

988:485

Professor Mary Trigg

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Motherhood: Nature and Culture, Policy and Politics

Syllabus

This class will draw on memoirs, film, photography, poetry, short stories, and historical and sociological literature to investigate the representations and realities of diverse mothers in the United States. While most women share the biological possibility for pregnancy and childbirth, not all women become mothers, and for those who do (as well as those who cannot or choose not) the choice as well as the experience are profoundly shaped by multiple factors and forces. We will consider historical contexts as well as contemporary policy and politics that shape the experiences of American mothers and the ways we interpret and judge their lives and needs. This course will pay attention both to common threads and to the important differences of race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. The central issues this class will address include: (1) the maternal ideal and who does (and does not) exemplify it; (2) the emotional terrain of motherhood--diverse mothers' own feelings about pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood; (3) the ways that race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity inform the experiences of and resources available to mothers and the construction of motherhood in the United States; (4) the ways that mothers are represented (or represent themselves) in selected films, memoirs, photographs, and how we can "read" these in different historical contexts; (5) the labor of motherhood; and (6) the "value" of care work and motherhood. Together we will seek to understand the ways in which a complex and multifaceted cultural discourse about motherhood shapes diverse experiences of motherhood.

Learning Goals

In this course, students will:

- Gain an understanding of the literature of motherhood studies.
- Come to understand the ways in which motherhood in the United States has been constructed over time through complex social, cultural and discursive forces.
- Learn to appreciate the manner in which the representations, meanings and experiences of motherhood vary depending on historical period as well as race, class, and sexual orientation within US society.
- Learn to analyze the representations and experiences of motherhood as sites for negotiating and contesting important social and political questions including: women's place in society; the role of the family; the privilege of whiteness, heterosexuality, citizenship, and middle class; the authority of experts; the idea of "the feminine"; the question of who should give care.

Department Learning Goals

In addition, in accordance with the learning goals of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies, this course strives to enable students to develop their talents in oral and written

communication and in critical analysis of words and the world. Toward that end, student presentations in class and written assignments are designed to achieve the following learning goals.

- Understand and critique the formation of categories of gender and sexuality as they function in social, economic, cultural and/or political contexts and as they intersect with other categories of difference such as race and ethnicity.
- Communicate effectively using gender analytics as a tool for academic research, for creative production, for collaborative work, and/or for practices of social change.
- Know the complexity and variety of differently gendered lives and livelihoods around the globe.
- Recognize stereotypes and the naturalization of hierarchies of difference through analyzing power dynamics from the micro to the macro level.
- Identify the politics of issue framing and knowledge production.

Course Requirements

Grading Criteria

Assignment Policy: All assignments are to be handed in at the beginning of class on the due date. Late assignments will be graded down $\frac{1}{2}$ grade per day late. Handing in the paper after class counts as one day late.

Academic Integrity Policy: All students in this class will be held to the Rutgers policy on Academic Integrity, which can be found online: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/> All ideas that are not your own must be cited appropriately. Any cheating, fabrication, plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be reported. Please come and see Mary Trigg with any questions.

Attendance and Seminar Participation: The seminar format requires the preparation, attention, and participation of all class members. Quality of participation (thoughtfulness, relevance) is as important as amount of participation. Attendance is not only required, but necessary.

Cell phones or any other electronic devices must be turned off and stowed away during class. You can check them during the break.

Absence and Lateness: Students are expected to attend all classes. If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An e-mail is automatically sent to me. **Please note: my policy for missed classes is that each unexcused absence will be 20% of your participation grade. Two times of lateness are equivalent to one absence.**

Reading Points: Students must bring to class each week *in written form* three questions or key ideas raised by the reading. I want to know how you are responding to the readings (not just notes on content). Although these will not be graded (they will be checked off as completed or not completed), their completion is worth 10% of your grade.

In this course, each student will be expected to:

- 1) complete all reading assignments by the dates specified on the syllabus;
- 2) bring in reading questions/responses to each class;
- 3) use the reading as the basis for informed class participation;
- 4) complete two short papers;
- 5) make one class presentation based on your second paper.

Papers

Students are required to write two short papers (5 to 7 pages). The papers are designed to assist you in developing your analytical and critical skills. Each paper should be double-spaced and handed to me in hard copy in class, not electronically.

Paper #1: For this paper, you will watch one film from a list to be distributed in class. The list will include a few of the films we will see in class. Then you will write a 5–7 page paper in which you analyze how motherhood is portrayed in the film. You should not only consider the film’s plot, but also the images themselves. How is motherhood represented in the film? How are images of mothering culturally produced? Finally, using three sources from our syllabus you should consider how the film’s portrayal of the mother/mothers/motherhood fits in with other issues we have discussed in class. You should support your arguments with **specific** examples from the film and all sources you use should be appropriately cited using footnotes. Your paper is due in class on March 2nd.

Paper #2: This paper involves a little extra research. I will provide a bibliography of sources on motherhood, but you are welcome to find your own. Drawing upon course readings and at least three additional scholarly sources (book chapters or articles from academic journals), your task is to write a paper that considers one of the central themes of our course (see page one, or the topics of each class). Find the readings that relate to your topic and the argument you want to make. A successful paper will draw on three readings from our syllabus, and three additional outside scholarly sources (book chapters or academic articles from journals). If you want to include an interview/oral history or two in your paper, the interviews total will count as one outside scholarly source. Length: 5-7 pages. A one paragraph description of your final paper (and presentation) topic is due, with bibliography, in class on March 9th. Your paper is due EITHER April 20th or April 27th (your choice). It is paired with the presentation assignment below.

