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Searching for Balance but Finding Guilt A Story of Academic Mothers in South Africa

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Abstract

This article draws on the data from a larger ethnographic study which tracked the lives of three academics who had just become mothers. In it, I respond to the question I have repeatedly encountered, in a variety of forms: How can I be an academic and a mother without going insane? Two linked thematic issues emerge from the data: (a) the search for balance between academic work and motherhood is elusive; and (b) academic mothers are torn apart by guilt. In using Grosz's idea that feminists need to consistently critique and construct, I make a case for academic mothers seeking to 'let go' in order to 'let in' more liberatory ways of being 'academic' and 'mother'. I argue too that Grosz's idea should be extended to include ways of destructing paralysing notions of what it means to be an academic and a mother, simultaneously.

Résumé

Ce papier s'appuie sur les données d'une vaste étude ethnographique qui a suivi la vie de trois nouvelles mamans universitaires. Dans cet article, je tente de répondre à la question qui m'a été posée à plusieurs reprises, sous différentes de formes, au cours des présentations du livre : « comment puis-je être universitaire et mère, sans perdre la tête ? ». Deux questions thématiques liées découlent des données : a) la recherche de l'équilibre entre le travail universitaire et la maternité est insaisissable ; et b) les mères universitaires sont déchirées par la culpabilité. En utilisant l'idée de Grosz selon laquelle les féministes doivent constamment critiquer et construire, je prends le cas des mères universitaires qui cherchent à « lâcher prise », afin d' « adopter »

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plus de moyens émancipateurs pour être universitaire et mère. Je démontre aussi que l'idée de Grosz devrait être élargie pour inclure les moyens de détruire les notions qui bloquent la signification d'être universitaire et mère.

Introduction

This article draws on data from an ethnographic study of three women academics who were also new mothers. The study tracked their lives over eighteen months, as they sought to integrate motherhood into their academic worlds. The original study was published as a book, *Academic Mothers*, in 2007. In this article, I use selected data from the study to respond to the questions I have repeatedly encountered, in a variety of forms, during seminars on the book. My audience was almost exclusively women and they wanted to know how to cope with the intense demands of being a mother and an academic. There were strong voices of empathy from the audience, many of whom had experienced similar situations as the women in the study. But there were also undercurrents of anxiety from women who were looking for a way to be both academics and mothers. I do not offer a 'how to' solution here, nor do I offer creative ideas on how to make higher education institutions recognise that mothers are good teachers and researchers (see Judith Sanders in Evans and Grant 2009). I recognise that higher education institutions, despite their commitment to gender equality, are notoriously unequal places for women, especially women academics who are also mothers. But this is not the focus of my article. Instead, I attempt to glean here the common threads in the stories of the three academic mothers and hope that these threads would have value in forging our own ways forward.

There is no doubt that until recently, motherhood was not considered a legitimate area of study (Ruddick 1995; Oakley 1986). Mothering was something women did quietly and in private spaces, and the public and work world did not have to be bothered with the complexities and challenges of mothering. The literature that proliferates in this domain of important social and work life contained a plethora of advice books often written by paediatricians on how women may cope with the enormous task of being mothers. In the last twenty years or so, motherhood and mothering have gained significant ground as a legitimate field of study. More importantly, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the work environment to turn a blind eye to the demands of bearing and rearing children. Universities, as places where, *inter alia*, the teaching of social justice takes place, should not remain impervious to this challenge. Sadly, this is most often not the case and women academics write movingly of the stubborn imperviousness of universities and academic communities to the plight of academic mothers (Bassette 2005; Evans and Grant 2009). While I value recent publications that speak directly to the issue of what higher education institutions

can do to ease the burden (Wilson 2011), this article does not intend to scrutinise the behaviour of universities. In offering some thoughts on academic mothers caught in the cross fire of mothering and academic work, I attempt to reconceptualise the ways in which academic mothers conceive their roles and assert what I suggest may be liberatory ways of being academic and mother.

Methodology

As indicated, the data in this article are primarily taken from a larger study. In this study, I tracked the lives of three academics who were new mothers. Over a period of eighteen months, I had numerous conversations with each of them. The conversations were about how they felt as new mothers and how motherhood impacted their lives as academics. Of course, there were times when their own emotions dictated the topics of the conversations. In addition, each of them kept a journal, either in the form of notes, a diary or a tape recording, saying anything they wanted to say as they progressed through their academic lives and motherhood. All three were from the same university but did not know who were the others involved in the study. At the end, on the suggestion of one of the participants, all three met one another, read the others' stories and went through a reflective process of what the study had meant to them.

