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Intensive Motherhood Is Not Inevitable: A Community Autoethnography Exploring Experiences of U.S. Intensive Motherhood Discourse

Intensive motherhood (IM) dictates definitions of good mothering in the U.S., affecting how people experience pregnancy, birth, and/or parenthood. Generally, the good mother mythical norm is a white, cis, straight, married, able-bodied, appropriately aged woman who is at least middle class or above. The pervasive discourse affects not only how we observe others, but how we view ourselves. In this community autoethnography, we share stories of our different pregnancy and parenting experiences to help us identify and interrogate how IM's pervasiveness has affected us. Fitting many of the standards of IM, Molly discusses how she continuously feels she falls short of the unrealistic standards it sets. As a new immigrant from Asia, Sharon finds herself standing in a split ground between the traditional Asian cultural values that are passed down from generations before her and the western beliefs that she has gotten accustomed to. Elizabeth discusses her race and sexuality as places of interrogating what it means to be a Queer Black Mother. Her experience from conception to birthing was fraught with complex layers of what it means to become a mother in an unconventional way. Her narratives reflect the experience with IM as a Queer Black woman in the South. Intensive motherhood has individuated the pregnancy and parenthood experience undermining mothers' collective political action that could address racist, classist, patriarchal, U.S./western-centric, and ableist assumptions about good motherhood. Thus, we argue that writing through our experiences offers us insight into how we can work to resist IM for the collective benefit of every mother.

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