

The
JUGGLING

Coming Undone in the Age of Anxiety

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UBC Press • Vancouver • Toronto

CONTENTS

	Acknowledgments	<i>xi</i>
<i>Ch. 1</i>	Coming Undone	<i>1</i>
<i>Ch. 2</i>	The Juggling Mother	<i>30</i>
<i>Ch. 3</i>	C-Suite Moms	<i>56</i>
<i>Ch. 4</i>	You Are What You Nurse	<i>77</i>
<i>Ch. 5</i>	Avoiding Regret	<i>103</i>
<i>Ch. 6</i>	Dropping the Ball	<i>121</i>
	Notes	<i>133</i>
	Works Cited	<i>139</i>
	Index	<i>/ 161</i>

Ch. I

COMING UNDONE

WHEN I FOUND OUT I WAS PREGNANT, even though it was intentional, I felt ambivalent. I wanted to have a family, but I did not want to become a *mother*. After some anxious reflection, made more unsettling by the precarity of being a pregnant body on the academic job market, I attributed my doubt to both a lifetime of responsibly tended internalized misogyny and fear that gendered labour and its related resentments would defeat me upon having a baby. Acknowledging this could not mitigate the numbness of postpartum depression, which came in dense waves following the birth of my first child.

Through the postpartum period, I was haunted by the misogynist cliché that mothers are most suited to be bearers of nature (and not creators of culture). I was tired and often alone with a mercurial newborn. He cried a lot. I was no longer able to think, in a sustained manner, about abstract ideas the way I so often had before becoming pregnant. I became susceptible to missing appointments and dropping correspondence. Tears of release never came, so I waded through solitary days with little awareness of myself. My partner was supportive, but I was oftentimes unreachable.

Despite having studied the insidious and disciplinary features of the institution of contemporary motherhood for years, I felt myself attempting to perform a kind of motherhood that was ironically aloof or even detached and cynical but also innately capable: proficient at care work while quick with a dismissive joke about the sometimes-intense minutiae of pumping breast milk in the middle of the night or carrying a dehydrated newborn through a rainstorm to the emergency room. Feminist intellectual sensibilities certainly animated my reflections throughout

this time, but they could not exempt me from the visions of productivity, efficiency, independence, resilience, and flexibility that I had so long criticized but still so diligently pursued. As a privileged Canadian academic with a benefits package that includes up to a year of combined maternity and parental leave while earning nearly my full salary, I had planned on applying my scholarly discipline to this time away from the university. I thought I could sufficiently dote on the infant during his waking hours and turn my attention to cultivating my intellect and spirit during naps. I realize now how this sounds, especially to parents whose babies scoff at napping as mine did, but at the time, the question of why I couldn't even open one of the dozens of books I had stockpiled for this absence from academic work consumed me. Why couldn't I read a book? Why couldn't I even remember to feed myself? Would I recover? What would that *feel* like?

As a fellow mother reminded me during this time, the days are long, but the years are short. Temporal qualifications like this can be forgiving in times of depression, as can validation that days become meandering rivers that narrow, widen, and turn at different rates and flow into one another with little demarcation or notice.¹ But this is not a book about postpartum depression, nor is it about caring temporalities, though they feature.

This book is about emotional responsibility, or affective duty as I have come to describe it. It is about the invisible and poorly understood emotional labour that women have a duty to take on to make things work as they juggle competing labour responsibilities. It is about feelings that compel us, lure us, make us compliant in our own sense of undoing. This book asks the questions: What is this affective duty of motherhood? Where does it come from? How does it bind us? Why and how do we reproduce it in ourselves and others? And what is at stake for mothers for whom the performance of juggling is foreclosed?

As I prepared to go “back to work” – to the extent that preparation is possible – I would daydream about how to secure my reputation as someone who could skilfully juggle my first year of new course preparations and life with a new baby. I envisaged myself floating stylishly through the corridors of higher learning, taking on meetings with a smile

to convey the ease with which I was conducting my responsibilities. Though I was mindful of the layers of irony involved in trying to advance radical ideas about liberating motherhood while personally attempting to conceal its messiness, I could not resist conforming to the performance of the talented juggling mother. If I had to be read as a new mother in my new place of work (breast pump and puffy eyes would give me away), I wanted to be known as being profoundly competent and even striking in my emotional stability. But, as I wrote in a journal at the time, I also felt pulled towards a performance of a harried, encumbered, “falling apart” kind of mother as I juggled paid and unpaid labour, ultimately maintaining the status of mothers as the most flexible and productive subjects. I wanted my colleagues to know how hard I was working and that they could trust my work to be stellar despite my family status. Maybe I even wanted to intimidate them.

When I became pregnant for a second time, I felt the affective duty intensify. Now the mother of a young toddler, my body would soon reveal my maternal status to my colleagues, and I would once again feel the sting of internalized misogyny as I imagined my pregnant body to be antithetical to the unencumbered intellectual mind. It was time for the performances of rejecting my body – of concealing my growing belly, of denying my fatigue, of “leaning in” to more professional activities than one person should reasonably manage. When I betrayed my pregnant status, I attempted to assure my colleagues in numerous ways, usually through self-deprecating humour, that I was capable of responding to my body while never reducing my productive capacity.

I tell this personal story to provide testimony to mediate between the personal, the social, and the scholarly. For instance, Ann Cvetkovich’s (2012, 24) depression journals were the “formative crucible” for her scholarly work on depression as a public feeling; Ahmed’s (2014, 18) experiences of being charged with wilfulness helped her develop the wilful subject as a sweaty concept; and Clare’s (1999) personal experiences, combined with political thinking, led him to explore the meaning of home. My experience of becoming a mother as I was also becoming a scholar in turn elucidates my conceptual work on the juggling mother, both as a subject and as an affective duty. Rather than being fully reparative, though,

situating myself as a juggling mother has been daunting. Knowing that responsibility for affective life and social welfare has been downloaded to the private family (Duggan 2004) only rubs against my secret desire to achieve visibility for overcoming this. It seems I cannot escape the affective duty, so perhaps I will not escape coming undone in its pursuit.

My research on the institution of motherhood has examined how mothers are represented in popular media as skilfully juggling paid and unpaid labour while smiling through obvious chaos – brought on by nuclear-family arrangements, social pressures to pursue best practices in parenting, and unsustainable economic and environmental futures. My focus on these commercial and popular representations sharpened when I felt myself trying to convince those closest to me that I, too, could be recognized as this agile, juggling subject. If I could no longer pursue a reputation as an independent, efficient, flexible worker, I would juggle to the brink of exhaustion, but never let it compromise me. I would roll my eyes at baby vomit or fussing and not miss a beat in discussions of current affairs, particularly with my male colleagues. The desire to perform this way felt bigger than me. I could not imagine an alternative. The impetus to juggle and perform a sort of emotional togetherness felt, and still feels, unsettling in its power.

