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J-term; 10-12, 1-3, M-S, M-F
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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?

Motherhood, mothering practices, and maternal identities have long been crucial elements of human existence that have not received the level of attention or support that their importance calls for. 2020 put mothers front and center in the spotlight: the global health pandemic revealed just how much the United States economy depends on the unpaid labor of mothers and low-paid laborer of childcare

providers and teachers. The burgeoning economic crisis triggered by the shelter-in-place COVID-19 lockdown disproportionately threatens mothers' well-being, particularly mothers of color. The killing of George Floyd brought new attention to the work of Black Lives Matter, founded by mothers. In the run up to the 2020 Presidential election, both parties appealed to women as mothers for their votes. How can we make sense of the ways that we, as a society, say that mothers are the most important people without providing them the support or respect their position deserves?

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.

Significant Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Articulate key theories that inform the field of motherhood studies
- Understand social, political, and cultural forces shaping ideologies of “good” mothering
- Engage in informed discussion of contemporary issues that impact mothering practices
- Appreciate cultural differences in expectations of mothering practices
- Understand ways that structures limit mothers’ autonomy in choosing how to mother
- Produce a theoretically-informed analyses of mothering practices, with particular attention to the impact of social identity and socioeconomic status on the range on choices available

Required Texts:

All readings are available on collab; you are expected to read them in advance of each day’s session.

Assignment Details:

20% → Reflections: at two points in the course (marked on the outline below), you will be asked to craft a (personal) reflection on one of the questions this course grapples with. These reflections should engage with course discussions and may take a variety of forms: personal essay, poem, multimedia presentation, etc. Please talk to me if you have an idea that you would like pre-approval for.

10% → Mothering practices presentation: you will work with a small group to research your chosen affinity group and share your findings with the class. How do mothers who identify with this group tend to think of good mothering? What mothering practices and philosophies do they tend to ascribe to? Each group will have 30 minutes to present and facilitate discussion.

40% → the “Game of Life” project: you will be randomly assigned an identity (career, salary, family status) for which you will prepare a budget. You will work with a partner to craft and present your budget to the class (30%); a 2-3-page paper complements this presentation (10%).

20% → Final exam

10% → participation

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

Class culture:

- Please log on by 10:00/1:00, ready to participate in our discussions. If you are able to have your camera on/a photo up, that is helpful for me.
- Please respect the contributions of your classmates. As we will quickly discover, the social expectations of mothers are strong and varied; we all approach this topic with our own experiences and understandings of the importance of the topic. The readings have been selected to provide a wide range of perspectives on mothering practices, and as such, will at times prompt strong responses. We can cultivate a brave space in which everyone can examine their prior conceptions and either affirm or adapt them by approaching with a sincere desire to learn from one another.

Class Attendance and Excused Absences

By enrolling in a J-term course, you are committing to a concentrated, intensive experience. The learning opportunities that come from discussing the course materials with peers in a community committed to reading and engaging with the same texts cannot be easily replicated outside the classroom. Regular attendance in class is expected and will contribute to your participation grade – and more importantly, to your understanding of the course material.

Absences traditionally excused are those that occur because of death in a student's family, important religious holidays, or authorized University activities. Unforeseen absences resulting from sickness, or from other circumstances considered to be emergencies, may also be excused.

If you miss a session, it is your responsibility to obtain notes and information about what you missed from a classmate. As a matter of professional courtesy, it is helpful if you notify me as early as possible about any absences you will have (just as you wouldn't simply not show up for work).

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

All students with special needs requiring accommodations should present the appropriate paperwork from the Student Disability Advising Center (SDAC). It is the student's responsibility to present this paperwork in a timely fashion and follow up with the instructor about the accommodations being offered. The SDAC is located in the Department of Student Health and can be contacted at 243-5180/5181.

