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### COMX 491.02: Special Topics - Discourses of Motherhood

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# COMX 491-Discourses of Motherhood in Practice, Politics, and the Media

Fall 2021

Mondays and Wednesdays 2:00-3:20



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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 1:00-1:50 pm and by appointment.

If you would like to attend office hours in person, you must wear a mask. If you are not masked, I am happy to meet with you over Zoom

at <https://umontana.zoom.us/j/93170318258?pwd=OXVuYTJxdnI1bk40M1VGTVBLbUVUTUT09>

To mother is to engage in a practice and to assume an identity that, across the globe, most women have shared or will share. Yet mothering, like all human endeavors, is not simply a natural process; instead, it is shaped by, and in turn shapes, the social institutions and cultural contexts within which it takes place. In this course, we will investigate the social, cultural, economic, and political implications of mothering. We will focus on two interrelated yet distinct lines of inquiry: First, how does public discourse *about mothers* shape expectations of motherhood as an identity and practice? Second, how have women (some of whom are mothers, some of whom are not) *appealed to motherhood* to effect change in the public sphere, and in turn, how have those practices (from maternal rhetorical strategies to maternal activism and resistance) affected understandings of motherhood?

## COVID Rules

- Mask use is required within the classroom or laboratory.
- If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please don't come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.
- If you are required to isolate or quarantine, I will work with you so that you will be able to continue to make academic progress in the course.
- UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to Curry Health Center.
- Where social distancing (maintaining consistent 6 feet between individuals) is not possible, specific seating arrangements will be used to support contact tracing efforts.
- Class attendance and seating will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts.
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.

## Grades

Grades will be based on evaluation of student performance on the following assignments:

Discussion Leader	50 points
Reading Notes/Participation:	100 points
Group Project	100 points
Exams	200 points (100 points per exam)

**Undergraduate Student Total: 450 points**

Graduate Student paper 100 points

**Graduate Student Total 550 points**

Grades will be assessed on the following scale:

92% and above =A, 91-90=A-, 89-88=B+, 87-82=B, 81-80=B-, 79-78=C+, 77-72=C, 71-70=C- and so forth.

## Assignments

**Reading Notes:** This is a reading- and discussion-based course. To help you think critically about the readings and prepare for discussions, you will complete reading notes for each class period readings are assigned. The reading notes are meant to encourage you to synthesize – combine, bring together, or interweave – the readings as a group or “set” in relation to the day’s topic. Reading notes should cover three areas: (1) commentary on the most significant themes addressed in the readings, (2) the differences between and nuances in that day’s readings and also in relation to prior readings, and (3) points of particular interest, concern, curiosity, or confusion. Please label the article you are discussing clearly in your notes.

Reading notes should be 1-2 single-spaced pages and must be brought to class. Periodically, I will collect your notes to verify that you are doing them and to assess their quality. Although reading notes will not be formally graded, they will form the basis for your participation grade. Finally, these notes should serve as a foundation for preparing for exams.

**All readings are available on Moodle.**

**Participation:** On the days you are not serving as discussion leader, you will be expected to participate fully in class discussions based on a close reading of all assigned material, material discussed earlier in the semester, and your observations about current events, outside readings, and personal interactions. If there are issues you find particularly fascinating/frustrating/confusing, draw our attention to them and be prepared to engage in a scholarly conversation about these issues.

**Discussion Leader:** Each class period, one-to-two students will serve as the discussion leader. When you serve in this role, your goal is to lead the discussion of the key areas of foci for the day's readings. This includes the most significant themes addressed, the differences between and nuances in that day's readings and in relation to prior readings, and points of particular interest, concern, curiosity, or confusion. To prepare for the discussion, you should develop more extensive reading notes than you would for the normal daily reading notes – 3-4 single spaced pages –and you will turn those notes in at the end of class. You also are welcome to bring in additional material that might facilitate discussion. So, for example, you might bring in popular culture representations of the day's topic such as a video or podcast clip or a magazine or newspaper article. Or, you might develop a short exercise for the class to engage in that illustrates the day's topic – make up a game or design an intervention. In short, when serving as a discussion leader, you should think of ways to *apply and visualize* the day's topic. If two students are assigned as discussion leader for the day, you may work individually or as a team. If you choose to work individually, please coordinate with one another so that you cover the breadth of the day's readings and do not repeat each other's ideas or areas of emphasis

You will sign up to serve as discussion leader on Moodle. Assignments will be allotted on a first-come, first-served basis.