Presentations

Each of you is responsible for giving one 20 to 30 minute presentation during our class. The purpose of the presentation is to share your research with the class, and to connect it to the ideas raised and discussed in our seminar. You may share a visual narrative (youtube, still images for example), or use PowerPoint or Prezi in your presentation if you like. Additional guidelines will be distributed in class. Presentations will be held the last two days of class (April 22nd and 29th).

Grading Percentages:

Attendance & Participation	20%
Reading notes	10%

Paper #1	25%
Paper #2	25%
Class Presentations	20%

Required Readings

Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women put Motherhood Before Marriage*. University of California Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-5209-5068-9

Elizabeth Heineman, *Ghostbelly*. Feminist Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1-55861-844-2

Ann LaMott, *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*. Knopf Doubleday. ISBN 978-1-4000-7909-4

Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood: An American History*. Rutgers University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8135-6378-7

Rebecca Walker, *Baby Love: Choosing Motherhood after a Lifetime of Ambivalence*. New York: Penguin, 2008. 978-1-5944-8288-5

All books are available at the Rutgers Barnes and Noble Bookstore, or for purchase online. All other readings will be posted on our class Sakai site.

Course Calendar

I. MOTHERHOOD: HISTORY, IDEALS AND PRACTICES

Week 1: Thursday, January 19 Introduction

Course Introduction, Syllabus, Film
FILM: "Stella Dallas" (1937, 106 minutes)

Week 2: Thursday, January 26 Women's Voices, Ambivalence and Struggle

Adrienne Rich, "Anger and Tenderness," *Of Woman Born*, Chapter 1
Ann Lamott, *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*
Jorie Graham, "Lapse" (poem)

Week 3: Thursday, February 2 Educating and Controlling Mothers

Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood*, Part II, 1890-1940 (pp. 77-169).

From Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, eds., *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America* (New York University Press, 1998).

From Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Raising A Baby* (immigrant mothers, need sources)

II. MULTIPLE MOTHERHOODS

Week 4: Thursday, February 9 The "Choice" to Mother (or Not)

Rickie Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion and Welfare in the United States*, Chapters 3 & 4, pp. 65-138.

Maura Kelly, "Women's Voluntary Childlessness: A Radical Rejection of Motherhood?", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Volume 37, Numbers 3&4, Fall/Winter 2009, pp. 157-172.

* Guest Speaker: Ask Jan Kaminsky to come?

Week 5: Thursday, February 16 Single Motherhood: Myths and Realities

Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women put Motherhood Before Marriage*

FILM: "Love & Diane" (116 minutes, 2002)

Week 6: Thursday, February 23 Motherhood in Black and White

Ruth Feldstein, "I Wanted the Whole World to See": Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till" (from *Mothers and Motherhood: Readings in American History*)

Georgia Douglas Johnson, "Safe," one-act play (1929)

Billie Holiday, "Strange Fruit" (song, 1939)

FILM: "Imitation of Life" (1934)

Week 7: Thursday, March 2 Activism in the Name of Motherhood

Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace Versus HUAC," Selection from Alexis Jetter, Annalise Orleck and Diana Taylor, eds., *The Politics of Motherhood* (to be announced)

Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Toward Defining Maternalism in U.S. History"

Cynthia Edmonds-Cady, "Mobilizing Motherhood: Race, Class, and the Uses of Maternalism in the Welfare Rights Movement," WSQ 2009

Annalise Orleck, "We Are that Militant Things Called the Public"

Mothers in the Black Lives Matter Movement

Select readings on Immigrant Mothers

FILM: "A Crushing Love: Chicanas, Motherhood and Activism" (2009, 58 minutes, Women Make Movies)

***Paper #1 Due**

III. MOTHERHOOD AND LABOR

Week 8: Thursday, March 9 Gender Ideology and Motherhood

Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood*, Part III, 1940-Today (pp. 173-286).

Amram Scheinfeld, "Are American Moms a Menace?" *Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1945, 6.

Stephanie Coontz, "When We Hated Mom." *The New York Times*. May 8, 2011.
From *Generation of Vipers*.

FILM: "The Motherhood Archives," (2013, 91 minutes, Women Make Movies)
<https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/the-motherhood-archives/#Twilight-text>

***One paragraph description of final paper topic and presentation due, with bibliography**

Week 9: SPRING BREAK

Week 10: Thursday, March 23 The Embodied Dimensions of Mothering

A chapter on childbirth from Robbie Davis-Floyd, *Birth as an American Rite of Passage*
or from Barbara Katz Rothman, *Laboring On: Birth in Transition in the U.S.* (2007)
Cindy A. Stearns, "The Work of Breastfeeding," WSQ 2009
Toi Derricotte, "Natural Birth" (poem)
FILM: "The Business of Being Born" (2008)

Week 11: Thursday, March 30 Motherhood and Grief

Lisa Heineman, *Ghostbelly*

Week 12: Thursday, April 6 The Politics of Care

From Ann Crittendon, *The Price of Motherhood*
From Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care* (2012)
FILM: "The Motherhood Manifesto"

Week 13: Thursday, April 13 The Emotions of Motherhood

Tillie Olsen, "I Stand Here Ironing"
Rebecca Walker, *Baby Love: Choosing Motherhood after a Lifetime of Ambivalence*
(2007)

IV. MOTHERHOOD FROM MANY PERSPECTIVES

Week 14: Thursday, April 20 Presentations

*PRESENTATIONS
PAPERS DUE (or next week—your choice)

Week 15: Thursday, April 27 Presentations

PRESENTATIONS
ALL PAPERS DUE