**Mother’s Day Letters: A Novel Mother to New Mother Initiative to Tackle Maternal Anxiety**

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For many mothers in Australia, worries about pregnancy, birth and parenthood have become a source of considerable anxiety. Maternal anxiety can have significant consequences for mothers, their children and families, however, current approaches to prevention and treatment of maternal anxiety focus on the individual woman and do not adequately address the impact of the sociocultural context. We argue a different approach is urgently needed.

**Aim:** In this presentation, we will examine the role the ‘good mother’ narrative plays in raising anxiety amongst new mothers. We will present a novel framework we have developed aimed at transforming the dominant narrative from one that pathologises and judges mothers and those who support them, to one that normalises, embraces and celebrates the diverse, natural concerns about parenting. In this presentation we will use our Mothers’ Day Letters” project to illustrate the potential for shifting dominant and often negative narratives of mothering.

The Mother’s Day Letters campaign was launched in May 2018 to celebrate new mothers. Mothers from all backgrounds and ages were invited to compose a letter to an expectant or a new mother to share with them what and who they found particularly helpful during the first-year after birth, and why. In a two-week period, we received 125 letters from Australian mothers of diverse cultural backgrounds and aged between 28 and 69 years offering suggestions and words of encouragement to new mothers. The letters have been analysed resulting in the “ten top tips” for new mothers. However, a more critical analysis reveals that key messages such as “trust your instincts” remain fraught with contradiction and the potential to reconstruct essentialist discourses surrounding the good mother.

In conclusion, novel approaches such as the Mother’s Day letters project have the potential to build resilience in women as they become mothers but how messages are constructed needs careful consideration.

**Professor Virginia Schmied** is Professor of Midwifery and Director of Research in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Western Sydney University and she holds a Visiting Professorship at University of Central Lancashire (UK). Her research focuses on transition to motherhood, perinatal mental health, postnatal care, breastfeeding and infant feeding decisions, with a strong focus on the organisation of healthcare, workplace culture and the facilitators and barriers to the delivery of high quality maternity and child health care.