Chapter One

The good mother in theory and research: an overview

Susan Goodwin and Kate Huppatz

This book brings together illuminating new research that contemplates the contemporary relevance of 'the good mother' in the Australian context. Despite decades of feminist critique of dominant representations of mothers and motherhood, images of 'the good mother' appear as prevalent as ever. These images persist in public policy, the media, popular culture and workplaces, and saturate everyday practices and interactions. They continue to powerfully shape women's lives. As Sara Ruddick (2001: 189) argues, the good mother 'casts a long shadow over other women's lives.' Mothers thus remain subject to close social regulation. It is also clear, however, that contemporary representations of the good mother are not uniform, nor are they stable. The good mother appears differently in different settings – she is a nuanced and multiple form. This book provides an exploration of her contemporary incarnations and effects.

These days few people interpret the phrase 'the good mother' literally, but rather make an association to feminist work on the ideological aspects of mothering and motherhood, and to notions of hegemonic motherhood. Thus the good mother is known as that formidable social construct placing pressure on women to conform to particular standards and ideals, against which they are judged and judge

themselves. The good mother is also recognised as institutionalised in social arrangements and social practices, and hence operating beyond the belief systems or choices of individual women. Finally, the good mother is implicitly linked to theories of gender stratification. It is understood that, somehow, the good mother is implicated in the subordination of women. However, the wry smiles and guilty looks that accompany references to 'the good mother' attest to the complex discursive power of the phrase. Women may know she is a hegemonic form, and be aware of her part in the reproduction of gender inequality, yet remain very much subject to her. As Terry Arendell (1999: 3) has argued '(i)nevitably, motherhood ideology reaches deeply into the lives of individuals and family processes. Rhetorically proclaimed, it shapes women's very identities and activities. Even when resisted, mothering ideology forms the backdrop for action and assessment'.

The main aim of this book is to generate an understanding of the good mother in the contemporary Australian context. As Porter and Kelso (2006) point out 'representations of motherhood, and the accompanying expectations of mothers, are in constant flux as they adapt to the changing socio-cultural context' (2006: xii). What are regarded as good mothers change with time, fashion and context, and have a variety of effects. This book captures some of these changes, and in doing so, significantly diverts from previous commentary on mothers and motherhood, in that it does not assume that the good mother's only contemporary form is the white, heterosexual housewife. We suggest that freezing the figure of the good mother as white, heterosexual, economically dependent, and child focused (see for example Arendell 1999; Johnston & Swanson 2006) can obscure other ways in which the good mother is involved in the regulation of women. So, for example, images of the good lesbian mother, the good working mother, the good educational mother, the good mother on welfare or the aesthetically

good mother all appear as variations on a theme. The opportunity to look at variations of good mother ideals as they operate in a range of contexts and a range of communities suggests that good mother ideals are produced in a range of locales and for a range of purposes, and they can have complicated and contradictory effects. An exploration of this diversity yields new knowledge about the relationship between motherhood ideals and other social processes related to class, heteronormativity, race, ethnicity and, of course, gender. It also provides new insights into how we are governed and govern ourselves.

The diversity of good mother images raises questions about how best to explain the processes by which they continue to exert undue pressure on women's lives. Again, the research undertaken for this book suggests that good mother ideals are produced and reproduced in a variety of ways: through media mis/representations, through government policy, via the organisation of institutions such as work and education, and as the result of deeply held cultural beliefs. In addition, contributors refer to a range of concepts to make sense of these processes, including ideology, discourse, governance, regulation, stereotyping, archetyping and figuration.

The good mother in theory

Feminist theorists have been concerned with disrupting dominant understandings of mothers, motherhood and mothering for at least three decades (Glenn 1994; Rich 1976; Ruddick 1989; Spigel & Baraister 2009; Porter & Kelso 2006). Feminist work on the mother has been particularly important in disrupting the notion that motherhood is a biological imperative and the view of womanhood and motherhood as synonymous identities and social categories. For this reason, many contemporary women understand themselves (and are understood by others) as 'choosing' motherhood, including 'when or whether to

have a child, and in what context, if at all' (Hadfield et al. 2007: 256). The de-naturalisation of motherhood and the opening up of the categories woman/mother has been established in a number of ways, but primarily through research that demonstrates diversity in women's experiences of pregnancy, birth, child rearing, care work, and familial roles and responsibilities. From a contemporary perspective, many of the findings from this research now appear self-evident: not all women give birth, not all women who give birth rear children, not all women who rear children give birth to them, not all families assign the role of child rearing to women, not all child rearers are in families, the nuclear heterosexual family is not natural and so on. By interjecting these 'surprises', the category 'mother' has been established as a social category, whose meaning is historically and culturally specific. Above all, mother has been established as a normative construct, a mechanism through which women do what they 'should'.

