

THE MOTHER WITHIN: INTERGENERATIONAL INFLUENCES UPON AUSTRALIAN MATRESCENCE SINCE 1945*

Female descendants within biological families are connected on multiple levels. While the female foetus floats in the liquid of her mother's womb, her body silently manufactures the eggs that may one day create her own daughter. In this sense, the granddaughter is formed within the grandmother: she shares her cellular material and has inhabited the same body. In societies where children have a singular maternal figure providing care — such as industrialized countries in the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries — female generations also share an emotional matrilineal inheritance. When a woman becomes a mother for the first time, she undergoes a psychological transformation that American psychiatrist and psychoanalytic theorist Daniel Stern calls 'the birth of the mother'.¹ The emotional negotiation of new motherhood includes several layers of inter-subjective dialogue for the new mother: with herself, her child, her partner if present, her friends and her family. In the process of fashioning her own sense of herself as a mother — her maternity² — a woman's own infancy and childhood is emotionally

* I would like to thank the narrators who granted me the opportunity to co-create their maternographies, and generously permitted the publication of excerpts. In addition, I extend my appreciation to Sarah Knott, Alex Shepard and Emma Griffin for their editorial interventions. This research is funded by the Australian Research Council (DE160100817).

¹ He argues that when a woman has her first child, she develops a 'motherhood constellation'; a 'unique organization of mental life appropriate for and adapted to the reality of having an infant to care for': Daniel N. Stern, *The Motherhood Constellation: A Unified View of Parent-Infant Psychotherapy* (New York, 1995), 3. Stern's work interrupts the preoccupation with the mother-infant dyad, arguing that the baby, mother and grandmother form a relational triangle which occupies the emotional foreground during the period of matrescence: Daniel Stern and Nadia Bruschweiler-Stern, *The Birth of a Mother: How Motherhood Changes You Forever* (London, 1998), 9, 109–23.

² Paola Mariotti writes that maternity refers to 'the quality of the actual experience of having children, and also the thoughts and the unconscious phantasies associated with carrying a symbolic maternal function in a wider sense': Paola Mariotti (ed.), *The Maternal Lineage: Identification, Desire and Transgenerational Issues* (London, 2012), 3.

revisited and re-evaluated. Sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, she is drawn into a re-evaluation of her relationship with her own mother and her mother's parenting style.³ Whether willingly or reluctantly, the process of becoming a mother necessarily invokes the spectre of one's own experience of being mothered.⁴

Since the mid twentieth century, psychoanalytic and sociological studies in industrialized societies have charted the inner transformation of the woman entering maternity and analyzed the ways in which new mothers actively 'make sense of motherhood'⁵ with reference to the cultural scripts available to them. But relatively few historians have benefited from the anthropological concept of 'matrescence' — the *rite de passage* of becoming a mother — nor examined how this emotional transformation and cultural milestone has changed over time.⁶ This paper draws upon research into the changing Australian experience of matrescence since 1945, which includes the co-creation of over sixty oral history interviews with a diverse group of narrators: heterosexual and lesbian mothers; adoptive, birth-giving and step-mothers; working-class and middle-class mothers; migrant and Australian-born mothers; urban, suburban and regional mothers; partnered and single mothers; and mothers of one, six and even eleven children. These women came to motherhood in a settler-colonial society with a history of violent indigenous dispossession by the British, a liberal democratic political tradition and a well-developed welfare state with publicly funded antenatal maternity care and postnatal infant welfare (later maternal child health) care. Over the seventy-year period under examination, the highly suburbanized nature of Australian family life remained relatively constant, Anglo-Australian cultural influences gave way to multiculturalism following successive waves of migration, and the economy slowly deindustrialized and feminized. This changing historical context inevitably influenced shifting experiences of matrescence,

³ Rosemary H. Balsam, 'The Mother within the Mother', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, lxxix (2000).

⁴ The topic of how new fatherhood shapes intergenerational relationships and influences for sons is outside the scope of this paper. Here I focus upon mothers and daughters because matrescence is a profoundly gendered process, in terms of the physiological functions of the gestating, birth-giving and breastfeeding body; the structural influences of gender inequality within workplaces and the broader economy; and cultural assumptions about caregiving and nurturance.

⁵ Tina Miller, *Making Sense of Motherhood: A Narrative Approach* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁶ Matrescence refers to the experience of becoming a mother: Dana Raphael, 'Matrescence, Becoming a Mother, a "New/Old" Rite de Passage', in Dana Raphael (ed.), *Being Female: Reproduction, Power and Change* (De Gruyter, 1975).

as we shall explore, but what is perhaps more surprising is the consistently powerful influence of the new mother's own mother.

Analyzing psychoanalytic, sociological and historical literature and applying it to this distinctive Australian context, I will elucidate what happens to a woman's relationship with her own mother when she has her first child, and the ways in which the past and present resonances of that relationship influence matrescence. I will separately examine emotional continuities and historical changes influencing the mother–daughter relationship, before untangling how these factors are interwoven within the matrilineal narratives of one family.

I

MULTIDISCIPLINARY THEORIES OF MATRILINEARITY AT MATRESCENCE

Psychoanalytic theories about maternity have shifted across time and place, in relation to the historico-cultural moment that generates them. Writing in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Austria, Sigmund Freud revolutionized understandings of human emotion as the 'father' of psychoanalysis. The consequences of his stress upon the influential role of unconscious desires and feelings whose patterns are laid down in early childhood is that in industrialized societies where mothers are primarily responsible for infant care, they also shoulder the primary burden of the emotional development of their children.⁷ Reversing Freud's emphasis upon the father figure and the Oedipal complex, Austrian-British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein foregrounded the important symbolic role of the child's unconscious phantasy of the mother, a phantasy rooted in the child's wish for all needs and desires to be satisfied by the maternal body. Her interest was not so much in the positive and negative influences of actual mothers, but rather the internalized image of the mother and what she represents.⁸

Such debates about mother–daughter relationships were primarily confined to intellectual circles until the mid twentieth century, when my oldest

⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality', trans. Joan Riviere, reprinted from *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, xiii (1932), 281. Though Freud was criticized for an over-emphasis on the phallus and the paternal role, later in life he came to acknowledge the significance of mother–daughter relationships. Nevertheless, the mother was analyzed chiefly for her pre-Oedipal role in relation to the father and son: Petra Bueskens (ed.), *Mothering and Psychoanalysis: Clinical, Sociological and Feminist Perspectives* (Bradford, Canada, 2014), editor's intro., 5–6.

⁸ Melanie Klein, *The Collected Writings of Melanie Klein*, vol. i, 'Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works 1921–1945'; and vol. iii, 'Envy and Gratitude: And Other Works 1946–1963' (London, 1975); Bueskens (ed.), *Mothering and Psychoanalysis*, editor's intro., 11–12.

interviewees came to motherhood. As these women were having their first child, psychological theories of child development were becoming popularized in the industrialized world amidst a context where, for the middle class at least, the ideal of the stay-at-home mother was prominent. English psychologist John Bowlby's theories of the dire psychological consequences of maternal deprivation were understood by contemporaries as emphasizing the importance of infant-maternal attachment and signifying that young children require full-time maternal care. Bowlby was subsequently much critiqued for placing the responsibility for the healthy psychological development of the child squarely (and heavily) upon the mother's shoulders.⁹ English psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott used the term 'primary maternal preoccupation' to describe the psychological state of the perinatal woman, whose self is not fully separate from the infant during late pregnancy and early motherhood: a connectedness that is necessary to the healthy psychological development of the child but slowly lessens as the child ages.¹⁰ Such mid-century ideas about the critical role of an attentive and ever-present maternal figure are reflected in American paediatrician Benjamin Spock's popular child-rearing treatise (which was published in forty-two languages and sold fifty million copies) which urged mothers to replace discipline and routine with intuitive and responsive parenting.¹¹

Whereas early psychoanalytic literature was only interested in the mother-infant dyad from the perspective of the infant's emotional development, on maternal subjectivity they were largely silent until the explosive cultural shift that accompanied the women's liberation movement.¹² American feminist Nancy Chodorow combined sociological and psychoanalytic perspectives, arguing that the desire to nurture is not an innate aspect of female biology. Rather, she concluded that women develop a desire to mother and a set of expectations about the maternal role from their own

⁹ John Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health* (World Health Organization, 1951). See also Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, 1945–2000* (Manchester, 2012), 122–8.

¹⁰ D. W. Winnicott, 'Primary Maternal Preoccupation', in Mariotti (ed.), *Maternal Lineage*.

¹¹ Carla Pascoe, 'Mum's the Word: Advice to Australian Mothers since 1945', *Journal of Family Studies*, xxi, 3 (2015); Nancy Pottishman Weiss, 'Mother, the Invention of Necessity: Dr Benjamin Spock's Care for Infant and Child', in N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes (eds.), *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective* (Urbana, 1985).

