect. *Dad*, from her 2003 series "Portraits Against Amnesia," demonstrates the duality of the Native experience. This piece begins from a photograph of her father in his U.S. military uniform. Behind him are examples of his artwork, *The Mule Rider*, referencing an oft-told childhood tale, and a Diné hogan, the image with which he signed many early paintings (Passalacqua). This combination of elements allows the artist and viewer to explore the complications of a hybrid identity by refusing to assign one fixed identity to her father. Giving authority to this viewpoint is Tsinnahjinnie's status as insider. As she puts it, "No longer is the camera held by an outsider looking in, the camera is held with brown hands opening familiar worlds" (Passalacqua). Tsinnahjinnie's embrace of the digital process allows her to transcend the limitations of straightforward documentary photography to create a layered and complex version of reality more in keeping with her experiences of identity.

1.10 The Subject's Agency

The third aspect that has changed in a post-documentary culture is the participation of the subject in the work. An increasing awareness of the power of photography and its ability to be manipulated affects how the subject reacts to the camera and photographer. A street protestor

might shield his face for an unknown photographer, but pose for a citizen journalist friend. Very young children demonstrate awareness by saying “cheese” or striking a pose that a model in a print advertisement might make. In addition, they often run to the photographer demanding to see the picture immediately on the back of the camera.

When the photographer has insider status, the trust between photographer and subject can create a more personal and respectful image. We see this in Nan Goldin’s work as well as that of Bea Nettles. Sally Mann’s documentation of her children growing up is another example. Mann uses a large format camera, which doesn’t allow for spontaneous snapshots.¹⁴ Instead, with her children’s cooperation, she creates beautiful and sometimes disturbing black and white images. Family members are often the subject of photographs, since their relationship to the photographer creates an atmosphere of trust, and they agree to pose deliberately for the photographer, such as in Tina Barney’s long-term project depicting her family in what she describes as being “akin to an anthropological survey” (Cotton 159). In *Philip and Philip, 1996*, the older Philip stands, arms hanging loosely at his side, facing the camera, while the younger, slightly blurry Philip perches on the sofa, legs crossed, gazing to the side. Lastly, the point of interaction, or site of display of the images, must be considered in the context of post-documentary culture. Photographs are no longer limited to the pages of magazines and newspapers or the family album. As photographs became part of the mainstream art world and began to grace gallery walls, the value of the photographic print overshadowed the value of the photograph as information. According to Ritchin, this state of affairs still holds true (10).

¹⁴ Usually documentary photographers follow the latest technology of the time in order to capture more and more precise seconds.

However, with the switch from analog to digital and the rise of the internet as a site for displaying images, the value of the image as information may trump the value of the print, at least in terms of impact on the viewer. Although “the ephemeral and easily malleable online photograph can be increasingly considered an expression of a particular point of view,” the fact that it is so readily available to viewers and their increasingly sophisticated abilities to read it, gives a value that cannot be measured in a dollar amount (Ritchin).

1.11 The Site of Engagement

The internet is now the main site of engagement between viewer, photographer, and image/subject. While reputable online venues such as galleries and journals offer a professional level of exposure, the majority of images are uploaded more informally. Along with opportunities to self-publish come the responsibility to edit and think critically of one’s own work, and to consider the implications of publishing in a forum such as Facebook or a blog, which, despite their apparent superficiality, are very permanent. A photographer cannot control an image once it has been published to the web. Others can appropriate it, revise it, and use it for purposes that the photographer and subject never intended.

The internet is not the only site of engagement, however. Artists in the 1980s such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer took their work out of the gallery and embraced the possibilities of the public space of the billboard. More recently, Susan Meiselas used photographs that she had taken during the uprising against the Somoza regime in Nicaragua in 1978 and installed them as large murals in the streets of Nicaragua in 2004, in a project entitled “Reframing History” (Ritchin 88). This project was in collaboration with local communities to remember their collective history and educate young people about the country’s past. Also in

collaboration with local communities, the activist artist JR has created enormous prints in weather tight material to display on rooftops in slums. These photographs function as both roof and portrait, albeit viewable only from above- either on a higher building or mountain, or from the air. Just this year, an artists' collective in Pakistan displayed a large-scale photograph of an orphaned child to protest and prevent drone attacks on the community. The specific intent of this piece, and of JR's work, is to engage with those who view the community from a distance, either through satellite images or from airplanes, and provoke a sympathetic response to the people who live there (Mackey).

Finally, the back of the camera itself becomes a site for viewing the photograph. This creates an immediate site of meaning creation, a "transactional moment," where the subject becomes viewer and engages with the image and photographer. The subject may express approval of the image or demand that it be deleted and another photograph taken in its stead. It also allows the photographer to direct the subject more efficiently in subsequent shots, since the subject is able to clearly see the image that the photographer is trying to make. The subject of the image becomes a more active agent in the creation of the work and its meaning by participating at the moment of creation.

These things together have created a new literacy in terms of understanding the photographic image. In a post-documentary culture, meaning is not fixed, but is created anew with each fresh viewing. Post-documentary culture affects everyone, and changes subtly but inexorably, allowing for new interpretations to surface while recognizing that these interpretations are created at the intersection of photographer, subject, and viewer. No longer can

we say, “This is what this picture means.” Instead, we can only add our interpretation of the image to the ever-increasing possibilities of interpretation.

CHAPTER 2

WRITING MATERNAL IDENTITY

Mother is a complicated word that evokes conflicting images, both positive and negative. For some, a mother is defined in terms of a biological or legal connection. For others, a mother is defined relationally. The many images corresponding to the term *mother* arise from the diversity of the women who live this role and their varied experiences. From these experiences of mothering is birthed a feminism that is maternal in nature. This chapter draws on the theories of a diverse group of writers from the fields of psychology, economics, law, social sciences, and literary studies, to present a concept of maternal feminism based on women's ways of speaking, thinking, and acting. This feminism recognizes motherhood as an institution set up by patriarchal societal norms, which often elevates mothers to an imprisoning pedestal from which no practical work can be accomplished. In order to liberate mothers from the limitations imposed by the institution, the word *mother* is used as an active verb, a revolutionary act through which women claim the right to create their own identities, multiple and intersectional, and based on lived experience, not imposed by societal expectations.

The theories from which maternal feminism arose are not perfect and have gone through various metamorphoses over the last half century since their development. Many of them came out of the second wave of feminism which began in the 1960s, which critics rightly claim was centered around privileged, white, middle-class women from developed countries while ignoring the differing experiences of women of color, poor women, lesbian women, transgender women, and other women who did not fit the experiences of those of the dominant culture. However, it is

still worthwhile to examine how women were beginning to theorize and write in ways that challenged male-dominated theories.

One theorist of maternal nature is psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow, who examines how motherhood functions as a “central and constituting element in the social organization and reproduction of motherhood” (7) in her book, *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Two theories of feminism undergird her argument: first, that the “sex-gender system” is a male dominated social product, which self-perpetuates. Second, “women’s mothering is a central and defining feature of the social organization of gender and is implicated in the construction and reproduction of male dominance” (9). Mothering situates women in the domestic sphere, which is dominated and defined by the public sphere, long considered the realm of men. Chodorow defines being a mother as not just giving birth, but “being a person who socializes and nurtures. It is being a primary parent or caretaker” (11). She goes on to argue against ascribing motherhood to women as socially, psychologically, or biologically natural. Instead, psychoanalysis allows for a “systemic, structural account of socialization and social reproduction” that can explain how mothers reproduce the gendered organization of society (39). In Chodorow’s “Psychoanalytic Story,” the reproduction of motherhood begins with the mother-infant relationship, which produces three results: “the basic psychological stance for parenting is founded;” a memory of intimacy is created which is then longed for; and expectations of women as mothers are formed (57). A child acquires his or her sense of self, of identity, in this relationship with his or her mother, and this relationship, in turn, affects all of his or her other relationships. Physical and psychological maturation lead to differing developments for boys and girls in their relationships with their mothers and in forming their identities. Girls are taught to interact relationally with

others in a way that boys are not, and they learn that having a child is a way in which a woman can find completion in her romantic relationship. Having a child also allows her to relive the childhood intimacy created by her own mother. “Because women are themselves mothered by women, they grow up with the relational capacities and needs, and psychological definition of self-in-relationship, which commits them to mothering. Men, because they are mothered by women, do not. Women mother daughters who, when they become women, mother” (209). The problem with this cycle of reproduction is that maintaining sexual division of labor means maintaining sexual inequality and the power of men. Chodorow does recognize that her explanation is problematic in that not all women mother, and men have the ability to mother, but the primary pattern of parenting is not one of equality because women do more of the nurturing, thus fulfilling expectations that are instilled in them from birth.

According to Carol Gilligan, the concern women have for others is evident not just in their behavior, but also in the way men and women speak. In examining male and female behaviors from a psychological perspective, Gilligan’s book, *In a Different Voice*, claims that men speak as though they are not connected to women, but women speak from a sense of connectedness.

Women want to be in relationship with others (xiii). This desire for connectedness sets women apart in communication models established by men. “It was concern about relationship that made women’s voices sound ‘different’ within a world that was preoccupied with separation and obsessed with creating and maintaining boundaries between people” (xvi). Gilligan, however, does not view the difference between how men and women speak as a problem that needs changing, but simply a marker of difference which is being proudly claimed by women writers, especially those coming out of an African-American oral/aural tradition based on “searing and

complex experiences of difference.” These leaders demonstrate “how to give voice to difference in a way that recasts our discussion of relationship and telling of truth” (xviii). Giving voice to experiences and forging connections to other women has the potential to change the subservient status women hold in society.

Gilligan describes herself as a listener, and a central assumption of her research is “that the way people talk about their lives is of significance, that the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act” (2). This is one reason we should write and read narratives and writings by women about motherhood. These stories allow us to understand how women perceive the world and the voices with which they speak their experiences. Furthermore, Gilligan notes the danger of men speaking for women is that: “many women have a hard time distinguishing the created or socially constructed feminine voice from a voice which they hear as their own” and giving up their voice means to relinquish their ability to make choices and relationships (xvii). In telling their own stories they are able to construct their true voice. Therefore, it is all the more necessary that we read women’s own accounts of their lives, whether real or fictionalized, rather than ceding the task of telling stories to men.

Philosopher Sara Ruddick agrees with Gilligan that speaking changes the speaker. Because they have thus far not been given adequate space, maternal voices are still developing and finding the language with which to share their knowledge (40). However, it is not just male voices that dominate, but also male thought processes. Ruddick found that male ways of thinking excluded her, and she began to investigate what a woman’s way of thinking, shaped by practice, would look like. In her book, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, she focuses on

the practice of mothering as one that “is central to many women’s lives” and influential on the lives of many more women as daughters, sisters, and friends of mothers. She found that maternal thinking is not an isolated, cerebral activity, but one that occurs in relationships with other-mothers. For Ruddick, being a mother is a choice “to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantial part of one’s working life” (17).¹⁵ Further, to be a mother means to “be committed to meeting these demands [of *preservation, growth, and social acceptability*] by works of preservative love, nurturance, and training” (17). Ruddick views the cognitive processes required to properly perform these tasks as equal to those of a scientist, a critic, or a historian, and acknowledges how the cognitive processes inherent to each task can overlap. That is, being a mother does not exclude a woman from other kinds of thinking. Notably, Ruddick recognizes the context from which she is speaking as a heterosexual birth mother in North America. She acknowledges the differing experiences of mothers, while making claim to universality based on meeting the demands of children. “To claim a maternal identity is not to make an empirical generalization but to engage in a political act,” and this political act can go beyond mothering one’s own children and extend to “a commitment of protect the lives of ‘other’ children, to resist on behalf of *children* assaults on body or spirit that violate the promise of birth” (56, 57). From the personal sense of motherhood, then, comes a broader way of thinking about the world, which looks to create a nurturing, life-affirming space for all children. Maternal thinking, Ruddick says, leads to a politics of peace.

¹⁵ The idea that being a mother is a choice is problematic. While maternal feminism sees mothering as a choice, we also recognize that being a mother is not always a choice for women. There is a distinction between the mother who gives birth and does child care tasks and the action of mothering, though for many women they are indistinguishable.

Despite their historical importance as challenges to previous ways of thinking, Chodorow's, Gilligan's, and Ruddick's theories are incomplete, rooted as they are in a one-sided feminism that sees all women as equal, thus negating the variety of experiences by which women are informed. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins criticizes Chodorow and Gilligan for excluding black feminists by focusing on white and middle-class women. Black women in the U.S. have had different lived experiences, including a history of oppression. In order to oppose this oppression, they have produced social thought in the form of poetry, music, essays, and more, to "escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice" (9). Collins recognizes that oppressed women in other countries share a similar struggle against injustice and that their lived experiences inform their theories. "Social theories expressed by women emerging from these diverse groups typically do not arise from the rarefied atmosphere of their imaginations. Instead, social theories reflect women's efforts to come to terms with lived experiences within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and religion" (9). When personal experience informs theory, opportunity opens for the diversity of women's experiences to join in a collective dialogue.

