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Narratives of Motherhood: Voices of Selected South African Women

Sharon van Doorene

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Community-Based Counselling)

University of the Witwatersrand, 2009.

Abstract

The study explored whether South African mothers subscribed to the Western ideology of intensive motherhood and how this ideology was altered or resisted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten working South African mothers with a child under the age of ten. Thematic content analysis revealed that motherhood was largely regarded as synonymous with womanhood, where the inherent and biological ability to bear children rendered the mother responsible for intensive efforts in child-raising. As a result, motherhood was a gendered practice situated within a powerful and normative ideology of inequality. These themes were discussed in the racially stratified and gendered context of South Africa from a feminist perspective. The research concluded with a recommendation that alternative motherhood ideologies, more representative of the diverse contexts and experiences of mothers, are explored.

Declaration

I declare that this research report entitled "Narratives of Motherhood: Voices of Selected South African Women" is my own, unaided work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated by means of complete references. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Community Based Counselling) at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signed this _____day of _____ 2009

_____

Sharon van Doorene

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    - My mother who taught me and showed me to be a strong woman, despite what life might bring;
    - My grandmother who epitomizes courage and grace;
    - Carol, who gives so much.
- To my sisters
    - Laurentia, who journeyed with me into womanhood and motherhood, making it lighter;
    - My friends, who have laughed, cried and celebrated with me as we have tried to fathom the mysteries of motherhood and croup.
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