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## **Conceiving Intensive Mothering**

*Key academically informed feminist approaches to intensive mothering continue to separate the ideological and psychological in the analysis of intensive mothering. In this essay, I argue that my analysis of *The Mommy Myth and Maternal Desire* reveals the vestiges of a lingering fear of the ideal “Mother” subject position within both texts that perpetuate this split approach and will ultimately lead to feminisms’ inability to theorize fully intensive mothering. I also suggest that, as a result, feminisms will be unable to theorize women’s current split subjectivity and agency between the old “ideal” Mother subject position and a new feminist mothering subject position unless both institutional and psychological approaches are integrated.*

I try to distinguish two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control. (Rich, 1986: 13, italics in original)

There is no doubt about it: maternity—both the institution of motherhood and everyday experiences of mothering—has come out of the closet for many contemporary feminist writers. Indeed, motherhood and mothering are “hot” topics in the popular press, with a diverse range of issues covered: the ways that legal institutions penalize women as mothers is addressed in *Unbending Gender* (Williams, 2000); the anger, frustration, and confusion many women feel once they become mothers are central concerns in *The Bitch in the House* (Hanauer, 2002); how women can achieve both a family and a career given the structure of professional institutions is the topic of *Creating a Life* (Hewlett, 2003) and, finally, the economic costs women pay as a result of being the

primary parent in most families is the focus of *The Price of Motherhood* (Crittenden, 2001).

One central, defining topic embedded in these public conversations is, what Sharon Hays (1996) first named as, “intensive mothering.” Intensive mothering has three key tenets. First, it demands that women continue to be the primary, central caregivers of children. As Hays (1996) argues: “there is an underlying assumption that the child absolutely requires consistent nurture by a single primary caretaker and that the mother is the best person for the job. When the mother is unavailable, it is other women who should serve as temporary substitutes” (8). Second, intensive mothering requires mothers to lavish copious amounts of time and energy on their children. Indeed, Hays argues, intensive mothering is “construed as *child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive*” (8, italics in the text). Third, intensive mothering takes a logic that separates mothering from professional paid work, which supports the notion that children and the work of mothering are completely outside the scope of market valuation because children are now considered innocent, pure, and “priceless,” deserving special treatment due to their special value within the private sphere of the family (122-129). Thus, Hays argues intensive mothering continues to position all women in the subject position of the all-caring, self-sacrificing ideal “Mother,” with limited and constrained agency in the public, professional realm and, importantly, is the *proper* ideology of contemporary mothering for women across race and class lines, even if not all women actually practice it (9, 86).<sup>1</sup>

Even though Hays (1996) focuses almost all of her attention on the ideological and structural components of intensive mothering, she does recognize that it is also important to explore the psychological dimensions of intensive mothering. According to Hays, doing so is important because, even when asked directly what role nature, nurture, genetics, and/or tradition play in positioning them as the primary parent, many of the women she interviewed “also know that they feel a deep commitment to their children and they do not experience this feeling as something men impose on them” (107). Moreover, when addressing the complexity of nurturant love in intensive mothering, Hays also argues that it cannot simply be dismissed in the analysis of intensive mothering because this love is so central to and important for the mothers she interviewed. Thus, Hays argues that understanding the ideology or cultural logic that transforms this deep commitment and love into the practices associated with intensive mothering is important for a fuller, richer understanding of contemporary maternity.

Unfortunately, beyond this call, Hays (1996) goes no further with this important insight to integrate both an ideological/institutional and psychological perspective in her understanding of intensive mothering, as do other contemporary academically informed feminist writers (de Marneffe, 2004; Douglas and Michaels, 2004). That key texts in academic understandings of

intensive mothering fail to integrate both is particularly problematic because many women writers (Crittenden, 2001; Edelman, 2002; Hanauer, 2002; Hewett, 2003) explore how the desire to have and subsequent love for children can be understood in relation to the ways institutionalized motherhood continues to negatively impact women's lives and challenge second-wave feminisms' gains for women.