Statement on Academic Fraud

According to the UVA Honor Committee, "All students at the University of Virginia are bound by the Honor Code not to commit Academic Fraud, which is a form of cheating. " Consequently, it is required or implied that all work conducted by students conform to the following honor pledge: "On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment." If you are not familiar with or require further information about the honor system, please see <http://www.virginia.edu/honor/>.



Course Outline:

[all readings are available on collab]

Unit 1: Maternal Theory

M, 1/4

AM: Introduction, Maternal Studies as a field of study

- Evelyn Nanako Glenn, “Social Constructions of Mothering: A Thematic Overview” [in *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*. edited by Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey. New York: Routledge. 1994. 1–29.]

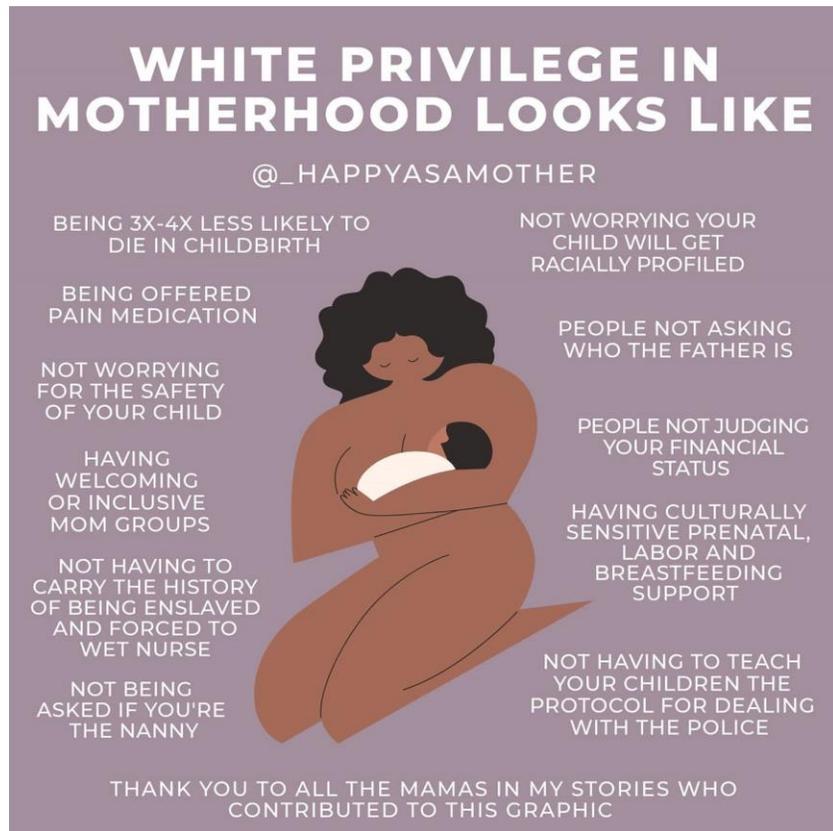
PM: foundational theorists

Motherhood as institution vs experience

- Adrienne Rich, “Foreword” and “Motherhood and Daughterhood” [in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. 1976. New York: Norton, 1995. 11-17, 218-255.]
- REC: Fiona Joy Green, “Feminist Mothers: Successfully Negotiating the Tension between Motherhood as ‘Institution’ and ‘Experience’” [in *From Motherhood to Mothering*. Ed. Andrea O’Reilly. Albany: SUNY Press, 2004. 125-136.]

Other mothers and Motherwork

- Stanlie M. James, “Mothering: A possible Black feminist link to social transformation?” [in *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*. Eds. Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia. New York: Routledge, 1993. 44-54.]
- Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Women and Motherhood” [in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 2000. 173-199.]
- REC: Kaila Adia Story, “Living My Material: An Interview with Patricia Hill Collins” [*Patricia Hill Collins: Reconceiving Motherhood* (2014): 181-91.]
- REC: Delores Williams, “Hagar’s Story: A Route to Black Women’s Issues” [in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993. 16-20, 29-42, 56-59.]



