Course Description

In this joint seminar, graduate and undergraduate students will investigate motherhood as an identity, a social-historical construct, and a social institution. Readings will include theoretical works, personal accounts, and empirical studies. We will pay particular attention to the variety of social science theoretical approaches to motherhood. By focusing on motherhood in the United States, we will consider how definitions and constructions of motherhood change over time and how they vary by race-ethnicity and class. Central themes will include: motherhood as a social identity that encompasses certain expectations and assumptions; motherhood as a personal experience that is shaped by social, cultural and economic structures; motherhood as a gendered, classed, and raced institution; and mothering as an activity regulated by the state but enacted by individuals within a social context.

Course Requirements

Students will be expected to come to class fully prepared to discuss the week’s readings. Grades will be based on participation (10%), two oral presentations (10% each), one media analysis paper (30%), and one research paper (40%). Participation includes not only attendance, but also active and thoughtful engagement in the discussion each week. Each student will be responsible for teaming up with other students to circulate discussion questions prior to the class on the weekly readings and make two brief (5 to 10 minute) presentations on weekly readings. In addition, the research paper will involve a multi-step process that begins with a proposal, an outline, a presentation on work-in-progress, and a final paper.

The media analysis, 4 to 6 pages, will involve identifying a current controversy in the public domain regarding motherhood. Choose an article in a newspaper or magazine, an editorial, an essay, or a blog that has been written between August 25th and September 30th. State the argument of the article, outline its assumptions about mothers or motherhood, examine the author’s use of evidence, and assess the overall political perspective. Do you agree or disagree with the argument? Why? What are the public policy implications of this perspective? Be sure to attach a copy of the original article. This paper is due October 3rd in class.
The research paper, 10 to 12 pages, will be a sociological analysis of a topic related to the themes of the course concerning motherhood or mothering (e.g., definitions of “fit” motherhood, conditions and rights of incarcerated mothers, “bonding” and adoptive mothers). It should apply concepts and perspectives from the class to the primary and secondary literature on the chosen topic. Graduate students have the option of writing a literature review rather than a research paper. The paper topic will be developed in consort with Professor Hansen.

- An initial prospectus is due October 17th
- An outline of the paper and a list of at least five published sources are due November 14
- The final paper is due Friday, December 12th by noon.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability you should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay, Director of Disabilities at x63470. Letters of accommodations should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

A Note on Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person – be it a world-class philosopher or your lab partner – without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, paragraphs or ideas found in published volumes, on the internet, or created by another student.

Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section 3 of Rights and Responsibilities, may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

Required readings

Blum, Linda, At the Breast (Beacon Press, 1999)
Garey, Anita Ilta, Weaving Work and Motherhood (Temple, 1999)

The readings below designated by an asterisk (*) can be found on the LATTE page for the course.

**Course Outline**

**Week 1 – August 29: Historical Constructions of Childhood (and Motherhood)**
Zelizer, Viviana, *Pricing the Priceless Child*

**Week 2 – September 5: “Good Enough” Mothers and the Needs of Children**
*Guest speaker –Stephanie Bryson, Ph.D. Candidate*

Roberts, Dorothy, *Shattered Bonds*
*Olsen, Tillie, “I Stand Here Ironing,” in *Tell Me a Riddle* (New York: Dell, 1956), pp. 9-21

**Week 3 – September 12: Theorizing and Historicizing Motherhood**
Collins, Patricia Hill, “Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood,” in *Mothering*, pp. 45-65
Stack, Carol and Linda Burton, “Kinscripts: Reflections on Family, Generation, and Culture,” in *Mothering*, pp. 33-44
**Week 4 – September 19: Psychoanalytic Feminism, Maternal Consciousness & Gender**

Chodorow, Nancy, “Why Women Mother,” in Families in the U.S., pp. 271-293
Carothers, Suzanne, “Catching Sense: Learning from Our Mothers to be Black and Female,” in Families in the U.S., pp. 315-327
Witherow, “Native American Mother,” in Families in the U.S., pp. 335-337