Unpacking how and why two key academically informed feminist approaches to intensive mothering continue to separate the ideological and psychological is important, then, to learn more about how contemporary feminist approaches to intensive mothering are being conceived. Moreover, given that much of this feminist analysis is also crossing into popular forums and many mothers have actually read them, these texts have tangible affects on women as they come to understand their own subjectivity and agency as both women and mothers; the texts have real influence on mothers as they go about the business of living and understanding their lives as women and mothers. Thus, I explore two theoretical questions in this essay: Why does this pattern of separating or splitting the institutional and psychological emerge in academically informed feminist writers exploring intensive mothering? And, what are the implications of this approach for feminist understandings of contemporary maternity?

To explore these questions, I do a case study of Susan J. Douglas and Meredith Michaels' *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women* (2004) and Daphne de Marneffe's *Maternal Desire: On Children, Love, and the Inner Life* (2004). These two texts are particularly appropriate for this analysis because, even though both texts draw extensively on academic theories and ideas, both were written in more popular, accessible language, were widely distributed in popular rather than just in academic publishing outlets, were widely read, and received an enormous amount of popular media attention.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in terms of feminism, the rhetorical exigencies and contexts of the texts are similar: both books were published in 2004, the authors are self-professed feminists who argue that the primary motive for writing the texts is to benefit both feminisms and women's daily lives and, at the core, both explore contemporary intensive mothering.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in many ways, these two texts are both central to and representative of the discussion occurring by academically informed feminists about intensive mothering that is crossing into the public realm.

In the remainder of the essay, I argue that my analysis of *The Mommy Myth* (Douglas and Michaels, 2004) and *Maternal Desire* (de Marneffe, 2004) reveals the vestiges of a lingering matrophobia—the fear of the ideal “Mother” subject position—which results in the split approach between the psychological and institutional. I also suggest that, ultimately, this leads to feminisms' inability to theorize fully intensive mothering and women's current split subjectivity and agency between the contemporary “ideal” Mother subject position and a new empowered feminist mothering subject position. Unpacking these arguments,

then, requires more detailed analysis and a brief overview of the core arguments in both books.

### **The institutional and the psychological assessments of intensive mothering**

Given that both *The Mommy Myth* (Douglas and Michaels, 2004) and *Maternal Desire* (de Marneffe, 2004) draw on Adrienne Rich's ideas in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986), it is appropriate to view the texts within Rich's work. Rich was the first feminist to make a distinction between motherhood as an institution and the actual potentially empowering practices of mothering. In doing so, Rich argued that feminists must explore and understand how both impact and shape women's lives under patriarchy. As she argued, "I try to distinguish two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (Rich, 1986: 13, italics in original). Consequently, Rich's all-important distinction offers a conceptual frame for viewing how contemporary feminist writers explore maternity, which I use below in my analysis of the texts.

### **The institutional approach: The mommy myth**

As self-professed feminists, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) have a very specific agenda in terms of feminism: they hope that their book is a "call to arms" to re-invigorate or "re-birth" a feminist movement for women (26). In doing so, they utilize Rich's (1986) work specifically and reveal their own focus on the institution of motherhood when they write that Rich "saw motherhood as a patriarchal institution imposed on women 'which aims at ensuring ... all women shall remain under male control'" (Douglas and Michaels, 2004: 50). They do not, however, articulate her all-important distinction about motherhood as both an institution and a potential relationship.

With these rhetorical exigencies as their framework and grounded in what they call the "new momism," Douglas and Michaels' basic argument is that media have harnessed feminist gains and reshaped them to support intensive mothering so that women, as mothers, are positioned in an ever-demanding, constantly failing "ideal" Mother subjectivity that constrains and confines women's agency primarily within the private realm of the family and outside of the public realm. As such, Douglas and Michaels' analysis is an extension of Hays (1996) work, which they cite specifically in their book (2004: 5).

Douglas and Michaels' argue that media do so primarily through fear tactics, guilt, and celebrity mom profiles. Television news, for example, repeatedly caution women about the "threats from without" to their children: Satanism, abduction, consumer-safety problems with car seats, toys, cribs, and, of course, food allergies from peanuts (2004: 85). "Celebrity mom" profiles, on

the other hand, begun in the 1980s and well established by the 1990s, primarily work to encourage guilt and failure in mothers because these profiles always show celebrity moms juggling it all—work, family, and mothering—with a smile on their face and in glowing pictures with their healthy, well-behaved children. In short, celebrity moms and other media strategies have the effect of creating and supporting an intensive ideology that works to keep mothers constantly striving for perfection, an all-consuming vigilance, and failure; it is an institutionalized perspective that exhausts and controls women and keeps them “in their place” under patriarchy.

