



Unbecoming Mothers: The Social Production of Maternal Absence (Haworth Marriage and Family Therapy)

Diana Gustafson

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Learn the “who,” “what,” and “why” of unbecoming a mother

In a society where becoming a mother is naturalized, “unbecoming” a mother—the process of coming to live apart from biological children—is regarded as unnatural, improper, or even contemptible. Few mothers are more stigmatized than those who are perceived as having given up, surrendered, or abandoned their birth children. *Unbecoming Mothers: The Social Production of Maternal Absence* examines this phenomenon within the social and historical context of parenting in Canada, Australia, Britain, and the United States, with critical observations from social workers, policymakers, and historians. This unique book offers insights from the perspectives of children on the outside looking in and the lived experiences of women on the inside looking out.

Unbecoming Mothers: The Social Production of Maternal Absence explores how gender, race, class, and other social agents affect the ways women negotiate their lives apart from their children and how they attempt to recreate their identities and family structures. An interdisciplinary, international collection of academics, community workers, and mothers draws upon sources as diverse as archival records, a therapist’s interview, a dance script, and the class presentation of a student to offer refreshing insights on maternal absence that are innovative, accessible, and inspiring.

Unbecoming Mothers examines five assumptions about maternal absence and the families that emerge from that absence:

- the focus on parenting as highly gendered caring work done by women
- the idea that women share the same experience of unbecoming mothers and share the same circumstances and background
- the perception of maternal absence as a recent phenomenon
- the notion that women who want to manage their mother-work will make choices to overcome life’s obstacles
- the Western concept of womanhood being achieved through motherhood and the unrealistic ideal of the “good mother”

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