

Perspectives on Motherhood: A Review Essay

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Mother Love. Myth and Reality. Motherhood in Modern History. Elisabeth Badinter, Foreword by Francine du Plessix Gray. *New York: Collier Macmillan Canada Inc., 1981. Pp. 360;*

Inventing Motherhood. The Consequences of an Ideal. Ann Dally. *London: Burnett Books Ltd. (Copp Clark Ltd.), 1982. Pp. 360;*

Fair Sex, Family Size and Structure, 1900-1939. Diana Gittins. *London: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1982;*

The Politics of Motherhood. Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900-1939. Jane Lewis. *London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1980.*

Mothering

Speaking to his new mate-
both savouring the fish chowder
I had prepared-
my son explained:
"Yes, she has a way."

Not an explanation
but a declaration?
He never would have said that
straight to my face!

Now, as I hear it
second-hand
I feel all those tight domestic years
slipping away-
those routines that had seemed to crush
my very self
were all the time creating a bond:
mother to son.¹

In this poem Dorothy Livesay makes explicit the two-edged nature of motherhood. Eli Zaretsky has described it in another way. "It is a tragic paradox that the bases of love, dependence, and altruism in human life and the historical oppression of women have been found within the same matrix."² Indeed, "the vexed place of the family in feminism"³ is a theoretical and practical problem which has yet to be resolved.

Several recent books have addressed the question of women as mothers in an attempt to shed light on at least that aspect of family life. One of the most sweeping is Elisabeth Badinter's tome, *Mother Love, Myth and Reality: Motherhood in Modern History*. Badinter's main thesis is straightforward. Mother love is not a universal and natural instinct; it is a socially created phenomenon. In defense of her position she examines motherhood in (mostly) France across several centuries. It is important to note here that contrary to claims made by Badinter's critics,⁴

she does not claim that mother love did not exist in the past. She acknowledges, for example, the love expressed by peasant women of Montaillou towards their offspring and by other mothers towards their children in various times and places but notes that this evidence must not be taken as proof that mother love is a universal form of behaviour that is innate and biologically determined.

In the first part of her book, Badinter rehearses many of the arguments already well-known in social history. Following in the foot-steps of Shorter,⁵ she argues that “the absence of love was a social and family value” (p.27) in France until the middle of the eighteenth-century. Similarly she accepts the main thrust of Ariès position that childhood was not accorded a special place in society until about the same time.⁶ She notes that prior to 1760 philosophers and theologians displayed a real fear of childhood and condemned children for all manner of sins as judged by adult standards. Ordinary people, however, were more inclined to view children as nuisances or misfortunes.

Badinter claims that many parents could not or would not make the sacrifices necessary for raising children and sought through various means to rid themselves of the “nuisances.” Here she deals with what she calls “the first indication of the rejection of the child” (p.40)—the use of wet nurses. She argues, indeed, that the widespread use of wet nurses which contributed in very large measure to high rates of infant mortality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is evidence enough of the lack of any maternal love instinct. While she understands recourse to wet nursing as a necessary strategy for survival in poor families where women were forced to work outside the home and as a deference to traditional community standards in lower middle class families where women’s work was required in field or shop, she concentrates her analysis on and therefore draws her conclusions from the apparent behaviour of women she defines as be-

ing free of both financial pressure and traditional value systems. She does this on the grounds that by considering the actions of women who were the freest “we can with the greatest certainty question the spontaneity of mother love.” (p.52)

In looking at the treatment of children by the women of the “privileged class,” Badinter finds signs of maternal indifference everywhere. She cites the absence of sorrow over the death of a child, the failure of parents to attend children’s funerals, and the lack of overt evidence of grief as a strong indication that love was lacking. She discusses the inequality of treatment meted out to children in a family, noting particularly that the eldest son was coddled and cared for far more than his siblings and that he would be the only child to be nursed and cared for by the mother herself. Other children would be sent off to wet nurses and virtually ignored for periods of up to four years. In this context of selective feelings she asks “where is the mother love that is said to exist in all places and at all times?” (p.66)

