

## chapter 2

### literature review:

#### theories of motherhood and motherhood in film

*Women mother. In our society, as in most societies, women not only bear children. They also take primary responsibility for infant care, spend more time with infants and children than do men, and sustain primary emotional ties with infants.<sup>1</sup>*

Of all theoretical writings, those from psychoanalytic, sociological and feminist perspectives have proved the most useful in analysing the representations of motherhood on the Australian screen. While my study retains its historical focus, the theories, from emotional, experiential and political perspectives, are useful in assessing the way the maternal role has been constructed . Psychoanalytic theorists have examined the mother's unconscious actions, exploring her deep attachment to her children. Sociologists have attempted to trace the mother's actual experience of child rearing, identifying the way that society and culture have affected her behaviour and her attitudes. Feminists, especially since the beginning of the liberation movement in the late 1960s, have been concerned with the subordination of women in the mothering role and have offered impassioned and often contradictory ways of thinking about motherhood.

In the first part of this chapter, these theoretical positions are summarised in order to provide a foundation for understanding the maternal role. In the second part of the chapter, recent literature on the representation of motherhood in films is introduced to add a further and, perhaps, more specific dimension to the research.

#### Theories of Motherhood

Sigmund Freud described the mother as the child's primary love object and the parent most responsible for its optimal development. He argued that in the early years of the

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<sup>1</sup>Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978a, p. 3.

infant's life, the relationship with the mother was close, but during the Oedipal conflict, the boy renounced the love of his mother in fear of his more powerful father. The girl also moved away from her mother, whom she saw as powerless and 'castrated'.<sup>2</sup> Freud's ideas of difference between male and female behaviour provided a starting point for many theories on motherhood. Melanie Klein, Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow, for example, made use of his exploration of the unconscious instincts and drives of infant girls and boys.<sup>3</sup> As well, his case studies and clinical appraisals on men were often from data collected from women. As sociologist, Sondra Farganis suggested, they provided a useful source of information about women's behaviour for the feminists, psychoanalysts and sociologists who came later.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most influential theoreticians and practitioners of psychoanalysis was Melanie Klein, whose work was crucial in understanding the unconscious side of mothering. Klein believed that the resolution of the Oedipal conflict was not as important as the developmental period which preceded it, when the mother, as the primary nurturer, was the most important 'object' in the infant's life. Drawing on Freudian theory, though with major differences from it, Klein established a psychoanalytic school of 'object relations' during the 1920s, which focused attention on the pre-Oedipal child's deep attachment to its mother.<sup>5</sup> Klein's importance came from her work with children in psychoanalysis, and, importantly, with her understanding of the significance of the mother on the 'inner world' of the child. Although she took into account the father's involvement, she believed the mother was more important to the child because she was the source of its nourishment. The infant, Klein explained, fantasised the mother as the 'good' and 'bad' breast. As the infant's need for nourishment was its prime concern, nervous and depressive anxieties in later life could be related to

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<sup>2</sup>Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton, NY, 1963, (c.1935), p. 129.

<sup>3</sup>Lisa Appignanesi & John Forrester, *Freud's Women*, Virago, London, 1993.

<sup>4</sup>Sondra Farganis, *Social Reconstruction of the Feminine Character*, Rowman & Littlefield, NJ, 1986, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup>Janice Doane & Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the 'Good Enough' Mother*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1992, p. 8, p. 12.

the way the child had coped with the nursing experience.<sup>6</sup> Although Klein's work emphasised the importance of the mother, it implied that any problem that the child may have had was an indication that the mother's care had been deficient.

Mother-blaming theories came to play a critical part in child psychology and psychoanalysis after the Second World War. John Bowlby was an influential figure<sup>7</sup> who argued that the child's care in the early years was of vital importance for its future mental health.<sup>8</sup> He developed the theory of 'maternal deprivation' which maintained that a child could be damaged if for any reason it was removed from its mother's care at least for the first three years of its life. The popularity of Bowlby and other 'experts' caused problems for many mothers in the workforce.<sup>9</sup> Lois Bryson reported that tests carried out in 1959 on children of working and non-working mothers in Melbourne found no differences in their well-being. Because belief in Bowlby was so strong at the time, however, the findings were rejected and kept from the public.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, perhaps, for those mothers who felt anxiety and guilt about leaving their children, nowhere was it acknowledged that Bowlby's conclusions were based on the neurotic and damaged children that he saw in his practice. His young patients may have suffered under cruel and inappropriate maternal management, nevertheless, his condemnation of all mothers who were not in constant attendance on their children was an untenable extrapolation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Although Klein related the child's problems to its nursing experience, she would not consult with the mother, but insisted on seeing the disturbed child alone. Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis: The Conduct of the Psycho-Analysis of Children as Seen in the Treatment of a Ten-year-old Boy*, Virago, London, 1989, (1961).

<sup>7</sup>Bowlby was especially important in Britain, according to Denise Riley, after the Second World War, when it suited national interests to entice the mother out of the workforce and into the home. Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother*, Virago, London, 1983, pp. 189-96.

<sup>8</sup>John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, Second Edition, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1974, (1953), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup>Riley, *War in the Nursery*, p. 137.

<sup>10</sup>Lois Bryson, 'The Australian Patriarchal Family', in S. Encel et al., (eds), *Australian Society: Introductory Essays*, Fourth Edition, Longman Cheshire, 1990, (1984), p. 132.

<sup>11</sup>Bowlby believed like Chodorow, that if clinical studies revealed 'systemic, patterned' responses, they were useful explaining 'normal' tendencies. See Nancy Chodorow, 'Reply: On *The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 6, number 3, Spring 1981, pp. 500-14.