**Group Presentation:** Students will work together in small groups (2-4 people) to develop a presentation on an issue related to discourses of maternity. You may choose to address a topic not yet covered or to expand upon an issue covered in previous sessions. Presentations should include a combination of scholarly work and application. Each group will be allotted 20 minutes for their presentation. Additional instructions will be provided at a later date.

**Exams:** You will complete two take-home exams; exams will entail a combination of identification, short answer, and essay questions. Exams questions will be provided no later than one week prior to the exam due date. Exams are due October 6 and December 14 and will be submitted via Moodle. Word documents are preferred. Exams are not cumulative.

**Graduate Student paper:** Graduate students will write a research paper related to the course topic and their own areas of interest. We will meet periodically as a graduate cohort to discuss your topics and papers.

**Academic Misconduct:**

Academic misconduct includes cheating, plagiarizing, and deliberately interfering with the work of others. Plagiarizing means representing the work of someone else (such as another student or an author of a book or an article) as your own. If you use the ideas or words of someone else on an exam or in a paper, you must cite the source of the original information. Following university regulations, cheating and plagiarism will be penalized with a failing grade in this course.

**Schedule**

M 8-30      Introductions

W 9-1      **Academic Explorations of Motherhood: Foundational Texts**

Rich, Adrienne (2007). Introduction from *Of Woman Born*. In Andrea O'Reilly (Ed.) *Maternal Theory: Essential Reading*. Toronto: Demeter Press, (pp. 6-10).

Rich, Adrienne (2007). Anger and Tenderness. In Andrea O'Reilly (Ed.) *Maternal Theory: Essential Reading*. Toronto: Demeter Press, (pp. 11-26).

Hays, Sharon. (2007). Why Can't a Mother be More like a Businessman? In Andrea O'Reilly (Ed.) *Maternal Theory: Essential Reading*. Toronto: Demeter Press, (pp. 408-430).

M 9-6      No Class – Labor Day Holiday

W 9-8      **Academic Explorations of Motherhood: Foundational Texts**

Collins, Patricia Hill (2007). Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood. In Andrea O'Reilly (Ed.) *Maternal Theory: Essential Reading*. Toronto: Demeter Press, (pp. 311-330).

Fixmer-Oraiz, Natalie (2019). Introduction: Homeland Maternity, the New Reproductive Regime in *Homeland Maternity: US Security Culture and the New Reproductive Regime*, Urbana: University of Illinois (pp. 1-30).

M 9-13

**Experiences of Motherhood—Pregnancy and Childbirth**

Johnson, Bethany and Quinlan, Margaret M. (2015). Technical Versus Public Spheres: A Feminist Analysis of Women's Rhetoric in the Twilight Sleep Debates of 1914-1916. *Health Communication*, 30, 1076-1088.

Horstman, Haley Kranstuber, Anderson, Jenn, and Kuehl, Rebecca A. (2017). Communicatively Making Sense of Doulas within the U.S. Master Birth Narrative: Doulas as Liminal Characters. *Health Communication*, 32, 1510-1519.

W 9-15

**Experiences of Motherhood – Infertility and Unplanned Pregnancies**

Foster, Elissa (2010). My Eyes Cry Without Me: Illusions of Choice in the Transition to Motherhood. In Hayden, Sara and O'Brien Hallstein, D. Lynn (Eds.). *Contemplating Maternity in an Era of Choice: Explorations into Discourses of Motherhood*. Lanham, MA: Lexington. (pp. 139-158).

Cunningham, Summer R. and Pearson, Amy R. (2010). Two Women, Two Stories: Complicating Our "Right to Choose." In Hayden, Sara and O'Brien Hallstein, D. Lynn (Eds.). *Contemplating Maternity in an Era of Choice: Explorations into Discourses of Motherhood*. Lanham, MA: Lexington. (pp. 159-180).

M 9-20

**Experiences of Motherhood – Mother Work**

Hallenbeck, Sarah (2018). Mobility, Moms, and the Babywearing Phenomenon. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 41, 359-369.

Kinser, Amber E. (2017). Fixing Food to Fix Families: Feeding Risk Discourse and the Family Meal. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 40, 28-47.