I also draw on the numerous conversations I have had about the original study at various forums at universities and conferences in the United Kingdom and the United States.[1] Of course my own experiences as an academic mother inflect the stories I tell (See Lather 2007).

Theoretical Positioning

To offer conceptual clarity to this search, I firstly turn to the need, as Grosz (1990:59) argues, for feminist theory to exist as 'both critique and construct'. In other words, feminist theory has to understand and critique patriarchal knowledges while simultaneously reaching beyond them. She argues that it is important to show 'how knowledges, theories, discourse, function by excluding, expelling, or neglecting the contributions of femininity and women, producing lacks, gaps, absences about femininity which are necessary for these theories to operate; and how these theories distribute value according to the privileging of one sex over the other' (Grosz 1990:60). For the academic mother, this means not only being conscious of and understanding the intellectual prescriptions within which she is located, but also finding ways of going beyond such prescriptions. Grosz (1990) makes the key point that knowledges exist not only through what is included but more significantly through what is excluded. It is these exclusions that feminist theories need to identify and draw into the intellectual and knowledge net. While Grosz (1990) talks of the 'absences

of femininity' as an exclusion, my effort is to be more definitive and to recognize the limits of prevailing discourses of motherhood and how such discourses serve to exclude liberatory ways of being academic mothers.

I show that the 'balancing two lives' approach to motherhood and work is not really feasible. In the main, my argument is that the notion of balance implies elements of equilibrium and harmony which the experiences of academic mothers do not attest to. The stories of Ann, Sally and Sue suggest that motherhood appears to inevitably imply feelings of guilt. I show that such guilt is externally created and perpetuated as well as internally reinforced. I link the understandings of guilt and potential for liberation from guilt to my third point that mothering is what mothers often believe is solely their responsibility. In other words, I examine the ownership of nurturing and show that what remains fixed and stubborn is the socially constructed notion that mothers are responsible for nurturing. I argue that this understanding of nurturing is oppressive and restrictive for mothers, fathers and children. Finally, I contend that for as long as motherhood remains a 'subjugated knowledge' that remains in the margins of epistemology academic mothers will continue to fail in their efforts to be both (Foucault 1997). I suggest that for as long as we, as academics do not give epistemological credibility to our motherhood and mothering, we undermine our value as both academics and mothers.

Contextual Background

It is likely that in the foreseeable future in South Africa, higher educational institutions will give more attention to the employment of academic women of all race groups. There is a host of literature that shows the increasing numbers of women academics in South African universities, as is no doubt the case in universities in other parts of the world (Cloete and Bunting 2000). As is for other countries across the world, be they the most economically and educationally resourced, women academics still do not occupy a significant number of senior university positions. Similarly, while women academics are likely to be given attention, it is unlikely that the academic mother will have any special treatment. In South Africa, there is no visible significant political or educational will in this regard and universities will use their resources on more politically and economically visible institutional changes. No doubt, this approach will find an echo across the globe.

I give space to each of the three women to introduce themselves in their own words.

> Anne: I used to believe that the challenge in life is to 'keep things simple'. I started both my academic career and motherhood rather late in life. After being a high school mathematics and science teacher and head of department for nine years, I entered the 'scholarly world'. On my fortieth birthday, my

> second and younger boy was born. Being an educator and a committed person, I knew how important it was to be there, whenever, for my children. I also wanted to be a successful academic. I experienced conflicting identities which caused emotional and spiritual stress in my life – I strived for the simplistic existence that I once knew before two children entered into my life. As I write this, I know that I have also been transformed through my journey as mom and academic. In a week's time, I will present at a conference – and this time no children or family will have to be there – they will be fine, and so will I…I hope.
>
> Sally: I am a 38 year old mother to a three-year old child and wife to a wonderfully supportive husband whom I adore. I am also an academic in a university position where I particularly enjoy the research aspect of my work. I am fortunate to have found a career in a department where fellow colleagues are women with young children too and we provide a very supportive environment for one another. I see myself as a responsible person and it's important to me to be effective in my role as an academic and a mother. I have learned though, that priorities must be negotiated constantly to achieve some kind of balance between family and work life even if just to create the illusion of balance. I love my work, I love my family and I firmly believe there is space for both in one life.
>
> Sue: I have always been curious about the world around me and have placed a great value on the importance of having a general knowledge and not looking at anything in isolation. This broad perspective has motivated me to be interested in and study so many different topics across many domains, both formally and informally, over the years. It also probably explains why I do not have a linear path in my education or career – I went with what interested me at the time and neglected a traditional immersion in only one area. However, once I have an interest, I may become obsessive in my desire to know and understand a certain phenomenon. It is this intrinsic motivation that results in a tremendous drive and sometimes some distress for those around me who experience this as a whirlwind and a single-mindedness that is difficult for them to understand.[2]