Psychoanalyst and paediatrician D.W. Winnicott based his work on Kleinian theories, although rather than concentrating on the fantasies of the child, he focused on the performance of the mother. In radio broadcasts in Britain, he asserted that he did not want to place impossible demands on the mother and asked only that she be 'good enough', which he defined as adapting to the child's demands, enabling it to develop without 'anxieties and conflicts'.<sup>12</sup> He declared that although the mother must be prepared to put the infant's interests above her own, the child rearing process was natural and intuitive and the child's needs were easy to anticipate and accommodate.<sup>13</sup> Although purporting to comfort mothers, Winnicott considered that problems with the child's growth and development were the result of a lack of maternal devotion. He did not take into account the paradox in his own role as expert and adviser. As Doane and Hodges pointed out, if the mothering role were natural, his recommendations would not be needed.<sup>14</sup>

Winnicott and Bowlby indicated that the mother's proper place was the home, where she was to spend her time caring for her infant. While they were well-respected figures,<sup>15</sup> — Nancy Chodorow, for instance, described Winnicott as the 'pre-eminent British object-relations theorist',<sup>16</sup> — there is no way of assessing the degree to which mothers followed their advice. It is, perhaps, likely that many did not, as the guidelines for mothering were unbending and did not take into account problems or variations in the family's social situation. The mother was assumed to be in a stable marriage; difficulties related to her economic situation, marital status, class and race were ignored. As historian, Jay E. Mechling found in his research, mothers did not always follow child care advice and sometimes, perversely, acted in the opposite way. Mechling found that

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<sup>12</sup>D.W. Winnicott, 'Primary Maternal Pre-Occupation', *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, Tavistock, London, 1958, (1956). p. 300.

<sup>13</sup>D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Tavistock, London, 1971, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>Doane & Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva*, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>For instance the first edition of John Bowlby's *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, was reprinted six times and the second edition was reprinted eight times. Similarly, Donald Winnicott's output was extensive and was backed up by regular radio broadcasts.

<sup>16</sup>Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1989, p. 10.

interviews or questionnaires provided only unreliable evidence of behaviour as the mother's description of how she cared for her infant was frequently inaccurate.<sup>17</sup>

The notion that all women desired motherhood was not universally accepted. Simone De Beauvoir, writing in France in 1949, was one of the first and, perhaps, the most influential to proclaim that women's ability to give birth was the source of their subordination. In her view, motherhood signalled that women were twice doomed: biologically, during pregnancy when they lacked control over their bodies; and socially, when children restricted them to the home.<sup>18</sup> Fourteen years later, and in the United States, Betty Friedan diagnosed what she called 'the problem that has no name'. She identified the unhappiness of middle-class, educated, suburban housewives who were pressured into their maternal role and, consequently, felt unfulfilled and discontented.<sup>19</sup>

Like de Beauvoir, the radical feminist, Shulamith Firestone argued that women's oppression lay in her child bearing and child rearing role. For Firestone, the denial of the mother's sexual desire within the social organisation of the family was the primary instrument of female control.<sup>20</sup> Clearly, an expectation that mothers were pure and chaste, limited their expression of sexuality. Furthermore, for some women the prohibition of sexual enjoyment was linked to restrictions on the joy of bonding with their children.<sup>21</sup> As feminist, Iris Young pointed out, cultural pressures condemned the mother's pleasure even in breast-feeding. At the base of this, she argued, was the husband's requirement that his wife depend solely on him for sexual pleasure.<sup>22</sup> In

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<sup>17</sup>Jay E. Mechling, 'Advice to Historians on Advice to Mothers', *Journal of Social History*, number 1, Fall 1975, pp. 44-63.

<sup>18</sup>Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Translated and edited by H.M. Parshley, Landsborough, London, 1960, (1949), pp. 199-236.

<sup>19</sup>Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972, (1963).

<sup>20</sup>Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972, (1971).

<sup>21</sup>See for instance, Susan Contratto Weisskopf, 'Maternal Sexuality and Asexual Motherhood', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 5, number 4, Summer 1980, pp. 766-82.

<sup>22</sup>Iris M. Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990, p. 197. See also Rigmor Berg's assertion that the primary obstacle against recognition of the erotic pleasure women may derive from breast feeding, was the possibility that this may reduce her need for sexual gratification from her partner. R. Berg, 'Sexuality: Why do women come off second best?' in N. Grieve & A. Burns, (eds), *Australian Women New Feminist*

western society, the good mother was seen as pure and self-effacing and the bad mother as sexually active and self-interested.<sup>23</sup>

Self-serving patriarchal interests were responsible for promulgating the notion of the asexual mother according to American feminist poet, Adrienne Rich. She urged women to become educated about their corporeal processes in order to reclaim their sexuality and form a united female culture.<sup>24</sup> Her book, *Of Woman Born* was pivotal to mothering theories because it investigated women's experience with their children and related it to their subordination in society. Writing from the mother's point-of-view, Rich criticised the ideological institution of motherhood. She argued that by commandeering the birth process, male institutions had devalued motherhood and kept women in an inferior position.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, Rich extolled the practice of mothering. Unlike de Beauvoir and Firestone, she considered that women's ability to give birth could become the main source of their power. Rich's idea to 'think through the body' was, perhaps, impractical for busy mothers. The main benefit of her work came from her compassion and understanding of the experience of mothering. Although her writing has an essentialist, biological base, she explored her own maternal ambivalence in her relationship with her three sons in a candid and enlightening manner.

Sociologist Alice Rossi also highlighted the connection of the mother to her children. In 1964, Rossi had advocated shared parenting in order to reduce the woman's involvement in mothering duties so that she would be able to work outside the home.<sup>26</sup> By 1974 she had changed her views. In her controversial article, 'Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', she argued that equality could not be achieved if the biological differences between men

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*Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, (1986), p. 157.

<sup>23</sup>Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990, p. 125.

<sup>24</sup>Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Virago, London, 1981, (1976). pp. 256-80.

<sup>25</sup>Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 13, p. 127.