As Spigel and Baraister (2009) point out, 'many authors have drawn attention to the dominance of ideologies such as patriarchy, conservatism or more recently neo-liberalism in the shaping of maternal meanings and maternal practices'. In particular, feminists have viewed motherhood as structured and organised within the prevailing gender system. Earlier feminist scholarship that propelled this paradigm includes the theoretical work of Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), Adrienne Rich (1976), Nancy Chodorow (1978, 1989) Sara Ruddick (1980), Betsy Wearing (1984), and Sharon Hays (1996). This work has informed and influenced the way feminist scholarship 'thinks and talks' about motherhood (O'Reilly 2004): we speak of motherhood as an 'institution' that is 'reproduced' through 'ideologies of motherhood' including the 'ideology of intensive mothering', and through the existence of a 'hegemonic motherhood'. Thus the institutionalisation of motherhood

through mothering ideologies is seen to define women and promote standards by which they are judged, both as mothers and not-mothers, in the reproduction of a gender-stratified society.

Historically and culturally specific notions of what constitutes a good and bad mother are crucial in these processes. Typically, these discourses are classed and raced, with discourses of deviancy involved in the production and reproduction of differently classed and raced 'types' of mothers. Most significantly, motherhood is scrutinised and 'typed' in ways that fatherhood is not. As Arendell (1999: 4) points out:

> Motherhood, no matter how closely conducted in accord with the ideological dictates, does not elevate its performers to the social and economic status experienced by men collectively. Rather, hegemonic motherhood remains subordinated to and under the force of hegemonic masculinity.

Good mother discourses require that mothers 'act responsibly' and present themselves in 'culturally recognizable and acceptable ways' (Miller 2005: 86). Thus the literature on prevailing good mother discourses has been concerned with elaborating what is regarded as culturally desirable and socially acceptable for mothers. One concern has been with the social location of the good mother, constructing and defining who good mothers *are*. Here, the class, race, sexuality and economic status of the ideal 'type' of mother has been drawn out. Arendell (1999: 3) for example, claims that the good mother, against whom all others are measured, has the following characteristics

> The *good* mother is heterosexual, married, and monogamous. She is White and native born. She is not economically self-sufficient, which means, given the persistent gender gap in earnings, largely economically dependent on her income-

earning husband (unless she's independently wealthy and, in that case, allows her husband to handle the finances). She is not employed.

A second concern has been an elaboration of the way good mother discourses shape the activities of mothering, constructing and defining what mothers *do*. For example, good mother discourses which position women as intuitive nurturers 'naturally equipped and always readily available to care for their children, no matter what the circumstances' (Krane & Davies 2007) have been discussed in terms of the elevation of intensive mothering. As Sharon Hays (1996) explains, through discourses of intensive mothering 'A good mother would never simply put her child aside for her own convenience. And placing material wealth or power on a higher plane than the well-being of children is strictly forbidden' (Hays 1996: 150). Finally, good mother discourses are shown to shape the identities of mothers and the meaning of mothering for individual women, constructing and defining how mothers *feel.* 'A good mother is a happy mother; an unhappy mother is a failed mother. This myth attributes responsibility for the conditions of motherhood to the individual, not the system' (Johnston & Swanson 2003: 23).

Regulating women through good and bad mother discourses has a number of functions: it ensures that women take on child rearing, it ties women's identities to their roles as child raisers and nurturers of others. More generally, it regulates families and family life, it controls the reproduction of the next generation of citizens, it is also implicated in shoring up the dominant culture and driving nation-building agendas. But regulation does not simply involve coercion and domination. Mothers themselves take on the aspirations, norms and desires that are being articulated by wider political forces and 'through a process of subjectification in the Foucaultian sense, take on the twin tasks of

conforming to the norms that are prescribed to her, and taking on her own self-regulation' (Spigel & Baraister 2009). This, in essence, is the power of the good mother: mothers want to be good.