The Juggling Mother is about the social expectation that women, particularly as they have children, must juggle an unfair share of paid and unpaid work. But more than that, this book is an invitation to imagine how these multiple labours are bound by this affective duty, an untold commitment to the performance of maternal responsibility, a demonstration of one's *devotion* to juggling multiple labours, a willingness to push oneself to the emotional edge as a condition of one's political visibility. A kind of labour tethered to agility – that is both physical and emotional, and an accumulation of dedication, resilience, and productive and reproductive capacity. A duty that is disciplinary, and performed by some mothers, foreclosed to others, and intimately felt by those in its wake.

Across scholarly disciplines and commercial genres, much has been written about the gendered and racialized labour burdens of mothers, particularly as their labour continues to be characterized by unpaid care work even as they also work for pay. A woman's work is never done, and

the conditions of this labour are precarious (Bashevkin 2002). In the contemporary moment, adult women are encouraged and disciplined into paid labour as gender-neutral workers under ableist conditions (Daly 2011; Giullari and Lewis 2005; Lister 2003). Middle-class domestic labour is increasingly outsourced (Glenn 2010; Hochschild 2012; Tronto 2013), often to underpaid migrant women (Mohanty 2013; Torres et al. 2012; Vosko 2010; F. Williams 2006). The sexual division of labour and dated models of welfare provision remain stubbornly entrenched (Hochschild 2013; Kershaw 2005; Lister 2003). Black and Indigenous women in the United States face institutionalized racism when they need care, and this racism produces distressing rates of infant mortality and pregnancy- and delivery-related mortality. The infant mortality rate is wider today between Black and white mothers than it was during antebellum slavery (Owens and Fett 2019). Women remain riveted to a responsibility for care – for themselves and others – even as they work for pay, and even as attitudes about gender shift. Care, then, its material, emotional bits and how they are organized, is a logical place to begin conceptualizing the affective duty that binds the work of contemporary motherhood. In my own household, I spend more time doing invisible forms of care work than my partner does, and we outsource weekday child care to early childhood educators, many of whom are first-generation immigrants to Canada.

Following Care

Throughout this book, I underscore emotionally loaded symbols that imply a maternal responsibility for what we can think about as care, but care is a contested concept (C. Kelly 2013; Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). As Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) notes, it feels reductive to attempt to sample the literature on care as it continues to expand, but I attempt to frame it here to provide context for the concept of the juggling mother. Fiona Williams (2006, 103), an emerita professor of social policy at Leeds whose work considers the position of care in contemporary society, defines care work as the “activities and practices associated with meeting the needs of those who are unable to care fully for themselves, for example, younger people, older frail people, or people whose illness or disability is such that they need support for

daily living.” These activities might be unpaid and carried out by a relative or friend inside the home, or they might be paid and provided through institutions or home-based services and volunteers. Of course, responsibility for care work is wildly skewed to some groups, as Williams’s work illuminates. Care providers are mostly women, and through globalization and the marketization of care, middle-class, often white, families outsource care to racialized migrant domestic workers, whose reproductive labour forms the foundation of their global citizenship (Parreñas 2015).

With my focus being on the mother who juggles paid and unpaid work, it would be easy to be remiss about the global political economy of care and the nuances of reproductive labour, an oversight that would allow me to embrace a simplistic notion of care as something that is top-down or even altruistic. Indeed, the word “burden,” which I use repeatedly to describe how women are overburdened with unfair divisions of labour, holds the caregiver over the caree in terms of status, power, and desire. In Williams’s conception of care, the inability to care for oneself is central to the care relationship. But her definition of care for the social policy arena has been problematized by disability scholars, who assert that this focus on the caregiver over the caree, as well as the degree of attention being given to the gendered nature of care labour, gives insufficient scrutiny to the power inherent to the care relationship (see Fine 2007). I felt this dearth first-hand as I learned to care alongside my nonneurotypical daughter, following recommendations from her care team while sifting through my feelings about what I feared could qualify as curative violence against her (see Orr and Watson forthcoming).

Disability-justice work that centres the needs of queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour who are sick or have disabilities (QTBIPOC) (Clare 1999; Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018) can help us think through the idea of the juggling mother as an ableist aspiration that is simultaneously unfairly burdened. I therefore approach the definition of care with some ambivalence. Hierarchies of care are complex and dynamic. As Christine Kelly (2013) theorizes in her autoethnographic study of her “frien-tendant” relationship with a friend with physical disabilities, support activities can blur the lines between informal private service and formal, publicly outsourced activities, and, given power

imbalances and abuse, care can be defined as a form of oppression (see Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). To make sense of the way care is organized, we need to “stay with the trouble” of care, to use Haraway’s (2016) words. We can see that the concept of care work is embedded in one individual’s power over another – adult over child, people without disabilities over people with them (F. Williams 2006). Putting disability and feminist care literatures in conversation through what she calls accessible care, Kelly (2013, 36), asserts that “care is a paradox (P. Douglas 2010); it represents the failure of medical cure and neoliberal progress; it is a deep compassion and empathy; a highly intimate relationship; an institutionalized approach to disability; a transnational supply and demand of feminized labor; a dependency on state-funded programs; and so on. It is a tension among all of these definitions, none to be disregarded.”

What her conceptualizations of accessible care and care as tension show is that feminist care perspectives and a disability approach might be unnecessarily antagonistic. With this book, I hope to strategically recuperate feminist notions of care while acknowledging the nuanced power dynamics and tension at the heart of what some call the care paradox (P. Douglas 2010) so that we can think about care as a site of liberation. This book needs the concept of care to underscore our dependence on maternal labour as a cheap remedy for the failure of capitalist progress. It is therefore useful to consider the work of feminist political theorists who have cleared a path for placing care at the centre of theories of democracy and social justice.

Seeking to elevate the intricacies and intimacies of the emotional and material aspects of care, feminist scholars in the 1970s generally conceptualized two components of care: caring *about* (as a “labour of love”) and caring *for* (unpaid labour) (F. Williams 2006). They argued that women’s unpaid “caring for” was discriminatory and demanded that the state subsidize care provision for young and old (F. Williams 2006). Elevating care work this way was and still is necessary, but it is easy to see how the framing of “caring for” (as in giving care to somebody) side-steps the fact that care relationships can be fraught with harmful abuses of power by caregivers (see Orr and Watson forthcoming). On the other side of the relationship, caring is also a potentially dangerous job, for

carers are sometimes threatened by or subjected to violence from carees. These important nuances inform a disability-justice notion of care (see Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018) that allows us to imagine the exaltation of the caring, juggling mother as inherently ableist and racist. She is a worker who is admired for her agility, flexibility, resilience, emotional stability, and, ultimately, productivity.

