

**The Power of Maternal Writing: A Critical Analysis of Naomi Wolf's Memoir *Misconceptions: Truth, Lies, and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood***

قوة كتابة الأمومة: تحليل نقدي لسيرة نعومي وولف المفاهيم الخاطئة: الحقائق، الأكاذيب، والمفاجآت  
في الرحلة إلى الأمومة (2001)

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**Abstract**

In her book *Of Woman Born* (1976), the eminent American feminist scholar Adrienne Rich calls on mothers to unveil their mothering experiences through writing, an idea echoed by many other feminists such as Marianne Hirsch in *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989). Despite this appeal, maternal voices remain largely missing as mother writers keep their maternal anxieties a secret. This research paper sheds light on Naomi Wolf's memoir *Misconceptions* (2001) as an endeavor in which a mother writer bravely exposes her motherhood journey. Contrary to many responses that criticize Wolf's work, this article frames the study as valuable and empowering. Drawing on Andrea O'Reilly's theory of matricentric Feminism, this paper posits Wolf's narrative as a reflexive mirror to contemporary motherhood with all its challenges and complexities. The memoir participates in the ongoing struggle to move mothers from patriarchal motherhood to empowered mothering.

**Keywords:** Maternal writing, patriarchal motherhood, empowered mothering, unveiling motherhood, the motherhood journey, maternal subjectivity.

**المخلص:** وجهت الكاتبة الأمريكية النسوية الشهيرة أديان ريتش نداءاً للأمهات للكشف عن تجربتهن في الأمومة من خلال الكتابة في كتابها *من امرأة ولدت* (1976). كثير من الكاتبات النسويات قمن بمحاولة مماثلة مثل ماريان هيرش في كتابها *الأم/البنات: الحكمة* (1989). وعلى الرغم من هذا النداء، إلا أن أصوات الأمهات تبقى مفقودة إلى حد كبير، حيث تبقى الكاتبات الأمهات الصعوبات المصاحبة لتجربة الأمومة في منأى عن القراء. تسلط هذه الورقة البحثية الضوء على مذكورة المفاهيم الخاطئة (2001) لنعومي وولف باعتبارها محاولة جريئة لتسليط الضوء على رحلة الأمومة. وعلى عكس العديد من الردود السلبية التي تنتقد كتاب وولف، فإن هذه المقالة تصور الدراسة على أنها قيمة وفعالة. بالاعتماد على النظرية النسوية المحورية على الأمومة لأندريا أوريلي، يعتبر هذا البحث سرد وولف كمرآة عاكسة للأمومة المعاصرة بكل تحدياتها وتعقيداتها. ساهمت المذكرة في النضال المستمر لدحض الأمومة الأبوية وتمكين الأمومة. الكلمات المفتاحية: كتابة الأمومة، الأمومة الأبوية، الأمومة المتمكنة، كشف الأمومة، رحلة الأمومة، ذاتية الأمومة.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This article sheds light on Naomi Wolf's maternal memoir *Misconceptions: Truth, Lies, and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood* (2001), examining it as a response to Adrienne Rich's call for mothers to unveil their experiences as mother writers. It analyzes the work exclusively from the perspective of the mother. The work values Wolf's endeavor to break the taboo surrounding her maternal experience.

After decades of feminism, representations of motherhood still hold to normative cultural stereotypes and behaviors. These representations idealize motherhood and confirm its joyfulness hiding its challenges and anxieties. Mothers experience enormous pressure to conform to the demanding myth of motherhood. This article aims to address this problem by exploring Wolf's memoir as a major feminist contribution that does not romanticize motherhood but, instead, outlines its challenges and traumas. It examines how the memoir challenges deeply embedded cultural myths and representations of motherhood.

Wolf's honest account of her motherhood journey does not receive the critical attention it deserves as it violates the culturally tabooed maternal privacy. Contrary to the opposing viewpoints expressed in studies by Jennie Briston (2001), Susannah Herbert (2001), and India Knight (2001), this study regards the memoir as a significant feminist contribution that calls for maternal empowerment. Drawing on the insights of Rich's *Of Woman Born*, this article demonstrates that Wolf's memoir endeavors to establish motherhood as a site of empowerment, autonomy, and agency. Wolf, as a feminist mother, calls for a motherhood "revolution" and opens up a candid conversation with Andrea O'Reilly's theory of matricentric feminism that significantly values the transformative potential of maternal writing.