Collins says that black women's theories of motherhood¹⁶ also need to arise out of their own diverse experiences, rather than be dictated by white, middle-class women, black men, or media stereotypes. One tradition central to black motherhood is the "other-mother," a person who shares responsibilities with the birth or legal mother as a mother substitute. This role arises

¹⁶ Collins uses the term motherhood, which I have defined as an institution defined by societal norms. Collins is demanding a new definition for Black Motherhood defined by the mothers themselves. For my own definitions I have chosen "mothering" to describe the maternal identity defined by mothers.

from the significance of women in the black community. Other-mothers are generally blood relatives, but can also extend to “fictive kin.” Neighbors also take responsibility for children, and girls are socialized to become other-mothers at a young age.¹⁷ Another tradition of black motherhood is the value of paid work because economic self-reliance is a vital part of mothering. A mother must be able to take care of her children without relying on a man for money. In addition, the activity of mothering is symbol of power in Black motherhood. Some of this power comes from being community other-mothers. The politics of these community other-mothers is not domination or control, but rather a very maternal one of transformation through relationship. Black motherhood activism is for the child, not the mother; it is aimed outward for the children who give her hope. “Mothering is an empowering experience for many African-American women,” one which fosters creativity and moves them into a new definition of self (198). Alice Walker makes a similar point in her essay “A Writer Because of, Not in Spite Of, My Children” from *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*. Walker describes Zora Neale Hurston as a writer who, instead of separating herself from her children to write, looks to them for inspiration and motivation, thus being empowered by her maternal experiences rather than limited by them. Motherhood becomes, not a glorified state, but a practical, enabling tool of creativity. Most mothers do not have a space and time apart from their families to create. Recognizing that creation can happen in the midst of this chaos encourages mother artists and affirms their personal choices. If having a “room of her own” is a requirement for a woman artist, then many mothers would be denied that designation.

¹⁷Collins ascribes this value of community-based child care to African traditions of polygamous families, where one man lives with a number of wives who share care for all of his children.

African writer Ketu H. Katrak brings a non-western viewpoint to theories of motherhood. In some countries of the world, motherhood is a woman's sole purpose and sole source of identity; it is her only way to gain even a measure of place in the system of patriarchy. (Indeed, a woman's very name can be lost to her in the process of becoming a mother. No longer "Cynthia," she becomes "Mother of Ali" or, if she has no son, "Mother of Leila.") If a woman is infertile, she has failed in life. "It is as if she is doubly exiled from her body- once as a woman, an outsider to patriarchal power, and next as an infertile woman who cannot fulfill her biological destiny" (210). Katrak analyzes motherhood as a socially and economically constructed institution "located within specific historic times and spaces" (210). Further, she points out that with colonialism came a shift in culture that lost women status and respect as mothers, sequestering women in a newly-formed, colonizer-imposed notion of motherhood as part of the private realm of the family, and further subordinating them. The task of postcolonial women writers has been to challenge the equation of womanhood and motherhood, and topple the myth of "glorious motherhood" that fails to recognize the difficulties of mothering and elevates mothers to inactive objects.

Meanwhile, Nancy Folbre takes the discussion further by writing about motherhood from an economic perspective. She titled her book *Invisible Heart* in response to Adam Smith's theory of the Invisible Hand, which references supply and demand in the marketplace. The problem with Smith's theory, she notes, is that it pertains to short-term relationships of production and exchange, and excludes the long-term relationship economies of caring labor. Folbre theorizes that society benefits from people helping each other rather than just pursuing their own interests. Our society has devalued the importance of reproduction and caring labor,

without which it cannot sustain or replenish its population. The mantle of responsibility for this necessary societal role has largely fallen on women, and they have then been unfairly excluded from pursuing individual success in order to care for children. Instead of this unjust divide, Folbre says, “the costs of fulfilling values of love, obligation, and reciprocity should be more evenly distributed. We should also develop better ways of monitoring and improving the quality of care services” (xx). This shared responsibility benefits society not just in equalizing gender roles, but also in prioritizing care services.

According to Folbre, because women are perceived as more nurturing than men, they are assigned the tasks of caring for others. By accepting the task of child care and the resultant exclusion from the public workforce, women become financially dependent on men, which gives fathers and husbands power and “social and cultural forms of control over women” (5). Thus, there is a higher cost to women in becoming mothers than to men in becoming fathers. While liberal feminists battle for equality and the right to take on masculine roles, social feminists fight for “rules that would require men to take on more traditionally feminine responsibilities both within the family and beyond” (17). The difficulty is that our culture defines care as a feminine practice. What we need to do, Folbre claims, is begin to show our value for family and caring labor by rewarding those activities in the same way we reward “professional” jobs.

Naomi Wolf sees this same loss of power and need for a restructuring of society through her own experiences of motherhood. She has felt the vulnerability of pregnancy, and notices among her new parent friends and acquaintances that women acquiesce to their husbands about things such as a child’s last name because of this susceptibility. Wolf says a woman must become almost a non-feminist in order to defend her unborn child against abandonment by the

father. In *Misconceptions*, Wolf begins to form the opinion that feminism should not try to conform to a “masculine definition of accomplishment” because it does not take into account women’s needs. Instead, she decides, “society must restructure itself radically to support babies and new parents, too. Stopping short of that mean[s] that no revolution deep enough ha[s] been achieved” (121). There is a problem, though, with lobbying for “better pay and conditions in order to do the work of motherhood *if good motherhood is itself emotionally defined as sacrifice*” (230). Here we see the circular reasoning reinforced by the expectations of motherhood as Chodorow explained. Wolf echoes Ruddick when she ascribes her own sense of motherhood as arriving when her daughter is born, and “under her loving insistence and relentless impish demand, the mother, ‘the good mother’ in me, was eventually safely born” (275). The birth of her child leads to her own birth as a mother, and from this personal experience her feminist theory, too, comes to maturity.

These are all theories and discussions about motherhood on a general level. Two themes that run through all these theorists’ works are the understanding that motherhood is a lived experience and that relationship is vital. With this emphasis on lived experience, it is appropriate to now look at specific descriptions of motherhood and mothering experiences found in narratives written by women over the last 300 years. The next section of this chapter will focus on six narratives written by women in order to examine experiences of mothering which span various backgrounds and historical periods. The first of these, *The Coquette*, by Hannah Foster, is an 18th century story depicting how motherhood without marriage leads to ruin. In *Incidence in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs demonstrates how a slave woman uses motherhood for protection and freedom, while also being rendered more vulnerable because of it. In the early

20th century novel *Herland*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman explores the fantasy of a society devoid of men, where giving birth is the ultimate honor and mothering is assigned to those who excel at it. *Tracks*, by Louise Erdrich, set also in the early 20th century, but written much later, describes life on a First Nation reservation where mothering is not the sole provenance of the woman who birthed the child, but is a communal activity. In Jan Clausen's 1985 novel *Sinking, Stealing*, the protagonist is an "other-mother," related not by blood, but by love, who nurtures the child of her deceased lover, the child's biological mother. *In the Name of Salome*, by Julia Alvarez examines mothering on a community and national level as a political act during the 20th century political upheavals of the Dominican Republic and Cuba. The final novel, *A Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, imagines a near future where a woman's womb belongs to the state. Together, these stories paint a picture of what mothering can be.

In the eighteenth century, seduction novels were popular didactic texts used to warn young women of the dangers of stepping out of moral bounds. Typically, the novels would describe the wooing of a young, innocent girl by a wicked man who pledges his love, seduces her, and then abandons her. Pregnant and alone, she dies in childbirth or soon after. *The Coquette* by Hannah Webster Foster, tells such a tale through a series of letters written by various characters, allowing the reader to see differing perspectives. The novel opens with Eliza Wharton on a visit to Mrs. Richman, a newly married cousin, to recover from the end of an engagement. There she meets two men that vie for her attention: Mr. Boyer, a clergyman, and Major Sanford, who, friends warn her, is a rake. Eliza spends time with both men, and Mr. Boyer wants to marry her. Sanford, however, wants a wife with money. Eliza's father is dead, and her mother lacks the will, the intelligence, or the power to protect her from Sanford. Eliza, despite her friends'

warnings, has a propensity to flirt, and this flirtation gives Sanford an opportunity to seduce her. He blames his behavior on this flirting in a letter to a friend, contrasting it with her friend Julia's "dignity of manners", which he says would keep him from seducing her (352). Both Boyer and Sanford marry other women, but Sanford keeps up his friendship with Eliza, and at some point, manages to seduce her. They are able to keep their affair relatively secret until she becomes pregnant. When this happens, she runs away out of shame, leaving letters for her mother and Julia, confessing all. They are not able to find her, and instead receive news that she and the baby have died from a story in a newspaper.

This novel teaches the characteristics of a "godmother" in several ways. First, it is evident that a mother alone lacks the power to control the behavior of her child, and also to protect her from a rake. Instead, Eliza's mother is portrayed as emotional and ineffective, though caring. When Eliza asks for her forgiveness, albeit without a full confession, it is freely given. "But however great your transgression, be assured of my forgiveness, my compassion, and my continued love!' Saying this, she threw her arms about her daughter's neck, and affectionately kissed her" (373). She does not inquire about the problem, nor does she offer any solution to her daughter. The implication is that if Eliza's father had been alive, this care would have been balanced with discipline and protection.

The second description we have of attitudes toward motherhood is Eliza's letter of congratulations to Mrs. Richman upon the birth of her daughter: "Hail happy babe! Ushered into the world by the best of mothers; entitled by birth-right to virtue and honor; defended by parental love, from the weakness of infancy and childhood, by guardian wisdom from the perils of youth, and by affluent independence from the griping hand of poverty, in more advanced life!" (175).

This celebration of a child born in wedlock contrasts sharply with her reaction to her own coming child:

The little innocent I bear, will quickly disclose its mother's shame! God Almighty grant it may not live as a monument to my guilt, and a partaker of infamy and sorrow, which is all I have to bequeath it! Should it be continued in life, it will never know the tenderness of a parent; and, perhaps, want and disgrace may be its wretched portion! The greatest consolation I can have, will be to carry it with me to a state of eternal rest; which, vile as I am, I hope to obtain through the infinite mercy of heaven, as revealed in the gospel of Christ (366).

The shame of bearing a child out of wedlock denies her any joy in the coming birth, and in her eyes, makes her unworthy of being a mother.

Sanford is punished by losing his wife and all his money. "Heaven seldom leaves injured innocence unavenged!" writes Julia (407). However, it is Eliza who must pay the greatest cost. She must die, because she cannot be reintegrated into her society, which shuns fallen women. Sanford can go to a new place and start a new life; a lone woman cannot, at least not without giving up all claim to virtue. It is not succumbing to Sanford's seduction that alienates her from society. Becoming pregnant, the unmistakable sign of sexual activity, damns her. Mrs. Richman, secure in marriage, can celebrate that evidence; Eliza cannot. We see no letters from Eliza after she flees her house. Through motherhood, she has broken her relationships and lost her place of discourse.

Clearly Eliza's story is a product of her time, when women were expected to maintain chastity until marriage, and the story warns readers not to make the choices Eliza has made. In

this way, the “good-mother” ideal is taught to young women. By maintaining their chastity, they will not risk pregnancy before marriage, and will avoid both the ignominy of a lost reputation and the horror of bad mothering. In addition, the mothers of young girls are also instructed, albeit subtly, that their own status of “good-mother” depends on keeping a watchful eye on their daughters.

In the nineteenth century, Harriet Jacobs would write a seduction tale with a difference. While *Incidence in the Life of a Slave Girl* shares the confessional tone of a seduction novel, with asides to the reader asking for understanding, the circumstances and the results are vastly changed. In a letter about the book, she describes herself as “a poor Slave Mother” asking for sympathy not to herself, but “to the thousands of Slave Mothers that are still in bondage... let it plead for their helpless children” (xiii). Although the book uses first person narrative and describes Harriet Jacob’s own experiences, the protagonist’s name is Linda.

Linda is the granddaughter of a freed black woman, but Linda belongs to a white woman and thus, by property laws, to the woman’s husband. As a young child, she is treated well, but in her early teens, the master begins to pursue her. She rebuffs him, but he continues to try to seduce her, offending her with vulgar words. When she falls in love with and wants to marry a free black man, her master refuses. In any case, she knows a husband would not be able to protect her, as she will continue to be a slave, and children born to slave women become slaves as well. Instead, when her master continues to pressure her, she has an affair with another white man, which is revealed when he impregnates her. She hopes that he will be able to buy her and her child. However, her master says- “You are my slave, and shall always be my slave. I will never sell you” (60).She has a second child by the same man.

Meanwhile, she lives with her grandmother because her mistress is suspicious and jealous of her. When her children are older, she is sent to work at the plantation. Hearing that her children are going to be sent there as well, to keep her in line, she runs away and spends seven years hiding in the attic of her grandmother's home. She does not want to leave her children, but cannot reveal herself to them, either. At some point, the father of the children manages to buy them by fooling her master. Finally, she escapes to the north. Her daughter later joins her, but her son is with his father/master, who has not freed him yet.

