CSEM 23102 (section 3): “The Politics of Motherhood”

What makes a good mother? Not everyone will become a mother, but everyone has a mother. How does culture shape mothering practices? How do mothering practices shape culture?

Working moms vs. stay-at-home moms, Super moms vs. slacker moms – multiple rounds of the so-called Mommy Wars have played out in the US in the past few decades to great media attention. Exhibit 1: the 2012 Time magazine cover that featured a woman nursing her five-year-old child under the headline “Are you Mom enough?” Meanwhile, demographics measuring who is mothering and how reveal important shifts in US culture: the number of children being born to mothers who are unwed, poor, and/or the primary breadwinner are rising steadily. How do we begin to make sense of these numerous, disparate cultural notions of what a mother should do and be? Other important questions we might ask include: Is there a difference between “childfree” and “childless”? Is a child better served by a working mother or a stay-at-home mother? What are the impacts on children of “traditional” and “nontraditional” family structures? (and how do we define “traditional”?) How do race, economic class, educational attainment, sexual orientation impact women’s mothering practices?

We will read brief excerpts from a wide variety of disciplines (including anthropology, feminist theory, media studies, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and theology) to see how scholars have conceptualized “good” mothering and analyze depictions of mothering practices. There will also be a community involvement component to this course; students will be matched with a local organization serving mothers in the South Bend area.

**Required Texts:**

Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women*

Kathryn Edin and Maria J. Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage*
Assignment Details:

10% → Position Statement (you will select a session and prepare a brief position presentation that directly engages with the day’s reading(s); 5-10 minute presentation)

10% → Discussion Leader (you will select a chapter from either The Mommy Myth or Promises I Can Keep; craft a discussion question and lead a 30-minute discussion of the chapter)

15% → class participation

15% → the “Game of Life” project: you will be randomly assigned an identity (career, salary, family status) for which you will prepare a budget. In class discussions, you will need to draw upon this information as well.

10% → CE journal, including brief (100-200 words) reflections per week and a final reflection on the interplay between your community engagement and the course content

40% → Final exam: the exam will be administered orally during finals week; you will work with a partner. This assignment will require you to synthesize your community engagement with insights from the course readings.

Grade Scale:

A – 95-100
A- – 90-94
B+ – 87-89
B – 83-86
B- – 80-82
C+ – 77-79
C – 73-76
C- – 70-72
D – 60-69
F – 59 or lower

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here:

Confidential
University Counseling Center: 574.631.7336
University Health Services: 574.631.7497
SOS of the Family Justice Center Rape Crisis Help Line: 574.289.HELP (4357)

Non-Confidential
Deputy Title IX Coordinator: 574.631.7728
NDSP: 574.631.5555

Mandatory Reporting of Harassment and Mandatory Reporting of Harassment and Discrimination

Please note that all professors are considered mandatory reporters of harassment and discrimination by Title IX law. Mandatory reporters are responsible for reporting all Title IX violations of sex-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual violence, stalking/dating violence, and child sexual abuse. This means that if students disclose cases that meet this definition in written or verbal communication, I am obligated to report that to our Title IX office so they can help provide support and track such incidents. I welcome your deepest sharing but also want you to understand that all professors are bound to this law.
Class etiquette:
In developing the following policies, I was primarily guided by an understanding of our purposes in gathering twice a week, which I see as 1) developing your communication skills, particularly in the realm of verbal discourse, and 2) preparing you as future professionals; they are intended to facilitate both objectives.

- I expect that class will not be interrupted by cell phones or text messages.
- Attendance – any absence after your SECOND will be reflected in your final grade. If you will be absent, please send me a courtesy email informing me of the day(s) you are missing. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR FINDING OUT FROM A CLASSMATE WHAT YOU HAVE MISSED. Additionally, ABSENCE IS NOT AN EXCUSE TO NOT TURN IN WORK ON TIME – EMAIL IT TO ME.
- Plagiarism cannot be tolerated. Please be mindful of the Honor Code pledge – “As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty.” The most fundamental sentence in DuLac is the beginning of section IV-B:
  
  The pledge to uphold the Academic Code of Honor includes an understanding that a student’s submitted work, graded or ungraded – examinations, draft copies, papers, homework assignments, extra credit work, etc. - must be his or her own.

