

**WS 399 SECTION 002**  
**SEX, LIES AND MOTHERHOOD**  
**WINTER 2008**

**COURSE TIME:** Monday, 6-9 pm  
**CLASS ROOM:** GILK 113

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**Course Description**

**Welcome to Sex, Lies and Motherhood! This course focuses on the gendered experiences of women who are mothers in U.S. society. We will examine how motherhood is a socially constructed institution and how motherhood contributes to the oppression of all women, paying special attention to intersections of gender, race, and class in mothers' lives. We will explore feminist responses in mothering that will raise your consciousness of the realities, choices, and strategies for change for families in contemporary society. In addition, we hope you will gain skill and confidence in critical thinking, writing, public speaking, art creation, and performance.**

**Course Objectives**

**As a result of having taken this course students will be able to:**

- \_ Identify the difference between motherhood as an institution and mothering as practice and relationships.**
- \_ Evaluate the role of feminism in describing and challenging the status of mothers.**
- \_ Articulate how a focus on mother experiences illuminate issues applicable to contemporary society, particularly issues associated with the social construction of gender and the intersection of systems of oppression in women's lives.**
- \_ Think critically about the roles of patterns of privilege and discrimination for women who mother.**
- \_ Develop elements of critical thinking, i.e. identify main arguments and assumptions of texts and be able to evaluate them in the context of concepts learned in the course.**
- \_ Improve writing and public speaking skills.**
- \_ Utilize creative writing/art creation to demonstrate application of the concepts.**
- \_ Gain experience with interviewing as a research method.**
- \_ Experiment with performance and improvisation as a creative, learning tool.**
- \_ Use course concepts to analyze aspects of media and society from a feminist perspective.**

Please note that this course requires the use of the OSU Blackboard system:  
my.oregonstate.edu

### Required Readings

- *The Price of Motherhood*, Ann Crittenden, 2001
- *The Motherhood Manifesto*, Joan Blades and Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2006
- Additional readings posted on Blackboard.

AND

The first day of class, you will sign up for one of the following:

*Fuckin' A* a play by Susan Lori Parks **and** *Birth: The Play* by Karen Brody

*Beloved* by Toni Morrison

*Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston

*The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver

*The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver

*Vinegar Hill* by A. Manette Ansay

*Self Storage* by Gayle Brandeis

*The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant

*Babyville* by Jane Green

*I Don't Know How She Does It* by Allison Pearson

*Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood

*Without a Net* by Michelle Kennedy

*The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing

***OSU diversity/discrimination statement: OSU is dedicated to establishing a learning environment that promotes diversity of the student's race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and physical disability. If you notice discriminatory behavior in this class, or if you feel discriminated against, please bring it to the instructor's attention.***

### Course Expectations and Requirements

Classroom Behavior: The goal of OSU is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and wisdom they need to contribute to society. OSU has community rules and expectations that are formulated to guarantee each student's freedom to learn and to protect the fundamental rights of others. We must treat each other with dignity and respect in order for teaching, learning, and scholarship to thrive. Behaviors that create a hostile, offensive, or intimidating environment based upon gender, race, ethnicity, color, religion, age, disability, socio-economic status, marital status, or sexual orientation will be referred to the Office of Affirmative Action. It is expected that all the work turned in for evaluation be your individual work unless you are given instructions for joint projects, and that you understand how to cite and reference others' work (from journals, books, and web sites) in order to avoid plagiarism. Anyone who cheats on exams or assignments will be immediately referred to the OSU Student Conduct Program for disciplinary action and will receive an automatic F for this class.

**Academic dishonesty:**

- (a) Academic dishonesty is defined as an intentional act of deception in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or effort of another person or uses unauthorized information in any academic work;
- (b) Academic dishonesty includes “cheating” (intentional use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information, or study aid); fabrication (intentional falsification or invention of any information); “assisting in dishonesty” (intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty); “tampering” (altering or interfering with evaluation instruments or documents); and “plagiarism” (intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another person as one’s own);
- (c) Academic dishonesty cases are handled initially by the academic units, but will also be referred to the Student Conduct Coordinator for action under these rules.