<sup>26</sup>Alice Rossi, 'Equality Between the Sexes: An Immodest Proposal', *Dædulus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, volume 93, Winter 1964, pp. 607-52.

and women were ignored.<sup>27</sup> Although Rossi claimed to consider both the social and biological determinants of mothering, her arguments favoured the biological.<sup>28</sup> She asserted, for instance, that women were predisposed to the mothering role because of their unique ability to give birth and lactate. Using neuro-endocrinology and bio-evolutionary theories, Rossi contended that the mother-child bond was hormonally regulated and crucial for the survival of the species. In Rossi's opinion, it was the devaluation of the biological role that minimized the mother's contribution to society and allowed men's intrusive technological interference in the birthing process. She concluded that women's unique propensity to mother, as well as social conditioning from the media, schools and other institutions, meant that men could not share the parenting role. She appeared to revise this opinion in 1979 when she suggested men should have special training to assist them in fatherly duties.<sup>29</sup>

Rossi was censured for her biological perspective of the mothering process.<sup>30</sup> Her articles were depressing because of their restrictions on women's choices, according to Farganis, who doubted that Rossi's belief in the mother's prenatal hormonal response to her infant could be authenticated. Farganis criticised Rossi's bio-evolutionary position because it limited men's responsibility for child care to the pecuniary. She noted that Rossi omitted to give data on the infant's connection to the father, which in some cases was equal to, or greater than, the mother's bonding experience.<sup>31</sup> Rossi's belief that mothering came most easily to women was essentialist, as it ignored the variety of feelings women have toward their children and the nurturing capacity of some men. She did not allow for those women whose biological connection to their infant brought little

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<sup>27</sup>Alice Rossi, 'A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Dædulus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, volume 106, Spring 1977, pp. 1-31.

<sup>28</sup>Her biological perspective was noted by Harriet Engel Gross, 'Introduction: Considering A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 4, number 4, Summer 1979, pp. 694-7.

<sup>29</sup>Alice Rossi, 'Reply by Alice Rossi: Considering A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 4, number 4, Summer 1979, pp. 712-7.

<sup>30</sup>See 'Viewpoint: Considering A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 4, number 4, Summer 1979, pp. 694-717, where Alice Rossi replied to critiques from seven women.

<sup>31</sup>Farganis, *Social Reconstruction of the Feminine Character*, pp. 126-33.

nurturing response, or for women who adopted babies and had no biological connection, but great love and commitment.

Dorothy Dinnerstein also disapproved of biologically-based notions of the mother as primary carer and asserted, moreover, that as motherhood was a social practice, it could be altered.<sup>32</sup> She considered that the subordination of women was directly related to the social requirement for them to nurture their children, a problem increased by the extended period of dependence of human infants.<sup>33</sup> Dinnerstein's main proposition was that fathers should share equally in the parenting of their offspring. She argued that this was possible even from birth, as historical changes of technology allowed men access to formulae so that mothers were no longer tied to nursing. Co-operation between the mother and father could allow women to enter the workforce, thus gaining access to the public sphere.<sup>34</sup> According to Dinnerstein, with both mother and father providing the care, boys would not have the memory of the omnipotent mother to fear or despise and would reach adulthood without the hatred towards women and quest for power that currently prevailed. Girls would grow up with realistic attitudes to their own place in society and be able to accept independence and freedom instead of seeking domination by men.<sup>35</sup> Although Dinnerstein was speaking generally about women's subordination in society, Janet Sayers criticised her assumption that women necessarily colluded with male domination. She pointed out that Dinnerstein, as well as others in the women's movement, provided examples of women who resisted patriarchy.<sup>36</sup>

Like Dinnerstein, psychoanalytic sociologist, Nancy Chodorow blamed sexual inequality in society on the division of labour which allocated the primary infant care to women at home, while men were in the workforce in more highly valued occupations.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, Harper Perennial, NY, 1991, (1977).

<sup>33</sup>Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 112.

<sup>34</sup>Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 103.

<sup>35</sup>Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 189.

<sup>36</sup>Janet Sayers, *Sexual Contradictions: Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism*, Tavistock, London, 1986, p. 63.

<sup>37</sup>Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 214-8.

While her work was based on psychoanalysis, she moved away from Freud's concentration on the libido, instincts and drives, towards 'relational aspects of psychic development'. Drawing on the separation/individuation theories of Margaret Mahler, Chodorow used 'object relations theory', which positioned the mother as 'an object' — the first and most important in the baby's life. According to Mahler, the biological birth of the child occurred on its release from the mother's body, its psychic birth occurred when it separated from its primary love object (usually the mother) and established its relationship to 'the world of reality'.<sup>38</sup> Object relations theory was characterised by its concentration on the pre-Oedipal experience where pre-verbal social relations had a critical influence on the baby's development.<sup>39</sup> It explained that humans understood their existence by their connection to others.<sup>40</sup>

Chodorow made the point that because women were responsible for mothering, daughters and sons were treated differently and in consequence, developed differently. The daughter, who shared a 'core female identity' with her mother was encouraged to imitate her, while the son was expected to be separate and autonomous.<sup>41</sup> During the Oedipal conflict, the daughter remained in an 'attached' relationship, which ideally suited her for adopting the caring and nurturing responsibilities in the domestic sphere. The son, on the other hand, turned away from the mother and toward the father, whom he saw as more worthy. He adopted, as a consequence, competitive traits which were suited to the powerful public sphere.<sup>42</sup> In addition, much like Dinnerstein, Chodorow concluded that the early memory of their powerful, omnipotent, mother left men, who struggled for ultimate control, with feelings of resentment and fear.<sup>43</sup> Chodorow strongly recommended the necessity for equal parenting in order to bring about social change. She maintained that it would be beneficial to women and girls as it would allow them

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<sup>38</sup>Margaret S. Mahler, Fred Pine & Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, Basic Books, NY, 1975, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup>Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 40-54.

<sup>40</sup>Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 67.

<sup>41</sup>Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 151.