Badinter sees the refusal to nurse as the strongest evidence of maternal indifference. Indeed, she refers to the refusal to nurse as an “unnatural act” and is largely unsympathetic to the arguments women used to justify their decision. She sees these arguments as simply excuses women used so that they could continue to ignore their children in order to pursue lives outside of the realm of domesticity. While Badinter’s tone is here, as it is elsewhere in the book, somewhat ambivalent (perhaps the fault of a bad translation?) and almost suggests that, in fact, there is mother love and these women were abnormal, she is quick to then take up the argument that women rejected motherhood in an attempt to move beyond the roles of wives and mothers to achieve some measure of emancipation. Since motherhood was not accorded any recognition by society, privileged women sought esteem in other ways, ways not compatible with motherhood. Their prime motivation was the desire for

personal freedom, whether it was freedom to do "what they wanted when they wanted," to do what the trend-setters did or to pursue intellectual matters. (pp.89-90) That the pursuit of personal freedom for whatever goals, worthy or not, had tragic consequences for children is acknowledged by Badinter who describes the consequences of the virtual abandonment of children to wet nurses, tutors and governesses and boarding schools. She also suggests that this way of treating children became a dominant value in society though less privileged women could only dream of leaving motherhood behind.

By 1760, however, Badinter argues that changes were afoot. Some women such as Mme. du Châtelet, one of the *femmes philosophes* and mistress to Voltaire, realized that knowledge was the means to liberation but that knowledge was not enough to secure power. In other words, "for women knowledge was only a consolation, a solitary pleasure that did little to satisfy the will to power." (p.88) According to Badinter, Mme. d'Épinay, a follower of Rousseau, drew on du Châtelet's position to leave knowledge to men and take "symbolic possession of another role, long left vacant: that of mother." (p.88)

In the second part of her book, Badinter examines how, at the end of the eighteenth century, "the idea of mother love resurged with the force and appeal of a brand-new concept." (p.117) She is quite unequivocal in tying this change in "ideology" to the state's perceived need for more citizens. The renewed interest in mother love on the part of writers, administrators and doctors was the result of a male-defined goal to increase the population of France by encouraging women to spend their time bearing and caring for children. This material and very concrete goal was reinforced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment which emphasized ideas of equality and individual happiness. Badinter argues, in fact, that women would have ignored the economic and social arguments for subordinating their self-interest to the interests of children had they

not also been promised equality, love and happiness in relations between husband and wife.

In any event, Badinter sees the emergence of a "new mother" in the period after 1760, particularly within the middle class. Children assume centre stage and mothers begin to focus their attention on the care and rearing of the young. Wet nursing was abandoned as were swaddling clothes and other restraints. There was new concern for hygiene and cleanliness and mothers began to fondle and cuddle their babies. The health of children became a central concern and when infants and children died they were mourned and their parents displayed public grief. By the middle of the nineteenth century "the new mother was the woman we know all too well, the one who lives entirely for and through her children." (p.179)

Badinter makes it clear that not all women rushed to embrace the new motherhood. Aristocratic women, women with social or intellectual ambitions or women with the will to power continued to resist the call to be doting mothers. For many women, however, motherhood seemed to offer them advantages not otherwise available. It is Badinter's view that for middle class women, especially, the new role offered enhanced status and a type of emancipation rooted in the acquisition of power within the domestic sphere. "Motherhood became a gratifying role because it was now a repository of the society's idealism." (p.190)

Motherhood may have been a gratifying role for many women but for those who wished to avoid devoting their lives to babies a new emotion entered the picture. Women felt increasingly forced to resort to ruses if they wished to escape the new requirements of motherhood. Women came to *feel* responsible for their children even if they did not want to be. As Badinter put it, "Rousseau had won a very significant battle. Guilt had invaded women's hearts." (p.201)