In the 1990s, Joan Tronto (1993) developed an ethic of care that reached beyond “caring for” and “caring about” by defining care as having four interconnected practices: attentiveness (recognizing when care is necessary), responsibility (responding to those needs by summoning responsibility), competence (meeting needs and demands), and responsiveness (recognizing relationship dynamics between the giver and receiver). In doing so, she showed how, as paid work, “care work is different from other jobs. It involves face-to-face emotional sensibilities (listening, talking) and intimate bodywork (bathing, washing, lifting)” (F. Williams 2006, 104). Still, although she highlighted the complexity of care work, her examination at the time did not delve into the affective transmissions of the labour, as her political project was and still is concerned with centring this labour in theories of democracy and citizenship. What Tronto and Williams offer to this study is awareness that deep consideration must be paid to how care work is fragmented in terms of tasks and their corresponding cultural status and how it is variously outsourced (see also P. Armstrong and Braedley 2013). In health care, the lowest-status jobs, which are disproportionately performed by racialized women, have to do with managing bodily functions (F. Williams 2006). Such jobs are perceived as “unskilled” and are matched by low pay and status in stark contrast to high-status caring jobs such as medical doctor or therapist.

Complicating care further, Williams (2006) argues that there is also a sentient aspect to bodily work: a sense of reward and satisfaction associated with providing care. Care is thereby associated with both exploitation and *fulfillment*, and with the potential to abuse or be abused. I remember this tension well from my infant-care days – the sense of being “touched out,” of being abandoned by my partner and friends, of taking on far more than my male partner, and of needing a break from bodily work while also feeling a full tank of affection, and maybe even love. It

intensified in the toddler-care days, when I could be emotionally triggered by a wild knee to the throat and needed to manage an appropriately caring response to an active and unknowing child. Given the complex affective inflections of care, and the fact that mothers so often do it alone, I realized that understanding the juggling mother and her incoherent responsibilities would depend on being sensitive to the various strands that bind women's labour responsibilities together.

I began with a definition of care from the social policy arena and quickly nuanced it with notions of disability to underscore how care is both ubiquitous and political. As Mol (2008, 84) states, care is an intervention. My favourite thinking about care, set beautifully in *Matters of Care* (2018) by Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, remains that of Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto (1990, 40): "A species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible." Here, "care" includes the less easily measurable emotional, cerebral, and management practices associated with meeting others' needs and, in some ways, meeting one's own needs and the needs of the broader community. Because of my focus on the maternal body as a subject and object of study, this book also vacillates between feminist political and disability-justice notions of care when referring to care practices such as infant feeding. For instance, in that case, intellectual sensitivity must be paid not only to the ableist and binarist assumptions that underpin breast-feeding but also to newborns as vulnerable beings who require specific (and diverse) kinds of care. All of these components rely on normative assumptions about bodies and their functions that I make clear throughout this book.

Representations of mothers trying to juggle it all always involve consumer symbols of care work (sippy cups, diaper bags, stuffed animals), and these images are loaded with the question of what counts as work. Despite the fact that care occurs throughout the life course, infant care – as a site of intimacy, privacy, and the intersection of state and individual responsibility – is commonly invoked in the representational sphere. It is an inescapable trap for the myth of the unencumbered, gender-neutral adult worker and the responsible, independent nuclear family. We need only call to mind state-sponsored breast-feeding campaigns, or posters

of sad pregnant women in government liquor stores, to conjure this hectic meeting of responsibility, care, and vulnerability. Some forms of infant care can be outsourced and degendered, and others pose a puzzle for this model. (The middle section of this book tugs at this knot by examining representation of women in breast-feeding recommendations and offers a hypothesis for why care is so often represented by squishy infants in the public domain.)

In popular media representations, the juggling mother is usually married to a man, even if he is mostly out of sight. The legacy of the heterosexual two-parent family structure clearly persists in contemporary beliefs about domestic versus paid labour, even as family and kinship structures and cultural values pertaining to families are changing (F. Williams 2004). Hinging on male-centric and homophobic understandings of independence, where nuclear families represent independent economic units, the story of the married, juggling mom tends to reflect the belief that two-parent families are best at caring for children. It provides a foundation for endorsing state-sponsored marriage promotion (while discouraging divorce) and degrades queer families and any individual who needs support from others. For example, even as gay couples are normalized and granted marriage rights in mainstream North American culture, and thus folded into the family group deemed deserving of certain entitlements, queer and racialized family forms are excluded – sometimes socially and sometimes from material provisions (Halberstam 2012; Puar 2007; Spade 2014).² The juggling mother, while she performs coming undone to enforce her political authority, is inimical to queer projects of resistance that would reject ableist notions of individual efficiency and the siloed nuclear family as a site of domestic bliss.

The juggling mother runs parallel to the trend of care marketization; there is now a “growing care gap,” alongside social changes related to women’s paid employment, an aging population, and concerns about work-life balance (Doucet and Merla 2007; Folbre 2012; Slaughter 2016; F. Williams 2006; J. Williams 2000). Surely it is vital to highlight the complex power dynamics involved in who provides care and who receives it, especially the issue of who is entitled to receive it and expected to provide it. As the ubiquity of the image of the juggling mother shows, the way

care is currently structured as either private or outsourced to the labour market is not conducive to challenging the sexual and racial division of labour and the corresponding low status of care in contemporary welfare states. Even though feminists have been fighting for universal child care to reduce women's inequality with men for over fifty years (Charlton 1979; Prentice 2009), political discourse and government policies are not moving in that direction in the United States or Canada. Further, as the "expectation that every person should be an independent worker has become more general" (Young 1995, 548), and now that women are stably involved in paid labour, however precarious (Albanese and Rauhala 2015), the notion that citizens should be self-sufficient has secured itself as common sense. Without a national plan for universal child care, care and dependency on care are thus stigmatized, so we are left with the performance of the juggling mother, who shows how she "takes care" without becoming stuck to the low-status work of the domestic realm and without disrupting the ebbs and flows of global capitalist exchange.

Beyond Maternalism

Maternalism is the promotion of the essential values of mothers. It has been a tough nut for feminists (see Badruddoja and Motapanyane 2016). Accounting for the intimate work of the juggling mother risks reinstating essentialist values or traits of female reproductive bodies even as this book seeks to do the opposite. It aims to attend to the specific needs and contexts of maternal and birthing bodies while revealing how their institutional power over marginalized families is maintained through the performance of appropriately, and not threateningly, coming undone. Feminist projects deal inconsistently with the issue of diminishing gender and sexual difference in attempts to either raise women's status or advocate women's rights according to women's essential, presumably shared, traits – debates that come to a head over reproductive labour. The affective duty of the juggling mother reflects the need to conceive of women's needs and skills as dynamic and contextual; where some forms of labour require a recentring of natal and intergenerational caring, others require a degendering of unpaid care work, and others still require the focus to be on the needs of nonbinary birthing folks and adoptive parents.