Yet contemporary women in affluent democracies are presented with a wider range of social roles, positions and identities than ever before, offering women an abundance of opportunities to perform motherhood in diverse ways. In addition, images of mothers have proliferated into new public spaces, so that we see, take up, reflect and comment on a multiplicity of motherhood ideals. Commenting on the North American experience, Johnston and Swanson (2006: 510) state 'there is little dispute that the range of *what exists,* what is good and *what is possible* in terms of mother identity for contemporary mothers is historically unprecedented' (emphasis in the original). It is somewhat paradoxical then, that motherhood remains a site of intense governmental control and regulation. Kara Jesella captures this intensity in her discussion of mother chat on the internet. She suggests 'Our society is constantly seeking ways to rate mothers: the internet provides an endless number of articles, blog posts, and quizzes asking: 'Are you a bad mom?' 'Is Britney a bad mom?' 'Does Facebook make you a bad mom?' (Jesella 2009). Regulation, of course, raises possibilities for resistance, or at least rupture. Jesella's work, for example, highlights what appears to be resistant activity – mothers embracing deviancy from good mother ideals through 'bad mom' websites and chat rooms. Here mothers 'confess' their transgressions of good mother norms, articulating alternative views of what mothers are, what they do and how they feel. If we can take what is happening on the internet as a window into broader social trends, it looks like it may be possible to be acceptable as a bad mother, or at least to bend good mother images. Jesella, however, takes a skeptical stance toward this phenomenon. She says

> In some ways, these maternal rebels are simply reacting to the very real anxiety that women have always felt about being perceived as bad mothers. Though there is a smattering of bad-dad Web sites, the idea is practically redundant: Most any sitcom father makes clear that paternal figures are supposed to be a little bit bad, an antidote to the steadfast mom. A bad mother? Now that's a scandal. (Jesella 2009).

The good mother in contemporary research

The chapters in this book begin from the assumption that motherhood, femininity, sexuality and gender remain heavily regulated. Each chapter explores and casts new light on the nature of this regulation in the contemporary Australian setting. Each chapter is based on empirical research, and so the accounts bring to life the contemporary maternal experience through the presentation of narratives from policy texts, media commentary or interviews with mothers.

It is often suggested that the entry of women into the labour force in unprecedented numbers is one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary era. Wilson and Huntington (2006) provide a more provisional description of this major social change. Their work on teenage motherhood suggests that while 'the pattern of higher education, the establishment of a career, and then (perhaps) starting a family for contemporary middle-class women has gradually become normative' (Wilson & Huntington 2006: 59) it is important to remain cognisant of those women who do not follow this trajectory. Nonetheless, new social and political imperatives that encourage women into education and employment have disrupted ideas about the good mother. Does she work? What work does she do? How does she strategise the handling of family life and employment?

A key characteristic of the contemporary Australian labour market is the extent to which women, but not men, with young children withdraw from the labour force. Currently only 63 percent of women with children under 15 are employed, compared to 92 percent of men with children. There are also considerable differences between the hours that mothers and fathers work: in 2008 around 60 percent of 'working mothers' worked part-time, or under 35 hours per week. On the other hand nearly 30 percent of 'working fathers' worked 50 hours a week or more (ABS 2008; ABS 2009). Belinda Probert (2001) argues

> the revolution in expectations about women's labour market participation seems to have occurred without any corresponding revolution in the care of children and the domestic sphere. The practice of fathering is relatively unchanged despite the changes in expectations since the 1950s.

In addition, Australia has a notoriously gender-segregated workforce. This segregation is both vertical and horizontal. Men are disproportionately represented in positions of power and authority across occupations and accrue a disproportionate proportion of economic and social rewards for their work. The Australian labour market can also be characterised as homosocial – women tend to work with women, men tend to work with men (Goodwin 2003: 386). In sum, while higher education and the establishment of career may have become a normative pattern for women, having children continues to interrupt this trajectory.

The first two chapters of this book provide insights into the operation of good mother discourses which come through the analysis of research with 'unusual' working mothers: women who are senior executives in Australian organisations and women who work in manual trades such as carpentry, plumbing, cabinet making and motor mechanics.

