

Andrea O'Reilly Distinguished Seminar Final Report

Objective

To host a public and cross-disciplinary seminar on the topic of motherhood studies, bringing distinguished scholar Andrea O'Reilly to the ANU. It was proposed that O'Reilly conduct a seminar introducing ANU staff, students and the public to Motherhood Studies by providing an overview of the development and rich diversity of scholarship on motherhood. As well O'Reilly would introduce her own work on "matricentric feminism", which "...asserts that the topic of mothers, mothering, and motherhood is deserving of serious and sustained scholarly inquiry." (O'Reilly 2016) The gender institute grant assisted in meeting the travel costs incurred by bringing Professor O'Reilly to ANU in November 2017. The School of Art & Design supported all other costs, accommodation, transport and hospitality.

Overview

Andrea O'Reilly, PhD, is Professor in the School of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at York University. O'Reilly is founder and director of *The Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI)* (1997-), founder and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative* (1999-) founder and editor of *Demeter Press* (2006-), the first feminist press on mothering, reproduction, sexuality and family. (See: www.motherhoodinitiative.org/ www.demeterpress.org)

She is editor and author of 20 books including most recently *This is What a Feminist Slut Looks Like: Perspectives on the Slut Walk Movement*, (2015), *Mothers, Mothering and Motherhood across Cultural Differences: A Reader* (2014) and *Academic Motherhood in a Post Second Wave Context: Challenges, Strategies, Possibilities* (2012). Andrea O'Reilly served as General Editor for the first-ever *Encyclopaedia of Mothering* (Sage Publications, 2010). She is a recipient of the CAUT Sarah Shorten Award for outstanding achievements in the promotion of the advancement of women in Canadian universities and colleges, is twice the recipient of York University's "Professor of the Year Award" for teaching excellence and in 2015 was the first inductee into the Museum of Motherhood Hall of Fame.

On Wed 29 November 2017 at the Roland Wilson Wilson building conference room O'Reilly presented a seminar entitled *The Baby Out with the Bathwater: The disavowal and disappearance of Motherhood in 20th and 21st Century Academic Feminism*. In her seminar, O'Reilly argued that "Motherhood is the unfinished business of feminism." She also made clear the disjunct between academic women's studies scholarship and the reality of many women's lives, she argued:

The percentages of motherhood content in women studies conferences, journals, textbooks and syllabi range from under 1 percent to just under 4 percent. Given that 80 percent of women become mothers in their lifetime, there is an evident disconnect between the minimal representation of motherhood in academic feminism and the actual lives of most women.

The event was broadly advertised through flyers, newsletters and social media. It was attended by over 50 people, representing diverse cultural and age backgrounds, though the vast majority were women who were mothers. About 30% of the participants were

academics, the remainder were members of the broader community including those working directly with mothers, for example community sector workers as well as women interested in attitudes and policy that has an impact on their lives.

The seminar was filmed and published on the Gender Institute website:

<http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/baby-out-bathwater%E2%80%A6-disavowal-and-disappearance-motherhood-20th-and-21st-century-academic-feminism-0>

An interview taken with O'Reilly at the time of her visit to the ANU was aired on the ABC's Baby Talk program on Saturday February 3, 2018 at 1.00pm. Babytalk: Feminism and Mothers <http://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/babytalk/babytalk-feminism/9367666>

From ABC website: *What's your view of feminism? How do you think it applies to parenting? If you're a mother (or primary care giver) you may wonder how your life suddenly swung back to the 1950s. Even after returning to work most mothers (or primary care givers) are overwhelmed with the biggest share of parenting. How do we go about making the changes that distributes the work of parenting evenly? Why is parenting one of the last barriers to fall to equality? Does feminism have a role in parenting? What should we even be fighting for?* [Professor Andrea O'Reilly](#) is from York University in Canada and is founder and Director of the Association for Research on Mothering. It may not be a surprise to know that Andrea is one of the few academics who study mothering. In this week's Babytalk Podcast we are going to discover Feminist Mothering!

Geraldine Doogue also interviewed Professor O'Reilly for ABC Radio National Saturday Extra but this interview hasn't gone to air as yet.

Evaluation

The event served as a forum for the cross fertilisation of ideas between various communities, the broader and the academic community interested in the topic of motherhood. The forum addressed different generations, revealing a strong interest in feminist politics across age groups. Discussion centred on broad social issues such as the perception of the role of motherhood in contemporary society, women's unpaid domestic labour, gender inequality and the importance of subsidised childcare and further policies that focus on adequate support for the main care providers in families. Scholars, policy makers, carer workers, mothers, (and one father), artists, and theorists were present.

The seminar was ground breaking at ANU where there has been limited discourse on the subject. The success of the event and the surrounding publicity displayed how the topic of Feminism and Motherhood is gathering momentum. The lecture was timely, feeding into other public discourse on Maternal Studies in Australia.

Note for example the February symposium in Melbourne – Australian mothering in contemporary and historical perspective.

<http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/shaps/news/australian-mothering-in-contemporary-and-historical-perspective-symposium>

Submitted by Denise Ferris and Bianca Williams
9th February 2018



**The Baby Out with the Bathwater...
disavowal and disappearance of Motherhood in 20th and
21st Century Academic Feminism**

Professor Andrea O'Reilly

Wednesday 29th November 2017

6.30 pm

**Sir Roland Wilson Building, Conference Room level 1
120 McCoy Circuit) The Australian National University**

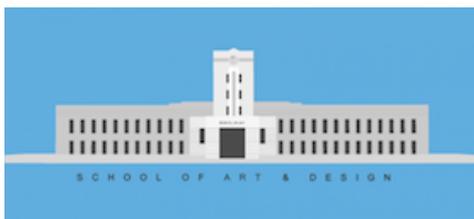
In this public talk Andrea O'Reilly will introduce Motherhood Studies providing an overview of the development of scholarship on motherhood. She will introduce her concept of "matricentric feminism"— that the topic of mothers, mothering, and motherhood is deserving of serious and sustained scholarly inquiry.

As research on motherhood is highly interdisciplinary, this presentation could appeal to academics, ANU staff and students from a broad range of disciplines including Gender Studies, Art, Political Science, the Environment and Economics as well as the broader ACT community.

Bio: Andrea O'Reilly, PhD, is a Professor in the School of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at York University. O'Reilly founded *The Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI)* in 1997 and remains Director. Founder and editor-in-chief, *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative* in 1999 and *Demeter Press* in 2006, the first feminist press on mothering, reproduction, sexuality and family. www.motherhoodinitiative.org/www.demeterpress.org

Andrea is author and editor of 21 books including: *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* (2017), *Mothers, Mothering and Motherhood across Cultural Differences: A Reader* (2014) and *Academic Motherhood in a Post Second Wave Context: Challenges, Strategies, Possibilities* (2012). She served as General Editor for the first-ever *Encyclopaedia of Mothering* (Sage Publications, 2010). Andrea is a recipient of the CAUT Sarah Shorten Award for outstanding achievements in the promotion of the advancement of women in Canadian universities and colleges, is twice the recipient of York University's "Professor of the Year Award" for teaching excellence. In 2015 Andrea O'Reilly was the first inductee into the Museum of Motherhood Hall of Fame.

This seminar is supported by the Gender Institute and the School of Art and Design.



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