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## Introduction

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FOR most mothers it is impossible to escape the ubiquitous idea that some mothers are "good," others "bad," and that some mothering practices are "right" and others "wrong." These ideas about mothers pervade our lives. Texts, images, interpersonal interactions, codes, and laws all drench us in messages about what constitutes good and bad mothering and who the good and the bad mothers are.

Though this coding of maternal behavior may seem invariant, what we code and how we code it has shifted dramatically over time. The feminist philosopher Elizabeth Badinter concluded that mothers behave as the culture dictates (Badinter, 1981). In her fascinating study of mothering practices in urban France from the 17th to the 20th centuries, Badinter has been able to determine that, for example, in 18th-century urban France, women of all classes did not organize their lives around the care of children, but rather around their husbands' lives. A "good" mother did not breastfeed her children, as she might today, for this would have interfered with her wifely role.

<sup>1</sup>Mary Watkins contributed to the writing of the Introduction but was not involved in the editing of the book that this chapter addresses.

If we look at the structure of maternal coding, we can see that dichotomization is its essential feature. Mothers and their behavior are coded as either good or bad. Nancy Chodorow, a psychoanalytically trained sociologist, and Susan Contratto, a psychologist, believe that it is the child's perspective of the mother that the culture has encoded in this dichotomy (Chodorow & Contratto, 1982). The child's fantasy of the perfect mother generates the good-bad split; it also obscures the mother's point of view.

Clinical and developmental psychology have historically focused on child development, with little attention paid to the lifelong relational development of mothers and children; even less attention is paid to the psychological development of mothers. The absence of the mother's perspective and experience in clinical formulations, developmental theory, and psychological research is striking.

The dominant Western ideologies of development portray the evolution of the individual "self" as emerging out of childlike dependence and enmeshment. Mothers are seen as "supports," "matrices," "holding environments," or "self-objects" who supply, gratify, mirror, and "develop" children. Without a two-person or relational psychology of human development, women and mothers will continue to be regarded primarily as "objects" or "self-objects," and not as "subjects" or "selves." In such a paradigm, mothers appearing as subjects with voices and interests of their own are experienced as deeply suspect and potentially destructive to children's development.

For women, the path to adulthood and motherhood remains complicated by the inherent conflict (as culturally constructed) between self-development and relational connection (Braverman, 1989; Surrey, 1990, 1996; Weingarten, 1997). Gilligan, Rogers, and Tolman (1991) have suggested that this core paradox begins to impact young women at adolescence. Surrey (1990, 1996) postulates that this relational paradox is at the core of mothers' lives; that is, in the name of the mothering relationship, mothers begin to take more and more of their authentic experience out of relationship, thus distorting and disempowering themselves and their relationships. This paradox renders mothers both deeply and passionately engaged in connections with their children, but simultaneously disconnected, disempowered, and isolated as mothers in their internal and relational worlds as well as in their social, political, and vocational worlds. It is the task of this book directly to address mothers' subjectivity. It is a project shared with other feminist scholars (Bell-Scott et al., 1991; Daly & Reddy, 1991; Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994; Knowles & Cole, 1990; Reddy, Roth,

& Sheldon, 1994), and it directly undermines the pervasive practices of mother blaming.

All of the contributors to this book share the belief that mother blaming—and the ubiquitous splitting of mothers and mothering into good and bad, right and wrong, that underlies it—has exerted a powerful and destructive influence on family life. One important study looked at the incidence of mother blaming in major clinical journals in 1970, 1976, and 1982 and noted that mothers were blamed for a total of 72 different kinds of psychopathology (Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale, 1985). The frequency of mother blaming did not vary significantly over the 3 target years. The ratio of mentions of the mother to father was 5:1.

Responding to the pervasiveness and destructiveness of mother blaming by clinicians, Jean Baker Miller suggested that "we declare a five-year moratorium on mother blaming in order to be more creative and thoughtful in our clinical formulations and psychotherapy" (Surrey, 1990, p. 86). Nearly a decade later, the challenge is as fresh and the need as great.