Sally, Sue and Ann became academic mothers with no notable institutional expectations with respect to their changed status. In the beginning, Sally brought her child to her office because it was what she wanted to do, yet she was careful to not disturb the peace that this child-free environment had engendered. Sue did not want Megan, her little girl, to upset the work place and Ann did not speak about bringing her child to work. None of them indicated any particular expectation with respect to institutional support for their changed status.

Ann, Sue and Sally each had crisis moments with respect to the wellbeing of their children. Sue had a momentary scare when Megan choked on a sausage, Sally was deeply perturbed when Justin, her son, had an inexplicable high fever for a few days and Ann has never forgiven herself for not recognizing the seriousness of her son Andre's illness as she believes she ought to have. While such crisis may, from the outside, be perceived to be of varying levels

of seriousness, needless to say to each of the mothers, such distinctions are meaningless. Each put all else aside while their child was ill, nothing else mattered and work had disappeared into oblivion. In short, having a child brings moments of crisis and it is unequivocal that at these moments the wellbeing of the child takes unquestionable priority. It also seems evident to me that the wheels of the institution going on, turning at these moments, and that the academic mother returns to her work and pursues her tasks no matter how she may have been professionally compromised by her absence.

All three academic mothers set their professional goals and time frames and went on to fulfil these. While compromises had to be made with respect to what they wanted to achieve as mothers and as professionals, none had relinquished any responsibility. I was impressed with Sally's decision that she was going to define her own successes so that she could feel fulfilled with whatever she chose to do. Sally said she did not want rush up the promotional ladder and wanted to set her own goals for success. She was equally able to understand the desire for success as being the achievement of promotion to senior levels and felt that there should be a place for this too within an institution. Each participant's attitude and approach to success seems to suggest that there are various possible institutional permutations and paths for defining and shaping success. Unfortunately, universities rarely show any cognizance of this.

I was also deeply moved by the extent to which Sue, Ann and Sally felt so passionately about their work and their children. I saw that being a mother and being an academic meant much to them, that they would have been unfulfilled and unhappy if either of these aspects of their lives were not there. Although priorities shifted at different moments, the importance and value of being mother and academic did not waver for a second. All three were absolutely clear that they would not want to stay at home with their children as full time mothers. All three said they wanted to work and loved their work. All three sought their own ways of being both. I suspect that the same would apply to academic mothers across the world.

While Sue, Sally and Ann bent over backwards to be academic mothers, to meet their responsibility of being both, and to find fulfilment in both, universities barely batted an eye-lid at their presence, their battles and their victories. Indeed, Sue made the point that universities' expectations are exactly the same as before a baby came into your life. I don't think in any way anybody changes the rules or the guidelines or the expectations.

Balance: The Myth of Equilibrium

The stories of the search for balance that reverberates through the literature on motherhood (Grossman and Chester 1990; Lupton 2000; Young and Wright 2001; Moe 2003) are echoed as a constant refrain in the stories of Ann, Sue and Sally. Perhaps, it is most voluble in Sally's story who in the earlier days of our

conversations described the need for balance in a somewhat inevitable and uncomplicated way:

> I suppose every working mother now and then feels she would just like to get away from the demands of work and having to balance competing needs. I do too.

At this point, being mother and professional appeared to be a matter of balancing her own competing needs to be both. However, the complexity of the balance became increasingly clear in time:

> But why do I have to make a choice? Why… why when you are at work do you have to switch yourself off as a mother and when you are a mother you have to switch yourself off again. It's actually weird. I don't know how one balances the two things.

