

UC SANTA BARBARA

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UCSB Professor Presents First Public Screening of New Film on Mothering

Birthright: Mothering Across Difference, a film by Celine Parreñas Shimizu, associate professor of Asian American studies at UC Santa Barbara, will have its first public screening at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, May 27, in the campus's MultiCultural Center Theater.

The film features interviews with 50 women from diverse backgrounds, all of whom live in the Santa Barbara area and are currently raising young children who range in age from newborn to four years. Whittled down from over 42 hours of footage, the film intersperses individual interviews with those of small and large groups of women who share the highlights and challenges of mothering. It explores how the act of mothering transforms womanhood, friendship, family, and home.

"When I had my first child I faced some unexpected challenges to my personal and professional identity," Shimizu, who is also an affiliated faculty member in the Departments of Film and Media Studies and Feminist Studies, said of new motherhood. "It changes your perspective on time, space, intimate relationships, even places.

"As we live in the moment where mothering is celebrated and idealized in popular culture, my film intervenes with a more complete story of the joy and pain of becoming a mother. Ultimately, I interrogate how mothering brings women together, as well as challenging existing institutions of family, marriage, work, and friendship."

Women have traditionally been the primary caregivers for young children in the United States, but their needs often go unspoken in our society, she continued. "Women often have to go back to work after only three months or so, and it can be devastating for some of them. For working women who endure the challenge of work and parenting, sometimes the two don't mix. The film opens up the need for society to develop a sustained vision for women and their children in ways that support their needs."

The film juxtaposes women from varying socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, and focuses on their similarities while acknowledging their differences.

"We see a wealthy woman speak immediately after a poor woman and we hear various women's racial and ethnic experience," Shimizu said. "And in opening their lives to each other and to us, connections are made. The film shows how mothers live in difference and mother differently while also sharing certain commitments. They don't belittle each other's worries and concerns."

In the month since it was completed, "Birthright" has been screened in preview version at Ohio Wesleyan University. It will have its world premiere in the Reelheart Film Festival in Toronto on June 24.

"Birthright" is Shimizu's fifth film. In 2002, she wrote, directed, edited, and co-produced the experimental documentary "The Fact of Asian Women," in which contemporary Asian American female actors re-enact scenes from popular Hollywood films. The film received awards for Best Documentary Short at the Big Mini DV Film Festival in New York; Best of Festival in Documentary at the Berkeley International Film Festival; and Best Picture - Women's Issues at the ZoieFest in New York. Other films Shimizu wrote, directed, edited, and produced include "Super Flip," for which she received a Motion Picture Association of America Directing Award; "Her Uprooting Plants Her"; and "Mahal Means Love and Expensive," which garnered a Motion Picture Association of America Prize.

About UC Santa Barbara

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All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.