ON THE MAKING OF MAN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE MEANING OF
MOTHERHOOD, ISSUES OF MASCULINITY, AND THE EXPERIENCE
OF RAISING A SON

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research focuses on the meanings that contemporary, working women assign to the experience of motherhood, how the role of work intersects the role of motherhood, and how these women are constructing and deconstructing gender with their preschool-age sons. Feminist and symbolic interactionist perspectives are utilized to ground the study empirically. The results are based on the in-depth interviews the researcher conducted with five working mothers living in a rural, college town.

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this work to my sons, Max and Hunter. Your existence has made my life so much more complicated, compelling, and important. I also want to thank my third, unborn son, whom I have carried through out this journey. I cannot wait to meet you. All of you are sources of great inspiration for me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The experience of motherhood is an experience in contradiction (Cusk, 2001). It is

prosaic as well as enigmatic. All at once it can seem commonplace, bizarre, exhilarating,

tiresome, amusing, and absolutely terrifying. Motherhood is the process by which an ordinary

life is transformed unseen into a story of strange and powerful passions, of love and servitude, of

confinement and compassion (Cusk, 2001). As Rich (1976), the American poet and feminist,

once wrote,

> All human life on the planet is born of woman. The one unifying, incontrovertible
>
> experience shared by all women and men is that months-long period we spent unfolding
>
> inside a woman's body…Most of us first know both love and disappointment, power and
>
> tenderness, in the person of a woman. We carry the imprint of this experience for life,
>
> even into our dying

This study attempts to tell something of an old story set in a new era in which women are

fighting for gender equality. It is culturally accepted that mothers are to nurture their infant sons;

however, patriarchal society has prescribed that a distance must be created between them so that

these little boys can become men (Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994). In encouraging this, our

society wants to deny males crucial aspects of their humanity. In the push to create relational

distance between mothers and sons, society is minimizing the courage it takes for self-expression

and true autonomy. This works to further degrade women, stigmatizing those qualities

considered "feminine". I share the belief that mothering needs to be redefined in ways that offer women authority and authenticity that will help them to challenge the patriarchal dictates of motherhood for themselves, as well as for the masculinization of their sons (O'Reilly, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

The focus of this study will be to explore the meanings that contemporary, working mothers assign to the experience of motherhood and parenting male children. In-depth interviews will be conducted with each mother to analyze continuities and discontinuities in how contemporary, working mothers define motherhood, conceptualize masculinities, and translate their understanding of both concepts into their parenting practices. Each mother will be asked to write a letter to her son, reflecting upon key previous experiences they have shared, as well as a description of her yearnings for him and his future as a man in society.

Feminist perspectives and symbolic interactionist perspectives will provide the basic framework to consider contemporary, working mothers' experiences. Black feminist theory will also be used to interpret findings not only from racial/ethnic mothers but also to provide a more inclusive examination of contemporary, working motherhood. Approximately five contemporary, working mothers of a 3 to 5 year old son from potentially diverse backgrounds will be interviewed at a site of mutual agreement.

Rationale for the Study

A major discourse within feminist perspectives has been the issue of "rethinking" the family, particularly the role of motherhood (Thorne, 1982). Feminists are concerned with how sexism is perpetuated and recreated within the family. In addition, feminists have questioned the role of "mother" as a possible factor of women's oppression. An important theme is the debate of

how to reconcile the needs of dependent children for nurturance with the needs of women to be active participants in all aspects of our society (Baber & Allen, 1992).

To think of mothering as a "role", as some social scientists have done, is to flatten and oversimplify a contradictory and emotionally charged activity. The subject of motherhood is loaded with exaggerated ideals and expectations, which has led to "mother blaming" and a loss of self-esteem in mothers (Hoffnung, 1998). Feminist theorists continually question the nature of motherhood, grappling along the way with the emotional interactions and relationships with children, persistent ideologies, and actual experiences of mothers (Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

In studying contemporary, working mothers, the "public-private" dichotomy of family and economy is problematized. The concept of work has traditionally been defined in terms of men's occupations and organizations and the concept of family has been traditionally defined in terms of "the" nuclear, middle-class, American model and by "sex roles" (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). This study will focus on the organization of work within and outside of families as shaped both by a patriarchal gender system and by a capitalist economic system. The study will refute the family-linked stereotypes of the man as sole provider and breadwinner and the woman as dependent and economically unproductive. This is neither a useful ideal, as it embeds women's subordination, nor does it describe the actual lives of most people. The study will demonstrate that the focus of women's subordination is not just in the economy nor just in the family, because "separate spheres" do not exist in women's or men's daily experiences. The study will also recognize a societal gender system that is autonomous with regard to any specific institution, yet it links all major institutions (Baber & Allen, 1992). By utilizing these breakthroughs in feminist conceptualization, this study will continue "theorizing in process" in the connected areas of gender, work, and family.

What is needed for working mothers to raise "good" men? If mother-son relationships are valued and supported, then sons can better attain personal autonomy, which Silverstein and Rashbaum (1994) defines as having a self with access to one's own feelings. They in turn can become good men, like good women, who are empathetic and strong, autonomous and connected, responsible to self, to family and friends, and to society, and capable of understanding how those responsibilities are, ultimately, inseparable (Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994). In the eloquent words of Lorde (1993),

> The strongest lesson I can teach my son is the same lesson I teach my daughter:
> how to be who he wishes to be for himself. And the best way I can do this is to be
> who I am and hope that he will learn from this not how to be me, which is not
> possible, but how to be himself. And this means how to move to that voice from
> within himself, rather than to those raucous, persuasive, or threatening voices
> from outside, pressuring him to be what the world wants him to be (p. 77).

The proposed study can only provide a further wealth of knowledge about the daily activities and experiences of motherhood. Are contemporary, working mothers raising their boys to be lovers or to be warriors? Odds are, they are doing both. By giving a voice to mothers of sons, perhaps, we can be one step closer toward eliminating gendered polarities. The goal may be an equality that rests on differences, those that confound, disrupt, and render ambiguous the meaning of any fixed binary opposition between women and men (Scott, 1988, p. 177).

Theoretical Framing

In the hope of hearing individual voices and visualizing distinct faces of contemporary, working mothers of sons, this study will be fashioned from a feminist perspective. Feminism directs attention to the effects of social institutions and ideologies on women, which both oppress

and disadvantage, with movement toward the goal of emancipation and empowerment (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991). Feminist perspectives contend that women's experiences are valid and valuable, rich in complexity and depth, and personal, yet embedded within the broader social landscape (Thompson, 1992).

Feminist theorizing on the social construction of gender is an important aspect of this study. "Gender" is a fruitful concept in the feminist re-visioning of the dynamics and boundaries of families. Flax (1987) argues that the most important advance in feminist theory is that the existence of gender relations has been problematized. She contends that gender can no longer be treated as a simple, natural fact, tied to issues of the biological. Gender is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon, relevant to all dimensions of individual and social life (Flax, 1987).

The second theoretical perspective that will provide a frame of reference to guide this study is that of symbolic interactionism. According to Turner (1988), symbolic interactionism has two missions. The first is to investigate the social factors that influence individual behavior and personality, and the second is to study the reciprocal task of exploring the effects of the individual on social organization and the processes of society. Symbolic interactionism demonstrates that individuals actively construct social roles with self-meanings and that self-concepts can become an important motive for individual behavior and social change (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

The proposed study intersects these two frameworks by giving a voice to working mothers. Both work and family are socially constructed institutions that work to oppress women. It breaks apart the dichotomy of public vs. private, and it forces the personal to become political. By encouraging working mothers to investigate their personal identities with regard to the roles they have established for themselves, and in the relationships they share with their sons, it is my

hope that they will become more empowered than ever to stand by their personal convictions.

The best thing that a mother can do for any child is to be true to herself (Lorde, 1993).

Sensitizing Concepts

In utilizing a qualitative methodology, the process of sensitizing concepts provides a

point of reference in helping to give personal meaning to ideas that are subject to multiple

interpretations (Blumer, 1969). For the purposes of this study, the concepts that follow will be

defined in these ways.

Core beliefs are those in-grained ideas or messages, in this case, about motherhood,

rooted in the family of origin, as well as from personal mothering experiences, which dictate to

each of us how and what the experience of motherhood should mean. Application of feminist

perspectives on the social and cultural context of motherhood, as well as social meaning to the

concept of core beliefs, provides clarity in understanding the link between the life event of

motherhood as socially defined and the socially created and interpreted meaning assigned to it by

individual contemporary, working mothers.

Contemporary, working mothers for the purpose of this study will incorporate those

mothers who work full-time (35 to 40 hours per week) out of the home, and who employ full-

time child care services for their children.

Gender is a culturally constructed dichotomy of sex categories, "woman-man" as well as

gendered notions like "masculinity-femininity" (Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Cultural or symbolic notions of gender tell us what it means to be a man versus a woman in a

specific sociocultural context. These expressions of normative legitimation constitute a hidden

dimension of power in family relations (Komter, 1989). In our culture and time, notions of

femininity and masculinity are linked to the production and attribution of sexual orientation and

the dynamics of homophobia. Personal gender is a basic component in emotional conflicts, antagonisms, trust, distrust, jealousy, and emotional dependency in the relations of heterosexual and gay and lesbian couples, as well as in the emotionally charged dynamics bound up in rearing children (Connell, 1987). Generalizations about masculine versus feminine personalities obscure enormous differences among men and women, for instance in the differences of social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and age. The term gender, for the purposes of this study, will refer to those characteristics implied by participants as essentially male or female.

Doing gender will be defined as the gender divisions that are socially constructed through ongoing social processes conducted by mothers and sons (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In Rich's (1976) formulation, the experience of motherhood refers to the ways women have been affected by and survived within patriarchal institutions and to the "potential relationship of any women to children and the powers of reproduction," (p. xv), a potential that can only be realized when women are able to fully define their own lives. Although feminists have explored many dimensions of family life, they have given special and recurring attention to one major topic, motherhood. This area of experience has often been defined by biology and instinct, but feminists insist that motherhood is a socially constructed institution and subject to historical changes. Furthermore, women's actual experiences have often been at odds with prevailing definitions of motherhood. Feminists have set out to uncover and to develop theory to explain these gaps. Mothering, for the purposes of this study, will be defined as a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people (Forcey, 1994).

Feminism: There is not one overarching "feminist theory" rather there is a wide range of perspectives that have been and are often in tension with one another. Gordon (1979) provides a

useful starting definition in which she concludes that feminist theories are "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it" (p. 107). Her definition helps draw together three predominant themes for all existing feminist perspectives: (1) emphasis on women and their experiences; (2) recognition that under existing social arrangements, women are subordinated or oppressed; and (3) the commitment to ending women's unjust subordination (Acker et al., 1991). From these three themes, a fourth essential theme has evolved with regard to feminist ideology, that is the attention to gender and gender relations as fundamental to all of social life, including the lives of men as well as those of women (Gordon, 1979).

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

Most of the research on motherhood and mothering has thus far centered around the relationships between mothers and daughters. Relatively little has been conducted on the relationships of mothers and sons, as it is complicated with issues of gender that have been dictated by the patriarchal system of binary oppositions (O'Reilly, 2001). With this in mind, I propose the following questions to guide this study.

(1) What meanings do contemporary, working women assign to motherhood before and after becoming mothers?

(2) How does the role of work intersect the role of mother?

(3) How do contemporary, working mothers construct and deconstruct gender with their sons, as well as envision masculinity and femininity in themselves and in their sons?

<div align="center">Locating Myself in This Work</div>

Qualitative research begins with the self. A key component in this process is to gain understanding of the relationship between the researcher and the subject of the research (Bogdan

& Biklen, 1992). The reflexive piece that follows was written as a means of demonstrating my connection with regard to the subject of this research process.

This study is proposed as a Masters thesis project in the concentration of family studies, a requirement for completion of the program. The "researcher" behind the proposal has very much been shaped by the university environment, but the issues raised in this proposal are anything but academic for me. This research is an academic means to a very personal end. I am the mother of two sons, and like many other mothers, I am aware that the close and caring relationships that I share with my boys are developing despite and in defiance of the patriarchal dictates of mother and son disconnection. My boys are very young, however, and I fear that their healthy senses of selves remain at risk in a culture where hypermasculinization is everywhere.

Recently, the media and some in academia have declared a state of national emergency for men in contemporary culture (Pollack, 1998). While I would not define it as a "crisis in masculinity" (Pollack, 1998), I do agree that males are not allowed by our society to become what they choose to be and to value many of the relationships that they define as important for themselves. I perceive that at least some of the changes we seek may be found in the relationships between mothers and sons, as they strive to redefine manhood, motherhood, and the connection they share with one another. The mother and son relationship, as Silverstein and Rashbaum (1994) conclude, "offers us one of our greatest hopes for transforming ourselves and the world in which we live – if we will but have the courage to make the necessary changes" (p. 241).

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In an effort to frame the diverse and complex meanings of motherhood and the experience of parenting a son, feminist and symbolic interactionist perspectives have been blended to provide the theoretical underpinning for this study. The social construction of gender, which shapes and molds women's identities, will be highlighted. Relevant gender socialization theoretical perspectives and key research on the differential patterns of parent-child interactions will be presented. Lastly, an analysis of literature relevant to the study of contemporary, working mothers of sons will be discussed as it pertains to the scope of the present inquiry.

Theoretical Perspectives

A Feminist Perspective

Interpretations of the impact of the family on women's rights and equality are widely variant, even within the paradigm of feminist theories. Early radical feminist writing emphasized the nuclear family as a root to women's oppression and advocated for its eradication (Firestone, 1972). Other theorists have developed this theme, exploring the limitations not only in the nuclear family, but in any kind of "home," which by its very nature is exclusionary (Allen, 1986; Martin & Mohanty, 1988). At the other end of the continuum are several feminist writers who emphasize the importance of family, and, for some, the importance of the nuclear family as it has been traditionally defined (Elshtain, 1981; Friedan, 1981; Greer, 1984). This school affirms gender differentiation, celebrates traditional feminine qualities, and urges a discontinuation of the struggle against male domination in the family as a detractor from more important feminist struggles (Wright, 1998).