Sally recognized that she did not know how if at all that balance could be achieved. More importantly, she began to question the rightness of striving for balance, her questioning being prompted primarily by an inability to achieve balance. Her head of department telling her that her personal life would become very small relative to her work life left her feeling dissatisfied. She had immediately decided that this was not an option for her. The imbalance implicit in the balance idea became increasingly clear to her as she progressed down the road of being an academic mother. Put another way, Sally began to see that the idea of balance was fraudulent, a myth, and that what was really expected of her was an imbalance, one which favoured her professional life and not her motherhood. But she chose differently and consciously decided that her baby would come first. For her, that meant choosing whether to be at certain meetings, giving up on travel options, not being up to date with developments in her field and finding ways of dealing with the fact that she was missing out on much that was going on around her professionally. Neither could she spend as much time as she would have liked to with Justin. It also meant questioning the rightness of her being forced into a situation of choice that she did not really want to make. She admitted that she was 'cutting corners' but that she did not know how she would 'feel about it at the end of the day'. Even though she was frustrated at having to make choices between work and her motherhood, she made them and knew that in doing so she was not achieving any form of balance. For her, it was about prioritizing her son and taking control about some aspects of decision making. Although she was sad to let go of an opportunity to attend an international conference, she did, and she had no doubt that she would not travel for any significant length of time without her husband and her child.

Sue dealt with the need for balance by separating her lives. The moment and means of separation occurred when she got into her car and took a few

seconds to adjust to another self. The journey between home and office was her transition from mother to academic. But she recognized that much guilt that went with juggling:

> I see because of the exhaustion, because of the juggling because of the ja… continual guilt. If you are there you are guilty about not being here, and if you are here you guilty about not being there. … Um… ja, so let's say that I'm enjoying both separate lives.

Sue does not hesitate to admit that she was finding much difficulty in 'doing both well'. Separation was not a means to balance but rather a means to living both elements of her life to the extent that each was possible. Sue separated repeatedly; when she put her bag down as she walked into the house, when she got into her car to go to work, when Megan was with and not with her, through the hours that she allocated to each aspect of her life every day. Again the complexity of balance became self-evident as Sue spent many more hours working than she did with Megan, 'basically between 4.30 and 7.00 is her time. And I stick to that pretty religiously'. The idea of balance then was not about a squaring off of time. It appeared to have more a multifarious and mysterious form of measure that the literature assumes but does not explicate.

Balance also does not appear to have much to do with the spaces in which one is mother and academic. Sally took her child into her workplace in an effort to be both mother and academic, yet was conscious that the presence of the child was an intrusion into the work space. Sue too was aware that Megan was a distraction from work. Both women worked in dominant female environments where the children were apparently welcomed. Taking work home was another form of intrusion, this time in the family space. Sue drew boundaries through time and all three used the children's sleeping hours to get on with being academic. Ann confessed that she often did her creative work in the home but after the children had been dropped off at the crèche. Balance then was not about sharing space but about dividing spaces physically into office and home, or if the same space was being used, then using time frames whether defined by the clock or by activities as a divider. Perhaps the singular sublime moment that transcended these barriers was when Sally breastfed her child while conducting an oral examination. My point here is not that academic mothers should breastfeed their children during examinations. Instead, I suggest the sublimeness was not in the act itself, but in Sally's decision to do so, her anxiety coupled with the firmness and confidence with which she took the decision. It was a brave step one which made her both proud and anxious. It was ultimately a situation in which she asserted herself and took control. That made her feel good. The need for control of their lives is important for all three. Sue says that '…I always had the feeling before that I was in control with what I was doing. Now I feel a lot of the time I'm out of control'. All three recognise that control is often not within reach.

It seems that balance and control are frequently conflated, that having balance is interpreted to mean control and having control is interpreted to mean balance. Ann sought control by repeatedly bringing her family into the same physical spaces as her work. Being within reach meant safety for her and her children. It also meant being in control, or at least having the opportunity for control, lest things go awry as they did when she went to Namibia and her son Andre had become dangerously ill. Interestingly, she chose to bring the family into her work space only when she had to leave her everyday work space for ones that were more distant. She was proud that she was able to show her whole family at the conference in Norway and was even applauded for her efforts in doing so.[3] Yet, I wonder whether such accolades exist only because the instance was a one-off, one which was not likely to be repeated, and certainly no threat to being a daily occurrence. Ann seemed to have deeply imbibed the approbation that confronted mothers, whether they leave work often to be with their children or whether they leave their children in the care of a child minder (Lupton 2000). In a distant work environment, she combined both her need for control and her need to be both mother and academic, without the possible approbation that came with bringing both into the same space. The fleetingness of the achievement is verified in the two observations that Ann made of the trip. The first was that the effort was not sustainable and that she would never do it again. The second was that sadly, all had returned to normal when she got back home. Ann and Sally show that having one's child in the same physical space did not necessarily bring peace of mind, and Sue who sought separations showed that even physical separations did not bring peace of mind. While Sue imagined that physical and temporal separations were effectively separations of self too, this was put to pay when she collapsed into tears the first time she left Megan at home and travelled overseas. She had left her baby behind but not her motherhood. I was left wondering whether motherhood can indeed be limited to delineated spaces and times.