T, 1/5

Reflection #1 due: What does a “good” mother look like in your community?

AM: Psychology of mothering

- D. W. Winnicott, “Children Learning” [in *Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*. New York: Norton, 1990. 142-149.]
- Nancy Chodorow, “Family Structure and Feminine Personality” [in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, Nancy J. Chodorow. New Haven: Yale and London: Polity Press, 1989 [1974], 45–65.]

PM: Maternal Thinking and Outlaw Mothering

- Sara Ruddick, “Maternal Thinking” and “Talking about ‘Mothers.’” [in *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. 1989. Boston: Beacon P, 1995. 17-40.]
- Andrea O’Reilly, “Outlaw (ing) motherhood: a theory and politic of maternal empowerment for the twenty-first century” [*Hecate* 36.1/2 (2010): 17.]

W, 1/6 Mothering styles

AM: from Attachment Parenting to Intensive Mothering

- Sharon Hays, “Intensive Mothering: Women’s Work on Behalf of the Sacred Child” [in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1998. 97-130.]
- Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, “Why it Takes a Village” [in *Mother and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009. 65-109.]

PM: Analysis of media depictions of styles (small group learning activity)

- Deirdre D. Johnston and Debra H. Swanson, “Invisible mothers: A content analysis of motherhood ideologies and myths in magazines”

Unit 2: Maternal Identities

H, 1/7 Social Constructions of Mothering

What does “good mothering” look like in cultural groups? What concerns and values do they share?

- Everyone reads: <https://theconversation.com/how-where-youre-born-influences-the-person-you-become-107351>
- Mothering practices presentation; each student reads 2 articles from the supplemental readings list (on Collab as “readings for ‘Cultural Constructions of Mothering’”)

AM: African-American, Asian-American, Indigenous, and Latina/Hispanic/Chicana mothering practices

PM: disabled, Jewish, Lesbian/queer, and Muslim mothering practices

AFTER WEEK 12 - WHEN THE BOOK SAYS IT'S OK - WE START TELLING EVERYONE (STRATEGICALLY AT FIRST, AND THEN LIKE WE'RE PRESENTING BOUQUETS.) WHEN WE TELL THE MOTHERS, THEY AMAZE US.



[panel from Rachel Masilamani’s comic “We Conceive”:
<http://www.muthamagazine.com/2015/06/we-conceive-a-comic-by-rachel-masilamani/>]

F, 1/8 Mothering under duress

Reflection #2 due: What burdens do we expect a mother to bear?

AM:

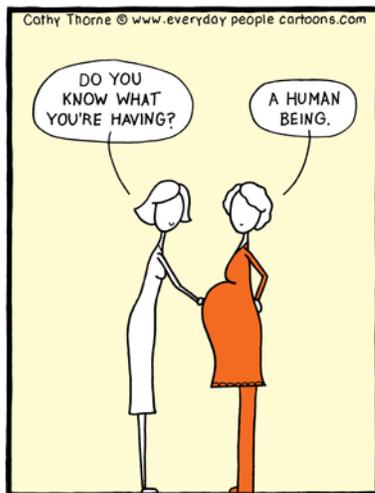
- Andrea Knittel, et al. "Evidence-based recommendations to improve reproductive healthcare for incarcerated women"
- Harmony A Reppond and Heather E Bullock, "Reclaiming 'good motherhood': US mothers' critical resistance in family homeless shelters."
- Leigh Sparks, Kimberly Stauss, and Kaitlin Grant, "Letters to Children project: A letter-writing group designed to help incarcerated women develop or reinforce their roles as mothers"
- Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, "Mothering from a Distance: Emotions, Gender, and Intergenerational Relations in Filipino Transnational Families"

PM:

- Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Lifeboat Ethics: Mother Love and Child Death in Northeast Brazil" [in *The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*. Eds. Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo. New York: Routledge, 1997. 82-88.]
- Laury Oaks, "Girls at Risk of Dumping their Newborns" [in *Giving Up Baby: Safe Haven Laws, Motherhood, and Reproductive Justice*. New York: New York UP, 2015. 75-115, 228-9.