In the third and concluding section of her book, Badinter examines how the mother's role was expanded from the late eighteenth to the twentieth century to include responsibility for all aspects of the child's life. In the eighteenth century the mother became responsible for the child's health, in the nineteenth responsibility for moral and religious education was assigned to her and in the twentieth century she assumed "a terrifying assignment" (p.20)—responsibility for the child's happiness and emotional well-being. All of this was in keeping with the definition of woman's true "nature" by male theoreticians of various sorts. As Badinter points out, though one hundred and fifty years separate them, Rousseau and Freud both characterized the "normal" woman as one with a highly developed sense of devotion and sacrifice. For love and with joy she gave herself to the bearing and rearing of children. "Feminine nature" became synonymous with loving motherhood and this had dire consequences for women who did not live up to the ideal. Women seeking to escape the role of mother were subject to moral condemnation and women who could not or would not conform to the expectations for good mothers were also condemned.

It is only recently with the advent of second wave feminism that women have been able to seriously challenge the narrow concept of their role as mother. Badinter argues that "By destroying the Freudian myth of the passive and masochistic 'normal' woman, the feminists rendered null and void the theory of the naturally devoted martyr-mother...." (p. 293) Now that it is clear that mothering is not a natural instinct, Badinter suggests that a re-evaluation not only of mothering but of fathering should occur.

Badinter's book covers several centuries of the history of motherhood and coincidentally family life. The broad parameters of her thesis seem plausible enough but in many ways her work lacks the necessary attention both to the use of evidence and to conceptual clarity to make it to-

tally convincing. In important ways these two problems are linked for without a clear idea about what exactly is being examined, it is difficult to evaluate the evidence. Is Badinter looking at the development of a *concept* of motherhood or is she really trying to evaluate whether or not a biological maternal instinct exists? It seems that a biological maternal instinct, motherliness and motherhood are three distinct concepts but all too often Badinter tends to use them interchangeably. For example, she says "It is not a question of denying the existence of love before a certain period....But love enjoyed neither the status nor the importance we grant it today." (p.27) Is she not, then, in fact acknowledging that love has always existed, is universal but that it simply takes different forms at different times in different cultures? Ariès in his work on the history of childhood distinguishes clearly between children and childhood as an idea or concept. Badinter fails to do this for mothers and motherhood.

In several respects, Badinter's use of evidence raises questions. She relies heavily on very few sources and most of those sources were written by men. Indeed, several recently published works in the history of women, childhood and the family would lead one to suspect that Badinter has been rather selective in her choice of sources. Her uncritical use of literary evidence is problematic for, as historians know, literary evidence often tells us more about the society in which the author lives. This is doubly problematic when the literary production of males is used to shed light on the female experience.

It is also important to ask whether Badinter is interpreting all her evidence in the correct way or whether she is letting our "modern" standards serve as the criteria for judgment. In one spot she recognizes that twentieth century psychological analysis might be "misleading" when used to try to understand the past (p.192), but on the whole she applies our current criteria to judge mothers and fathers in the past. Hence she is able to cite as evidence of a lack of affection the failure of par-

ents to overtly grieve over the death of children or attend their children's funerals. However, as Wilson points out, "reticence in bereavement is no guide to the depth of loss felt" and failure to attend a funeral might just as easily be seen "as an indication of intense grief."⁷ Similar counter-interpretations can be made of many aspects of Badinter's evidence, partly because she has rather uncritically adopted the interpretations of some historians such as Shorter and Aridaès without giving due attention to the critiques of their work.⁸

There are many problems with Elisabeth Badinter's book, problems partly explained by the fact that she was writing for the more "popular" market. Nonetheless, the book raises some important questions about the ways in which an ideology can be used to create and justify a new reality when it is demanded by those with power. For women seeking to understand their feelings about motherhood, this book will provide useful insights about the ways in which the concept of motherhood has taken shape and how that concept influences the way we feel and think. And for those seeking to understand women's history, Badinter demonstrates ways in which women can be viewed as active creators of their own history by showing them not as victims or passive objects but as conscious participants. That the choice of "equal but separate" spheres may not have been the right one does not negate the fact that many women did choose a role that they felt enhanced their power. Nor can we ignore the opposition of many women to the "new motherhood," an opposition which Badinter duly records.

