

Making Valuable Mothers in Publicly Provided Maternity Healthcare: Assessing Parenthood in Finland

**Public Lecture by Dr. Rikka Homanen,
University of Tampere, Finland**



"Source: The Social Insurance Institution of Finland"

Monday Nov. 7th - 4:00pm - 215 DeBartolo Hall

This presentation discusses the evaluation of motherhood in the assessment practices of maternity healthcare provided by the Finnish welfare state. It argues that while middle-class women can position themselves more easily than working-class women as neoliberal, reflexive and self-responsible client-consumers, and can have their family values reflected back to them by maternity nurses, there is also room for values and subjects of value beyond the dominant symbolic of parenthood. The study draws on ethnographic material from four clinics in Finland. Assessment encounters are considered as sites where mothers-to-be are evaluated on the basis of classificatory struggle. The analysis shows that in concert with the Nordic policy insistence on social equality, a recently introduced standardised numerical risk assessment enables moral judgements on the basis of seemingly class-neutral, scientific, statistics-based knowledge. The nurses integrate this risk assessment into more intuitive, practice-oriented and experience-based assessments of problems. Maternal subjects emerge during these practices that might not always fit into the scales of normality in risk assessment, and that fail to perform respectability and responsibility. However, they are not simply blamed for their own shortcomings, but rather practical solutions are sought in teams, and a variety of values may be recognised or at least tolerated.

**Sponsored by The Department of Anthropology, The Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts,
and The Dean of Undergraduate Studies**