

Constructing Motherhood

SPCH 4957/5957 WMST 4957/5957
East Tennessee State University, Fall 2010

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Amber Kinser, kinsera@etsu.edu
PHONE: 439-7577 (my office); 439-4491 (Comm Dept office)
OFFICE: Warf-Pickel 519A
OFFICE HOURS: Mon, Wed: 8:30-10 a.m.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- (All) Kinser, Amber E. *Motherhood and Feminism* (2010). Berkeley: Seal Press.
ISBN-10: 1580052703; ISBN-13: 9781580052702
- Friedman, May and Calixte, Shana. (2009). *Mothering and Blogging: The Radical Act of the MommyBlog*. Toronto: Demeter. ISBN: 9781550114488-8
- Additional readings posted on D2L.
- (Grads) O'Reilly, Andrea, ed. *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*. Toronto: Demeter Press, 2007.
ISBN: 978-1-550-14482-6
- Jetter, Alexis; Orleck Annelise; and Taylor, Diana, eds. *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997. ISBN 0-87451-780-X.
- Williams, J. C., Manvell, J., & Bronstein, S. (2006). "Opt Out or Pushed Out? How the Press Covers Work/Family Conflict: The Untold Story of Why Women Leave the Workforce." The Center for WorkLife Law, University of California Hastings College of the Law.
www.uchastings.edu/site_files/WLL/OptOutPushedOut.pdf

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course examines how the institution of motherhood, and experiences of mothering, have been constructed over time. Focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on the U.S., we will explore changing and multiple meanings of motherhood, how such meanings have been constructed through media, cultural practice, and language, and how they have impacted family experience and women's lives. We will examine the ways in which women have used the platform of motherhood to agitate for political power, both historically and in contemporary movements. We will interrogate how women's social power in general is assessed up against the backdrop of motherhood, regardless of whether or not they are mothers. And we will learn about how women have used their experiences as mothers as a significant motivating force for arguing powerfully and effectively on behalf of their families. Finally, we will study the role of online technology and communities in shaping maternal understandings, political meaning, family life, and mothering experiences.

COURSE GOALS

Successful participation in the class will enable you to:

1. Distinguish between motherhood as an *institution*, and mothering as *experience*.
2. Explore the reciprocal relationship between mothering/motherhood and social constructions of them. That is, examine how communicative messages about mothering/motherhood shape how women and others experience motherhood, and how experiences of mothering/motherhood shape our communications about them.
3. Investigate the historical unfolding and multiple forms of maternal activism in the U.S.
4. Examine how contemporary women use their positions as mothers to agitate for social change and understand the social structures that facilitate or suppress these efforts.
5. Make connections across and distinctions between various feminist approaches to the study of mothering/motherhood.
6. Interrogate the role of media representations in shaping maternal practice and family life, as well as women's experiences and opportunities more broadly.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the completion of this course, the student is expected to:

1. Identify ways that women's presumed maternity and actual role as mothers have been used by women, mothers, and others to expand and/or limit women's power.
2. Explain the influence of nationalism, racism, and classism in shaping the definitions and experiences of mothers
3. Identify the role of new media technologies in shaping motherhood and women's maternal activism
4. Craft a presentation that connects online and other media messages to feminist theory and motherhood studies.
5. Critique the notions of the "nuclear family," "good" or "bad" mother, essentialized definitions of mothering, and/or weblink bibliography)
6. Offer a sustained analysis of some theme regarding social constructions of motherhood that employs theory from motherhood studies, feminist studies, and/or communication studies (through for example a paper, project, and or weblink bibliography).

GRADING

Your final grade for the course will be calculated according to the following scale:

25%	Exam 1
25%	Exam 2
20%	Annotated Weblink Bibliography
20%	Course Project or Paper
<u>10%</u>	<u>Participation</u>
100%	TOTAL

You can figure your grade at any time in the semester if you take the total maximum points possible for all assignments graded so far, and divide it into the total points you have received so far. Use the scale below as a general guide for understanding points earned on individual assignments:

	87-89% B+	77-79% C+	67-69% D+
93-100% A	83-86% B	73-76% C	63-66% D
90-92% A-	80-82% B-	70-72% C-	60-62%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

2 Exams: 50% (two exams, 25% each)

Some combination of short answer, multiple choice, and essay for undergraduate students; essay-only for graduate students. Questions will cover course readings & class discussions. More information will be provided in class and/or on D2L.

