

Reflection on Presenting at the M.O.M. International 2019 Conference in New York City

My name is Samantha Copithorne and I am a second year Master's of Counselling Student at Athabasca University. I live with my husband and two children in the quaint suburb of Sherwood Park, Alberta. I am also a member of the Maternal Mental Health Progress in Canada, Athabasca University Research and Advocacy Working Group. I am in a fortunate position where I can tailor my academic papers towards researching Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs) – an area in which I am very passionate about it. One of my papers was focused on postpartum posttraumatic stress disorder (P-PTSD), which Gina felt would be great fit for the Museum of Motherhood's (MOM) conference, entitled *Rewriting Trauma and Visibility: Motherwork, Pregnancy, and Birth*. I have recently returned home from the conference, and this paper is a personal reflection of my experience.

I returned from the great city of New York approximately one week ago. Upon my arrival home, I felt it important to critically reflect and internalize my experiences pertaining to the MOM conference. This conference will always hold a significant place in my heart, on both a professional and personal level. Not only was I fortunate enough to be part of an emotionally charged and empowering conference, but also I was provided an opportunity to exceed the limitations of my comfort zone by disseminating and presenting research. First, I would like to address my professional development. Secondly, I would like to address my personal experiences from attending the conference. Collectively, my experience in New York City was profound and impactful, and it will certainly not be forgotten.

From a professional level, having the opportunity to present at an international conference as a Master's of Counselling student is truly nothing short of incredible. Not only did I gain invaluable experience to disseminate research, I was also privy to listen and to engage in

the incredible research of others. I was literally surrounded by intellects from all walks of life. In the spirit of full transparency, I was intimidated. However, there were people who were interested in what I had to say. They wanted to hear and learn about the research. They encouraged me to continue my research journey because ultimately we have the same goal – to help and empower women and mothers. There were far too many incredible presentations to summarize in this piece, so rather I am going to highlight general themes that really spoke to me.

Privilege. The concept of privilege was apparent in so many facets of the conference. How privileged I am to be living in Canada, where women's rights pertaining to motherhood are so much further ahead than that of the United States. Privilege to being a Caucasian woman who gave birth in a developed country, where I did not have to worry about war or additional discrimination being thrust upon me. It is incredibly easy to forget about privilege when we are surrounded by it. Listening and embracing to some women's recollections, and research reinforced the idea of privilege, and encouraged me to evaluate all the privileges that I have in my life. One concept that I found exceedingly interesting is the idea of matrescence. Matrescence was defined by one presentation as the developmental process of becoming a mother. She argued that the development of becoming a mother should be better examined, as it is developmental change in a woman's life that is synonymous with adolescence. Lastly, the closing ceremony was an amazingly powerful moment in which everyone had an opportunity to share the impact that the conference had on them. The overwhelmingly emotional connection we all felt within that time was something that I will not soon forget. The safety that encompassed everyone as there was no fear of judgment, condemnation, or rejection is something that I will strive to bring into my practice as a future psychologist.

On a more personal level, the MOM conference allowed me to gain a newfound sense of confidence. Pushing myself out of my comfort zone and delving into presenting research was something that I always aspired to do, and I am unbelievably thankful I had the opportunity to do it. Turns out that I do have new and interesting things to say, and that I am capable of being one of those brilliant women that intimidated me. Preparing for the conference fell on an exceptionally busy time during my life. There were many times in which I thought the workload was going to be insurmountable, and that it would be impossible to successfully accomplish everything to my standards. Yet, I was able to accomplish everything I needed to. I learned that I am capable of achieving high goals, and that maybe I undervalue or underestimate myself a bit too much. The MOM conference reinforced the notion that I am capable of achieving great things, so long as I am not afraid to push the limitations that I have set for myself.

Lastly, having the opportunity to present at the MOM conference provided me an opportunity to expand my personal identity and create (or maintain) relationships that expand the identity I have been living with. For the last several years, I have mostly been mom. There is nothing that I have more in this world than being mom. However, attending the MOM conference I was able to leave the mom identity at home and rediscover my goals, aspirations, and objectives that more distanced from my mom identity. I discovered the intellectual, academic, and researcher identities that I will embody moving forward. If the MOM conference taught me anything, it is that I do not have to just be “one thing” or “one identity”. I am capable of balancing multiple facets of identity to become a female powerhouse. There is no stopping me now.