¹² Alison Stone, 'Psychoanalysis and Maternal Subjectivity', in Bueskens (ed.), *Mothering and Psychoanalysis*, 334–6; Bueskens (ed.), *Mothering and Psychoanalysis*, editor's intro., 13, 16, 25.

mothers. Chodorow's innovation was to sever maternity — the quality or condition of being a mother — from nature and tie it instead to nurture.¹³ Her work therefore opened up the possibility that qualities previously perceived as innately feminine, as well as gender relations more broadly, could be transformed at a social level by interactions between mother and daughter.

Second-wave feminists such as Chodorow were writing from the position of daughters seeking to establish a political and philosophical basis from which to break with the lives of their own mothers. But once that project had been achieved — to separate being a woman from being a mother and to reveal that motherhood is therefore a choice — a new generation of scholars sought to understand and inhabit the maternal position. In the words of British psychosocial researcher Lisa Baraitser, the task became to 'repeat the second-wave move to uncouple maternity and femininity ... not this time for the sake of the feminine, but for the sake of the maternal'.¹⁴ For Australian social theorist Petra Bueskens, the historical moment that followed widespread access to contraception and abortion made motherhood a genuine choice for the first time and allowed for the creation of the autonomous or post-patriarchal mother.¹⁵

Following on from Chodorow's re-evaluation of mothering, feminist critiques of psychoanalysis's focus upon maternal presence have led to a renewed interest in maternal absence and ambivalence from scholars such as Rozsika Parker, Joan Raphael-Leff, and Rosemary Balsam. Parker has described the central role of ambivalence for the mother negotiating the shifting balance between seeing the child as part of herself and being able to distinguish their separateness. In her account, ambivalence is not to be measured for its positive or negative effect on the infant, but rather as a constructive and creative force in the mother's development.¹⁶ After the physiological connection of pregnancy, the mother and baby begin a gradual process of emotional separation after birth. Identification and separation are a transgenerational process: mothers bequeath their varying levels of competency at balancing separation and closeness to their daughters. Both real and

¹³ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, Calif., 1978).

¹⁴ Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (London, 2009), 10.

¹⁵ Petra Bueskens, 'From Containing to Creating: Maternal Subjectivity', in Camilla Nelson and Rachel Robertson (eds.), *Dangerous Ideas about Mothers* (Crawley, WA, 2018), 200–1.

¹⁶ Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence*, 2nd edn (London, 2005).

imagined maternal figures lurk within these emotional transactions. Even before conception a mother may have fantasized about her ideal child,¹⁷ and she will carry from her childhood an internal image of her ideal mother.¹⁸ One of the critical psychological processes of matrescence is for the new mother to work through her disappointment that she cannot realise her internalized image of the perfect mother, and to recognize the ways in which her real child differs from her fantasy child.¹⁹ For British philosopher Alison Stone, matrescence generates a distinctively maternal subjectivity, but one that is always and necessarily a process of revisiting the woman's own infantile experience of interacting with a maternal figure. The new mother actively builds on that foundation in fashioning her own maternal subject position. Maternal subjectivity therefore invokes the past, present and future, as well as being anchored in embodied relations of intersubjectivity.²⁰

These forms of inter-psychic and inter-generational negotiation identified by psychoanalysts may be understood as a form of emotional labour. The new mother undertakes conscious and unconscious emotional work to position her maternity in relation to that of her mother. As the 'generational pivot'²¹ there is intensive labour for the new mother to perform as the bridge between the new grandmother and the new child, the older generation and the new.

The types of emotional work mothers perform are many and varied, as this special issue of *Past and Present* demonstrates. They may include a responsibility to guard against supernatural harm, as in Clodagh Tait's examination of the 'worry work' of living and dead mothers in Irish folklore,²² or to guide the spiritual and religious growth of their children. Mothers may understand their emotional work as caring for the psychological development and interpersonal relationships of family members, as well as fostering a sense of home as a place of security, retreat and nourishment. It was this form of emotional labour that mid twentieth-century British graduate mothers most often invoked in Helen McCarthy's chapter.²³ Emotional labour

¹⁷ Joan Raphael-Leff, *Pregnancy: The Inside Story* (London, 1993).

¹⁸ Balsam, 'Mother within the Mother', 465.

¹⁹ Mariotti, *Maternal Lineage*, 13–19.

²⁰ Alison Stone, *Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Maternal Subjectivity* (New York and London, 2012).

²¹ Wendy Hollway, *Knowing Mothers: Researching Maternal Identity Change* (London, 2015).

²² See Clodagh Tait, 'Worry Work: The Supernatural Labours of Living and Dead Mothers in Irish Folklore', in this volume.

²³ Helen McCarthy, 'Career, Family and Emotional Work: Graduate Mothers in 1960s Britain', in this volume. For comparative themes in post-war Australia, see Carla

can also refer to the practical, administrative work of managing a family: balancing children's school and activity schedules with parents' paid and unpaid work in a complex choreography that requires considerable maternal attention. Sociologists and historians have analyzed such multiple — often invisible — labours of mothers, including the double burden or double shift of mothers undertaking paid work and care work.²⁴ Laura Paterson and Eve Worth focus upon the unacknowledged 'organizational labour' or mental load of working mothers, who must create the 'connective tissue' between their multiple roles as mothers, housewives and paid workers.²⁵

But despite this multidisciplinary recognition since the 1970s of the tangible and intangible labour of mothers, and a well-established interest in matrilinearity within psychoanalytic writing, other disciplines outside psychoanalysis have been slow to recognize the matrilineal emotional work of matrescence.

In her qualitative 1975 study of matrescence among fifty-five London women, British sociologist Ann Oakley mentions briefly towards the end of her book that

Living through the babyhood of one's own child is reliving one's own babyhood: through the actions and emotions of oneself as a mother the experience of *being* mothered is reawakened. So bridging the generation gap is another unanticipated consequence of first-time motherhood.²⁶

Australian sociologist Betsy Wearing did ask her 1970s Sydney mothers about the influence of their mothers, but like other Australian sociological research which followed in the 1980s and 1990s, she was more interested in

Pascoe, 'Home Is Where Mother Is: Ideals and Realities in Australian Family Houses of the 1950s', *Journal of Australian Studies*, xli, 2 (2017), 184–206.

²⁴ See, for example, Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven, 1996); Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (1989); Patricia Grimshaw, John Murphy and Belinda Probert (eds.), *Double Shift: Working Mothers and Social Change in Australia* (Beaconsfield, Vic., 2005); Lyn Craig, *Contemporary Motherhood: The Impact of Children on Adult Time* (London, 2007). For a fuller analysis of this literature, see Petra Bueskens and Carla Pascoe Leahy, 'Defining Maternal Studies in Australia: The Birth of a Field', in Carla Pascoe Leahy and Petra Bueskens (eds.), *Australian Mothering: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (London, 2020), 21–65.

²⁵ Eve Worth and Laura Paterson, "'How Is She Going to Manage With The Children?' Organizational Labour, Working and Mothering in Britain, c.1960–1990', in this volume.

²⁶ Ann Oakley, *From Here to Maternity* (Harmondsworth, 1981), 265.

understanding the *ideal* of the good mother that women tried to imitate.²⁷ Sociologists did not seem to connect that cultural ideal to the internal psychic symbolism of the maternal, though there was a faint hint of this insight in the observation of Australian researchers Jan Harper and Lyn Richard that

Asked to describe a good mother, most people produced pictures from the past of mothers who were always there, passive, patient, unselfish, good listeners. Asked for models, most nominated women of earlier generations.²⁸

More recently, some researchers have utilized interdisciplinary frameworks and methodologies to understand intergenerational transmission of parenting knowledge and practices. Uniting historical, sociological and anthropological approaches, Siân Pooley and Kaveri Qureshi's interdisciplinary collection proposes that such intra-family transmission occurs primarily through one of four processes: implicit normative expectations, moral judgement, habituation and memory.²⁹ It is through the prism of memory (and specifically qualitative interviewing) that history and sociology have drawn closer together, as sociologists have become more interested in studying the family across time and historians have focused upon the influence of the present upon past memories of family.³⁰

Combining a social perspective with an interest in the internal emotional shifts of matrescence, British researchers Rachel Thomson, Mary Jane Kehily, Lucy Hadfield and Sue Sharpe found that matrilineal influences permeated new mothers' experiences of pregnancy, birth, expert advice, work and care:

We discuss birth as an intergenerational act bringing an intensive traffic of conscious and unconscious meaning within the family ... Mothers and daughters may re-evaluate their relationship from both sides. We found that mothers and daughters looked

²⁷ Betsy Wearing, *The Ideology of Motherhood: A Study of Sydney Suburban Mothers* (Sydney, 1984).

