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### 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
  - 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.]
- 1/19 complete IRB training; community partners visit



1/21 Psychology of mothering

- Nancy Chodorow, "The Relation to the Mother and the Mothering Relation." [in *The Reproduction of Mothering*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999. 77-91, 109-110.]
- Nancy Chodorow, "Too Late: The Reproduction and Non-Reproduction of Mothering." [in *Mothering & Psychoanalysis: Clinical, Sociological and Feminist Perspectives*. Ed. Petra Bueskens. Toronto: Demeter P, 2014. 219-241.]
- Optional: Chodorow, "Preface to the Second Edition" vii-xvii.

1/26 Maternal Thinking

- Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking" and "Talking about 'Mothers'." [in *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. 1989. Boston: Beacon P, 1995. 17-40.]



1/28 Other mothers

- Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Women and Motherhood." [in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Routledge, 2000. 173-199.]
- Grace Chang, "Undocumented Latinas: The New 'Employable Mothers'." [in *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*. Ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, Linda Rennie Forcey. New York: Routledge, 1994. 259-285.]
- Optional: Michelle Téllez, "Mi Madre, Mi Hija y Yo: Chicana Mothering through Memory, Culture and Place" [in *Latina/Chicana Mothering*. Ed. Dorsía Smith Silva. Demeter P, 2011. 57-67.]

2/2 Mothering under duress

- 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.]
- Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
- Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

2/4 Theology of Mothering

- Delores Williams, selections from *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993. 16-20, 29-42, 56-59.
- Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Orpah's Untold Story: Generativity and Feminist Theology." [in *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma*. Nashville: Abingdon P, 84-105, 177-179.]
- Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

**Unit 2: Some issues**

2/9 Childbirth

- Jonathan M. Snowden et al., "Planned out-of-hospital birth and birth outcomes." [*New England Journal of Medicine* 373 (2015): 2642-2653.]
- Robbie Davis-Floyd, "The technocratic, humanistic, and holistic paradigms of childbirth." *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics* 75 (2001): S5-S23.
- Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
- Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

- 2/11 from Attachment Parenting to Intensive Mothering, I
- 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.]
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2/16 from Attachment Parenting to Intensive Mothering, II
- 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.]
  - Ayelet Waldman, “Truly, Madly, Guiltily” (link on Sakai)
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2/18 Non-heteronormative mothering
- Mignon R. Moore, “Lesbian Motherhood and Discourses of Respectability.” [in *Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood Among Black Women*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2011. 113-152.]
  - Shelley M. Park, “Mothering Queerly, Queerly Mothering” [in *Mothering Queerly, Queerly Mothering: Resisting Monomaterialism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families*. Albany: SUNY P, 2013. 1-16.]
  - 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!**
  - Kathy Witterick, “Dancing in the Eye of the Storm: The Gift of Gender Fluidity to Our Family.” [in *Chasing Rainbows: Exploring Gender Fluid Parenting Practices*. Eds. Fiona Joy Green and May Friedman. Toronto: Demeter P, 2013. 20-42.]
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2/25 Abortion
- Patricia Beattie Jung, “Abortion and Organ Donation: Christian Reflections on Bodily Life Support.” [in *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 16.2 (Fall 1988): 273-305.]
  - Petchesky, Rosalind Pollack. “Fetal images: The power of visual culture in the politics of reproduction.” *Feminist Studies* (1987): 263-292.
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3/1 Adoption
- 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.]
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

3/3 Abandonment

- 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.
- 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: \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_

### [Easter weekend]

3/29 Lynn O'Brien Hallstein, "Step One—Becoming First-Time Mothers." [in *Bikini-Ready Moms: Celebrity Profiles, Motherhood, and the Body*. New York: SUNY P, 2015. 51-110, 228-30.]

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
- Alison Wolf, “How the Rich Get Rich and the Poor Get Children” and “The Return of the Servant Classes.” [in *The XX Factor: How the Rise of Working Women Has Created a Far Less Equal World*. New York: Crown, 2013. 24-67.]
  - Position Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

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



*“Your attitude is sucking all the fulfillment out of motherhood.”*