Consistent with the mission of the University of Notre Dame, the Gender Studies Program is dedicated to fostering a learning community that represents and builds on a rich diversity of human experiences, backgrounds, cultures, histories, ideas, and ways of living. We also commit to the task of negotiating the dual priorities of authentic free speech and active regard for all others in a safe, supportive, and anti-oppressive classroom environment. An anti-oppressive environment means that we work against language, actions, interactions and ideologies that hurt people. Hate speech of any kind will not be permitted. This includes use of racial, sexual, gender, or abled slurs and personal attacks on others’ ideas.

Course Outline:
[unless otherwise indicated, readings are available on e-reserves.]

Unit 1: Maternal Theory

1/12 Introduction

1/14 Motherhood as institution vs practice

1/19 complete IRB training; community partners visit
1/21 Psychology of mothering


1/26 Maternal Thinking


1/28 Other mothers


2/2 Mothering under duress

- Position Statement:
- Position Statement:

2/4 Theology of Mothering

- Position Statement:

Unit 2: Some issues

2/9 Childbirth

- Position Statement:
- Position Statement:
2/11  from Attachment Parenting to Intensive Mothering, I
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________

2/16  from Attachment Parenting to Intensive Mothering, II
• Ayelet Waldman, “Truly, Madly, Guiltily” (link on Sakai)
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________

2/18  Non-heteronormative mothering
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________

2/23  Mothering gender-fluid children
• Lois Gould, “X: A Fabulous Child’s Story” (link on Sakai) – read this one first!
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________

2/25  Abortion
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________

3/1  Adoption
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________
  • Position Statement: ______________________________________________________________
Abandonment

- Position Statement:
- Position Statement:

**Spring break**

**Unit 3: Realities of Mothering in the US Today**

3/15  *The Mommy Myth*, Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2
Discussion Leaders: __________________ & __________________

3/17  *The Mommy Myth*, Chapters 3-5
Discussion Leaders: __________________ & __________________

3/23  *The Mommy Myth*, Chapters 6-8
Discussion Leaders: __________________ & __________________

3/25  *The Mommy Myth*, Chapter 9 & 10, Epilogue
Discussion Leaders: __________________ & __________________

Discussion Leader: ______________________________

3/31  Career Anxieties – CAREER CENTER VISIT
- Lisa Belkin, “The Opt-Out Revolution” (link on Sakai)
- Judith Warner, “The Opt-Out Generation Wants Back In” (link on Sakai)
- Robin Ely, Pamela Stone, and Colleen Ammerman, “Rethink What You ‘Know’ About High-Achieving Women” (link on Sakai)

4/5  the “Game of Life” presentations

4/7  the “Game of Life” presentations & discussion

4/12  *Promises I Can Keep*, Introduction, Chapter 1
Discussion Leaders: __________________ & __________________

4/14  *Promises I Can Keep*, Chapters 2 & 3
Discussion Leaders: __________________ & __________________
4/19  *Promises I Can Keep*, Chapters 4 & 5  
Discussion Leaders: ___________________ & ___________________

4/21 *Promises I Can Keep*, Chapter 6, Conclusion  
Discussion Leaders: ___________________ & ___________________

4/26 the economic interplay of working mother identities  
- Ann Crittenden, “How Mothers’ Work was ‘Disappeared’: The Invention of the Unproductive Housewife” and “Conclusion: How to Bring Children Up Without Putting Women Down.” [in *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World is Still the Least Valued*. New York: Picador, 45-64, 256-74, 284-6, 303-4.]
  - Position Statement:______________________________________________________________
  - Position Statement:______________________________________________________________

4/28 the economic interplay of working mother identities & wrap-up  
  - Position Statement:______________________________________________________________

Week of 5/2: oral exam, at time to be scheduled (in pairs)