Despite these various viewpoints, feminists do share some basic underlying concepts with regard to women and their experiences in family life (Baber & Allen, 1992). Feminist scholarship begins by assuming the centrality, normality, and value of women's experiences. As Ferguson (1984) suggests, feminist theory is not simply about women, it is about the world; however, feminists look through the lens of the usually ignored and devalued vantage point of women's experiences. By making women's experiences visible, feminist scholarship helps to reveal gaps and distortions in knowledge that claim to be inclusive, but in fact are based on the experiences of Euro-American, class-privileged, heterosexual men. Beginning with the life experiences of women, in all of their diversity, helps to open new epistemologies or ways of knowing the world.

Feminist scholars, by starting with women's experiences and thus with structures of gender, have continually questioned any unitary notion of family. As feminist writings make clear, a monolithic, bounded notion like family, is not only inadequate, but is also an ideology that contains class, cultural, and heterosexual biases and supports the oppression of women (Thorne, 1982).

Feminist scholarship emphasizes social change as well and favors methodological approaches that are value-committed; feminists want not only to know about the world, but also how to change it. There is a commitment to effect change by emancipating and empowering women (Baber & Allen, 1992). Feminist perspectives emphasize reflexivity (Thompson, 1992). Through the utilization of this methodology, feminists are allowed a significant source of insight; of being the outsider within (Collins, 1991).

By giving attention to the multiplicity and diversity of women's experiences, feminist scholars recognize the value of individual voices; whether they speak alone or resonate in chorus

with other similar voices (Baber & Allen, 1992). Acknowledging women's experiences as source and justification of knowledge elevates the status of women's experience from that of the everyday to a level of authority (Thompson, 1992). This experiential exchange between researcher and researched (DuBois, 1983) transcends common discourse, culminating in the creation of knowledge by and about women (Smith, 1987).

Feminist scholarship uses gender as a basic organizing concept. There are two interrelated elements with regard to the concept of gender. The first deals with the social construction and exaggeration of differences between men and women. The second has to do with the use of these distinctions to legitimize and perpetuate power relations between men and women. Like social class and race, gender is a social structure; it is a fundamental basis of inequality or social stratification (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Gender relations are basically power relations.

Feminists challenge the assumption that gender is some unproblematic individual characteristic, some essential "masculinity" or "femininity" a person has that can be understood in terms of sex differences. Feminist scholars quickly refute these assumptions. Instead, they analyze gender as a central principle of social organization and as something all people do in their daily activities in every institution. By viewing gender as an ongoing social process, feminists focus on gender relations, arguing that men's lives are as deeply influenced by gender as are those of women. Feminist scholars also insist that gender relations need to be analyzed in specific sociocultural and historical contexts while under study.

Feminist writers who emphasize what women may have in common have further marginalized those women who have variations in life experience from the dominant group. This homogenization has led to downplaying the complex and painful fact that some women experience compounded forms of oppression on a daily basis. In the last decade, feminist writers

have begun to grapple with the challenge of understanding complex relationships among gender, social class, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, age, and disability. Becoming aware of and trying to remove the blinders of privilege is a continuous process (Allen, 2001). I turn to a brief summary of Black feminist thought to convey the significant challenges that have come from the experiences of women who have been marginalized by many of the assumptions of feminist theory, as well as in society as a whole. The concept of gender as a social construction has become more complex through the work of Black feminists and other theorists who attend to intersecting patterns of difference and dominance.

Black feminist thought begins by placing African-American women, and their individual self-definitions at the center of inquiry (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). This enables Black women's experiences to become visible and helps to reveal racist, sexist, and class-biased assumptions. Black feminists stress the reality that both culture and class structure, along with Black women's long history of resistance and social action, have shaped African-American women's lives and their family experiences (Collins, 1990; Gilkes, 1981; hooks, 1984).

African-American women are oppressed by both gender and race, and frequently by class. Black feminist thinkers have made a major contribution to feminist scholarship by focusing on the interlocking nature of different forms of oppression (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). While many Black women represent an extreme of triple oppression, it is important to note that all people are affected by issues of race, class, and gender. The basic question that Black feminists ask is how do these social systems intersect to define, modify, and qualify each of our realities (Collins, 1990).

An interesting concept in Black feminist thought is the emphasis placed on the importance of bonds and alliances between African-American women and men. Black women

and men have historically survived and resisted systematic class and race oppression together, and although male dominance is an established problem, Black women, in many ways, have more in common with men of their race and class than upper- or middle-class white women. Although Black feminists see the ever-present reality of sexist oppression, they do not see solutions in some of the strategies, such as separatism, that white feminists have put forth (hooks, 1984). "Black feminists call for renewed attention to improving relationships between women and men; just as whites must play a part in struggles against racism, so must men contribute to efforts to eradicate sexism" (Osmond & Thorne, 1993, p. 607).

Finally, like others from marginalized backgrounds, Black feminists explicitly reject white idealizations of the middle-class American family (Collins, 1994). Their previous work has helped show the strengths of single-parent families, of networks of kin and fictive kin who help one another, and of families held together by strong cross-generational bonds. Black feminists articulate experiences of family that are submerged and devalued by the ideology of the family as a bounded unit, centered around a married couple.

Feminist ideology has an existing dilemma. Do women want equality with men or do they want their differences recognized and more highly esteemed (Osmond & Thorne, 1993)? Emphasizing gender difference has historically led to or at least reinforced women's subordination; however, conceptualizing men and women as equal ignores structural and ideological inequity. The issue of equality versus difference has tended to lead to the trap of binary oppositions (Baber & Allen, 1992).

Contemporary feminist perspectives do not deny the existence of gender difference; however, these perspectives do emphasize that the meanings and evaluations attached to difference constitute the core of the social construction of gender in specific sociohistorical

contexts (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Thus, feminist theory offers the insight that "it is not difference in itself that has been dangerous to women and other oppressed groups, but the political uses to which the idea of difference has been put" (Eisenstein, 1985, p. xxiii). The essential question is who has the power to define difference and consequent subordination. Recent feminist emphases on multiple differences among women constitute a basic challenge to the power to define. This is a fundamental first-step toward eliminating gendered polarities (Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

A Symbolic Interaction Perspective

Symbolic interaction is defined as, "a frame of reference for understanding how humans, in concert with one another, create symbolic worlds and how these worlds, in turn, shape human behavior" (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 136). It's unique contributions to family studies are the emphasis on the idea that families are social groups and that individuals develop both a concept of self and their identities through social interaction, enabling them to independently assess and assign value to their family activities (Burgess, 1926; Handel, 1985).

There are four sets of interrelated concepts in symbolic interactionism: 1) identities, 2) roles, 3) interactions, and 4) contexts, as decribed below (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). First, identities refer to self-meanings in a role, and are hierarchically organized by salience, or importance from the individual's standpoint. What roles are important to working mothers? How does work intersect with parenting? How do working mothers define who they are with regard to work and motherhood? How do mothers envision what other individuals think of them? These are just a few of the questions that this study will investigate.

The second concept is that of roles, which are defined as shared norms applied to the occupants of particular social positions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). For example, society

maintains that mothers should be the primary caregivers to their children. Mothers, however, can construct different identities in a role. For example, within the role of mother, one may find the multiple identities of friend, economic provider, and disciplinarian to the child. Roles are adapted and do change form and flavor throughout life, but they are also influenced by past experiences and events. (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). For instance, many would not find it too surprising if new mothers stressed that they had learned the most about nurturance from their own mothers. Some of the questions that will be asked in this study to address roles are, what messages were received regarding motherhood before becoming a mother? Where did they come from? How did these ideas change after the birth of a child?

From the symbolic interactionist perspective, role taking and role making are central components in the socialization process. Symbolic interactionists view socialization as the process of change that an individual undergoes as a result of social influences (Gecas, 1986). To elaborate further, the emphasis in a symbolic interactionist approach to socialization is on the development of self and identity, two concepts that are tied to role performances (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

"It is through social interactions that individuals apply broad shared symbols and actively create the specific meanings of self, others, and situations" (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 149). Through the use of symbolic interaction as a guiding framework for this study, working mothers will present themselves in such a way that the underlying assumptions they have about the rights and responsibilities of motherhood will be highlighted. These assumptions are justifications for their behavior in the mothering role. Another aspect of the interaction concept is that the relationship we have with our children tends to be significant enough to dramatically affect how we think and feel about ourselves (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). With this in mind, questions will

be directed toward the relationship between mother and son, how motherhood has changed the mother, and how motherhood has changed her relationships with others.

The fourth underlying concept is that of contexts. When discussing how individuals align their actions, is important to show how the behavior exhibited is shaped by culture and how culture is shaped by that behavior (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Questions regarding work/life issues will be asked as one method to getting into contexts. Other questions will focus on the construction and the deconstruction of gender that the mothers participate in with their sons. Personal definitions of femininity and masculinity will also be addressed. Mother and son relationships seem to be an ideal place to see the importance of the crucible between the interpersonal and the institutional (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Power, social class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and life course are exogenous factors that influence symbolic interactions (Stryker, 1980). In accordance, feminist theorists have recognized that symbolic interactionism is a valuable perspective precisely because it is capable of showing how the personal is political. Discrimination against women, and other minorities, occurs in all interactions. The value of symbolic interactionism to feminist theorists then is that it provides both "the language to discuss inequality based on everyday experiences", and the ability to "link everyday, public actions of people with the hidden rules of social life" (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 156).

<div align="center">Review of Literature</div>

Research has indicated that children as young as eighteen months of age show preferences for gender-typed toys, by the age of two, they are aware of their own and others' gender, and by three years of age, children begin to identify specific traits and behavior in gender stereotyped ways (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). In order to make sense of how children adopt

gender messages into their images of themselves, three major theoretical perspectives have been offered; 1) Psychoanalytic Perspectives; 2) Social Learning Perspectives; and 3) Cognitive Developmental Perspectives. I will briefly discuss each of these theoretical perspectives in the following section.

Psychoanalytic Perspectives

According to psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives, children pass through a series of stages in their personality development. By four years of age, children begin to unconsciously identify primarily with and model their behavior after the same-sex parent. This is the only way for children to learn how to behave in gender appropriate ways.

Following the work of Freud (1856-1939), who developed this perspective known as *identification theory*, feminist theorist Chodorow (1989; 1978) offers her own interpretation, which posits that gender acquisition occurs within a social context. The goal of her psychoanalytic perspective is to explain why females grow up to be the primary caregivers of children, and why they develop stronger relational ties to children than males. Her perspective suggests that young males have a more difficult time with the identification process than young females do because they must separate psychologically from their mothers, and model themselves after their fathers who are usually absent from the home. As a result, males become emotionally detached and repressed at an early age. In contrast, females remain closely connected to their mothers emotionally, which helps them to acquire the psychological capabilities for mothering themselves, and thus, the feminine personality becomes intertwined with notions interdependence with others (Chodorow, 1978).

Social Learning Perspectives

Social learning theory maintains that children acquire their gender identities by either being rewarded for gender appropriate behavior or being punished for gender inappropriate behavior. Usually these rewards or punishments are direct and take the form of praise or admonishment (Renzetti & Curran, 1999). Actually, research has shown that male children receive harsher disapproval for cross-gender behavior than female children do (Fagot, 1985; Martin, 1990).

Children also learn about gender through indirect reinforcement. By observing the actions of others, children are able to learn about the consequences of specific behaviors (Bronstein, 1988). For instance, in one study, parents did not explicitly tell their children what toys to play with, but if the children chose a cross-gender toy, the parents were less likely to play with them (Langlois & Downs, 1980). Social learning theory suggests that children learn about gender by imitating or modeling those around them as well. These theorists posit that children tend to model themselves after individuals whom they consider to be warm, friendly, and powerful, and who they are most like themselves (Bussey & Bandura, 1984). The sex of the individual may be less important in eliciting modeling than other variables, especially the perceived power of the model (Jacklin, 1989). Young females are more likely to model the behavior of males, than young males are to model the behavior of females, which may be because females are often perceived as less powerful than males (Golombok & Fivush, 1994).

Cognitive Developmental Perspectives

Cognitive developmental theorists contend that children learn gender and gender stereotypes through their mental efforts to organize their social world. In order to make sense of sensory information, children develop categories or schemas to help them organize their

observations and their experiences according to specific patterns or regularities. Sex is considered one of the first schemas that young children develop on account of the fact that gender is relatively stable. It also has some rather obvious physical cues attached to it as well (Renzetti & Curran, 1999).

Bem (1993) developed a gender acquisition perspective that she termed the *enculturated lens theory of gender formation,* which incorporates many elements of social learning theory. According to her perspective, children are socialized to accept their society's assumptions about masculinity and femininity. This enculturation process occurs through institutionalized social practices as well as implicit lessons, or "metamessages", about specific values and significant differences between the sexes. This process works to organize children's ideas of gender from birth (Bem, 1993; Renzetti & Curran, 1999).

Parent-Child Interactions

There are several important studies to introduce when looking at differential treatment of children by parents. As far as emotional attachments, Connors (1996) indicates that girls at the age of 14 months are more secure in their emotional attachment to their mothers than boys of the same age. In observing male and female infants between 3 and 14 months of age, Connors (1996) found few differences in the children's behavior; however, she did find that the mothers of girls were more sensitive toward them, while the mothers of boys were more restrictive. She attributes this differential treatment as the cause for the differences in attachment security.

Other research supports Connors's conclusions. Another study found that although 14-month-old children showed no sex differences in communication attempts, caregivers tended to positively respond to boys when they "forced attention" either by being aggressive, crying, whining, or screaming, while the same tactics attempted by girls were commonly ignored. The

caregivers responded positively to the girls when they used gestures or gentle touching, or when they talked calmly (Fagot, Hagan, Leinbach, & Kronsberg, 1985). When Fagot and her colleagues observed the same children a year later, they saw sex differences in their styles of communication where boys tends to be more assertive and girls tends to be more talkative (Fagot et. al., 1985)

In other studies on differential communication patterns, researchers have found that parents use a greater number and variety of emotion words when talking with their daughters, except for anger, which is significantly talked about more often with sons (Adams, Kuebli, Boyle, & Fivush, 1995). According to one research study, mothers tend to teach and question boys more than girls, which is thought to provide boys with more of the kind of verbal stimulations thought to foster cognitive development (Weitzman, Birns, & Friend, 1985).

