

Paper Title: *Fierce Mamas' Rising: Navigating the terrain of motherhood as formerly incarcerated/convicted women*

Presenter: Grace Gámez, PhD

Abstract

The criminal punishment system structures potentiality as one's "marked status" extends beyond the completion of any imposed sentence. In my research, I found that formerly incarcerated/convicted mothers respond to the extra-legal nature of their punishments, by adapting pre-existing skills that allow them to survive, and challenge common-sense notions around "ideal" mothering. I named their adaptations, *fierce mothering/motherhood*. Fierce mothering is both a social position and social practice, and is characterized by the emotionally and socially complex experiences they encounter; however in the process their sense of self evolves, they become empowered in their roles as mothers, and in the situated knowledge they possess of the criminal punishment system.

My presentation, titled *Fierce Mamas Rising*, will focus on the concept I developed "fierce mothering". Fierce mothering moves beyond reproductive rights as reproductive health care, and complicates how we understand the idea of "choice". As argued in *Undivided Rights* (2004) "choice implies a marketplace of options" where women have the right to decide what happens to/in their bodies (p. 6). Furthermore, choice suggests that women have options regarding how, if, or to what extent, they perform their roles as mothers. I found that fierce mothers respond to the absence of choice through creative insurgence, they generate possibilities in the absence of institutional reproductive liberty; and claim both their rights and identities as mothers.