It is apparent that while the word balance implies a sense of equilibrium, stability and perhaps even equality, the efforts at balancing work lives and motherhood refutes any such possibility. Indeed, buying into the search for balance is tantamount to predicting failure. As Sue, Ann and Sally show, they are constantly juggling, choosing one over the other, blocking out spaces and times, but had never spoken of a sense of equilibrium in doing all this. On the contrary, they are acutely aware of imbalance. I suggest that feminists need to renounce the very idea of balance. It forces us into a frame of failure, into accepting a definition of work and motherhood that has nothing to do with experiences of both and it subtly suggests an evaluative frame within which we measure ourselves daily and constantly, and inevitably come up short. For as long as we describe women's efforts at mothering and working as a balancing

act, in other words as the discourse of balance defines our lives and efforts, and we conceive of our selves as aspirant yogic circus acts, we become complicit in the act of sublimating our lives to a discourse of dysfunctionality.

Born to Feel Guilty?

A striking though not surprising theme that runs through the stories of Sally, Ann and Sue is about feeling guilty. Ann was consumed with guilt about numerous moments in her life and these had obvious impacts on her mothering. She confessed that the mere thought of leaving Andre and going to another country made her feel guilty. Indeed, Ann tried to reconcile the fact that she wanted to go for her own fulfilment, by feeling guilty. In other words, the fact that she felt guilty did not make wanting to go seem too bad after all. It was as though guilt was the bridge between what Ann wanted and what she believed was expected of her as a mother and woman. Part of her reason for taking her family with her on her travels was to assuage guilt. Yet, Ann is never free of guilt. She is constantly trapped on the middle of the bridge, her feisty strong character caught between and among social and family expectations of woman and mothers and her own feminist sense of equality. Indeed, in the course of our conversations, Ann said she was not a feminist and that she did not even have many women friends. After reading her own story, a version in which I referred to her statement that she was not a feminist, she came back to me eager to disabuse me of this view. She said that perhaps she was a feminist, that she had always discouraged sexist jokes, that she did not stand back for boys at school and was a strong leader when she was at school. She then even recollected the women she was close to and the strengths they had given her. In her fights with Herman, she was clear that she would speak up for herself and that she would not 'shut up'. Reading her story offered Ann a different view of herself, one which made her feel positive. Yet, despite moments of feeling good about herself and saying 'I actually feel that the baby had enhanced my own identity as a professional, which is weird', Ann's guilt was overwhelming.

Even though Sally was unequivocal that she was a good mother, she too confessed to feeling guilty. She said that she felt guilty when she was at home about work and when she was at work about not being with her baby. Either way, she could not win. She says:

> Is it possible to give 100 per cent at work and 100 per cent to your child while you look after him yourself? I am not always sure. All that I know is there must be a way and that way is not the usual answer. The usual answer is 'Put your child in day-care and you have the entire day free to do your work' ... But I cannot live with that answer.

Sue, who went to great lengths to separate her mothering and her work also admitted that while she was trying to be both mother and academic, she often felt that she was doing neither well enough. Yet, all three were adamant that they would not be full-time mothers, that they wanted to be academics, they found fulfilment in their work and would not be happy if they stayed at home with their children. It seems then that if mothers want to work, guilt is an inevitable accompaniment to being a professional and mother. Connections between guilt and motherhood may be explained by understanding the patriarchal contexts of mothering. Here, Rich (1995) speaks of the moral underpinnings of motherhood. Feminist attitudes towards motherhood have veered between the romanticization of motherhood and dismantling the categories of woman and mother in efforts to redefine female identifiers (McMahon 1995; Cooey 1999; Snitow 1992). Yet, what ties these perceptions of motherhood is the sense of moral goodness that accompanies mothering. The sense of being judged then is both externally sourced through social approbation and expectations of mothers, and internally reinforced by personal judgments of mothering. Ann's first diary entry told of the first 'test' she had as a mother, one which she set for herself, measured herself and failed.[4] Indeed, one of the women Ann admired was a friend who had freed herself from an oppressive relationship and had given up a glamorous career to be a full time mother and opened her own crèche. She was happy that her children were at this crèche and being taken care of by a woman Ann thought was a good mother. Ann reluctantly admitted that she was better with teenagers than with small children, her own success as a high school teacher bearing testimony to this.