Dismantling institutionalized reproductive injustice (D.-A. Davis 2019) requires this dynamic strategic frame.

Antimaternalism, in contrast to maternalism, maintains that women's rights and responsibilities should not be linked to their reproductive status. This view is commonly held by scholars and activists who understandably advocate for women's rights on the basis that women are equal to men (usually by degendering work and bodies altogether). Where antimaternalists run into trouble is in advocating for needs that remain gendered, even if messily so. Political theorist Fiona Robinson's (2013) work aims to close the divide between maternalists, who can advance harmful binarism in their advocacy for women, and feminist political economists who advance antimaternalist thinking to the potential detriment of some women. She rereads Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* as a feminist political theory that "provides feminists with a critical resource for considering the ways that masculinist power can drive a wedge between 'mothers' and 'feminists'" (Robinson, 96). Examining the conservative moral imperatives lacing former Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper's Muskoka Initiative on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, which received a \$7.3 billion endorsement from G8 countries, Robinson urges feminists to reconsider Ruddick's controversial work as giving insight into the discursive construction of women globally rather than as a normative ethic that asserts the authority of mothers. Robinson (2013, 96, citing Ruddick) asks feminists to pay better attention to the ways in which "maternal thinking reveals the fundamental moral importance of mothering for feminism *through* an analysis of the relations of power that account for the simultaneous 'honouring' and 'despising' of mothers and mothering." Robinson urges us to refuse the dichotomy between idealized motherhood and motherhood as antifeminist, suggesting that a frequent misreading of so-called maternalist arguments might be responsible for some divisions within feminist thinking on motherhood.

To consider what's at stake for the juggling mother, I avoid reproducing the divide between maternalists and nonmaternalists, instead seeking to elevate the needs of bodies that reproduce, or care, or need care, in ways that are not tied to gendered, binary political or legal definitions of parentage, family, or ability. Avoiding this trap altogether allows for a

critical examination of the juggling mother and her affective duty, one that rejects “good motherhood” as a source of oppression directed at queer families and also as a source of power for the mothers who have the relative privilege to pursue it. It makes space for caregiving to be valued: not dismissed as a burden or source of oppression, not afforded primacy over bodies in need of care, and not viewed as being exempt from exploitative relations that have the potential for violence (see Baines 2006).

Reproducing Responsibly

There are no politically neutral reproductive behaviours. The juggling mother lives on the purchase of folks who cannot reconcile their competing demands; in so doing, the juggling mother is uplifted as ultimately responsible for reproductive and care labour, even as she appears on the emotional edge. She has children, but not too many, and she has them at the right time – not too early, not too late. Her self-discipline is peculiar, as she seems to dutifully uphold the sexual or gender division of labour in her devotion to care, but she never ceases to impress in paid work. Feminist scholars address her responsibility to and for care work as the linchpin of the patriarchal dividend (Connell 1995), through which men systematically benefit from her labour and dispossession. This gendered labour burden is well known, but the juggling mother persists, bemoaned only in texts between friends or parking-lot debriefs. Recognizing our complicity in patriarchal divisions of labour has not loosened my own adherence to the ultimately self-defeating goal of juggling motherhood. I lie in bed, dog-tired, frustrated by the ways that my unpaid labour strengthens the backbone of exploitative capitalist flows. Why?

For decades, feminists have struggled to alleviate this unfair labour distribution, pointing to numerous social policy and educational programming responses. Political theorists such as Joan Tronto (2013, 2015) and Paul Kershaw (2005) assert that democratic politics should centre on assigning social responsibility for care, much like we have historically tied citizenship to employment, given that caring responsibilities are allocated based on nineteenth-century ideas about domesticity. But incentivizing men to care has not meaningfully alleviated responsibility from the

juggling mother, especially not her affective duty. Devoted fathers, not imagined to be juggling responsibilities but rather to be playing a supportive role at home, are still regarded as aloof and celebrated interlopers who periodically dip into the domestic realm, to our collective amusement. And though families have taken care needs to the market over the past several decades (Federici 2004), care and the management work of its outsourcing continue to be feminized. Even where care services have become a target of reform (see Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014; Keck and Saraceno 2013; C. Kelly 2014), women's paid employment has dramatically increased, but this has involved only a minimal shift in normative assumptions about care (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014). Child care provisions, which are aimed at raising "maternal employment in the context of social policies increasingly requiring that all individuals are self-supporting, active members of labor markets" (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014, 51) and justified on economic rather than feminist grounds (Prentice 2009), continue to take for granted a traditional division of labour, all the more as they encourage women into the workforce. We are culturally mandating the juggling mother. Where women's paid work is supported by welfare reform, their gendered labour burden is implied.

At the foundation of strategies of labour redistribution and reforming gender roles around an ethic of care is the question, What are citizens obliged to do when family forms, the division of labour, and the types of labour available are different from what they were when postwar welfare states developed? For corporatist welfare regimes such as that of the United States and Canada, which emphasize individual responsibility (Kershaw 2005), the juggling mother responsibly proffers a solution. And rather than interpreting her coming undone as the consequence of competing devotions (Blair-Loy 2005), her contribution is exalted when she helps us overcome a shortage of care work while optimizing a globally competitive workforce. She is asked to juggle labours to the brink of coming undone – but she should never drop the ball – in order to maintain the status quo race and class hierarchies when it comes to paid and unpaid care. She may report burnout or stress, but she still seems willing. Purportedly feminist labour redistribution models have thus, understandably, focused attention on alleviating this burden on mothers

by advancing universal caregiver models – policies that would “induce far more men to modify their behaviour so that they can act like most contemporary women, who perform primary care work in addition to employment and other citizenry ambitions and responsibilities” (Kershaw 2005, 138).³ This call to induce men to “act more like women” signals poor understanding, though, of the affective duty that binds mothers to juggling competing labours. As the portrait of the juggling mother in this book helps us understand, women’s labours are secured with assumptions about the essential value and abilities of their bodies and what pulls on their hearts.

The Juggling Mother and Coming Undone

The juggling mother figure is not just a busy mother. She is explicit in her performance of capitalist productivity and emotional resilience, and she is complicit in maintaining hierarchies of power. She signals the affective duty of contemporary motherhood – to fill the emotional and material gaps in her family life that result from such broad systemic forces as welfare retrenchment, transnational labour demands, and devastatingly sad climate futures – to “make it all better in insecure times” (Villalobos 2014). Performances of juggling motherhood, while they usually include expressions of cynicism and fatigue, do not threaten the way labour is organized. They show the cracks in the way we imagine normal family life, but they do not break them open. The juggling mother is not going to stop picking up the slack. Her juggling satisfies a desire to be seen and valued while concurrently doing work to conceal *and* reveal her competing labours. In this way, she is incoherent, and we love to loathe her. Activist moms, queer moms, single moms, racialized moms, depressed moms, self-medicating moms, incarcerated moms, and poor moms are rarely included in this representation of the agile juggling mother because they generate too much unease, cuing the ways in which political, economic, and social systems are to blame for individual families and children struggling to survive. Juggling moms are not quite killjoys. Killjoy mothers are already imagined to be unravelling to a discomfiting extent, and they are therefore barred from a respectable juggling performance in the popular realm.