In many respects, Ann Dally's book, *Inventing Motherhood: The Consequences of an Ideal*, covers much of the same territory as Badinter's though it is written more clearly from the view of a practising psychiatrist and is slanted towards what she considers the contemporary problems of mothering. I should admit from the start that I was somewhat put off by the rather smug Mar-

garet Thatcherish "I know best" tone of much of this book⁹. But that aside, Ann Dally has some interesting things to say about motherhood which, as she notes in the first paragraph of her introduction, did not emerge as a concept until the Victorian era. As she says, "There have always been mothers but motherhood was invented." (p.17)

Part One of Dally's book is entitled "Changing Motherhood." It is a sweeping exploration of changes in the experiences of mothers over several centuries motivated by the assumption that until we understand the meaning assigned to a "confidence in the survival of ourselves and our children" we cannot understand modern parenting. The converse of this assumption is obvious: until we understand the meaning assigned to a lack of confidence in survival we cannot understand parenting during the period when maternal and infant mortality rates were very high.

In an attempt to understand parenting, and particularly mothering in the past, Dally takes the reader on a quick romp through a number of the usual secondary sources including *The Image of Childhood* by Peter Coveney, *Centuries of Childhood* by Philippe Ariès, *The World We Have Lost* by Peter Laslett, *The Making of the Modern Family* by Edward Shorter and *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* by Lawrence Stone. She seems largely unaware of the criticisms of these works and accepts the general thrust of their interpretations to create a picture of family life in the past marked by indifference and neglect, a picture which then changed as the world began to industrialize and "modernize".

She then turns her attention to a discussion of the psychohistorical approach of Lloyd deMause as reflected in the collection of articles he edited and published under the title *The History of Childhood*. DeMause analyses parent-child relationships over time by applying Freudian psy-

chology to evidence from the past. Dally acknowledges that “the result is sometimes bizarre” (p.56)—most historians would say “thoroughly bizarre” for to apply one form of contemporary psychoanalytic theory developed out of the case studies of middle class Viennese to the totality of western history and to posit all historical change as the result of shifts in parent-child relations is simply ludicrous. As Joan Simon has pointed out, and her observation can be applied to deMause, Badinter and Dally, there are serious difficulties in arriving at generalizations about parents and children by using “sociological and psychological concepts deriving directly from the study of modern institutions whose origin and development is the very matter in question.¹⁰”

This comment aside, Dally uses much of deMause to show how badly treated children were in the past. She parts company with him on his views about the best form of child-rearing which he sees as warm, loving, helpful and full of empathy with both parents devoting enormous amounts of time and attention to their offspring. In this mode of child care parents meet the every need of child as determined by the child—they are totally devoted. Dally indicates that her psychiatric practice amply illustrates the many problems caused by this total and intense involvement of parents (for which read mothers) and suggests that this is just one of many fashions which have been prevalent in child-rearing over time.

In dealing with the modern fashions in child care she examines the work of men such as Winnicott, Truby King and Bowlby and shows how there is an almost universal belief that mother and child should rarely or never be separated. That this position also serves the interests of the state has not escaped her attention but her real concern is with the results she sees of this forced close and isolated relationship between mother and child, with what she calls the privatisation of motherhood. She notes that along with the idealization of motherhood there is a denigra-

tion of mothering for society makes little or no provision for a mother and children in terms of the design of suburbs, in the provision of facilities in public places for nursing and toileting children and so on. Indeed, she argues that the feminist movement has also ignored the real problems of mothers and addresses only such issues as birth control and abortion and so modern mothers are left isolated in houses with virtually no support and no contact with others and with all the responsibility for seeing that the children grow up to be happy, productive citizens. She considers the feminist demand for access to universal and free day care as inadequate for “The cost of meeting these demands is seldom mentioned and neither are the important effects that this would have on children....The demand so often seems to be that day care ...should be provided as though that was the end of the problems of motherhood.” (p.178) She further argues that feminism either ignores or trivializes motherhood, and, in a clever turn of Friedan’s famous phrase, says “motherhood is the problem that cannot be faced by modern feminists.” (p.179)