With regard to differential play patterns, research indicates that parents tend to engage in rougher, more physical play with sons (MacDonald & Parke, 1986). Both parents are just as likely to believe that their daughters need more help completing tasks than their sons (Burns & Homel, 1989). From the finding of these studies, it could be easily speculated that through these early gender socialization experiences, adults are teaching females to be more attentive to others' feelings and to place value in interpersonal relationships, whereas males are learning to be more assertive, aggressive, and independent (Renzetti & Curran, 1999).

It is important to remember that the research discussed in this section is almost exclusively on White, middle-class, two-parent, heterosexual families. Some research has suggested that Black parents stress the importance of hard work, independence, and self-reliance with both their male and female children (Poussaint & Comer, 1993). Other studies that have examined social class suggest that gender-stereotyped interaction decreases as one moves up the

social class hierarchy (Burns & Homel, 1989; Lackey, 1989). There are even fewer studies that

have examined gender socialization in gay and lesbian families. These studies seem to indicate

that children reared in such families are no different in their gender role behavior than children

reared in heterosexual families; however, the samples for these studies consisted of children who

had spent at least part of their early childhood in heterosexual families (Golombok & Fivush,

1994). It is clear from this overview that much more research is needed to elucidate the rich

diversity of parent-child interactions and their outcomes among the intersections of race, class,

and gender.

Because motherhood is as much a social location as it is a form of personal identity, the

sections that follow will focus on the social institution of motherhood and the ways in which that

social construct shapes and defines women's mothering experiences.

Scholarship on Mothering and Motherhood

Mothering and motherhood are viewed as dynamic social interactions and relationships,

located in a societal context organized by gender and in accord with the prevailing gender belief

system. Definitions and practices of mothering are understood to be historically variable (Apple

& Golden, 1997), rather than being seen as "natural, universal, and unchanging" (Glenn, 1994, p.

4), the product of biological reproduction. How these biological activities are culturally

organized and given meaning are the provocative questions (Arendell, 2001).

The prevailing ideology in North America is that of intensive mothering. This

motherhood mandate declares that mothering is exclusive, wholly child centered, emotionally

involving, and time-consuming (Hays, 1996). The mother portrayed in this ideology is devoted

to the care of others; she is self-sacrificing and "not a subject with her own needs and interests"

(Bassin et al., 1994, p. 2). Intensive mothering ideology both assumes and reinforces the tradional gender-based division of labor (Fineman, 1995).

Scholarship on mothering and motherhood tends to consider three central themes: mothers' activities, understandings, and experiences (Arendell, 2001). Focus is placed on the person who does the relational and logistical work of child rearing. A unifying theme, which exists in the various definitions of mothering encompasses the social practices of nurturing and caring for dependent children. The "business" of mothering involves dynamic activity and always-evolving relationships. Mothering is particularly significant because it is considered the main vehicle through which children first form their personal identities and later learn their place in society. Multifaceted and full of complexity, mothering is symbolically laden, representing what often is characterized as the ultimate in relational devotion (Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991).

Modern mothering entails extensive, ongoing emotional work (Benjamin, 1994; Chodorow, 1989; Thurer, 1993). Maternal ambivalence is grounded in the paradoxical character of the mothering experience. The uncertainty of children's long-term outcomes intensifies maternal ambivalence. Motherhood is a complicated set of roles that results in ambivalent feelings on the part of women. There are the love, intimacy, and caring that make it personal, intense, and special, but there are also the very real changes in women's bodies, free time, work, and marriage and other intimate relationships. This leads to conflicting feelings in most mothers: feelings of intense need and suffocation; of sublime selflessness and supreme selfishness.

The social concept of motherhood indicates that in order to be a good mother, a woman must like being a mother. This leads to ambivalent feelings in mothers, which usually leads to guilt and worry about mothering adequacy. As people, women have different personalities,

talents, and temperaments, but as mothers they are expected to be continually patient, even-tempered, and consistent. When they fail to meet these impossible expectations, they fear that they are bad mothers, that they are failing their children. With this guilt in mind, mothers turn to the experts, such as pediatricians and psychologists, who more often than not are males who prescribe to the institution of motherhood. The whole experience becomes more tormented and less satisfying as it loses the spontaneity and genuine warmth of unmediated intimate relations (Hoffnung, 1998).

Central in the conceptual work on mothering and motherhood is work aimed at delineating what it is that mothers do. Mothers share, by definition and condition, a set of activities even though they vary as individuals and across cultures (Ruddick, 1994; Phoenix et al., 1991). They engage in "maternal practice," which is the nurturing, protecting, and training of their children (Ladd-Taylor, 1994; Leonard, 1996).

McMahon's (1995) qualitative study is particularly relevant as it looks at how the experience of motherhood changed women's self-perceptions through the process of re-socialization, or a renegotiation of identity that helped to lay claim to the social position of motherhood. It is suggested that women are provided the opportunity to grasp those characteristics that are conventionally seen a quintessentially feminine through the experience of becoming a mother. Other ideas that where explored in McMahon's (1995) study were the perceived costs and rewards of being a mother, the experience of the everyday lives of mothers, and the issue of parenthood as a gendered and engendering experience. What McMahon (1995) was able to establish is that mothering is not a unitary experience for individual women, nor is it experienced similarly by all women. It carries multiple and often shifting meanings.

As theorist Ruddick (1994) observed, "Mothers are identified not by what they feel but by what they try to do" (p. 34). Maternal practice involves intimate relationships as well as skill. Through dynamic interaction with their children, mothers foster and shape a profound affectional relationship, a deeply meaningful connection (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). In this relationship of care, the child has physical, emotional, and moral claims on the mother (Leonard, 1996). Influencing women's particular mothering actions are their beliefs about family, individuality, the nature of childhood, and the nature of their child (Ribbens, 1994). Mothers actively interpret both cultural messages about childhood and their experiences with children, shaping their parental roles in accordance with their evolving beliefs (Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992). "Mothering is learned in the process of interaction with the individual mothered" (Barnard & Martell, 1995, p. 22).

Some theorists call into question a unitary model of mothering, insisting that women's various standpoints must be taken into account (Dill, 1994a, 1994b; Glenn, 1992). Cultural and economic contexts variously shape mothers' activities and understandings. Mothering takes place within "specific historical contexts framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender" (Collins, 1994, p. 56). Women's social locations, the intersections of regional and local political economy with class, ethnicity, culture, and sexual preference, "condition the strategies and meanings that working mothers fashion through their agency" (Lamphere, Zavella, & Gonzales, 1993, p. 4). Having limited or no access to class and racial privilege constricts the range of options and resources available to minority mothers (Baca Zinn, 1994). Three issues, according to sociologist Collins (1994), form the "bedrock" of the "motherwork" of women of color: survival, power, and identity (Stack & Burton, 1993).

Contemporary Conflicts for Mothers

The issues surrounding the experiences of contemporary, working mothers are characterized by diversity, contradictory images, a complicated array of role involvements, and engendered role expectations (Barnard & Martell, 1995). Part of the difficulty in describing the great diversity and reality of motherhood is the extent to which idealized images set high and perhaps unrealistic standards for most women. According to this view, most mothers are biologically predisposed to parent, have an intuitive grasp of child care, and have corresponding abilities to do so without ambivalence or awkwardness (Boulton, 1983; Chodorow & Contratto, 1982; Thompson & Walker, 1989).

The contemporary problem is how to fit motherhood into the lives of women without relinquishing their other activities, or narrowing their ambitions (Hoffnung, 1998). The socially defined concept of mothering conflicts with other important aspects of women's lives: productive work, companionate marriage or partnership, and economic independence. It limits women's public participation at a time when women have won access to the public world. It is not enough for women to be able to do men's work as well as women's; it is necessary to reconsider the value of mothering and to reorder public priorities so that caring for children counts in and adds to the lives of women and men. Until children are valued members of society and child care is considered work important enough to be done by both men and women, the special burdens and benefits of motherhood will keep women in second place (Hoffnung, 1998).

Both work and family require emotional investment, time, and energy; there are many external and internal pressures that push women to devote their major energies to the family. As a result, women often shy away from commitment to high-powered careers. As mothers, they often are employed outside of their homes, but they select jobs around the scheduling needs of

their families rather than according to their own career development. The conflict between individual achievement and feminine responsibility, therefore, is not just internal. It places constraints on women's commitment to employment, as well as pushes women to limit the careers they consider possible to less lucrative female occupations, to give up what they have accomplished for mother-work, or to spread themselves very thin. The resulting part-time or intermittent employment patterns contribute to the large wage differential between women and men. Motherhood, as we know it, has substantial material costs for women (Hoffnung, 1998).

Mothering is often negatively associated with psychological well-being. Distress, defined as " symptoms of depression, anxiety, physiological malaise, and lack of happiness" (Goldsteen & Ross, 1989, p. 505) is a common maternal experience. The most stressed of all mothers are those who are married, employed, have young children, and encounter difficulty in locating and affording child care and handle child rearing mostly alone (Benin & Keith, 1995; Marshall, et al., 1998; Neal, Chapman, Ingersol-Dayton, & Emlen, 1993; Sears & Galambos, 1993). Young mothers experience greater distress and have fewer psychological resources than do older mothers (Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale, 1995). Each additional child increases younger mothers' feelings of being overburdened (Goldsteen & Ross, 1989). When economic conditions are constant, single and married women experience similar levels of maternal distress (Ross & Van Willigen, 1996). Employed mothers experience lower levels of distress than do full-time mothers (Marshall, et al., 1998).

Contrary to prevailing wisdom, as Amato and Booth (1997) point out, "although people are moving toward the idea that fathers should be more involved with children, demographic and social changes have resulted in fathers being less involved with children than perhaps at any time in U.S. history" (p. 228). Single and married mothers spend roughly the same amount of time in

total family and child care responsibilities (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Duxbury, Higgins, &

Lee, 1994).

Overall, employment is conducive to mothers' mental health and parenting gratification.

But employment is not an unmitigated blessing: paid work and mothering are structured and

defined as distinctive spheres in U.S. society (Moen, 1992). Employed and stay at home mothers

generally engage in the same array of child care activities, with the exception that full-time

mothers watch more television with their children (Bryant & Zick, 1996; DeMeis & Perkins,

1996). Mothers holding employment do not necessarily spend less time with their children than

full-time homemaker mothers (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997).

There is some evidence that many employed mothers' compensate for their absence from

the home during work hours by increasing the amount of time they spend in intense interaction

with children during non work hours (Amato & Booth, 1997). Educational attainment is a factor

in employed mothers' time involvement with their children: those with higher levels of education

spend more time with their children than women with lower levels (Bianchi & Robinson; Bryant

& Zick, 1996).

African American mothers, regardless of family structure or socioeconomic class,

generally may experience greater psychological satisfaction and less stress in combining

parenting and paid work than do Anglo women, although they, like all mothers, must contend

with role conflicts between child raising, and working for pay. African American mothers'

employment rates have been higher for a longer period of time and are recognized within the

community as being essential to family survival (Collins, 1991, 1994; Glenn, 1992; Polatnick,

1996; Segura, 1994). These cultural contradictions, condemnation of working mothers even as

most mothers work for pay, complicate women's experiences and assessments of mothering (Arendell, 2001).

The experience of motherhood brings with it benefits as well as well as limitations. Although motherhood is not enough to fill an entire life, for most mothers it is one of the most meaningful experiences in their lives (Hoffnung, 1998). When mothers take on multiple roles, they are usually provided more privileges, more resources, and more avenues for self-esteem and social involvement (Hoffnung, 1998).

Changing social values may be necessary, but it hardly serves as an answer to women who are now facing or contemplating motherhood. While there is accumulating evidence that employed mothers feel better about themselves, report more satisfaction with their lives, and have a higher self-esteem than do their non-employed counterparts, it is helpful to consider what factors contribute to the satisfactory combination of work and family roles (Huffnung, 1998). Factors include: (1) work as a source of personal enrichment – a legitimate priority in the attitudes of mothers; (2) family support; (3) child care satisfaction; and (4) reduction of conflicting responsibilities between home and work (Hoffnung, 1998).

<div align="center">Summary</div>

In this chapter, I highlighted the theoretical perspectives of feminism and symbolic interactionism, which work together to provide a framework for this investigation. Major frameworks of gender socialization, relevant socialization literature, and family literature on mothering and motherhood was analyzed, exposing gaps in research on contemporary, working mothers of sons, while elucidating the necessity and justification for the qualitative study proposed here.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Overview of Research Design

Qualitative research is a process of inquiry utilized to explore individualistic meanings, while providing descriptive data about the multiple dimensions of a particular social or human phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). In utilizing the qualitative method of indepth interviewing, I was able to obtain first-hand knowledge of life as a contemporary, working mother and the various issues that surround raising a son (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

In-depth interviewing and reflexive activities are key qualitative data collection techniques. An in-depth interview is a purposeful conversation in that both the researcher and the participant have a genuine interest in the subject at hand. In-depth interviews are less formal than other interview methods, allowing for a negotiated flow between question and response (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The process of interviewing helps to provide a comprehensive description of the complex nature of relationships, as well as providing information on key developmental transitions in life (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Feminist perspectives have been identified as useful to the process of qualitative analysis in that they emphasize diversity and the multiplicity of experience (Baber & Allen, 1992; Bengtson & Allen, 1993). Symbolic interactionism is well suited for this research in that the data collected were from verbal and written sources. Conversations and letters are in fact symbolic interactions. Symbolic interactionism is one of the leading theoretical orientations used in family studies for interpreting the written and spoken word (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Sample Selection and Recruitment

The sample for this study consisted of five contemporary, working mothers who work 35 hours or more outside of the home and have sons between the ages of 3 and 5, enrolled in all day child care. During the development span from 3 to 5 years of age, gender schemas are being established. It is suggested that after 6 years of age, notions of gender become fixed and rigid (Bem, 1993; Chodorow, 1978; Edelbrock & Sugawara, 1978; Ruble & Martin, 1998). All of the women were from southern, rural communities in Southwest Virginia, located close to large universities.