## **2. The Backlash against Maternal Writing: The Case of Wolf's Memoir**

In her book *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Marianne Hirsch points to the absence of mothers from literary representations. She interestingly uses the case of Jacosta, Oedipus' mother

whose voice and story are missing from Sophocles's tragedy, *Oedipus Rex* (1989, p. 4). Hirsch wonders why Jacosta rarely appears in the play and poses an intriguing question "where the stories of mothers are in the plots of sons and daughters?" (1989, p. 4). She contends that writers suppress the story of the mother and silence her voice. In *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities* (1991), Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy point out that "we learn less about what is like to mother than about what is like to be mothered, even when the author has both experiences" (p. 2). Instead of writing about their experiences as mothers, mother writers often portray themselves as daughters. Critics also tend to focus more on daughters dismissing any subjectivity of mothers and making their experiences unworthy of literary exposure and discourse (Reddy, 1991, p. 1). To address this issue, contemporary feminist scholars such as Rich, Hirsch, and O'Reilly make a strong appeal for mother writers to uncover their mothering experiences. Despite this appeal, maternal writings remain largely unexposed.

As the twenty first century unfolds, some autobiographies and maternal memoirs appear in many parts of the globe. The most prominent ones include *Misconceptions* by Naomi Wolf, *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* (2001) by the British author Rachel Cusk, and *Le Bébé* (2002) by the French writer Marie Darrieussecq. The just listed works all attest to the great sense of motherhood while also highlighting the challenges that face mother writers.

In her memoir, Wolf candidly shares her experiences of motherhood and parenting. She weaves together personal anecdotes with a broad range of interviews she conducts with other mothers. The work encompasses three parts entitled "Pregnancy", "Birth", and "New Life", respectively. The first part covers nine sections, each dedicated to a month of pregnancy. The second part focuses on the experience of giving birth with all its pains, sorrows, and joys. The final part revolves around Wolf's "New Life" with her newborn baby; it centers entirely on parenting that terribly affects Wolf's marital and professional life. The memoir concludes with a section entitled "A Mother's Manifesto" in which Wolf passionately advocates for a motherhood revolution to ensure a successful

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and peaceful mothering experience for both the mother and the child (2001, p. 287).

Wolf's memoir is a significant contribution to the "revolution" she advocates for as it represents a step towards maternal agency. It situates itself among the major literary canon of maternal writing that aims at maternal subjectivity and power. Using the first person point of view of the mother, maternal writing credits the mother's perspective and makes her a subject in maternal narratives. Susanne Juhasz notes, maternal writing is "a gesture towards recognition" (2003, p. 395). To achieve "recognition", Wolf centers her memoir entirely on motherhood, making herself the subject of her own maternal experience and achieving "maternal subjectivity" through writing. Despite being a vital element in the struggle for recognition, maternal subjectivity remains a taboo topic. Critics often view maternal writing as confessional and over-generalize it as senseless and unable to meet the expectations of literary discourse. Ruth Quiney's article, "Confessions of the New Capitalist Mother: Twenty-First Century Writing on Motherhood as Trauma", highlights this issue. She points to critics often ridiculing mother-writers for considering their maternal experiences worthy of literary exposure and discussion: "Critics [...] mock mother-writers for valuing their own maternal experience highly enough to presume it worthy of literary exposure and discussion" (2007, p. 25). The maternal experience is doomed personal and is, therefore, unable to fit public expression. Wolf's memoir meets similar criticism and hostility as it exclusively portrays personal maternal issues.

Upon its release, Wolf's memoir met a fierce backlash from critics who were uncomfortable with its unrestrained openness. The acclaimed television director Susannah Herbert expressed her disapproval not only of Wolf's work, but also of that of Rachel Cusk, detecting a "sense of violated privacy" that infused their respective works (2001). In Herbert's view, the more private and mysterious the experience of motherhood is, the more exalted and triumphant mothers will feel. Her article concludes with a confession that maternal issues are

deeply personal and “aren’t tradable on the open market” (2001). As a mother writer herself, Herbert firmly maintains that she would never reveal the private intricacies of her own maternal life. While her perspective may seem reasonable, it is astonishing to find a female writer who does not recognize the significance of other mothers’ endeavors to halt the oppressive cultural assumptions governing motherhood. In so doing, Herbert participates in silencing mothers and in perpetuating the secrecy around maternal anxieties.