She acknowledges that perhaps some change is afoot with regard to the feminist position now that “some of the more vociferous of the women’s liberationists have become mothers themselves” but there is still “no attempt to show that motherhood can be women’s great strength rather than their burden.” (p. 183) She suggests that women ought to consider “rocking the cradle as a privilege” which should be restricted “only to those men and women who are wise enough, and developed enough and sane enough to be responsible for it.” (p.185) She concludes this assessment by arguing that only when feminism writes “sensibly” about mothers and motherhood, only when the pleasures and joys of mothering are acknowledged will the women’s movement grow and flourish.

With this, Dally moves on to Part Two, “The Crisis of Motherhood.” This is a peculiar section

for it largely consists of a recounting of all the “deviant” forms mothering can take discussed in a rather unsympathetic and “holier than thou” way. There is more than a tinge of anti-woman sentiment expressed here (and elsewhere). Before launching into deviant mothering, however, Dally offers a definition of what motherliness ought to be.

...motherliness is warmth, caring in a sensitive way, together with a desire to protect and enhance the child and the capacity to do this. It means putting the other’s interests first and knowing what these interests are without reading a book or being told ...It means constancy, the communication of security and optimism, and also patience, tolerance, the control of immediate feelings along with the recognition of negative and unpleasant feelings. It involves the capacity to delay satisfaction and the ability to think and feel in terms of the developing child...to know when anger is felt and on appropriate occasions to be angry yet at the same time being forgiving towards a child (p.198)

The list of characteristics goes on but enough are listed here to give some idea of Dally’s perspective on mothering. Do these characteristics not sound very much like an idealization of motherhood, a new set of impossible demands for mothers? Later, too, Dally emphasizes that mothering is a process most successful “when it is not intellectual” for intellectuals “inevitably lack *intuitive* (my emphasis) maternal feelings because their constant intellectual activity prevents the development of authentic maternal feelings.” (p.245) There we have it. There is, after all, some intuitive maternalism despite her earlier accounting of all the abuse children have been subjected to across the centuries. Society has simply distorted this natural tendency to mother—a tendency which Dally says can be found in both sexes but discusses as though it were essentially

female—by making the conditions for mothering difficult.

What is to be done to make mothering easier for women? Dally suggests more involvement of men and a commitment to ensure that women are no longer isolated in lonely homes in the suburbs. Efforts should be made to provide support services for mothers—parks and playgrounds, physical facilities for nursing and other child care functions in public places, and so on. In addition, her main suggestion is the development of a large network of day homes (rather than day care centres) where children could be cared for by trained child minders (“even the most uneducated can be trained to be good at it” (p.312)—so much for intuitive mothering!). This is, of course, hardly an astonishing new idea and it is rather an anti-climactic suggestion.

“Why do women not see that in motherhood lies their power?” asks Dally. (p.323) Women have allowed men to assume this power when, in fact, women need to use their power over these early years. The world is in the mess it is in because women have allowed both the idealization and denigration of motherhood to occur and thus mothers and their children have been neglected.

There is much in Dally’s book that is important and needs saying though, of course, she is wrong to suggest that feminists have not understood the effects on women and children of the creation of separate private and public spheres¹¹. Unfortunately aspects of her arguments are couched in terms which blame women for the current state of affairs and there is something queen beeish about many of her complaints about mothers and mothering. Her eclectic and often undisciplined approach to her material and the contradictions which result will be troublesome to many readers. Those familiar with the history of feminist thought will recognize many of her arguments about the key role of moth-

ers in creating a better society and will understand why her position is far too simplistic.

