PRODUCING THE NEW MOTHER
SURVEILLANCE, NORMALISATION
AND MATERNAL LEARNING

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the past 7 years, I have been privileged to meet fifteen very special women who so willingly shared their experiences of learning to mother. It was with great sadness at the end of the third interview that I left each of their homes for the last time. I will always treasure the camaraderie, tears and laughter we shared during the interviews. I hope, they will approve of the readings I have provided of their stories about motherhood.

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has been provided by my family and close friends even when it would have been easier to encourage me to stop. Thank you.
NOTES ON NOTATION

For convenience I will refer to this research project throughout the thesis as the *New Mother research study* to distinguish it from other research projects about mothering.

The names of participants and some identifying details have been changed in accordance with confidentiality agreements. My name has been maintained in the examples of transcript data to avoid confusion when reading the extracts.

Extracts of the transcribed tapes are indented. Since the approach taken with these extracts is not a linguistic one, the conventions of linguistic transcription have not been appropriate to the investigation in this thesis and therefore, in the interest of readability, have not been employed.

The women’s pauses occurring within the interviews have been identified by …. of differing lengths within the extracts to denote the length of the pause.

In preparing the transcripts, in most instances, hesitation phenomena such as ummhs, arrhs and other background utterances have been replaced with equivalent ……..

*Italics* are used to signal words of a participant that are being repeated within the analysis. The purpose of this notation is to achieve a more readable text.

‘Scare quotes’ are used to enclose a term and draw attention to its use which is in some way under revision.
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation of maternal learning through the experiences of fifteen women who were learning to mother their first born infants within a white anglo-centric culture. These women provided stories about their experiences of pregnancy, birth and the early days of mothering during a series of interviews.

Poststructural and feminist approaches have been used to inform this research study. These approaches have resulted in an analysis that troubles several of the dominant maternal discourses that are frequently used in two complementary ways: first, to explain the seemingly inexplicable ability to mother as ‘maternal instinct’, and second, within a specific culture, to provide the criteria for maternal attitudes and behaviours. The use of a poststructural framing has enabled an unsettling of the frequently accepted and taken-for-granted understandings about maternal learning through asking how it works and why women act in certain ways and not in other ways?

There are two major sections to this thesis. The first section provides a theoretical positioning within the practice disciplines of adult education, parent education and nursing, and an overview of poststructural and feminist understandings and research applications of discourse analysis. The analysis work of this thesis commences within the second section where maternal discourses are examined and the resulting discursive constructions of maternal subject positions are foregrounded. Tensions and contradictions within the women’s stories are explored and taken-for-granted explanations about women’s apparently inexplicable or ‘natural’ ability to mother are challenged. Counter constructions for the taken-for-granted understandings about maternal ability are offered through the use of the discourses of memory, habitus and incidental learning. These three discourses assist in thinking about maternal learning and why some women have such difficulty taking on the multiple subject positions of motherhood, while the ability to mother seems to ‘just happen’ for other women.

Of importance to this study is the inability of language to provide a common meaning for maternal experiences or to adequately portray the complexity of
maternal experience, learning and knowledge. This understanding signals the possibility for maternal knowledge being a predominantly 'somatically' based knowledge acquired throughout a woman's life as an outcome of incidental learning. The recognition of somatic knowledge as an important element in the development of maternal knowledge has significant implications for nursing practice, and the way in which maternal learning is facilitated.