What it means to come undone through a performance of juggling motherhood has evolved significantly for me throughout this project. What emerged in the realm of representation as I studied symbols of women juggling their multiple care labours migrated to the personal as I confronted the pull to its performance. As I wrote about images and stories in the popular press that showed mothers (usually of young children) struggling not to make mistakes in their high-power jobs or caregiving roles, I realized my own private longing to be recognized as one of these overachieving women. I therefore include sketches in each chapter from my own experience, hoping that women will see their own secrets in mine and join me in disrupting incitements to labour that are not only unfair but noxious to families who are already excluded and struggling to survive.

Coming undone is a sensation, a technique of discipline, a performance, an orienting process, and a form of concealing and revealing both labour and an affective state. The troubling irony of coming undone is it hides emotional unravelling in plain sight: here we are, crying on the freeway, laughing about our tearful outburst after the kids go to sleep at a book club of sympathetic peers. In the land of juggling mothers, the most ridiculous story of coming undone is awarded with knowing and envious laughter. While validation from others might slightly loosen the affective ties that bind, it does not necessarily halt the process of coming undone, nor does this sharing necessarily inspire collective resistance in the form of direct action. In fact, in my experience, performances of juggling and coming undone tend to normalize labour burdens and affirm white privilege rather than alleviate or challenge them. Recently, a friend and I commiserated about how we had been forced into extra caregiving responsibilities when our male partners, both in the same corporate, male-dominated work environment, continued to fulfill work obligations while they were supposedly on paid parental leave (she and I, in contrast, continued to work full-time). I believe our sense of solidarity may have prevented productive arguments with our respective partners, prolonging our complicity in these arrangements. We continue to accept coming undone as par for the course.

Coming undone is embedded within and perpetuates established inequities along race, gender, class, and ability lines. The ability and desire

to come undone are not open to already disenfranchised bodies, to bodies that threaten individual capitalist productivity and good feelings of pride and coziness for the dominant group. One must come undone respectfully. In this sense, the juggling mother is only inclusive of some working mothers in the same way that homonationalism, for Puar (2007), is bound to the ascendancy of whiteness as gay families achieve political traction if they are willing to maintain the American ideal of the self-sufficient, high-consuming nuclear family; and how, for Thobani (2007), the exaltation of white nationals relies upon the degradation of Indigenous and migrant bodies and work. In the context of a society where Indigenous women in Canada are fighting for their rights against recent practices of forced sterilization and where Black women in the United States face the reality of their disproportionate likelihood of maternal and infant mortality, to perform coming undone is to accept and ignore these realities for one's own social and political currency. Although not always neatly tied to white skin, coming undone involves an exaltation of whiteness through which queerness, racialization, disability, and migrant status remain too threatening to be included. Coming undone is an elite problem, reserved for people whose survival needs are taken for granted, but it is also an indication of pain and sadness. In this book, I strive to add nuance to the position of juggling mothers by revealing how they are subjected to and complicit in unfair divisions of paid and unpaid work. Because they are promised something impossible for their trouble, coming undone is ultimately a sad problem.

A Method for Following Symbols of Motherhood

To depict the juggling mother in the cultural imaginary, I foster a “deliberately broad citational praxis” (Pitcher and Gunkel 2008, n.p.), including an archive of popular film and advertisements, state-sponsored public health campaigns, demographic data, welfare-state arrangements, print and social media, and transdisciplinary research on motherhood and mother work. This archive – or, following Cvetkovich (2003), this antiarchive, which resists chronological archival traditions – is designed to make meaning out of cultural messages by juxtaposing different genres of text that shape our understanding of mothers, motherhood, and labour.

Thinking along with cultural theorists Ahmed (2010), Puar (2007), Berlant (2004), and Cvetkovich (2003), my purpose is not to portray an exhaustive media analysis of juggling motherhood but to show that there are representations that appear to strike a nerve because they are peculiar, and there are others that are repeated to the point of saturation – in other words, the images have been repeated so often that further repetition of like images does not add new meaning.

There are countless representations of motherhood made every day, and they demand a dynamic lens through which to interpret their myriad evolving symbols. I have collected representations from a variety of sites that have appeared to throw down a gauntlet in terms of what they are communicating – that is, representations that have ignited dialogue in newspapers and on daytime television talk shows and that have cut through the noise of other representations, if even for a moment. I focus especially on texts that have not only been circulated by numerous major mainstream media outlets but that have also served as the pivoting point for other subjects of editorial coverage long after the representation itself ceased to be circulated. The fact that they are high-profile now is meaningful, and by pushing these images to the surface of a conceptual map of juggling motherhood, we can interrogate the deeper meanings of their relationships. These representations are not *the* story about contemporary motherhood and responsibility. They detail the juggling mother and her affective duty from different angles, from assumptions about her body and work made by public health agencies to her representation and veneration on screen.

This book explores questions of affect, and the main objects of study are representational. Its objective is to unfurl the tightly wrapped affective duties of mothers to consider how they maintain hierarchies of power and bind our labours together and to contemplate how mothers can resist these duties. This objective requires careful examination of how we make meaning and how these meanings “regulate and organize our conduct and practices” (Hall 1997, 4). How can an ordinary exchange about family meal preparation in a coffee line, for example, amount to a signifying practice that can stoke lasting fear and shame in its participants? Where

do these negative feelings go, and what do they do? Can they be interrupted? What about when the feelings are good? To understand how we become bound to the affective duties of motherhood, and what clues about labour this binding might be hiding in its banality, I examine a spoke in what Stuart Hall (1997) calls our circuit of culture – the symbolic domain (in this case, popular representations of motherhood) through which we produce and circulate meaning and establish our own sense of identity. I examine the language, broadly speaking, that communicates messages about motherhood. This language contains symbols and signs that contradict one another as we consume and incorporate them in different ways into our everyday rituals and assign them different value (Hall 1997). Still, we weave narratives with this language, as individuals and collectively, that help “set up the rules, norms, and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed” (Hall 1997, 4). It is my hope that in picking apart the symbols we regularly consume or engage with through what Wilson and Chivers Yochim (2017, 13) call the digital mundane, we can appreciate how mothers might feel compelled to come undone, cruelly and optimistically.⁴

We do not have straightforward relationships with the various popular representations and conversations we encounter in our lives, nor can we disentangle media from everyday life in our assessment of the representational sphere. The symbols we do encounter, however conscious, “mobilize powerful feelings and emotions” (Hall 1997, 10), both positive and negative, and they move us. They give shape to our daydreams, suffuse the way we interact with one another, make our worlds, and inspire the way we think and feel about ourselves. Though our media consumption is mitigated by the gendered and racialized “digital enclosures” of algorithms, marketers, and data firms (Wilson and Chivers Yochim 2017), we exchange symbols with one another in dialogue, establishing shared cultural codes and power dynamics through our face-to-face and digital social encounters.

