

MOTHERS, MOTHERING AND COVID-19

Dispatches from a Pandemic EDITED BY ANDREA O'REILLY AND FIONA JOY GREEN

Demeter Press

REVIEW BY CHRISTINE PEETS

Through essays, creative art, poetry, photography and creative writing, the contributors to this anthology show us how mothers have dealt with the complexities of working, schooling and caring for children and others during the coronavirus pandemic. They describe, in vivid and often heart-breaking detail, experiences, knowledge and wisdom gained on the frontlines of motherhood. Photographs and other images are especially telling.

Catherine Moeller's embroidery art piece "Taming the Virus," on the book's cover, illustrates the virus in a medium traditionally associated with domesticity. Experiences are shared by mothers of diverse races and gender identities. Indigenous mothers from Turtle Island, as well as those in Australia, Brazil, India, Korea, Mexico, Spain, South Asia and the United Kingdom are included. The poem "Women's Witness" by Cali Prince ends with this: "And who was it/ who was perceived as a tortoise? / Yet more aptly/ was a multi-tasking hare/ or a triple headed/ one hundred-handed/ goddess?/ The women,/ they said."

Looking at the longer-term impact of the pandemic, the book's co-editor, Andrea O'Reilly, in her essay, "Certainly Not an Equal-Opportunity Pandemic," quotes sociologist Caitlyn Collins who argues, "When something has to give, it's often the women's careers."

The book was inspired by the popularity of O'Reilly's Facebook page, a place where mothers shared the impact of the pandemic on their mental and physical

health. O'Reilly knew there were more stories to be told. "Finally, and most urgently," she and co-editor Green note, "We want to explore how mothers are managing and what can be done to better support them in this pandemic."

While many of the essays discuss difficulties presented during the pandemic, there are noted examples of meeting these challenges with what is referred to by

Sara Hayden and Lynn O'Brien Hallstein

as "gratitude and grace." Some academics said they felt privileged to have a job that allowed flexible hours and the option of working from home, while recognizing that not everyone can do so. New ways of accessing work, health care, education and social connections provide some positive ways forward for the post-pandemic era.