Homogeneity in maternal age, number of different gendered children of various age groups, race, ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation or other alternative family lifestyles (i.e., single-parent) were not delimited. According to the latest research on family diversity factors, family structure is not a sound predictor of children's development and sense of well-being (Demo & Cox, 2001). The first limitation in relying on family structure as predictors of child development is that current family structure cannot explain family relationships, histories, or trajectories. The second limitation is that there are many similarities in parent-child relationships across diverse household configurations. In other words, it is the process more than the structure that matters in terms of the parent-child relationship (Demo, Allen, & Fine, 2000; Demo & Cox, 2001).

Demographics were established in the background guide, given to the mothers preceding the interview process (see Appendix A). Socioeconomic status was determined by a combination of education and income levels. From the demographic information collected, I was able to ascertain that all five of the participants were from middle-class standing. Four of the five had at least a bachelor's degree, and all five had a yearly household income of $50,000 or above. All of

the women were Caucasian, currently in their first marriages, and had more than one child. Four

of the women had female offspring (see Appendix B).

The sample was identified by the use of announcements (see Appendix C) posted at a

child care facility in the area. The process of snowballing was also utilized, in which the mother

from the pilot interview helped to identify the names of other eligible participants (Taylor &

Bogdan, 1984). Individual willingness to participate in the project was determined by telephone

contact with me (see Appendix D).

<div align="center">Instrumentation</div>

The study utilized two qualitative data collection procedures, an in-depth, semi-

structured interview (see Appendix E), and a reflexive narrative fashioned as a letter from

mother to son reflecting upon key previous experiences they have shared as well as a description

of her yearnings for him and for his future as a man in society (see Appendix F). The letter was

supplementary to the interview. This exercise allowed for the identification of consistencies that

existed between the interview and the letter to emerge. The letter also gave each mother an

opportunity to further re/define herself once the experience of motherhood had been

systematically explored in the interview.

The interview guide, derived from aspects of the theoretical perspectives, the literature

review, and the research questions, was designed in a semi-structured format. Following Allen's

(1989) method of qualitative interviewing and analysis, it was composed of open-ended

questions asked of all participants. The questions addressed the individual participant's current

assessment of self as a contemporary, working mother, as well as core mothering beliefs

established in her family of origin; how the role of work intersects the role of mother; how

gender is constructed and/or deconstructed in the relationship and the interactions she shares

with her son; and, the self-assessment of the definitions of masculinity and femininity and how she envisions these binary gender oppositions in herself and in her son.

Pilot Interview

In order to help evaluate the effectiveness of my initial interview questions, I conducted one 60-minute pilot interview with a working mother of a three-year-old. I had known this woman professionally for a long time, and as she fit my sampling criteria, I actively sought her out to ask if she would consider participating in the pilot. I wanted to interview someone with whom I felt comfortable during this learning experience. I learned a great deal from this encounter, but I walked away with more questions than answers. Her reflections on her personal experiences, though given with great detail, still left my research questions mostly unanswered. After writing in detail about the experience in my research journal, I revised the interview guide in a way that honed in on the three research questions for this study (see Appendix G). For example, in my initial interview guide, I asked many questions with regard to partner or marital equity. This is an extremely interesting concept for family studies; however, as interesting as it may be, its description did not help me to understand the experiences of working mothers who are raising sons.

Data Collection

The data collection process began by telephone to establish the willingness of individuals to participate in the study, their eligibility for inclusion, and to help build rapport between the participants and myself. During the initial telephone contact, I provided each participant with a brief explanation of the research process and the research topic, and together we established a time and a location to meet for a face-to-face, audio-taped interview. Three of the five interviews were conducted at the day care center that the mothers employ for their child. After trying to

transcribe the interviews, I decided that this location was not conducive for the interviews, as there were many interruptions and excessive amounts of background noise. I met one women at her office at work, and I met another in her home. Both of these spaces allowed us to speak freely and without distraction.

The semi-structured interview began with a description of the Human Subjects Form (see Appendix H), which addresses issues of confidentiality and other ethical considerations pertaining to the study, after which, informed consent (see Appendix I) to be interviewed was obtained. The next step focused on gathering the participant's background information (see Appendix A) to obtain specific demographics.

Although I had clear guidelines for each interview, questions were added and tangents were followed as they arose. Each semi-structured, in-depth interview lasted approximately 60 minutes (see Appendix E). After the conclusion of each interview, the participant was asked to write a letter to her son which reflected upon past key experiences they have shared, and described her yearnings for him as he becomes a man (see Appendix F). I contacted each woman once a week for six weeks to remind them that the letters were part of my data for the project and that I needed them for validity purposes. Unfortunately, only three of the five mothers opted to complete this data collection task.

My reflections were written down in a research journal within 24 hours of each interview. The journal was used to record a variety of information about the "human instrument," with respect to self and method. The journal provided information about the inferences or interpretations I have made during the interview process. The research journal also documented information about methodological decisions made and the reasons behind them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, I chose to use snowballing for the purposes of identifying my sample

after I was not contacted directly by five willing participants. As the data collection process progressed, I met frequently with the chairs of my committee for informal discussions about the interviewing sessions and to brainstorm how the data gathered could be grounded theoretically. These data, along with each reflexive letter, and each transcribed interview were incorporated into the data analysis.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Data analysis began only after all of the data were collected. The manner of analysis followed the template provided by Allen (1989), but was adapted by me for this study. The first step consists of reading and rereading the data line by line, thought by thought. After five initial readings, I sat down with two separate tablets, and as I read through the data again, I wrote down every quote that I thought was important, word for word on one of my tablets. On the other tablet, I wrote theoretical memos to myself as I formulated ideas about how the research questions were being answered by the raw data. For instance, after reading Roxy's response to the question I raised about if and/or how her friendships had changed since becoming a mother, I wrote the following theoretical memo; "Friends are mostly young, single men. They have been chosen as friends because she thinks they are good role models for her sons – strong, independent, rootless. This seems to play into the rigid stereotypes held for males in our society. Also, is she actually picking these "friends", or is it her husband that chooses them?" The letters were analyzed using the same method. I conducted this exercise until my lists became carbon copies of one another. This was done looking at the data one mother at a time.

The next step was analyzing the comparisons of lists across all five mothers (see Appendix J). During the data analysis, I had weekly meetings with Allen, one of the chairs to my thesis committee, who continually stimulated my emergent thinking by asking questions about

the data. My original coding scheme came from grouping items from my tablets. I categorized

the data by general headings or codes. After I had organized all of the data under 28 separate

codes, I then further organized the codes under 6 major themes. After a particularly successful

meeting with my advisor, I was able to reduce or collapse certain data together. During this

meeting new connections were made, and I was able to reconceptualize my major themes. I

finalized my coding scheme by utilizing only 5 major themes and 23 coding categories only after

further review and analysis.

After these steps were completed, I began the process of writing up the findings. This

was actually another layer of analysis. Writing forced me to reconsider all of the data, pick and

choose, and organize. Following Allen's (1989) content analysis method, quotations from the

interviews were extracted to illustrate the 5 major themes. Throughout the writing process, both

of my thesis advisors read and commented, allowing me to reflect on the data and refine the data

analysis in multiple layers of writing and rewriting.

Triangulation

In the hope of establishing validity, two sources of data collection were utilized in the

study. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to examine the responses of questions

tailored around the research questions of the study. My reflections were written in a research

journal within 24 hours of the conclusion of each interview. The supplementary data from the

reflexive letters were particularly useful in understanding those individuals who express

themselves more clearly in writing than in speech, as well as providing information pertaining to

future expectations. The letters were useful in the analysis on account of their confirmability.

The information contained in the letters were general summaries of the information received in

the interviews. Only three of the five women completed this task, even after several attempts

were made on my part to collect them. Although the letters did help to validate the general "ideas" established in the interviews, they were not specific enough to be very helpful as a data collection procedure. I would not utilize them a second time in this particular way.

Reflexive Subjectivity

I kept an ongoing research journal. This document was analyzed along with the interviews and the letters written to sons. Reflexive subjectivity requires that I evaluate how the "human instrument" is utilized in a study, how my preconceived ideas have been changed or altered by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I detailed each step I took during the entire research process and reflected on which methodological changes were made and the reasoning behind those changes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Face Validity

Face validity is explored by soliciting feedback from the participants. Member checking allows the participants to offer additional information, as well as an opportunity to validate or critique the materials. Member checks are also consistent with feminist research models of involving the participants as colleagues in the research (Borland, 1991). A copy of the transcription was made available to the participants and they were asked to provide feedback if they so chose. None of the participants responded. After the difficulty I had obtaining the letters, I can only assume that the women I interviewed lead busy lives, and were unable to give the study anymore of their time after the initial interview.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the relevant aspects of qualitative methodology that were utilized in the sample selection, the instrumentation, the data collection, the data analysis, and the pursuit of building trustworthiness into the research. The sample was selected through the

posting of announcements at a child care facility as well as snowballing (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The data were collected from in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, which were framed within the guidelines established by the theoretical perspectives, the review of literature, and the research questions posed. Individual demographics were incorporated in the data analysis. Reflexive letters written by the participants, were also analyzed, as well as the research journal for emergent themes and patterns.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, I substantively discuss the results of my data analysis. After two

substantive revisions of the coding scheme, 5 major themes and 23 coding categories remained. I

introduce each theme, followed by the participants' responses, which will take the form of

narration, under each coding category. I purposely chose to utilize a narrative form, because each

of the five women, though occupying the same social role, told their "story" of motherhood in

uniquely different ways. This is indicative of how extremely personal the experience of

motherhood is perceived by the women who were interviewed.

Who Am I?

The first set of coded data consists of how the women interviewed identify themselves

and how they feel others see them--their sons, their spouses, and their friends and family. This

information is vital when one is attempting to understand the meaning that these five women

apply to the role of motherhood. In asking questions about identity during the interviews, I was

trying to find out how these women are interpreting the societal view of motherhood, and how

they are attempting to redefine this ageless role in a way that "fits" into their view of themselves.

It is interesting to see from the data analysis that women spoke of the traits that they liked

the most when asked about how they would describe themselves. Although being a mother was

high on the list, they also spoke of other qualities that they possess outside of the role of mother

or wife. Actually, being a wife did not even make the list for these five women. When they

discussed how their sons would describe them, the women focused on basic caregiving tasks that

mothers usually provide, such as cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry. When the women were

asked how their spouses would respond, they either focused again on basic caregiving and

homemaking tasks, or they chose to talk about what their spouses did not appreciate about them. Most of the time, these traits were the very ones that these women liked about themselves. Perhaps the women are attempting to define themselves in other ways not established or dictated by the role of motherhood.

After a second look at the initial data analysis, it seemed appropriate to include a coding category on family and friends under the theme of identity. The relationships among family and friends had been changed after these women became mothers, and by including it in this section, it helps to tell the story of how these women see themselves in relation to others. Elaborating the theme of "Who Am I?," there are four coding categories. The following sections will elaborate on each one in turn.

How I See Myself

The women were asked how they would describe themselves to someone who did not know them. The role that was most significant for all of the women was the role of motherhood. One mother, Amanda, explained this by saying:

"I'm a mom. That's first and foremost."

Jamie further identified that she was proudest of her children and being a good parent, while Therese stated that she was extremely proud of having lots of kids.

The women also spoke of the personal characteristics that they liked most about themselves. For example, three of the five women discussed liking that they were independent, as Becky noted:

"I am confident, intelligent, and I try to be kind."

Two of the five women spoke of the contributions that they personally make to their community and to their professions. Therese stated:

"I'm proud of the contribution I make personally and professionally to the world outside

of my own little home, and that's why I like to work."

Who I Am to My Son

The women were asked how their sons would describe them to an unknown individual.

Most of the responses to this question revolved around specific "duties" related to the role of

cargiving. For instance, Roxy explained that she thought her son would say that she was a good

snuggler and a good cook. She said that he would also say that she does laundry a lot. When

Becky was asked this question, she responded by saying:

"[He would say]…, the person who fixes his food, the person who puts [him] to bed, the

person who goes to work and leaves him, the person who disciplines him, the person he

would know actually very well, and probably the person who loves him."

Two of the mothers also talked about how their sons would describe them as fun, and Roxy

answered this question by replying:

"Tucker thinks I'm beautiful."

Who I Am to My Husband

When the women were asked how their husbands would describe them, there was a wide

range of responses. The responses either dealt directly with their role as mother or how they were

lacking in this role in some way. Two of the five women stated that their husbands would say

that they were good mothers. Roxy responded by saying that her husband thinks she's a good

cook. Two women said that their husbands would definitely say that they were bad

housekeepers. Therese used this question to talk about all of her negative characteristics. She

said that her husband would say that she is not a forgiving person, that she is too driven, she has

a big ego, and that she is the one that most affects daily life for her family. Therese went on to say:

"And he would be right."

Roxy said that her husband thinks that she is hot-headed. Only one woman discussed positive, personal qualities about herself that her husband would identify. Amanda said that her husband would describe her as independent, smart, and outdoorsy. This was the extent of her response to this particular question, and it was the only response given to this question among all of the women that was not negative or stereotypical to women in some way.

Who I Am to Family and Friends

Four of the five women said that since they have become mothers, they have become closer to extended family, especially to their own mothers. For example, Jamie stated:

"[Parenthood] made me closer to my family. It made me understand what my mom went through. It made me much more understanding of her."

Amanda responded:

"I think that since I've had kids, my family--my parents, my brothers, and sisters have become more important to me. And I work really hard to spend time with them because family is just so important."

After being asked about family, Becky said:

"I depend on [my parents] to help me with my kids. Whereas before [I had children] I wanted to be so independent…I didn't want anything from them. But now, I'll ask them to help me out on weekends…to give me a break, or to help me out around the house. It's hard to do things now that I have two kids."

Therese discussed that there are some hard feelings between her parents, her husband's parents, and herself. She said though she struggles with relationships with family, she tries to not let her feelings color her children's relationships with their grandparents. She discussed how they all live far away from them, and that helps because she does not have to visit often.