²⁸ Jan Harper and Lyn Richards, *Mothers and Working Mothers* (Harmondsworth, 1979), 45.

²⁹ Siân Pooley and Kaveri Qureshi (eds.), *Parenthood between Generations: Transforming Reproductive Cultures* (New York, 2016).

³⁰ Rachel Thomson, 'Generational Research: Between Historical and Sociological Imaginations', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, xvii, 2 (2014), 147–56.

to each other to bridge the transition to motherhood, to personalize the experience and *make it real*.³¹

In her study of English mothers from 1945 to 2000, historian Angela Davis has drawn upon oral histories to explore how attitudes towards and practices of mothering were passed down from mothers to daughters in the second half of the twentieth century. Although families became more mobile and households were less likely to be multi-generational over this period, Davis found that mother–daughter relationships remained significant and diverse. Whilst experts assumed a matrilineal transmission of knowledge, mothers were reluctant to pass on the ‘facts of life’ and daughters increasingly relied upon professional advice.³² Engaging Chodorow’s approach, Davis explains that

As well as discussing the reality of their experiences of mothering and being mothered, as they constructed their life stories interviewees also actively created, consciously and subconsciously, the model of motherhood they wished had been passed down to them and which they hoped to transmit.³³

Nevertheless, only a small body of Australian historiography has used oral history or personal sources to ask women about their feelings, perspectives and experiences related to mothering. In their interviews with a hundred Australians who became parents in the 1950s and 1990s, respectively, historian John Murphy and sociologist Belinda Probert focused upon the ways in which cultural attitudes relating to work, family and community manifested in individual narratives.³⁴ Alistair Thomson’s intimate portraits of four British women who came to Australia is primarily focused upon themes relating to migration and gender, though motherhood is a dominant

³¹ Rachel Thomson *et al.*, *Making Modern Mothers* (Bristol, 2011), 16.

³² Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, 20–8, 62–5.

³³ Angela Davis, ‘Generational Change and Continuity among British Mothers: The Sharing of Beliefs, Knowledges and Practices c.1940–1990’, in Siân Pooley and Kaveri Qureshi (eds.), *Parenthood between Generations: Transforming Reproductive Cultures* (Oxford, 2016), 207–28, 226.

³⁴ John Murphy, ‘Breadwinning: Accounts of Work and Family Life in the 1950s’, *Labour and Industry*, xii, 3 (2002); John Murphy and Belinda Probert, ‘“Anything for the House”: Recollections of Post-War Suburban Dreaming’, *Australian Historical Studies*, xxxvi, no. 124 (2004); John Murphy and Belinda Probert, ‘Never Done: The Working Mothers of the 1950s’, in Grimshaw, Murphy and Probert (eds.), *Double Shift*; Belinda Probert, ‘“Grateful Slaves” or “Self-Made Women”: A Matter of Choice or Policy?’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, xvii, 37 (2002).

narrative arc in several of their life stories.³⁵ Other Australian historians have employed oral history to understand the often-neglected histories of single mothers,³⁶ stillbirth,³⁷ suburban mothering,³⁸ migrant mothers,³⁹ and pregnancy and miscarriage.⁴⁰

Yet we lack an overarching history of Australian mothers, despite comparable accounts in other Anglophone, industrialized societies such as the United Kingdom, the United States and New Zealand.⁴¹ Historical studies in Australia have largely focused upon *motherhood* — cultural, medical and political discourses of maternity — rather than *mothering* — the experiences, emotions, practices and perspectives of mothers themselves.⁴² My current project attempts to remedy this strange absence within Australian historiography by examining the history of mothering within living memory, as

³⁵ Alistair Thomson, *Moving Stories: An Intimate History of Four Women Across Two Countries* (Sydney, 2011).

³⁶ Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe, *Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment and Survival in Australia* (Cambridge, 1995).

³⁷ Susannah Thompson, “‘I’d Just Like to Die with a Bit of Peace’: The Role of Oral History in Reinterpreting Repressed Memories of Stillbirth and Neonatal Death in Australia’s Past”, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, xvi (2007), 120–31.

³⁸ Miranda Francis, “‘Only the Ends of Your Hair Don’t Hurt’: Mothering and Memories of Touch”, *Oral History Australia Journal*, xxxix (2017), 55–62; Miranda Francis, ‘One Woman’s Creche Is a Bureaucrat’s Child-Minding Centre: “The Flat” at Footscray High School 1976–1986’, *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, xv (2016), 69–77; Miranda Francis, ‘Remembering the Family That I Thought We Would Be’, *Oral History*, xlvii (2019), 49–60; Miranda Francis, “‘Somewhere between the Toast and the Marmalade’: Analyzing an Intuitive Approach to Memory Sources”, *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, xxxiii (2011), 45–53.

³⁹ Thomson, *Moving Stories*.

⁴⁰ Catherine Kevin, “‘I Did Not Lose My Baby . . . My Baby Just Died’: Twenty-First-Century Discourses of Miscarriage in Political and Historical Context”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, cx, 4 (2011), 849–65.

⁴¹ Davis, *Modern Motherhood*; Sue Kedgley, *Mum’s the Word: The Untold Story of Motherhood in New Zealand* (Auckland, 1996); Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood: An American History* (New Brunswick, 2014); Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago, 2010); Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940–1970* (Oxford, 1995). Until recently, we have also lacked an Australian history of fatherhood. Murphy and Thomson are collaborating with others on a new project tracing the history of Australian fatherhood since 1919 through oral history interviews (DP190100214).

⁴² Carla Pascoe Leahy, ‘From the Little Wife to the Supermom?: Maternographies of Feminism and Mothering in Australia since 1945’, *Feminist Studies*, xlv, 1 (2019), 100–28.

recalled by a diverse group of mothers. As I elicited and interpreted these memories of entering maternity, it has become clear that matrescence is influenced by and transforms every facet of a woman's life, including pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing strategies, relationships with others, work and care choices, experiences of place, material culture and self-identity — what I call the maternalization of the self.

II

A TEMPORAL-PSYCHOSOCIAL METHODOLOGY

Despite this ambivalent relationship with the maternal within Australian historiography, I contend that matrescence offers valuable challenges to the ways in which history as a discipline normally conceives of itself. For one thing, it explodes rigid disciplinary boundaries, exposing them as insufficient to adequately explain a transition as complex as new motherhood. Historical analyses that focus only on changes to cultural discourses concerning, say, child-rearing or perinatal healthcare capture important aspects of the context in which mothering takes place but fail to explain the cataclysmic internal changes of the woman becoming a mother. Sociological analyses of the ideal of the good mother, or shifting patterns of paid work and care work in maternal lives, similarly remain at the level of the discursive and structural. Psychological and psychoanalytic examinations of the profound psychic reorientation of matrescence are essential to comprehend the ways in which women themselves describe the emotional transition central to becoming a mother — yet psychological accounts are equally enriched by the ways in which history, sociology and anthropology reveal matrescence to be mediated by time, place and culture.

To contend with this complexity, I have conceived a methodology which I term 'temporal-psychosocial', drawing upon and extending psychosocial studies which utilize both psychoanalytic and sociological frames.⁴³ This interdisciplinarity is particularly apt for studying phenomena such as matrescence, where a woman's experience of becoming a mother will necessarily be influenced by both personal factors and social structures. Wendy Hollway has drawn upon a psychosocial methodology for her studies of contemporary British mothering, utilizing innovative methodologies to study the alterations in subjectivity that accompany matrescence which she

⁴³ Stephen Frosh has written of the difficulties and strengths of a psychosocial approach, using the Birbeck Centre of Psychosocial Studies as an illustration: Stephen Frosh, 'Psychosocial Studies and Psychology: Is a Critical Approach Emerging?', *Human Relations*, lvi (2003), 1547–67.

understands as partially ineffable, and thus resistant to full comprehension.⁴⁴ Baraitser also argues that 'maternity is an experience that I maintain is impossible to anticipate in advance, one that unravels as it proceeds, and that one is always chasing the tail of, never becoming expert at, or even competent, and that always eludes our attempts to fully understand it'.⁴⁵ Faced with a phenomenon which is at least partially unknowable or indescribable, researchers require a multifaceted and nuanced methodology. To date, the psychosocial approach has been used to study the present. In this paper, I argue that by extending this approach temporally, we can more fully analyze the inner and outer worlds of mothers across time.