From two sweeping and sometimes polemical books we turn now to two carefully documented historical studies which examine aspects of the experience of mothers over a forty year span in England and Wales. The detailed and careful work of Diana Gittins in *Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure, 1900-1939* and Jane Lewis in *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900-1939* helps us evaluate some of the broader arguments and generalizations made by Badinter and Dally.

Badinter, for example, concentrates much of her effort on an exploration of the mothers of the "privileged class" because it is her view they were the trend-setters, that women outside this class would seek to emulate the behaviour of those "above" them. It is this very "embourgeoisement" or "diffusion" model which Gittins finds unsatisfactory as an explanation for the startling decline in family size in the English working class during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Instead she chooses to look at working class women and family size from their point-of-view and attempts to classify these women not by the occupations of their husbands as is usually done but by the women's own occupational experiences. One of her central aims, and the one which yields the most interesting information, was "to explore in greater depth the association between women working, fertility and family size." (p.25) She also sets out to look at how power relations in society and within the family influence the way in which decisions are made about family size.

After a look at various theories of fertility and family size and an explanation of where they fall down, Gittins sets the stage for her own interpretation by looking at British society between 1900 and 1939. Although there were still many pockets of real poverty, the standard of living was slowly improving. In order to promote consumer in-

dustries, domesticity, family life and the concept of woman as wife and mother became part of the dominant ideology and the health, welfare and education of children was pushed through the aegis of the child and maternal welfare movement. According to Gittins, this movement served to reinforce the isolation of the woman in the home by breaking down the traditional women's networks and support systems. Women thus became more dependent on their husbands and state agencies for support. In addition, changes in leisure patterns—the advent of movies and radio and the proliferation of women's magazines, for example—encouraged family activities rather than community ones. These and other factors accounted for a shift towards the ideal of a small, loving, close-knit family. Similarly structural changes were observable within the country and different areas experienced different patterns of employment and unemployment. According to Gittins many changes were occurring and all of them, to one degree or another, may have accounted for the decline in family size in the working class. However, she argues that the two really important areas to consider are work and home.

Gittins contends that women's work outside the home is a significant variable to consider when trying to explain the decline in family size. After examining the work of women prior to marriage she draws two major conclusions from the data. First, she argues that the availability or non-availability of work in a particular area affected demographic patterns because the work of women or lack of work for women outside the home was a major factor in determining age of marriage and attitudes towards marriage and fertility. Secondly, she suggests that the type of work women engaged in prior to marriage was also important in determining attitudes and behaviour. The more isolated the work, the less likely it was that women would have exposure to new ideas and information about matters such as sex and birth control. Women who had worked in isolated jobs were far more likely to exper-

ience segregated marital role relationships than were women who had worked in larger work situations. Similarly in situations where women continued to work after marriage in jobs parallel to those of their husbands (e.g. where they were both weavers), household duties tended to be shared equally. The situation was not as clear in situations where women working after marriage did so in occupations different from their husbands—there about half had joint role relationships and half had segregated. This split was also found in the cases where the woman stayed at home after marriage. Gittins argues that the nature and context of the work women engaged in had a significant impact on the power relationships within the family. Women employed in occupations directly comparable to “men’s work” were more likely to be treated as “equals” by their husbands.

In looking at the families where the wives stayed at home, however, Gittins noted differences in the behaviour of family members. These families were far more child-centred and even when household work was shared it was done so because the husband was “helping out.” He would refuse to do certain jobs and a substantial portion of the joint role relatedness centred on the child care activities rather than on the housework. In these families Gittins detected that “segregation and isolation within marriage frequently led to bitterness and an atmosphere of undeclared warfare” (p.141) and that wives often used the children in battles against the husband.

On the basis of the evidence she examined Gittins draws the following conclusion:

...ideals of family size and the ability to achieve those ideals, were associated with the family organization of the couple, which was in turn related to both the husband’s and wife’s participation in the labour market, and occupational experience, before and after marriage. (p.156)

In her exploration of the use of birth control she makes similar claims for a relationship between occupational experiences and power within the marriage to determine the type of method used and the responsibility for birth control.