Although their assessment of intensive mothering is almost entirely negative, similar to Hays, Douglas and Michaels do acknowledge that love and desire to mother well are vital components of contemporary maternity. In their limited attention to both, they frame the issue around women’s desire to both work and mother well. They articulate this as: “many of us want to be both women: successful at work, successful as mothers” (2004: els 12). In the end, to use Rich’s language, even though the potential relationship women have with their children separate from patriarchy is acknowledged, Douglas and Michaels’ analysis of contemporary maternity focuses almost exclusively on the *institution of motherhood* and reveals how media continue to ensconce a maternal ideology that co-opts feminism and twists it to control women and position them as failures in both their mothering and the public realm. In other words, Douglas and Michaels show how the cultural changes brought about by feminisms, which recognize that women can and do have more agency in their lives, is being harnessed and utilized by media, then, twisted and repackaged as a new form of the “ideal” Mother subject position that works to constrain and limit women’s agency through the ongoing patriarchal institution of motherhood.

### **The psychological approach: Maternal desire**

Also a self-professed feminist, Daphne de Marneffe is a psychoanalytic scholar and therapist who is interested in theorizing maternal desire from within a feminist framework (2004: xiii). Unlike Douglas and Michaels (2004) who hope to “rebirth” feminism, de Marneffe’s feminist agenda is to “revise” feminism because she believes that second-wave feminism failed to articulate a desire to have children, “almost as if it were politically suspect or theoretically inconvenient” (2004: 64). Thus, de Marneffe also argues: “in a strange way, in our effort to free women by bringing to light the oppressive aspects of maternal experience, we have to some extent mischaracterized its opportunities for enjoyment” (2004: 141).

In her revision, then, similar to Douglas and Michaels (2004), de Marneffe also employs Rich’s (1986) writing in *Of Woman Born*. Unlike them, de Marneffe does acknowledge Rich’s distinction between motherhood as an institution and what she calls “an embodied field of relating” between persons (2004: 30). Moreover, de Marneffe argues that it was “Adrienne Rich who took

the crucial step of teasing apart the pleasures offered by mothering and its oppressive aspect” (30). De Marneffe argues, however, that Rich’s work was incomplete because it failed to theorize a mother’s desire for and delight at being present with her child (31). Consequently, de Marneffe revises feminism by extending Rich’s work.

With these rhetorical exigencies as her framework, de Marneffe (2004) theorizes maternal desire by significantly revising how women’s subjectivity, agency, and desire to care for children are understood within both psychoanalysis and feminism. Primarily by reworking Nancy Chodorow’s (1978) and Jessica Benjamin’s (1988) classic feminist works, which viewed the mother-infant relationship as primarily one of merger, de Marneffe’s core argument is that the mother-infant and later mother-child relationship is best thought of as mutually responsive. De Marneffe makes this argument by suggesting that recent “mother-infant research has shown that the infant expresses his or her agency in encounters with the caregiver, and that the caregiver and baby are extraordinarily attuned to their unique interaction from very early on” (2004: 66). As a result, even within the demanding first six months of an infant’s life, the dynamic between mother and child is best thought of as mutually responsive, a mutually responsive pattern of attentiveness. When the relationship is viewed as mutually responsive, then, genuine relating is at the core of the relationship and the interaction between a mother and baby gives both parties “a great deal more individuality than the somewhat swampy metaphor of merger evokes” (de Marneffe, 2004: 68).

Moreover, de Marneffe (2004) also suggests that viewing the relationship as mutually responsive fundamentally alters what counts as psychologically “healthy” interaction between a mother and her child and contemporary understandings of women’s subjectivity and agency as mothers. Drawing on recent attachment literature and, again, more current mother-infant research, de Marneffe argues that instead of physical separation as a sign of a mother’s “health,” which is Benjamin’s view, a caregiver’s self-reflective responsiveness to a child is far more important. Indeed, a mother’s ability to reflect on and communicate about her own childhood experiences and with her child is, according to de Marneffe, a sign of the mother’s own healthy sense of self and agency and is more crucial to a child’s ability to develop both an independent sense of self and recognition of her own individual subjectivity and agency. In other words, a mother’s own internal or inner life and her ability to communicate that to and in relationship with her child is far more important to healthy mutual recognition of agency and connection for *both* the mother and child.