As a methodology in which the subject's personal interpretations are prioritized, and intersubjective dialogue can yield new answers to subconscious and potentially sensitive questions, oral history is particularly suited to this project's focus upon the extent to which a woman's identity shifts upon entering maternity and the ways in which her relationship with her mother may have influenced this process. Given the lack of historical research foregrounding and comparing diverse maternal perspectives, I resolved to generate a large and varied interview sample of Australian mothers.⁴⁶ I define 'mother' as someone who takes on significant emotional and practical caring responsibilities for a child and, importantly, self-identifies with a maternal characterization. Thus, I include birth-giving mothers, adoptive mothers, relinquishing mothers, stepmothers, and co-mothers in my sample. A consistent theme across this diverse sample was that a woman's beliefs about and experiences of mothering were impacted by her own mother and memories of being mothered.⁴⁷ All the women interviewed were simultaneously

⁴⁴ Hollway, *Knowing Mothers*.

⁴⁵ Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters*, 22.

⁴⁶ Since 2013 I have co-created more than sixty oral histories with Australian women who became mothers between 1945 and 2017. The women are diverse in terms of their age, dis/ability status, cultural background, socio-economic status, sexuality, place of residence, relationship status and family size. Narrators were sought from three case study locations in the state of Victoria: an inner-urban area, a suburb and a regional town.

⁴⁷ I explored the possibility of creating an interview cohort based upon intergenerational chains within a select sample of families. However, I rejected this option based upon concerns that this may skew my sample towards families with internal harmony, restrict the cultural diversity of the sample (because I lacked funds to interview family members living outside Australia) and prove practically difficult to carry out. Where the opportunity arose, I interviewed women whose mothers or daughters had also been interviewed. Out of my overall interview cohort, ten women fit this category. For further information on how I selected interviewees, see Carla Pascoe Leahy, 'Selection

mothers and daughters, and those dual roles influenced their maternal recollections.

Drawing upon and extending Scottish historian Lynn Abrams' concept of 'feminographies', I call these oral histories 'maternographies'. For Abrams, a feminography is a woman's life story framed by a feminist ideology, where she can narrate herself as the central, determinative actor in the drama of her life's unfolding. She explains further that: 'Feminist oral history practice in the industrialized west with the cohort of post-war women has acted in concert with the confessional, expressive and feminist turns to produce oral narratives in which women narrate first-person narratives in the voices of self-determining subjects'.⁴⁸ I coined the term maternography to refer to a woman's life story where her maternal memories are explicitly privileged and highlighted, within a matricentric feminist⁴⁹ frame which refutes the assumption that mothering is necessarily restrictive, oppressive and antithetical to a woman's self-realization.⁵⁰ As matrescence is a human experience accompanied by intense physical and psychological effects, maternographies are a unique type of narrative where sensory, corporeal and emotional memories come to the fore.⁵¹

In addition to collapsing disciplinary boundaries, there is another sense in which mothering destabilizes the discipline of history: matrescence undermines the concept of a unitary understanding of time upon which history is predicated. In creating maternographies for this project, it became clear that multiple understandings of time were at play. In their analysis of interviews about work and care with four generations across twelve UK families during the twentieth century, sociologists Julia Brannen, Peter Moss and Ann Mooney explain that at least three meanings of time were implicated in their research. 'Time present' refers to the present experiences of work and care of their interviewees and the ways in which present experiences and perspectives influenced reflections on the past in interview. 'Life course time' denotes where the interviewee is situated in their life course. In my research

and Sampling Methodologies in Oral Histories of Mothering, Parenting and Family', *Oral History*, xlvii, 1 (2019), 105–16.

⁴⁸ Lynn Abrams, 'Heroes of Their Own Life Stories: Narrating the Female Self in the Feminist Age', *Cultural and Social History*, xvi, 2 (2019), 205–24.

⁴⁹ Andrea O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism and Practice* (Bradford, Canada, 2016).

⁵⁰ In this approach I am taking up Daphne de Marneffe's invitation to understand mothering as authentic self-expression: Daphne de Marneffe, *Maternal Desire: On Children, Love and the Inner Life* (New York, 2004).

⁵¹ Pascoe Leahy, "'From the Little Wife to the Supermom?'".

the life stage of the narrator at the time of our discussion influences the shape and tone of interviews. Whether a narrator is presently mothering young children or looking back on those experiences several decades later has an influence on the sharpness and meaning of those memories. Women who have recently experienced matrescence may be still working through its implications for their relationship with their mother. Becoming a grandmother or great-grandmother can reawaken dormant recollections of early mothering. 'Generational time' is the term Brannen *et al.* use to refer to the age cohorts of different generations born into similar socio-historical periods, whose personal experiences are therefore coloured by collective experiences such as war, economic upheavals or cultural transformations.⁵²

In addition to these three categories of time, Stone alerts us to the possibility of another form of time operating in mother–daughter relations; one that is at least partially unconscious, embodied and archaic. As Stone writes:

the mother replays her maternal past . . . primarily at an affective, bodily and habitual level, by re-enacting patterns of behaviour and affective response that once circulated between herself and her own mother. These modes of maternal remembering generate a particular form of lived time — maternal time — that is cyclical, centring on the regular reappearance of an archaic past that cuts across time, as a linear succession of moments. However, a structural feature of mothering is that the mother's past repeats itself with a difference. Because that past is re-enacted between the mother *and her child*, the past is re-created in a new shape, adapted to the unique individual that the child in each case is. This ensures that the mother can only remember her maternal past in the light of this novel present, a present that bestows upon the past new meanings that it did not originally have. The maternal past returns, but never simply as it was.⁵³

Maternal time is cyclical, not linear, based upon a form of remembering that is partially unconscious and centred upon preverbal bodily intimacy with the mother.

All four of these meanings of time are implicated in this study of subjective, remembered experiences of matrescence from multiple generations of Australian mothers. In this paper I will focus upon maternal time — the

⁵² Julia Brannen, Peter Moss and Ann Mooney, *Working and Caring over the Twentieth Century: Change and Continuity in Four Generation Families* (Basingstoke, 2004), 210, see also 3–4.

⁵³ Stone, *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity*, 8–9.

ways in which a woman's relationship to her mother was reignited during her matrescence — and generational time — the extent to which the mother–daughter relationship was influenced by changes to the historical context in which it took place. I will tease apart these different understandings of time within matrilineal relationships, before examining the ways in which they intertwine in one family.

III

MATERNAL TIME: PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF MATRESCENCE

Across the seventy-year period that this research encompasses, many historical changes are apparent — including rising female workforce participation, a diversification of family types, shrinking family sizes and changes to child-rearing philosophies — but there are also persistent emotional continuities evident in the matrilineal inflections of new motherhood. When a woman becomes a mother, she returns to the powerful mother–child dyad of her infancy, but for the first time she views this relationship from the maternal perspective. A new mother has the opportunity to return to and re-evaluate her own upbringing, a re-examination which might be conscious and explicit or subtle and subconscious. If the return is unreflexive, new mothers are likely to repeat the patterns of attachment they experienced with their own mothers, whether they are warm, cold, or ambivalent. New mothers more actively engaged in reassessing their past may make conscious decisions about which aspects of their upbringing they wish to emulate, and which they would prefer to reject or adapt.⁵⁴ Despite their pervasiveness in psychoanalytic literature, such insights have not entered the popular imagination or the vast quantities of pregnancy, birth or child-rearing literature that continue to multiply. For most women entering matrescence across the seventy-year period of my research, the powerful renewed significance of their own mother came as a surprise.

Regardless of whether they choose to imitate her maternal style, many women report feeling a greater appreciation of the unique quality of maternal love and the difficulties of the maternal position. New mothers also come to realize that their childish fantasies of an omnipotent and omniscient maternal figure were unrealistic. Sarah was born in 1983 and grew up in an Anglo-Australian family in a regional Victorian town. When I asked if becoming a mother had changed her relationship to her own mother, she affirmed:

Yes, I appreciate her so much more. Feel closer to her than ever.
Even as an adult, I never reflected on how much she would have

⁵⁴ Stern and Bruschiweiller-Stern, *Birth of a Mother*, 109–23.

given up for us ... It's made me more appreciative of her as a mother and as a person in general ... You don't know til it happens to you. It's this consuming love ... I said to my mum, 'Do you love me as much as I love [my son]?' ... It's nice to know that someone loves you as much as you love your little baby.⁵⁵

Balsam argues that physiologically inscribed moments in a woman's life, including pregnancy and childbirth, carry the most potent potential for psychological identification with the mother.⁵⁶ As a baby's due date approaches, many birth-giving mothers-to-be anxiously evaluate what they know of their own mother's stories of birthing them, wondering if their experience of childbirth will be similar.⁵⁷ Often stories of suffering haunt these imaginings, framing the next generation's expectations of labour. Ariana grew up in a middle-class, Welsh-Australian family with a different maternal birth narrative. Her mother's memories of a swift, straightforward labour in suburban Melbourne in 1979 coloured Ariana's optimistic expectations, to the extent that she felt resentful when her own experience in 2010 was contradictory.

