

University of San Diego  
Spring 2010

**Cultural Construction of Motherhood:  
Ideologies, Practices, and Contradictions  
HONORS**



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**Description:**

Motherhood is often portrayed as a “natural” role that women are charged to undertake. This multifaceted role produces differing demands on women based on race, social class and sexual orientation, and has a powerful impact on their identities. Motherhood can influence how women engage in the labor force, particularly as women take on a “double shift”, balancing work outside the home with reproduction of the household. Finally, the media and popular culture create gender norms and reinforce a normative script of what constitutes good mothering. This course will provoke students to critically analyze the varied factors that shape and define motherhood as a social role, its impact on society, and the institutions that perpetuate normative ideologies about gender.

**Learning Objectives:**

- 1) To examine the biological, psychological, cultural and economic variables and social processes related to a) fertility & reproduction (conception and adoption), b) values & norms that contribute to gender roles & stereotypes c) conflicts between work and family ideals and d) technological, biomedical, and social influences that change idioms and practices of motherhood.
- 2) To critically analyze and deconstruct the idea that motherhood is a “natural” phenomenon
- 3) To explore how psychological, social, and cultural differences of women (of various racialized/economic/social-class backgrounds, including sexual orientations) affect experiences of motherhood and how these are portrayed through media
- 4) To navigate and discuss the often complicated terrain associated with motherhood, including individual choices, responses, and challenges to the role and also the institutional and macro-level dimensions that are implicated

## Reading list:

1. Selected journal articles and chapters from other texts on Electronic Reserves (e-res).  
Password is: “mother”.
2. *Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women*. Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels. Free Press. 2004. (Used copies available online at abebooks.com or alibris.com; new copies available at local bookstores as well as online retailers such as Barnes & Noble, Amazon, etc.)

## Requirements and Course Expectations:

Students will be responsible for both the material presented during lecture and in the assigned text. The schedule provided is TENTATIVE and therefore the professors reserve the right to make needed changes. Any change in the syllabus will be announced in class and posted on WebCT (see below), therefore the student is responsible for that information. By remaining in this class you agree to abide by all that is stated in this document and any necessary changes the professor may make to this agreement.

In this class, you will be expected to...

- Attend every class & stay for the entire class period. If you have an emergency please try to leave as unobtrusively as possible. Class begins promptly at 2:30. It becomes very disruptive to the instructors and the rest of the class if you come in tardy to the lecture. If you feel that you will have difficulty showing up to class on time, please discuss this with the professors.
- Take a regular and active part of class discussion and activities. Please, do not: talk while others are speaking; text, IM or surf the web during class; sleep during class (you will be asked to leave).
- Mobile phones should be put away and turned off. Even on vibrate, cell phones are a distraction. Cell phones are not to be used as clocks – if you want to know the time, wear a watch. Any violation will result in the loss of the phone for the class period.
- Complete all readings and assignments prior to class meetings. This will enhance your understanding of the lecture as well as prepare you for discussion.
- Show respect for all students and instructor by giving your full attention and treating others kindly.
- Challenge points of view expressed by course texts, videos, the instructor, or other students in a respectful manner, grounding your argument in facts and literature.
- Be conscious of your everyday social context and media use, make efforts to apply class content to these experiences, and share your reflections with the class.

## **WebCT Resource:**

Many course materials will be available on the WebCT server (<http://pope.sandiego.edu/>). In order to access this course you will need a USD e-mail address – if you do not have one you will need to go to academic computing to get one set up for you – the service is free to registered students. It does take a few days so you will need to do this ASAP to gain access. If you have a USD account you will automatically be registered on the WebCT. All instructions about how to use the WebCT are available on the WebCT site – [www.sandiego.edu/webct](http://www.sandiego.edu/webct)

### What you can do with WebCT:

- a. All instructions, grading sheets and ratings sheets will be available for you to read and print out. This will provide you with information about due dates, what the research assignments are as well as how you will be graded.
- b. Calendar of dates will provide information about what lectures are being covered, the reading assignments, reading questions, and due dates for the various components of the course.. Updates of changes will be made here as well. Be sure to check this calendar regularly. The syllabus is posted in case you lose yours and do not have it available.
- c. Group Discussions can be used to communicate with your group via e-mail.
- d. Grade Report can help you keep track of your progress in the course and provide you with your grades in the class
- e. Slide presentations may be posted ahead of time so that you may print them out to have before class. When available, it is advisable to do so because you may not have enough time in class to write down everything on the slide. Try printing 3 slides or more at a time per page to save on cost or paper.
- f. E-mail via WEBCT. All e-mails regarding this course should be sent via the e-mail in WebCT so that you get the quickest response. You can also send attachments and messages to others in the course through the WebCT system

## **Attendance Policy**

Considering that this class meets only once a week, that all information builds cumulatively on previously discussed content, and that a successful class session relies on the active participation of all students, we have three expectations of you regarding attendance:

1. That you will attend every class.
2. That you will arrive on time.
3. That you will stay the entire duration of the class period (2:30-5:20pm.).