For Jacobs, becoming a mother is a way for her to escape becoming the mistress of her master. Unlike Eliza in *The Coquette*, she seems to actively choose motherhood, with agency in selecting the father, to escape her master. Perhaps there is a weary acceptance of her fate: she is bound to become the mistress of a white man, and the only way to maintain any power is to choose that man herself. She is light-skinned, almost passing as white. Part of her choice to have children fathered by a white man may be to make them whiter, thus allowing them to pass as white and escape life as a slave. She is very concerned that her children are being born into slavery; her priority is their freedom.

Motherhood identifies Linda as the sexual property of a man who is not her master. This takes her sexuality away from her master. However, the bonds of motherhood also tie her to the place of slavery.

I could have made my escape alone; but it was more for my helpless children than for myself that I longed for freedom. Though the boon would have been precious to me, above all price, I would not have taken it at the expense of leaving them in slavery. Every trial I endured every sacrifice I made for their sakes, drew them closer to my heart, and

gave me fresh courage to beat back the dark waves that rolled over me in a seemingly endless night of storms. (89-90)

Linda's children both bind her to slavery and give her the power to face her difficult circumstances. Beyond that, the children inspire her to want more and to look beyond slavery to the possibility of freedom, not for herself, but for them.

Her grandmother, who acts first as a mother to her, and then to her children while she is in hiding, does not want her to escape. When Linda says that the children's father might be able to "secure their freedom," her grandmother says, "don't trust too much to him. Stand by your own children, and suffer with them till death. Nobody respects a mother who forsakes her children; and if you leave them, you will never have a happy moment" (91). But she chooses to break with this advice – her grandmother has ties of loyalty to Linda's mistress- and at least partially leave. Indeed, when Linda is gone, her mistress says, "As for their mother, her ladyship will find out yet what she gets by running away. She hasn't so much feeling for her children as a cow for its calf. If she had, she would have come back long ago, to get them out of jail, and save all this expense and trouble" (102). By describing Linda as less than human, her mistress justifies her own actions that have led to Linda's plight. However, Linda triumphs over these words; she has not run away, but is living in secret the attic of their house, precisely because she cannot leave her children. She knows that if she could remain free, one day her children would be free, too.

Linda rejects her mistress's definition of a "good mother," which will only serve to enslave Linda again. Nor is she able to craft her own identity as mother, so she is trapped between her desire to remain close and her desire for freedom. Therefore, she can only observe

her children from the safety of the attic where she is hidden, unable to risk revealing herself to them until just before she escapes to the North.

At one point, her children, aunt, and brother are put in jail in the hopes that this will draw her back. The neighbor woman with whom she is hiding at this time does not understand why missing her children causes Linda so much grief. Linda says,

Good old soul! She had gone through the world childless. She had never had little ones to clasp their arms round her neck; she had never seen their soft eyes looking into hers; no sweet little voices had called her mother; she had never pressed her own infants to her heart, with the feeling that even in fetters was something to live for. How could she realize my feelings? (101-102)

This expression of emotion directly contradicts that lack of maternal feelings which her mistress ascribes to her, and also serves to inform the reader of Linda's strong emotional ties to her children.

Once free in the north, Linda has to work as a live-in domestic, other-mother to someone else's child. Her daughter is brought north, having been given to a family member by her father. Linda depends on the good will of the Hobbes family, trusting that they will treat her daughter well and send her to school. It is also through their kindness that Linda can gain access to her daughter. She requests that her daughter be allowed to come to New York to see an eye doctor.

It did not occur to me that there was anything improper in a mother's making such a request; but Mrs. Hobbs was very angry, and refused to let her go. Situated as I was, it was not politic to insist upon it. I made no complaint, but I longed to be entirely free to act a mother's part towards my children. (169)

Despite her deep desire to care for her daughter, because of her economic and legal circumstances as an escaped slave, and because of the power her daughter's father wields, Linda is restricted even from making decisions for her daughter from a distance.

Then Linda receives word that her master is going to come and return her to slavery. Her employer, Mrs. Bruce, suggests that Linda escape with her (Mrs. Bruce's) baby. This generosity deeply affects Linda, who has sacrificed much for her own children.

But how few mothers would have consented to have one of their own babes become a fugitive, for the sake of a poor, hunted nurse, on whom the legislators of the country had let loose the bloodhounds! When I spoke of the sacrifice she was making, in depriving herself of her dear baby, she replied, 'It is better for you to have baby with you, Linda; for if they get on your track, they will be obliged to bring the child to me; and then, if there is a possibility of saving you, you shall be saved. (194)

Mrs. Bruce acts out of maternal compassion. She is the "good-mother" mother whose love for her own child allows her to recognize Linda's need and provide for it.

Linda continues to face judgment on her mothering from others. When she tells a Northern sympathizer about her situation- her children and lack of husband- he warns her that others might not be understanding and may have contempt for her. She rejects this condemnation. "'God alone knows how I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me. If I am permitted to have my children, I intend to be a good mother, and to live in such a manner that people cannot treat me with contempt'" (161). The reader, who has closely followed Linda's suffering and seen how motherhood has both strengthened and constrained Linda, looks on her not with contempt, but with admiration for her strength.

Unlike Eliza's ostracization in *Coquette*, Linda is not cast out when she has the children because it is understood by her family that a slave woman doesn't have a choice. Furthermore, the children are not her downfall, but her only way of exerting power over her master. By choosing the lover with whom she will have children, Linda is able to avoid sex with her master. Though her grandmother is not happy with the choices Linda has made, she continues to help her. Finally, Linda does not die or pine away; instead, her children spur her hopes of a better future for them all. "Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. I and my children are now free!" (201). It is her children who have compelled Linda to fight for freedom and who have made her victory over slavery so sweet.

There are several parallels with Patricia Hill Collins' writing on black Feminist mothering in this story. First, there is the other-mother, in this case Linda's grandmother who mothers Linda and her children. Linda, too, takes on the role of other-mother, but as a paid caregiver in the North. Secondly, there is the community activist element of black mothering. Linda writes this book not only for herself, she says, but for all the slave mothers and their helpless children. Finally, it is Linda's motherhood that gives her the power and the impetus to make a change in her life. She doesn't escape to free herself, but to seek freedom for her children. She knows that if they are sent to the plantation to keep her in line, they will suffer as plantation slaves. Once she makes it to the North, she is able to work and save money to buy their freedom. Just as her children freed her from the sexual advances of her master, so she works to free them from his ownership. Linda is not constrained by an ideal image of motherhood; rather, she is empowered by her own experience of motherhood.

In stark contrast to the socially and legally limited women of the previous novels, Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes of an all-female utopia in *Herland*, published in 1915. The novel is written from the perspective of a man, who, with two male companions, sets off in search of a land rumored to be populated only with women. When they find it, they are taken captive by the women, and taught their language and culture. In this new land, women control all of society. The greatest surprise is that the women reproduce by parthogenesis; pregnancy is brought on by “a period of utter exaltation- the whole being is uplifted and filled with a concentrated desire for that child” (Gilman71). The men learn that early in their history, women had several children, but when overpopulation began to overwhelm the small country, they limited themselves to one, deferring pregnancy through caring for the babies already born. In response to the men’s curiosity, their tutor explains, “We soon grew to see that mother-love has more than one channel of expression. I think the reason our children are so-so fully loved, by all of us, is that we never- any of us- have enough of our own” (72). Through this explanation the narrator begins to understand that “mother-love with them [is] not a brute passion, a mere ‘instinct,’ a wholly personal feeling; it [is] – a religion” (69).

In this utopia of women, faults are eliminated not only through breeding (women with bad qualities were requested to renounce motherhood), but also through child rearing. The men are shocked that women do not raise their biological children, but their teacher explains that mothers love their children enough to have them raised by the most qualified women. “Education is our highest art, only allowed to our highest artists,” she avows, assuring the men that the mother and child are not separated (83). Children know from whom they descended, but all the women are mothers to them. The entire country is dedicated to raising up their children.

By choosing to write from the male perspective, Gilman highlights the differences between the men's expectations and the realities of the culture of *Herland*, which run counter to the traditions of the world the male protagonists come from, and in which Gilman lived. We can see clearly in the story Gilman's belief that work should be assigned according to talent and ability rather than limited to gender roles, and that raising children is a national responsibility, not a purely domestic one.

The utopia of *Herland* contrasts with the poverty of a Canadian First Nations reserve in *Tracks*, by Louise Erdrich. The novel, written in 1988, is set at the turn of the twentieth century. Erdrich writes the story of two women, Pauline and Fleur, alternating the telling between Nanapush, an old Chippewa man, and Pauline. Whereas Fleur is full-blooded Chippewa with strong emotional and physical ties to the native land, Pauline is a half-blood who rejects her Indian roots. Both girls have daughters, but Pauline gives hers up for adoption. Fleur takes good care of her daughter, hunting to feed them and focusing on their survival. She almost dies in birthing her daughter, Lulu. The narrator says, "What I overheard later, they were sure Fleur was dead, she was so cold and still after giving birth. But then the baby cried. That, I heard with my own ears. At that sound, they say, Fleur opened her eyes and breathed" (60). Motherhood saves her, and her connection to her daughter is strong. When she is pregnant with her second child, she becomes very ill (poisoned by Pauline), and her daughter goes for help in the snow, getting terrible frostbite. Her uncle Nanapush nurses Lulu back to health. He doesn't know if Lulu will live or die in the beginning. He later tells her:

When you're married and have your children, you will know this: we don't have as much to do with our young as we think. They do not come from us. They just appear, as if they

broke through a net of vines. Once they live in our lives and speak our language, they slowly seem to become like us. (169)

Here, Nanapush begins to be Lulu's "other-mother." She does not come from him, but slowly becomes like him as he raises her. He has articulated the cultural value of shared parenting.

During this time, Fleur loses the baby she is birthing, and falls into a deep depression. Nanapush describes it: "Fleur heard her vanished child in every breath of wind, every tick of dried leaves, every scratch of blowing snow" (170). But then, Lulu brings her back. "Because of your demands, your mother roused herself. She woke one morning, rose early, and sat down with me, her face bright. 'Uncle,' she smiled, holding my hand, 'today we'll eat fresh venison'" (170). But there is no venison, and not much food. On the verge of losing their land, unable to save her baby who died, Fleur loses herself. She is no longer confident, but hesitant. When she loses the land, she sends Lulu off to a government boarding school and Fleur booby traps the land and leaves, taking everything with her. Then Lulu's grandmother and Fleur's "uncle," Nanapush, who is listed as father on her birth certificate, go through the difficult process of getting Lulu back from the government.

Lulu is not the first child Nanapush has cared for. Years before, Fleur is left motherless and close to death from influenza when Nanapush finds her and nurses her back to health. He "mothers" her. In fact, as Erdrich scholar Hertha Wong writes, he is the most consistent "mother" in the book. His biological children all died, "delivered into death," but by restoring Lulu to life, he delivers her, and thus puts things back into their natural order (Wong 186).

From her mother and the traditions of her people, Fleur has a sense of mother as provider and mother as powerful. As long as she has her land, she is able to feed her family by hunting

and fishing. When she loses this connection, she loses her link to reality and her ability to mother. Pauline, who has rejected Indian ways, is not able to care for her child herself. She takes herself to the sterile convent and joins the nuns, further distancing herself from the Indian world. Pauline, too, loses her link to reality and becomes crazy, poisoning Fleur and making her lose her child. In the face of cultural alienation, neither woman is able to mother her child. Fleur tries, but then sends Lulu away. Wong states, “under such circumstances, abandoning one’s child is not an act of selfishness; it is an act of despair or an act of desperate mercy” (186). Sometimes the sacrifice of motherhood is in giving up one’s child.

Fortunately for Lulu, she has Nanapush and her grandmother to act as other-mothers for her: to send for her and rescue her from boarding school, and to give her some sense of herself as Chippewa and Fleur’s daughter. Being a strong mother in this novel is closely tied to cultural identity. Those who have abandoned their culture and lost their identity as First People are unable to mother, but mothers who maintain the traditional ways, including the male “other-mother” Nanapush, are successful. However, the encroaching power of the colonizing government robs them of these traditions and takes the children away from them.

Jan Clausen’s 1985 novel *Sinking, Stealing* also figures an other-mother, Josie. Josie’s lover Rhea has died a year ago, leaving behind Ericka, a daughter that she and Josie have raised together, and an ex-husband, Daniel. Ericka now lives with her dad, and visits Josie some weekends. Daniel is remarried with a young daughter and another child on the way. When Daniel gets a job in another state, Josie realizes she wants more time with Ericka. However, Daniel clearly sees this as a chance to break from their old lives.

Without a legal relationship with Rhea, Josie has no legal claim to Ericka. She is not really a

step-mom, but a “flommy” (a term her partner coined for her). In order to try and force Daniel into recognizing her status more formally and granting her some rights to time with Ericka, the two mutually agree to run away using fake identities. They travel by Greyhound across the country to Oregon. The cross-country trip brings tension to their relationships, but the subsequent resolution of the tension draws them closer. In the end, Daniel will not give in to this pressure, and, unwilling to live forever on the run, Josie and Ericka are forced to return.

