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## Hall, Ann C. and Bishop, Mardia J. (Editors): Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture.

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**Hall, Ann C. and Bishop, Mardia J. (Editors): *Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture.***

Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 230 p. ISBN 978-0-313-37530-9 (hard copy: alk paper.)

*Reviewed by Carol Reagan Shelton, PhD, Professor Emerita Nursing, Rhode Island College*

In this edited book consisting of ten essays written by scholars from a variety of fields, Hall and Bishop attempt to explore the tensions and anxieties related to motherhood through the fictional and media representations of mothers in popular culture as well as in the lives of real mothers in contemporary America.

The editors, in their introduction, describe the complex and myriad ways in which motherhood is depicted in the stories, both fictional and real, to which the population is exposed to on a daily basis. Despite the “longing” in American culture of a singular model of motherhood to which women might aspire and are often judged, this longing is unrealistic and absurd. The relationship of “motherhood and apple pie” has no relevance to most contemporary mothers.

Each of the essays represents a singular point of view, not necessarily related to other essays in the volume. Popular culture includes everything from television, film, fiction and music to name the most obvious places where the population derives pleasure. Given the differences among these sources, one can understand the lack of a singular point of view within this volume.

Katherine Kinnick, in her essay, attempts to examine various TV mothers such as Donna Reed and June Cleaver in from situation comedies of the past. The mothers in television situation comedies are often idealized and traditional gender roles are reinforced in many of these shows. In addition to the fictional mothers, Kinnick points out the lack of authenticity rampant in celebrity “news” programs, where motherhood is depicted as simple and easy, a far cry from the reality of the endeavor. Think of how ludicrous it is for the average middle-class mother to compare herself to celebrity moms who have personal trainers and all the household help they need. Yet those magazines at the check out line of the supermarkets filled with celebrity moms with their gorgeous children, beckon Moms who are hopelessly trying to quiet their crying babies while doing their weekly grocery shopping. What is wrong with this image?

Another author, Marjorie Worthington considers the impact on the role (or lack of role) of mothers among “Disney” princesses, who are often motherless and always obedient, While Craig Owens examines the depiction of monstrous mothers in literature and film, such as *Monster-in Law* (2005). These essays provide some insight of both the contradictions and challenges to mothers and to their roles in society.

In addition to television and other media representations of mothers, another essay explores how women who devote themselves to politics negotiate their roles in the public arena. The author (Ann C. Hall) examined the careers of prominent women politicians

and mothers, specifically Pelosi, Clinton and Palin. The author describes society's expectations of mothers in political roles as well as in society's unease with their political ambitions.

On a totally different note, author Mardia Bishop examines how contemporary culture with its emphasis on beauty and weight, has triggered an increase in cosmetic surgery among mothers. "The Mommy Lift: Cutting Mothers Down to Size", recounts the dramatic increase in the numbers of cosmetic surgery procedures performed on mothers. Tummy tucks and breast lifts have become de rigueur among contemporary mothers. Not only do women have to aspire to what some authors have called, "Momism", i.e., the need to be perfect in every way, but they are also expected to look perfectly shaped and groomed. The pressure and anxiety that results from these impossible expectations is something that some women find difficult to live with. Resorting to surgery seems like a dangerous strategy to meet society's impossible expectations.

The challenges, expectation, stereotypes of adoptive mothers, Jewish mothers and disabled mothers are among the additional topics addressed in this compelling volume. The book introduces the casual reader to the complexities of motherhood in a media obsessed culture. Whether it is the social media, television, film, or newspaper stories, unrealistic expectations of mothers dominate our world-view. Recognizing that an enormous gap exists between the real world where people live and the make-believe world of media fantasy and false expectations, mothers must come to grips with their own reality, finding confidence in their power to shape their children's lives as well as their own.