#### CHANGING CONTEXTS FOR MOTHERING: CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS IN AMERICA

Society's definition of "good" mothering is closely tied to particular childcare arrangements. These arrangements, however, are responsive to social and economic factors, not primarily biological ones. The childcare arrangement that white middle-class Americans take for granted consists of care by married women in a nuclear family of children and parents; these women are largely unassisted and isolated. But anthropological studies (Margolis, 1984, pp. 15–16) show that this arrangement differs from that of 93.9% of the world's population. In a study of 186 societies worldwide, in less than half were mothers the primary caretaker of infants. In fewer than 20% of societies was the mother the primary caretaker after infancy (Margolis, 1984). However, in common with the rest of the world's population past and present, we assume our own methods of childcare are the best and the most natural. In fact, we do so despite much evidence to the contrary.

To gain a deeper understanding of their role in American culture, mothers need to appreciate the historical and cultural forces that have crafted their job description and the psychological burden that issues

from it. A brief look at American history can show how novel our present images of "mother" are.

Three centuries ago, although all adult women were expected to marry and bear children, the orbit of their industry was far larger than childcare. In colonial America, mothers did not devote themselves to their children. Instead, the mother was a necessary member of the production team and she could not be spared to care for children, who were not seen as valuable until they too were old enough to contribute to the economic survival of the family and the colony (Block, 1978).

Women were responsible for much of the home industry, that is, the production of clothing, food, and all other household goods, and children were integrated at an early age into the work of the family. Older siblings, apprentices, journeymen (i.e., adolescents "put out" to learn a trade), servants, and extended family often also lived in the household. They contributed to the care of the younger children as the mother worked through her daily list of chores. As the children grew, the boys were trained by the father and men, and the girls by the mother and women of the house. Childhood was at most a period lasting up to age 10, but long before that, by age 5 or 6, each child had an orbit of industry. Childhood was not thought of as a period of leisure, play, or protection as we now envision it. Children were conceived of as miniature adults and treated accordingly. There was little attention paid to developing their personalities, their individuality, or their intelligence (Margolis, 1984, p. 19). What attention was paid was not the province of mothers. According to historian John Demos (1983), in the late 1600s it was fathers, not mothers, who were believed to be the central figures in the child's religious and moral development. Men were thought to be better endowed to reason than women, a characteristic that made it necessary for them to be the rulers over children and mothers. "Carried to and fro by their inordinate affections and lacking the 'compass' of sound reason, women could hardly provide the vigilant supervision that all children needed" (Demos, 1983, p. 162).

With the rise of capitalism and industrialism the former arrangements for childcare were disrupted. The idea of the child began to change radically, and with it the idea of who "mother" should be. Production outside the home increased, as store-bought goods began to be substituted for homemade ones. This lessened the burden on women for household production. By the late 1700s the family had become more nuclear. Servants and apprentices were no longer members, and the father worked outside the home for the larger part of the

day. For the first time in American history the home and the workplace became separated (Chodorow, 1978, p. 5). Because the man of the family left the home each day for long periods of time, childcare was left exclusively to the mother. As the practice of putting out children into apprenticeships declined, childhood began to reach into what we now call "adolescence," leaving mothers with both older and younger children to care for exclusively.

For the first time, childhood—and an extended one at that—began to be seen as a distinct period in the life cycle. A literature of advice arose that began to warn how crucial the early years were to the later character of the child. The "discovery" of the child led to the "cult of motherhood." Images of mothers became polarized: Mothers were either saintly, all-nurturing, and self-sacrificing; or cruel, ruthless, and self-centered. Although the image of the saintly mother primarily applied to white women of middle- and upper-class status, women of color and women of lower social class were also affected. This ideal became the dominant discourse of expectations of motherhood and often rendered the experiences of women of color and lower social class inferior by comparison (Collins, 1987; Ehrenreich & English, 1979).

