BORN TO DO IT?

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MOTHERHOOD

by

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Abstract

Dominant ideologies of motherhood have limited the choices many women have made about when, if, or how they become mothers. Adrienne Rich describes this as the "institution" of motherhood. This thesis explores the question of how twenty-first century mothers feel constrained or empowered by current mothering ideologies. Interviews were conducted with eight Greater Vancouver mothers representing a variety of racial, socio-economic, and marital backgrounds. Some mothers stated that at times they feel pressured to measure up to an idealized standard of motherhood; others believed that decisions they make in relation to mothering are mostly influenced by their own free-will and resourcefulness. Motherhood in the twenty-first century is as diverse as individual mothers themselves. Andrea O'Reilly's nuanced theoretical understanding of resistance helps us to see how women redefine what motherhood means to them and how to legitimize diverse ways of mothering.

Keywords: Motherhood--Mothers--Social Construction--Patriarchy

Dedication

This research is dedicated to strong, inspirational women the world over.

It is especially dedicated to my mother,
the woman who has inspired me more than anyone.

Your strength and courage is not only immeasurable, it is inspirational.
You taught me from an early age that feminism is not a dirty word.
For this, and so much more, I thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE
A Mother Like No Other

Introduction

There seems no more "natural" image that that of a peaceful newborn cradled by its adoring, blissful mother, an instant in which the world seems to make sense. Every society holds its own unique mythology surrounding motherhood and creation yet there are some common grounds in the norms and expectations surrounding mothers and motherhood. The dominant ideology in the West focuses on the natural and instinctive characteristics of appropriate motherhood. "Good" mothers possess characteristics that are said to flow naturally from the instinctual love of their newborn child. It is my contention, however, that the iconic concept of a good mother is anything but natural; it is definitely socially constructed. Feminist historians, according to Andrea O'Reilly,

> ...agree that motherhood is primarily *not* a natural or biological function; rather, it is specifically and fundamentally a cultural practice that is continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and societal factors. As a cultural construction, its meaning varies with time and place; there is no essential or universal experience of motherhood (2004, 5, italics in original).

For some observers, the social construction of motherhood has a sinister impact, for the characteristics attributed to good mothers have been used to subordinate millions of women in society. However, such a construction can be challenged as individuals continue not only to deconstruct but also reconstruct what it means to be a mother.

Historically, very little attention has been paid to the cultural, economic and social forces that work along with patriarchy to define appropriate motherhood. Over centuries

motherhood has transformed from something that was done out of necessity to something that defines and shapes cultural notions of gender. Nowhere else in society is an occupation surrounded with so much ambiguity while at the same time subjected to such intense public scrutiny and at times, denunciation. Many mothers have also had the dubious luck of becoming public property while being confined to the private sphere of the home and family. How has the transformation taken place? What social systems have been in place to allow for this to happen? What does this mean for not only mothers but women in general? These are just a few of the questions I address in this thesis.

Feminists have debated a myriad of issues throughout the years yet one topic that is often submerged is motherhood. As the role of 'mother' differs from any other role a woman can play, discussions surrounding this topic are hotly debated. Some feminists ignore the topic altogether, claiming it is too big a can of worms to open. Others insist on moving the topic from society's periphery only to be told that their focus is self-indulgent and narcissistic (Maushart, 1999, 15). Motherhood is seen by many as a natural stage in most women's lives and as such, it is considered beyond discussion. The Women's Movement itself has also had a tenuous history of engagement with the notion of motherhood. Here, motherhood was linked with the notion of the traditional, patriarchal-dominated family and as such, it was presented as something to rebel against. Women who celebrated motherhood were seen as not only participating in their own oppression but, more dangerously, participating in the oppression of their own children. David Cooper (a noted figure from the anti-psychiatry movement) adds that, "the nuclear family unit in capitalist society in the late twentieth-century reinforces the effective power of the ruling class in any exploitative society by providing a highly

controllable paradigmatic form for every social institution" (http://laingsociety.org/colloquia/inperson/davidcooper/index.htm). Cooper believes that the nuclear family "renders people anonymous" and moves them into the preset roles of "mother", "father", "sister", "brother", "daughter", and "son". The relationship between the Women's Movement and motherhood will be explored further in Chapter Two.