**Recommended:**
Chodorow, Nancy, Reproduction of Mothering (University of California Press)

**Week 5 – September 26: Point of View, Mothering, and Sexuality**

*Guest speaker:  Professor Joyce Antler, American Studies*

*Antler, Joyce, “Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict: Social Science Uncovers the Jewish ‘Family Plot,’” in You Never Call! You Never Write!: A History of the Jewish Mother (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 73-99

Recommended:

Week 6 – October 3: Public Mothers, the Maternal Body, and Breast Feeding

Guest Speaker: Professor Linda Blum, University of New Hampshire (invited)

Blum, Linda, At the Breast

**First paper due**

Week 7 – October 10: YOM KIPPUR – NO CLASSES

Week 8 – October 17: “Choice” and Advice

Guest Speaker: Professor Rosanna Hertz, Wellesley College

Hertz, Rosanna, Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice
*Mechlin, Jay E., “Advice to Historians on Advice to Mothers,” Journal of Social History v. 9, no.1 (Fall 1975): 44-63

**Prospectus for research paper due**

Recommended:
Week 9: October 24: Employment and Symbolic Motherhood

Guest Speaker: Professor Anita Garey, University of Connecticut

Garey, Anita, Weaving Work and Motherhood
Segura, Denise, “Working at Motherhood: Chicana and Mexican Immigrant Mothers and Employment,” in Mothering, pp. 211-233
Shaw, Stephanie, “Mothering Under Slavery in the Antebellum South” in Mothering, pp. 237-258

Recommended:
Movie: “Rosie the Riveter”
Boris, Eileen, “Mothers are Not Workers: Homework Regulation and the Construction of Motherhood, 1948-1953” in Mothering, pp. 161-180

Week 10 – October 31: Transnational Mothering

Guest Speaker: Professor Paula Aymer, Tufts University

*Aymer, Paula, “Migration and Motherhood,” in Uprooted Women: Migrant Domestics in the Caribbean (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), pp. 95-123
*Parrenas, Rhacel Salazar, “Mothering from a Distance: Emotions, Gender, and Intergenerational Relations in Filipino Transnational Families,” Feminist Studies v. 27, no.2 (Summer 2001): 361-390

Recommended:
Movie: “Chain of Love”

Week 11 – TBA: Lesbian Identities and Motherhood

***KVH to conference – need to reschedule class

Hequembourg, Amy, Lesbian Motherhood: Stories of Becoming
Recommended:
Lewin, Ellen, “Negotiating Lesbian Motherhood: The Dialectics of Resistance and Accommodation” in Mothering, pp. 333-353

Week 12 – November 14: “Doing Family” and Performing Motherhood

Guest Speaker: Professor Margaret Nelson, Middlebury College

Pardo, Mary, “Mexican American Women Grassroots Community Activists: Mothers of East Los Angeles” in Families in the U.S., pp. 251-262

**Outline of research paper due

Recommended:
Schnitzer, “He Needs his Father: The Clinical Discourse and Politics of Single Mothering,” in Mothering Against the Odds, pp. 151-172

Week 13 – November 21: Medicalized Motherhood & Reproductive Controversies

Litt, Jacquelyn, Medicalized Motherhood: Perspectives from the Lives of African-American and Jewish Women
Reinelt, Claire and Mindy Fried, “I am This Child’s Mother: A Feminist Perspective on Mothering with a Disability,” in Families in the U.S., pp. 339-348

Student Presentations on final papers
Recommended:
Movie: “Refrigerator Mothers”
*Sparks, “Against All Odds: Resistance and Resilience in African-American Welfare Mothers,” in Mothering Against the Odds, pp. 215-237
Finger, Anne, “Claiming All of Our Bodies: Reproductive Rights and Disability,” in Families in the U.S., pp. 849-857

Week 14– November 28: THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS

Week 15 – December 5: Gendering Parenthood and Public Policy

Walzer, Susan, Thinking about the Baby

Student Presentations on final papers

*** Research Papers due Friday, December 12th, by NOON***