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O'Brien, Leigh M. & Swadener, Beth Blue. (2006). *Writing the Motherline: Mothers, Daughters, and Education.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

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Reviewed by Cynthia Miller Coffel
ACT, Inc.

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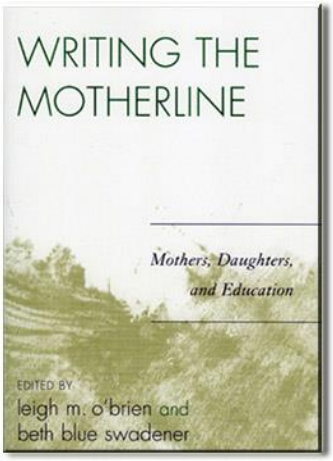
One of the things I love about being a teacher is that when I'm in the classroom, I use all of who I am and what I know. When I teach, I use lessons I've learned from being the mother of a son as well as lessons I learned long ago in education methods classes. I use my imagination and my body, my wit and the information I found in the newspaper yesterday. I also use the memories of stories I learned from my mother and from my mothers' mother.



This is one of the points, I think, of Leigh O'Brien and Beth Swadener's edited collection of essays, *Writing the Motherline: Mothers, Daughters, and Education*, published in 2006 by the University Press of America. The essays in this volume are ones in which mothers and daughters reflect on the ways in which their lives and work have been influenced by being mothers and daughters. In these essays, for example, one teacher educator explains how living in the patriarchal, Mormon state of Utah impacted her as she worked to become a professor, and how she watched those same mores affect her daughter; another describes how choices she made about the care of a disabled sister when she was young has helped her develop a theory of morality that informs her teaching, writing, and mothering; yet another teacher educator reviews the research on the importance of caring in the schools and describes her reactions to her daughter's run-in with a particularly uncaring high school teacher.

The essays in *Writing the Motherline* are firmly rooted in the body of research that sees story as central to the self and to our understanding of the world; they are rooted in a personal strand of feminist qualitative research, and in standpoint feminism. In the introduction to the eleven essays that make up the body of the book, the editors explain that the essays, written by female teacher-educators about the intersections between their practice and their mothering lives, are critical auto/ethnographies in which the authors are trying to break down a "personal-maternal/professional dichotomy." These women are then, "writing the motherline," the

motherline being, as I understand it, the link from mother to daughter, the stories and histories told by mother to daughter and the ways in which a daughter learns from her mother how best to live in the world. The editors quote Adrienne Rich, who wrote “the quality of the mother's life . . . is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to create livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist.” These essays are intended to be “counter-narratives to patriarchal framings of family,” and the editors hope that they will “affirm the power of women telling and reading their/our stories as a means of self-discovery, empowerment, and ultimately, cultural transformation.”

The essays in this volume are organized into three sections. In the first, female teacher educators write about how their work has been influenced by what they've learned by raising, talking with, and living with their daughters and granddaughters. In the second section, a series of mother-daughter pairs write about how living and working in academic environments has influenced them. In the third section female teacher educators write about the importance of acting for social justice both in their work as mothers of daughters and in their work as teacher educators. Many of these essays are written by both mother and daughter; a few are written by grandmother, mother, and daughter.

For the most part, I found these essays compelling. I appreciate the editors' impulse both to tell women's true stories, to make connections between mothers and daughters, and to make connections between mothering and teaching. I appreciate these stories as attempts to speak against the “master-narratives” of patriarchy.

Beth Blue Swadener

I found most interesting the essays in which the writer described her professional work in detail as it impacted her personal experiences, and vice versa. I most appreciated, for example, the essay in which Leigh M. O'Brien lays out the ways in which having a special-needs child has impacted her critique of the culture of schooling and the complexities of mothers' relationships to schools, and the essay in which Sue Novinger, a long-time literacy educator, finds herself distressed that her granddaughter is expected to learn to read in part by cutting out from magazines words that begin with “E” with no concern about the meanings of those words. Novinger compares this worrisome way of teaching reading to another teacher's more thoughtful use of similar materials when she shows how a teacher asked her students to design a mother's day catalogue with pictures different from the skinny, well-dressed white models found in most catalogues. The teacher Novinger describes also asked her students to survey their own mothers and find how different the kinds of gifts they wanted for mother's day were from the narrow choices provided in marketing catalogues. I also appreciated the essay in which two academics, mother and daughter, wrote about the complexities and pleasures of conducting research together; and I am glad to know there are so many intelligent women out there spending as much time working for social justice as it sounds like these women are.

But in these stories I found fewer women experiencing real sexism than I expected to—no one spoke of a colleague denied tenure because of the feminist nature of her research, of unequal pay for equal work, or even of being treated dismissively by a male professor. I found fewer stories told by women of color than I'd like—with the notable exception of the story by Gabriella Sotello Garcia, who describes how she worked her way up into academia from her childhood as the daughter of migrant workers; her daughter and granddaughter, both of mixed-race families, talk interestingly of how they work to keep close to their cultural origins and familiar values even as

they move into wider, and more middle-class worlds. There was no essay about how a lesbian teacher-educator had been influenced by her daughter's life, either.

I sometimes felt the writers in the stories came too exclusively from positions of comfort and more than middle-class ease, with their academic stories of spending a year working in Africa, or traveling to Thailand. I found an overemphasis on the literature about caring and a lack of critique of that literature, and I found some self-congratulatory phrases. I would have appreciated more theory and exact descriptions of practice—as in the essays I cited above—than I found in the book.

But these are just quibbles, and I applaud the impulse behind the book. Other teachers and teacher educators who are interested in women's lives, and women's relationships with their daughters, may be interested in this book, and this book could be useful for a woman's studies course as well as for courses in which teachers' lives are being studied. Because, as the editors say when they quote Mary Catherine Bateson, “When the choices and rhythms of lives change, as they have in our time, the study of lives becomes an increasing preoccupation.”

About the Reviewer

Cynthia Miller Coffel earned her PhD in language, literacy, and culture from the University of Iowa in 2007. Her dissertation, *Stories of Young Mothers*, tells the autobiographies of a small group of teen mothers trying to graduate from high school. She teaches classes in children's and young adult literature, and works as a curriculum writer at ACT, Inc.