M, 1/11 reproductive justice

AM: Pregnancy and Childbirth



- Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Fetal images: The power of visual culture in the politics of reproduction"
- Carly Gieseler, "Gender-reveal parties: performing community identity in pink and blue."
- Laura Hmiel, et al. "We have this awesome organization where it was built by women for women like us': Supporting African American women through their pregnancies and beyond"
- Amy Roeder, "America is Failing Its Black Mothers"
- REC: Robbie Davis-Floyd, "The technocratic, humanistic, and holistic paradigms of childbirth"
- REC: Jonathan M. Snowden et al., "Planned out-of-hospital birth and birth outcomes"

PM: Interrupted pregnancies, Adoption and Surrogacy

- Patricia Beattie Jung, "Abortion and Organ Donation: Christian Reflections on Bodily Life Support"
- Ellen Goodman, "In today's GOP, even Goldwater not welcome"
- Jean Keller, "Rethinking Ruddick's Birthgiver/Adoptive Mother Distinction" [in *Maternal Thinking: Philosophy, Politics, Practice*. Ed. Andrea O'Reilly. Toronto: Demeter P, 2009. 173-187.]
- Deomampo, Daisy. "Racialized commodities: Race and value in human egg donation." *Medical Anthropology* 38.7 (2019): 620-633.
- REC: Dorothy E. Roberts, "Why Baby Markets Aren't Free"
- REC: Neomi DeAnda, "Miscarriage Matters, Stillbirth's Significance, & the Tree of Many Breasts" [in *Parenting as Spiritual Practice and Source for Theology: Mothering Matters*. Ed. Claire

Bischoff, Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, and Annie Hardison-Moody. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 173-185.]

Unit 3: 2020 and Motherhood

T, 1/12 care-giving and economic responsibilities

AM:

- Darcy Lockman, “We Are Raised to Be Two Different Kinds of People” [*All the Rage: Mothers, Fathers, and the Myth of Equal Partnership*. New York: Harper Collins, 2019.]
- Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, “Conclusion: Making Sense of Single Motherhood” [*Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2011. 187-220, 262-268.]
- Lisa Belkin, “The Opt-Out Revolution”
- Judith Warner, “The Opt-Out Generation Wants Back In”
- Robin Ely, Pamela Stone, and Colleen Ammerman, “Rethink What You ‘Know’ About High-Achieving Women”
- Emily Greenman, “Asian American–white differences in the effect of motherhood on career outcomes.” [*Work and Occupations* 38.1 (2011): 37-67.]
- REC: Shelley J. Correll, Stephen Benard, and In Paik, “Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty?” [*American journal of sociology* 112.5 (2007): 1297-1338.]
- REC: Patricia Cortes and Jessica Pan, “Children and the remaining gender gaps in the labor market.” [*NBER Working Paper* 27980 (2020).]
- REC: 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, 284-6.]
- REC: Caryn Medved, “Constructing Breadwinning-Mother Identities: Moral, Personal, and Political Positioning”

PM: Mothering during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Charlotte Tscherning, Jacques Sizun, and Pierre Kuhn, “Promoting attachment between parents and neonates despite the COVID-19 pandemic” [*Acta Paediatrica* 109.10 (2020): 1937-1943.]
- Misty L. Heggeness, “Estimating the immediate impact of the COVID-19 shock on parental attachment to the labor market and the double bind of mothers” [*Review of Economics of the Household* 18.4 (2020): 1053-1078.]
- Andrea O’Reilly, “‘Trying to Function in the Unfunctionable’: Mothers and COVID-19” [*Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 11.1 (2020).]