Thus, rather than view a woman’s desire to mother and care for children as potential signs of her internalization of the oppressive “ideal” Mother position or as a sign of “bad” health, de Marneffe argues for a psychological perspective that sees both as signs of the ongoing challenge mothers face to “integrate love and loss, togetherness and separateness, and connectedness and autonomy in ourselves and in our relationships with children” (2004: 83). In the

end, then, to invoke Rich, de Marneffe's work reveals how the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children contain a maternal desire that represents a potentially empowering and different mothering subject position and agency that accounts for the very real changes in women's lives brought about by feminism and introduces an empowered feminist desire to mother well.

When *The Mommy Myth* (Douglas and Michaels, 2004) and *Maternal Desire* (de Marneffe, 2004) are viewed together, it becomes clear that both texts revise and update current understandings of intensive mothering in important and meaningful ways. Both texts, however, neither explore intensive mothering nor utilize Rich's (1986) work fully. Grounded only in Rich's understanding of motherhood as a patriarchal institution, *The Mommy Myth* articulates clearly and persuasively contemporary, institutionalized intensive mothering, while almost completely ignoring any full understanding of a potentially empowered mothering or maternal desire. Grounded in Rich's understanding of the potential empowered relationship between mothers and their children, de Marneffe, on the other hand, articulates clearly and persuasively an empowered maternal desire within intensive mothering, while she ignores the very real ways that the ideology of intensive mothering does, in fact, work to control and constrain women's lives through the institution of motherhood.

One important avenue for making sense of this split approach between the two texts is to view them within the larger history of feminist writing on maternity. Indeed, although their intellectual trainings are different—Douglas is a communication media scholar, Michaels is a philosopher, and de Marneffe is trained in psychoanalysis—I argue below that the issue that drives this split approach between the texts is related to the overarching similarity between them: feminism. In other words, I suggest that feminism and the historical legacy around the relationship between feminism and maternity is what bonds the authors, separates them, and underlies the split approach to understanding intensive mothering in the texts.

### **Feminisms and mothering: The continued legacy of the early matrophobia**

When viewed together, the texts seem to mirror the legacy of feminist subject positions on maternity, which have shifted from a "Sisterly" perspective to a "Daughterly" perspective. According to Marianne Hirsch (1997), the subject position of "Sisters" was embraced in feminist theorizing in the early second wave because feminists rejected mothering entirely. Hirsch argues that this was the case because feminism of that time suffered from, what Rich (1986) first named as, "matrophobia." Citing Rich explicitly, Hirsch argues that matrophobia is "not the fear of our mothers, but the fear of becoming like our mothers" (1997: 357). Indeed, for most participants in the feminist movement, even those who actually had children, Hirsch argues, as do Diane Taylor (1997) and Judith Stadtman Tucker (2004), that motherhood and the social roles and

responsibilities associated with it were viewed as confining and constraining patriarchal traps for women.

A “sisterly” subject position on mothering, then, resulted because, as Hirsch argues retrospectively, sisterhood, provided:

the possibility of mutuality and reciprocity. The metaphor of sisterhood, though still familial, can describe a feminine model of relation, an ideal and alternative within patriarchy. It could help women envision a life and a set of affiliations outside of the paradigm of mother/child relations and the compromises with men that motherhood seems to necessitate. It can liberate feminist women from our anatomy and from the difficult stories of our own mothers’ accommodation, adjustment and resignation. “Sisterhood” can free us, as we were fond of saying, “to give birth to ourselves.” (1997: 356)

Clearly, *The Mommy Myth* emerges out the legacy of the “sisterly” paradigm, even though Douglas and Michaels (2004) are not taking up the same sisterly perspective that drove the early second wave. They are quite clear about distancing themselves from the essentializing and elitist understandings that emerged in much of that work.<sup>4</sup> Also, in updating Rich’s (1986) notion of institutionalized motherhood to fit with contemporary culture and briefly acknowledging mothering, *The Mommy Myth* is an important step toward including mothering in a sisterly perspective, as they “rebirth” a contemporary feminist movement that challenges patriarchal motherhood.