There are a number of weaknesses in Gittins’ book, not the least of which is a very heavy reliance on a very small sample of women who were interviewed for the study. However, Gittins indicates that her work is exploratory and she makes no other claims for it. It was also originally written as a graduate thesis and it still bears many of the less attractive marks of such an undertaking (unnecessary repetition and a certain flat tone to the prose, for example). Its strengths outweigh any weaknesses in my view and Gittins’ attempts to relate the personal and the political, to examine husbands and wives in relationship to one another through the mediating effect of occupational experience suggest many other research problems which might benefit from a similar conceptualization. Gittins remembers that for women there is life before motherhood and besides motherhood and that these experiences help create the women. Would that this were more often the case in research on mothers.

In *The Politics of Motherhood*, Jane Lewis pursues one of the changes in English society in the first part of the twentieth century that Gittins identified as significant, namely the child and maternal welfare movement. Child welfare became a national concern in Britain after the Boer War as part of the more general drive to improve and increase the population of the country. To upgrade the health of children a variety of measures were adopted and, though lagging somewhat behind, policies and practices designed to improve maternal health were also instituted. In her book, Lewis seeks to explain why certain social policies were adopted and why others were not. In exploring this topic she also examines “the interaction between policy makers, the pro-

viders of health care and the female clients.” (p.11)

By the beginning of the twentieth century, eugenicists, military officials and medical officers were expressing deep concerns about the quality and quantity of the English population. Their developing interest in the health of the population strengthened the force of women’s demands for improvements in health care for women and children and this combined lobby pressured the government to adopt new social policies in health and welfare. However, the reformist measures adopted by the government consistently failed to meet the real needs of women and children according to Lewis. While women were pointing out that problems of poverty and unemployment caused malnutrition and hence ill-health, the government would not recognize these claims. Instead the government adopted measures to educate mothers on higher standards of hygiene and child care as a way to cope with infant mortality. Child welfare clinics were established during the inter-war years to provide help to mothers but this help took the form of education and inspection and did not provide real medical assistance, food, funds or day care services. This was at least partly due to the fact that doctors opposed broadening the scope of the work done by clinics because of a fear that they would lose patients. However, the approach of the clinics can be seen as part of a broader effort to keep women busy in their homes for at the same time domestic work was elevated to household science and was taught in the schools. Raising house work and child care to the status of a “science” and making it a “subject for study in schools and colleges helped to legitimize the ideology of motherhood and keep women at home. Furthermore, as Lewis points out, the educative approach named mothers as the responsible parties for children’s health and hence infant mortality could be blamed on mothers. This served to deflect social critiques and absolved the state.

Initial efforts in health and welfare were concentrated on the child and little thought was given to maternal care. However, high rates of maternal mortality were a major embarrassment when the official ideology glorified wives and mothers and hence authorities were forced to seek ways to resolve this “problem.” The solution was found in medicalising maternity, a solution which was interestingly not wholly supported by the medical profession because of a number of intraprofessional rivalries and conflicts. Women’s groups, on the other hand, tended to support the hospitalization of childbirth and the medicalisation of domiciliary care because they were convinced that this was best for women’s health. However, women’s groups also demanded additional services such as a system of home helpers for new mothers but these were not granted.

