



Hope Springs Maternal: Homeless Mothers Talk About Making Sense of Adversity

Jill Gerson

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Hope Springs Maternal is a book about the young mothers who live in New York City's shelters. Through extensive interviews with twenty-four young women of color living in temporary shelters who either were pregnant or had very young children, Jill Gerson sought to learn about the shelter users' background, current living experiences, and subjective views of home, family, and parenting. Gerson also employed the life history approach to focus on the ways the mothers' individual and collective biographies were shaped by both socioeconomic context and interpersonal experiences.

The interviews reveal that most of the mothers had experienced a range of disruptive experiences in childhood and adolescence and that their shelter use was closely related to the adverse economic realities with which many poor women of color are forced to contend. Based on the interview data and life history approach, Gerson concludes that the mothers living in shelters had engaged in a determined search for a safe haven that could help them complete their transition into an adult role and become parents able to consider the needs of their children. Their narratives speak to the capacity of the individual to use limited social resources as a self-righting developmental opportunity. The mothers' transitional shelter use often resonated with a normative maturational thrust to create opportunities to develop economic and residential security and caring interpersonal and family relationships.

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