Women's experience as mothers is often left out of history as a result of its diminished importance. The process of birth is celebrated the world over yet the process of becoming a mother passes relatively unnoticed (Maushart, 1999, 105). Maushart notes (1999, 105) that although becoming a mother is an "enormous personal transformation, it remains largely socially invisible". Maushart believes that what we call public discourse is "really a forum for what men know" (1999, 17) and adds that because men do not experience pregnancy nor do they tend to be the primary caregivers of children, adequate discourse on these issues does not exist. Phoenix and Woollet note that the "ideologies that underpin 'common sense' ideas about motherhood produce much of the theoretical work and discourse on motherhood" (Phoenix et al, 1991, 5). If public discourse is inordinately produced by men and ideologies flow from public discourse then it is fair to say that the discourse surrounding motherhood will be stunted and somewhat misleading.

Maushart believes that when motherhood has been addressed it has been shown as a cause rather than an effect (1999, 18). She points to the discipline of Psychology, for example, to show how mothers have been pathologized for centuries and adds that 'mother-blaming' has been "the bread and butter of traditional psychotherapy" (1999, 18). Whatever the discipline, mothers are often afforded limited

autonomy over their own experiences. Historically, when motherhood was discussed, it was approached in a way that defined mothers as the objects of study; rarely were they presented as the subjects of their own knowledge. Each year there are more and more books being written about mothers and motherhood but most of these are written by someone who purports to speak on behalf of mothers. Very rarely are mothers themselves the producers of knowledge and this only adds to the silence many women feel once they become a mother. The purpose of this research is to give a voice to mothers themselves and to allow for a conceptual space where the ups and downs of motherhood can be discussed freely.

In patriarchal societies motherhood is presented as the supreme route to physical and emotional fulfillment for women (Phoenix et al, 1991, 7). In their content analysis of mothering manuals Phoenix and Woollet observed that the notion of maternal fulfillment was echoed over and over,

> As a mother holds her new baby in her arms she also experiences a sensation of emotional and physical fulfillment that here at last is what she has been waiting to see and she is also emotionally fulfilled by producing a child for the man she loves (Bourne, 1979, 8 as quoted in Phoenix *et al,* 1991, 69).

Although this excerpt was published more than a quarter-century ago such beliefs are prevalent today. Motherhood, as a concept, is central to processes in which women are defined by others and how they define themselves (Phoenix et al, 1991, 13). According to Phoenix and Woollet (1991, 6), motherhood establishes a woman's credentials as a woman. In keeping with this, we can see how the majority of women are, at one point or another in their lives, defined in relation to their relationship with motherhood, including those who do not bear children. Women who remain childless are

assumed to live a second-rate life, devoid of emotional satisfaction (Morell, 1994, xiv). Even the term, childless, denotes a lack. It is interesting to note that more contemporary literature on this topic refers to the state of not having children as childfree (www.childfree.net). There is a concerted effort on the part of many feminist theorists and activists to validate the decisions of women who have chosen not to become mothers. Rather than describe childfree women as selfish, narcissistic and emotionally cold the coordinators of childfree.net want to be identified as women "free from the loss of personal freedom, money, time and energy that having children requires" (www.childfree.net).

Females are all potential mothers once we reach the age of menses and after that we are expected to fulfill our reproductive destiny. If this does not occur, we are often viewed as "failed" mothers. Our womanhood is directly linked to our potential for motherhood and it is exactly this source of comparison, judgment, and pity that I find so problematic. Women are reduced to their biology and therefore, the appreciation of women's diversity and contributions is also reduced.

References will be made to both "appropriate" mothering and "good" mother(s) throughout this paper. It is important to note that appropriate mothering refers to the practice of socially-sanctioned mothering whereas good mother(s) refers to mothers who are said to uphold the practices of appropriate motherhood as defined by mainstream societal norms.