I just expected to copy my mum which was fast, easy, no pain relief, over and done within half an hour, out the door which is basically what Mum told me her labour was. So I had this idea that that is how I was going to have my first baby. It did not go that fast and it was not that easy. I actually said to my dad when he walked in ... 'why didn't you tell me it was horrendous? It was so bad. I was in so much pain' and Dad said ... 'No one is ever going to tell you that'. So mine was a lot — yes. I'm going to tell my child that it hurts a lot.⁵⁸

Having also interviewed Ariana's mother for this project, I am aware that Sybil believes her first birth was so swift that she was barely conscious of pain. Yet in this extract Ariana questions whether the birth narrative her

⁵⁵ All interviewee names have been replaced with pseudonyms. All interviews are in the possession of the author and some are in Museums Victoria's collections where nominated by the interviewee. Interview with Sarah, recorded by the author, 29 August 2012.

⁵⁶ Rosemary H. Balsam, 'The Pregnant Mother and the Body Image of the Daughter', in Mariotti (ed.), *Maternal Lineage*; Balsam, 'Mother within the Mother', 483; Carla Pascoe Leahy, 'Mothers-in-waiting: Maternographies of Pregnancy in Australia since 1945', in Carla Pascoe Leahy and Petra Bueskens (eds.), *Australian Mothering: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (London, 2020), 155–177.

⁵⁷ Thomson *et al.*, *Making Modern Mothers*, 252–9.

⁵⁸ Interview with Ariana, recorded by the author, 5 April 2017.

mother bequeathed to her was a genuine reflection of her memory of the experience, or whether her mother had knowingly censored her story to avoid burdening her daughter with anxiety going into the birth experience. Regardless of the 'truth' of whether a woman ever accurately remembers her experiences of childbirth,⁵⁹ Ariana here expresses dissatisfaction with the birth inheritance she received from her mother and determines to bequeath her daughter a different intergenerational narrative.

If birth stories echo down matrilineal generations, so too do stories of loss. Justine was born into a middle-class, Anglo-Australian family in Sydney in 1964 and her mother died when she was 23. When Justine herself became a mother at the age of 32 she felt the loss of her mother anew. The absence of the real mother who represented her idealized maternal figure was painful. Justine felt that her experience of losing her first pregnancy at twenty-one weeks connected her to her mother's experience of stillbirth, whilst also sharpening her distress that her mother was no longer alive to share her grief.

My mother had lost her first baby but full term. So . . . I have all these questions that I can't get answered . . . Of course those things are going through your head, well, I wonder why and what happened to her? . . . That's what I mean by seeing things through childish eyes because . . . as a child you go, 'Oh, okay, Mum had a baby before us but, you know, it didn't live'. It's just — that's it and you don't question the whys and wheres.⁶⁰

Justine explains that while as a daughter she was satisfied with her mother's explanations of losing a baby, when she began adopting a maternal identity she desperately wanted to understand that loss afresh from a maternal perspective. Experiences of miscarriage, stillbirth and infant death may haunt families, with the loss of a foetus or baby often reverberating across several generations.⁶¹ Even where mothers have not explicitly communicated a sense of grief to their children, their daughters' maternal experiences may be influenced by deaths that occurred decades earlier.

⁵⁹ I have argued elsewhere that birth is a peak experience which cannot be accurately captured by language or memory: Carla Pascoe Leahy, 'On the Cusp of Life and Death: Australian Memories of Childbirth since 1945', Oral History NSW Annual Lecture, 8 September 2018.

⁶⁰ Interview with Justine, recorded by the author, 3 April 2017.

⁶¹ For more on the history of miscarriage and stillbirth in Australia, see Catherine Kevin, 'Maternal Responsibility and Traceable Loss: Medicine and Miscarriage in Twentieth-Century Australia', *Women's History Review* (2016), 1–17; Thompson, "'I'd Just Like to Die With a Bit of Peace'".

Early motherhood may cement or estrange mother–daughter relationships. For mothers and daughters with an emotionally warm way of relating, the daughter’s experience of becoming a mother can be a bonding experience. Some daughters in this category are conscious of deliberately choosing to imitate their mothers. Andrea was born into a middle-class, Catholic family in 1979 and had her first child in 2010. Shortly afterwards she moved back to her regional home town, buying a house around the corner from her parents. She reflected,

I probably tried to be a parent just like my mum. Which is relaxed and go with the flow and try not to worry . . . She always said this and it’s stuck in my mind, ‘That the one thing you will worry about with your child, will be the exact thing you shouldn’t be’ . . . And she’s always said that, ‘Kids will just be themselves, so don’t try and push them into certain areas’.⁶²

During her maternography, Andrea analyzed and reflected on her mother’s parenting legacy at several points, concluding that this was the maternal ideal to which she aspired. As in Andrea’s maternography, geographic movements around the time of matrescence often seemed to symbolize whether a new mother desired greater intimacy with her own mother, as well as communicating judgement of the type of childhood environment in which the narrator was raised.⁶³

For emotionally distant mother–daughter relationships, the arrival of the daughter’s baby can force further estrangement. Several women reported feeling hurt that their own mother offered little practical or emotional support once they had their child. Amanda was born in 1959 to working-class, Anglican parents who had recently migrated from England. When her first baby was born in 1994, Amanda recalled: ‘At one stage I said to Mum, “Can you come and see me?” and she said, “You’re the one who chose to move away”. Oh, okay, I’ve been put back in my place here’.⁶⁴ Amanda believed she had suffered undiagnosed post-natal depression, and her narrative of difficulties in dealing with matrescence was underpinned by a sensation of inadequate support from partner, family and friends.

In Valerie’s maternography, she explained that her mother reconstructed her maternal style through grandmothering. Valerie was born into a working-class, Presbyterian family in England in 1949 and had her daughter

⁶² Interview with Andrea, recorded by the author, 15 November 2016.

⁶³ Carla Pascoe, ‘Memory, Place and Motherhood: Oral Histories of Urban and Regional Australian Mothers since 1945’, Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, 2017.

⁶⁴ Interview with Amanda, recorded by the author, 21 November 2016.

M in Australia in 1984. Valerie felt resentful that her mother was much closer to her maternal ideal with M than she had been with Valerie: 'She wasn't half as good a mother as she was a grandma'. Valerie went on to explain that she was 'the opposite' of her mother in raising her daughter.

I certainly was a different mother than my mother was and that's why I could see how different a grandma she was. She was a better, loving — had a much better relationship. She talked more to my daughter about anything personal and intimate that she couldn't even look me in the eye and say, but all generated by the love that they had ... The relationship was wonderful and I envied it. Oh, did I envy it. But I loved it for both of them, to see how a grandma can change from a mum who wasn't very close at all until probably the last 10 years of her life with me ... So she came out of her shell with her grandchildren rather than anything else.⁶⁵

Although on some levels Valerie is glad that her daughter M can enjoy a closer relationship with her grandmother than Valerie enjoyed with the same woman as her mother, there is a strong undercurrent of envy for an intimacy she yearned for but never experienced, and a resentment that her mother could not produce these latent qualities for her own children. Without more evidence, it is difficult to be sure whether the different maternal and grandmaternal behaviours of Valerie's mother were prompted by the expressive turn within industrialized societies, a shift in her mother's material or emotional circumstances, or the lesser sense of responsibility and stress experienced by grandmothers (who are less often caring full-time for children) by contrast to mothers.⁶⁶

Rather than a clear replication or denunciation, many new mothers display an ambivalence towards the way that they were raised and their ambitions for their own parenting. Connie was born in 1971 and raised by working-class, Greek-Australian parents. Since becoming a single mother by choice (via IVF) in 2015, Connie is consciously trying to parent differently from her own parents, who she feels offered her insufficient autonomy and responsibility. But she has also re-evaluated her own mother — who died in 1997 — and is less critical than she was previously. She recalls her mother as 'very, very affectionate' and finds that she imitates this physical intimacy

⁶⁵ Interview with Valerie, recorded by the author, 10 October 2016.

⁶⁶ Contrasts between mothering and grandmothering were often highlighted by older narrators, with most asserting that grandmothering was less difficult and more pleasurable.

with her own son. She can now appreciate the difficulties of her mother's position; forced by material circumstances to work full-time and to raise children without extended family support due to her migrant status. When I asked Connie if there are things she would have liked to ask her mother, she responded,

Loads, yes. A lot of things about how I was as a child as well. How to do things, how to do everything frankly . . . At the beginning, I would have asked how to wash him, how to hold him, how to stop him crying, how to feed him. Then she could have looked after me too.⁶⁷

Since becoming a mother herself, Connie has modified her previous rejection of her parents' child-rearing strategies. She recognizes her mother's physical affection in herself and wishes that her mother was present to offer practical advice. In particular, Connie yearns to be mothered by her own mother during her transition to maternity. Although her father is a regular presence in her child's life, he cannot fill the void of a longed-for maternal figure at this time of transformation. Connie's story also speaks to the multiplicity of forces impacting upon the mother–daughter relationship. Whilst some can be attributed to psychological factors — or maternal time — others appear to be more directly attributable to the differing historical and cultural circumstances of female lives.