As childcare came to be left to mothers who were increasingly freed from other responsibilities, the psychological significance of mothering became elevated in the writings of the late 19th century. Such literature became increasingly addressed to mothers alone, as duties that had been shared or had been the preserve of fathers gradually came within the province of mothers. The mother in popular literature was depicted as the moral guide for both children and husband. While the husband coped with the evils of power, aggression, and ambition outside the home, the wife and mother was supposed to create a protected environment, a haven in which to bring up her children and to which her husband could return to rest and renew himself. The more mothers were idealized and given power to do good, the greater the potential seemed that they might also misuse that power and go astray, promoting evil and badness, and harming their children and society by their wrong doings in the realm of motherhood.

By the time psychology overtook religion in providing the canon for childrearing, mothers were seen as the exclusive care providers for children. Psychoanalytic theory that focuses on the mother-child dyad would not have been possible before the child's early affective relations had been shrunk down to one person. The mother's personality did indeed become central to the developing child, because the child was left alone with the mother. Psychoanalytic theory, unmindful of its

cultural context, did not question this arrangement or its consequences for children and mothers. Rather it took these arrangements as universal and inevitable. It could be argued that one factor in the so-called "breakdown of the American family" is the culmination of this century's impossible ideas about motherhood. Now a mother is assigned full-time work outside the home, while she is expected to perform the bulk of childcare, and to attend minutely (largely unassisted) to the emotional and psychological development of her children (far into adulthood), in communities that have failed to provide education, health care, resources, and safety.

### MARGINALIZATION OF MOTHERS

It is precisely in the context of the unrealistic demands placed on contemporary mothers that marginalization of mothers and their mothering practices takes place. Marginalization is the social phenomenon of being diminished and devalued in comparison to others, or of having one's ideas, feelings, practices, or actions rendered less valid or useful in relation to a dominant ideal. When marginalization occurs, the experience of some is subjugated to the experience of others and rendered less visible and less heard. Those who are marginalized often find that their experiences are represented by others in ways that do not express or reflect them. Value is placed on the experiences of those in the center, and less value, no value, or a negative value is placed on those pushed to the margins.

There are many ways that marginalization of mothers occurs. One way is in relation to other mothers. Those at the center tend to be mothers with economic resources, social and community support, and a view of themselves and mothering that fits the dominant ideology. Mothers who are seriously compromised in their ability to access social resources are blamed, mis-seen, or vilified, such as welfare mothers, mothers in prison, mothers who are homeless, or poor immigrant mothers.

In fact, it is possible to describe the prototypical "good mother." She is likely to be white, married, not working in a job that takes her away "too much" from her parenting responsibilities; she has only one or two children, and they do not have any physical defects or behavioral problems; she conceived her children and is raising them in a heterosexual relationship; and she and her spouse are older than 20 years of age and are of the same ethnic and racial background. The more a

mother deviates from this prototype, the more likely that she or her mothering practices will be marginalized. These assumptions marginalize the many mothers who are raising competent children and maintaining adaptive family systems, some in spite of very difficult extenuating circumstances.

Another way that mothers are marginalized is in relation to the ideal of the "good mother." No mother can *always* be a good mother by her own or others' standards, and therefore all mothers are inevitably marginalized by this oppressive ideal. Societal marginalization—the social phenomenon—is experienced individually. All of us are affected, even haunted by the cultural images of "good" and "bad" mothers. Most of the authors in this book wrestle profoundly with popular and professional ideas about resilience that imply that children in any context will develop well, regardless of risk and circumstance, *if* there is sufficient "goodness" or "strength" in their individual mothers. These models place mothers at risk. The current political targeting of single mothers, working mothers, and lesbian mothers does just this.