Structure of Thesis

I plan to draw upon the works of several feminist authors including Adrienne Rich, Sharon Hays, Elisabeth Badinter and Ann Dally to illustrate the complexities of motherhood. I will use Rich's concept of motherhood as an institution to show how, through the creation of appropriate mothering, the forces of patriarchy and capitalism collude to isolate women in the private sphere. Drawing on the work of Hays allows for a historical analysis of the shifting demands of motherhood as documented in Western societies. Badinter's work expands on this and delves deeper into the concept of maternal love. She questions the concept of an essentialist maternal love, showing how expectations of mothers have varied dramatically throughout the ages. When it benefited patriarchal society to have as many familial labourers as possible, mothers were expected to work alongside their husbands yet as soon as these same husbands were faced with competition in the workplace mothers were banished to the private sphere. Dally demonstrates how mothers have been simultaneously idealized and abhorred throughout history and shows how this ambivalence has contributed to the setting of unattainable maternal codes of behaviour.

Chapters Two and Three of my thesis focus on myths that surround motherhood. In Chapter Two I specifically address the interconnected relationship between patriarchy, capitalism and the institution of motherhood to shed some light on why these myths were created in the first place and, more importantly, why they proliferate today. Key issues (as they relate to the construction of mothering ideologies) addressed in this chapter are kinship, property, and labour.

Chapter Three focuses on specific myths that have historically surrounded motherhood. Focusing on the structure of the family prior to Industrialization and on the roles of the individual players within it allows one to see how the expected role of "mother" changed with the times. Mothering ideologies are thus not stagnant; they are fluid and representative of the economical, political and social fabric of a given society. As society experiences growths and changes so too does the dominant ideology surrounding motherhood. Providing specific examples of how mothering ideologies have changed over time allows me to combat one of the oldest myths itself - that motherhood is a natural, inevitable stage in all women's lives.

Chapter Four contains an analysis of the interviews I conducted with eight Greater Vancouver mothers. Giving a voice to mothers was the main focus of this chapter and as such, in-depth, open-ended interviewing allowed me to focus on issues that the mothers themselves deemed to be of importance. Providing a space where mothers could be heard allows them to create language that speaks to their lived experiences and as a result, they feel included as opposed to excluded from theories produced about mothering.

I will conclude in Chapter Five with an analysis of where motherhood may be headed in the twenty-first century. My aim is to present a more diverse account of mothering and show how mothers of the twenty-first century are redefining motherhood according to values, beliefs and experiences that are representative of their lived experiences. My goal is to produce an exploratory analysis of mothering that is at once educational and empowering.

Methodology

Engaging in research from a feminist standpoint allows one to be creative when deciding on what methods to use. As a result, I have used multiple methods of inquiry in my articulation of how motherhood is socially constructed and reconstructed. Reinharz (1992, 201) acknowledges that, "the multi-method approach increases the likelihood that...researchers will understand what they are studying, and that they will be able to persuade others of the veracity of their findings". "Women" as a category is by nature heterogeneous so it is fitting to apply a variety of research methods when women are at the centre of an inquiry into gender and power. That said, it is important to note that all methods chosen for this project are qualitative in nature.

Qualitative research methods are used by researchers who value "subjective, personal meaning and definition, commonalities and giving voices to the oppressed" (Brayton, 1997, 2). Qualitative research is not only "concerned with words rather than numbers" (Bryman and Teevan, 2005, 144) it is also,

> ...an ontological position described as constructionist, which implies that social life is an outcome of the interactions between individuals, rather than a phenomenon 'out there' and separate from those involved in its construction (Bryman and Teevan, 2005, 144, single quotes in original).

My feminist beliefs require that I do more than just describe how motherhood is socially constructed. I am obliged to investigate and explain how these socially-constructed definitions of motherhood affect the lived experiences of mothers (and to a larger degree, women) everywhere.

I will begin with a literature review to set the context for the rest of my paper. Certain "myths" about motherhood proliferate and pressure mothers into a subordinate

social position. Patriarchy demands that most men be free to compete in the work place and at its extreme, motherhood myths effectively remove women from the public sphere altogether. To see how motherhood myths are internalized by mothers themselves I must first outline what the myths are. I have chosen mainly feminist sources for the literature review, which is a selective overview of the available English-language literature on motherhood.