What fascinates me most about this exchange of symbols and the circulation of affect is the oftentimes *contradictory* pull we feel, when, say, watching TV after dinner or scrolling through a message board of

recipe ideas (I roll my eyes at *and* yearn for a tidy manicure, a scratch-made meal). Is the incoherence of this pull particularly disciplinary? In other words, does the fact that our feelings are mixed upon encountering these representations mean that they have extra power over us as we struggle to process our own reactions? Or does this incoherence offer an opening to interrupt affective swells? Sometimes, I'll be enjoying the warm chuckles of my children when my internet scrolling brings me to a newly published list of choking hazards, or a friend's curated image of her neurotypical child's recent success, and my heart feels squeezed, like it's dripping on my good feelings, obscuring critique. I try to break down the content of a popular film into its ideological components to serve them plain, but I feel my own fears and fantasies being engaged. I criticize the ways in which women are unfairly assigned to make up for the privatization of happiness (Ahmed 2010; Watson 2016; Wilson and Chivers Yochim 2017) yet go to bed with tweaks of shame for my insufficient effort in this area. I let go of one mothering shame (last week, unhealthy food) only to replace it with another (this week, screen time). If I could summon the tears of coming undone, they might be tears of confusion. By providing representational analysis of mothers alongside personal reflection on motherhood, I hope to unlock some of the fears and desires that we leave off the record, fears that I suspect keep us perpetually unravelling.

Following Feelings: The Affective Duty of Motherhood

There is no single generalizable theory of affect. As Seigworth and Gregg (2010, 1) describe it, affect is “the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us towards movement, towards thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us.” To speak about affect, then, is to discuss processes of orientation – the forces that prompt thoughts, induce behaviour, and ultimately direct us. I do not engage with the theoretical contours of affect itself, but instead apply the politically engaged work of feminist and queer theorists of affect who “attend to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workday, of everyday

and every-night life” (Seigworth and Gregg, 7). Affects are the ordinary surges of everyday life (Stewart 2007). They take from us, but they also “spawn a series of little somethings dreamed up in the course of things” (Stewart, 9). They cannot be easily laid out for analysis because they are moving – emergent problems or questions, a “tangle of potential connections,” of promises and threats (Stewart, 4). Feminist theorists of affect take into account the daily routines and labours of bodies when they reflect on how people experience and make meaning of their surroundings and relate to others. This political commitment makes feminist theories of affect helpful for this book’s aim of imagining maternal labour as being bound by an affective duty, since this approach opens up space to examine intricacies of human experience that are not readily counted in our mainstream definitions of the work people do and the way people experience time, labour, and leisure. Thinking through maternal affect helps to fill a gap in feminist and sociological discussions of care work – within which we readily acknowledge that many women are burdened and that some women are living in particularly precarious circumstances on the margins of the margins. Using affect theory to investigate labour, we can better elucidate why representations of juggling motherhood are powerful and how an affective duty that binds and conceals labour is enforced culturally, not just by way of welfare-state arrangements. To keep affects alive when analyzing their currents alongside flows of labour, I like to imagine textures of feeling that gather and disperse around care, that resonate for a precise moment as they rush through.

This book suggests we should think more carefully about maternal affect in terms of its movement and circulation within and between mothers, whose bodies generate and respond to affective experience. If we consider that affective sensations are not static feelings and that we translate, interpret, pass through, and continually circulate our unnamable experiences, we can see how women exchange meanings with one another in ways that discipline one another – ways that are perhaps deeply felt but not easily accounted for, especially not in terms of their labour or the capacity to resist their incitements. For example, how do we account for strangely unpleasant, emotionally loaded, and disciplinary encounters between mothers on, say, the sidelines of a drop-in activity?

How do we attend to the feelings that circulate between mothers at the daycare drop-off that are less likely to circulate between fathers because they are less likely to be picking children up from daycare *and* because their duties are not so yoked to the behaviours of their children?

In my own life, I have tried to stay with the feelings that circulate during and after encounters with other parents in order to monitor their resonance in my body. Just this morning, for example, I felt sad on the walk to my office after a social exchange with a parent whose child seemed so pleasant. I realized while walking that in my discussion with her I had dismissed my morning struggle to get my toddlers in the car in favour of performing the aloof but competent mother I endlessly long to embody. I did not confess that I had clenched my teeth until my enamel could crumble to keep from screaming at the kids on my ride to work. Was she concealing her true feelings too? What might have been opened through this encounter had I been able to resist the performance of being mildly frazzled but ultimately responsible, of coming undone?

For a theory of affect that details how women are compelled to take up emotional duties, I turn to Sara Ahmed's work on the pursuit of happiness objects and the promise of "the good life," as well as her notion of how affective processes "stick" some bodies to one another (and to the national project) at the expense of others. In the *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Ahmed presents affective processes as cultural practices that have the power to bond some people together – in shared affective experiences and joint pursuit of national ideals – and exclude others. She insists that we "track" the work that emotions do and identify the objects that cause feelings in any given scenario. These feelings are the affective forms of reorientation that wrap the social body together or position people as insiders or outsiders. Even if we subordinate emotions to other faculties, they orient us. Of particular interest to me in the study of the juggling mother is the notion that emotions can even "attach us to the very condition of our subordination" (Ahmed 2004, 12). What we believe politically and how we feel intuitively can diverge in stubborn ways.

One of Ahmed's most useful contributions, presented in her 2010 book, *The Promise of Happiness*, is her notion of happiness objects. Happiness objects are culturally sanctioned assets or goals inscribed with

the correct way to pursue good feelings and a life worth living. These objects might be normative values such as marriage or family that come to represent a moral journey. As Ahmed, citing Seligman, notes, citizens now have guideposts for the good life, which for Ahmed means the pleasures and sense of gratification promised at the end of a path of striving. The good life might be elusive in that it is always out of reach, but popular literature in what Ahmed calls the “happiness turn” insists that we have indicators of wellness for which to strive. Mothers may, of course, resist orienting themselves to guideposts for happy mothers and happy families, and different mothers may hear different messages and see different paths, to be sure, but the good life is always already out of reach because of irreconcilable labour tensions and unsustainable futures. How sad is that? The confluence of conditions resulting from neoliberal welfare policies, general economic instability, and the gendered labour contract that designates unfair burdens of paid and unpaid labour on men and women (Vosko 2010) guarantees that there will be no respite from pursuit of *some* version of the good life. Even when they recognize the frenzied pressure towards happiness in the happiness turn, families are insecure and, thus, they must keep striving to protect their own well-being. Notably, happiness objects are couched in the rhetoric of choice, which rears itself in discussions of when women “choose” to have children or choose to start or leave work (as if the conditions of pregnancy or employment are always “choices”). As Ahmed notes, the ideals of freedom (to make choices) and happiness are commonly linked, so making a choice is in fact a happiness object itself, one that can be pursued.