W, 1/13 Mothers as political activists

AM:

- Judith Stadtman Tucker, “The new future of motherhood.” *The Mothers Movement Online* (2005).
- Margaret E. Burchianti, “Building bridges of memory: The mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the cultural politics of maternal memories”
- Mabel Bellucci, “Childless motherhood: Interview with Nora Cortiñas, a mother of the plaza de Mayo, Argentina”
- Kerreen Reiger, “Reconceiving citizenship: The challenge of mothers as political activists.” [*Feminist Theory* 1.3 (2000): 309-327.]

PM: in 2020

- Rebecca Aanerud, "The legacy of white supremacy and the challenge of white antiracist mothering." [*Hypatia* 22.2 (2007): 20-38.]
- Kaila Adia Story, "Mama's Gon' Buy You a Mocking Bird: Why# BlackMothersStillMatter: A Short Genealogy of Black Mothers' Maternal Activism and Politicized Care." [*Biography* 41.4 (2018): 876-894.]
- Stephanie Hartzell, "An (in) visible universe of grief: Performative disidentifications with white motherhood in the We are not Trayvon Martin blog." [*Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 10.1 (2017): 62-79.]
- Lyz Lenz, "How America weaponizes motherhood" (Washington Post, July 30, 2020)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/07/29/how-america-weaponizes-motherhood/>

- Find a popular press article about mothers and racial justice work

H, 1/14 Mothers as a political identity group

AM:

- Marsha Marotta, "Political Labeling of Mothers: An Obstacle to Equality in Politics" [in *21st Century Motherhood*; 324-337.]
- Lisa A. Bryant and Julia Marin Hellwege, "Working Mothers Represent: How Children Affect the Legislative Agenda of Women in Congress." [*American Politics Research* 47.3 (2019): 447-470.]
- Grace Deason, Jill S. Greenlee, and Carrie A. Langner, "Mothers on the campaign trail: Implications of politicized motherhood for women in politics." [*Politics, Groups, and Identities* 3.1 (2015): 133-148.]
- Find a popular press article about mothers and the 2020 presidential election

PM: the "Game of Life" presentations

F, 1/15

AM:

- the "Game of Life" presentations
- wrap-up/review

PM: Exam period



"Your attitude is sucking all the fulfillment out of motherhood."

A few words about the course content and personal disclosures:

The content of our course, by its nature, can be emotionally challenging at times. I realize that certain topics will be harder than others, based on an individual's experiences. In order to ensure your emotional safety in this class, I hope that you will feel able to let me know if something is challenging for you—this will help me make accommodations for you, if needed. My goal is that this class be a space where you can learn and participate fully in the class.

This also means that there will be occasions when students wish to disclose information about their experiences or seek additional support. We have counselors at the Women's Center, all of whom are wonderful resources should you need them. The Counseling Services confidential line is 434-982-2252; we offer free counseling services, particularly for students struggling with traumatic experiences.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) in the Elson Student Health Center offers services for students in emotional distress. During evenings and weekends, emergency crisis assistance (434-972-7004) is available. In addition, if you are concerned about another student, call 434-243-5150 during business hours, and request the consulting clinician. There are also two confidential community crisis hotlines (open 24/7) that you may call when you are in need:

- Sexual Assault Resource Agency: 434-977-7273, saracville.org
- Shelter for Help in Emergency: 434-293-8509, shelterforhelpinemergency.org

Underscoring all of this is that the University of Virginia is dedicated to providing a safe and equitable learning environment for all students. To that end, it is vital that you know two critical values that we share with the rest of the UVA community:

- Power-based personal violence will not be tolerated.
- Everyone has a responsibility to do their part to maintain a safe community on Grounds.

More information can be found on the UVA Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights office website that describes reporting options and resources available (www.virginia.edu/eocr, including the University's Title IX policies and procedures) and on the Resources tab of the Women's Center's website (<https://womenscenter.virginia.edu/gender-violence>).