Simply put, attendance and punctuality are necessary for you to make the most of this course and for class to run smoothly. A single absence, with advanced notification, can be excused. More than one absence, however, will have a negative impact on your grade in this class. If you miss more than three class meetings, you will automatically receive an F for this course. (The only exception is a documented emergency.)

If you must miss class for health reasons or an emergency, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate, and/or to pick up materials handed out during class. Missing class does not excuse you from failing to turn in an assignment on time.

### **Academic Integrity**

USD expects all students to adhere to the accepted norms of intellectual honesty in their academic work. Any forms of cheating, plagiarism, dishonesty or collusion in another's dishonesty is a fundamental violation of these norms. If you have any questions about what is allowed or not allowed, please discuss the matter immediately with one of the professors.

### **Evaluation:**

Evaluation: You will be evaluated as follows:

Participation	15
Weekly Reading Questions	25
Mommy Wars Paper	20
Mother's Story Assmt.	20
Current Affairs Assmt.	20

#### ***Participation***

Everyone is expected to take regular part in class discussions and activities. The more you involve yourself in class, the more you will learn and the more other students will benefit from your input. Participation is not the same thing as attendance. Rather, it involves speaking up, offering your input, and asking questions. It also means referring to course readings, rather than exclusively to personal opinions, experiences, and anecdotes. Participation also means allowing and even inviting others to talk, respond, and present divergent viewpoints.

Sometimes during class you will be asked to talk about one of the readings, reflect on an issue, engage in a group activity, or conduct another relevant task. When appropriate you may be asked to present your written work. Such participation will be evaluated based on how well you demonstrate that you read the assigned articles, completed the assigned tasks, and/or engaged thoughtfully in the activity at hand.

#### ***Weekly Reading Question***

Each week, you will be asked to respond to reading questions. The response must be posted to WebCT by 3pm the Tuesday prior to class. Be prepared to discuss your ideas by having them typed and in class for discussion. Your comments should reflect not only your careful reading of the assigned chapters/articles, but thoughtful reflection and critique of the ideas presented. The professor will post questions on WebCT by the Friday prior to the class for which they are due.

### ***“Mommy Wars”***

Focus Group Analysis Paper In class we will host a “focus group session” of various mothers. A “focus group” is like a group interview in which participants answer a set of questions in a collective format. You will listen to, take notes on, and analyze their conversations. One group will be working mothers, the other will be stay-at-home mothers. This will consist of two in-class panels on February 24th. After their presentations, you will have the opportunity to ask follow up questions. Then you will synthesize and interpret the conversations in light of the various readings and lectures from class up to that point. More information on the paper will be distributed during class time.

### ***Mother’s Story Assignment***

For this assignment, you will conduct an ethnographic interview with a mother. The objective is to learn about her lived experiences with mothering, employment, family, power, socio-legal issues, assisted reproductive technologies (in vitro fertilization, donor insemination, gamete and embryo donation), surrogacy, adoption, and/or experiences of pregnancy (including pre- & post-partum depression, amniocentesis, ultrasounds, and the presence or absence of technological intervention during childbirth). In class you will learn how to conduct and analyze a personal interview. Class members will be asked to interview a range of mothers (e.g., working, stay-at-home, teen mother, empty-nester, elderly, etc.) and to give an informal class presentation to share findings with the rest of class. A formal report with analysis of the interview will also be due (4-5 pages). Papers will include direct quotes transcribed from the interview, along analysis of the interviewee’s narrative framed by the perspectives of course readings and concepts. You will be required to use citations from at least four separate course readings. The class will work together to develop a series of common interview questions, and each student will also prepare additional questions based on the type of mother they interview. More details on this project will be delivered during class time.

### ***Final: Investigation of a Contemporary Issue -- Poster Project***

For this assignment, students will work in groups to evaluate the social and political status of a key contemporary issue facing mothers. Your group will research the issue, examine the various complexities that surround it, determine what solutions and/or opportunities have been suggested/implemented to improve the situation, identify relevant policy and legislative efforts, and articulate a strategy for progress. All groups will organize their findings and suggestions on a poster for presentation to the class during the Final Exam period. As with the other assignments, complete details for this project will be provided later in the semester.