By 1939 England had developed a system which offered infant and maternal welfare services such as ante-natal care, infant welfare clinics, trained birthing attendants, health visitors and hospital care for parturient women and babies. Nonetheless, Lewis points out that this system fell far short of the demands of women’s groups who sought economic assistance for mothers and by the 1920s were also seeking easy access to birth control. Lewis examines both of these campaigns in some detail and though ultimately family allowances became a reality and birth control received official sanction the author observes that these changes were introduced only when they met changing social and economic needs. Thus “family allowances were granted first to keep wage rates down and secondly to increase population” and “birth control achieved recognition...when it was perceived that a change in women’s participation rate in the workforce might be desirable.” (p.214)

Lewis’s study of the child and maternal welfare movement is an interesting and informative examination of what happens to the reforms women’s groups demand and how and why it hap-

pens. A close reading of her text reveals a great deal about how the "system" works—this is a history that teaches some lessons. It is also an important contribution to our understanding of how women's groups have struggled for change, how they have made use of limited gains while continuing to fight for more fundamental change. At the same time Lewis demonstrates that not all reforms are benevolent. Indeed, Lewis and Gittins both point out that the reforms introduced through the infant and maternal welfare movement have, for many women, meant further isolation in the home through an increased reliance on state agencies and a decreased reliance on informal women's networks and mutual aid groups of various sorts.

That motherhood, mothering and mothers should attract the interest of a philosopher, a psychiatrist, a sociologist and an historian, all of whom pursued some similar and some different aspects of the subject matter only goes to show yet again that for women an understanding of the politics and experiences of reproduction is essential to a broader analysis of women's oppression and women's power—an analysis which is essential in the struggle against the narrow familism of the New Right.

Notes

1. Dorothy Livesay. "Mothering." In *The Phases of Love*. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1983.
2. Eli Zaretsky. "The Place of the Family in the Origins of the Welfare State." In *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*, edited by Barrie Thorne with Marilyn Yalom. New York and London: Longman, 1982, p. 193.
3. Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh. *The Anti-Social Family*. London: Verso, 1982, p. 20.
4. See, for example, Stephen Wilson, "The Myth of Motherhood A Myth: The Historical View of European Child-Rearing." *Social History*, vol. 9, no. 2 (May 1984); 181-198.
5. Edward Shorter. *The Making of the Modern Family*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
6. Philippe Ariès. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Translated from the French by Robert Baldick. New York: Vintage Books, 1962.
7. Wilson, "The Myth of Motherhood..." p. 188.
8. For criticisms of Shorter see, for example, Joan W. Scott and Louise A. Tilly, "Women's Work and the Family in Nineteenth-Century Europe." In *The Family in History*, edited by Charles E. Rosenberg, pp. 145-178. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975; Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott.

Women, Work, and Family. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978. For criticisms of Ariès see, for example, Adrian Wilson, "The Infancy of the History of Childhood: An Appraisal of Philippe Ariès." *History and Theory*, vol. xix (1980): 132-154; Richard Vann, "The Youth of *Centuries of Childhood*." *History and Theory*, vol. xxi (1982): 279-297. Recent books which suggest the need to rethink past interpretations of parental neglect and indifference include Shulamith Shahar. *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*. Translated by Chaya Galai. London and New York: Methuen, 1983; Linda A. Pollock. *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Steven Ozment. *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1983

9. Indeed, we find that Margaret Thatcher was one of Dally's classmates at Somerville College, Oxford. Thatcher is cited as an example of a woman "successful in the world while raising children." (p.151) That Thatcher is also responsible for making the British world a great deal more difficult for mothers these days escapes mention. Barrett and McIntosh, *The Anti-Social Family*, do a good analysis of the contradictions in Thatcher's position on family life. In a bit of self-indulgence I might note, as well, that Dally quotes Sir Keith Joseph on difficulties facing families and D. H. Lawrence as an authority on sex and trust. How ironic!
10. Joan Simon, "Childhood in Earlier Seventeenth Century England." In *Informal Agencies of Education*. Proceedings of the 1977 Annual Conference of the History of Education Society of Great Britain, edited by K. S. Dent. History of Education Society, 1979. p.1.
11. See, for example, Thorne, ed. *Rethinking the Family* for an interesting collection of articles. See, also, Barrett and McIntosh. *The Anti-Social Family*; Adrienne Rich. *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1976; Nancy Chodorow. *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1979; Sheila M. Rothman. *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*. New York: Basic Books, 1978.