“Negotiating Surrogacy: the Dilemma of Foster Parents”
from the forthcoming *Fostering Nation? Canada Confronts the History of Childhood Disadvantage* (2011)

Foster parents stand in for the community at large. For many children and youth, they may be the closest to responsible and caring adults they encounter. The work of foster mothers and fathers has unfolded in the context of social relations that make some groups and individuals more likely, acceptable, or able candidates. It has been highly gendered and ideally required expressions of model maternity and paternity. In the last half of the 20th century, such surrogates also increasingly emerged as part of therapeutic teams working toward the physical and psychological salvation of disadvantaged children and young people. Canada’s fostering adults have always negotiated an essentially border status. In modeling superior mothering or fathering or in operating alongside experts, they confronted a recurring dilemma of authenticity. On the one hand, most have received money and been subject to state supervision for duties judged preferably voluntary and private. On the other, most have lacked formal credentials in child study and protection agencies and governments have rarely paid professional wages. As surrogates and amateurs, they always struggled to be treated as more than inferior mimics of ‘real’ parents or ‘real’ experts. Women stand at the centre and men to the side of both conundrums.