

American Woman

By Cierra Olivia Thomas

Motherhood in America is ever changing in its ideal form, and as a "woman's role" what it means to be a mother is internalized and perpetuated often without question. Motherhood is a component of the hegemony that perpetuates the current society and its structure of social ideals that ultimately repress women. The roles of women - and the worth of those roles - change according to the socio-economic needs of America. For example, women served as a backup labor force during WWII, although they were also expected to raise the children and run households by themselves. AND they did.

Today the norms of women in the workforce have changed, as it is less taboo to be employed outside of the home. In fact, working is no longer a choice for many women. However, since the emergence and rise of capitalism, women's role as mother, caregiver, queen of the household and all-knowing ruler of the domestic sphere has remained a social norm. Women must work, yet they must also care for the home, and *their* children. Motherhood, thus, is a role that causes much inner conflict, as women are expected to "do it all."

As a single mother of twin 3-year-old daughters I feel guilty all the time due to the expectation that I can and should do everything for my family. I feel guilt about things I have done, and things I have not done; I feel guilt about things I should do, and things I should not do. In short, my life is one long guilt trip. This comes largely from the expectation that I can "do it all." What follows is a poem I wrote to "exorcise the demon" inside me which constantly told me that I am not good enough in any of my roles. This piece was performed at Eastern Oregon University's second annual "That Takes Ovaries" open-mic event, and this poem is the manifestation of the guilt imposed upon me for being an American woman.

A 30-second conversation with my hats

By Cierra Olivia Thomas

Student: I wish the kids would take a nap; I have too much homework to be JUST sitting here.

Woman: I need to workout, not sit. I'll get fat, but I am so tired.

Mother: I am not *JUST* sitting here. I am playing with my daughters.

Woman: I should be mopping the floor.

Student: But I really *need* to work on my homework.

Woman: I need a break and some chocolate.

Feminist: I can't have a break or chocolate; I'll just deal with it. I can do it all.

Mother: Why aren't they tired yet? Why are they crying? They hate me.

Woman: I am so tired.

Mother: I wish they would just GO TO SLEEP.

Woman: Calm down, breathe. They just want me. I am mama.

- Mother:** If I continue yelling they'll think I don't love them.
- Daughter:** Why doesn't Mother love me? Why hasn't she called? Why won't she help me? I want my mommy.
- Sister:** She'll never love me as much as she loves my sister.
- Daughter:** She doesn't love me because I am selfish.
- Mother:** I am selfish, aren't I? All I think about is me.
- Student:** But I *need* to do homework. I have to achieve. I have to be the best.
- Woman:** I *need* help.
- Feminist:** Women who *need* are a stereotype. I can do it myself.
- Woman:** I am so tired.
- Mother:** I don't want to read "One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish" again.
- Woman:** I just want to be left alone.
- Mother:** I'll never be alone again.
- Daughter:** I am alone. No one loves me. I am selfish.
- Woman:** I feel guilty all the time. Am I crazy?
- Feminist:** I am human.

Cierra Olivia Thomas is an honors graduate of Eastern Oregon University who recently earned her B.S. in Anthropology/minor in Gender Studies. As a student activist dedicated to feminism, her commitment to feminist inquiry was recently recognized with the 2005 Women of Courage and Vision award for persistently "working toward a just and equal world." Cierra is currently applying to graduate schools.