Before Rhea’s death, Josie’s role in Ericka’s life is that of step-mother, but with no legally recognized relationship, she has no legal right to mother. This question of legal parenting leads to conflict. An early scene in the novel involves a problem at Ericka’s school. Daniel’s wife has had a conference with Ericka’s teacher about her stealing from other children, but they want Josie to talk to Ericka about it. Feeling pushed aside, Josie suppresses her resentment. “I used to go to those conferences with Rhea” (p. 8). However, because she truly cares for Ericka and wants what is best for her, as any mother would, she puts her resentment aside for the good of the child.

Sexual orientation and economic status both constrain Josie. When Josie is planning to run off with Ericka, her friend brings up her vulnerability. If Daniel goes after her and brands her as a lesbian kidnapping his daughter, it would put a sexual spin on a maternal relationship. She also does not have much money. Daniel has financial power that she is lacking, as well as power stemming from his gender. Another woman tells Josie that courts are beginning to consider the mother more, but there is an understanding that men have more power in custody issues.

A part of Josie does not want to be a mother, but Josie and Ericka’s relationship is a way for both of them to connect with the absent Rhea. Josie cleans up all traces of Ericka right after

she leaves the apartment, and she imagines her life without the responsibilities of parenthood. Her love for Rhea and Ericka causes her to pursue this relationship. Not having an official role in Ericka's life excludes her from the camaraderie of the mother group at Ericka's birthday party. When she pretends to be Ericka's mother in their cross-country adventure, she becomes part of the mommy club, albeit on the fringe due to her fugitive status.

Several times friends suggest that she have her own child, but that is not the point for Josie. She wants to be Ericka's mother, not just a mother in general. She feels like Ericka's mother in that she knows Ericka intimately, for she has watched her grow up. She tells the reader: "And I'm afraid to fight, to feel too much. But none of that matters; I've got to say to Daniel: look, I'm here. I'm Ericka's parent, too" (30). This, too, is being a "good mother." She recognizes that Ericka needs Josie as much as Josie needs Ericka. Despite the hurt of not being officially named as a mother to Ericka, she recognizes the validity of her acts of mothering.

Rhea used to tell [Ericka], 'You have two mothers.' That was an error, of course. I might be many things, might wake with her in the night and guard her play and comfort hurts and read monosyllabic books and praise her and scold her and make her eat vegetables- but children do not have two mothers. Anyone knows that.

So we got it settled: I was not her mother. But neither was I nothing. Which is part of why I now feel the way I do about Brenda. 'Brenda is my new mother,' I've heard more than once, on some occasion that required an explanation. I don't hold this against Ericka: she has to say it. But I do hold it against Brenda (19-20).

What is the result? She chooses to fight, creating power for herself by running away with Ericka. She is powerless as a lesbian and a non-legal mother, but her sense of responsibility compels her to bring Ericka back to her grandparents and father in the end. She really wants what is best for Ericka, and she knows that living on the lam is not. Again, there is the acknowledgement that sometimes the sacrifice a mother makes involves giving up claim to her child.

In the Name of Salome by Julia Alvarez is the story of another childless woman and her mother. Camila's mother, Salome, died when she was a few years old. Salome was a famous poet in the Dominican Republic- one who inspired a love of country and furthered the revolution. Camila wants to make her own contribution to the world, but struggles to figure out her role in the shadow of her mother's fame. She is about to retire from a Spanish professorship at Vassar. Unmarried and childless, her long-term romance has been with a close female friend now married and far away. Camila plans to move to Cuba and help with the revolution there.

Camila is not a mother, and her mother was not around to be a role model; instead she can only see the myth of her mother as a grand poet and educator. When her brother is talking about getting her a burial plot near their mother, she says: "As for being with Mama, I learned how to be with her as an absence all my life. Why change things now?" (337). She has a stepmother, but her feelings toward her are ambivalent. However, the stories of her mother that her brothers and aunts have told her as well as the national story of Salome teach her about her mother and motherhood. Salome could not be both a poet/teacher and a mother. Already in poor health, pregnancy further erodes her strength. In fact, bearing Camila contributed to her final lingering illness. In spite of her physical difficulties, Salome had four children. Since the children kept her busy, she put aside her poetry for a long time, and lost her "poet laureate"

identity temporarily. Despite the wishes of her country to maintain her national identity, she chose the personal identity of motherhood, writing poetry about her children rather than the nation.

Unlike her mother, Camila has not chosen the traditional woman's role of marriage to a man and motherhood. Chodorow might say that she has not been taught to mother, and so has not developed a desire to mother. However, when Camila begins helping with the revolution, she creates a new identity for herself. Her form of helping is teaching women with no education to read. This helps raise the literacy rate in post revolution Cuba. One day she reads a poem her mother wrote after one of her brothers was born: "There sleeps my little one, all mine!/There sleeps the angel who enchants my world!/I look up from my book a dozen times,/absorbed with him, I haven't read a word" (348).

The women she reads to are interested. "That was written by a mother?" one of the women asked. I nodded. 'It was written by my mother, in fact'" (348). After she shares Salome's story, the women applaud by clacking their wooden tools on the table. Camila, who comes from a powerful family and is well-educated, connects to these poor working women through the poetry of a mother.

As Camila nears the end of her life and deliberates on preparations for her future, she thinks:

So much left to be done! And no children of my own to send into the future to do it. Not true! My Nancy in Poughkeepsie, my coffee sorters in Sierra Maestra, my Belkys, my Lupe, my Elsa in Santo Domingo- my own and not my own- the way it is for all us childless mothers who help raise the young. (351)

She realizes that she has become a mother by making the choice to help train the young. While Salome is called the mother of her country in that her poetry inspires others to do great things, Camila takes a long time to recognize her own mothering through teaching. It is not until the end of her life that she does so. Her form of mothering is more practical than her mother's; she teaches women and shows them the path to a better life. Having children would have limited this national action, just as having children limited Salome's ability to write poetry. By doing this national service, Camila is finally following in the footsteps of Salome. Both Salome and Camila reach beyond their family to become political mothers in aid of their cause. Their mothering nurtures their fellow revolutionaries.

Finally, Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* imagines a world where motherhood becomes proscribed in rather ominous ways. In the not-too-distant future, certain areas of the United States have been taken over by a totalitarian religious regime that has stripped women of their jobs and slotted them into strict categories. In this new country, Gilead, many women are barren due to radiation, so those who have lifestyles contrary to the regime's beliefs but retain the ability to bear children are given the option of becoming handmaids, who bear children for childless couples of the elite. (The other roles are that of prostitute or waste pickers in nuclear wastelands).

Offred (who lives in the household of Fred, a leader in the regime) is the main protagonist. Her daughter has been taken from her and adopted by a powerful couple, and her husband is killed by the guards when they try to flee to freedom in Canada. The book is split into sections describing Offred's daily life, interspersed with sections entitled "Night" in which she

remembers the past: “The night is mine, my own time, to do with as I will, as long as I am quiet. As long as I don’t move. As long as I lie still” (47).

Offred’s duty is to get pregnant during a ritualized sexual act involving Fred and his wife. The wife is desperate to become a mother and achieve the status conferred by motherhood. She encourages Offred to sleep with her husband’s driver, Nick, out of fear that her husband is sterile. Fred, meanwhile, invites Offred to clandestine meetings in his study to drink and look at forbidden magazines, and even sneaks her to a brothel, dressing her as a prostitute.

Offred learns of a resistance movement from her handmaid partner with whom she goes into town to do the shopping. This partner is part of the resistance and is discovered, but hangs herself just before being picked up by the police in the dreaded black van. The driver, Nick, is part of this resistance, too. They want Offred to participate in the resistance, but she refuses. She becomes content in her life and believes that she is pregnant with Nick’s child. “The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him”(305). The security of the known, despite its limitations and dangers, perhaps seems the safest choice for the child growing within her. Offred tells herself she loves Nick; if he loves her, too, then he will care for their child. However, Offred could be choosing this way because a “good mother” survives for her child.

Some days I was more rational. I did not put it, to myself, in terms of love. I said, I have made a life for myself, here, of a sort. That must have been what the settler’s wives thought, and women who survived wars, if they had a man. Humanity is so adaptable, my mother would say. Truly amazing, what people can get used to, as long as there are a few compensations.(306)

When Fred's wife discovers that her husband has been meeting secretly with Offred, she locks her in her room. The black van comes for her, but it is the resistance, spirited her away before her arrest. This is the end of the story.

The book ends with a section called "Historical Notes," which is the transcript of a conference keynote address. The conference is in the 20th and 21st century archives, and talks about Offred's story as though it was a spoken (on tape) journal found in a safe house – Gilead is no more, and historians are connecting the people in the journal to "real" people in the regime. We do not know what has happened to Offred, and we never learn her real name.

The role of mother in this novel is key. Being a mother is the only way a woman can have value in this society. In the upper class, the mother is not the Handmaid who gives birth, but the wife of the home, who is involved in the conception and the birth through ritual ceremonies, and is the mother in name. During the conception ritual, the husband has sex with the handmaid while the wife holds the handmaid between her legs, restraining the handmaid's arms by the wrist. During a birth, the handmaids gather to support the birthing handmaid, and the wives gather with the wife of the house, who sits behind the birthing woman on the stool, mimicking the act of labor. The birthing is a communal event, and one of power for the handmaids. After the birth, the other wives help the wife to bed and give her the child:

They cluster around the bed, the mother and child, cooing and congratulating. Envy radiates from them, I can smell it, faint wisps of acid, mingled with their perfume. The Commander's Wife looks down at the baby as if it's a bouquet of flowers: something she's won, a tribute.

We stand between Janine and the bed, so she won't have to see this. Someone gives her a

drink of grape juice, I hope there's wine in it, she's still having the pains, for the afterbirth, she's crying helplessly, burnt-out miserable tears. Nevertheless, we are jubilant; it's a victory, for all of us. We've done it.

She'll be allowed to nurse the baby, for a few months, they believe in mother's milk.

After that she'll be transferred, to see if she can do it again, with someone else who needs a turn. But she'll never be sent to the Colonies, she'll never be declared Unwoman. That is her reward. (145)

It is by their past birthing of children, which confirms their fertility, that women become handmaids in the first place, and then birthing a child again gives them a permanent place in society.

This power of motherhood is conferred by the male leaders that define society - but also by the powerless women who do nothing to change it. Women have no value on their own. When Janine's baby is born- "We hold our breath as Aunt Elizabeth inspects it: a girl, *poor thing*, but so far so good, at least there's nothing wrong with it, that can be seen, hands feet, eyes, we silently count, everything is in place" (144). Though women are not highly valued, even a female child grows the population and thus brings honor to both birth and legal mother.

Despite the lack of power throughout society, clear separations exist between the women. The upper-class women who are barren cannot be mothers without a handmaid. The women with less powerful husbands do not have handmaids and servants. If they become mothers it is through their own bodies. The handmaids are women who are not part of the dominant religion or have behaved contrary to its tenets. As far as race goes, the leaders want to increase Caucasian

birthrates, so only Caucasian women become handmaids. However, sexual orientation doesn't matter in this instance. Offred's lesbian friend, Moira, is first given the chance to become a handmaid, but she rebels from the restrictions of this role and escapes. Offred later finds her in the brothel, a choice more preferable to her than the dangerous colonies full of radiation, which is where the least valued women are sent.

Offred is already a mother when the story begins. However, she no longer has the status of mother because her child was born in what was considered an unofficial, adulterous union. Her daughter is taken from her and given to a childless couple. She is out of her mind with grief and terror, but they tell her "She's in good hands, they said. With people who are fit. You are unfit, but you want the best for her. Don't you?" (49). They show her a picture of her daughter, standing next to another woman. She looks like an angel, but a bit unfamiliar. The only way to cope with this loss is to distance herself from it.

I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it.

Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.

If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off.

It isn't a story I'm telling.

It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. (49-50).

Later, Offred's wife shows her another picture of her daughter. Grief washes over her as she realizes she no longer exists for her daughter.

Time has not stood still. It has washed over me, washed me away, as if I'm nothing more than a woman of sand, left by a careless child too near the water. I have been obliterated for her. I am only a shadow now, far back behind the glib shiny surface of this photograph. A shadow of a shadow, as dead mothers become. You can see it in her eyes: I am not there.

But she exists, in her white dress. She grows and lives. Isn't that a good thing? A blessing?

Still, I can't bear it, to have been erased like that. Better she'd brought me nothing. (260)

By the end of the story, Offred is pregnant, but she seems more concerned by her relationship with Nick and her own survival than the child inside her, who perhaps hasn't become real to her yet.

Atwood's story shows the extremes of women's bodies being colonized by men. Women's identity has been completely linked with motherhood, and for some, their very lives depend on it. Although the strong radiation has affected both men and women, women must bear the blame for their failure to get pregnant. It is never the man's fault. And a male child is the ideal, as we see in the reactions of the women to Janine's girl. All economic power has been taken away from both mothers and handmaids, and their relationships with one another are strictly controlled. The frightening thing about this imaginary place is that these things, though not practiced in the same way, are realities in some parts of the world. When the myth is stripped down to lay bare the power structures, mothers are on the side of the oppressed. The repressive taking of one woman's child to give to another in *A Handmaid's Tale* contrasts sharply with *Herland's* voluntary transfer of a child from birth mother to gifted care takers.