Central to most motherhood myths is the notion that women are irrational, emotional, instinctual beings and as a result, maternal subjectivity is completely denied. The term "maternal subjectivities" is used to refer to the thought processes mothers have in relation to not only their own mothering, but to the larger concept of motherhood in general. A common belief central to the dominant ideology of motherhood is that mothers are just doing what comes naturally and as such, no sense of thought, reason or agency is afforded to them. Concentrating on reproductive functions allows for the focus to be on the instinctual aspects of mothering and as such, agency and rational thought are overshadowed as integral components of mothering. I hope to shed some light on this concept by exploring how a small sample of eight women process and negotiate the act of mothering themselves. More specifically, I am interested in seeing whether the mothers I interviewed feel any pressure to conform to a specific mode of mothering and, if so, how they balance this with any personal beliefs and agendas that may run counter to this dominant mode of mothering.

To gain a more complete understanding of how motherhood myths affect the daily lives of real mothers I asked a variety of open-ended questions in my interviews (See Interview Framework, Appendix One). The interviews were semi-structured and

although I drew upon a scripted list of questions, I was interested in what the mothers themselves valued. The questions were meant to elicit complex responses and to allow mothers to speak about their unique experiences in their own voices.

I had originally planned to interview 10 mothers from the Greater Vancouver Area but due to scheduling difficulties I ended up with eight completed interviews. I felt that the rich material obtained in each of these interviews was substantial enough to justify not contacting two additional interviewees.

I used a combination of two non-probability sampling techniques to gather my participants. As Babbie notes (1999, 173), non-probability sampling techniques are used when no complete list of potential interviewees exists from which a random sample can be drawn. I combined both purposive and snowball sampling to draw up a principal list from which I later drew participants from. Purposive sampling refers to the act of selecting your participants on the basis of your own knowledge of the population (Babbie, 174). Snowball sampling allows the researcher to use their existing contacts as a means of obtaining additional participants.

A number of factors contributed to my decision to use purposive sampling for my thesis. First, I must acknowledge the time and financial constraints in pursuing a graduate degree. With more time and money I could have contacted various local activity centres offering courses and programs for mothers and then gone to each of these to introduce my research and myself. I could have then complied a central list of all interested mothers from which a random sample would eventually be drawn.

Snowball sampling allows for the creation of a more heterogeneous population from which my final participants were drawn. Although interviewing mothers I already

knew might have indeed reduced the amount of time spent on the interview phase it also ran the risk of producing biased results. My goal, therefore, was to draw from as diverse a sample as I possibly could within this exploratory framework.

I compiled a principal list of all the women interested in participating in my research project (25) and then drew ten random names to establish the interviewees. Before the start of each interview, I handed out a "Research Information Sheet" which contained a brief description of my research goals and outlined the voluntary nature of the interview (See Appendix Two).

Individual interviews were conducted with each woman. Trying to organize group interviews could prove problematic as arranging schedules and childcare with multiple participants could get quite complicated. I also wanted each woman to feel that they had my complete and direct attention and that their identities and responses were kept in strict confidence. I planned for the interviews to take place wherever each individual woman felt most comfortable. I foresaw that for some, this might have been their own home whereas others may have found it more relaxing to meet outside of their home; away from the ears of their families. In the end, only one interview was conducted in my home, four were conducted in the interviewees' homes and three were conducted at the interviewees' places of work.

The interview results build on the theoretical grounding to produce a more complex understanding of maternal subjectivities in relation to the social construction of motherhood.

Ethics

There are many ethical concerns to consider in conducting research that involves human subjects. As a researcher it is my responsibility to be aware of the various potential ethical concerns that may arise out of the course of research. Although certain ethical concerns may be able to be circumvented by planning ahead of time one must be aware that ethical issues can arise seemingly out of nowhere and as such, the researcher must always be ethically aware.