Annotated Weblink Bibliography: 20%

You will compile an annotated bibliography of online multimedia sources (5 for undergraduates, 10 for graduates) that highlight the relationships between motherhood and feminism, illustrate how media representations influence experiences of mothering/motherhood, and/or illustrate theoretical concepts discussed in the course. Your links will explore a specific theme you have chosen and you will show how the links and the theme connect with course material. All URLs should be fully functional and should link directly to the audio or video or other multimedia source you are using. You will title each entry and include the URL, and explain in your annotation the connection to course material. You might pull from women's maternal activism messages, coverage of significant historical moments or contemporary events, political ads, televised news excerpts, commercials or other ads, or a host of other sources. Your annotations should make clear, sophisticated, and intelligent connections to course material. It should not simply be a bunch of links, for example, to commercials or publicly available home video on YouTube. Instead, your responsibility is to illustrate specific historical or contemporary moments and specific feminist or communication concepts. You will create a presentation for the class that walks us through your sources and their connections to course material. Graduate students will develop this assignment more fully, integrating graduate readings and other scholarly research.

Project (undergrad) or Paper (grad): 20%

Project for undergraduates: Pursue one of the "Topics for Research" in the Reader's Guide at the back of the Kinser book. At its completion, [rovide evidence of your project and write a 5-page paper discussing what you executed and tying it into course concepts or theories.

Paper for graduates: Write a 15 to 20-page paper that analyzes some theme related to constructions of motherhood, as it emerges in the media and/or the arts. You will analyze film, television drama, plays, music, literature, poetry, blogging, visual arts, or the performing arts. You will both explain and illustrate some cluster of theoretical concepts as they related to your media/art form, and identify specific feminist, motherhood studies, or communication themes that emerge from your analysis. If you have a clear idea of other cultural texts you wish to analyze, you may be able to negotiate that with me.

Participation: 10%

The success of the class depends largely on your choice to participate. Minimally, each member of the class should commit to attending regularly, and being prepared to talk. Being prepared for class means, *at the very least*: 1) reading and understanding assigned material, 2) clarifying difficult concepts with me during office hours, and 3) writing down, and verbally sharing, insightful questions that can initiate thoughtful discussion. Your participation grade largely will be contingent on how well you are prepared for and actively participate in class discussions. Effective preparation and participation requires not only regular attendance, but also diligence in class exercises and homework assignments, as well as open verbal discussion in class. Absences and participation are, for the most part, evaluated separately. This means that a person who has perfect attendance but who rarely contributes to class discussion could still fail this portion of the final grade. Finally, to avoid losing accumulated participation points at the end of the semester, you must complete, turn in, and discuss your Course Retrospective assignment in class on the last class day.

Constructing Motherhood Course Agenda, Fall 2010

		Readings, Assignments—All	Readings—Grads
M	Aug 30	Course Intro Kinser ch 1: Feminist Foundations	O'R: Anderson 46; Hill-Collins 18;
W	Sept 1	Kinser ch 1	
M	6	Labor Day—No class meeting	
W	8	Kinser ch. 1	O'R: Thurer 21
M	13	Kinser ch 2: From the Mother Heart to the Mother Vote	Gillman
W	15	Kinser ch 2	
M	20	Kinser ch 3 From Mothering the Nation to Restructuring the Family	O'R: Chodorow 3
W	22	Kinser ch 3	O'R: Lorde 9; Rich 1 & 2
M	27	Kinser ch 3-4	O'R: Ruddick 6; hooks 17
W	29	Kinser ch 4: From Pronatalism to MommyBlogs	O'R: Lewin 23; Copper 11
M	Oct 4	Contemporary critiques of the institution of motherhood Graduate students lead discussion	O'R: Douglas & Michaels 37; Maushart 4; Warner 43 (be prepared to lead class discussion on these readings)
W	6	Exam 1	
M	11	Fall Break	
W	13	Weblink I presentations	
M	18	Weblink I presentations	
W	20	Weblink I presentations	Online: Williams, Manvell & Bronstein "Opt Out or Pushed Out?"
M	25	Kinser ch 5: Mother Activism	O'R: Crittenden 36; Guiterrez, 42
W	27	Kinser ch 5: Mother Activism	JO&T: Intro
M	Nov 1	Mother Activism Graduate students lead discussion	JO&T: Wangari Maathai and the Greenbelt Movement; Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo
W	3	Mother Activism Graduate students lead discussion	JO&T: Politics of Feeding; Las Vegas Welfare Mothers; Chinese Mothers in NYC Sweatshops
M	8	Mother Activism Graduate students lead discussion	JO&T: Mothers in Race-Hate Movements Skingirl Mothers; Radical Motherhood (Moraga)
W	10	Commercialism & Technology Paul: "Edutainment" Bronson & Merryman "Plays Well with Others"	JO&T: Commercializing Motherhood; Nash: 3D Fetuses
M	15	Friedman & Calixte Foreword, 3 Mothering & Blogging	
W	17	Friedman & Calixte 5, 7 Mothering & Blogging	
M	22	Friedman & Calixte 8, 9 Mothering & Blogging	
W	24	Exam 2	
M	29	Weblink II presentations	
W	Dec 1	Weblink II presentations	
M	6	Weblink II presentations	
W	8	Retrospective	
	Final Exam Week	Discuss completed final projects/papers	