Jennie Briston is another writer who takes issue with Wolf’s memoir and those of some other mother writers. She writes an article entitled “Playpen World: Jennie Briston on the Cult of Mummy Lit” as a response to many memoirs including Wolf and Cusk’s. She uses the terms “phobic” and “playpen” to describe the worlds these writers create (2001, p. 114). She classifies both works as “mummy literature” conveying a depressing message to mothers to be; parenting is more challenging and stressful; it “is more pressured than it has ever been” (2001, p. 115). Briston suggests that such literature may even discourage women from having children altogether, encouraging them “to choose childlessness instead” (2001, p. 115). In fact, Briston herself confesses that she would never have children if she believed the narrative put forth by Wolf and Cusk. She disagrees with their descriptions of motherhood as “horrid” and “hard” (2001, p. 114). Like Herbert, Briston aligns herself with a culture that stifles mothers and perpetuates the taboos surrounding their maternal subjectivity. In such a culture, any writer who reveals her maternal experience risks both criticism from critics and disapproval from the culture at large. The mother writer, therefore, must keep her maternal anxieties secret if she is to preserve both a successful mothering experience and a great professional career.

Like Briston and Herbert, the British journalist and author India Knight expresses her resentment and anger at both Wolf and Cusk describing them as “self-obsessed bore[s]” (2001). In her opinion, mothers should prioritize the wellbeing and happiness of their children rather than making “happiness an option for [themselves]” (Knight, 2001). Knight sees nothing special in these memoirs, as they bring nothing new and everyone can write about the same topic; those are things all mothers experience and know. Knight admits that she

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sees no problem surrounding motherhood and she comfortably associates being a mother with happiness. She contends, “There are no solutions, because fundamentally there is no problem” (2001). Conversely, the “grotesquely self-obsessed modern parenting”, Knight describes, does not negate the joyfulness of motherhood. Wolf expresses how “tender and intimate” mothering is (2001, p. 209). The disappointment Wolf experiences is quite natural and experienced by most mothers; she cannot escape the ambivalence inherent in the nature of motherhood.

Briston, Herbert, and Knight participate in perpetuating the silence surrounding the maternal experience, despite it being inevitable for them as women. The intense hostility of critics towards maternal subjectivity leads Quiney to speculate on whether Rachel Cusk’s maternal memoir would gain access to publication if it were her first work, a speculation that equally applies to Wolf’s memoir. Both works risk acceptance for publication as they violate deeply embedded cultural assumptions and behaviors. In contrast, reading Wolf’s memoir through feminist lenses adds significant value to the work and credits its strong commitment. The memoir’s worth lies in the candid conversation it opens with Rich’s *Of Woman Born*. Wolf’s memoir stands as a tribute to the courage and resilience of mother writers. It confirms the transformative power of maternal writing.

### **3. A Matricentric Feminist Reading of *Wolf’s Memoir***

A matricentric feminist reading of Wolf’s memoir is noteworthy as it provides a nuanced and insightful perspective. The work front and center embodies the core principles and objectives of O’Reilly’s matricentric feminism. First, the book recounts a woman’s journey into motherhood and is exclusively mother defined and centered. Exposing the defining agenda of her theory, O’Reilly looks forward “to develop research and activism from the experience and the perspective of mothers” correcting the daughter defined perceptions that has dominated discussions of motherhood (*Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice*, 2021, p. 46). Wolf’s unwavering focus on the maternal lens

throughout the memoir reinforces the central tenets of matricentric feminism. She exposes the limited and often ignored experiences of mothers and proves this topic worthy “of serious and sustained scholarly inquiry” (O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice*, 2021, p. 46) . The work reinforces O'Reilly's theory by fighting the biological trait of motherhood and advocating shared parenting. It also aims at social change and justice for mothers wherein empowered mothering replaces patriarchal assumptions that govern motherhood. The matricentric feminist approach confirms the refreshing and valuable contribution of Wolf's memoir in enriching discussions of motherhood and feminism.