Please remember that you are under no obligation to agree with the authors of the readings or with us as your instructors. Your obligation is to engage with the material of the course and be able to demonstrate your understanding. Whether you like or agree with this (often controversial!) material will not affect your grade in this class; the extent of your understanding and integration of class material will. You are asked to agree on a commitment to encounter and engage course readings, course goals, and each other with openness, careful and attentive listening, honesty, and mutual respect.

Accommodations: Students with documented disabilities who need accommodations, who have any emergency medical information that the instructor should be aware of, or who need special arrangements in the event of evacuation, should make an appointment with the instructor as early as possible, and no later than the first week of the term, in order to ensure positive learning outcomes. Students with family responsibilities which have the potential to affect course participation should speak with an instructor at the beginning of the term.

Participation: In the feminist classroom we understand knowledge as a product constructed by those who create it. This means that your participation and input into our collective knowledge-making is valuable. As a student in a feminist classroom, you are responsible to your classmates and yourself for the success of our joint teaching and learning. As a result, your attendance and participation in this class is required. You demonstrate your commitment by arriving on time ready to engage with the theme of the day and to discuss course readings, listening actively, contributing to discussion, and engaging enthusiastically in learning activities. Learning activities will include opportunities for presenting information and reading scripts/poetry to the class. Attendance means getting to class before it starts and staying until the class is over. While attendance will not be monitored as such, weekly quizzes will be administered at the beginning of each class period and cannot be made up.

## Course Requirements

1. Weekly Quizzes: (20%) Each class meeting after Week 1 will begin with a quiz over the assigned readings. Quizzes cannot be made up.
2. Research Paper: (20%) Students will write a paper on a mother-related topic. At least five academic sources in addition to the assigned class readings must be referenced. Due In Class Week 4. The paper is to be 4-6 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font, 1" margins. A complete rubric with breakdown of points is posted on Blackboard.
3. In-Class Midterm: (10%) Week 5
4. Mother Interview: (20%) Conduct an interview with a mother exploring her lived experiences with motherhood, mothering, employment, family, power, etc. Turn in your list of interview questions with a 4-5 page paper which analyzes her life from the perspective of course readings and concepts. Your paper should demonstrate an understanding of systems of oppressions and appropriately cite at least four separate course readings. Due In Class Week 6. A complete rubric with breakdown of points is posted on Blackboard.
5. Art Response to Literature: (20%) Four steps:  
*Step One*: Analyze the novel or plays (selected in class Week One) by applying course concepts. The number of students who respond to each piece of literature will be based on enrollment so there will be at least one Art Response to each piece of literature.  
*Step Two*: Create an art piece in response to your chosen story. The art piece can be poetry, film, script, short story, sculpture, painting, drawing, dance, monologue, performance piece, song, or music that you create. It may not be a magazine collage. If you are an artist who works in a collage media, please speak with us before beginning to create. We are available to discuss ideas by e-mail or by phone during office hours.  
*Step Three*: Write an Artist Statement to submit with your Art Response. Artist Statement is to be typed, 1 page, double-spaced, 12 point font, one inch margins.  
*Step Four*: Students will read/watch/experience colleagues' art responses and discuss the themes in a group discussion in class Week 9. A complete rubric with break-down of points is posted on Blackboard.
6. Take Home Final: (10%)  
The final is due by Wednesday, March 19, by 4 pm. We have our final class discussion during the scheduled final time, Monday, March 17, from 8-10 pm.

### Grade Calculation

Weekly Quizzes – 20%  
Mother Interview – 20%  
Art Response – 20%  
Research Paper – 20 %  
Exams – 20%

Grades will be issued as follows:

A = 93-100%; A- = 90-92%; B+ = 87-89%; B = 83-86%; B- = 80-82%; C+ = 77-79%; C = 73-76%; C- = 70-72%; D+ = 67-69%; D = 63-66%; D- = 60-62%; Below 60% = F. OSU does not offer the A+ grade.