Even with these important advances within the sisterly paradigm, like the sisters of the early second wave, Douglas and Michaels’ (2004) perspective keeps its distance from maternal desire. In fact, their work is quite resistant to women embracing maternal desire; maternal desire is only acknowledged superficially in their institutional approach. Moreover, the perspective fails to operationalize and fully recognize the importance of the potential relationship a woman has to mothering that was so important to Rich’s (1986) work. By so clearly ignoring a legitimate maternal desire and only recognizing it through a sisterly feminist position, then, like the sisters of the early second wave, the feminism found in *The Mommy Myth* continues to be fearful of “becoming like our ideal Mother.” Thus, even as a more contemporary, anti-essentialist feminist perspective, Douglas and Michaels’ analysis of intensive mothering in *The Mommy Myth* continues to be linked to and perpetuate a more contemporary form of matrophobia.

*Maternal Desire*, on the other hand, clearly emerges out of the legacy of the “Daughterly” perspective that developed in response to both this sisterly perspective and difference feminism. According to Hirsch (1997), as opposed to the “equality” feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s that drew on the sisterly position, difference feminisms explored the specificity of women as different from men by drawing heavily on psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives

and focusing on the mother-daughter relationship. Specifically, difference feminism explored the long-term psychological impact of the different early gendered relationship between mothers and sons and mothers and daughters. As a result, mothering was, at best, secondary to this daughterly feminist subject position because it focused almost exclusively on the perspective of daughters, while ignoring mothers. Thus, Hirsch argues that the daughterly subject position was still steeped in matrophobia in its fear of fully acknowledging mothering in its own right.

Similar to Douglas and Michaels (2004), de Marneffe (2004) enlarges the daughterly feminist subject position in important ways. First, she articulates a daughterly perspective that includes the mother's side of the all-important first relationship that drives the psychoanalytic perspective. Indeed, she finally accounts for and articulates a feminist maternal desire. Thus, in this way, de Marneffe is unlike Douglas and Michaels because she faces the matrophobia within feminisms and attempts to grapple with the desire to mother without the fear of becoming wholly like the "ideal" Mother; she theorizes a mother subject position in feminist ways.

Even with these advances in the daughterly paradigm, because de Marneffe only focuses on revising feminism and ignores the very real and ongoing need to grapple with and challenge the institution of motherhood; she theorizes a perspective that is more "fearful" of feminism than of patriarchy. As such, de Marneffe's daughterly perspective also reveals a lingering matrophobia. In an interesting and new twist on it, however, de Marneffe's matrophobia is the "fear of becoming like our Sisters." In other words, rather than ignoring our mothers, de Marneffe ignores her feminist sisters. Thus, de Marneffe's new version of matrophobia is her fear of becoming like her sisterly feminist mother rather than the 1950s patriarchal "ideal" Mother.

The analysis of *The Mommy Myth* and *Maternal Desire* and the subsequent feminist approaches to contemporary maternity revealed, then, suggest that the early matrophobia that drove feminism in the second wave continues to impact the current relationship between feminism and contemporary maternity. Thus, even though this matrophobia was important and probably necessary in the early second wave so that women could imagine an alternative to the all-consuming, patriarchal "ideal Mother" subject position, it is now time to imagine a feminist subject position on maternity that eschews that matrophobia and its lingering vestiges. What I am suggesting here is that if academically informed feminists are truly coming out of the closet about mothering, then, we must recognize our own internalized matrophobia in the same way that gays and lesbians have worked on purging their own internalized homophobia (or, as another example, as many Blacks have made attempts to move away from their own internalized racism). We also must do so in order to integrate, finally, the institution of motherhood and the potential relationship that both exist within contemporary maternity and that Rich so aptly suggested over 30 years ago.