W 9-22

**Experiences of Motherhood – Identity Work**

Medved, Caryn E. and Kirby, Erika L. (2005). Family CEOs: A Feminist Analysis of Corporate Mothering Discourses. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 18, 435-478.

Gilchrist, Eletra S. and Camara, Sakile (2012). Cultural Dis/Continuity in African-American and Ghanaian Mothers' Voices and Identities. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 41, 81-108.

M 9-27      **Experiences of Motherhood – Mothering Outside the Heteronormative, Nuclear Family**

Adams, Heather Brooks (2017). Rhetorics of Unwed Motherhood and Shame. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 40, 91-110.

Renegar, Valerie R. and Cole, Kirsti K. (2019). "Evil Is Part of the Territory": Inventing the Stepmother in Self-Help Books. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 42, 511-533.

W 9-29      **Experiences of Motherhood – Mothering Outside the Heteronormative, Nuclear Family**

Miller, Katrina L. (2012). What Will They Call You? Rhetorically Listening to Lesbian Maternal Narratives. *The International Journal of Listening*, 26, 134-145.

Fixmer-Oraiz, Natalie and Wehman-Brown, Grover (2020). Called in the World by All of Us: An Interview with *Masculine Birth Ritual* Podcast Creator and Host Grover Wehman-Brown. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 7, 94-105.

M 10-4      Study Day

W 10-6      Exam One

M 10-11      **Motherhood and Paid Employment – Maternity Leave**

Buzzaell, Patrice M., Remke, Robyn V., Meisenbach, Rebecca, Liu, Meina, Bowers, Venessa, and Conn, Cindy (2017). Standpoints of Maternity Leave: Discourses of Temporality and Ability. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 40, 67-90.

Peterson, Lori West (2010). Cutting the Meeting Short: Conflicting Narrative Choices in One Woman's Maternity Leave. In Hayden, Sara and O'Brien Hallstein, D. Lynn (Eds.). *Contemplating Maternity in an Era of Choice: Explorations into Discourses of Motherhood*. Lanham, MA: Lexington. (pp. 227-246).

W 10-13      **Motherhood and Paid Employment – On the Job**

Bochantin, Jamie E. and Cowan, Renne L. (2010). Total Motherhood and Having it all: Reproduction, Maternity, and Discourses of Choice among Female Police Officers. In Hayden, Sara and O'Brien Hallstein, D. Lynn (Eds.). *Contemplating Maternity in an Era of Choice: Explorations into Discourses of Motherhood*. Lanham, MA: Lexington. (pp. 247-268).

McFarlane, Megan D. (2021). "Examining the Pregnancy Continuum in the US Military," in *Militarized Maternity: Experiencing Pregnancy in the U.S. Armed Forces*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press. (pp. 1-22).

M 10-18      **Mediated Motherhood – Idealized Visions of the Mother**

Douglas, Susan J. and Michaels Meredith W. (2004). "Attack of the Celebrity Moms" in *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. New York: Free Press. (pp. 110-139).

O'Brien Hallstein, Lynn D. (2011) She Gives Birth, She's Wearing a Bikini: Mobilizing the Postpregnant Celebrity Mom Body to Manage the Post-Second Wave Crisis in Femininity. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 34, 111-138.

W 10-20      **Mediated Motherhood – "Bad" Moms**

Guillem, Susana Martinez and Flores, Lisa A. (2016). Maternal Transgressions, Racial Regressions: How Whiteness Mediates the (Worst) White Moms. In Hundley, Heather and Hayden, Sara (Eds.). *Mediated Moms: Contemporary Challenges to the Motherhood Myth*. New York: Peter Lang (pp. 77-102).

Lehman, Katherine J. (2016). Addicted to Danger: The Fierce, Flawed Mothers of *Nurse Jackie* and *Weeds*. In Hundley, Heather and Hayden, Sara (Eds.). *Mediated Moms: Contemporary Challenges to the Motherhood Myth*. New York: Peter Lang (pp. 53-76).

M 10-25      **Mediated Motherhood – Not-So "Bad" Moms**

Howard, Natasha (2016). *16 and Pregnant* and Black: Challenging and Debunking Stereotypes. In Hundley, Heather and Hayden, Sara (Eds.). *Mediated Moms: Contemporary Challenges to the Motherhood Myth*. New York: Peter Lang (pp. 103-122).