<sup>42</sup>Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 8-10, p. 39.

<sup>43</sup>Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p. 6.

subjectivity and autonomy. Additionally, the 'individualism and competitiveness' of boys would be reduced and their 'commitment to the group' increased.<sup>44</sup>

Chodorow's work was taken up by the women's movement as the most competently theorised new writing on mothering.<sup>45</sup> She was not without her detractors, however, and was censured for her presumption that families were healthy, white, western and middle-class, with a strong, rational father at the head.<sup>46</sup> In separate accounts, Pauline Bart and Judith Lorber criticised Chodorow for ignoring sociological research on the mother's practical experience by relying on clinical data in her analysis. They claimed that she overlooked variations in the mother's situation, for instance, the number of children in the family, the birth order of the sons and daughters and the mother's and the child's health.<sup>47</sup> Rossi pointed out that Chodorow's concentration on the mother's role in the pre-Oedipal period omitted life changes, particularly hormonal influences in the adolescent years which could have far greater effect on the adult's mental health.<sup>48</sup> Doane and Hodges warned that Chodorow perpetuated the myth of 'insatiable children and selfless mothers' which positioned the women's role as primarily maternal.<sup>49</sup> Historian, Carolyn Steedman also saw this as a problem. Growing up in a working-class household in the 1950s, Steedman revealed that her mother's economic problems and the absence of a husband led her to become resentful and exasperated with motherhood. She did not fit Chodorow's traditional nurturing role model.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps Chodorow's theories applied most appropriately to white, middle-class nuclear families where responsible

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<sup>44</sup>Chodorow, 'Reply: On *The Reproduction of Mothering*', p. 512.

<sup>45</sup>Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, Virago, London, 1994, (1987), p. 136.

<sup>46</sup>Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, 'Reinventing the Mother-Daughter Relationship', *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, volume 49, number 4, Fall 1995, pp. 526-39.

<sup>47</sup>Pauline Bart, 'Review of Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering*', in J. Trebilcot, (ed.), *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, Rowman & Allanheld, NJ, 1983, pp. 147-52 and Judith Lorber, 'On *The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 6, number 3, Spring 1981, p. 483.

<sup>48</sup>Alice Rossi, 'On *The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 6, number 3, Spring 1981, p. 496, n. 34.

<sup>49</sup>Doane & Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva*, p. 41, p. 51.

<sup>50</sup>Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Virago, London, 1986, p. 86.

husbands were in the workforce and the wives remained dependent and nurturing within the home.

Feminists in the 1970s, like Rich, Dinnerstein and Chodorow, introduced mothering theories which challenged, as Chodorow commented, 'nearly exclusive Freudian focus on the father and Oedipus complex'.<sup>51</sup> Their revelations linked women's subordination in society to the gendered division of labour which allocated the mother total responsibility for child care and restricted her to the domestic sphere. As a result of their writing, many women questioned the socialisation of motherhood as 'natural and inevitable' and decided that women's ultimate fulfilment in life should not necessarily be maternity.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps as a reaction to the anti-motherhood position, philosopher, Sara Ruddick, in the 1980s, offered a new conception of the mothering experience.<sup>53</sup> She suggested that the mother's nurturing abilities led to a kind of 'maternal thinking', which was constructed out of 'reflection, judgment, and emotion' about their maternal role.<sup>54</sup> The mother's main task was to ensure that the child was protected and nurtured and grew up to be socially acceptable. The challenge to provide for her child's welfare and growth to an acceptable citizen in society, according to Ruddick, led to a particular maternal, co-operative way of thinking which was antithetical to the individualistic, competitive and aggressive ways of patriarchal social behaviour.

The romantic view of motherhood espoused by Ruddick and others restricted women to the role of 'child facilitator' according to psychoanalyst, Jessica Benjamin. The mother's individuality and rights were not recognised and she came to feel inferior and lacking in self-confidence.<sup>55</sup> Her authority was further undermined by the prevailing fantasy of the

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<sup>51</sup>Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p. 6

<sup>52</sup>See for instance, Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto, 'The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother', in B. Thorne and M. Yalom (eds), *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*, Longman, NY, 1982, p. 54.

<sup>53</sup>Sara Ruddick, 'Maternal Thinking', in *Rethinking the Family*, pp. 76-94.

<sup>54</sup>Ruddick, 'Maternal Thinking', p. 77.

<sup>55</sup>Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, Pantheon, NY, 1988, p. 23, p. 208, p. 215.

'perfect mother'. Chodorow and Contratto pointed out that any failure to live up to perfection, caused women to feel guilty or be denounced as bad mothers.<sup>56</sup> The assumption that the mother was primarily responsible for the care of the child was a concern as well of Anne Woollett and Ann Phoenix, as it left the mother open to blame for any problems in development.<sup>57</sup>

One solution, which was suggested by many women, was for the fathers to share parenting duties. This proposal was, however, criticised on the grounds that it would allow men to infiltrate the domestic sphere and undermine women's major area of power. Young, for example, considered that motherhood was a source of authority and autonomy for women.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, in the contemporary workforce, the higher male pay rates made the father's contribution financially impractical for many families. In any case, however equitable the idea of shared parenting, child care remained the primary responsibility of the mother.<sup>59</sup>

The family unit continued to be the foundation of society, and the contribution of the mother in upholding cultural values and state ideologies was recognised as especially important.<sup>60</sup> Sociologist, Jessie Bernard pointed out that the function of the institution of motherhood was to socialise girls to be mothers. Images of the mother were glorified in the culture, particularly in religion and art. The media portrayed motherhood as inevitable and worthy, while childlessness was seen as deprivation. As well, women were subjected to governmental pressure motivated by the economic necessities of population growth and the need for individuals for the labour market and the military.

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<sup>56</sup>Chodorow & Contratto, 'The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother', p. 55.