## Conclusions

One intriguing route for feminism to begin to recognize and move past the lingering matrophobia and the split approach to analyzing intensive mothering is also revealed by my analysis. To extend Hirsch (1997), we require neither *only* daughters nor sisters and, instead, we need *both* daughters and sisters. In short, contemporary feminism needs a feminist subject position on maternity that is best thought of as a “daughters-and-sisters” subject position that fully turns into and then theorizes a new feminist subjectivity on maternity that is free from contemporary forms of matrophobia, embraces a feminist maternal desire to care for children, and resists contemporary institutionalized motherhood, which continues to constrain and control women’s lives. Or, to put it another way: the analysis of *The Mommy Myth* and *Maternal Desire* suggests the possibility of conceiving or a “giving birth” to a feminist position on maternity that is grounded in both mutuality and reciprocity between daughters and sisters as the next step for feminism.

While this work will be difficult and complex, one reason why this “daughters-and-sisters” feminist subject position must be written is so that feminist analysis of contemporary maternity can actually speak to contemporary American mothers’ lives, which are, as Julia Wood (2001) argues, in a “transitional time” between new roles and expectations and persisting and deeply held traditional gender values and roles (17). Or, to put it another way, contemporary American mothers’ lives are split between second-wave gains and lingering patriarchal forms, including those associated with mothering and motherhood. In fact, this split subjectivity is at the heart much of the popular conversations about contemporary maternity mentioned here. As the beneficiaries of second-wave feminism *and* as mothers, these women recognize that they are grappling and living with a mothering that is not their mothers’ maternity, and they recognize that their feminist issues are different because they are caught between an old patriarchal institution and new forms of empowered feminist mothering.

Conceiving of the next step in feminist analysis as a daughters-*and*-sisters subject position on maternity, thus, is also important rhetorically for two reasons. First, doing so allows us to understand fully and “Richly” both an institutional and relational empowered perspective on contemporary maternity that, *finally*, also eschews feminism’s lingering matrophobia. Second, conceiving a daughters-and-sisters subject position also encourages us to self-reflexively respond to and resist what some feminist scholars (Gillis, Howie and Munford, 2004; Henry, 2004) argue is an erroneous and problematic description of the differences between so-called second and third-wave feminisms as a generational, familial, and I believe matrophobic, dispute between second-wave mothers and third-wave daughters. Thus, if feminists are serious about fully understanding contemporary maternity, then, we must conceive a daughters-and-sisters subject position that faces the lingering matrophobia in feminisms, resists entrenching a generational dispute, and explores both

institutionalized motherhood and a relational empowered mothering, which both continue to be part and parcel of contemporary maternity for *all* feminist mothers.

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<sup>1</sup>Even though all women are disciplined by the ideology of intensive mothering, it is important to note that other maternal scholars (Collins, 1991; Edwards, 2004; O'Reilly, 2004; James, 1993; Thomas, 2004) argue that intensive mothering is Eurocentric and privileges white, upper middle-class women. Black feminist scholars (Collins, 1991; Edwards, 2004; Thomas, 2004; James, 1993) have also shown how African-American mothers have traditionally and continue to utilize empowered mothering practices that are non-normative within the intensive mothering ideology. African-American mothers engage in othermothering—the practice of accepting responsibility “for a child that is not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal”—and community mothering—the practice of supporting and sustaining the larger community (James, 1993: 45). Unfortunately, however, both are considered “dysfunctional” and “deviant” practices because they challenge the key tenets of intensive mothering that support biological or bloodmothers caring for their own children within the confines of a nuclear family.

<sup>2</sup>Both books were reviewed extensively in print and in online forums, and the authors received much media attention in a variety of U.S. newspapers, magazines, and online.

<sup>3</sup>Rather than use the language of intensive mothering, de Marneffe describes contemporary mothering as driven by the “super-mom” ideal (2004: 10). De Marneffe argues “this cultural ideal pressures mothers to perform excellently on all fronts, in a job, with their children, with their partner, at the gym, and in the kitchen, making those fifteen-minute meals” (10). That this super-mom ideal is part and parcel of intensive mothering is clear in Hays’ analysis of intensive mothering (132).

<sup>4</sup>Douglas and Michaels are unambiguous about their anti-essentialism: they repeatedly situate their analysis in terms of race, class, and sexual orientation. Douglas and Michaels, for example, argue that media always create mothering heroes as white middle-class women and mothering villains as almost always African-American working-class women (2004: 20).

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