***Late Policy:*** Late assignments, including those that are turned in or emailed during class time, are not accepted unless approved by the professor beforehand or in very rare cases with an approved excuse. This policy will be strictly enforced. Work turned in to a department mailbox must bear a time/date stamp from the secretary in the psychology, sociology, or communication department specifying the date and time you turned in the work.

### ***Course Schedule:***

Jan 27 Introduction to course  
In class writing assignment

Feb 3

Politics of Reproduction and Representation

Martin, E. (1991). The Egg and the Sperm. *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*. 16(3).

Inhorn, M.C. and Birenbaum-Carmeli, D. (2008) Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Culture Change. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 37:177-196. (Read the first three sections: Introduction; Globalization and Inequalities; Gender, Embodiment and Subjectivity)

Selection from: *Killing the Body: Race Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*. By Dorothy Roberts. Vintage Press. 1998.

Available on E-reserves.(password: mother)

Feb 10

Biology of Motherhood

Kinsley, C.H. & Lambert, K.G. (2006). The Maternal Brain. *Scientific American*, 294(1), 72-79.

Maestripieri, D. (2001). Biological bases of maternal attachment. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10(3), 79-83.

“From Here to Maternity” from Chapter 7 in *Mother Nature: Maternal instincts and how they shape the human species*

Feb 17

The New Momism & Perfect Moms

Douglas & Michaels, Introduction: The New Momism; Ch. 1: Revolt Against the MRS; Ch. 4: Attack of the Celebrity Moms

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\*Bring in a publication in which a celebrity’s status as a mother or hopeful mother is noted, described, or profiled

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Feb 24

Mommy Wars

Reading:

-Douglas & Michaels, Ch. 7, The “Mommy Wars”

Hays, The cultural contradictions of motherhood ch. 6, “The Mommy Wars: Ambivalence, Ideological Work and the Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood”

Mar 3

The Body

Upton, R. L. Upton and Han, S. (2003) Maternity and Its Discontents: "Getting The Body Back" After Pregnancy *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 2003; 32; 670

Dworkin, S and Wachs , F. (2004) "Getting your Body Back" *Postindustrial Fit Motherhood in Shape Fit Pregnancy Magazine*. *Gender and Society*

March 17

Psychological Outcomes and Adjustment to Motherhood

Beck, C.T. (2001). Predictors of postpartum depression. *Nursing Research*, 50(5), 275-285.

Kalmuss, D., Davidson, A., & Cushman, L. (1992). Parenting expectations, experiences and adjustment to parenthood: A test of the violated expectations framework. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, 516-526.

Mar 24

Film: Motherhood Manifesto

Mar 31

Lessons on Motherhood from Advertising & Parenting Literature

-Douglas & Michaels, Ch.2: Mouthing off to Dr. Spock; Ch. 9, Moms "R" Us; Ch. 10: Dr. Laura's Neighborhood

Apr 7

Devaluation and Legislation: Politics of Parenting

Crittenden, A. (2001). Where are we now. Chapter 1 in *The Price of Motherhood* pages 13 – 27.

Alpert, M. & Cawthorne, A. Labor Pains: Improving employment and income security for pregnant women and new mothers. Center for American Progress series on Parenting with Dignity.

-Douglas & Michaels: Ch. 8 "Dumb men, stupid choices – or why we have no childcare"

Apr 14

Work

Correll, S., Benard, S. Paik, I. 2007. Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?

*American Journal of Sociology* . 112 (5): 1297–1338

Apr 21

Doing It Wrong: Bad Mothers & Poor Parenting

Reading: Douglas & Michaels Ch. 3: Threats From Without: Satanism, Abduction and Other Media Panics; Ch. 5: Threats From Within: Maternal Delinquents; and Ch. 6: The War Against Welfare Mothers

Apr 28

Motherhood at all costs (surrogacy, adoption)

Ulrich, M. & Weatherall, A. (2000). Motherhood & Fertility: Viewing Motherhood through the Lens of Infertility. *Feminism & Psychology*, 10, 323-336.

May 5

The Aging Mother

The Clash of the Titans: Motherhood Meets Menopause by Nancy London

Sheriff, M. & Weatherall, A. (2009). A feminist discourse analysis of popular-press accounts of postmaternity. *Feminism & Psychology*, 19(1), 89-108.

Raup, J.L. & Myers, J.E. (1989). The Empty Nest Syndrome: Myth or Reality? *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 68, 180 – 183.