<sup>57</sup>Anne Woollett & Ann Phoenix, 'Afterword: Issues Related to Motherhood', in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett & E. Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, pp. 216-31.

<sup>58</sup>Iris M. Young, 'Is Male Gender Identity the Cause of Male Domination?' in J. Trebilcot, (ed.), *Mothering Essays in Feminist Theory*, Rowman & Allenheld, US, 1984, pp. 129-46.

<sup>59</sup>Anne Phoenix, Ann Woollett & Eva Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, p. 4 and Kathryn C. Backett, *Mothers and Fathers: A Study of the Development and Negotiation of Parental Behaviour*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p. 194.

<sup>60</sup>Ann Phoenix & Anne Woollett, 'Motherhood: Social Construction, Politics and Psychology', in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett & E. Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, pp. 13-27.

Motherhood was legitimated in a political sense by subsidies and pensions and controlled by the laws relating to contraception, abortion and infanticide.<sup>61</sup>

Noting the effectiveness of this social pressure, Bernard asked why women were eager to mother when the task was so thankless. She pointed out that if mothers were home-bound, they were thought to 'smother-love' their children, while if they had paid work, they were accused of neglect and selfishness. Bernard identified an enigma in the culture where mothers were blamed for society's problems yet women continued to 'want at least one or two children'.<sup>62</sup> Woollett and Phoenix also turned their attention to the problems of mothering. They argued that child care manuals and expert advice were unhelpful to women as they were most often based on white middle-class families which were seen as the 'norm'. Special difficulties were pathologised and essentialist accounts often neglected teenaged, older, lone and working mothers and issues of race, class and economy.<sup>63</sup> The development of the child was most often the primary focus and the mother's day-to-day experience of child rearing was ignored.<sup>64</sup>

While sociologists identified the pressures placed on mothers in the home, Ruddick expanded her 'maternal thinking' theory to point to a way in which they could function in the public sphere. She promoted the idea of an 'ethic of care', where mothers could work for world conciliation and the preservation of the life of all children.<sup>65</sup> For Ruddick mothering was a 'work or practice', and she attempted to separate it from the act of giving birth. This, she determined, would break the cycle of envy of women's creativity, release them from the suffering they encountered as potential mothers, and allow them to relinquish care of the child to others; perhaps the father or adoptive parents. Her

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<sup>61</sup>Jessie Bernard, *The Future of Motherhood*, Dial, NY, 1974, pp. 22-7 and p. 371, n. 32.

<sup>62</sup>Bernard, *The Future of Motherhood*, pp. 7-15, p. 21.

<sup>63</sup>Ann Phoenix & Anne Woollett 'Motherhood: Social Construction, Politics and Psychology', in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett & E. Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, p. 21, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup>Anne-Marie Ambert was also concerned that theoretical findings were most often from the child's point-of-view and ignored the mother's interest. Her book pointed out that most theories did not take into account experiences of mothering which could include ill-health of the mother, the effect of the child's emotional or health problems. A. Ambert, *The Effect of Children on Parents*, Haworth, NY, 1992.

<sup>65</sup>Ruddick, 'Maternal Thinking', pp. 76-94.

radical concept rejected the idea of an instinctive mother love and encouraged women to make the choice of whether to refuse or to undertake pregnancy and child care. Enabling a women to control her own pregnancies, according to Ruddick, would develop a maternal commitment to cherish life and 'undertake a work of peace'.<sup>66</sup>

The notion of women's role in the peace-making process was taken up and aligned with the ecofeminism movement's concern with the health of the planet. Ecofeminists tended to romanticize natural birth and child care, using it as a metaphor for nurturing of the earth. In their vision of the 'earth mother', women were close to nature and suited to nurture the earth. While these generalisations may have had the effect of bringing women together, for example, the remarkable group at Greenham Common,<sup>67</sup> some women saw the problem of the position. Lynn Stearney commented that it ignored the ideological and social construction of motherhood while stressing that women were inevitably tied to their capacity to reproduce.<sup>68</sup> The mother's work for the environment was also investigated by feminist peace researcher, Linda Forcey. Surveying one hundred and twenty mothers of sons, Forcey found that their attitudes towards peace were more ambivalent and complex than Ruddick and others had indicated. Forcey concluded that peace-making mothers should be praised without expecting the same of all women.<sup>69</sup>

### Theories of Motherhood and Film

Although theoretical perceptions and interpretations of motherhood frequently are conflicting, they can be used to elucidate the diversities of the representations of the mother in cinema. The film-mother reflects the experience of the mothering process and helps to construct ideas of what is 'normal' maternal behaviour. In order to understand

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<sup>66</sup>Sara Ruddick, 'Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth' in D. Bassin, M. Honey, & M.M. Kaplan, (eds), *Representations of Motherhood*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, p. 44.

<sup>67</sup>See the account by Segal, *Is the Future Female?*, pp. 163-5.

<sup>68</sup>Lynn M. Stearney, 'Feminism, Ecofeminism, and the Maternal Archetype: Motherhood as a Feminine Universal', *Communication Quarterly*, volume 42, number 2, Spring 1994, p. 146.

<sup>69</sup>Linda Rennie Forcey, 'Feminist Perspectives on Mothering and Peace', in E. N. Glenn, G. Chang & L. R. Forcey, (eds), *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, Routledge, NY, 1994, pp. 355-75.

the representations of the maternal role more completely, it will be useful to survey the literature concerned with motherhood on the screen. This will enable an evaluation of the way in which the mother's role was 'normalised' in film narratives, as well as ascertaining what patterns if any were established and if this had changed over the decades.

The essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, written in 1973 by Laura Mulvey,<sup>70</sup> had a profound effect on theories of representation and was particularly relevant to women. Mulvey drew attention to the way filmmakers positioned their actors and the way the audience watched films. Using psychoanalytic concepts of fetishism, voyeurism, identification, castration and scopophilia,<sup>71</sup> she argued that films served patriarchy by placing the male as the active subject and the woman as a passive — 'to be looked at' — object. With editing, change of distance, camera position and focus, the filmmaker could control what the spectator looked at in a way that theatre and other spectacle could not. Mulvey's 'theory of the gaze' was important in drawing attention to the male influence on female representation. Her insight, which assumed that the spectator was a male, who voyeuristically watched the seductive, exhibitionist, female body in the film, was taken up in feminist film criticism during the 1970s. Women began making their own films to provide an alternative to the male-dominated feature film industry. Many investigated the mother-daughter relationship, which was a crucial component of women's concern at the time.<sup>72</sup> In this way, Mulvey's work was important to issues of motherhood, although her concentration on the male spectator did not adequately explain women's enjoyment of film.

E. Ann Kaplan, in her book, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, drew on Mulvey's work to investigate the objectivisation of the mother in film.<sup>73</sup> She found that:

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<sup>70</sup>Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989, pp. 14-26.

<sup>71</sup>Mulvey defined scopophilia as 'pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object', Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, p. 25.

<sup>72</sup>For instance, Laura Mulvey & Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx*, (1976), Joyce Chopra's *Joyce at 34*, (1973) and Michelle Citron's *Daughter-Rite*, (1978).

<sup>73</sup>E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, Routledge, London, 1993, (1983).

The domination of women by the male gaze is part of patriarchal strategy to contain the threat that the mother embodies, and to control the positive and negative impulses that memory traces of being mothered have left on the male unconscious.<sup>74</sup>

It was clear that Kaplan placed great significance on the unconscious of male filmmakers and their reaction to their own pre-Oedipal mothering. Her belief that it was the foundation for the cinematic point-of-view, in a way, elevated the mother to a position of fundamental, though admittedly masked, importance in the medium. The mother may have had a metaphoric presence, although the audience was deprived of her actual figure, for as Kaplan pointed out, films rarely focused on the mother's experience, but concentrated instead on her children or partner.<sup>75</sup>

The representation of the mother as a person who reacts, rather than one who acts, was coterminous with the idea of the male gaze. The film mother was objectified by the way in which men looked at her and in the way she responded to other characters. By these means, her own desires and needs could be ignored without explicitly drawing attention to the inequity of her situation. To facilitate the consistent and controlled representation still further, Kaplan noted the use of archetypal images, familiar in the mythology and literature of western culture. She summed these up into four distinct types:

The Good Mother who is marginal to the narrative.  
 The Bad Mother who is punished.  
 The 'Heroic Mother' who sacrifices her own life for her family.  
 The 'Silly, Weak or Vain Mother' whose contribution is trivialised.<sup>76</sup>

These stereotypical representations showed a narrow maternal lifestyle and limited, at least for the spectator-mother, ways of understanding her relationship with her children and partner. In her research of Hollywood films between 1910 and 1940, Kaplan reiterated that the representation of the mother was restricted to traditional and rigid

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<sup>74</sup>Kaplan, *Women and Film*, p. 205.

<sup>75</sup>E. Ann Kaplan, 'The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*', in P. Erens, (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990a, p. 127.

<sup>76</sup>Kaplan, 'The Case of the Missing Mother', p. 128.

notions of love and sacrifice, which omitted the ambivalences and contradictions inherent in the role.<sup>77</sup>

In her 1992 book, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*,<sup>78</sup> Kaplan proposed that film, as a popular spectacle, had the power to transform the audience's perception and desire. She related the actual experience of watching a film to the spectator's own experience of motherhood. The theatre space and the images on the giant screen were appropriate metaphors for the omnipotent larger-than-life mother.<sup>79</sup> For Kaplan, watching the film in the theatrical space allowed a sense of fusion with the maternal body, an internal desire which was retained from the early 'mirror phase'. This traumatic moment in life, described by Lacan, occurred when the infant first discovered, by comprehending its own image in the mirror, that it was a separate being from its mother. Lacan inferred that there was a subconscious, inevitable, and everlasting desire to return to the comfort and safety of the bosom of the mother.<sup>80</sup> Kaplan's model offered an explanation for the continued popularity and influence of cinema-going on the audience.

Using literature and an historical and psychoanalytic framework, Kaplan argued that the foundation for the representation of mothers in early twentieth-century film was nineteenth-century white, middle-class American melodramatic fiction. In her examination of the ideology that underpinned the representation of the mother in films, she identified two important areas of early influence. She showed firstly, that the

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<sup>77</sup>E. A. Kaplan, 'Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman's Film 1910-40', in C. Gledhill, (ed.), *Home Is Where The Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, BFI, London, 1987, pp. 113-37.

<sup>78</sup>E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*, Routledge, London, 1992.

<sup>79</sup>Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, p. 28. See also Philip Dacey's poem about the cinema, quoted by Lucy Fischer, *Cinamaternity: Film, Motherhood, Genre*. Princeton University Press, NJ, 1996, p. 3:

*Something large enough  
to be our mother  
embraces us  
with light, shadow and sound,  
making us one.*

<sup>80</sup>Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, pp. 30-1.

intervention by the church into child rearing perpetuated the tradition of 'the mother as angel'. Secondly, she proposed that the popularity of Darwinian theories of evolution upheld biological arguments for keeping the mother as the primary child carer within the home. Interestingly, Kaplan gave changes to the mother figure in films a historical perspective. She noted that in the period before the 1970s, when compliant women made few demands, the mother was represented as a relatively pleasant and uncomplicated character. After this time, when the women's movement was gaining strength, there was a shift in the mother's role in films. According to Kaplan this was a result of societal anxiety about women's growing visibility and dissatisfaction.<sup>81</sup>