Friendships were all discussed differently in these interviews. Roxy said:

"I'm a terrible, neglectful friend, …[but] kids are more important than friends."

Roxy did talk about how most of the people that spent time with her three sons were young, single men. She said that this was important so that her children could have, "strong, cool guy role models." However, these men were not her friends per se.

Jamie talked about how she stayed close to friends who also had children, while distance grew between her and other childless friends:

"I always felt bad for the people who didn't have kids. Why did we have nothing else to talk about but our kids?"

Jamie also added that parenting styles and working status will change friendships as well. Jamie, Therese, and Becky talked about finding new casual friends through their children, for example, at PTA, scouting, or sporting events. Amanda said that there just is not any time for her to have relationships outside of her family.

<div align="center">On Being a Mother and Raising a Son</div>

The second major theme is tailored around how the women's ideas of motherhood changed after actually becoming mothers. This theme also encompasses how they described their relationships with their sons, as well as how basic parenting issues are handled within their family units. The findings indicate that motherhood is an experience in contradiction. It is at once hugely rewarding and self-sacrificing. The overwhelming feelings of responsibility and

love have caused some of these women to experience a new kind of guilt. Are they good mothers? Although the women interviewed seem to be able to self-validate very well, societal dictates on motherhood and what the role should entail provide contention for them. The analysis suggests that these institutional ideals can lead to self-doubt and feeling of guilt among working women.

The data analysis shows that these women feel especially close to their sons when the young boys are displaying their sensitivity and wanting close physical intimacy. Several of the women spoke of how when their sons misbehave, it is a cry for attention, so they use alone time together to discuss how individual behavior affects other people. Discipline was described as a close and special bonding time between mothers and sons. The women also discussed how their sons actively sought more alone time with their fathers than they did with them. The explanations ranged from not seeing the father very much during the week to just being at that "age" where they want to do more "guy things." Is this the subconscious push of young boys into the adult realm of independence that Chodorow (1978) has theorized about for more than two decades? This theme is divided into five coding categories. The following sections will elaborate on each of these points in turn.

What Motherhood Means to Me

The women were in general agreement about what mothering means to them, and what an overwhelming task it is to mother children. From the women's combined responses, it seems these women feel there is a certain ambivalence to motherhood. Although there is ambivalence, it is also clear in the data that motherhood is hugely rewarding despite the many sacrifices. Jamie responded by saying that motherhood gives her a purpose in life, adding:

"Sometimes I think it is the one thing I think I've done well. Other times, I don't know."

Amanda described motherhood as:

"the hardest job you will ever do and the most rewarding job you'll ever do."

Becky said that although most people she talked to about motherhood were very positive about it, no one prepared her for how overwhelming it could be at times to be a mother:

"[Motherhood is a] huge commitment for the rest of your life. It takes time, energy, and mental capacity."

Roxy simply said:

"My kids are everything [to me]."

Let Me Tell You about My Son

The women were asked questions about the personalities of their sons, their relationships with them, and about any special time or activities they share with their sons. The major findings from data analysis are that these mothers perceive their little boys as sensitive and physically affectionate. The women felt closer to their sons when they displayed these attributes. They also discussed their sons' needs to be close to their fathers as well. Sometimes this presented itself in the form of maternal distancing. For instance, when the mothers discussed how the fathers and sons spent time together doing "guy things," they said that they stayed home to take care of the other children.

Four of the five women talked about how empathic and sensitive their sons are to others. Jamie talked about how her son asks her how she is feeling, or if she is upset, he tries to comfort her. She also talked about how at night, as she sits with him before bed, he cuddles her. He wants to touch and soothe her, and that is how he draws his comfort. Therese talked about how she feels closest to her son when driving in the car. They listen to music and talk about what

messages the singer is trying to convey. She commented that her son just "understands" things that her other children do not. Therese is amazed daily by her son's sensitivity. She wrote in her letter to him:

"You FEEL everything so deeply and then you make the words and they flow from your beautiful pouty lips so easily. You cry when you upset people who love you, and you cry when they upset you. Some of that is just being four and it doesn't always look like fun. I was raised to have thick skin, and though feeling is painful [to me], you have awakened my heart."

She also said that he asks the most amazing questions, like one night he asked her:

"Mommy, why are your feet so soft."

Therese believes that her son just seems to see and feel things that are so easily taken for granted.

All of the women said that their sons still want to cuddle with them. This time is so special to all of these women. A very interesting note to this is that two of the five women talked about how this cuddle time with their sons influences their relationships with their daughters. Becky said in her interview:

"I think he's made me more affectionate in general to [my daughter], because I've been more affectionate to him, and I don't want her to feel slighted. So even though I don't think she even thinks about it, I don't want her to think that I'm hugging him and I'm not hugging her. She wants to do different things with me, but that is a physical way to show love, and so I [have] noticed I do hug her more and [I'm] more physical with her than I was before."

Jamie said that her son and daughter were like night and day. She explains that her son is very introverted, and he is the one she worries the most about. She said that he simply needs her more than her daughter does.

All of the women discussed that their sons were very physical. They enjoyed rough and tumble activities. For instance, Roxy's son rides motorcycles competitively at 5 years of age. Amanda's son enjoys camping and playing soccer, as does Therese's son. Becky talked about how she has had to become a stricter parent because her son takes more risks with his body than her daughter ever did.

Four of the five women talked about how they feel their sons would rather spend time with their fathers. Roxy talked about how badly her son wants to start working on the farm his father runs. Amanda said:

"He actually does more with my husband probably alone than he does with me, because a lot of times the other children will choose to stay with me, and he would rather go with my husband by himself."

Becky stated that her son would prefer alone time with his father because he sees him less often than he sees her. Jamie said that her son is at the age where he is doing "guy" things with his dad, like building.

Amanda's responses to these questions are worth noting separately because of their uniqueness. She said that the biggest reason that she has a special bond with her son is that she and her son not only look similar, but they like the same things:

"He actually looks the most like me, so sometimes somebody makes a comment about that. He's a lot like me and so sometimes he does little things that remind me of me. Yeah, I think that [makes me feel closest to him]."

How My Son is Disciplined

      After being asked about how discipline was handled in their home, several of the women indicated that discipline was their sole responsibility either because of physical proximity to the children or because of their spouses lack of consistency. Roxy stated that she is the one to handle discipline, because:

      "I'm the only one there [at home]."

She also said that she has to be stricter than she wants to be. This theme was similar in Becky's interview:

      "I handle discipline five days a week, and then I expect my husband to do it the two days

      that he is home."

Jamie said that discipline is handled equally in her household, but both she and her husband have different styles and feel strongly about different things, so discipline is not always consistent. Amanda and Therese both spoke of how when their sons misbehave, it is a cry for attention, so they use alone time together to discuss how behavior affects other people. Therese also mentioned that she feels that it is okay to be a "mean" parent sometimes, that it is okay to be firm. Another thing that Therese mentioned that is significant is that she approaches discipline differently with her sons and her daughter:

      "I let my daughter be rude and obnoxious, because I figure that she's going to need some

      practice doing these kinds of things [as a woman]."

She is stricter with her sons.

My Struggles with Motherhood

      Data analysis suggests that the struggles discussed in the interviews regarding motherhood came from the apparent need for validation that they are in fact good mothers.

Four of the five women discussed their own personal struggles with their role of mother. Roxy

mentioned that it was very important for her to remember not to take herself too seriously:

"because some of the things can drive you just about insane, but if you laugh it off, it will

get better. It's hard, you know?"

Jamie said that her biggest struggle as a mother was to not compare herself to anyone else for

validation purposes. She stated:

"[I] just do the best I can to throw away the guilt of what everyone else thinks that I

should be doing [as a mother]. I'm not raising my kids the way my parents raised me,

[and] I think I'm kind of a different mother than a lot of my friends."

Becky spoke of the guilt she feels as a mother. She said that her son makes her feel like a

wonderful person, but he can make her feel like a horrible person, too. Therese talked about

maternity leave and postpartum depression. Maternity leaves were tough on her because she

could not stand staying at home. She talked about her depression after her son was born. She said

that she could not even function at times, and for a while after the baby was born, she wished

that she could shirk her new responsibilities of being a mother and a wife. She wanted it all go

away; however, after she had her last baby, she refused maternity leave and went right back to

work with baby in tow. She said that she did not feel the depression like she had in the past.

How Motherhood Changed Me

"I think I went into [motherhood] thinking I was going to be a little more relaxed and a

little more hip of a parent,"

Roxy explained. She added that as a mother, she has to be aware of what is happening with all of

her children all of the time. Jamie said that she is less judgmental of others now that she is a

mother. People have to find their own way. Amanda laughed when asked how motherhood changed her:

"I have a whole new vision of sleep deprivation."

On a more serious note, Amanda noted:

"A lot of my beliefs are still the same, but my standards have certainly changed… I felt that seeing kids in dirty clothes was a bad [sign] of parenting. What I didn't realize was [those parents] had just picked them up from day care [where] they rolled in the mud, and they had to stop and get milk on the way home."

Amanda added further:

"I've learned to have patience, …and [motherhood] has made me realize what's really important [in life]."

Becky talked about how she now tries to be more in tune to other people. She feels that motherhood has taught her empathy.

<div align="center">The Intersection of Work and Family Life</div>

The third major theme encompasses six coding categories. The data analysis grouped all of the responses concerning the women's opinions on their jobs/careers, their personal goals and ambitions, and how their work outside the home impacted their parenting. This theme also incorporates basic work/life issues, such as day care, sick and snow days, and daily routines.

The findings indicate that these women enjoy that they make personal and professional contributions outside of the home. It fulfills a part of them that is separate to the role of motherhood. For most, it allows them to define themselves in other significant ways. The findings resulting from data analysis also suggest that these women are still taking on most of the

responsibilities of child care and housekeeping in their homes. The following six sections will further elaborate the points just outlined.

Viewpoints on Work

Roxy said that she enjoys her work as a clerical aide at an elementary school. She likes to feel that she is making a difference. When she discussed general work/life issues however, she said that she has no problems balancing because her family comes first. Jamie helps her husband run his own landscaping company. She says that it is a good job and does not interfere with her family. Amanda works for her husband's family owned business as well:

> "I love to go to work. I love my job and I try to instill that in my kids too. It's what I like to do. It's what we do [run a business], it's who we are… They [the children] know that we own the company, it's ours and it's part of our life."

Becky, on the other hand, said that her teaching job is for paying bills. She said that she always wanted to be a teacher; however, her job does not define her in any way. Therese, a professor, said that she also has to work for financial reasons. Her career is very important to her as well as continuing her education:

> "You deserve the opportunity to work as hard as you can. It is important because that's what makes the world go around."

In summary, three of the women, Amanda, Becky, and Therese, are working in the careers that they personally want for themselves. Roxy works a job that is important to her, but she emphasizes that motherhood is her career. Jamie likes to work outside of the home, but her current job is not what she wants for herself. She is going back to school to follow her career goals this fall.

Personal Ambitions and Goals

Roxy stated that her career is motherhood. She has no other career goals than that:

"There has to be people like us. You know, we all can't have careers."

She asked:

"Can you imagine if all the moms in the world had careers [outside of the home]?"

Jamie has always worked outside of the home since having children, but she has had no career

yet. She wants to have a career where she can help other people, and that gives her life more

meaning. Becky said that she was probably more in tune to her job before she had children, and

she had thought about moving up. Now that she is a mother though, her career plans have

changed:

"I don't want to be anything but what I am [now]."

The Impact of Work on Mothering and Mothering on Work

Roxy feels that her job positively impacts her mothering, because she can see at the end

of the workday what she has been able to accomplish. She said that at home, it is not so cut and

dry. It is hard to see personal, everyday accomplishments when raising children. Amanda said:

"In some ways having kids has been a help to my career because I don't live, eat, and

breathe my job 24-hours a day. I have something else [children] that I have to take care

of."

This helps Amanda relieve work stress by not allowing work to overwhelm her life. There is now

more of a healthy balance than before she had children. Becky said that working with children

has helped her to keep a happy medium in her parenting. She said that her parenting has also

enhanced her career by making her more patient, more understanding, and more aware of home

issues. She does not assign as much homework now that she is a parent. Therese says that she

builds stories about her family into her classes to make points. She no longer tries to separate her personal life from her professional life, and this helps remind her that her students also have lives outside of the classroom.

The Issue of Day Care

Four of the five women interviewed talked about how day care is seen as an extension of home, and were very positive about their experiences. Therese and Jamie both said that day care is the best place for their children. There are more learning opportunities and activities for their children to enjoy at day care than they would have at home. Becky discussed the guilt she feels leaving her children at day care, and the betrayal she feels when her children ask to stay longer when she comes to pick them up:

> "[My son] can make me feel like I'm a horrible person if I go pick him up [at day care] and he doesn't want to go with me. He wants to stay with the people who keep him longer."

Handling Sick and Snow Days

Three of the women said that they handled all of the doctor visits, and that their spouses did not participate in this care. Amanda said:

> "There's something about the mommy in me. I would be at the doctor whether my husband was there or not. It has gotten where, with three kids, it's a waste of time for both of us to have to go to every doctor appointment, so I do all of that."

She wants to have this responsibility. Roxy and Therese both said that they handle all of the doctor visits because they knew the right questions to ask and because they were more organized about making or keeping appointments. Jamie said that it depended on what kind of care the

children needed at the doctor as to which parent handled the visits. She said that she is more of a "wimp" than her husband is about dentist visits and shots.

Roxy stays at home whenever the children are out of school. Becky, Amanda, and Jamie talked about "tagging" off with their husbands midday on the days that their children are out of school. That way they all get a little done. Mostly for these women, it depended on whose schedule was the most flexible on those days. Therese and her husband do the same; however, with four children, they also depend on friends and neighbors to help them on sick and snow days.