IV

GENERATIONAL TIME: SOCIO-HISTORICAL INFLUENCES UPON MATRILINEAL RELATIONSHIPS

Some transitions in mother–daughter relationships have been driven by historical shifts in cultural attitudes and material circumstances in Australia across the past seventy years.⁶⁸ A lowered male wage and heightened property prices have worked alongside increasing professional aspirations for women to raise workforce participation of women aged 15 to 64 years from just over a third in 1966 to 59 per cent in 2016.⁶⁹ The average age of first motherhood has climbed from a woman's early twenties in 1963 to her early

⁶⁷ Interview with Connie, recorded by the author, 7 April 2017.

⁶⁸ Abrams has explored similar shifts in the British context: Lynn Abrams, 'Liberating the Female Self: Epiphanies, Conflict and Coherence in the Life Stories of Post-War British Women', *Social History*, xxxix, 1 (2014), 14–35.

⁶⁹ Barbara Pocock, 'Australian Mothers in 2004: Awaiting a Decent Work/care Regime', in Grimshaw, Murphy and Probert, *Double Shift*, 9–10; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia 2019* (cat.no. 6202.0, Canberra, 2019).

thirties in 2017.⁷⁰ Shifting views regarding the desirability of formal child-care versus maternal care, the emotional and physical competencies of children, and a turn from disciplinary to affective styles of parenting have altered parent–child interactions. Cultural discourses concerning medical authority and women’s bodily autonomy have revolutionized attitudes and practices surrounding perinatal health care. The introduction of the birth control pill in 1961, the expansion of legal abortion, increasing use of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) from the 1980s, and the extension of ART to single and lesbian mothers in the twenty-first century has given women more choice about whether, when and under what circumstances they have children. Social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, including the women’s liberation movement, created a cultural chasm between women born before and after this period which is most evident in attitudes towards marriage, sexuality and motherhood.

A significant change since the mid twentieth century is an increasing willingness to discuss matters relating to the body, including menstruation, sex, pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding.⁷¹ But for women becoming mothers in the 1950s and 1960s, the emotional ease for intergenerational conversations about such matters did not exist. Marjorie was born in 1931 into a British Jewish family and migrated to Australia in 1949, before having her first child in 1954. She recalled that

Your mother didn’t tell you about her labour and how she felt, so you couldn’t bounce off your mother and certainly not your grandmother ... When I was pregnant myself, we never discussed much physically ... My mother seemed uncomfortable with me talking about my sex life or my body.⁷²

In 1970s Australia the maternity reform movement began to shift these intergenerational silences. Popular discussion of childbirth exploded in the UK

⁷⁰ Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Demography* 1963 (Canberra, 1964); Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Births, Australia, 2017* (cat. no. 3301.0, Canberra, 2017).

⁷¹ Josephine May, ‘Secrets and Lies: Sex Education and Gendered Memories of Childhood’s End in an Australian Provincial City, 1930s–1950s’, *Sex Education*, vi, 1 (2006), 1–15; Suellen Murray (1998) ‘“Keeping Their Secret Safe”: Menstrual Etiquette in Australia, 1900–1960’, *Hecate*, xxiv, 1 (1998), 62–80; Carla Pascoe, ‘The Bleeding Obvious: Menstrual Ideologies and Technologies in Australia, 1940–1970’, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, xx (2014), 76–92. Angela Davis similarly found that English women were given very little reproductive information by their mothers: Davis, *Modern Motherhood*.

⁷² Interview with Marjorie, recorded by the author, 27 June 2014.

during the twenty years after World War Two, as Joanna Bourke discusses in her article in this issue. During the long 1950s, British medical professionals valorized 'natural birth', emphasizing that the birthing woman should be conscious and emotionally responsive during labour, though still subject to hierarchies of gendered, racialized and medicalized power.⁷³ From the 1970s, activists across the industrialized world, including Australia, demanded that women be better informed and offered more choice during pregnancy, birth and motherhood.⁷⁴ The 'natural' childbirth agenda of the movement pushed for a reduction in medical intervention and drug use during labour, and privileged home birth over hospital birth. The breastfeeding arm of the movement sought to lift declining breastfeeding rates by emphasizing its benefits.⁷⁵ As social attitudes to discussion of the embodied aspects of mothering changed, women becoming mothers in the 1970s and 1980s were more likely to receive some practical information and intimate insight from their own mothers.

Patsy was born in 1948 and grew up in a Catholic, working-class family in Queensland. She had her first child in 1967, on the cusp of these dramatic changes. As a young woman of 19 she was heavily influenced by her mother's opinions about early motherhood. Although she cannot recall her mother's rationale as to why formula feeding was preferable to breastfeeding, Patsy clearly remembers the strength of her mother's assertion and the influence it had upon her: 'I didn't breastfeed because my mother . . . was a pretty strong woman . . . She was adamant that I was not going to breastfeed and I can't remember the reasons why . . . I did bottle-feed T'.⁷⁶ Patsy's mother was not alone in 1950s and 1960s Australia. Bottle-feeding was often viewed as scientific and hygienic; a more modern way to feed babies. It was also supported by a cultural discomfort with breastfeeding's association with the primitive, the sexual and the naked.⁷⁷

⁷³ Joanna Bourke, 'Becoming the "Natural" Mother in Britain and North America: Power, Emotions and the Labour of Childbirth between 1947 and 1967', in this volume.

⁷⁴ Kerreen M. Reiger, *Our Bodies, Our Babies: The Forgotten Women's Movement* (Carlton South, 2001).

⁷⁵ Jill Barnard and Karen Twigg, *Nursing Mums: A History of the Australian Breastfeeding Association 1964–2014* (Malvern, Vic., 2014); Virginia Thorley, 'Middle-Class Mothers as Activists for Change: The Australian Breastfeeding Association', in Andrea O'Reilly (ed.), *The 21st Century Motherhood Movement: Mothers Speak out on Why We Need to Change the World and How to Do It* (Toronto, 2011).

⁷⁶ Interview with Patsy, recorded by the author, 23 January 2017.

⁷⁷ For discussion of the cultural meanings of breastfeeding in Australia, see Alison Bartlett, *Breastwork: Rethinking Breastfeeding* (Sydney, 2005); Fiona Giles, *Fresh Milk: The Secret Life of Breasts* (Crows Nest, NSW, 2003).

These maternographies suggest that the mother–daughter relationship is strongly implicated in infant feeding, with women more likely than not to follow their mother’s version of feeding either because it has been explicitly presented as superior or because it is subconsciously associated with approval of the way they were raised.⁷⁸ Alison has a German–Australian, working-class background and was born in a regional area in 1974. She became a mother to twins in 2004 in that same coastal town. Her mother was a breastfeeding counsellor when Alison was younger and her strong belief in the importance of breastfeeding formed an explicit and implicit backdrop to Alison’s introduction to motherhood.

I can remember once saying something while I was pregnant . . . ‘Should I get some formula and bottles . . . just in case?’. I can remember her saying, ‘Just in case what?’ I said, ‘Just in case I can’t breastfeed’. ‘Why wouldn’t you be able to breastfeed?’. I was, like, ‘Okay, well, fair question’, and that was that.⁷⁹

The maternal reform movement precipitated changes in how health professionals interacted with new and expectant mothers. Although child-rearing texts such as Spock’s began to multiply after World War Two, my research suggests that take-up in Australia was slow. Narrators who became mothers in the 1950s and 1960s rarely mention reading or relying upon such advice. Instead, post-war mothers believed in maternal instinct and sought the advice of female relatives when necessary. From the 1970s women were offered increasing amounts of information about their pregnancy, birth and early motherhood through classes, books, consultations and other sources. This reflected the efforts of the women’s health movement to empower women, including mothers, with more information and choice. But as advice has proliferated from the 1990s, women having babies in the past twenty years report feeling overwhelmed by the variety of formal and informal advice surrounding them.⁸⁰ My research echoes Miller’s British findings that the increasing medicalization of discourses about pregnancy and birth impart a sense that the experiential advice of older women is less trustworthy than expert medical advice.⁸¹ New mothers in the twenty-first century report feeling

⁷⁸ This observation is supported by health research: Joel Negin, Jenna Coffman, Pavle Vizintin and Camille Raynes-Greenow, ‘The Influence of Grandmothers on Breastfeeding Rates: A Systematic Review’, *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, xvi, 91 (2016), 1–10.

⁷⁹ Interview with Alison, recorded by the author, 9 February 2017.