When conducting interviews it is of paramount importance that the researcher conceals the identities of research subjects. As a result, I safeguarded the identities of my interviewees by using a digital voice recorder instead of a traditional tape recorder when documenting the interviews. This allowed me to transfer the interviews to my computer, and since my computer is password-protected the files were stored safely. Each interviewee was given a pseudonym and when I gave the interviews to my transcriber she received only numbered files (the name of each participant was removed from the title of the file and any reference to material that could be used to identify the interviewee was left out). The transcriber also signed a confidentiality agreement before receiving any of the interviews (see Appendix Three). It should also be noted that before any of my interviews were conducted I had to submit my research proposal to Simon Fraser University's Research Ethics Board. It was only after receiving approval from the Research Ethics Board that I began to conduct my interviews,

Conclusion

My exploratory project will make an original contribution to the field of Women's Studies as it will tie together theory and practice in a way that empowers mothers by acknowledging their individual authority. Moreover, although much has already been written about mothers and mothering in patriarchal societies, the voices of the mothers themselves are often overlooked. My project allows mothers to not only speak for themselves but to identify what issues are of current importance for them. The mothers in this study may benefit from learning that they are not alone in some of the issues they deem pivotal. Reading other mothers' thoughts on similar issues may help certain individuals to feel as though they are not alone in their thoughts or concerns. Isolation is a major concern for some mothers and I hope that my research can help to combat this. In addition, the results from this study could later be used as a jumping off point for my future research.

CHAPTER TWO
Patriarchy, Capitalism,
and the Institution of Motherhood

Setting the Theoretical Stage

In her book, *Recreating Motherhood: Ideology and Technology in a Patriarchal Society* (1989), Barbara Katz Rothman outlines how modern American motherhood is shaped by the ideologies of patriarchy, capitalism and technology[1]. Ideologies are powerful and have a way of displacing individuals if they are not part of the dominant group (Rothman, 1989, 26). Ideologies focus our attention by providing us with a specific point of view. In this chapter I will discuss how the ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism work in tandem to not only define appropriate motherhood but, more importantly, work to limit the full potential of women. According to Rothman (1989, 22), motherhood is a 'master status' as everything a woman does is seen in terms of her potential for motherhood[2]

Patriarchy, as defined by Rothman, refers to "any system of male superiority and female inferiority" (1989, 29). For Adrienne Rich (1989, 57),

> Patriarchy is the rule of the fathers: a familal-social, ideological, political system in which men-by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

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[1] Although Rothman focuses on *American* motherhood, I believe her findings apply to the larger topic of *Western* motherhood.

[2] Howard Becker coined the term "master status" in 1963. It refers to the attached label that is normally seen as a characteristic of more importance than all other aspects of a particular person (www.criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/becker.htm).

Western society can assuredly be defined as patriarchal when taking both Rothman's and Rich's definitions into account. Women have consistently made up over half of the population yet male interests continue to dominate our social, legal and economic systems. As laws, policies and moral codes often reflect the beliefs of those in power, it is not surprising that these beliefs are used as a measuring stick for all other areas of society. Men have historically dominated Western society and as such, male viewpoints and beliefs have been transmitted through various social policies, laws and behaviour mores. Historically, men-and particularly, wealthy men- have been the members of society who have dominated public discourse and as a result, have exerted the greatest influence on the development of social norms and codes of behaviour. It is, therefore, not surprising to see that the majority of social norms governing any given society will flow in accordance to the values of patriarchy.

Motherhood, often presented as a mere function of women's innate biology, is not immune from the influence of patriarchy. A given society's assumptions of motherhood are formed just as any other social role. Individuals form their opinions and beliefs about a certain subject, in part, due to the influence of the attitudes and beliefs of the dominant members of society. In Western society, patriarchal ideologies predominate and these androcentric ideologies contribute to society's basic understanding of what it means to "mother" in general and what "good" mothers look like. The result for women is twofold. On the one hand, women are reduced to their biology and defined only in terms of their reproductive capabilities. We are all either potential mothers, current mothers or failed mothers. On the other hand, once a woman becomes a mother she often finds herself at the mercy of mothering ideologies which are heavily influenced by patriarchal ideologies. Mothers who are for whatever reason

unable to live up to these ideals are deemed not only 'bad' mothers but, more importantly, failed women. To explain how this is done I intend to show how patriarchy works in tandem with capitalism to define what appropriate motherhood looks like in Western society.