In 'Good executive, good mother: contradictory devotions', Colleen Chesterman and Anne Ross-Smith explore the expectations on women who hold senior executive positions in Australian organisations. As they remind us, the proportion of women in senior managerial roles in Australian organisations remains stubbornly low. But some women are executives, and many of these women are mothers. Their chapter demonstrates that women in senior roles experience seemingly irreconcilable tensions between motherhood and career, and they describe these tensions as emerging through a schema of 'devotion'. On the one hand, the good executive is expected to be devoted to work, and this devotion is expressed in full-time continuous work, a high level of organisational commitment and long hours on the job. On the other hand, the good mother is expected to be devoted to family, and by definition, not engaged in full-time continuous work, committed to her children rather than the organisation, and therefore unable to work long hours. In most cases executive mothers arrive at a less than optimal compromise between the two extremes of this dichotomy.

Highlighting the operation of a 'competing devotions' dichotomy is extremely useful for understanding how mothers are regulated in the field of paid employment. In some instances, this regulation is quite brutal – executive women described how having children would be 'career death'. Chesterman and Ross-Smith problematise devotion. They suggest that organisations *should* be able to accommodate motherhood: that senior managers do not have to be devoted to work in the way that conventional stereotypes demand. Similarly, their work draws attention to the significance of 'devotion to family' in good mother discourses. Being 'devoted' forecloses on the potential of a raft of non-traditional domestic and caring arrangements that would assist women to maintain careers and have children. In addition, we suggest that problematising

devotion might mean that working mothers do not have to spend so much energy trying to pass as good mothers *and* good workers.

In 'Mother of all constructions: mothers in male-dominated work' Louisa Smith examines the ways that the concept of the good mother is incorporated, reworked and resisted by women in another unconventional field of work, the manual trades. Manual trades, such as carpentry, plumbing, cabinet making and motor mechanics are occupations that are dominated by men and are places where men produce and reproduce hegemonic masculinity. In this chapter Smith is interested in ascertaining if women's participation in non-traditional paid work translates into a non-traditional motherhood. She explains: 'because these women weren't conforming to ideas around being a good woman worker, I thought that they would also challenge ideas around being a good mother'. The narratives from mothers in trades suggest otherwise – like the executive mothers they all struggled with tensions related to being both a good tradesperson and a good mother, to the extent that most left the trade or reworked their trade work to fit with maternity.

But Smith's analysis also highlights an important distinction between regulation and resistance, and regulation and rupture (see Renold & Ringrose 2008). In her analysis these women in trades did aspire to be mainstream mothers, but their stories offer alternative and potentially disruptive insights. Many of these concern how motherhood is embodied. The women who worked in manual trades found, for example, mothering both physically and psychically unsatisfying. This dissatisfaction was thinkable and sayable precisely because they were assessing motherhood against the experience of using their bodies in masculinised manual trades. From this 'unusual' perspective these women were able to comment on culturally normalised motherhood

practices, almost as though they were outside motherhood. An excellent example of the disruptive insights made by women in trades is described in a section titled 'Mothering as ergonomic nightmare'. Here Smith presents views of motherhood as physically unsafe practice, in desperate need of the kinds of occupational health and safety standards available to workers in the field of physical trades. So, while good mother ideals continue to regulate women by 'drawing female bodies into line', voices of mothers accustomed to very different ways of being can serve to rupture the acceptability of this regulation.

In 'Mothers making class distinctions: the aesthetics of maternity', Susan Goodwin and Kate Huppatz shift the focus away from what mothers do, to what mothers look like. Just as Smith's research underscored the significance of bodies and embodiment, this chapter highlights the importance of the visual in the production of good and bad mothers. It appears that maternity style has become more important in the assessment of mothers, and women have become increasingly concerned with the presentation of the maternal self via the clothes they wear, the shape of their bodies, the image they project and the objects they consume. Goodwin and Huppatz point to the significance of figures such as the 'yummy mummy' and the 'slummy mummy' in the making of contemporary maternal selves. These 'figures' are understood as highly distorted archetypes of real women that women are exposed to and draw upon. The idea of figures and the processes of figuration are useful in understanding how good mother discourses continue to exert pressure on women.

The central argument of this chapter, however, concerns the making of class and classed mothers. A range of writers has highlighted the ways in which mothers, motherhood and mothering are classed concepts and practices. For example, Walkerdine and Lucey (1989)

argue that working-class motherhood has been consistently judged against middle-class motherhood. More recently, Bridget Byrne (2006) suggests that practices of mothering are implicated in repeating and re-inscribing classed discourses. In this chapter Goodwin and Huppatz suggest that these include practices of taste, style and self-presentation. In their view, the yummy mummy/slummy mummy distinction not only produces new forms of the good mother, but also enacts and re-enacts the working-class – middle-class divide.

