

**PRODUCING THE NEW MOTHER
SURVEILLANCE, NORMALISATION
AND MATERNAL LEARNING**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Certificate	i
Acknowledgement	ii
Notes on Notation	iv
Abstract	v
Chapter 1: Positioning the Study	1
1.1 The New Mother study: an overview	3
1.1.1 The women and their stories	3
1.1.2 Shifting positions	5
1.2 Positioning the research	8
1.2.1 Parent education	10
1.2.2 Learning as a field of practice	16
1.2.3 Nursing	26
1.3 The thesis outline	31
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framing of the Research	35
2.1 Motherhood and essentialism	38
2.2 Poststructuralist approaches	44
2.2.1 The subject and subjectivity	46
2.2.1.1 Habitus	49
2.2.2 Language and discourse	53
2.2.2.1 Régimes of truth	56
2.2.3 Power and knowledge	58
2.2.3.1 Bio-power	62
2.3 Conclusion	68
Chapter 3: Methodology	69
3.1 Research practices	70
3.1.1 Reciprocity	76
3.2 Conducting the research project: Collecting the women's accounts	77
3.2.1 Ethics approval	78
3.2.2 Recruiting	81
3.2.3 Description of the research subjects	82

3.2.4	Generating spaces of engagement	84
3.2.4.1	First interview	89
3.2.4.2	Second interview	90
3.2.4.3	Third interview	90
3.2.4.4	Group gathering of the research participants	91
3.2.5	Ethical considerations	93
3.2.5.1	Identification of a woman and baby ‘at risk’	94
3.2.5.2	The use of women’s experiences for research	97
3.3	The analysis process	101
3.3.1	Transcription of the data	102
3.3.2	Sorting	105
3.3.3	Discourse analysis	108
3.4	Conclusion	112
Chapter 4: ‘Maternal Instinct’, Memory and Habitus		113
4.1	Characteristics of a mother	117
4.1.1	Living with the contradictions of motherhood: Meredith’s story	129
4.2	The ‘nature’ of motherhood — ‘maternal instinct’	134
4.3	Memories of mothering	146
4.3.1	Counter constructions of learning to mother	151
4.4	Conclusion	158
Chapter 5: Motherhood under Surveillance?		161
5.1	Surveillance: coming under the gaze	165
5.1.1	Tightening the surveillance net: enforcing the norms	181
5.2	Making sense through confessional practices	187
5.3	Conclusion	199
Chapter 6: Constructing Maternal Knowledge		202
6.1	Maternal knowledges: beyond formal learning	205
6.1.1	Capturing the moment: opportunistic education	215
6.2	Knowledge about mothering	220
6.2.1	Changing the dominant discourse: Sophie’s story	228
6.3	Dancing with the baby: learning to read the baby’s cues	238
6.4	Conclusion	244

Chapter 7: Capturing Motherhood: Words and Drawings	245
7.1 Conspiracy of silence?: putting experience into words	246
7.2 Drawing the words to describe motherhood	256
7.3 Conclusion	271
Chapter 8: Conclusion	273
8.1 Implications for nursing research and practice	275
8.2 Maternal knowledge	276
8.3 Final thoughts	279
Appendix 1: Women's profile — realist tales	280
Appendix 2: Jane's drawings	298
Appendix 3: Meredith's drawings	300
Appendix 4: Rebecca's drawing	302
Appendix 5: Zoe's drawing	303
Bibliography	304

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.

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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.