Daily Routines

The main idea behind this coding category was to encapsulate how daily parenting tasks were delegated in these women's homes. Jamie, Becky, and Therese discussed how both parents in their houses were responsible for child care and getting household tasks completed when the parents were not at work. Roxy said that she takes care of all the child care and household tasks. She said that those things were her responsibilities, and that she takes pride in her abilities in these areas. Amanda did not mention her husband when discussing daily routines; however, she did discuss how she takes care of herself before she has to start helping the children get ready for the day:

"The first thing I do on a workday when I get up is I take care of myself." She normally gets about two hours to herself in the mornings before the children wake up. She was the only woman interviewed who talked about caring for herself on a daily basis.

The Socialization of Gender

The fourth theme indicated by data analysis consists of five coding categories encompassing issues regarding the construction and the deconstruction of gender, the women's

views or ideas about femininity and masculinity, and how the women envision gender in themselves and in their sons. The findings indicate that the sons, who are between the ages of three and five, are very rigid about their ideas about the differences between males and females. Not only is this a phenomenon caused by age and dualistic thinking (Piaget, 1965), but also by active participation by family members and friends (Bem, 1993) (Chodorow, 1978).

When discussing masculinity and femininity, the women tended to speak of societal stereotypes and named them as such; however, when they spoke of how these traits were present in themselves or in their sons, they tended to speak in terms of basic human traits, instead of strictly male and female characteristics. The data analysis indicates that the women used a broader base for femininity when discussing themselves, however, masculinity was much more rigid in their minds when it came to their sons. The data suggests that there is a stronger societal "punishment" for men who stray too far from the dictates of masculinity than there is for women who are less feminine. The following sections will elaborate these points in turn.

The Differences Between the Sexes

This code is used to group each woman's response about either her own or her son's ideas of differences between the abilities of males and females. All of the women interviewed discussed how their sons were interested in the physical differences between boys and girls. Four of the five women have daughters, so they felt this curiosity was completely normal. The sons have also become very rigid in their gender role beliefs, asking if a toy or a television show was for boys or girls. Jamie said:

"He has it in his mind that it has to be one or the other."

Both Jamie's and Amanda's sons have asked questions about who the boss is in the house, mom or dad. Amanda laughed and said:

"Lucky for me, he thinks it's me."

Therese said that in her career, she has to fight the manifestation of masculinity all day, so when she gets home and hears it from her sons, she quickly jumps into the discussion. She says that she never lets a comment on gender equity go by without comment from her.

Becky and Jamie both agree that there are innate differences between males and females, but that no one should ever feel limited because of their gender. Becky also stated:

"I don't normally define people as masculine or feminine so it's pretty hard, because I think people have both traits. I label more traits as good or bad than masculine or feminine."

Amanda concluded her comments by saying:

"Only biology determines gender."

Gender Construction

This code was created to group all of the interview material that could describe gender rigidity that occurs in the home. Roxy told a story about a time when her youngest son came home from day care and told his older brothers that he kissed his best, male friend. She said that his brothers taunted him about being gay, so when he went to school the next day, he proudly stated to all who could hear, "Do you know I'm gay?" Similarly, Amanda said that she feels since her 4-year-old son has an older brother in school, he is pushed into more stereotypical male roles. Roxy's 5-year-old son points to women and talks loudly about their "boobs," and tells Roxy how much he loves breasts. Another example that Roxy gave on gender construction was that:

"We (husband, male siblings, and herself) don't encourage him to cry. We don't want him to be a crybaby."

Becky said that her son likes dressing up in his sister's clothes. Her husband has a problem with this behavior, and has told her not to encourage him. She has not heeded his advice as of yet.

What Masculinity Means to Me

This code contains the participants' perceptions on what it means to be masculine and how they envision masculinity in themselves and in their sons. Roxy said that to be masculine, one has to be independent. A masculine person cannot depend on anyone but himself or herself. Becky said that when she thinks about masculinity, she thinks about muscle strength, not mental or emotional strength. She said:

"[A masculine person has] the ability to produce sperm."

Amanda said that when thinking about masculinity, she sees a picture of a man in blue jeans and a denim shirt working outside. This man is someone who listens well, holds doors open, and has respect for other people. She said while laughing:

"There's nothing more masculine to me about a man that can, you know, be kissing a baby while working on a bulldozer."

Therese commented that to her masculinity means absolute privilege. Finally, Jamie commented that to her masculinity meant having confidence to display to others who you truly are.

What Femininity Means to Me

This code contains the participants' perceptions on what it means to be feminine and how they envision femininity in themselves and in their sons. Roxy stated that to be feminine you've got to be independent:

"You have to flirt a little. You have to have softness, too. You have to be willing to be a spirit and put up a little fight if you need to."

Concerning femininity, Amanda said:

"I can go buy something at Victoria's Secret and be very comfortable with that and I can

work in the garden in my hiking boots and work gloves, and throw bales of hay and do all

that. That's who I am and it's all feminine."

Therese said that she feels the most feminine when she is the most confident in herself and her

abilities, especially in a male dominated profession.

My Views on Feminism

There were several different responses to the question about views on feminism, and

these are the basis for this coding category. Jamie said:

"I'm not this big women's libber who thinks that I can do anything that you can do,

because I can't."

Amanda responded by saying that she believes in equal rights:

"It's all a matter of respect for all people."

Therese said that:

"Feminism isn't being coy. It doesn't mean being quiet. It means being female."

Becky and Roxy both said that they had no view on feminism, but Becky elaborated by saying:

"I believe that each gender can do whatever they choose as long as it does not interfere

with the rights of someone else."

<div align="center">Envisioning the Future for My Son</div>

The fifth and final major theme focused on the women's desires for their sons as they

grow into men. This theme was organized around three coding categories. There is some overlap

between this theme and the previous one with regard to the issues of masculinity and femininity;

however, I chose to separate them because of the futuristic connotation. The women spoke of

wanting their sons to grow up having good human qualities. There was still the issue of

conforming to society a little in order for men to survive emotionally. This reflects the idea that masculinity is more rigidly constructed by society.

Several of the women also talked about how they could best teach their sons how to respect women. These women wanted their sons to enter into an equitable intimate partnership. Perhaps they were unable to find that kind of relationship for themselves. Their views on this issue raise the point as to whether they are attempting to somehow correct the wrongs that were placed upon them.

Lastly, the women spoke of how they hoped their sons would not lose certain qualities that they already possess, such as sensitivity, and the need for physical affection. Are these women afraid of "losing" their babies? Do they somehow feel that unfortunately the only way their boys can become men is to distance themselves from their mothers and anything considered feminine as Chodorow (1978) suggested our society encourages? The data indicates that the women want their sons to know that they are loved and valued, and will be accepted and supported no matter who they may become. A mother's love is everlasting.

Characteristics I Want My Son to Have

All of the women basically wanted their sons to have the same characteristics. These characteristics were not labeled masculine or feminine, but characteristics that decent human beings should possess. For instance, Roxy wants her son to be self-reliant, strong in character, and compassionate toward other people. Jamie wants her son to respect others. Amanda stated her desires for her son in her letter:

> "I hope you know that you are loved. I hope you are never afraid to show your true feelings, that you stand up for what you believe in, and that you always live life to its fullest, that you respect mother earth and all that it has to offer, that you treat everyone

you meet with respect and dignity and that you are always surrounded with those you

trust and love."

 Becky wrote of her desires for her son as well:

"What I want for you are not things or goals, but three qualities, which are not easily

acquired. I want for you to be a hard working, compassionate, and confident person. If

you possess these three traits your life will be everything *you* desire. I stress the you here

because it is your life to do as you choose."

Therese wrote to her son:

"If I have one wish for you and your future it is that you remain overtly sensitive,

emotional, your heart on your sleeve."

Amanda brought up a desire for her son that centers around societal expectations of

manhood. In addition to her response above, she said:

"I guess one of the things that I want for him, and it may be wrong, but to fit into society,

and you know in our society, we have stereotypical roles. I don't want him to be hurt. I

don't want him to be teased."

I Want My Son to Have an Equal Intimate Partnership

In addition to wanting their sons to respect women, Roxy and Therese made comments

about what they hope for their sons in the way of intimate partnerships. Roxy said that she hopes

that her son will have a 50/50 relationship with a woman when he is older. Therese wrote to her

son in her letter:

"I hope for you to find a person in your future on whom to fix that amazing gaze and to

kiss with those pouty lips that so eloquently reveal what is in your heart."

I Want My Son to Feel Good about Himself

Jamie talked about how she hopes her son will always remember that he can do whatever it is he wants to do. She mainly wants her son to feel loved, valued, and special. Amanda stated the same sentiment:

"He can be anything that he wants to be".

Becky ended her letter to her son by writing:

"If you are happy with your choices, then I will be happy."

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the results of the data analysis. The coding scheme consisted of 5 major themes and 23 coding categories. I introduced each of the themes by outlining the major findings of the data analysis within the theme, followed by the participants' responses including in each coding category. The 5 major themes were: Who Am I?; On Being a Mother and Raising a Son; The Intersection of Work and Family Life; The Socialization of Gender; and, Envisioning the Future for My Son. I will present a summary of findings in the following chapter, as well is provide an answer to each of the three research questions that have guided this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I will discuss the highlights of my five major themes in relation to the research questions, the theories, and the previous literature that I utilized in my project proposal. Major conclusions are drawn and integrated into a summary of how my findings compare to what other researchers and theorists have found within this area of inquiry. The chapter concludes with an outline of the limitations of the study and the implications for future research and practice in family studies.

Discussion

The Meanings Women Give to Motherhood

The findings for this research question came from two of the five major themes: "Who Am I?;" and, "On Being a Mother and Raising a Son." The five women who participated in this study identified motherhood as their primary role in life, although they saw this role in a different way than they felt their spouses or sons did. There was a certain ambivalence toward the tasks that other individuals would characterize as those mothers are primarily responsible for undertaking, for instance several of the women discussed that their spouse would say that they are terrible housekeepers. The women also discussed the day-to-day tasks of housekeeping and child care that they assume when explaining how their sons view them. For explanation purposes, several women discussed that their sons would say they do all of the laundry, cooking, and doctor appointments. This is the behavior that the women are modeling for their sons, but it could be concluded from these five interviews that it is being modeled by mothers because fathers are simply not taking responsibility for these tasks. The husbands seem to have become more traditional in their views of gender equity as children were introduced into the family. The

women seem to feel that in order to hinder the role of motherhood to completely consume them, they have to have dual personalities, an embittered subservient one and one independent and free to create change in their lives.

Being married often means more housework for women and less for men (Gupta, 1999; Nock, 1998; Shelton, 1992). When single mother and single fathers households are compared, women still do more of the housework, suggesting that even without a spouse, housework is a gendered task (Fassinger, 1993). Studies have also shown that the transition to parenthood is associated with even less sharing of the family work between men and women (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Johnson & Huston, 1998).

Friendships and relationships with family were discussed at length in the interviews. It was not something that I had envisioned, but these relationships became an essential element to the identity of the women interviewed. Friendships had taken a back seat to motherhood. Not one woman felt there was enough time for her to cultivate or maintain friendships solely for her own best interest. Friendships were seen as a necessary sacrifice to motherhood. Of the women who discussed having loose or casual friendships, the relationships between the women centered around their role as mothers. Family had become more important to the women after becoming mothers, but these relationships were cultivated for the children as well. The women wanted their children to grow up knowing and being close to family. The only relationship that was enhanced for the women was the relationship between themselves and their own mothers.

Fischer's (1981) research on the transitions in the mother-daughter relationship helps to verify this conclusion. The findings of her study indicate that when daughters become mothers, both daughters and mothers tend to reevaluate their relationship and become more involved with one another. Fischer suggests further that the mother-daughter relational process of renegotiation

and redefinition is helped along by their relative statuses, their role perspectives, and their family structure.

The women discussed how motherhood was portrayed as a wholly rewarding and wonderful experience; however, no one prepared them for the self-sacrifice and the overwhelming sense of responsibility that the role has entailed for them. There seems to be a sense of societal dictates that these women are constantly struggling against, and for some, it has caused self-doubt. The largest struggle for the women interviewed was to self-validate themselves in the role of mother.

Benjamin (1994), Chodorow (1989), and Thurer (1993) found that maternal ambivalence is grounded in the paradoxical nature of the mothering experience. According to these researchers, the social conception of motherhood entails sublime selflessness. When women fall short of this impossible expectation, their common reaction is guilt and worry about their mothering adequacy. The contemporary problem is how to fit motherhood into the lives of women without allowing the role to define them (Huffnung, 1998).

The Intersection of Work and Motherhood

The findings for this research question came from two of the five major themes: "On Being a Mother and Raising a Son;" and, "The Intersection of Work and Family Life." The participants believe that the work that they have chosen for themselves and their role as mother are mutually beneficial to each other. They discussed that by doing both, there was a balance within themselves that would not be there otherwise. For example, work gave a sense of personal fulfillment and pride in that they were to measure their own personal accomplishments, whereas in the role of mother, it is often difficult to measure your importance on the development of your children. Being a mother, though, provided a balance in other significant ways. For instance,

work cannot be all consuming when you have responsibilities to take care of at home. Motherhood helped these women feel a sense of humanity that is sometimes not present in the workplace.

The occurrence of maternal employment adds complexity to the overall well-being of mothers and their satisfaction in their mothering role. According to many researchers in the field of family studies, employment is in fact conducive to the mental health of mothers and to their feelings of self-worth as a parent (Moen, 1992). Although there are draw backs to being a working mother, such as loss of sleep and a loss of personal time, there is a common feeling from women participants that they are successful in balancing both work and family demands (Daly, 1996; Hochschild, 1997; Robinson & Godbey, 1997).

Mothers and Sons Doing Gender

The findings for this research question came from two of the five major themes: "The Socialization of Gender;" and, "Envisioning the Future for My Son." There is a double standard attached to ideals of masculinity for the women who participated in this study. They saw nothing wrong with being a tomboy or having masculine characteristics as a woman. In fact, they discussed that all femininity means is being a women, no matter your personality or physical characteristics. The women were more concerned about their sons being able to fit into society than they were about their daughters. What others thought about their sons' masculinity was important to these women because they did not want their sons to either be social outcasts or "sissies", "wimps", or "crybabies". The women also wanted their sons to have some traditional feminine characteristics such as empathy, sensitivity, and nurturance, but they wanted their sons to be able to portray these characteristics in a masculine way. Societal standards played a larger role for males than they did for females in this study. This finding aligns with Ruddick's (1980)

Theory of Maternal Thinking. The theory suggests that mothers are raising their sons in a way that is acceptable to the society in which the mother lives in order to prevent the son from becoming a social outcast.