These stories are important because they move beyond theory to voice the experiences of mothers. We need to hear how the people doing the mothering, whether blood mother, adopted mother, or other-mother, define their roles, rather than allowing those who would colonize our mother bodies to tell us who we are.

Informed by these experiences and the research and theories on mothering, an understanding of maternal feminism emerges. What Collins says are distinguishing features of Black feminist thought can also be ascribed to maternal feminism: it is lived experience, as we see in the stories above; varied (a “diverse response to common challenges”(28)); self-defined and leading to resistance which merges action and theory; dynamic; and related to other social justice concerns. Each of the stories analyzed here illustrates these features. Eliza’s life-ending experience of unwed motherhood contrasts with Linda’s power conferring motherhood. Further, Linda’s mothering gives her the power to free herself and her children from slavery and create her own identity as mother. It also pushes her to fight for the rights of other-mothers and their children. As Ruddick would say, her maternal thinking leads to political action for all children. The women of *Herland* present a new template for raising children that elevates the job of caring and educating to the highest level. The *Herland* utopia frees women from the psychological training of girls for motherhood that Chodorow describes. Nanapush shows that men can be mothers, too, and Camila and Josie teach us that commitment to mothering does not require participating in childbirth. Finally, Offred’s story reminds us of the dangers women face when the power to self-define is taken away from them.

These are only a few of the stories that show how women speak and create in relationship to those around them, not in isolation. More stories need to be told, and we can only accomplish

this work in relationship with one another. Middle-class mothers, poor mothers, white mothers, black mothers, Latina mothers, immigrant mothers, lesbian mothers, men who mother, and all other-mothers must speak to each other about our experiences, which, though different, all emerge in response to the needs of our children.

CHAPTER 3

CREATING MATERNAL IDENTITIES THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

“All the world’s a stage,” but for mothers, the world, and thus the stage, is often the limited realm of home. From this limited domestic realm, how is it then possible for them to find their identity as mothers? Sociologist Erving Goffman says that we present ourselves as if we are performers on a stage, changing personas frequently as we come into contact with different audiences. Our children, our partners, and society constantly demand the persona of “mother,” making this our dominant persona. Because “mother” is not an identity that can be put aside at the end of the day, but a permanent position, this identity may even take over the “backstage,” that time when most people are able to drop the persona imposed upon them by others. In this theory of identity creation, the performer is passive, reacting to the audience’s demand rather than to her own choice.

In contrast, the philosopher J.L. Austin describes an active form of identity creation in the performative speech act. This theory proposes that through speaking we create reality, and thus a mother is given the authority to choose and create her identity through the words that she speaks. These utterances can be: verdictive, acknowledging who she is; commissive, committing her to this identity; exercitive, or influencing her listeners/observers so that they view her in the way she chooses; or behabitive, in that they express her attitude towards herself. While mothers may choose to reinforce the definitions of maternal identity imposed on them by others through these utterances, she is not a passive receiver, but has the authority to create her identity through the words that she speaks.

In reality, neither of these theories encompasses the whole of identity creation. We do not speak in a vacuum. While mothers may claim agency, the demands of children also create the mother. In addition, cultures construct social identities for mothers, reinforcing them through social norms. As Judith Butler says, women cannot separate themselves from their material bodies, and mothers cannot separate themselves from their maternal bodies (qtd. in Barker 109). Despite this, they can resist being passive mannequins on which cultural meanings are hung without their participation. Acknowledging that no universal maternal identity exists means that each mother can become an agent, actively joining the ongoing discourse on maternal identity to create her own version of this identity. This specific identity is created through the stories that we tell and the narratives that we create by living and interacting with others.

When mother photographers create narratives through family photo albums or photographic series, they invite the viewer to become part of the discourse of identity creation. Historian and theorist Sarah Parson writes, “Motherhood cannot be separated from children in life or in representation. To tell a mother’s story is to tell a child’s. Can there be any other way?” (129). The chapter on documentary photography explains how meaning is constructed by the viewer, the subject, and the photographer. I also proposed that we use a form of Rosenblatt’s Transactional Literary Theory adapted for photographic analysis. This is especially relevant to the family snapshot or photo album, which is read in multiple ways.

Family members read these images as documents, looking to confirm their memories of an event. (“Who was at that event?” “When did we last see Uncle Joe?”) Richard Chalfen calls this the “home mode visual communication,” in which the images are made for and displayed to a particular audience who understands the private information contained in the photographic

album (8-9). The photographers and viewers share a common background (8-9). Marianne Hirsch explains that "What I see when I look at my family pictures is not what you see when you look at them: only my look is affiliative, only my look enters and extends the network of looks and gazes that have constructed the image in the first place" (*Family Frames* 93). This familiarity with the subjects of the photographs confers insider status on the viewer, obviating the need for explanations.

In contrast, an outsider examines the photography with an aesthetic eye, looking for meanings apart from personal connections. Without the story behind the image, the viewer reads the image differently, using what Chalfen identifies as a public symbol system, which is used for mass modes of communication (8-9). The viewer of the family album is able to read the home mode symbols if they have an understanding of the events that are being photographed. Since family albums generally include proscribed events, the symbols are easily recognized. Indeed, taking the photograph becomes part of the ritual of family events. For example, family albums in the United States and Canada will almost always include birthday pictures with the celebrated child in front of a cake; the first day of school is commemorated yearly with a photograph; the family lines up in front of a monument on vacation and takes a picture. Chalfen notes that, "The notion of *change* is very important. Moments of positively valued change, marked by parties, official recognition, or public celebration 'punctuate' the collection's view of life" (96). This is the societal expectation of a photograph album and the "good mother" complies by dutifully posing the children for the camera and placing the resulting photograph into the album.

However, Chalfen goes on to note that these specific moments give us only a very limited view, "an incomplete rather than a 'complete' look at life" (96). Often, mothers

deliberately choose to photograph the non-celebratory, not-dressed-up-for-the camera, everyday moments. When mothers such as Linda Brooks, with “Between the Birthdays,” and Mary Kelly, with “Post-Partum Document,” privilege these moments in their family story, then they are challenging the mythologies of the family album. Susan Sontag says photographers like this “alter and enlarge our notion of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe”(6). These records of quotidian moments give a more complete view of the maternal experience than images of celebratory events provide. And, by moving the record from the family album to the gallery wall, the privilege of viewing the images extends to a broader audience.

If family photo albums serve to “shore up dominant familial myths and ideologies,” then by creating alternate myths and stories, a mother is able to reinforce the ideologies that she wants to highlight and strengthen her definition of maternal identity (Hirsch xvi). More specifically, mother photographers challenge societal constructs of maternal identity and how they create their own maternal identities through the stories that they tell.

Susan Close suggests that we can view family photographic narratives as an entry point into a theoretical analysis of these family mythologies, where the creation and viewing of the narratives “becomes an act of establishing identity both for the photographer and the viewer” (23). Close’s mode of analyzing photographs as identity markers and as intentional identity creators by the photographer provides a solid foundation for research into maternal identity creation through photography. In particular, Close examines how photography was used by Canadian women “as a social practice to establish identity” (xi). One photographer that she examines is Mattie Gunterman, who kept a photographic diary of her life in a mining camp in

British Columbia from 1899 to 1911. Close reads Gunterman's photographs as "signs of identity in terms of gender", claiming that through photography she was able to gain a form of control over the wilderness that was mostly viewed as a "man's world"(21). Close writes, "Mattie Gunterman used the camera to create her own identity, 'picturing' herself as a strong, heroic, pioneer woman" and "develops a narrative of her family's heroic quest to establish themselves in what was a largely wilderness environment" (22-23). Close claims that Gunterman's "highly individual approach" makes the photographs exemplary "of how a woman could use photography to create her own identity" (23). A closer examination of Close's practice will provide a model for further image analysis in this chapter.

Close reads a photograph of Gunterman posing alone at the beginning of her wilderness journey as establishing herself as an individual, with an identity apart from that conferred on her by familial ties. She is "comfortable in nature, not someone in conflict who is trying to 'tame the wilderness'" (25). When Gunterman is not present as a subject in a subsequent picture of her partner and their son, her presence is in her control from behind the camera, as the two subjects freeze at her command. In a third posed photograph, the family faces left as though walking into the future. Gunterman, holding a rifle, is in the lead, with her son and partner walking behind her. This is a romantic pioneer pose, with Gunterman posed as the dominant family matriarch. Even in a photograph taken in a manicured garden on a visit to San Francisco, Gunterman's figure is central.¹⁸ Again, the family does not look at each other; they are connected only by the triangular composition of their pose. Son and father are seated, gazing at the camera/viewer.

¹⁸ Gunterman used a 5x7 view camera with glass negatives Close does not include notes on Gunterman's working process so we do not know how self-portraits were made without a self-timer.

Gunterman stands slightly in front at the apex of the triangle, gazing to the left, her arm resting on the twisted stump beside her. These images are an intentional construction of a narrative wherein women are “heroic pioneers who insist upon a dominant place for themselves within the frame” (35). Gunterman is intentionally creating an identity of herself as a strong pioneer woman and as an individual. By making photographs of her son, Henry, and putting them into albums for herself and for him, Gunterman is fulfilling one of the duties ascribed to the “good mother.” Close, argues, however, that unlike most family albums, Gunterman’s do not romanticize the familial relationship of the husband/father as patriarch ruling over a submissive family. Instead, Gunterman maintains the position of protagonist, with her family as supporting characters. Close writes:

Mattie Gunterman and others like her used photography as a means of documenting their families and narrating their own stories. They were women seeking a voice at a time when few women had real control over their destinies. Some found in photography a medium through which they could represent their identities and subsequently used the family album as a gendered format within which they could author a coherent narrative from these representations. (95)

Through Gunterman’s insistence in positioning herself as the protagonist of her family narrative, she creates an identity for herself that opens up new frontiers for mothers to come. Her position as a survivor in the unforgiving Canadian wilderness, and her ability to provide for her family as both hunter and mining camp worker, supports the created identity of her photographic narratives.

Gunterman is an early example of women taking agency in creating her own identity through photography. And in these images, the photographer becomes a viewed subject; in others, though, the absence of the mother photographer creates an invisible subject.

Mary Kelly, with her worked titled *Post-Partum Document, 1973-1978*, is one of the artists who challenged the dominant discourse that places women in a position of submission and presents the mother as a mythic figure, erasing her individuality. In an interview with Terrence Maloon, she describes it as being about “my lived experience as a mother and my analysis of that experience” (qtd. in Iverson 39). Kelly eschewed the typical photographs of mother and child interacting as being sentimental, and instead documents the realities of mothering through an installation with found objects, diagrams, writings, molds, gestural marks, and close-up photographs. Kelly uses Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to explore “the way biological sex difference is made to conform to patriarchal social norms of gender difference which are ‘sealed,’ so to speak, in the woman’s experience of maternity” (39). Iverson writes,

Yet Kelly’s use of psychoanalysis is critical. The story of this moment is usually told from the child’s point of view with the mother’s fantasies, fears, and desires neglected. *Post-Partum Document (PPD)* is about a reciprocal relationship, but the child’s development is always seen through the loving, anxious eyes of the mother. It is a picture of *her* psychic life. (41)

Although the images in the artwork do not show the figure of the mother, she is present in the lens through which the work is presented. Thus, the subject of the work becomes her mothering, her maternal psychic life. This is a key point for all of the artists in this chapter.

Part of *Post-Partum Document*, the series *Introduction* consists of four Perspex boxes, each containing a tiny wool baby vest (shirt), each one adding an inked line to finish a Lacanian diagram. “The piece suggests that the mother’s intense attachment to these objects is now mediated by an explanatory theory”(Iverson 41). The tension between scientific theory and the maternal nostalgia of saved baby clothes creates ambivalence. Iverson explains that women viewers reacted with emotional responses to the installation, “some clinging to the security offered by the conceptual apparatus, others balking at its alienating remoteness from lived experience and turning to the objects for comfort. One’s emotional response is part the installation” (42). These responses became part of the installation as they created meaning in conjunction with the artist and the object, and create a psychic revelation for the viewer as she considers her response.

While Kelly’s work is not primarily photographic, it does function in similar ways to photography, documenting the day to day realities of motherhood much as photographs in an album do. She is included here, because, as Iverson so aptly explains, “With *Post-Partum Document*, Kelly broke the taboo surrounding maternity in contemporary, critical art practice” (48). Her images of daily mothering move the discourse away from the nostalgic that objectifies the maternal image and allow for expressions of deeper meaning. In addition, she removes the objectifiable, passive mother from the image itself, and creates for the artist/mother a position of image creator and meaning maker.