Mazzarella, Sharon R. (2016). "It Is What It Is": Here Comes Honey Boo Boo's "Mama" June Shannon as Unruly Mother. In Hundley, Heather and Hayden, Sara (Eds.). *Mediated Moms: Contemporary Challenges to the Motherhood Myth*. New York: Peter Lang (pp. 123-142).



W 10-27      **Mediated Motherhood – Social Media**

Palmer-Mehta, Valerie and Shuler, Sherianne (2016). “Devil Mamas” of Social Media: Resistant Discourses in Sanctimommy. In Hundley, Heather and Hayden, Sara (Eds.). *Mediated Moms: Contemporary Challenges to the Motherhood Myth*. New York: Peter Lang (pp. 221-246).

Dubriwny, Tasha N. (2016), Mommy Blogs and the Disruptive Possibilities of Transgressive Drinking. In Hundley, Heather and Hayden, Sara (Eds.). *Mediated Moms: Contemporary Challenges to the Motherhood Myth*. New York: Peter Lang (pp. 203-220).

M 11-1      **Motherhood in the Public Sphere – Activists**

Buchanan, Lindal (2013). Theorizing Motherhood in Public Discourse. In *Rhetorics of Motherhood*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press (pp. 1-23).

Prasch, Allison M. (2015) Maternal Bodies in Militant Protest: Leymah Gbowee and the Rhetorical Agency of African Motherhood. *Women's Studies in Communication* 38.2 187-205.

W 11-3      **Motherhood in the Public Sphere – Activists**

Morrissey, Megan Elizabeth & Kimball, Karen Y. (2017) “#SpoiledMilk: Blacktivism, Visibility, and the Exploitation of the Black Breast.” *Women's Studies in Communication*, 40:1, 48-66.

Hartzell, Stephanie (2017). "An (In)Visible Universe of Grief: Performative Disidentifications with White Motherhood in the We ARE Not Trayvon Martin Blog." *Journal of International & Intercultural Communication* 10.1 62-79.

M 11-8      **Motherhood in the Public Sphere – Activists**

Murphy, Mollie K. (2020) “Maternal Dissent in Mainstream News: ‘Peace Mom’” Confronts the Nation’s Strict Father.” *Women’s Studies in Communication*, 43:1, 23-44.

Dubisar, Abby M. (2015). Embodying and Disabling Antiwar Activism: Disrupting YouTube’s “Mother’s Day for Peace.” *Rhetoric Review*, 34, 56-73.

W 11-10      **Motherhood in the Public Sphere – Politicians and First Ladies**

Gibson, Katie L. and Heyse, Amy L. (2010). "The Difference Between a Hockey Mom and a Pit Bull": Sarah Palin's Faux Maternal Persona and Performance of Hegemonic Masculinity at the 2008 Republican National Convention. *Communication Quarterly*, 58, 235-256.

Hayden, S. (2017). Michelle Obama, Mom-in-Chief: The Racialized Rhetorical Contexts of Maternity. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 40, 11-28. DOI: 10.1080/07491409.2016.1182095

M 11-15      Set Up Presentations

W 11-17      No Class -- NCA

M 11-22      No Class – Open Office Hours

W 11-24      No Class – Thanksgiving Holiday

M 11-29      Presentations

W 12-1      Presentations

M 12-6      Presentations

W 12-8      "Where Do We Go from Here?" and Study Day

Final Exam – Due Tuesday, December 14, 2:00 pm

**Final notes:**

This course is registered with the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program. Students taking this course may count it toward a major or minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies or toward a Graduate Certificate in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. If you enjoy learning about women, gender, and sexuality and would like to know more about the Women's Studies Program, please see me or drop by the WGSS office (LA 138A), visit our website [www.cas.umt.edu/wsprog](http://www.cas.umt.edu/wsprog) or give us a call (243-4100).

Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. "Reasonable" means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications.

Incompletes will be given only in emergencies and only with the prior consent of the instructor. If you foresee having difficulty finishing the course, come speak with me immediately.

Last day to drop classes without petitioning is November 1, 2021 by 5:00 pm. As stated in the course catalog, documented justification is required for dropping courses by petition. Some examples of documented circumstances that may merit approval are: accident or illness, family emergency, or other circumstances beyond the student's control.