⁸⁰ Pascoe, ‘Mum’s the Word’.

⁸¹ Miller, *Making Sense of Motherhood*, 74.

sceptical of their mothers' advice as it may contradict what they have been told by health professionals or other 'experts'. Kristen had her first child in 2009 while living in a middle-class suburb of Melbourne. When I asked whether she parented similarly to her own parents, she replied,

I think Mum and Dad weren't so thoughtful about it ... So parenting was just something you did. And then I came out of a generation that over-analyzed everything and tried to do everything just right. If this authority is saying this is how it should be done, then that's what you would do, and ... you would read books on it. So I think maybe I'm one of the first generations — I don't know how far it goes back — that parenting was this thing that you could do well like a career you can do well — instead of just something that you do. So it's less natural for us, it was more of an exercise in KPIs [key performance indicators] ... where I think Mum kind of just went with the flow, did what her mum did, who did what her mum did — they all just did what everybody else did.⁸²

For Kristen, who is university-educated unlike her parents, child-rearing decisions should be made thoughtfully in the context of expert advice. She feels a generational divide from her mother, who she perceives as parenting instinctively or on the basis of maternal advice. Davis' British research similarly suggests that across the second half of the twentieth century, women became more likely to turn to 'expert' child-rearing information than that of their mothers. Experiential knowledge of previous maternal generations was increasingly dismissed as 'old wives' tales' in the wake of this rising tide of professional advice.⁸³

These historical changes raise the question of whether a grandmother's maternography now has a decreasing relevance to a new mother's experiences at matrescence. Nowhere is this sense of rapidly shifting maternal lives more evident than in the realm of paid work. Second wave feminism precipitated seismic shifts in Australian views of the suitability of mothers undertaking paid work and utilizing childcare. Murphy and Probert's interviews in the 1990s found that the stable gender order of the 1950s assumed a breadwinning father and homemaking mother, whereas by the 1990s these gender expectations were destabilized and in flux.⁸⁴ Interviewing Australian

⁸² Interview with Kristen, recorded by the author, 4 April 2017.

⁸³ Davis, *Modern Motherhood*.

⁸⁴ Murphy and Probert, "'Anything for the House'"; Probert, "'Grateful Slaves' or 'Self-Made Women'".

women who came of age before and after the women's liberation movement, sociologists Christine Everingham, Deborah Stevenson and Penny Warner-Smith found that older women believed that they would work until they had children (though many did in fact return to paid work later in life), whereas younger women assumed that they would combine working and mothering across their adult years.⁸⁵ Implicit in both these studies is the fact that 1990s mothers were often challenging the maternal norms maintained by their own mothers or grandmothers in seeking new modes of combining paid work and care. My interviews in the 2010s suggest that for some new mothers, their decision to combine paid work with mothering may strain their relationship with their own mother. For other women, conversations with their own mother may help them adapt to their experiences as a new mother.

Sally was raised in a Lebanese-Australian, Catholic family in a small town. She became a mother in 1978. On the one hand she felt buoyed by feminist principles to combine mothering and paid work, but she also felt conflicted about returning to paid employment when her baby was only six weeks old. The advice of her own mother (a stay-at-home mother of the 1950s) helped her to accept her decision:

When I was going back to work and feeling really bad about it, she said 'So you're doing the best you can and you're doing what you think's right in your circumstances and don't feel guilty about it' . . . The other thing she did at one stage, I feel emotional even thinking about it, but she actually said to me a couple of times 'I think you're a good mother' and I remember how important that was, you know, that my mother thought I was a good mother.⁸⁶

Other mothers have presumably disapproved of their daughter's choice to work after having children, but few mothers or daughters have openly voiced this sentiment during interviews, an interesting silence which suggests that this issue may be particularly sensitive.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Christine Everingham, Deborah Stevenson and Penny Warner-Smith, "'Things are Getting Better all the Time'? Challenging the Narrative of Women's Progress from a Generational Perspective', *Sociology*, xli, 3 (2007), 419–37.

⁸⁶ Interview with Sally, recorded by the author, 8 March 2014.

⁸⁷ Interviewing British mother–daughter pairs, Jill Armstrong found that the daughters of professional women who worked full-time when they were growing up stated that their childhood was not negatively impacted by their mothers' work. Nevertheless, a majority of these daughters intended to work part-time to have the 'best of both worlds'. While Armstrong interprets this finding as a product of the intensification of

Hazel had her first child in 1989 and returned to work full-time when her baby was around three months old. Her own mother — who raised a Catholic, middle-class, suburban family of seven children — had not undertaken paid employment until her youngest children commenced school, but had then engaged in further university study and employment. The matrilineal conflict around Hazel's choice to combine paid work with mothering emerged not with her mother but with her mother-in-law.

For the period that I was actually home I realized I had to have an outside activity. I realized very early on ... that your world contracts ... There were a few days when I probably didn't get out of my pyjamas til the evening and you were doing loads of washing and I realized that for me I wasn't ever tempted to take more time off when I returned to work. Even though it was a juggle I was quite glad to go back to work ... Somebody once said to me 'happy mother, happy child', when I was worrying about going back to work and my mother-in-law, in particular, was very, very critical of that. But I realized that she kept finding articles in the newspaper and sort of cutting them up for me, a clipping service on what would happen to children who had been left in childcare and so on. She was very disapproving.⁸⁸

Second-wave feminists viewed paid employment as empowering women to be financially independent from men.⁸⁹ Equal pay campaigns were thus connected to domestic violence refuges and family law reforms that allowed for no-fault divorce and child support. Brenda was born in 1953 and raised in an Anglo-Australian, Catholic farming family. Whilst she had a great deal of respect for her mother's loving parenting style, she consciously modelled her life differently from her mother's.

My mother lived a very difficult, hard life ... I made many decisions to make sure that I wasn't going to live an oppressed, sad life. Because I think my mother was actually quite depressed, being a mother with all those kids, on a farm ... I made sure

mothering ideals, I would suggest that it speaks to the sensitivity of the issue: that daughters may not feel that they can explicitly critique their mothers' life choices. Jill Armstrong, 'Higher Stakes: Generational Differences in Mother and Daughters' Feelings about Combining Motherhood with a Career', *Studies in the Maternal*, ix, 1 (2017), 1–25, 3.

⁸⁸ Interview with Hazel, recorded by the author, 8 April 2017.

⁸⁹ Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, NSW, 1999).

that I was independent . . . My mother was also a nurse, but she stopped nursing as soon as she got married and had children . . . So it was always really important for me to know that I needed to have a career, and my mother was financially very dependent on my father, which gave her very few options in life.⁹⁰

Other historical changes also impacted upon Brenda's relationship with her mother. She explained that her religious and socially conservative parents were challenged by her decisions to retain her maiden name, to give birth at home and to not baptize her children. In many ways, Brenda's ability to feel close to her mother after her children were born was limited by their positions on opposing sides of a cultural divide that opened up as a consequence of the sweeping social changes of the 1970s.

Another major cultural change since 1945 is a shift from a more disciplinarian parenting style to a more permissive and affective child-rearing approach. In the late 1970s, Wearing asked women with pre-school-aged children whether they were raising their children similarly to their own mothers. Only 33 per cent answered in the affirmative. The other two-thirds explained that they were parenting with more affection, interaction, honesty and encouragement, in an attempt to raise independent children.⁹¹ Older women who are now grandmothers (and great-grandmothers) can reflect upon continuity and change across several generations of mother-child relationships. Marjorie recalled that her own mother was 'emotionally removed' and 'very strict with me'. Marjorie continued that pattern of distance and discipline with her own children, but found a different style as a grandmother.

You're different as you — not only as you age, but as your experiences change . . . I used to smack my children . . . One of my grandsons stayed with me — he was about two and he was naughty and I gave him sort of a smack on the bottom and L [her daughter] rang me the next day . . . She said, 'Mum, we don't smack. We negotiate'. Well, I never negotiated, and I look back and I am regretful that I was so strict, but I've talked to other mothers and they were strict too . . . I'm not like that with my grandchildren.⁹²

Broad shifts in parenting styles to a lesser focus on discipline and a greater focus on negotiation and emotional openness are connected to the growing

⁹⁰ Interview with Brenda, recorded by the author, 6 April 2017.

⁹¹ Wearing, *The Ideology of Motherhood*, 57.

⁹² Interview with Marjorie.

field of child development. With the popularization of psychology from the mid twentieth century, corporal punishment, strict rules and emotional reserve have been gradually replaced by an emphasis on teaching emotional literacy and empathizing with and responding to the needs of individual children.⁹³ These shifts have filtered down into child-rearing manuals and individual relationships, though parenting styles remain diverse across all the generations researched.