Mothers' practices relating to the education of children have also been implicated in class and gender making. In recent years, partly as a result of the extension of the market into school provision and the promulgation of 'school choice' discourses there has been a growing literature on the parental involvement in schooling and, in particular, the ways in which it serves to reproduce middle-class advantage (see Ball 2003; Byrne 2006; Campbell et al. 2009). What is absent from this literature, however, is a discussion of the significant amount of labour involved in parental involvement and school choice. New motherhood discourses that stress the importance of 'school work' also add a new dimension to the unpaid care work and emotional work that other feminist theorists have referred to as 'labours of love' (Luxton 1980; Graham 1983; Finch & Groves 1983).

In 'Good mothers go school shopping' Claire Aitchison describes how the recent policy changes that position parents as consumers of education have expanded the shopping that mothers are expected to take on. This chapter also highlights the pressures on mothers to undertake emotional labour associated with this type of shopping: settling conflicting desires within the family, comforting and protecting vulnerable children, and presenting publicly as 'responsible' and involved mothers. Aitchison describes the mothers in her study as

'frequently haunted by guilt and anxiety as they engage in an activity that they regard as "high-stakes"'. School shopping is thus characterised as time consuming and emotionally charged. Perhaps most disheartening is the way in which there is often a pointlessness to this labour: mothers shopped and angsted, but ultimately did not get to 'choose' a school for their child. Indeed, in most cases, the schools chose them.

It is clear from this chapter that government policy shapes mothers' activities and identities. Some authors, such as Byrne (2006), portray the activities of middle-class mothers valiantly trying to position themselves and their children in the 'best' or the 'right' school setting as articulations of middle-class whiteness, smacking of snobbishness and often racism. It is therefore important to acknowledge the raced and classed lines of new forms of motherhood. It is also important, however, to also see these 'school shopping' mothers regulating themselves and others, primarily because it is often the practices of middle-class mothers that become normative for all mothers. Mothers who shop for schools are enjoined to take on this 'work' via discourses that tap into the fear of failing to be a good (white, middle-class) mother. Thus policy is exposed not as only as placing pressure on mothers, but actually dependent on mothers' engagement with this pressure.

What if mothers resisted the imperative to shop for schools? What if *they did not care* which school their children went to? The unthinkability of this suggestion is rendered thinkable through Helen Proctor's historical account of pre-neoliberal parenting in Australia. In 'The good mother and the high school: a view from the twentieth century' Proctor asks

> To what extent is the busy, strategic neo-liberal mother of recent times an entirely new woman? And to what extent can her origins be traced to earlier developments in the history of schooling and the history of mothering?

The view from the first half of the 20th century is that most mothers 'let the school do its job' in the main, and, beyond that, they 'did what they could'. The kind of cultural and intellectual labour around education and schooling required of contemporary mothers did not feature. However, through her research on the introduction of the early meritocratic high school in Australia, Proctor is able to trace the formation of the good schooling mother of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

This chapter provides some interesting insights into Australian mothers' roles and responsibilities vis-a-vis the education of children. For example, Proctor's history shows that during the first half of the 20th century women in Australia *became* mothers in the sense of actively and intensively nurturing children. It was also the period when women began to see the development of the mind and the psyche of the 'quality' child as significant. These new motherhood discourses are probably important precursors to the emergence of the good schooling mother. The chapter also demonstrates another side of maternal ambition for social mobility via education. Few mothers in the early 20th century had experienced a secondary education. For this reason they were neither expected to nor able to undertake activities such as helping with homework, selecting subjects, choosing schools. Thus it appears the experience of education may well be implicated in the next generation of mothers' ambitions for their own children. Here, then, is an example of government policy (that is, the expansion of access to secondary education) producing mothers with desires for mobility.