A third way that marginalization of mothers takes place is through the invisibility or absence of representation of their own particular contexts, practices, or preferences in dominant constructions of mothering. Many mothers find their experience missing in cultural iconography. It seems as if the dominant culture wants to expunge their maternal situation or style from the "record." Adoptive mothers, mothers of adolescents and disabled children, and bicultural mothers are marginalized by their lack of representation in discussions and images of mothers. Marginalization breeds invisibility. However, it can also give rise to resistance.

### FROM MARGIN TO CENTER: ACTS OF RESISTANCE

While the culture can marginalize the realities of mothers in many ways, mothers do not have to accept this. Many find ways to actively resist their marginalization.

Each of the chapters in this volume examines sources of resistance and draws on the voices and strengths of the mothers being represented. We chose, as a group, to focus on the concept of resistance to marginalization, rather than psychological resilience. We felt that the concept of resilience as traditionally used in psychology considered the individual apart from the social context, a view that we found unhelpful

and misleading. The scope of "resilience" was too broad, encompassing highly individualistic intrapsychic factors, and could easily fall into blaming individual mothers for "nonresilience." The decision to focus on resistance, not resilience, was itself a form of resistance to the traditional categories of psychological and clinical research, which have profoundly silenced and pathologized mothers.

Chapter contributors draw on a variety of theoretical models of resistance, but we have found our theoretical differences to be compatible at the level of basic assumptions, psychological and sociopolitical applications, and personal commitments. With regard to resistance, we have drawn on the work of Weingarten (1995, 1997); Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey (1991); Garcia Coll, Cook-Nobles, and Surrey (1995); Gilligan et al. (1991); Robinson and Ward (1991); Freire (1989); hooks (1989); Aptecker (1989); and Stacey (1997).

First, it is important to state that we are using the concept of resistance as it has been articulated in the sociopolitical, not the psychological, domain. Resistance as described within the psychological domain has generally been cast in a negative, destructive light. Aware of this, and wanting to retain the concept of resistance nonetheless, Gilligan, founder of the Harvard Project on Girls and Women, reframes and distinguishes positive or "healthy" resistance from more damaging psychological forms, which create psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, dissociation, and immobilization (Gilligan et al., 1991). Gilligan's work has influenced our thinking about resistance from a psychological perspective.

However, this book is more concerned with resistance as it is understood within a sociopolitical perspective. We have drawn on the works of several writers who speak about resistance in this way. bell hooks (1989) writes of the movement from margin to center as an act of self-determination as one becomes one's own subjective center; this is an act of resistance, opposition, and liberation for those who have been at the margins. She defines this process of "speaking out" or "talking back" to dominant objectifying forces as liberatory and radically transforming. We see this book as part of and contributing to a more realistic, appreciative, exploratory, and creative construction of motherhood. As hooks writes, "The struggle to end domination, the individual struggle to move from object to subject, is expressed in the effort to establish the liberatory voice—that way of speaking that is no longer determined by one's status as object. That way of speaking is characterized by resistance. It demands that paradigms shift—that we learn to talk—to listen—to hear in a new way" (1989, p. 15).

The work of several authors is helpful in understanding the processes that persons go through to establish a liberatory voice. Paulo Freire (1989), leader of the literacy movement in Brazil, radical pedagogist, and social activist, argues that learning to read should involve a process of becoming able to decode the cultural and socioeconomic circumstances that shape your life and your thinking. He calls the first step in this empowering process "conscientization," a group process that allows one to engage actively with the structures one has previously identified with and been blind to. The process allows people to see through these constructions.

In Freire's (1989) model, an "animator" helps group participants to interrogate their day-to-day experience, their concerns and suffering, exploring the relation between daily life and the cultural dictates that suffuse it. Efforts at change are directed not foremost to the individual level, but to wider cultural change that will, in the end, affect the participants. This change becomes possible through the second step of Freire's method, "annunciation." Once a group knows how to decode the dominant paradigm and its effects, then they can begin to conceive of more just social arrangements.