In patriarchal societies, motherhood is conceived of as what mothers and babies signify to men (Rothman, 1989, 27). What exactly do mothers and babies signify to men in Western society? It is my contention that the answer to this question explains why motherhood myths were not only created but why they continue today. To answer this question properly I will draw on Rothman's analysis of the social construction of motherhood to show, how together with the ideology of patriarchy, capitalism helps to define mothers as inferior members of society. It must be noted that there have been (and continue to be) many challenges to this definition.

Ever since the invention of the microscope, (usually male) scientists have been describing the male sperm as 'active' and the female egg as 'passive'. In fact, Rothman (1989, 34) notes that one of the first uses of the microscope was to look inside the sperm to see "the little people inside". We all learn from a very young age that strong, agile sperm swim up to the egg and then implant themselves inside for conception. Nowhere is there any mention of any possible activity on the part of the egg - it seemingly floats along the current of the fallopian tube awaiting implantation. Emily Martin (cited in Price and Shildrick, 1999, 179) claims that, "the picture of egg and sperm drawn in popular and scientific accounts of reproductive biology relies on stereotypes central to our cultural definitions of male and female". Scientific texts "celebrate sperm production because it is continuous from puberty to senescence, while

they portray egg production as inferior because it is finished at birth" (Price and Shildrick, 1999, 181). In the cycle of reproduction, the male's contribution has received far more accolades than that of the female. This scientific skew only reinforces the patriarchal notion that men, and all they have to contribute, are more important than women.

Kinship is the central social relationship according to the ideology of patriarchy (Rothman, 1989, 29) and implicit in this relationship is the primacy of male genetics. The individual family unit is at the core of patriarchy and Rich points out that this originated with the idea of property and a desire for men to see one's own property transferred to their biological offspring (Rich, 1989, 60). Kinship in patriarchal societies is traced through male lineage and Rothman points out that even the Bible states that children are born to men out of women (1989, 29). When a couple marries, it is the woman who has both historically and traditionally taken the man's last name; she has gone from being her father's daughter to her husband's wife. In both cases she is the 'property' of a man and is denied any agency of her own. Any children born out of the marriage will now belong to the father and carry his last name. Rothman notes (1989, 31) that even though many women continue to use their own last name after marriage they still give their children their father's name. The same could be said for many women who, despite not being legally married to their baby's father, give the child the father's last name.

Many factors contribute to patriarchal ideology's focus on patrilineal kinship above all other social relationships yet I believe the answer has more to do with men feeling as though they need to compete in the cycle of life than anything else. Women's physiological ability to bear children and reproduce the species has long been both

envied and feared by men. Ehrenreich and English point out that many women burned at the stake as witches were lay healers who assisted women with, among other things, labour and delivery and because of this, "an aspect of the female has ever since been associated with the witch" (1973, 5). As a result, men feel as though they need to participate in the continuation of the species however they can. By passing on one's name, men preserve their lineage and in doing so feel as though they are not merely competing with women in the cycle of life but are, in many cases, winning. The result for women is twofold. First, for many women their family lineage dies with them. If they have no brothers then their own father's name ceases to continue. Second, when girl babies are born the father runs the risk of his own lineage ending. His name also ends with his (female) children.

As femaleness in general is devalued in patriarchal society I will draw on Rothman's analysis of capitalism to show how, together with the ideology of patriarchy, capitalism helps to define mothers as inferior members of society. Capitalism can be defined as,

> An economic system based on a free market, open competition, profit motive and private ownership of the means of production. Capitalism encourages private investment and business, compared to a government-controlled economy. Investors in the private companies (i.e. shareholders) also own the firms and are known as capitalists (www.dictionary.com, March 14, 2006).