Sue set up her own forms of measure and judgment and said she was not doing well as mother and academic. She also declared that she felt bad about enjoying a good night's sleep the first night she was away from Megan. Despite being meticulous about allocating undisturbed time to her child, Sue still felt guilty. Even though Sally was confident she was a good mother, she still felt guilty and although Ann took her family with her, she too still felt guilty. While it is evident that guilt is a weapon that we wield against ourselves, I suggest that feelings of guilt have to be understood in the wider context of nurturing, specifically, the ownership of nurturing. In the section that follows, I suggest that mothers' claiming ownership of nurturing is closely linked to the perpetuation of feelings of guilt.

Letting Go and Letting In

In her book on motherhood and thinking, Ruddick (1995) argues for the conceptualisation of motherhood, not as something that mothers do but that it should be understood more broadly to mean nurturing. I like this. I like the idea, especially when it is evident from the stories I recount here, that mothering

as a lone act, such act being the prerogative of mothers, is not a tenable idea. Indeed, given the extended family system I come from and which has been prevalent in many parts of the world, I wonder if it ever was.

I listened to Ann talk about her husband who came home tired from a weekend of golfing, who made little, if any, effort to take care of their children and of her momentary joy at his feeding their child. I heard her effort at explaining his behaviour by saying that he travelled a long distance to work everyday and therefore could not really help with the children. I saw her recognition that it did not explain his failure to assist on the weekend. I felt sad as I saw the tiredness in her face, as she exhausted herself frantically running around, trying to organise their family venture to Norway. Ann tried to be everything at all times. And she was so afraid of 'failure'. She admitted that she felt she failed at her first marriage and that she wanted this one to work.

Ann's sense of failure was self imposed. That her first husband was unfaithful did not seem to matter. I suggest Ann did not know how to share mothering and that sharing this might have implied another failure for her. That she would have liked her husband, Herman, to help was clear. Her effort at leaving him to take care of the children while they were all in Norway showed that he was able to look after the children and she wanted him to, yet it was not a system either of them sustained on their return. The only person with whom Ann shared mothering was her mother. Her mother was probably the only person with whom it was acceptable to share mothering. She spoke warmly of the wonderful stories her mother could tell the children and the energy her mother had to play with them. In this context she admitted, albeit reluctantly, that she was simply not able to do these things as her mother did. Accepting that she could not do some things was an achievement for Ann. When Ann talked of her mother's passing, I was aware that she had lost more than her mother. She had lost the only person with whom she shared mothering. Her mother also offered Ann space to be Ann. As she left my office after speaking of her mother's passing, Ann lamented, 'there goes my time for golf'. In that statement, she conveyed a loss of so many things beyond golf.

Although Ann employed a nanny and she made only one brief reference to allowing the nanny to perform certain tasks, like feeding the children, because she was better at doing that. She admitted to feeling a mild jealousy at this. Ann did not really speak of sharing her mothering with the nanny. Indeed, in the course of our conversations, Ann spoke many times of the nanny leaving and of having to hire another. Ann was also aware that she wanted things to be different. Specifically, she spoke about feeling unappreciated. She said that no matter what and how much she did for the family; there was little appreciation of this from her family. Her example was that when there was no cheese in the fridge, everyone demanded cheese; but when there was, no one acknowledged

that she had bought it. She had learnt to respond by saying that they should do without cheese until she was ready to get it.

Sally too spoke of the social failure to appreciate mothers. She was annoyed with herself for thanking her husband, Robert, when he took care of Justin, yet there was no one to thank her. She was determined that she would not put her child in day-care. She eventually did when he was almost two years old and felt sad when he seemed to enjoy the social connections that day-care gave him. Sally spoke of her desire for Justin to be proud of her and to look nice for him. Perhaps, this was a form of appreciation of her nurturing that would have meant much to her. Her desire to look feminine, to pierce her ears and wear the earrings her husband had bought her, to 'do something with her hair' happened after Justin was born. I suggest that the efforts at nurturing had awakened her desire to be appreciated.