While acknowledging that from the 1970s, the cinematic mother was portrayed with more complexity, Kaplan concluded that recent American films avoided representations which combined motherhood with work and sexuality in any meaningful way.<sup>82</sup> Women commonly had to deal with these issues in real life and their omission from films was salient. For Kaplan, the reluctance to confront these aspects of the mother's experience was due to patriarchal concern about women's role in society. Changes brought about by the post-war influx of women into the workforce, the sexual liberation movement and the availability of new reproductive technologies, paved the way for the creation of different non-nuclear families and individual sexual freedom. Child birth and child care within heterosexual marriage were no longer necessarily women's inevitable goal and this, according to Kaplan, challenged the dominant establishment and placed financial pressure on the state. Proposing that popular images revealed unconscious anxieties and desires, she noted the current sentimental images of the nuclear family and non-working wife at home with her contented children. Additionally, the trend in films to locate the foetus or the baby as the most central aspect of the family was a concern for women, as it had the effect of reducing the mother to the disturbing position of 'biological receptacle'.<sup>83</sup> Kaplan's work on motherhood has been insightful in revealing the complex

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<sup>81</sup>Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, pp. 179-81.

<sup>82</sup>E. Ann Kaplan, 'Sex, Work and Motherhood: The Impossible Triangle', *The Journal of Sex Research*, volume 27, number 3, August 1990b, pp. 409-25.

<sup>83</sup>Kaplan, 'Sex, Work and Motherhood', pp. 409-25 and *Motherhood and Representation*, p. 205, where

way in which ideological pressures worked in film representations to 'control female sexuality and reposition the nuclear family with the woman safely within it'.

Another illuminating examination of motherhood and films came from American scholar, Lucy Fischer, who used film genres as an organising device to understand representations of motherhood.<sup>84</sup> In the genre of 'trick' films, men's desire to emulate female creativity was connected to the magician's miraculous production of live rabbits, scarves, balls and other objects familiar to prestidigitators everywhere. *Rosemary's Baby*, a film in the horror genre, was analysed to show how childbirth could be related to anxieties about the threat of the unknown. In thrillers, such as *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, Fischer explored the prevailing concern about leaving infants in child care. The mother's relationship to her son was investigated in *White Heat*, a film from the crime genre, and several comedy films provided a source of information about male attempts at mothering.

Although Australian feature film production has not been extensive enough to allow research based solely on genre, Fischer's work is valuable in pointing out how metaphor and symbolism can provide a key to enter into the meaning of films. For instance, taking the example of D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920), Fischer showed how silent melodrama used the maternal body in a metaphorical way to examine the public attitude to illegitimate births. The heroine of the film, the unmarried Anna, has a baby and is abandoned by the scoundrel who had promised to marry her. When her little son dies, she is left alone. Later, as she works on a farm, she finds an honourable man who becomes her true love. A cinematic device brings them together. Anna, lost in a snowstorm and near death, floats on ice, perilously close to the top of a waterfall. She is rescued just in time by the suitor and presumably lives happily ever after.

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she cited *Look Who's Talking* (1990), as an example of the foetus taking over from the mother as subject.

<sup>84</sup>Fischer, *Cinamaternity*.

The use of metaphor for the maternal body, according to Fischer, can be traced throughout the film. Anna's promiscuity could be forgiven by the audience, even allowing for repressive attitudes to sexuality of the time, although her pregnancy out of wedlock, so physically visible, was inexcusable. As Fischer asserted, Anna's motherhood was 'written' on her body and could not be overlooked. The death of her son 'erased' her mistake, enabling her to start life afresh and find happiness in a suitable marriage. Drawing attention to the constant images of water in the film, Fischer reminded us of the long-term association of the element with female sexuality. The heroine drifted helplessly on a lump of ice as it floated in the river, her predicament metaphorically linking her to punishment for 'the sin of having broken maternal waters'.<sup>85</sup> The waterfall stood for her 'fall' into pregnancy and the breaking ice signified the hymen breaking during her seduction. Anna, reliving her earlier defloration, was rescued by a 'proper' partner. The very act of her rescue was an act of parturition which Fischer further aligned to the restoration of the original silent film which had been edited and cut and stored in a vault, before coming to life — or being reborn — in its 'legitimate' condition in 1984.<sup>86</sup>

Sociologist and cultural theorist, Andrea Walsh concentrated on the genre of women's films for her research.<sup>87</sup> Drawing on the concept of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci and expanded by Raymond Williams, she showed how dominant groups attempted to use films to maintain their beliefs. At the same time, she argued against the Frankfurt school of critical theorists who believed that cinema had unrestricted power to influence the audience. According to Walsh, this view implied that women, because they were passive objects in films, were rendered powerless and without the means to resist state ideologies or private vested interests. She recognised the importance of the hegemonic effect, although she insisted that the dominant social values of the films could be negotiated or resisted. Consequently, the power of the film was mediated in a

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<sup>85</sup>Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, p. 64.

<sup>86</sup>Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, p. 70.

<sup>87</sup>Andrea S. Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience: 1940-1950*, Praeger, NY, 1984.

way which was 'dynamic, historically specific, and constituted through the ongoing power relations and struggles of class, race, age, and sex'.<sup>88</sup> It was unlikely, anyway, according to Walsh, that films could produce a united and totalitarian front because of the multi-layered institutional nature of film production. Filmmakers, creative industry workers, heads of studio, marketing agents and the state, were frequently engaged in conflict. Even if they managed to produce a 'preferred reading',<sup>89</sup> of a particular film, Walsh argued that it was possible for the spectator to accept, reject or interpret it in any way.

Walsh drew attention to the importance of historical changes in society in the way films were evaluated and interpreted. Targeting the plot, characters and structure of the narrative in American women's films of the 1940s, she found that the films tended to reflect the mother's experience at that time. Many mothers had gained authority from their work during the War and the domesticated mother of the pre-war years was replaced in post-war films by women with power in the community. Some films focused on the diverse mothering of working class and immigrant women. Others showed changes in the mother/daughter relationship and in films where the mother was the traditional, nurturing type, her daughter did not necessarily imitate her lifestyle, and had her own ambitions and ideas of self expression. Walsh noted ambivalences in the mothering role in films and a tendency to feminist influence, where although women remained as nurturers, they were often powerful, courageous and strong.