## Course Outline

*This is a general outline. The class may be adjusted based upon the needs of the students and the time it takes to cover the material.*

### Week 1, Jan 7

#### **Introduction**

Sign up for Novel/Play

### Week 2, Jan 14

#### **Reproductive Choice and Justice**

Birth Control

Abortion

Breastfeeding

Birth as a Cultural Practice in America

Read articles posted on BlackBoard:

"Some Thoughts on Being Pregnant" from *Operating Instructions* by Anne Lamott

"Nassan ka anak ko? A Queer Filipina-American Feminist's Tale of Abortion and Self-Recovery" by Patricia Justine Tumang

"Beyond the Birthing Room" and "Joy and 'Blues'" from *Misconceptions* by Naomi Wolf

"My Fight For Birth Control" by Margaret Sanger and "Women of Color and Their Struggle for Reproductive Justice" Silliman et al

"A New Vision: Theoretical and Practical Views of Reproductive Justice" Amy Allina

"Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights" Angela Davis

Recommended Reading:

"The Fourth Trimester: Creating the Outer Placenta" from *Mothers and Daughters* by Christian Northrup

### Week 3, Jan 21

*Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—No Class*

*(We will meet for the last regular class discussion during the regularly scheduled final exam time: March 17, 8-10 pm)*

### Week 4, Jan 28

**\*\*Research Paper Due\*\***

#### **The Price of Motherhood**

Read:

Introduction through Chapter 4, *The Price of Motherhood* Crittenden

Read articles posted on BlackBoard:

"Restoring the Family Ethic: The Assault on Women and the Welfare State" Mimi Abramovitz

Recommended Reading:

"Welfare Reform, Work-Family Tradeoffs, and Child Well-Being" London et al.

### Week 5, Feb 4

#### **Midterm Exam**

#### **Research Paper Student Presentations**

Read:

Novel or Plays for Art Response

### Week 6, Feb 11

**\*\*Mother Interview Analysis Paper Due\*\***

#### **Employed Work, Unpaid Labor, Child Care, Welfare**

Read:

Chapters 5-10 and Chapter 13, *The Price of Motherhood* Crittenden

Read article posted on BlackBoard:

"I Stand Here Ironing" Tillie Olsen

Week 7, Feb 18

### **Contemporary Mothering**

Read articles posted on BlackBoard:

"Heterosexual and Lesbian Mothers Challenging 'Feminine' and 'Masculine' Concepts of Mothering" by Andrea Doucet and Gillian Dunne

"I've Worked Very Hard and Slept Very Little" by Alice Fothergill and Kathryn M. Feltey

"Welfare Recipients Attending College: The Interplay of Oppression and Resistance" by Karen Christopher

"Developmental Mothering in an African American Community: From Grandmothers to New Mothers Again" by Priscilla A. Gibson

"Stepping on Maternal Ground: Reflections on Becoming an 'Other-Mother'" by Pamela J. Downe

Week 8, Feb 25

### **Contemporary Issues in Motherhood**

Read articles posted on BlackBoard:

"Shifting the Center" Patricia Hill Collins

"Making Connections Between Parenting and Peace" by Sara Ruddick

"Motherhood" from *Catfight* by Leora Tanenbaum

"'Work it out with your wife': Gendered Expectations and Parenting Rhetoric Online" by Lisa Hammond Rashley

"Feminist Perspectives on the Personal and Political Aspects of Mothering" Diane M. Hall  
Infertility article TBA

Week 9, Mar 3

**\*\*Art Response Due\*\***

### **Student Art Presentations**

#### **Mothers in Popular Culture and Art**

\*Note: Please bring a motherhood-related magazine to class today!

Read articles posted on BlackBoard:

"Rewriting 'Cinderella': Envisioning the Empowering Mother-Daughter Romance" by Jeanne Wiley

"Mama Bear as Domestic Micromanager" by Jodi E. Vandenberg-Dave

Week 10, Mar 10

### **Feminism and Mothering**

Read articles posted on BlackBoard:

"Introduction: 1986" from *Of Woman Born* by Adrienne Rich

"The Dailiness of Women's Lives" from *Tapestries of Life* by Bettina Aptheker

"Introduction" from *The Essential Hip Mama* by Ariel Gore and "Mothering" both from *The Women's Movement Today*

"In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" by Alice Walker

"Feminism and Ecology" from *The Dialectic of Sex* by Shulamith Firestone

Recommended Reading:

"Coming to Writing" by Helene Cixous

Scheduled Final Exam Time, March 17, 8-10 pm

**\*\*Take Home Final due in class\*\***

### **Feminist Theory Solutions**

Read:

Conclusion, *The Price of Motherhood* Crittenden

*The Motherhood Manifesto*