
The image shows a spiral-bound notebook with a light brown, textured cover. The spiral binding is on the left side. The text is centered on the cover in a dark brown, serif font. The title is the largest and most prominent, followed by the author's name and affiliation, and then the event details.

**Negotiating Diversity
within the
“Culture of Motherhood”**

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A graphic of a spiral-bound notebook with a silver metal spiral on the left side. The notebook is open to a page with a light cream or yellowish background. The text is written in a dark brown, serif font. The page is framed by a dark brown border.

If the social world of mothering is an actual culture, we might expect to find:

- Symbols:** pregnant body, maternity clothes, baby
- Stories:** birth stories, sharing experiences
- Rituals:** prenatal class, baby showers
- Norms and Values:** ideologies, hot topics, “good” mothering
- Initiation:** labour (birth stories)
- Identity:** “mother”, self, membership

Other Mothers, During Pregnancy:

- compare notes about experiences**
- provide information and resources**
- understand, from an insider's perspective, what this process can be like**
- scare the hell out of each other**
- pass along cultural norms and values**
- sometimes alienate each other in their attempts to be affirming**
- share labour/birth stories**

Some of the Rules:

- Experience counts (but books are good too)**
- Recognizable conversation openers**
- Prepare to share**
- Mothers care about this stuff**
- Accept advice graciously**
- Birth will hurt**
- Expect an ordeal**
- You'll probably need painkillers**
 - but you're going to have to justify it**



Other Mothers, Early Motherhood:

- Share information about how to do this job**
- Sometimes, do the job together**
- Provide social contact**
- Acknowledge and value the labour of motherhood**
- Debate hot topics/ideologies**
- Share labour/birth stories**

Hot Topics:

- **Birth location/attendant**
- **Circumcision**
- **Breast feeding**
- **Back to work or stay at home**
- **Vaccination**
- **“Attachment” vs. “structured” parenting**

***This is no light undertaking**

***These also become identity questions**

Birth Stories:

“When you are able to share a labour story, you feel like you kind of have arrived, you know, with other mothers”

- Offered to, and elicited from, new mothers**
- Are reassuring**
- Keep the event alive**
- Establish roles in the club**
- Provide information for assessment**
 - But can lead to one-upmanship**
- Negotiate pain**
- This is the story of the birth of the mother**

What about Non-Gestational Mothers?

- **“Expecting” is a bit too abstract**
- **Don’t get to have all the anticipatory conversations**
- **For lesbian couples, the gestational mother must work to make it a pregnancy for two**
 - **This is also a conceptual challenge**
- **No birth story**
 - **Might have to offer another ordeal**

The Mommies' Club

“If I see a stranger and she has a baby, I feel connected to her”

- **Feeling connected**
 - **Recognition and empathy**

- **Very valuable contact**
 - **Though not without challenges**
 - **E.g. ideologies, lesbian moms etc**

- **But I don't belong**

The Mommies' Club

- **Main advantage of not belonging**
 - maintaining a sense of uniqueness
- **Main disadvantages of not belonging**
 - social isolation
 - alienation

The Mommies' Club

- **Main advantages of belonging**
 - sense of community and connectedness
 - affirmation
 - shared knowledge and resources
- **Main disadvantages of belonging**
 - identity struggles
 - stigma