V

MARY AND MICHELLE

In tracing threads of maternal time and generational time within these maternographies, I have teased apart emotional and historical influences upon mothering. Re-entering the cycle of maternal time, new mothers revisit their memories and fantasies of being mothered, choosing consciously or unconsciously what relationship to their maternal past they will embrace for their present and future. In addition to these emotional and relational factors, new mothers are embedded within generational time; influenced by the many cultural, technological, medical, legal and economic forces that create the context in which they enter maternity. But such dynamics are rarely clearly distinct at matrescence; rather they are experienced as interwoven and co-productive. To explore some of the ways in which maternal and generational time overlap within these narratives, I will now examine more closely the maternographies of a mother and daughter interviewed separately.

Mary was born in 1951 in the Netherlands to parents of European and Asian descent. She and her husband had two children in the 1970s, before moving to a regional Australian town. She stayed home full-time with her children until they were in primary school. Mary then undertook training and started working part-time as a pre-school educator. She later commenced an undergraduate degree. But although her feelings about her maternal role were shifting as her children aged and as cultural attitudes broadened, she still acutely remembers the conflicting emotions engendered by attempting to combine work, study and caring.

That's I think when it gets hard as a mum. When you have to juggle, you have to choose ... After three months I stopped my Bachelor because I felt so guilty about not being there when [my

⁹³ Paula S. Fass, *The End of American Childhood: A History of Parenting from Life on the Frontier to the Managed Child* (Princeton, NJ, 2016); Harry Hendrick, *Narcissistic Parenting in an Insecure World: A History of Parenting Culture 1920 to Present* (Bristol, 2016); Pascoe, 'Mum's the Word'.

son] was doing his last year of high school. Yeah, I had to make a choice and sometimes I think I should have persisted. Man would always go for his work. Maybe now — it's a different generation. Women have a lot more the same stakes as a man in the family setting . . . You can juggle a lot of things but sometimes something has to give. And you can say, 'It's okay. I don't have to be in the last spot all the time'.⁹⁴

Mary eloquently describes the internal struggle she faced when she tried to rearrange the hierarchy of needs in the family so that her personal ambitions could be realized. Implicit in this narrative is an awareness that in partially embracing feminist-influenced ideas that women should fulfil their own desires, Mary is to some extent rejecting her own mother's life choices. When I asked Mary about her idea of a good mother, she responded,

If you have a good childhood — you look at your mum as a really important person that teaches you all those things . . . So I always thought, I want to be like my mum, but there are certain things that I would do differently . . . My mum was of Indonesian Asian background and she was pretty submissive. So she would often say, 'Go now to Dad'. I wanted her to make a decision. So I've always felt that if the child comes to me and says, 'Mum', then I'll make a decision on that.⁹⁵

Here Mary asserts her general approval of the way she was raised but also inserts herself into this intergenerational dialogue, explaining that the different cultural and historical contexts in which she came to mothering means that she does not imitate the way her mother deferred to her father's authority. Mary went on to talk about the rising number of families where both parents are working and the effects this has on family time.

Having studied all those childcare things, I see a lot of things happening that I think is not really very good. But, life's changed. Everything has changed. A lot of two-parent families need to work . . . Sometimes you have no choice if you want to keep the house. We had actually, I think, a lot easier and better. But . . . you're the next generation, you grow up with new ideas so you might think of it totally different . . . But I see a lot of things happening for children in childcare that I think, 'It's sad'.

⁹⁴ Interview with Mary, recorded by the author, 23 February 2014.

⁹⁵ Interview with Mary.

Because ... you see a lot of families that have very little family time.⁹⁶

Mary is careful to formulate this gentle critique of twenty-first-century parenting in broad terms, characterizing the increase in the numbers of mothers working as an historical shift about which she feels ambivalent. When we created Mary's maternography together, I assumed that her implied disapproval of mothers working was delivered in a qualified manner because she was reluctant to censure her interviewer's life choices. But upon reflection I have realized that her hesitant criticism may have also been directed elsewhere.

Mary gave birth to Michelle in Mozambique in 1979, before the family moved to Australia in 1980. Michelle grew up in regional Victoria and moved to Melbourne as an adult. She told me she followed her mother's advice to 'make sure you do something you love doing and do it well' and was the operations manager in a medium-sized business when she became pregnant with her first child in 2012.

Michelle consulted apps and child-rearing manuals during her pregnancy, but recalled that she often sought out her mother's advice in the weeks after her baby was born.

Then once F was born, I have to say I was calling Mum up on a regular basis ... Just getting her to talk about her experiences and stories of, like my dad changing my first nappy or what did you do, sleep her on her back? You know, Mum used to sleep us on our tummies, whereas now it's all about sleeping the babies on their backs. I think when we were children ... things were a little bit more relaxed than what they are possibly now ... I did speak to Mum quite a lot in the first few weeks. And she came over a few times as well and stayed the night. She was a great support ... She never really told me you should do it this way or that way. She was just always there for me.⁹⁷

Michelle felt that her relationship with her mother deepened considerably after her first child was born. She appreciates Mary's lengthy weekly journey to spend time with her granddaughter. But in contrast to the time that her mother spent away from paid employment after her children were born, Michelle never completely ceased work, doing small tasks from home from her daughter's earliest days. Nevertheless, Michelle's expectations of

⁹⁶ Interview with Mary.

⁹⁷ Interview with Michelle, recorded by the author, 5 September 2013.

returning to a more formal presence at her workplace were tempered by her unexpected yearning to be with her child.

When I was first pregnant I sort of said to ... my boss, 'I'll be back in three months. I'll be full-time. It'll be fine. I'll drop her off at day care'. Then as the pregnancy went through I realistically thought about it and thought no maybe six months is a bit more realistic and it has been exactly six months. But I'm not going back full-time either. Two days a week I think is going to be perfect. Initially I thought three days but then I changed my mind and I thought let's start with two days and see how that goes. But eventually obviously things will change but at the moment I think what I'm doing I feel comfortable with my decision.⁹⁸

Our maternography was created the day before Michelle formally returned to work, and all the uncertainty of that milestone was uppermost in her narrative, as she reflected on the excitement and trepidation engendered by the change. Her mixed emotions at attempting to combine work and caring echoed those of Mary thirty years previously, though under different personal and historical circumstances.

By examining the interlaced themes in Mary and Michelle's maternographies — which also encompass the lives of Mary's mother and Michelle's daughter — the influence of matrilineal and other factors on the experience of matrescence becomes apparent. Cultural influences across these four generations extend from Indonesia to the Netherlands, and from Mozambique to Australia. Historical shifts are evident in the relationships between these heterosexual couples, in the divisions of work and care in maternal lives, and in attitudes towards caring for children by non-family members. Psychologically, Mary and Michelle both profoundly appreciate the maternal legacy bequeathed to them, but also differentiate their own mothering style. Both display a willingness to give and receive maternal advice, and a desire for closeness while tolerating some level of separation. Overlapping cultural, historical and affective forces have played out in different ways in the lives of four female generations in this family, traversing three continents and a century of time. For Michelle's daughter, her matrilineal inheritance will bear traces of these diverse places, cultures, time periods and subjectivities.

⁹⁸ Interview with Michelle.

VI

CONCLUSION

For many Australian women who became mothers in the second half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, becoming a mother for the first time is the final moment of differentiation, when they are forced to distinguish themselves from their own mother. In becoming mothers themselves they are called upon to clarify the things they value and the things they would discard from their own upbringing. Examination of maternographies remembering seventy years of Australian mothering reveals patterns of change and continuity, closeness and distance, that are partly the product of individual subjectivities, partly intergenerational family dynamics and partly a broader story of historical movement in the fabric of Australian cultural life.

This paper has explored and combined psychoanalytic, sociological and historical perspectives on Australian experiences of mothering since 1945, employing a temporal–psychosocial methodology to understand the complex forces influencing matrescence. Certain emotional dynamics surface consistently across maternal time, including the fact that entering maternity forces a return to and a re-evaluation of a woman's relationship with her own mother and her memories of being mothered. Through their mothering, women imitate, adapt or reject the maternal style with which they were raised, though this process occurs at different levels of consciousness for different people. While aspects of this psychological transition are inexorably triggered by matrescence, cultural forces shift across generational time and exert their own influences on the experience of becoming a mother. Across the past seventy years, historical changes in attitudes to birth, infant feeding, child-rearing and gender roles have impacted upon the ways in which mothers and daughters experience the advent of a new generation. A case study of four generations within one family demonstrates the ways in which psychological, historical and cultural forces are interwoven in matrilineal relationships.

Matrescence is a complex rite of passage in a woman's life. The study of her adaptation to and adoption of maternity demands, I argue, an interdisciplinary methodology that combines psychoanalysis, sociology and history. The temporal–psychosocial approach that I propose here is an attempt to respond to the complexity of matrescence with a methodology that is as multi-layered as the transition itself.

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