In 'Mothers and mutual obligation: policy reforming the good mother' Megan Blaxland provides a discussion of another significant moment in the history Australian motherhood. From 1999 on, with the introduction of Australians Working Together, the Australian welfare system began to be radically reshaped so that income support for low-

income parents came with new obligations. Low-income mothers were, for the first time, expected to work. Blaxland explains that for much of the 20th century, most low-income mothers were eligible for income support based on their responsibility for care work. Of course there were many exceptions: unmarried mothers had limited assistance, Aboriginal mothers had limited eligibility for government support and for much of the century there was a moral element to social security entitlements – mothers had to be seen as deserving of support. However as a general principle, caring for children was regarded as mother's work, and by being good mothers, women executed their citizenship responsibilities. The re-articulation of citizenship responsibilities described in this chapter suggests that there has been a definite shift away from the ideal of mothers engaging in care work. For mothers to be regarded as good citizens, they are now expected to engage in paid work as well as caring work. At least this is the good mother/good citizen ideal that operates for those in need of income support.

In a sense, the chapter also tells a story of government officials constructing new images of 'bad mothers' in order to move people off welfare. Parents receiving income support were constructed as 'not employed' rather than participating in the previously culturally valued work of caring for children. In addition they were portrayed, through welfare dependency discourses, as 'unmotivated' and 'immoral'. Furthermore, women receiving income support without engaging in paid work were constructed as 'bad mothers' who set bad examples for their children, and were possibly responsible for a new social scourge: intergenerational welfare dependency. What is particularly alarming in this account of the regulation of mothers through government policy is the extent to which the promulgation of a new good mother on income support discourse depended on the misrepresentation of mothers.

Blaxland is careful to point out that many mothers receiving Parenting Payment were already *voluntarily* engaged in some form of paid employment prior to the government mandating paid employment. These mothers were therefore not 'not employed', nor were they 'unmotivated' or 'poor role models'. The misrepresentation of mothers, however, served the governmental purposes of reshaping the welfare system more broadly to restrict eligibility for income support, and monitor and control the activities of low-income people.

A similarly alarming account of the regulation of women through misrepresentation is provided in the chapter on maternity allowances by Leanne Cutcher and Talila Milroy. In 'Misrepresenting Indigenous mothers: maternity allowances in the media' Cutcher and Milroy show how the reporting of public policy in the media has constructed and reinforced negative stereotypes of Aboriginal mothers. Through an analysis of media reports and policy statements referring to the introduction of the 1912 Maternity Allowance and the 2004 Maternity Allowance they expose how negative constructions of what it means to be an Aboriginal mother have been perpetuated. These include views of Aboriginal mothers as negligent and corrupting, as well as uncivilised, uneducated, and as 'other'. Cutcher and Milroy emphasise the continuity and repetitions in the representations produced in 1912 and 2004. The racism of 1912 when Aboriginal mothers were simply excluded from payments is repeated in the policy talk and media commentary that surrounded the changes to the new maternity allowance, dubbed the Baby Bonus, in 2004. In 2004, government officials sought to control the payment of maternity allowances to Australian women by replacing lump sum payments with a series of instalments. In Cutcher and Milroy's account, this change in policy was achieved by falsely representing teenage Aboriginal mothers living in 'Aboriginal communities' as the

'problem' the policy shift sought to address. The spuriousness of this problem representation is stark: in the first place, the government and the media invented a spectre of rising teenage pregnancy in Aboriginal communities to justify the amendments, when in fact fertility rates among Indigenous communities had actually declined. Second, the government and the media continued to represent Aboriginal mothers as in need of controlled payments well after they have been receiving payments by instalments. Indeed these mothers were the first group of Australian mothers to be subject to the new 'income management regime'. The fact that these misrepresentations went unquestioned signals the brutal way in which Aboriginal mothers continue to be regulated through bad mother discourses.

Cutcher and Milroy stress the importance of inserting alternative Aboriginal mother discourses into the public domain as one way of countering negative and racist representations of Aboriginal mothers. Thus they underline the importance of Aboriginal mothers telling their own stories of motherhood.