Motherhood and feminism intertwine in Wolf's memoir and grab the attention of other feminists. Driven by their feminist inclinations, these writers value the memoir and provide arguments against its backlash. The feminist scholar Samira Kawash credits the memoir's focus that aims at social justice. She values the way in which Wolf honestly underpins the adversities that come with motherhood claiming it a major feminist issue (Summer 2011, p. 970). Wolf's commitment to feminist matters is certainly deliberate as she outlines it as her major objective. She points out: “Only by listening closely to the full spectrum of stories that women confess to one another, including stories that they intuit they must not speak out loud in our culture, can the taboo against voicing our fears and bowdlerizing our experiences be broken” (2001, p. 10). The quote clearly emphasizes the mothers' need to unveil their mothering experiences and to break the “taboo” surrounding it. Wolf's claim situates her memoir among the major matricentric feminist literary canon that prioritizes the perspective of the mother. It reminds readers of Rich's belief to share personal and painful stories of motherhood to create “collective description of the world” from a mother centered unbiased vision (Rich, 1976, p. 16). Maternal centered descriptions stand as block stones against the culturally idealized notions of motherhood and refute it.

Wolf, as did Rich before her, interrogates the myth of the “good mother” that has dominated literature and fights unrealistic expectations of motherhood. While Rich occasionally refers to her experience as a mother, Wolf provides a

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complete and practical account of her motherhood journey. Both writers confirm that motherhood as viewed by society is “biological”, “effortless”, and “natural” (Wolf, 2001, p. 4). Through narrating her personal experience as well as experiences of her peers, Wolf endeavors to falsify the cultural assumptions that guarantee the naturalness and easiness of the motherhood experience. Elizabeth Podnieks in her article “Matrifocal Voices” uses the term “matrifocal literature” to describe texts entirely written in the mother’s first person point of view. She argues that this kind of texts reinforces the mother’s voice and perspective that endow the maternal with value and power. Matrifocal narratives are authentic accounts that “contest or negotiate traditional ideologies of the ‘good’ mother as self-sacrificing, nurturing, and sexless” (2020, p. 176). Wolf’s memoir is a prototypical matrifocal narrative that refutes the culturally defined institution by making the mother’s voice discernible and strong. In so doing, it embodies the key defining feature of matricentric feminism.

Wolf’s *Misconceptions* owes Rich so much because she is the first to differentiate between the terms “experience” and “institution”. The jargon Rich chooses attests to the large disparity that exists between the institution of “patriarchal motherhood” and the actual experiences of mothers (Rich, 1976, p. 263). The legacy of Rich manifests itself in Wolf’s memoir at different intervals. Both writers challenge the patriarchal institution of motherhood that guarantees mothers’ demotion. Wolf believes that the culturally defined “ideology of motherhood”, a term synonymous with what Rich terms “patriarchal motherhood”, can only be destroyed if mothers tell their own stories (2001, p. 6). Writing her maternal memoir, Wolf undeniably makes a significant contribution in moving motherhood from institution/motherhood to experience/mothering. The memoir puts into practice what Rich called for two decades before. Countering patriarchal motherhood is arguably one of the underlying features of matricentric feminism that is so much discernible in Wolf’s memoir. The theory front and center seeks to empower mothers by freeing them from cultural patriarchal conventions that continue to put enormous pressure on them to conform to traditional oppressive norms. The matricentric feminist approach



seeks to promote mothers' agency by uncovering maternal challenges and complexities and inventing empowering maternal tactics and strategies (O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice*, 2021, p. 46).

Wolf's choice to expose her personal experience as a mother stems from her conviction that mothers need more societal support. "The experience of becoming a mother", she argues, is "undersupported, sentimentalized, and even manipulated at women's expense" (2001, p. 2). This quote echoes some arguments in Rich's *Of Woman Born* where she states, "Motherhood as institution has ghettoized female potentialities [...] female possibility has been literally massacred on the site of motherhood" (1976, p. 13). Both writers believe that culture transforms the experiences of motherhood to put women down. The idealization of motherhood continues to guarantee mothers' silence. Throughout her memoir, Wolf points to the lack of support mothers experience at all levels. On the one hand, she sheds light on the challenges and difficulties that mothers face. On the other hand, she points out the lack of support that complicates the challenges of motherhood. Wolf confesses that the American culture teaches mothers to suppress their "feelings" and "discoveries" preserving the taboos that govern the maternal experience (2001, p. 2). She demonstrates that many cultural assumptions and ideologies that need interrogation continue to outline motherhood.