Freire's Brazilian work has direct application in therapeutic and community-oriented work with mothers, as well as in our conceptualization of mothers' lives. It asks of us that we enlarge our understanding of the sufferings of individual mothers to include the historical and cultural contexts that shape their daily lives. Further, it asks that groups of mothers inquire into their deepest intentions and heartfelt aspirations for their relations with their children, and that they work together to change some of the status-quo-oriented forces that mitigate against creating motherhood in ways that more effectively serve mothers and children.

These ideas fit with ours about resistance and mothering. Weingarten, in her work on "cultural resistance" (1995), discusses another aspect of the process by which persons can identify dominant cultural discourses, critique, and resist them. This, she believes, makes room for voice that is authenticated by communities of listeners. Weingarten has applied this framework in therapeutic contexts and in the family (1995, 1997), especially focusing on maternal voice.

Authors at the Stone Center have focused on creating mutually empathic and mutually empowering relational contexts in therapy and in research that empower, authorize, and support the emergence of different voices. In particular, clinicians and researchers have sought to "hear into speech" the voices of girls and women who have "carried"

the disavowed knowledge of the worlds of connection and relationship within the dominant culture (Miller, 1976; Jordan et al., 1991). Such a model of resistance seeks to describe with great detail the qualities and radical impact of such "listening," "being present with," "standing with," and "solidarity with" the client or subject. Surrey (García Coll et al., 1996) has described a key aspect of psychological strength in women as the capacity for healthy resistance and described the power of mutually authentic and mutually empathetic relationships as "resistance-fostering" relationships. In patriarchal culture, women's (especially mothers') resistance to division, isolation, and "silencing" lies in the power of authentic connection.

Frequently, in this volume, marginalized mothers speak of close relationships with other mothers and role models as the source of their ability to resist devaluation or vilification and to maintain a sense of worth and hope. This emphasis on the qualities of the listener and the relational context lead to an emphasis on building or accessing "communities of resistance" (Welch, 1985), which appear to be an important factor in each of the models of resistance we draw on. These communities are often politically and/or spiritually based, and may be the foundation on which a liberation movement can develop. They frequently are a source of alternative culture building, through the development of new language, literature, art, music, ritual, and storytelling, and community action, through enlarged communication possibilities through newspapers, workshops and conferences, media alerts, marches, and so forth. Such communities foster the process of resistance and the creation or liberation of new voices and visions as a positive resource.

Robinson and Ward (1991) describe different models of resistance for African American female adolescents in a society that continually denigrates womanhood and blackness. They distinguish "resistance for survival" (personal, individualized, short-term survival strategies in the face of oppression) from "resistance for liberation and empowerment" (collective strategies whose goal is self-affirmation, self-determination, and community validation).<sup>2</sup> Robinson and Ward call on an Afrocentric model based on enhanced awareness of the strengths of African culture and tradition as a base for fostering positive resistance for liberation and empowerment. In thinking about Robinson and Ward's work, we have identified a third form of resistance, that of "resistance for

<sup>2</sup>During our monthly conversations, we also referred to this form of resistance as "resistance for transformation." This phrase occurs in Chapter 3.

equality." This form of resistance seeks equality under the law where diversity or difference does not lead to marginalization, inequality, and oppression, but rather equal opportunity and representation in all areas.

Finally, all of these ways of thinking about resistance have in common the view that women generate resistance out of their daily lives. Resistance, as Aptheker (1989) writes, "is about creating the conditions necessary for life, and it is about women expanding the limits of restrictions imposed upon them by misogynist, homophobic, racist, religious, and class boundaries" (p. 169).

Aptheker (1989) goes on to write that "women's resistance is not necessarily or intrinsically oppositional; it is not necessarily or intrinsically contesting for power. It does, however, have a profound impact on the fabric of social life because of its steady, cumulative effects. . . . To see women's resistance is also to see the accumulated effects of daily, arduous, creative, sometimes ingenious labors, performed over time, sometimes over generations" (p. 173).