It is in this spirit that the book presents 'Aboriginal mother yarns' by Jane Moore and Lynette Riley. This chapter provides a range of diverse perspectives on the experience of Indigenous motherhood, demonstrating that there are multiple ways of being an Aboriginal mother. Contemporary Aboriginal motherhood, however, has been profoundly shaped by both traditional kinship systems, and the colonial and ethnocentric policies of past Australian governments. The attempted destruction of Indigenous social structures, many of which relied on bad (Aboriginal) mother discourses *and* the survival of Indigenous culture both contribute to contemporary Aboriginal motherhood. Moore and Riley argue that at the core of contemporary Aboriginal mothering is a strong concept of 'kinship', an understanding of the importance of

extended family, a real sense of the importance of cultural heritage and a commitment to overturning the damage that colonisation has done. In this chapter, generational change in rupturing dominant discourses can be observed. As the authors explain, this is the first generation of Aboriginal children since colonisation not to live under the cloud of forced removal from their parents and institutionalised poverty. In turn, this is also the first generation of Aboriginal mothers since colonisation who are able to take pride in their culture without fear that their traditions will be used to demean them or to separate them from their children. As a result, Aboriginal mothers are involved in a process of creating and recreating images of Aboriginal mothers as an important part of cultural (re)building.

The ideas that Aboriginal women 'are each others' mothers' and that Aboriginal children have multiple mothers (and fathers) who may be biological but are often social are important themes in both chapters on Indigenous motherhood. These alternative conceptualisations of motherhood highlight the cultural and historical dimensions of dominant representations of the mother category. Most significantly, they highlight the incompatibility of prevailing ideas about motherhood for women outside the dominant white culture. The good mother is thereby produced and reproduced in very narrow ways. In particular, the singularity and biologism implicit in contemporary meanings of 'mother' regulate women by demanding congruity with standardised relationships with others. For example, it has become unthinkable, impossible, to have more than one mother and as a result women are forced (by social policy, by institutional arrangements, by popular culture and so on) into social arrangements that do not fit with their experience or desires. This force is also visible in the governance of lesbian parents. Parenting outside heterosexed arrangements reveals

the category mother as, at best, inapt and, at worst, hostile to difference.

In 'Mother impossible: the experiences of lesbian parents' Margot Rawsthorne explores the intelligibility of lesbians with children. Tellingly, she employs the categories 'lesbian women who parent' and 'lesbian parents' rather than lesbian *mothers* in her account of research. She explains that the singularity of the category 'mother' leaves lesbian parents struggling to find language that encompasses their experience. In some cases, women invent new language in order to render them intelligible to others, to their children and to themselves – 'tummy mummy' and 'co-parent' are examples. Despite this, the parental identity of lesbians often remains unseeable and unthinkable in a range of contexts including the community, government policy, the school, the workplace and even the extended family.

The chapter draws on narratives from lesbian parents in order to discuss the ways in which lesbian women disrupt scripts concerning the good mother. Interestingly, these narratives also reflect the ways in which lesbian parenting disrupts scripts concerning the good lesbian. Here, Rawsthorne describes the way motherhood draws lesbians into the orbit of heterosexuals, making them more familiar to their heterosexual sisters and less familiar in their lesbian networks. This normalising of lesbians can, however, mean the loss of networks that have played a vital role in nurturing and protecting women in sometimes hostile and homophobic environments. While much of the chapter concerns the impact of diverging from hegemonic good mother discourses on lesbian parents, Rawsthorne also notes the emergence of new discourses that perform similar regulatory functions: discourse about the 'good lesbian mother'. These include, she argues, ideas about the role of fathers in children's lives and ideas about 'good' and 'bad' modes of conception. Like other women, lesbian parents also want to

be good (lesbian) mothers.

In the final chapter 'Being a real mother: adoptive mothers' experiences' Denise Lynch explores the ambiguous position that adoptive mothers occupy in relation to good mother discourses. Adoptive motherhood is regarded as both contained within and challenging contemporary meanings of the mother category. The most obvious challenge is to the biologism, including theories of genetic determinism, that makes mothers 'real'. But adoptive mothers have also been constructed in the image of biological mothers, and so they have insights into the daily regulations that biological mothers experience. They thus have both an insiders and an outsider perspective on the good mother.

This chapter focuses, more than any of the preceding chapters, on children's responses to the social and cultural positioning of mothers. A number of vignettes illustrate how adopted children are affected by constructions of motherhood, including constructions of the 'biological' mother, the 'real' mother, the 'relinquishing' mother. In her commentary on these vignettes, Lynch is interested in the ways adoptive mothers can rework moments where both child and parent are aware of their difference in order to reframe the roles, responsibilities and identities of parents, both adoptive and otherwise. Here she hopes to present a more assertive view of adoptive mothering than currently exists. This is the view that adoptive mothers' experiences are a useful window through which to view dominant ideologies of the family, childhood and mothering.

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