

MOTHERHOOD STATEMENTS:

Mothers and their Adolescent Daughters

Submitted by:

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Statement of Authorship

The work in this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committees.

CATHY LYNN DEACEY

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.....(Date)

Abstract

Despite significant change in women's lives in recent decades, the prevailing ideology of motherhood is predominantly based on nineteenth-century ideals. Underpinned by a socially-constructed, idealised version of womanhood, the dominant paradigm promotes an essentialist model of maternal excellence largely grounded in the early childhood context; that of the 'good mother'. Amidst deviancy discourse that has historically beleaguered women who failed to fulfil prescribed standards of good mothering, this thesis contends that the ideology of motherhood that remains dominant requires substantial revision.

Central to this is the need to understand the range of historical factors that shape and influence cultural, and thus, personal understandings of the role of a good mother. Accordingly, the literature reviewed is subjected to critical analysis, examining stereotypical depictions of women that have historically typified the archetypal ideal. Particular consideration is given to sociological, psychoanalytic and feminist accounts of motherhood, mothering and the mother-daughter relationship. Therein, the focus of this study involves assessment of the degree to which the cultural meaning attributed to being a good mother influences personal perceptions and the lived experience of mothering.

While the literature reviewed provides a useful foundation for considering the likely impact the ideology of motherhood has upon the lives of contemporary women, it also highlights that the maternal perspective has been noticeably absent from much of the literature. Given the centrality of the maternal role in reproducing existing conditions of mothering, and indeed, the mother-daughter relationship (Chodorow, 1978), this study is perhaps long overdue. Based on a case study involving twelve Melbourne mothers, this thesis highlights both the commonalities and considerably divergent experiences of motherhood and the mother-daughter relationship in the postmodern context.

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