All of the mothers in this book can teach us ways to observe resistance in daily life. Stacey (1997) describes a few strategies of resistance that are present in these chapters:

Refusing to submit to other's pejorative definitions of oneself, is resistance. Being committed to living by modes of life and thought other than the dominant expectations. . . . is resistance. Creating a counter-culture . . . is resistance. . . . Holding onto connections and relationships which problems endeavor to split apart, is resistance. Persisting with practicing one's non-dominant cultural knowledges and beliefs in the form of language, religion, health-care, community or family, is resistance. Forging connections between other marginalized people whom the oppressor would have you believe are the "real" enemy, is resistance. Enduring on-going hardship while refusing to give up one's belief or life, is resistance. As a member of a marginalized culture, raising one's children to understand and to live in both their own and the dominant culture, is resistance. (p. 31)

It is our hope that the voices of the mothers in this book will contribute to our awareness of the ways in which mothers do resist the oppressive conditions of their lives, and that by noting these ways, we can contribute to processes whereby these daily acts of resistance become visible, gather mass, and count. We hope that these processes will transform the oppressive ideologies of motherhood into cultural practices that respect and support the multiplicity of ways that motherhood is lived.

## HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

Bruner (1990) suggests that when there are breakdowns in a culture, or even a family, evidence for this can be noted in peoples' narratives. The "good mother" narrative shows signs of this. It is certainly an impoverished one. It attempts to assert uniformity where there is diversity; consensus where there are differing perspectives. We hope the individual chapters in this book will contribute a rich stock of maternal narratives that will create multiple centers and no edge.

Each chapter that follows speaks of a group of mothers whose lives or mothering practices are marginalized, and who have found ways to resist that marginalization. The individual stories are powerful, and so are the stories of each group.

Although the narrative of each diverse group of mothers is unique, we have come to see that there are also commonalities across groups. All of these mothers have experienced the pervasive processes of marginalization and tried in one way or another to put themselves at the center of their own narratives. For these reasons, groups that might initially be thought of as very dissimilar have much in common. In order to explore potential similarities across groups, we have arbitrarily arranged them into three clusters, Chapters 1-4, 5-8, and 9-12. Other, more intentional grouping schemas all seemed to reproduce the very marginalizing effect we were trying to critique. After the completed chapters were grouped in this way, the contributors to this book came together several times to take a broader view of each four-chapter cluster. Our aim was to identify unexpected points of convergence. These illuminating discussions were transcribed and edited into the "Conversations" that follow each cluster and comment upon the four chapters.

Since we started working on this book, many women have approached us with ideas for other chapters. We look forward to a book that includes the voices of many other groups of mothers, a book that will value their mothering practices and appreciate the contexts within which they mother. We hope that many others will take up the challenge of recognizing and respecting the daily acts of maternal resistance.

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## I



## Sidelined No More

### Promoting Mothers of Adolescents as a Resource for Their Growth and Development

KATHY WEINGARTEN

We live in a lattice of myths. Stories which manifest the meaning of our lives and at the same time define for us the circumference of the imaginal world. What is it we are free to imagine?

—SUSAN GRUPIN, *A Chorus of Stones* (1992, p. 189)

FOR several years I have led workshops for clinicians on mothers and adolescent sons and daughters. Some of the participants are parenting an adolescent; most work with adolescents and their mothers in clinical or educational settings. Early in each workshop, I situate myself as the mother of an adolescent son<sup>1</sup> and daughter as well as a partisan zealot in my own self-imposed mission to change the cultural image of the mother-adolescent relationship. I ask people in the workshop to talk in pairs and tell a story of their own adolescence, preferably one that connects symbolically or literally to the time of their leaving home. I also request that the one who listens jot down words or phrases the speaker uses that seem particularly evocative to him or her. Following

<sup>1</sup>When I began these workshops my son was an adolescent. As of this writing, he is no longer a teen.