In moving away from the kitschy sentimental images of the typical family photo album, which mimic the Madonna and Child myth, a mother/artist gains agency in creating her identity. Linda Brooks does this by presenting photographs of the non-holidays and non-birthdays, and

thus begins to unpack her own lived experience through the experiences of her family in her series “Between the Birthdays.” Brooks approached this series almost as an anthropological study. She says, “examining my own family’s rituals, practices and ways of relating, I was interested in how traditions and communication unfolded from the beginning of raising my own children. As the narrator and active participant, I observed the cultural and social values, and subsequent attitudes and behaviors, those filtered into or already perpetuated by the family” (*Linda Brooks Photography*). By documenting her observations through images and text, she created a space for an outside viewer to come in and analyze the family dynamics as well, this time as an outside observer only, but one whose view is controlled by what Brooks chooses to share. This image, *Joe fixing their flat tire 1994* (fig. A.1) appears to be a family snapshot. However, the handwritten text adds another layer of meaning:

I offered to change the tire but Granma Kay said “You’re not!” Instead she called for Joe to stop playing with Aaron in the pool, and come do it. Rather than argue with her, I just took pictures. Ana knows her Dad is good at fixing things, but does she know that she will be able to do those things if she needs to?

Looking deeper, we can see all of this written detail in the image. The men are in a huddle around the car, while Grandma discourages the little girl from helping. Mom documents this scene from outside the frame. She is not changing the tire. Her words below allow her to challenge the reinforcement of traditional masculine and feminine roles portrayed in the image. This is not documenting a happy moment, but a moment of the family and society culture that conflict with Brooks’ understanding of women’s abilities.

Both the image and the text in *Aaron Taking Down Laundry, R.I. Street* challenge the expectation that laundry is women's work. The photograph shows a line of clothes hanging across the yard, with a masculine pair of legs extending beneath one black shirt, which hides the rest of the person. The text handwritten below the image reads "Joe told Aaron how he used to help his Mom take down laundry from this very same yard when he was growing up. It just would not have made sense to his mother to expect his three older sisters to help with house chores and not expect the same from him."

This caption to the photograph of this daily task documents a multi-generational commitment to sharing domestic chores between both male and female children without assigning tasks based on gender.

Elina Brotherus comes at mothering from another perspective—that of a woman who wants to be a biological mother but needs medical intervention to do so. The *Annunciation* series is based on Brotherus's personal experience of IVF treatment over a five-year period. She places herself as the central figure in each image, sitting quietly on a sofa while the light from a window falls on her closed eyes, or waiting silently at the dinner table in a pool of light cast by the overhead fixture. These images draw from centuries of paintings depicting the Virgin Mary at the moment she is told she will give birth to Jesus. Brotherus depicts a moment before an announcement is made. There is hope, but also resignation in her face. The photographer and the woman are separate in the image; the viewer is pushed away from the would-be mother, to a position of observer. Brotherus' agency comes from her willingness to expose her personal struggle with infertility, a subject often hidden from view, to the viewer. As Susan Bright writes, "This story has no happy ending. It is just a sad journey that shows that the state of being a

‘mother’ does not necessarily begin with conception or birth, but is something more complicated with roots deep within one’s intentions” (21). And, therefore, Brotherus, despite not being a biological mother, has something to share about the experiences of mothering.

Lupita Murillo Tinnen also documents a woman’s struggle to become pregnant in her series *Muted Whispers* (fig. A.2, A.3). The viewer takes the perspective of the woman, looking down on a row of syringes in one image. Another image is a diptych: the top half shows white clouds against a blue sky, while the bottom half shows the bared thighs of a woman, presumably just before or just after an injection. Murillo Tinnen examines her identity as a woman, which is called into question, because motherhood and femininity are so closely intertwined in our culture. Can a woman who does not give birth still be a woman? Motherhood is often seen as the ultimate expression of womanhood— yet many women cannot become mothers and many choose not to become mothers. Murillo Tinnen shows how for some women the mind becomes a mother before the body does.

Mothering can move a woman out of the private domestic sphere to become a political act. As second-wave feminists proclaimed in the 1960s, “The Personal is Political.” In maternal feminism, political action rises out of personal experience, as Ruddick explains in *Maternal Thinking*. Family photographs and photo albums convey a subtle political message by bringing the political or public arena into the personal domestic arena, with the inclusion of a newspaper clipping of a news item affecting the family in a particular way. Infrequently, the message is communicated through the inclusion of personal images inside a portfolio of public images.

Annie Leibovitz’s book, *A Photographer’s Life*, is an edited view of twenty-five years of her iconic photographs, including portraits of famous people, celebrities, politicians, and

intellectuals. However, she also includes in this book personal family pictures of her children, adding to her primary public identity as photographer and normalizing these images of family life with an older, non-traditional mother at the head. The book is arranged mostly chronologically, with pictures spread across both open pages, and only a very small caption in the corner. About two-thirds of the way through, several pages depict the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York. The next page shows Leibovitz in a classic pregnancy pose: nude, hands on hips, belly pushing forward as she stares at the camera. This image was taken by her partner Susan Sontag. The next page shows four photographs of her daughter's birth, taken by various people, and the final one of her daughter, Sarah, being handed to her by a masked Sontag. The next two pages show Sontag holding Sarah, and then the book returns to portraits of celebrities¹⁹: Philip Glass, Patti Smith, and Willie Nelson.

By including such personal, family images ("home mode communication") in the same volume as images made on the world stage, she is equating the status of both, and elevating the personal to the level of political. Annie Leibovitz and her children become the stars, replacing the more recognized celebrities for a few pages of the book. Leibovitz's inclusion of family pictures merges the professional and personal realms to reveal her rounded identity throughout her life in pictures.²⁰ Mothers cannot separate their family life from their professional life without damaging one or the other and fragmenting their own identities. Insisting that they not be separated, that there is honor in all of our work, both in the home and in the professional arena, is

¹⁹ It could be argued that Susan Sontag is a celebrity, but in this context, she is in the role of co-parent with Leibovitz.

²⁰As Leibovitz explains in a recent lecture, the personal and public photographs "collide and converge."

an act of rebellion against the status quo that demands mothers bifurcate their identities, and that belittles the knowledge and skills of unpaid mothering.

Leibovitz's inclusion of family images is also political in that it challenges the myth of the traditional family with one mother, one father, and their biological children. Instead, she reveals the intimacies of a seemingly happy family with a lesbian mother, no father, and a surrogate birthmother. Her experiences of mothering and her willingness to claim her identity fully broaden the story of maternal identity.

Joanne Leonard refers to this crossover of personal and political in the prologue to her book, *Being in Pictures: An Intimate Photo Memoir*. She says,

Through my work as an artist, I've discovered that the realms of the personal and the public are rarely as separate as I once imagined. Writing this book clearly revealed to me how things in the public sphere such as the women's movement have stimulated, provoked, and even enabled my work. On the other hand, my personal photographs showing the highs and lows of daily life have made their way into the public realm through publications, exhibitions, and teaching. (3)

A black and white photograph she took of her sister-in-law, titled "Sonia" shows a dark-haired woman hanging white clothes on a line. The light shines through her transparent shift, highlighting the rounded belly of her pregnancy (93). Leonard says did not consider how this image, her first exhibited photograph, might romanticize pregnancy, despite her own unmet desire for a child at the time. She writes, "Today, I would more readily consider that some women experience impoverishment or subjugation from the very state I longed for and celebrated in this image" ("Being in [Feminist] Pictures"). Her own lived experiences, and those

other women have shared with her have allowed her to see this image in a new light. Of her own experiences, she acknowledges, “I would forever fail to live up to the idealizations of motherhood and family I created in many of my photographs” (32). Perhaps she addresses this point in her photo memoir with the inclusion of text detailing those ways that her experiences have contrasted with this idealization: accidental pregnancy, abortion, miscarriage, and single parenting.

Leonard uses another picture of Sonia, this time with her baby, in an overtly political piece that contrasted the idealization of motherhood in the United States with the realities of how mothers and children were suffering in the United States’ war with Vietnam. She created a *Red Triptych*, reminiscent of a religious icon. The two side pieces with headlines about the war such as “War,” “No Hope,” “Nightmare” opened to show a photograph of Sonia and child in the center, and photographs of a man diving on each side. The back showed an appropriated image of an anguished Vietnamese mother holding her wounded child (Leonard 58-59). Leonard shows her awareness of both the differing experiences of motherhood and the realities of mothering, placing an image that could be considered romanticizing motherhood next to an image that shows stark suffering. This juxtaposition of such opposite experiences of mothering exposes the horrors of war and calls the viewer to oppose it as a politicized act of mothering.

Another way that Leonard moves beyond the surface of her images is in acknowledging the complexity of the mothers in her pictures with her text. The photograph *Four Old Friends with Babies, Los Angeles*, shows four women sitting in a row, each with an infant on her lap. This is not an idealized mothers and children image; the children are uncooperative—one looks askance at all the others, another throws his head back in a cry, and the other two lean forward to

reach the ground. The mothers look at each other, the children, or the camera. Leonard writes, “I’ve always loved this photograph because it is such a wonderful contradiction to the idealized mothers-and-babies photos typically taken by portrait studios, where the desired image is one of composure-peaceful babies, smiling mothers” (34). Then she goes on to acknowledge, “Today I read this photo also for the histories of the women in the picture. One woman is an artist now, another a college administrator. One is a pathology lab tech who brings health care to poor women in Central American and unionizes health care workers in the United States” (34). This text reminds the viewer that the women in the picture have complex identities beyond that of mother.

Leonard also took many pictures of her own daughter as she grew. In her memoir, Leonard displays a grid of the *Julia Series*. The first image shows a neighbor girl holding the infant Julia, still wet from her bath. In each of the other pictures she poses alone or with a friend, getting progressively older, until the final picture shows a young woman posed on a Paris sidewalk. After the passive infant years, her daughter Julia “definitely became complicit in the making of her own image, thus prompting me to think about this enduring partnership between artist and model, between Julia and me, her mother/photographer” (144). This awareness of the extension of the mother and child relationship to one of artist and model, and their inextricable link, prompts Leonard to consider the power dynamics that come into play. Julia poses to please or manipulate her, for example, and the complexities of these “‘realities’ and contractions about family life embedded in this image by me, as the maker of it, by Julia (its subject), and by viewers (who have become the audience for the work)” (144). Meaning for Leonard is not found in a simple package, but is a result of dialogue between these three participants—maker, subject,

and audience. She writes, “photographs are in a sense always collages, layered as they are with levels of ‘realities’ – the photographers, the subject’s, the viewer’s” (148). This is an early reference to the transactional moment of photography, and perfectly encapsulates meaning creation with this method.

Leonard provides one explanation for a mother who takes so many pictures of her children: she is devoted and absorbed in being a mother. She writes,

There is a popular notion that women’s creativity is ‘natural,’ that procreative and creative forces in women are part and parcel of the same womanly instinct. Then what could have been more ‘natural and motherly’ than the picture-taking mother that I had become.” (142)

This aligns with the idea that a “good mother” catalogues and documents her children’s progress in a family photo album. However, Leonard also recognizes that other interpretations of this close attention to a child exist, “including as devoted and attentive or as horridly intrusive, too objective, and thus cold, exploitive, or even pornographic” (142). In particular, mothers who publicly display nude images, which might be considered appropriate for a private family album, risk censure.

Leonard considers this further when creating pieces about her mother and her memory loss. She explains,

Clearly there are tensions between what I might “expose” as a photographer and my mother’s feelings, feelings that, as a good daughter, I would honor. I also face this dilemma from another direction: when I write or make art about life with my daughter, I risk exposing things she might prefer not to have made public. (200)

The balance between telling “true” stories and exposing what should be private to the public eye is a real dilemma for mother photographers. Leonard manages it by working with her daughter to create photographs, giving her subject agency. However, in many of the photographs, her daughter is too young to make informed decisions about how she poses, including in the nude. Leonard’s book contains two or three nude images of her daughter, and only when she is very young—about two or three years of age.

In a recent lecture, Annie Leibovitz also addresses the difficulties of exposing her family to the public eye. She says she “laid family and close friends bare, open to scrutiny,” in her book *Photographers Life* because she was too obsessed with the story. Therefore, she chooses in her recently published memoir not to include these types of images. She says, “Photos of my children presented a dilemma for me,” and with this awareness she describes herself as becoming protective. Beyond just the need to minimize the exposure of her children to the public eye, Leibovitz also becomes aware of the barrier that camera creates between mother and child. She still “sees” the potential photographs created by her children, but she “chooses to live life without putting a camera between me and them.” For Leibovitz, the good mother puts aside her camera and her art making when it creates a barrier between her and her children.

In Sally Mann’s first well-known images, the camera is always between Mann and her children, and she has faced much criticism as a mother for her depictions of them. Her exhibition and book *Immediate Family* is comprised of black and white images that contain her children. Some of the images include another family member, but none of them show Mann interacting with her children. The pictures record children naked, sleeping or playing, bloody or covered in

Popsicle drips. White dresses, bodies, and faces stand out against the dark background of the family farm.²¹ Mann writes in the foreword to *Immediate Family*,

These are photographs of my children living their lives here, too. Many of these pictures are intimate, some are fictions and some are fantastic, but most are of ordinary things every mother has seen—a wet bed, a bloody nose, candy cigarettes. They dress up, they pout and posture, they paint their bodies, they dive like otters in the dark river. (n.p.)