Capitalism in and of itself is not oppressive to women. It is only once capitalism is co-opted by the oppressive forces of patriarchy that women begin to suffer from the new, gendered world. In her article on "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation", Heidi Hartmann notes,

> The division of labour by sex appears to have been universal throughout human history. In our society the sexual division of labour is hierarchical, with men on top and women on the bottom. Anthropology and history suggest, however, that this division was not always a hierarchical one (cited in Humm, 1992, 99).

Hartmann goes on to note that "sexual stratification...occurred as human society emerged from the primitive and became 'civilized'" and as such, she views capitalism as a "relative newcomer" (Humm, 1992, 99). For Hartmann, patriarchy established itself as the dominant ideology long before capitalism emerged.

In most societies men have controlled the labour of women and children in the family and as such, have developed systematic techniques of hierarchical organization and control over the years (Humm, 1992, 100). The Industrial Revolution transformed Western economies and many social changes followed the accompanying urbanization.

> With the advent of public-private separations such as those created by the emergence of state apparatus and economic systems based on wider exchange and larger production units, the problem for men became one of maintaining their control over the labour power of women (Humm, 1992, 100).

According to Hartmann, the "emergence of capitalism in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries threatened patriarchal control based on institutional authority as it destroyed many old institutions and created new ones, such as 'free' market labour" (as cited in Humm, 1992, 100). Men's unilateral hold on the labour market was now threatened. Women were free to compete in the labour market according to capitalist ideology. This not only threatened the existing family structure but, more importantly, the very basis of male power over women.

For patriarchy to continue to enjoy its dominance in society the work women did had to somehow be devalued. By devaluing women's work, patriarchs denied women the full economic potential of capitalism. When women were "allowed" to work they were pigeonholed into certain types of jobs, ostensibly based on their innate ability to care and nurture. Biology was used to segregate women into low-paid, less-valued jobs. Motherhood has historically been conceived of as a "state of being" and Maher notes that focusing on "being' as opposed to "doing" allows the labour women do as mothers to be rendered invisible (2004, 7). Patriarchal ideologies have constructed the work associated with mothering as something that naturally flows from women and as such, no inordinate effort, skill or thought is employed.

The separation between public and private spheres[3] that followed the Industrial Revolution also devalued women's work. Men, in general, were deemed skilled (or at least valued) workers as they left the home every day to work. Women, on the other hand, stayed home and focused their time and energy on mostly domestic duties which were thought to be unskilled. Unskilled workers are not in high demand in a capitalist society where surplus profit is valued above all else. Women's work was not only devalued due its perceived lack of skill; it was also devalued because it did not turn a profit. Household labour is also not paid labour and because of this it is easier to devalue.

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[3] It is a common belief that society is divided in two spheres: the public, which consists of business, politics, formal education, etc. and the private, which consists of the home and the family. It is believed by many, that the two spheres should operate on different principles and value systems and that different behaviours are appropriate for each. Men are commonly assigned to the public sphere while women are often relegated to the private sphere (http://coss.stcloudstate.edu/psamuel/415Glossary.htm).

In addressing the issue of the unpaid labour of mothers, Cindy L'Hirondelle states that, "(P)aid work gets recognition; it is 'real' work" (2004, 1). Domestic work is not seen as productive work in many senses and therefore has no value according to capitalistic ideology. Rosa Dalla Costa was one of the first women to challenge this. In 1972 she argued that, "the housewife and her labour were the basis for the process of capital accumulation" (L'Hirondelle, 2004, 2). According to Dalla Casta, "capital commands the unpaid labour of the housewife as well as the paid labourer" (L'Hirondelle, 2004, 2). Patriarchy flourished under this system of sexually segregated labour. Men were left to compete in the newly developed labour market while women were relegated to the unskilled domestic sphere.