The Academy Award winner and box-office success, *Mildred Pierce* (1945), Walsh suggested, was different from other maternal dramas. Directed by Michael Curtiz, it appeared at first to indicate a conservative backlash against motherhood, as the mother was suffocating and alienated from her daughter. Even in this 'monstrous mother', however, Walsh found an ambivalence in which was located a certain strength and

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<sup>88</sup>Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience*, p. 15.

<sup>89</sup>For a detailed explanation of 'preferred reading', that is, the prevailing ideology or the 'official line', see Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in S. Hall, et al., (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, Hutchinson, London, 1987, (1980), pp. 128-38.

resilience. The film has been recognised as complicated and inconsistent.<sup>90</sup> Its portrayal of a successful business woman who failed as a mother, may have been designed to serve patriarchal ambitions to get women out of the workforce at the end of the War. On the other hand, women might have related to Mildred's ambivalent feelings about her daughter in an echo of their own confusion about maternal duties. Walsh's importance in understanding the mother's place in cinema, besides her recognition of the change in the role, was in her reiteration of the several possible ways of interpreting the narrative. She attempted to construct a framework for understanding the film rather than finding fault with its representations. Her own interpretations of the narratives tended to alternate between women's contemporary experience and the influence on them of vested patriarchal interests.

Suzanna Danuta Walters, a communications and cultural theorist, has been more concerned to expose and criticise the meanings built in to cinematic representations of the mother.<sup>91</sup> For Walters, the sacrificing, vengeful or malevolent mothers she perceived on screen bore no resemblance to her own experience. Walters was critical of the practice of highlighting conflict between mother and daughter and holding the mother to blame. She argued that assuming the mother was responsible for her child's problems placed the daughter into the role of a victim, without control of her life. For Walters, conceiving the relationship as mutually beneficial was realistic, and preferable to the Freudian ideas of conflict which were currently fashionable in film narratives.<sup>92</sup> Her research was based on the belief that films were part of society's methods of producing a commonsense understanding of mothering.<sup>93</sup> Although her relationship with her mother may not be representative of all families, Walters' work proved valuable in challenging the partial, often unfair and damaging view of mothers in some film narratives.

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<sup>90</sup>Apart from Walsh's discussion on *Mildred Pierce*, see Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, Penguin, NY, 1975, pp. 179-81. Additionally, Fischer referred to the many critiques of this film 'a virtual cottage industry', Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>91</sup>Suzanna Danuta Walters, *Lives Together/Worlds Apart: Mothers and Daughters in Popular Culture*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992.

<sup>92</sup>Walters, *Lives Together*, p. 11.

<sup>93</sup>Walters, *Lives Together*, p. 17.

### Conclusion

Various discourses on motherhood have provided a framework to assist in deconstructing the maternal images in films. The psychoanalytic writings of Freud and Klein explained the mother as the child's primary love object, the source of its nourishment and life. The strength of the connection of mother to child in film narratives can be evaluated in terms of their work. Their contention that the mother treated her son and daughter differently can be used to understand these aspects of the mother's relationship with her children on screen. The extent to which the mother cared for and devoted her life to her children, can be compared with expert advice which has commonly been dispersed through child care manuals. The writings of Bowlby and Winnicott are pre-eminent in this regard.

Sociologists and behavioural scientists, such as Dinnerstein, Chodorow, Phoenix and Woollett have considered the actual experience of mothering. Challenging the notion that women must always be the primary carers, they recommended instituting a system of shared parenting. They argued that sole responsibility for the child was unfair, and had the wider and potentially more important repercussion of keeping women in a subordinate position in society. The day to day behaviour of mother and child in films can be scrutinised with their research in mind. Additionally, the biological viewpoint from sociologists such as Rossi, which implied an inherent, instinctual connection of mother and child can be determined and evaluated in some films.

Societal pressure to mother has been criticised by the feminists, de Beauvoir, Friedan and Firestone, whose work is helpful in discerning representations of taken-for-granted notions of maternal bliss. Other feminists, such as Young, Flax and Rich promoted interest in the eulogising portrayals of motherhood which placed the mother on a pedestal as a chaste, virtuous woman. For them, the purpose of denying women's sexuality was clearly to benefit men. These presumptions, of the patriarchal influence on

popular culture pave the way for identifying ideological vested interest in film. They encourage the important questions: who is speaking and whose interest does the representation serve?

Some research had a direct and specific application to film and motherhood. Mulvey's perceptions served to alert us to the power of a gaze, which emanates from a male point-of-view and tends to disregard the mother's subjectivity. Additionally, it is important to explore Kaplan's findings on stereotypical representations of the mother and the omission of women's actual experience of work, sex and motherhood in films. The metaphorical analyses of Fischer can be instructive in making sense of a deeper meaning in the films to decipher the cinematic images of the maternal role. She revealed the situation where although the mother may not be the focus or the most active character in the film, her place can be found in metaphors. Walsh has explained how the text of films may be deconstructed in order to negotiate or resist the preferred reading. Finally, the prevalence of mother-blaming has been exposed by Walters as a damaging and inequitable representation which was frequently motivated by the filmmaker's homage to prevailing fashion.

These psychoanalytical, sociological and feminist theories on motherhood offer valuable insights into the representation of the mother in films. Film theories add a further dimension, although these have been restricted to a narrow frame of reference and primarily have taken into account well-known productions of classic Hollywood cinema.<sup>94</sup> Very little work has been done specifically on motherhood and cinema and even less on Australian feature films. The chapters that follow attempt to redress that omission.

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<sup>94</sup>An exception can be found in Lucy Fischer's analysis of Gillian Armstrong's Australian feature, *Hightide*, Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, p. 221.