With these visceral images, Mann challenges the myth that mothering means constant caring for the children, the tending to dirt and wounds immediately. In the standards of the family album, the absent mother is present in her careful preparation of the children for the photograph, where they appear fully clothed, usually in their nicest clothes, and spotlessly clean. In contrast, Mann shows a mother who values independence and personal identity of her children, showing them as themselves, not primped for the camera, in their everyday activities.

Mann goes on to explain that the images are collaborations and the good pictures come by grace.

When the good pictures come, we hope they tell truths, but truths “told slant,” just as Emily Dickinson commanded. We are spinning a story of what it is to grow up. It is a complicated story and sometimes we try to take on the grand themes: anger, love, death, sensuality, and beauty. But we tell it all without fear and without shame. (n.p.)

Despite her physical absence from the images themselves, Mann is present as the storyteller, the collaborator with her children in presenting truths. Telling the story of her children’s experiences

²¹Leibovitz describes Mann’s farm as a “magic place,” and that is what we see in the pictures.

and her own mothering is perhaps a way for Mann to teach them to live unashamed in their refusal to conform to societal expectations.

Sarah Parsons states that one task of parents is to investigate the grand themes of life with their children, creating space for discoveries about the broader world within the safe environs of home. Parsons writes that Mann is engaging in this task “by exploring with her kids how to visualize and then capture her children in relation to these themes” (129). When Mann works in collaboration with her children, where they create the story of their family as a team rather than ceding all control to the mother album keeper, she is also challenging the accepted practice of the mother controlling the family store of memories.

In the afterword to Mann’s book, Reynold Price reflects on the value of family photographs to contain memories, but also their concealing and editing nature. He writes that he wishes his parents had taken more pictures of him, not just as visual proof of their happiness together as a family, but recognizing less happy moments. “Like most veterans of family photographs, then, my face and body...will survive as a highly edited version of the whole person I managed to be behind an ever-ready grin” (np). For Price, Mann’s many images of her children are a responsibly-gathered resource of their childhood facts and “their hovering knife-edge truths.” He reads these carefully crafted images as evidence that Mann is a caring, responsible mother, fulfilling the duties of a “good” mother in maintaining the repository of family memories. The freedom of her children as evidenced in the images echoes Price’s description of Mann’s own childhood as a “free-roaming life in the country-mountain home of her own loving, freehanded and independently imaginative parents” (np). Prices describes the work as “brilliant and focused to the burning point as they often are and always fiercely devoted

to their subjects with a heat that's understandably feral as any wolf mother's" (np). For Price, then, what some people describe as Mann's obsession with creating the perfect image at the cost of mothering becomes a symbol of her intense devotion to her children and her commitment to the family story record. It is a legacy "indescribably large— her children's treasure" (np). The challenge to this ideal maternal identity that Price describes arises when Mann opens this family treasure vault to the public view and makes money from her "children's treasure." Critics maintain that her offering of private moments for public consumption robs her children of both their childhood and their privacy.

Parsons argues that the conflicting views of *Immediate Family* lie in the confusion between public and private that is common to photography. Images placed into a family photograph album are meant to be viewed in the domestic sphere. Mann's work, the title of which conflates to the family photograph album, is disseminated through gallery shows and as a book, wresting what seem to be very private images from the careful control of the parents and giving that control over to the public. Parsons writes,

The circulation of the *Immediate Family* project provides a rich opportunity to examine how notions of public and private are constantly and importantly constructed and dismantled by photographers and viewers. The subjects and spaces that Mann depicts challenge the clear distinction between public and private, as do the physical spaces (such as commercial galleries, museums, and books) and ideological contexts in which viewers encounter these photographs. As the title for the series indicates, the most important space that Mann's work occupies is the contested space of the nuclear family. (124)

By bringing these pictures into the public sphere, Mann is challenging the social mores of keeping nudity and nonconformity secret in the family vault and inviting public comment on her mothering.

However, it is not merely the site of engagement that is problematic in these images, but also the discomfort many viewers feel when confronted with underage nudity. The culture of the United States is reluctant to acknowledge the sensuality inherent in all bodies. Critics accuse Mann of making her children vulnerable to predators; she is identified as a bad mother for failing to protect her children, but instead exposing them. Mann addresses this in a chapter of her memoir *Hold Still*, wherein she discusses various reactions to her using her family as subjects for her pictures. One reaction that she notes is some viewers' inability to distinguish the photograph from the real child. In contrast, her children were able to distinguish a picture of themselves from their living, breathing body, due in large part to family discussions and to the children's collaboration in the image making. Another criticism was that Mann herself was immoral as the creator of the images. In defense, she writes,

Part of the artist's job is to make the commonplace singular, to project a different interpretation onto the conventional. With the family pictures, I may have done some of that. In particular I think they tapped into some below-the-surface cultural unease about what it is to be a child, bringing into the dialog questions of innocence and threat and fear and sensuality and calling attention to the limitations of widely held views on childhood (and motherhood). (153)

With this defense, she turns the onus of the immorality back on the viewer. She says, "I loved the whole sensual package with a ferocious intensity. Yes, it was a physical desire, a parental

carnality, even a kind of primal parental eroticism, but to confuse it with what we call sexuality, inter-adult sexual relations, is a category error” (158). Both subject and photographer see childhood innocence in the images; thus, it must be the fault of the viewer who, at the point where the three intersect in meaning creation, introduces sexuality.

Apparently, Mann had no concept of how these images might be received by the public until they were already exhibited. Perhaps her role as mother blinded her, as she suggests. In her eyes, “But when I saw their bodies, and photographed them, I never thought of them as being sexual; I thought of them as being simply, miraculously, and sensuously beautiful” (158). Certainly, in the early 1990s, when this work came out, the internet with its unrelenting dissemination of images did not exist. The physical limitations of gallery exhibits and printed books may have felt safe in a way that the viewers of today know they are not. Mann’s more recent work does not include intimate family photographs of her children and grandchildren, perhaps because of the reception of her earlier images and her own reflection. She does photograph her children, but in posed head shots. The more intimate images she chooses to exhibit are of her husband’s aging body and lack the element of maternal identity.

The sensuality to which Mann refers, and the maternal desire that tugs at the body in a physical way, is a difficult subject. In “Jocasta,” (fig. A.4) Eti Wade explores this physical connection between mother and child and the anticipation of loss and tragedy. Through performing her deep passion towards her male child and the joyous emersion in the sensual pleasure of the physicality of his body, she goes beyond the cliché of sentimentality. Wade uses a scanner rather than a camera, and prints her images two feet tall and about six feet long. Her son’s face is crushed almost painfully against the glass, and she bites his fingers and pinches

him, as though she would devour him. The title, “Jocasta,” references the story of Oedipus and his mother, Jocasta, who he marries after killing his father. Wade exposes the sensuality of motherhood and the wrestling that ensues as a child, through natural psychological progression, disengages from his mother to become independent. Our bodies are one site of mothering. If we are biological mothers, we conceive the child in passion, and grow and birth the child with our bodies, and then nurse them, feeding them from our bodies. If we are non-biological mothers, we are still responsible for the physical bodies of those we nurture. These offspring have become a physical piece of us, and therefore the necessary separation of the growth process becomes a struggle for both mother and child.

Catherine Opie’s image “Self-Portrait/Nursing” also confronts the viewer with the physicality of mothering. The color photograph captures the intimacy of a breastfeeding mother and child. Opie is bare to the waist with her arms circled around her naked son. Her short, dark hair, tanned-tattooed arms, and weathered face contrast with his blond hair and smooth skin. His leg curls into her arm, while his hands bring her breast closer to his suckling mouth. Pale swirls of scars cross her chest, spelling out the word “Pervert.” Mother and child gaze at each other with a private intensity. The simple background is a red tapestry tablecloth (National Museum 115). Opie’s image mimics renaissance Madonna paintings, but has none of their sentimentality. Her nudity is not coyly covered and no smile crosses her face. Instead, Opie claims a position for herself and her child equal to saints and icons. Claire Raymond does not view Opie’s work as “thumbing its nose at Renaissance paintings of the Madonna [but] as rather opening the field of the visual feminine to a more expansive, substantial, and long-standing discourse” (137). Indeed, Opie’s image serves to introduce a new perspective on the Madonna, the Eastern Orthodox

“bearer of God” (Raymond). This new model is made for the mother herself, not for the male gaze. The mother is strong, capable, independent, and bears the scars to prove it. By enacting the role of the nurturing, breastfeeding mother, Opie reminds the viewer that it is her actions, not a conformity to societal expectations, which embody her maternal agency,

Another of Opie’s photographs demonstrates her refusal to conform. In “Oliver in a Tutu,” a small boy stands on a chair in the center of the room. On his head is a silver crown, around his neck a beaded necklace, and a backlit tutu glows. In the yard, two blurry figures sweep the deck (National Museum 114). The pose is a snapshot from the family album, from just before a birthday party or just after. Oliver is posed in all his finery, pausing from his play of arranging magnetic letters on the washing machine to half smile at the photographer, who the viewer assumes is his mother. The image is a celebration of the child, a recognition of his beauty and a preservation of the moment. It also functions as a confirmation that a boy in a pink tutu is a normal occurrence, not a shame to be hidden away. This mother/photographer asserts her power as a mother to affirm her child’s choices and establish her identity as a non-conformist mother who will advocate for herself and for her children.

Though family photograph albums highlight the ideal moments of family life, mother photographers challenge these whitewashed views. Motherhood is not a constant joy. Danielle Khoury’s “Becoming Mother” reveals the daily challenges of motherhood, and the constant re-forming of identity, both as a mother and as a person apart from her children. The camera becomes the mother’s eye and the viewers share her perspective. In *I See You*, (fig. A.5) the child looks back at the viewer, back at the mother, and the two merge, unable to escape the constant presence of a small child, even in a private moment. With *Fenced in*, (fig. A.6) the title

reinforces the confining boundaries of mothering small children with a diptych of a backyard fence and bars of sunlight on a wooden floor. The wide world shrinks to a small, personal domestic realm. Khoury's *Wash* (fig. A.7) shows a top-down view of a child washing her hands. This is a familiar perspective for a mother. Although the mother is not visible in the photograph, because of the angle and the moment, there is an implied presence of a watchful career. Again, the mother and viewer become one, turning the viewer into the one caring for the child and the mother/photographer into an observer.

The work of women photographers reminds us of the complexity of identity. We do not identify solely as "mother." Instead, we are complex layers of multiple identities. Jennings H. Sheffield highlights this theme of complexity. For her series "Tethered," (fig. A.8) she uses a mathematical formula to create images that splice together moments from the same time frame on different days to document her daily tasks in the roles of artist, mother, teacher, wife, and daughter. Her images remind us that we are not mothers in isolation; this is never our only role in life, but combines with our other roles to form a whole identity. In addition, her pieces contain the essence of why mothers photograph their children for family albums: we are trying to capture exact moments in our lives in order to memorialize who our children are in that particular instance, and who we are. This is an impossible task. When the moment passes, we are no longer the same, so another moment must be captured.

Identities are created through storytelling. For mother photographers, storytelling happens through pictures. No one definition exists of what a mother is, nor does one standard of good mothering exist. Instead, each of the mothers presented here adds her experience, her story, to the quilt of maternal identity. Through the visions created by this community of mothers, we

can begin to understand the complexity of a mother's identity. Even then, we cannot create a comprehensive catalog of maternal identities. Too many varied experiences exist to say that Mother is this, or Mother is that. But in sharing and listening to each other, mothers will come closer to an understanding of their diverse identities.

CHAPTER 4

AN ARTIST STATEMENT AND A MOTHER'S LIFE

The projector hums as the film threads through and we appear, moving jerkily across the sheet hung on the dining room wall. First into view is my brother, tromping down the outside stairs of our jungle house in his black swim trunks and black rubber boots, a big paddle over his shoulder. I follow in my little pink one piece, dragging a smaller paddle across the sand. Seeing myself on the screen jolts me as I recognize myself and yet do not. I peer at the curly head, the chubby little legs running to keep up with the others, and try to understand who I am.

This film runs through my mind as I photograph my children at play. I capture moments in their lives with a still camera, not a movie camera. A single frame catching a single moment limits my ability to capture their movement, so I advance the film halfway and open the shutter, repeating again and again. When I develop the film, I find my daughter's image outside of the fixed frame, merging, overlapping, ghost hand appearing from nowhere, moving across the landscape of our lives (fig. B.1).

My father was my first photography teacher, and I keep to the lessons he taught me still. He took me into an almost abandoned darkroom, ripe with the smell of bat guano, and taught me the magic of bringing image out of nothing but light and chemistry. And then he lent me his camera to travel the world. This was my plan, to travel and photograph the world.

Then I got a job, and a child, and a house, and I settled to one place. My focus narrowed down to my family and my local community. Bound by the restrictions of mothering young children, I turned my camera on what was around me. When I enrolled in graduate school, I knew that this would take me away from my children, so I determined that I would involve them

as much as possible, and for a photographer, this meant making them the center of my dissertation. In the end, my dissertation has become about me and moved beyond photography to encompass my whole mothering story.