The memoir outlines the scant and sometimes misleading information presented about the motherhood issue (Wolf, 2001, p. 3). Learning that she is soon to become a mother, Wolf is desperately in need of a full maternal guide. She complains about the incomplete and sometimes fake information she reads in books and watches in videos. She argues:

All too often, women are offered sugarcoated niceties to guide them on the [motherhood] journey, misleading information, half-truths, and platitudes. Books, classes, and videos available to mothers to be, I discovered, frequently have hidden agendas. Many of them omit aspects of the birth experience, or withhold information to advance their cause, to women's detriment. (2001, p. 3)

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Wolf's statement clearly expresses her opinion and disappointment with the materials at hand. The poor and sometimes fake package she gathers terribly affects her journey to motherhood. According to her, books romanticize motherhood to guarantee that a mother's complaints will never find their way to surface. She criticizes the book *What to Expect When You're Expecting* claiming that it focuses on the brighter side of motherhood. The book also attacks mothers who tell horrifying stories about the experience of giving birth. For Wolf, stories mothers tell are "more dramatic, more true [sic] to life, and at times more dire than what books expose (2001, p. 5). While some books give only "half-truths", she argues, others do not the least mention some major motherhood issues treating them "as a private problem" (2001, p. 230). Wolf is so terrified that many guidebooks she owns prefer not to address the issue of balancing work and family responsibilities. The matricentric trend of *Misconceptions* gives the mother a chance to interrogate and correct fake and romanticized visions of motherhood.

Wolf honestly confesses that real motherhood is "unexpected" and very different from the idealized version frequently portrayed in society. The matrifocal narrative she composes artfully demythologizes motherhood and exposes its challenges, complexities, and contradictions. It stands as an explicit social critique of American culture that leaves mothers with very few and limited options. The memoir confirms that the topic of motherhood is worth investigating because of the hidden secrets it carries. Wolf's book arguably confirms the complex and compelling nature Rich and O'Reilly attribute to motherhood. It, therefore, stands as a testament for Rich's argument: "We know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel than about the nature and meaning of motherhood" (1976, p. 11). Wolf's insights validate the complexity of motherhood and provide a powerful and passionate analysis of her American culture. Most mothers, Wolf argues, have "misconceptions" and false ideas about motherhood as culture frequently prescribes fake standards and ideologies. Wolf's memoir is an explicit challenge to traditional cultural assumptions that literally massacred motherhood and inscribed "the murder of the mother" into

every social texture (Irigaray, 1991, p. 47). The memoir deliberately challenges the literary matricide and reclaims the voice of the mother strongly advocated by the matricentric feminist literary theory.

Demythologizing motherhood, Wolf highlights both the physical pain motherhood causes and the social and psychological ramifications of being a mother. She reflects on what it means to be a mother writer. Wolf analyzes motherhood and sees it as self-robbing. Yet, she confesses that motherhood is joyful and fulfilling. When she first learned about her pregnancy, Wolf felt mixed feelings of love and hatred; she cannot completely accept the idea because deep down she knew that her ambitions as a writer were at stake, yet she did not repudiate it completely. Wolf writes, "I experienced, in spite of myself, a little thrill of joy" (2001, p. 15). The expression "in spite of myself" shows that to her, motherhood is not a joyful experience, yet, feelings of joy intrude to affirm her maternal instinct. Bronwyn Davis and D'arne Welch attribute the ambivalence and conflict surrounding motherhood not to the experience of motherhood per se, but to the measures that determine the quality of mothering provided ("Motherhood and Feminism: Are they Compatible? The Ambivalence of Mothering", p. 411). Wolf makes a similar observation when she explains that societal influence generates maternal ambivalence (2001, p. 63).