Another of Ahmed’s key tenets from *The Promise of Happiness* that is helpful to imagine the textures of coming undone is the relationship between happiness and productivity. Happiness, she explains (2010, 10), is an individual responsibility and a life project as well as an instrument for achieving greater happiness, “a way of maximizing your potential of getting what you want, as well as being what you want to get.” If happy people are more optimistic, altruistic, adaptable to change, and physically and mentally healthy, as social psychology studies find, it follows from a capitalist perspective that happy people are better workers. Not

surprisingly, reported happiness intersects with markers of affluence and privilege, or as Ahmed (2010, 11) says, “The face of happiness . . . looks rather like the face of privilege.” For example, happy people are typically found in wealthy countries, married and have healthy social networks, belong to “majority groups,” enjoy mental and physical health, and experience control of their lives (Veenhoven 1991, as cited in Ahmed 2010).

Just as we have happiness objects for which to strive, bodies become marked by the legibility of their pursuit of these objects, introducing an element of surveillance to the idea of coming undone. These judgments are not relegated to the social imagination either. In Canada, women workers who leave paid employment for maternity leave are viewed as temporarily acquiring a legitimate disability that prohibits them from working. To overcome the stigma of hindering workplace productivity, they are framed as requiring and deserving accommodation, which, from a disability-justice perspective, renders women’s maternal bodies irreconcilable with productivity and the ideal capitalist worker in ways that systematically stigmatize and relegate differently abled bodies to the margins. In comparison, workers who are unhappy and thus might also threaten workplace productivity are also stigmatized, and this stigma applies most severely to racialized women who, in a white supremacist culture, are more likely to be viewed as angry or unpleasant (Ahmed 2010). So mothers, especially mothers with less access to power and privilege, are encouraged to keep private their emotional unravelling with feelings of stress or depression. The extra energy required to perform as a deserving and responsible worker might be seen as an added responsibility in itself: to project, and even to truly maintain, good feelings while overburdened. This is how the affect of coming undone works as the glue that binds women to both a performance of appropriately productive unravelling and a concealment of feelings that might denote some impediment to productivity. Ahmed’s happiness objects help to explain how the cultural symbol of the juggling mother accumulates positive affective value, how proximity to these objects comes to be desired, and how women are disproportionately burdened with responsibility for the pursuit of these objects. Sadly, they explain why we strive for something that turns out to be imaginary.

Growing public interest in measures of well-being and popular media preoccupation with what leads to physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness are part of the happiness turn. Ahmed (2010, 3) explains that the proliferation of books and courses containing self-help discourses and therapeutic cultures, particularly since 2005, has formed a “happiness industry” in which “happiness is both produced and consumed through these books, accumulating value as a form of capital.” The happiness turn is also seen in changing governance frameworks, as governments report turning to well-being indices as assets and goals to supplement, or in some cases supplant, the gross domestic product (Ahmed 2010; Kemp 2012). Ahmed is suspicious of this shift towards measuring happiness. In a chapter titled “Happy Futures” in *The Promise of Happiness*, she explains that the quest for happiness is a futurist orientation, because “to pin hopes on the future is to imagine happiness as what lies ahead for us” (160), which sits agreeably next to the temporal orientation of capitalist accumulation. Looking for happiness – “Do what you love!” – has become a moral guideline for how to live well, but it has negative consequences for individuals who seem disinclined to reach their potential happy life.

The work of affect theorists on gendered responsibility is instructive for a theory of mothers coming undone. It helps us think about the consequences of how – whether from magazine stands, misogynist colleagues, or well-meaning grandparents – women receive beliefs about their responsibilities to engage in reproductive labour, particularly in the context of reduced fertility rates among white, over thirty, college-educated women. This may be an emergent demographic context, but mothers have long been understood as objects of state action intended to reproduce a healthy society (Albanese 2006; Finkel 2006; Lister 1997; Yuval-Davis 1997), and women’s responsibilities regarding social and biological reproduction are well documented in feminist research (Kanaaneh 2002; McClintock 1995; Robinson 2011, 2013; Tronto 1993; Vosko 2010; Yuval-Davis 1997). Since mothers and pregnant women are commonly targeted to cure social ills beyond their control through their individual behaviours, including, for example, solving problems of infant mortality and “obesity” through private acts such as breast-feeding (Nathoo and Ostry 2009; Parker 2014), so too are they the targets of beliefs about how

and when babies should be born. Women's affective duty emerges from this rhetoric, as women are told to avoid bad feelings by simply taking responsibility for their families' health and happiness – a set of invisible burdens that becomes frightening to resist.

Cvetkovich (2003) and Berlant (2010) both gesture towards the power of affective processes to orient individuals towards or away from one another. The affective duty of the juggling mother both individualizes mothers while orienting them to a shared performance of juggling to the point of coming undone. In *An Archive of Feelings*, Cvetkovich (2003) presents the power of trauma to generate political communities. She attends to what she calls ordinary affects, or the regular, normal traumas of everyday life. She shows how these trauma feelings can catalyze political orientations or movements. Pertinent to an affect of juggling motherhood, Cvetkovich's work explicitly challenges the divide between public and private, since what counts as legitimately traumatizing for the medical community is what occurs in public, or at least what can be witnessed in public, rendering invisible the insidious microtraumas of individuals' private lives. If we think about the labour that mothers perform in private and in public, we can draw a parallel between Cvetkovich's thinking on trauma and how this book thinks through care. I think about the so-called private sphere in terms of the labours that people perform at home, away from their friends and colleagues, "behind closed doors," but I also think about the internal labour, or stressful mental time – what sociologists have called contaminated time and Brigit Schulte calls confetti time (Schulte 2014) – that women spend managing households wherever they go. We know this labour exists, but we do not know how to deal with it, theoretically or personally. I extend Cvetkovich's idea of private microtraumas to think about the microcares of mothers – invisible labours behind closed doors as well as the mental and emotional work of caring that occurs internally and bleeds into our daily lives and responsibilities.