Conclusions

There are three major conclusions to this study; motherhood is a contradictory experience, the role of motherhood and the role of work are mutually beneficial to one another, and the views of masculinity are more rigid than views on femininity. Scholars in family studies have known these for decades. The results of this study produced from the experiences of five Caucasian, married, working mothers from a rural town in Southwest Virginia provide further validation of these findings, but they also provide theoretical insight about why the gender gap is not shrinking. The following section has been dedicated to furthering this discussion.

Research Questions	Major Coding Themes	Major Findings
What meanings do contemporary, working women assign to motherhood before and after becoming mothers?	100-- Who Am I? 200-- On Being a Mother and Raising a Son	Motherhood is a contradictory experience.
How does the role of work intersect the role of mother?	200-- On Being a Mother and Raising a Son 300-- The Intersection of Work and Family Life	The role of motherhood and the role of work are mutually beneficial to one another.
How do contemporary, working women construct and deconstruct gender with their sons, as well as envision masculinity and femininity in themselves and in their sons?	400-- The Socialization of Gender 500-- Envisioning the Future for My Son	The women's views on masculinity are more rigid than their views on femininity.

"Doing Gender" Through Symbolic Interaction

The perspective of "doing gender", which has evolved from symbolic interaction theory, is a new way of conceptualizing how gender is constructed. This perspective analyzes gender as a phenomenon has is constantly recreated by individuals as they interact with others. From this point of view, the meanings of gender and gendered social structure are not static, but are constantly in flux within everyday interactions. Gender, then, is not an individual trait; it is created either consciously or unconsciously by social interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

All five of the women that participated in this study were in some way "doing gender" in their own lives and when they interacted with their sons. According to symbolic interaction theory, these mothers reflected on how other individuals saw them in order to form their self-concepts. For instance, Roxy talked about how her family thought that she was a good cook. This theoretical stance would postulate that Roxy was reinforced to continue to cook for the family because she had internalized the view that she actually was a good cook. The opposite can happen as well. For example, Jamie talked about how she was actively trying to raise her children in a different manner than most of society. She has incorporated in her own self-definition of what it means to be a good mother, an actively resistant position to the social institution of motherhood.

Another way the women were "doing gender" is in the interactions that they reported with their sons. Becky said that she allowed her son to dress up in his sister's clothing; however, the father, who did not approve of this activity, set certain limits. For instance, Becky is not allowed to photograph her son in girls' clothing, and she is not to allow him outside of the house where others may see him. Roxy actively discourages her son from crying, saying that she does not want him to be a sissy. Therese stated in her interview that she was stricter on her sons than

she is with her daughter. Finally, Amanda was contradictory and rather hypermasculine in her responses of what she hoped for her son's future. She said that she wanted him to be respectful to women, nurturing, loving, and true to himself, but she also wanted him to be a macho man at the same time. Her biggest fear was that he would be made fun of by others if he did not display masculine behaviors.

Where Are We Going?

Although feminists have resisted and rebelled against women's gender oppression for decades, the gender categories have not blurred and gender has not stopped being a major determinant of how the work of modern society is allocated and how the rewards are distributed (Lorber, 1994). Consciousness of oppression does not always lead to a push for action, especially when rebels are often times publicly punished. If this is in fact the case, is it no wonder that only one of the women I interviewed expressed to me that she was a feminist? This leads individuals to conform even when they find exception with the "rules," and those who benefit from the social institution of gender are satisfied with the status quo. Even the not so privileged also have an investment in a social order that gives them some bargaining power (Lorber, 1994). Unless rebellion against the social institution of gender is a major group effort, supported not only by women but also by men, it is not likely to find lasting change. The major paradox of gender then is that in order to dismantle the institution, we must first make gender oppression very visible.

<div align="center">Limitations of the Study</div>

As with all qualitative research, this study can only be generalized to the five women who were interviewed. When first conceptualizing this study, I hoped to have the opportunity to interview a more diverse population of working mothers. I was unable to locate ethnically diverse women within the sample size that I limited to my study. If this had been a dissertation

project, I would have increased my sample and spent more time interviewing and observing these participants in order to conduct an ethnography of the experience of mothering a son.

Another limitation to this study was the use of letters written by the women to their sons. I hoped to utilize these data to further validate information obtained through the interview process. I believed that I would also find qualitatively different information in these letters as well. Unfortunately, this letter was perceived by the participants as "busy work," and although they allowed for some triangulation in the data, it was not a significant source for validation purposes. The letters did provide some beneficial data that helped to answer my third research question on how the women envisioned masculinity and femininity in themselves and in their sons. I had a difficult time retrieving these letters from the participants. Only 3 of the 5 women returned them to me. Perhaps another source of data collection would have been more beneficial, such as in-home observations between the mothers and sons. This could have produced both qualitatively different data from the interviews, and it could have led to more significant data validation as well.

Implications for Future Research and Practice in Family Studies

After the conclusion of this particular research project, I am left with many more questions than I had when I first began this study. After speaking with the women who participated in this study, I am curious about their relationships outside of their immediate families. The women in this study talked about a particular closeness that they now share with their own mothers. Transitions in the mother and daughter relationship, especially when the daughter herself becomes a mother, are of interest to me after the conclusion to this study. Another area of interest that was generated from this study are friendships. The participants discussed how their friendships, if they had any at all, now revolve around their role of mother.

Friendships seem to bond around this similar social role, more so than other roles such as ones preformed at work. More research on this area would be beneficial to the field of family studies.

Another area of research that is relevant to this study is that of spousal or partner equity. Women in this study were still performing more of the daily housekeeping and child care than their husbands were, even though they were involved in full time employment outside of the home. Although the women said that they were happy with their level of such responsibility, many of them wanted for their sons an equal partnership in the future. It would be fascinating to research why there are such dualistic ideas about the issue of equity.

It is also important for the field of family studies to further understand how diversity impacts the intersections of race, class, and gender within the experience of mothering a son. The sample for this study consisted of five Caucasian, heterosexual, married, middle-class, working mothers. Although this was not my intent, my participants represent the majority. There are many merits of single, working mother families (Amato, 2000; Arditti, 1999), lesbian families (Allen & Demo, 1995; Patterson, 2001; Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000) as well as the relationships between Black mothers and their sons that critique Chodorow's (1978) theory as one that can only be applied to White, heterosexual, nuclear families (Collins, 1994).

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Appendices

Appendix A

BACKGROUND GUIDE

I am currently conducting a study on the experience of motherhood and issues of gender surrounding the experience of raising a son. I would like to begin with a few background questions.

1. When were you born?

2. How long have you lived in this area?

3. How far did you go in school?

4. What type of work do you do? How many hours per week do you work?

5. What is your approximate yearly household income?

6. Briefly explain your marital experience, if any. Were you ever married to your son's biological father? Length of marriage(s)?

7. How many children do you have? What are their genders? What are their ages?

8. Briefly describe your current child care arrangements for your son.

9. Briefly describe your current living arrangements.

10. Which people do you incorporate in your definition of "family"? Ages? Ethnicity?

11. Religion?

12. Briefly describe your views on feminism.

If you are not with the biological father of your son, please provide this information. If you are still with your son's biological father, please skip down to FAMILY HISTORY.

1. Briefly describe current arrangements.

    - Legal?

    - Custody arrangements with regard to time spent with son?

    - Financial?

- Emotional (how do you get along?)

2. How long have the two of you been divorced/ split-up?

3. Are you currently involved in a close, romantic relationship? How long have you been together?

FAMILY HISTORY

Briefly tell me about your family of origin. Parents? Siblings?

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT'S DEMOGRAPHICS

	Roxy	Jamie	Amanda	Therese	Becky
Year of birth	1969	1969	1965	1964	1970
How long have you lived here?	33 years	33 years	30 years	20 years	10 years
Level of education	Finished high school	Starting Master's in the fall.	Bachelor's Degree	Working on Doctorate	Half way through Master's
Occupation	Clerical aide-elementary school	Office manager for husband's business	Accountant for husband's business	College instructor and doctoral student	High school teacher
Length of work week	35 hours	35 hours	35-40 hours	60+ hours	40 hours
Approximate yearly household income	$50,000	$60,000	$90,000	$100,000	$70,000
Marital experience	First marriage	First marriage	First marriage	First marriage	First marriage
Number, gender, age of children	3 boys - 10, 9, 5 yrs.	2 children – one boy, 5 yrs.; one girl, 3 yrs.	3 children – two boys, 6 and 4 yrs.; one girl, age 22 months	4 children - three boys, 10 and 4 yrs. and 9 months; one girl, 6 yrs.	2 children - one boy, 3 yrs.; one girl, 4 yrs.
Child care arrangements	All day child care	All day child care	All day child care	All day child care	All day child care
Living arrangements	Lives in house on farm husband operates	Owns home	Owns home	Owns home	Owns home
Who is in your family?	Grandparents aunts, uncles, cousins, all ages	Immediate family, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins	Grandparents cousins, nieces, nephews, siblings	Just immediate family	Immediate family, grandparents, husband's and her siblings
Religion	Christian	Lutheran	Christian	Christian	Baptist

Appendix C

MOTHERS & SONS

I am looking for mothers to interview. If you have a son between the ages 3 and 5, work outside of the home 35 to 40 hours per week, and employ full-time child care services for your son, then I would like to talk with you. You are invited to participate in a research project exploring the experience of motherhood, issues of gender, and the unique opportunity of raising a son.

All I need is approximately 60 minutes of your time. If you are willing to share your thoughts and feelings with me, please give me a call: **Kate Gentry Hansen**, Masters Candidate, Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech, **951-3610**.

Interviews will be confidential and scheduled at your convenience.

Appendix D

TELEPHONE CONTACT

Hello, my name is Kate Hansen. I am a Masters Candidate in the Department of Human Development at Virginia Tech. I am conducting a research project on the experience of contemporary, working mothers. I am interested in talking with women who have a son between the ages of 3 and 5, who work outside of the home for 35 to 40 hours per week, and who employ full-time child care services for their son.

Does this description sound like you?

Participation in the study will involve this initial telephone contact, as well as one face-to-face meeting in which background information will be gathered and approximately a 60-minute, audio-taped interview will be conducted. After the conclusion of the interview, I will ask that you write a letter to your son about your hopes and dreams for him as he becomes a man. I will provide you with a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which to return this letter to me by mail. At the conclusion of our meeting, you will be offered the opportunity to receive a copy of the transcription of the interview, as well as an executive summary of the final results after the study is completed.

Would you be willing to participate in this study?

May we arrange a time and a location to meet in person that would be most convenient for you?

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

If for any reason you are unable to keep our appointment or if you should have questions or concerns before we meet, please feel free to contact me again at this telephone number.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to participate. I look forward to meeting with you very soon.

Appendix E

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about yourself.
   - How would you describe yourself to someone you don't know?
   - How would your son describe you?
   - How would your spouse/significant other describe you?

2. What messages did you receive regarding motherhood before you became a mother?
   - From family?
   - From friends?
   - From society in general?

3. What are your current beliefs about motherhood?

4. How were your beliefs formed?
   - Where do you think they came from?

5. How have these beliefs changed over time?
   - From before you became a mother?
   - From after you became a mother?

6. What meanings do you assign to your job/career?
   - What does your work mean to you?
   - What does it mean for your son?
   - How does working impact your parenting?

7. Can you tell me about an average workday?
   - When you first wake up?
   - How does your child get settled at day care?
   - How is he picked up from day care?
   - What is your evening at home like?

8. How are sick or snow days handled in your home?
   - Who stays home with your son or picks him up from day care?
   - Who handles doctor, dentist visits?

9. Can you tell me a little bit about how you feel these work life issues impact your career goals?
   - How has having a son hindered or enhanced your job/career?

10. Tell me about your interactions with your son.
    - How do you spend your time together?
    - What about discipline issues?

11. Tell me about your relationship with your son.
    - When do you feel especially close to your son?
    - What does this relationship mean to you?
    - How does your son make you feel about yourself?
    - How does he make you feel about your life?

12. In what ways has being a mother changed the way you view yourself?
    - Personally?
    - Professionally?
    - Politically?

13. In what ways has being a mother changed your relationships with others?
    - Family?
    - Friends?
    - Employer and coworkers?

14. Tell me about any gender issues that have surfaced.
    - Specific gender related activities?
    - Questions your son has asked?

15. What did your son receive as gifts from the last holiday or birthday?
    - What kinds of things did he ask for?
    - What did you choose to give him?
    - What did others choose to give him?

16. What kinds of "extracurricular" activities is your son involved in?
    - How were these chosen?
    - What is your role in these activities?

17. What does "masculinity" mean to you?
    - To society in general?
    - How do you envision masculinity in yourself?
    - How do you envision masculinity for your son?

18. What does "femininity" mean to you?
    - To society in general?
    - How do you envision femininity in yourself?
    - How do you envision femininity in your son?

19. What are you attempting to teach your son?
    - About women?
    - About men?

20. What are you actively modeling for your son?

- What are the most important values that you want to pass on?
- What can your son learn best from you?

Appendix F

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LETTERS

Please take some time at your earliest convenience to write a letter to your son. I ask that you touch upon the points listed below as you write; however, feel free to be as creative as you want, and to add anything else you feel to be important. It could include photographs, scrapbook pages, artwork, song lyrics, poetry, etc. This would be a wonderful addition to his baby book!

- What characteristics do you most treasure in your son?

- What are some of your fondest memories that you have of your son?

- What special rituals or activities have you particularly enjoyed with your son?

- What are the key lessons or values that you want to instill in your son? What do you want him to learn from you?

- What are your dreams that you have for your son and for his future?

- What qualities do you hope to see in your son when he is an adult?

Thank you again for your time and your thoughtful responses. After you have completed your letter, please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope enclosed to mail it, or a copy of it, to me. As a reminder, this is a piece of the data collection process for the study.

