

Looking up words in feminist analysis: motherhood & mothering

Example of a language activity to develop a feminist intelligence by MF (2019)

Part 1. Reading Definitions, Note-taking

Read the following definitions, on page 28 of "The Motherhood Statement," an essay in *The Science of Herself* (collection of essays and articles), by **Karen Joy Fowler** (PM Press, 2013).

Motherhood is a concept that changes from culture to culture and over time. Sometimes, it's set in opposition to mothering--motherhood, in this schematic, is the sacred duty of women, an artificial construct which underlies the whole system of patriarchy. In this system, a woman with no children is a shirker. **Mothering**, on the other hand, is simply the work of first bearing and then raising a child. The biological mother need not be the same person who raises the child. The person (or people) who raises the child need not be female. The extent to which this second formulation, mothering, can be untangled from any imposed societal values is unclear. (At the very least, the untangling would be the work of generations.)

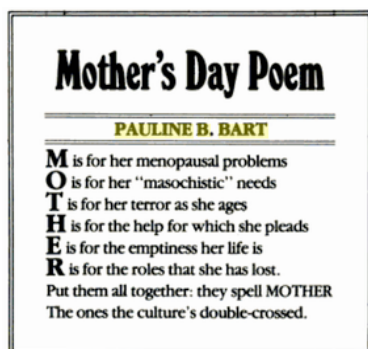
Discussion (= Analysis, not War)

- Discuss the terms and their meanings and implications. Discuss freely, exploring the question, not getting into a battle for prevalence!
- Next write down one statement per group member, which allows us to learn about your views on motherhood and mothering. Use your own words, even if you agree with the author.
- Do you think any of these terms might become obsolete in the world we have today? What are your analyses?

Part 2. More to help you think

Read the poem and continue exploring the questions:

- Do you think the poem reflects mothering or motherhood today? List and group your ideas.
- Together, write similar poems about mothers, fathers, parents... today. Please, remember to listen to everybody -- instead of discarding what people say, try to integrate or make a positive use of all you come up with! Collective writing is about listening, communicating, and being flexible with outcomes so we can truly explore the question. You can always write something on your own as a follow-up exercise.



Source: *Pulling Our Own Strings: Feminist Humor & Satire*, edited by Gloria Kaufman & Mary Kay Blakely (Indiana University Press, 1980)

Presentation of Analysis or Conclusions (Reporting your answers)

Share people's statements on motherhood and mothering (part 1), and your collective poem or poems (part 2).