I was impressed with Sue's observation of her friends' leaving their partners out of parenting and paying the price for this by bearing the major burden for nurturing. Her story of handing Megan over to Andrew the moment they arrived home and consciously leaving him to do as he saw best was crucial for setting the platform for further nurturing. Sue tells the story of how when they arrived home from the hospital with the baby, her husband said that the nappy needed to be changed. She said she hesitated for a moment and then said he could change it, as they were both present when the nurse had shown them how to. David changed the nappy and returned with the nappy on back to front. Sue decided to remain silent as she knew that if she corrected him she would position herself as the one who knew, the one who was responsible for mothering. In choosing silence, she also chose to share responsibility. That Andrew was able to 'come out of his shell', to travel with Megan to Crete to join her on holiday, to take care of Megan when Sue travelled had much to do with this first important act of sharing responsibility for nurturing.

I suggest that shared parenting and nurturing do not simply happen. They are a conscious decision, one which has to be consciously implemented. It was evident that Ann wanted Herman to be more central in their children's lives. She had not found any sustainable way of doing this. Although Sally started off thinking she wanted to be the primary caregiver, she was quickly disabused of this by the obvious enormity of the task of taking care of Justin. Yet, she was adamant that the responsibility for mothering was still primarily hers. Sally began by being determined to have her child with her, became grateful for her husband's willingness and ability to take care of Justin, then reluctantly acknowledged Justin's need to be in a play group and socialize and even admitted that he did not seem to be bothered when she left him there, and finally acknowledged that she would be willing to leave her second child at a play group sooner than she had Justin. She had also moved from being

stubbornly the significant care giver for her child to a person that spoke strongly about the need for child care facilities at work and that all the talk of gender equality needed some form of real practical expression. Sally's progression showed that who nurtured was not simply a matter of logistical and practical arrangements, although these were important, it was also about a state of mind.

It was through a conscious decision to draw Andrew into parenting that Sue and Andrew were able to achieve the level of shared parenting that they did. In her study of mature women students, Edwards (1993) showed that eight of the 31 women she interviewed left their partner in the course of their study. The reasons, among others, were that they were unable to achieve equality with their partners within their relationships, that the partners consumed their emotional energies without sharing the burdens of housekeeping or nurturing, that it made sense to remove their partners from their sphere of responsibility. She also suggested that since it was not feasible for women to leave their children, leaving their partners became a viable solution. It is clear from Edwards's study and from the stories of Sue, Ann and Sally that while the desire for shared parenting, for shared nurturing, for shared mothering is strong among mothers, the means to do this is rarely there. I suggest this is about more than the provision of childcare facilities in the work place or flexible working hours. It is about the social perception that nurturing is women's work. More importantly, it is about women's own ownership of nurturing. It is time we gave up this sense of ownership. While I endorse Grosz's (1990) view that feminists need to both critique and construct the world, I suggest we also need to destruct restrictive patterns of behaviour, both within ourselves and in our environments. Sue, Ann and Sally in various ways and to various degrees articulate the need to let go and let others in, with respect to their nurturing. They demonstrate that they do not want ownership of nurturing. Neither do I. Yet, it is not easy to say this out loud for fear of being a 'bad' mother. My father, sister and mother were always at hand to love my girls. For as long as my father was alive, he offered immeasurable love and nurturing for my children. For that, I am deeply grateful. My children's lives are fuller and richer from the nurturing they receive from the many people in their lives. So is mine. As my girls grew up, my older daughter, in a period of estrangement from her father, said that she wished that loving a father went beyond the boundaries of biology. I knew what she meant. And I confess without shame that I am unable to mother alone. Now, I can begin to understand why it was possible for me to complete a PhD while being a single mother. It was because I was not a single mother. It's true I was divorced but I did not mother alone. I say this with a deep awareness of and respect for the mothers across the world who have no choice but to mother alone.

In returning to the feelings of guilt that Sue, Ann and Sally speak of, I suggest that guilt is intimately linked with the compulsion and belief that we ought to take full responsibility for nurturing. Our experience tells us of the sheer enormity of nurturing alone. Guilt is about feeling that we have to hide or apologise for our motherhood in the workplace. That we are bound not meet our own and social expectations as mothers is inevitable in such a context. I suggest that letting in, that is, sharing mothering, would also mean letting go of guilt. Put another way, letting go of the ownership of nurturing would also mean letting go of guilt.