Appendix G

GETTING MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS ANSWERED

ON THE MAKING OF MAN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE MEANING OF MOTHERHOOD, ISSUES OF MASCULINITY, AND THE EXPERIENCE OF RAISING A SON

Theoretical Perspectives Used: Feminist and Symbolic Interactionist

> **(RQ 1)** *What meanings do contemporary, working women assign to motherhood before and after becoming mothers?*

IQ 1. Tell me about yourself.
- How would you describe yourself to someone you don't know?
- How would your son describe you?
- How would your spouse/significant other describe you?

IQ 2. What messages did you receive regarding motherhood before you became a mother?
- From family?
- From friends?
- From society in general?

IQ 3. What are your current beliefs about motherhood?

IQ 4. How were your beliefs formed?
- Where do you think they came from?

IQ 5. How have these beliefs changed over time?
- From before you became a mother?
- From after you became a mother?

IQ 10. Tell me about your interactions with your son.
- How do you spend your time together?
- What about discipline issues?

IQ 11. Tell me about your relationship with your son.
- When do you feel especially close to your son?
- What does this relationship mean to you?
- How does your son make you feel about yourself?
- How does he make you feel about your life?

IQ 12. In what ways has being a mother changed the way you view yourself?

- Personally?
- Professionally?
- Politically?

IQ 13. In what ways has being a mother changed your relationships with others?
- Family?
- Friends?
- Employer and coworkers?

(RQ 2) *How does the role of work intersect the role of mother?*

IQ 6.   What meanings do you assign to your job/career?
- What does your work mean to you?
- What does it mean for your son?
- How does working impact your parenting?

IQ 7.   Can you tell me about an average workday?
- When you first wake up?
- How does your child get settled at day care?
- How is he picked up from day care?
- What is your evening at home like?

IQ 8.   How are sick or snow days handled in your home?
- Who stays home with your son or picks him up from day care?
- Who handles doctor, dentist visits?

IQ 9.   Can you tell me a little bit about how you feel these work life issues impact your career goals?
- How has having a son hindered or enhanced your job/career?

(RQ 3) *How do contemporary, working mothers construct and deconstruct gender with their sons, as well as envision masculinity and femininity in themselves and in their sons?*

IQ 14. Tell me about any gender issues that have surfaced.
- Specific gender related activities?
- Questions your son has asked?

IQ 15. What did your son receive as gifts from the last holiday or birthday?
- What kinds of things did he ask for?
- What did you choose to give him?
- What did others choose to give him?

IQ 16. What kinds of "extracurricular" activities is your son involved in?
- How were these chosen?
- What is your role in these activities?

IQ 17. What does "masculinity" mean to you?
- To society in general?
- How do you envision masculinity in yourself?
- How do you envision masculinity for your son?

IQ 18. What does "femininity" mean to you?
- To society in general?
- How do you envision femininity in yourself?
- How do you envision femininity in your son?

IQ 19. What are you attempting to teach your son?
- About women?
- About men?

IQ 20. What are you actively modeling for your son?
- What are the most important values that you want to pass on?
- What can your son learn best from you?

Appendix H

Application for Approval for Research Involving Human Subjects
Katherine Gentry Hansen
Department of Human Development
540 / 951-3610

Protocol for Research Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: On the Making of Man: A Qualitative Study on the Meaning of Motherhood, Issues of Masculinity, and the Experience of Raising a Son

<u>Justification of this Research</u>

The purpose of this study is to examine the meanings assigned to the experience of motherhood and parenting male children by contemporary, working women. Despite the increase in employment rates of mothers, the social institution of motherhood is slow to change. Women who do go to work full-time after becoming mothers, either out of financial necessity or seen as an opportunity for personal fulfillment, are often viewed as being neglectful of their child's development. Given the strong social imperative towards viewing mothers as the primary caregiver to children coupled with the negative associations of being a contemporary, working mother, the experience of doing both challenges the conventional construct of motherhood. Information is needed to inform our understanding of these women whose lives have followed an alternate life path, as well as to explore their experiences of motherhood relative to the experience of raising sons.

As contemporary, working women live in contrast to the social construction of motherhood, and have in essence joined the masculinist paradigm of breadwinner, it is also important to gain further information about their experiences constructing and deconstructing gender for themselves and for their sons.

<u>Procedure</u>

Because children form gendered notions associated with the different sexes at an early age, contemporary, working women who are the mothers of sons between the ages of 3 and 5 will be recruited for this study. Other delimiting factors for the sample are that the mother must work outside of the home for 35 to 40 hours per week, and her son must be enrolled in a child care facility on a full-time basis. Participants will be sought through advertisements posted at various child care sites. If needed, snowball sampling will be utilized. This technique is a process whereby names of applicable individuals will be given by existing participants.

The sample will consist of five contemporary, working mothers. Interested individuals in the advertisement will contact the researcher by telephone. If these individuals qualify to participate, the researcher will brief them on the general scope of the study, and then they will be asked to consent to a face-to-face, audio-taped interview. The interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon location and it will include a background guide, followed by an in-depth interview, which should last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will conclude with a reflexive writing activity by the mothers about any further experiences they have shared with their sons, and the aspirations they have for them in the future.

Risks and Benefits

Participants in this study will be assured of their right to terminate participation at any time. The interview questions and the reflexivity activity are not intended to cause risk.

The contemporary, working mothers who agree to participate in this study will have the opportunity to express and reflect upon their unique experiences of motherhood and parenting male children. By sharing their personal information, contemporary, working mother participants can validate or revalidate their life experiences as both positive and empowering for themselves as well as for their sons. Through reflexive exchange between participant and researcher, who is

also a contemporary, working mother of two sons, issues relative to the topic of the proposed research may be explored and discussed in a shared way, a benefit to both participant and researcher. Participation of contemporary, working mothers in this study will contribute to the knowledge base of the lived experience of motherhood, as well as issues surrounding the construction and deconstruction of gender.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

Only the named investigator will conduct the interviews and have access to the list of participants. The responses of the mothers who participate in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Participant names, telephone numbers, addresses, audio-taped interviews, and reflexive letters will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed after six months. Information provided will have actual names removed, and be replaced instead with code numbers. The transcriptions of audio-taped interviews will be conducted by the researcher and a paid transcriptionist. Analyses, future documents, and/or presentations will use pseudonyms.

Appendix I

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: A Qualitative Study on the Meanings of Motherhood and Masculinity, and the

Experience of Raising a Son

Principal Investigator: Katherine Gentry Hansen

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

You are invited to participate in a study on working mothers and the experiences of

parenting a son. The purpose of this study is to increase understanding about the meaning of

motherhood and what gender issues arise in parenting. There will be a total of 5 participants in

the study.

II. PROCEDURE

You are being asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. Our initial contact was by

telephone and lasted approximately 10minutes. The interview which is taking place in a mutually

agreed upon location, will begin with some brief questions about your personal and family

background. Our conversation about the research topic will be tape-recorded and will last

approximately 60 minutes. You will be asked questions about your beliefs regarding

motherhood, your experiences as a working mother of a son, and how you think and feel about

issues of gender. After the interview is over, I will give you an assignment to take with you. It is

a small writing activity that I would like for you to complete at your earliest convenience, and

send to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope enclosed.

III. RISKS

No more than minimal risk is intended. Questions being asked are about everyday life
experiences.

IV. BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Participation in this study will give you the opportunity to express and share your thoughts and feelings about what motherhood and the experience of parenting a son means to you. Reflecting on life experiences often provides an opportunity to understand how our lives have been shaped as well as what the future might hold. By talking about your experiences of motherhood with me, also a working mother of two sons, issues of everyday living may be discussed and explored in a shared way, which could be of benefit to each of us.

Your participation in this project will provide information that will be helpful to the understanding of the relationship between mothers and sons. Little is known about the life experiences of working women who are the mothers of sons. Providing insights and perspectives on this topic may be of benefit to other women who share a similar experience.

No guarantee of benefits is being made to encourage you to participate.

V. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Your interview will be tape-recorded for later transcription. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. All identifying information will be removed and code numbers or code names will be assigned to all information and written reports. The list of names, telephone numbers, addresses, as well as the audio-tapes of interviews and the reflexive letters will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. This list and the audiotapes will be destroyed in six months. The tapes will be reviewed and transcribed by the interviewer and a paid transcriptionist. Any future documents and/or presentations will use code names.

VI. COMPENSATION

Other than my sincere appreciation, there is no compensation for participating in this study.

VII. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are also free

not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer throughout the interviewing process.

VIII. APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

This research has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for

projects involving human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by

the Department of Human Development.

IX. SUBJECT'S PERMISSION

I have read and understand the informed consent and conditions of this project. I have

had all of my questions answered. I agree to the above and give my voluntary consent for

participation in this project. Two copies of this agreement will be signed. One copy will remain

with me and the other will be kept by the interviewer.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct I may contact:

Katherine Gentry Hansen   540 / 951-3610
Investigator   sgentry@vt.edu

Katherine R. Allen   540 / 231-6526
Faculty Advisor   kallen@vt.edu

April L. Few   540 / 231-2664
Faculty Advisor   alfew@vt.edu

David M. Moore   540 / 231-4991
Chair, IRB   moored@vt.edu
Office of Research Compliance
Research & Graduate Studies

Appendix J

MAJOR THEMES AND CODING CATEGORIES

100 Who Am I?

101 How I see myself
102 Who I am to my son
103 Who I am to my husband
104 Who I am to family and friends

200 On being a Mother and Raising a Son

205 What motherhood means to me
206 Let me tell you about my son
207 How my son is disciplined
208 My struggles with motherhood
209 How motherhood has changed me

300 The Intersection of Work and Family Life

310 Familial viewpoints on work
311 Personal ambition/ goals
312 The impact of work on mothering
313 The issue of day care
314 Handling sick/ snow days
315 Daily routines

400 The Socialization of Gender

416 The differences between the sexes
417 Gender construction
418 What masculinity means to me
419 What femininity means to me
420 My views on feminism

500 Envisioning the Future for My Son

521 Characteristics I want my son to have
522 I want my son have an equal intimate partnership
523 I want my son to feel good about himself

VITA
Katherine Gentry Hansen
Master of Science in Human Development
Concentration in Family Studies
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia

HOME ADDRESS

3790 Mount Tabor Road
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 (540) 951-3610
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EDUCATION

> M.S. Department of Counseling and Human Development. Concentration in
> Community Counseling. Radford University.
> Expected date of completion: May, 2004

> M.S. Department of Human Development. Concentration in Family Studies. Virginia
> Polytechnic Institute and State University.
> Date of completion: September, 2002.
> Thesis: On the Making of Man: A Qualitative Study on the Meaning of
> Motherhood, Issues of Masculinity, and the Experience of Raising a Son
> Major Professors: Dr. Katherine Allen and Dr. April L. Few

> B.S. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1997
> Major: Family and Child Development
> Concentration: Child Care Administration

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Office Manager   Faculty Development Office
                                           Radford University
                                           Radford, Virginia
                                           2002-present

Primary responsibilities include scheduling and facilitating programs and workshops for
faculty and staff development and new faculty orientation, maintaining and disbursing
monthly budget reports as well as dispensing foundation funds, as well as develop
teaching resources.

Graduate Research Assistant   Department of Human Development
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia
2000-2002

Primary responsibilities included guest lecturing, recording grades in Excel, grading essays, conducting literature searches, community outreach, public speaking, interviewing, as well as transcribing, coding, and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, entering and analyzing data in NUD*IST, EnVivo, and SPSS programs, mentoring new graduate students and undergraduates, and planning academic/professional conferences.

Lead Teacher   Rainbow Riders Child Care Center
Blacksburg, Virginia
1997-2000

Primary responsibilities included planning and implementing an emergent, anti-bias curriculum for various age groups, developing assessment portfolios for each child in the classroom, planning and conducting various parent meetings and classes, socials, and conferences, implementing periodic home visits, promoting developmentally appropriate practices throughout the center, and participating in further professional development. Web development.

Student Assistant   Department of Human Development
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Child Development Laboratory
Blacksburg, Virginia
January 1997 -May 1997

Primary responsibilities included aiding lead teacher in preparing curriculum plans and developing assessment portfolios.

GRANTS

Few, A. L., Stith, S. M., & Hansen, K. G. (2001). ASPIRES Grant, $10,600. "Resiliences of Battered Women Who Seek Assistance in Rural Communities".

Gillman, L., Few, A. L., & Hansen, K. G. (2001). Globalizing Interdisciplinary Research Incentive Grant. Funded by the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Interdisciplinary Task Force, $3,000.

PRESENTATIONS

Few, A. L. & Hansen, K. G. (October, 2002). Ending Domestic Violence Across the Lifespan: Finding Resiliencies in Self and Community. Department of Human Development. Blacksburg, Virginia.

Few, A. L. & Hansen, K. G. (October, 2000). American Culture at the Crossroads? Dialogue on the Sociocultural Effects of Media Violence on Youth, Women, and Families. Family Violence Coordinating Council of the Roanoke Valley Fall Conference on Media and Families. Roanoke, Virginia. Presented summary of recent U.S. Congressional hearings on media and violence.

Hansen, K. G. & O'Quinn, J. (March, 1999). Who?, What?, When?, Where?, and How?,: Documentation for Children. Virginia Association For Early Childhood Education Conference. Roanoke, Virginia.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Few, A. L., Stith, S. M. & Hansen K. G. (2002). Resiliences of Battered Women Who Seek Assistance in Rural Communities. Entering and analyzing survey data, participation in the interviewing of participants, and transcribing interviews.

Geller, K. & Hansen, K. G. (2001). Child Care Needs Assessment for Montgomery County Public Schools. Under the direction of Dr. Tammy Henderson, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia. Analyzed SPSS results and wrote results in final report to be distributed to Montgomery County Public Schools.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION AFFILIATION:
American Counseling Association
National Association of the Education of Young Children
National Council of Family Relations
Virginia Association of Early Childhood Education

SERVICE ACTIVITIES:

Departmental Committees:

Housing Coordinator for Quint State Conference, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2001