Maternal identities comprise meta-narratives that incorporate maternal intuition, learned behaviors, and physical knowledge. Adrienne Rich expresses this well when she challenges women to “begin, at last, to *think through the body*, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized- our great mental capacities, hardly used; our highly developed tactile sense; our genius for close observation; our complicated, pain-enduring, multi-pleasured physicality” (284). This totality encompasses our lived experience, from which arises our maternal identity.

Creating an identity takes more than fifteen years. I have been doing field research for this dissertation all that time, and still new territory waits to be uncovered. When we think of mothering, a picture of a Madonna or a woman tending to a small child comes to mind. However, mothering is so much more than that. The experiences of mothering a small child are completely different than the experiences that come as that child grows up. When I began this project, I had two small children; now I have three stretching from adolescence to pre-teen to kindergartner. There have been many lessons over the years, and my breadth of knowledge has expanded in surprising ways. I am an expert in various medical issues, local soccer, girl scouts, and education; I have witnessed mean girls, and queen bees, and bullying, but also girl power, and strong friendships, and bully resisting. I deal with three separate personalities, and food issues, and emotions. My body has nurtured three children, both in the womb and at the breast. I have birthed in the hospital, and with a midwife, and learned to soothe with my hands and voice. And soon it will be time to separate from my children again as they move into adulthood. Unable

to capture all of my experiences in my photographs, I create images of those whom I have chosen to mother as symbols of that deeper story.

Unlike the photographs in a family album, these images do not attempt to capture just one moment. Instead, I open the shutter and half-wind the film and open the shutter again in order to capture a series of moments, to slow time down, like Eadweard Muybridge trying to slow down time in his series “Animal Locomotion” (Frizot 246). Muybridge’s methods and intentions were scientific; my methods are not replicable from image to image and my intentions are to spread the photographic moment out over several seconds.

My work echoes other photographer mentioned in this dissertation- the fragments of Sheffield’s combined strips show in my work’s fragmented film frames. The ghost images of the overlapping exposures also echo the Latteier collages with their repeated figures, and Tsinhnahjinnie and Leonard’s dreamlike collages.

These photographs are maternal landscapes in part because of their extended horizontal format; landscapes are traditionally horizontal panoramas that extend beyond the standard pictorial proportions. Landscape critic J. B. Jackson’s wrote: “I suspect no landscape, vernacular or otherwise, can be comprehended unless we perceive it as an organization of space; unless we ask ourselves who owns or uses the spaces, how they were created and how they change” (150). Spaces are not just physical, but also the relational, emotional, and mental spaces created by mothering, and these questions of ownership, creation, and change apply.

They are also landscapes because they are the view out my kitchen window or from my backyard. Like Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe, who travel the country re-photographing landscapes that other photographers have photographed, and combining their new images with

the old, I am revisiting the sights/sites of other mother photographers. Mother photographers are not photographing new subjects, but revisiting the often photographed moments of childhood. However, by choosing to photograph them and by photographing those moments with new eyes, we create new images and new meaning. Like Klett and Wolfe, my images extend beyond a standard frame of film, but unlike them, I do not layer other photographs onto mine; the meanings layer themselves.

I choose to use the term mothering over the more standard term motherhood because of the institutionalized connotations of the second term. Motherhood is a legal and biological term. In contrast, mothering carries the meaning of an active choice. Mothering for me has constantly been a choice that I must make again and again. There was not a magic moment when I instantly became mother. Instead, I became mother again and again with the choice to bear and birth my daughter, and then to hold her and nurse her and change her dirty diapers. This choice was one I faced daily with each child- when their cries woke me before the alarm, or their requests for attention drew my thoughts away from work or pleasure. It is still a choice, but one that has become habit after almost fifteen years of mothering.

From my lived experience comes my exhibition, my view of the landscape. The exhibit took place in the Visual Art Gallery at The University of Texas at Dallas in the summer of 2015. All of the photographs were taken with a plastic toy Holga camera on either color or black and white 120 mm film. I purposefully mis-wound the film, advancing half or three quarters of a frame in order to create overlapping images and to eliminate the stripes between frames. This takes control of the image away from me, countering the tight control available with a digital camera image, and mirroring the loss of control I have over my children's lives. Each

photograph is a surprise when I develop it because I am shooting film, not digital, and I have little control over where the film overlaps.

After digitally scanning the negatives and removing scratches and dust, they were printed at UT-Dallas on an Epson Ultrachrome printer. All the images are two feet wide, but range in length from three to ten feet. This large size echoes the projected home movie images of my childhood, and also reveals details hidden in a smaller print. In addition, the scale removes the photographs from the context of the family photograph album, challenging the viewer to engage with the subject matter on a universal level rather than as personal images. The overlay of the double exposed negative and the ghostliness of the figures echo the viewer's own childhood memories, and mimic the patterns of play common to childhoods in many times and places.

The first image is a triptych of children bashing a piñata. First, Ali takes a turn (fig. B.2), then the camera stops the swaying piñata, bright against a dark background (fig. B.3). Finally, the older Leila swings at the piñata (fig. B.4). The double exposures and layered figures against a dark background capture the vertiginous flailing of the blindfolded piñata basher. *Tic Tac Toe* is dominated by a blue tarp with children lined along the edge. The photograph contains each turn the children take to put their Frisbees in a row (fig. B.5). The black and white photograph titled *Hide and Seek* appears to be multiple children hiding behind multiple trees, but it is one boy, Sami, playfully running between two trees to hide and reappear (fig. B.6). In *Water Boy*, Sami is engaged in the Sisyphean task of emptying the sea with a little red bucket. This photograph differs from the others in that the frames are more defined, although their edges overlap. The first two show the small child in the sea with his bucket; the third frame looks back to shore where he

delivers the water to his siblings and cousin who are building a castle, flanked by Grandpa and Uncle. The final frame returns to the boy in the water, his bucket full once again (fig. B.7). In *Basketball*, Leila and Ali run across the basketball court, block each other, and shoot, appearing again and again in the same small area (fig. B.8). *Strawberry Picking* hides a secret strawberry filching in the final frame. The first two frames are clearly Leila picking strawberries and the flat of berries. The third frame, which comes back to Leila picking, bleeds into the fourth frame, and on the edge is a barely visible image of Leila smiling as she pops a ripe berry into her mouth (fig. B.9). Sami moves through *Skipping Stones*, throwing, picking up a stone, and throwing again. In the final frame he is transparent, rocks showing through his ghosted image. In the first frame it is his cousins who are transparent, but they are fully present in the final frame (fig. B.10). The final photograph, *Ride 'em Cowboy* has the most defined frames. Sami rides a toy horse in the park. The first frame is of his back and the last a front view, but in the middle photograph he has turned his head to smile directly at the photographer (fig. B.11).

It is in this final image that I am most present as the photographer. In the other images, I am invisible, my presence implied as a watchful protector and observer. In *Water Boy*, the photographer's perspective of being in the water with Sami and then looking back at the shore indicates that she is there to keep him safe as well as photograph. *Hide and Seek* has a similar implication. *Skipping Stones* and *Strawberry Picking* show a mother who offers her children new experiences. She is not, however, consciously present in the image. It is not until Sami "sees" me and smiles in the final photograph that the viewer becomes conscious of the photographer and her relationship to the subject.

In the alcove, the 8mm film described at the beginning of this artist statement played over

and over, my childhood on display just like my own children's childhoods in the larger gallery space.

The exhibition includes ten images from a catalog of more than twenty. I have moved on to other series of work, but I hope that these photographs become, in the words of Reynold Price, a legacy “indescribably large— her children's treasure” (np).

APPENDIX A

PHOTOGRAPHS REFERENCED IN CHAPTER 3



*Joe fixing their flat tire
I offered to change the tire but Grandma Kay said "You're not!" Instead she called for Joe to stop playing with Aaron in the pool, and come do it. Rather than argue with her, I just took pictures. Ana knows her Dad is good at fixing things, but does she know that she will be able to do those things if she needs to?*

Figure A.1. Brooks, Linda. *Joe fixing their flat tire* 1994



Figure A.2. Murillo Tinnen, Lupita. *Lupron* (from the series *Muted Whispers*). 2012.



Figure A.3. Murillo Tinnen, Lupita. *Lupron* (from the series *Muted Whispers*). 2012.



Figure A.4. Wade, Eti. Detail from *Jocasta 2*. 2008.



Figure A.5. Khoury, Danielle René. *I See You*.



Figure A.6. Khoury, Danielle René. *Fenced In*.



Figure A.7. Khoury, Danielle René. *Wash*.



Figure A.8. Sheffield, H. Jennings. *2:00pm-4:00pm* (Sept. 10, Oct. 20, Oct. 25, Nov. 23, Feb. 1). 2013.

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM LANDSCAPES OF MOTHERING



Figure B.1. *Waving*



Figure B.2. *Piñata 1*



Figure B.3. *Piñata*



Figure B.4. *Piñata 2*



Figure B.5. *Tic Tac Toe*



Figure B.6. *Hide and Seek*



Figure B.7. *Water Boy*



Figure B.8. *Basketball*



Figure B.9. *Strawberry Picking*



Figure B.10. *Skipping Stones*



Figure B.11. *Ride 'em, Cowboy*

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Cynthia M. Miller grew up in the rolling plains and jungles of southern Colombia, received her Bachelor's degree in Humanities from Biola University in California, and traveled the world before settling in Texas. Her Master's degree is in English, with a TESOL emphasis, and she is ESOL faculty at Richland College in Dallas, Texas and a lecturer in photography at The University of Texas at Dallas.

Cynthia is an artist because of, not in spite of, her children. She uses her art to explore her identity and create maps of the landscapes where childhood and motherhood intersect.

She photographs with a plastic toy camera, vintage cameras, a cell phone, and DSLR. Most recently she has begun to use time lapse photography.

Her work has been exhibited locally at The University of Texas at Dallas, Cedar Valley College, Fourteenth Street Gallery, TCC Photo Gallery, Longview, Texas, and the Bathhouse Cultural Center, as well as online in the PhotoPlace web annex.

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EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS, Dallas, Texas
PhD: Humanities, Aesthetic Studies, May 2018

TEXAS A&M COMMERCE, Commerce, Texas, May 2005
Master of Arts: English with a TESOL emphasis

BIOLA UNIVERSITY, La Mirada, California, May 1992
Bachelor of Arts: Humanities -emphasis in Literature, History and Drama

WORK EXPERIENCE

ESOL FACULTY, August 2009- present
Richland College; Dallas, Texas

ADJUNCT LECTURER, Photography, January 2016 –present
UT Dallas; Richardson, Texas

ESOL FACULTY, August 2006- May 2009
Eastfield College; Mesquite, Texas

INSTRUCTIONAL SPECIALIST III, January 2001-August 2006
Richland College; Dallas, Texas

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SPECIALIST, October 1999 to January 2001
Richland College; Dallas, Texas

ENGLISH TEACHER, February 1998 - December 1998
Universidad de La Sabana; Chia, Colombia

BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHER, September 1997-March 1998
Business English Institute, CESA; Bogota™, Colombia

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Universidad de Los Andes; Bogota™, Colombia

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PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITIONS

Upcoming:

Telling Our Stories, Cedar Valley College, Lancaster, TX, Summer 2018
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Previous:

In This Day and Age, Bathhouse Cultural Center, Dallas, TX, Spring 2017 (Curator)

Shutter to Think, Edith O'Donnell Building Gallery, UTD, Richardson, TX Fall 2015.

Landscapes of Mothering PhD Show, Visual Arts Main Gallery, UTD, Richardson, TX. Spring 2015.

Reframing Documentary, Visual Arts Main Gallery, UTD, Richardson, TX. Spring 2013

Visual Language, Cedar Valley College Gallery, Lancaster, TX. Spring 2012

Social Studies UTD Visual Arts Main Gallery, Richardson, TX Fall 2011

New Works UTD Theater Gallery, Richardson, TX. Spring 2010

SPE Group Show, The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA, Spring 2010

Frames of Reference, 14th Street Gallery, Plano, TX, Spring 2009

New Works, UTD Theater Gallery, Richardson, TX. Spring 2009

Student Show, UTD Visual Arts Main Gallery, Richardson, TX. Fall 2008

Trinity Arts Conference, University of Dallas, Dallas, TX June 2008

Student Show, UTD Visual Arts Mezzanine Gallery, Richardson, TX. Spring 2007

Psalm 23, PCPC, Dallas, TX April 2007 (Juried Show)

City of Richardson Photography Contest. January 2006. (First Prize- Cityscapes)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Creating Maternal Identity through Photography,” Southwest Popular/American Culture Association, Albuquerque, NM; Spring 2018

“Creating Maternal Identity through Photography,” SPE South Central Regional Conference, Waco, TX; Fall 2017

“Postdocumentary Photography,” University of North Texas Art History Award Presentation, Second place award; Spring 2016

“Post-Documentary and Identity,” RAW Conference, University Texas, Dallas; Panel coordinator; Spring 2015

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Society for Photographic Education

TESOL International
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PUBLICATIONS

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LANGUAGES

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