Conclusion

In assessing the validity of my assertion that motherhood can be understood, in Foucault's (1997) terms, as a subjugated knowledge, and that it should be inscribed into our ways of thinking and our epistemologies, I turn firstly to an understanding that all three academic mothers in this study shared: that their motherhood did not belong in their work spaces. Both Sally and Sue indicate a sense of unease when they brought their child to work because the child would be a disturbance. Ann took her child only into temporary work environments. The unspoken message that children did not belong at work was clear. That intellectual work is organized and produced at universities in established and prescribed ways gives the academic mother, who has had no hand in shaping this space, little scope for flexibility. If universities pretend that the women who are producing research within their walls are not mothers, the potential for institutional adjustments remains closed. I suggest that if universities sought a package of institutional possibilities that allow academic mothers a number of permutations of how they could structure their work lives and their motherhood, universities would benefit from increased productivity. Academic mothers too are likely to be happier. And that matters for society.

Secondly, I am concerned about the perceptual divisions between work and mothering. I suggest that it is not simply the physical presence of the child that the work environment discourages, but also the emotional, intellectual and psychological presence of the child. Ribbens (1994:31) speaks of the need to incorporate 'emotions into our subject matter' and Rich (1995:68) makes the point that 'Reason was failing [her]'. Ribbens (1994), Ruddick (1995) and Rich (1995), all women scholars of note, speak powerfully of their experiences of dislocation and disjuncture between their emotional selves, their experiences and what scholarship and intellectual work entailed. All three speak in varying ways of the need to bring thinking and emotion closer. Sue, Sally and Ann speak of the deep emotional impacts that mothering had on them. My contention is that incorporating emotions into our thinking as Rich (1995) suggests we do, or finding ways to include our experiences into our thinking, is not enough.

The very division of reason and emotion paralyses and limits thinking. I take Wu's (1997) argument that 'the scrutiny of thought means that feminists must address the limits of the concept'. In other words, motherhood must be implicated in epistemology; it must be inscribed in our scholarship, creating possibilities for a synergy of motherhood and intellectual work. Thinking is about the wholeness of self, not the splitting and divisions of self. If reason functions as the periscope of thought, then thinking will remain limited.

In returning to Grosz's call for feminists to 'critique and construct' and my extension of this idea to include efforts to destruct entrenched ways of perceiving the world and one's self in it, I suggest that academic mothers replace the search for balance with a striving to find a 'Mona Lisa' state of being. The academic mother needs to be unmoved by the gaze of the world and her institution. I have yet to meet a working mother who said she was able to find the elusive balance. In order to critique and construct, we have to find the confidence and courage to determine for ourselves what is best for us as academics and as mothers. The academic mother needs to stop her own critical gaze at herself that absorbs the reflections of a judgmental world. She needs to find her inner peace and place of triumph. That place is likely to be different for us all. She needs to be unfazed by the world in which she lives. I say this, knowing that it is the striving and the journey towards it that allows us to continuously critique and construct, and not the expectation of arrival. I say this unequivocally, knowing too that we have no cause to doubt ourselves and that we all want to be good mothers and good academics. I say this, knowing that universities will go on as they always have, no matter what our struggles. In taking on this gigantic monolith of patriarchy, we have to remain unflinching in what is best for us, simultaneously, as academics and as mothers. And only we have the right the say what that may be. To construct what this means for us, we need to destruct what has been handed down to us, and assimilated into our selves, through institutional and social structures. To create this state of being, we have to go beyond the limits of reason, emotions and institutions, beyond balance, beyond guilt to solidity in and for ourselves. We have to define for ourselves what it means to be academic and mothers.

Notes

1. I did guest presentations on this book at seven universities outside South Africa and one in South Africa. In addition, I did one conference presentation on the methodological implications of the study.
2. The quotations of the three participants are all extracted from my book – *Academic Mothers*, 2007.

3. When her second child was born Ann was invited to a conference in Norway. She was heading a major doctoral project based in Africa and funded by the Norwegians. She decided to take both her children and her husband with her. Previously she had taken her husband and her sister with to Italy. She seemed determined to take them with her every time she left the country. After Norway she said, 'Never again'.
4. Leaving her child behind and going to Namibia. She felt she had failed because she had actually wanted to go and he became ill in her absence.

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