Like Cvetkovich and Ahmed, Berlant in "Cruel Optimism" is interested in how bodies "lean toward" their objects of desire, which hold what she calls a cluster of promises (2010, 93). Berlant (2010, 93, 97) argues, with Ahmed, that we pursue proximity to objects that promise what we know as the good life – because "proximity to the object means

proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises” – even though, for many, the normative good life is “a bad life that wears out the subjects.” Coming undone is an expression of the end game that wears out its subjects. Because representations of the good life for women depict some sort of juggling, balance, satisfaction, and even happiness vis-à-vis family, mothers undo themselves in its pursuit. Notions of perfection and attainment through personal responsibility are dangling carrots. Berlant analyzes attachment to possibilities, an inherently optimistic and arguably modern state of leaning towards a future life. Of course, this incitement to “lean towards” is a technique of discipline, exalted in popular parlance (see Sandberg 2012). I am concerned with how it corresponds with the process of *undoing* for mothers, an affect that I see being touched on in the popular press and in memoirs by motherhood scholars though not articulated as such, and it is not often taken seriously as a form of labour. In the vocabulary of citizenship, leaning towards the good life, echoed by Sheryl Sandberg’s admonishment to “lean in,” is the modern promise of entitlements and well-being that encourages mothers towards multifarious forms of labour. “Coming undone” can therefore encapsulate disciplinary power and an affective state. As E. Ann Kaplan wrote in 1992 language, while mothers might variously resist “oppressive institutional positioning,” dominant discourses of motherhood persist in the “intra-psychic and unconscious terrain, which often produces women’s complicity with patriarchal norms” (Kaplan, 10). The concept of coming undone extends this legacy of examining women’s affective state via the imaginary good mom whose image is slow to change.

Focusing even more explicitly on the politics of affective orientations, Puar (2007) argues that rhetorical constructions of feelings of nationalism and patriotism disaggregate bodies that are deemed deserving of national inclusion from outsiders who are purported to threaten national security. Puar painstakingly traces the numerous, intricate ways in which some subjects and the symbols that come to represent them (such as brown immigrants and the turban) come to be reviled in the national imaginary whereas other subjects (such as white nuclear families) are perpetually celebrated and others still move between subject positions of deserving and undeserving depending on their utility to imperialist aims – for

instance, wealthy, white gay couples whose celebration is used to justify US claims to tolerance and civility. Similarly, Thobani's (2007, 59) *Exalted Subjects* presents a portrait of the "cultural and emotional topography of the nation," in which women's responsibilities to citizenship are, as Puar (2007, 72) puts it, "imagined, felt, feared, desired" with real consequences for our understanding of mothers' status and their labour.

The process of coming undone reproduces existing gender, race, and class hierarchies as it polices the boundaries of acceptable emotional expressions and labour struggles. It works by tuning out the labour issues and mental health crises faced by precarious mothers and mobilizing discourses of independence, dexterity, and appropriate feminine emotionality. It harbours the potential for a productive unravelling of gendered and racialized labour burdens and of liberating feminist values from the capitalist ideals and liberal democratic ideas of choice and freedom, but it is more often regulatory. It more often choreographs racist cultural practices – it enables the devaluing of work made available to Black, brown, and beige bodies, it sticks already devalued feminized work to immigrant women, and it associates contemporary motherhood struggles with the thin, rich, white bodies of professional elites.

The Thread

The chapters that follow chronicle the juggling mother and the productions that she has been cast in as she comes undone. They tease out the affective duty that mothers so diligently perform, reproduce, and sometimes resist. Chapter 2, "The Juggling Mother," is about the juggling mother in popular culture. What does she look like, and what does she do? This chapter begins to elaborate on the question, *What* is the affective duty, and how do we recognize it? Chapter 3, "C-Suite Moms," interrogates representation of real juggling moms – from Silicon Valley executives to popular journalists and politicians – in mainstream current-affairs media. The lives of these mothers are far from typical in terms of means and status, and though the juggling mother is arguably most prevalent and most rigidly constrained in families of lower socioeconomic status, I underscore these extreme representations of power to elucidate the complicity of these mothers in tense and incoherent expectations of motherhood and capitalism. In some ways,

representations of these real-life mothers are far from representations of the juggling mother in cinematic life because they are more likely to reject any risk of coming undone in their very public and scrutinized lives. The C-suite mom has all the discipline of exalted, responsible motherhood. She appeals to us because she can play it cool as a juggler, while giving subtle clues about her legitimate struggle warms her up. She no longer needs to fulfill the historical criteria of ultimate devotion to the private sphere because she keeps her family from any real risk by accumulating wealth and outsourcing care. In so doing, she rejects coming undone and ironically reproduces the affective duty and white privilege she seems positioned to resist.

In Chapter 4, “You Are What You Nurse,” I consider how the juggling mother mysteriously vanishes in public health promotion of mothering practices, particularly infant feeding. Presenting a twist in the affective duty of coming undone, I ask: What is implied about women’s affective duty when their juggling bodies are missing from representations of their own embodied labour and bodily fluids? In a public conversation that has been reduced to upholding the moral superiority of breast milk, where has the juggling mother gone, and how does her invisibility enforce her affective duty? How are these erasures variously racialized, and how do ableist logics permeate parenting best practices and imaginary good motherhood? This chapter considers how parents can resist coming undone in contexts where children are vulnerable.

Chapter 5, “Avoiding Regret,” serves as a sort of thematic coda for the book, but it departs from the preceding chapters in method, as it studies the rhetoric of popular editorial writing that is explicitly about a gendered affective duty. This chapter traces discourses on women’s responsibility to have kids without delay, which, they argue, will help them avoid negative feelings in themselves and others. These writings, a collection of sensibilities, showcase how women reflect on their reproductive potential and allow us to consider how the undone mother might well include the undone woman, pinched and bound by her affective duty even or especially while she is child-free. The final chapter, “Dropping the Ball,” imagines the radical potential of moms who fail to keep it together.

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: The juggling mother : coming undone in the age of anxiety / Amanda D. Watson.

Names: Watson, Amanda D., author.

Description: Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200286560 | Canadiana (ebook) 20200287192 | ISBN 9780774864619 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780774864626 (softcover) | ISBN 9780774864633 (PDF) | ISBN 9780774864640 (EPUB) | ISBN 9780774864657 (Kindle)

Subjects: LCSH: Working mothers. | LCSH: Working mothers – Social conditions. | LCSH: Working mothers – Psychology. | LCSH: Motherhood. | LCSH: Motherhood – Social aspects. | LCSH: Motherhood – Psychological aspects. | LCSH: Mothers. | LCSH: Mothers – Social conditions. | LCSH: Mothers – Psychology.

Classification: LCC HQ759.48 .w38 2020 | DDC 306.874/3—DC23

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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Set in Garamond and Meta by Lara Minja

Copy editor: Lesley Erickson

Proofreader: Helen Godolphin

Indexer: Patti Phillips

Cover designer: David Drummond

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

www.ubcpress.ca