In addition to the physical pain, discomfort, lack of support, and the deadly possibilities motherhood causes, there are many "symbolic deaths" Wolf describes. She states:

We deny the many symbolic deaths a contemporary pregnant woman undergoes: From the end of her solitary selfhood, to the loss of her prematernal shape, to the eclipse of her psychologically carefree identity, to the transformation of her marriage, to the decline in her status as a professional or worker. (2001, p. 7)

Becoming a mother for the first time, according to Wolf, disrupts a woman's earlier life. It moves her from a strong woman to a selfless creature totally consumed by the mothering task. The earlier status she hardily worked for and secured is threatened, as she aches to balance her duties as a mother and a worker. "In motherhood" to borrow Rachel Cusk's words, "a woman exchanges her public significance for a range of private meanings, and like sounds, outside a

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certain range, they can be very difficult for other people to identify” (2001, p. 3). The barrier of language manifests the lack of understanding mothers experience. Wolf’s authentic matricentric narrative brings overlooked maternal issues back to the center. It claims that motherhood is self-robbing at many levels. At the familial level, a woman’s marital relationship is no longer successful as time now belongs not to her but to the baby. A new mother also loses her “prematernal shape” due to pregnancy and the caesarean intervention. Wolf comments on new mothers undergoing these changes as symbolically “dead” because their pre maternal success, status, and shape are now at stake.

Wolf explains how hard it is to balance the responsibilities of mothering and writing. She recounts many scenes where the presence of the baby spoils the event. She declines an invitation from a feminist organization that wants her to speak as a guest. The reason why Wolf refuses the offer is that the organization has no “child care” center to hold the baby while she is talking. Wolf shows her puzzlement because this organization, despite holding the title “feminist”, does not offer services that help mothers with children. She suddenly realizes that the baby’s responsibility is hers no matter how busy she is. “My baby” Wolf writes: “[is] my personal hobby; my awkward, living handbag for which there was no room” (2001, p. 210). She also declares that there are times when she has long breaks from her work as a writer; sometimes she does not write in many months because she has no time to. Wolf expresses to her readers how betrayed and deceived she feels. The inability to balance work and personal duties as a mother causes her trauma. She feels depressed at many times, and resorts to walks in the evening as a remedy for her traumatic situation.

Wolf’s “unexpected” truth about motherhood transforms her into a very sensitive person who reacts at the slightest provocation; she easily cries and feels greatly wounded (Wolf, 2001, p. 208). She demonstrates that working and mothering are irreconcilable and that they generate feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and distress. Wolf’s idea matches many studies that associate motherhood with trauma such as those by Arlie Russell Hochschild (1992),

Judith Warner (2005), and Sharon Hays (1998). She declares that trauma is the defining feature of her first motherhood experience. Wolf confesses that her disappointment is intense to the point that she takes a long time to accept Rosa as her child, despite the love and affection she has for her. She also finds it difficult “thinking about her [Rosa] by name” (Wolf, 2001, p. 207). It is important to note that motherhood does not generate these challenges and anxieties, as it is not naturally oppressive. Motherhood tyrannical nature is a cultural touch meant to conceal maternal wishes and identities. Wolf’s traumatic experience is common among most mothers she interviews. The challenges put forth by Wolf do not negate motherhood. Instead, they inscribe maternal power in a society that validates mothering as the most difficult task one can do.

To overcome the trauma she experiences, Wolf seeks solace in the company of other mothers. The memoir matches the major contemporary feminist canon that prioritizes discussion among mothers. Scholars, like O’Reilly, share their mothering experiences as an attempt to help other mothers. In 2008, she released her book *Feminist Mothering* in which she exposes her personal experience as a mother writer. Other scholars like, Fiona Joy Green, Emily Jeremiah, and Erika Howritz, among others, interview mothers to learn about the mothering strategies they find useful. In *Misconceptions*, Wolf adopts both options; she comfortably shares her motherhood anxieties with other mothers and, in return, interviews many mothers to learn from them. Wolf acknowledges that all the mothers she interviews confirm that their experiences are similar (2001, p. 20). They all admit that their first-time motherhood experience was horrifying on all levels.

As a way of promoting good enough mothering, the memoir strongly advocates shared parenting which, Wolf conceives, is completely missing. It shares the matricentric feminist belief that “the essential task of mothering is not, and should not be, the sole responsibility and duty of mothers” (O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice*, 2021, p. 46). Wolf claims that equality between parents ends with the birth of the first baby. The mothers Wolf interviews confirm how much alone they find themselves in the parenting task. Wolf claims: “Many marriages suffer as younger women, raised to expect equal parenting, find the equality of their supposedly trusted modern partnership

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shipwrecked on the rocks of childbirth” (2001, p. 8). She describes how her husband resumes his work and his previous normal life two weeks after her birthing experience. Wolf retrospectively thinks about her situation and compares herself to “Prometheus chained to a rock”, an expression that expresses how tied and threatened she feels (2001, p. 131). Interviewees complain that they do not have time for themselves even for the smallest activities like showering. Wolf shows her disappointment with the post maternal life she and her peers live. She attributes their miserable conditions to the lack of support from their partners. Wolf points out: “Women who work outside the home also do the lion’s share of work within it” (2001, p. 233). The Memoir demonstrates that with all these responsibilities heaped upon the mother, balancing professional and maternal duties seems impossible.

Wolf’s state of mind is similar to so many working mothers who show their resentment of a status quo they see as unfair. In *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (1989), Hochschild reflects on the divided loyalty she has as a mother professor; she has to balance her career duties with that of mothering. Hochschild explains that the presence of David, her baby, disrupts her career and lessens her production. She expresses how envious she is of males who leave their babies behind and do not have to worry about them because they leave them at “loving hands” (1989, p. xi). Hochschild attributes the failure of marriage to the unequal responsibilities shared by spouses. She points to the fact that patriarchy is not over, but it only takes on a new form as mothers do everything alone both outside and inside home. Judith Warner also articulates her thoughts about modern motherhood in her book *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (2005). She outlines the major anxieties surrounding the experience of motherhood including the lack of equal parenting. She investigates parenting styles at length and confirms that male partners do not seriously undertake “co-parenting”. Warner reflects on the postpartum depression and the traumatic outcomes that emerge out of the mothers’ exhaustion. She, like Hochschild before her, advocates shared parenting and demonstrates how helpful it is to reduce the depression mothers experience. Shared parenting opens up the

possibility to reduce pressures heaped upon the working mother. Discussions of shared parenting put forth by Hochschild and Warner give credibility to Wolf's argument.

Wolf's striking honesty, commitment, and devotion in approaching maternal issues establish her work as a matrifocal authentic narrative. The memoir's mother centered quality counters the silence that pervades the majority of maternal achievements. Margaretta Jolly in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms* highlights the challenges that mother writers face when writing truthfully about their experiences. In her opinion, the ideology of the "good mother" urges mother writers to expose the positive side of their maternal experience hiding all other negative aspects (2013, p. 617). Jolly explains that autobiographies and memoirs are most of the time incomplete because their writers skip over many unpleasant details (2013, p. 617). The literary scholar and critic Juhasz shares a similar standpoint with Jolly. She explains that the impossibility of meeting the idealistic "social construction" of motherhood makes it almost impossible for mothers to write truthfully about their experiences (2003, p. 407). In this respect, Wolf takes a courageous step towards maternal writing with her often complete and fruitful contribution. Wolf's memoir is one of the very few endeavors that genuinely represents the realities of motherhood. She defies the mythological representation of motherhood through her honest portrayals, which are both rare and refreshing in the literary world.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research paper studies Naomi Wolf's *Misconceptions* in the light of O'Reilly's matricentric feminist literary theory. Drawing on the legacy of Rich in Wolf's memoir, the work demonstrates that cultural assumptions governing motherhood continue to dominate even in changing social times and after decades of feminism. It examines the power of maternal writing as evidenced through Wolf's memoir. Wolf opposes patriarchal motherhood by making her memoir entirely mother defined and centered. The matricentric quality of Wolf's work reinforces the mother's voice and gives her the chance to provide a truthful

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account of her motherhood journey. *Misconceptions* is a major contribution to the feminist field as it helps to falsify deeply embedded motherhood ideologies that guarantee the naturalness and easiness of mothering. It urges society to validate mothering as the most difficult task one can do. Wolf criticizes the American culture accusing it of many social imbalances and tries to correct the fake image society attributes to motherhood. The memoir advocates shared parenting as a possibility to promote mothers' agency. *Misconceptions* is appealing because its author wittingly conducts an objective research. This study appreciates Wolf's honest portrayals as they contribute to creating matrifocal societies that grant mothers more agency and power.



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