Patriarchy and capitalism continue to feed off one another even in today's society: the work women have traditionally done continues to be undervalued and most certainly underpaid. According to the Employment Standards Branch of the BC Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services employers are only required to pay domestic workers the current minimum wage of 8$/ hour (www.labour.gov.bc.ca). Domestic workers as defined by the same website are said to be those who are "hired to live and work in private homes to provide cooking, cleaning, child care, or other services" (www.labour.gove.bc.ca). Contemporary Western society disregards the real nature of "motherwork", or the variety of endless jobs mothers do when looking after children and home: cooking, cleaning, teaching, counseling, transporting, and so on. Our society places such little value on these types of activities that when it comes time to hire someone to assist with them, they are often paid no more than minimum wage. In some cases, people go so far as to outsource domestic workers from impoverished countries, knowing they will get a reduced rate. Rachel Rosen, a member of the B.C. based

advocacy group, Grassroots Women, is one of many who are calling for the dismantling of the Live-In caregiver Program (LCP) (www.3telus.net/grassrootswomen/index.html). The Grassroots Women claim the LCP has brought (mostly third-world) women to Canada "under the guise of an immigration policy" in order to work as domestic workers in private homes (www.3telus.net/grassrootswomen/index/html). According to Rosen, 95% of these workers are from the Philippines and many of them are qualified nurses who are being de-skilled in order to work as nannies, maids and cooks. Rosen adds that the LCP contains a two year minimum contract in which domestic workers must remain living in the home of their employer while remaining virtually on-call 24 hours a day (www.3telus.net/grassrootswomen/index/html). Activities like these only reinforce the idea that women's work in general and mothering more specifically is both devalued and easily replaceable.

In a capitalistic society, the value of the worker and the value of the product are not always in a direct relationship (Rothman, 2004, 19). In many cases the value of the product far exceeds the value of the worker. We can see for instance how designer clothes are valued far more that the child labourers who produce them and this is also true, in many cases, when discussing babies and mothers. Rothman notes (2004, 19) that in modern Western society the most valuable product are healthy white babies and they are valued far more than their mothers-which are often seen as cheap, expendable and untrustworthy. According to Rothman, in this crude outlook, mothers are often simply conceptualized as the necessary labour needed to produce the desirable product (2004, 19). Mothers are seen as the incubators of male chattel and as such, are not afforded agency or autonomy.

A central tenet of the ideology of capitalism is that ultimately, everything is for sale. Biological reproductive functions are not exempt from commodification according to Rothman and she points to the historical use of wet nurses as an early example of this (1989, 42). Today, almost all components of reproduction are for sale. A person can buy not only sperm but eggs, blood and milk provided they are willing to pay the asking price. Rothman argues that under capitalism, mothers' work and bodies become resources out of which babies are made and that in patriarchal societies it is really men's babies that are being made (1989, 65)[4].

Alison J. Clarke (2004) expands on this "everything is for sale" ideology inherent to capitalism by showing how, through the purchasing of particular goods and services, women are able to solidify their identity as mothers. In a "consumer culture", Clarke (pg 55) explains that the "relational process of 'having' a child (is) a social process far more complex than the mere bearing or biological creation of an infant". Clarke contends that consumption has become a more fitting way of understanding reproduction for it is through "the accumulation of goods and gifts pertaining to a new child that a baby and a mother are socially constructed" (2004, 56).

Whether it is decorations for the nursery, maternity clothes or fashionable strollers, capitalism has seeped into every aspect of maternity. Mothers are marked by the brands they choose and the more recognizable the brand, the better the mother is thought to be. Consumerism goes hand in hand with capitalism and as such, mothers often feel pressure to express their level of care for their children through the products

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[4] As this is not a thesis on New Reproductive Technologies (NRT) I am unable to delve into the complexities surrounding this debate. It must be noted, however, that many women have benefited from NRT and as such, its existence is not entirely malevolent.

they buy. The more they care about their children, the more expensive the products mothers are supposed to buy.

Now that I have sketched out how patriarchy and capitalism work, in general, to limit women's subjectivity, I would like to focus more specifically on ways in which these cohorts of oppression affect motherhood. Patriarchs demand that women become mothers in order to raise heirs and have worked in tandem with capitalism to segregate women into the private sphere. Adrienne Rich builds on Rothman's theories to show how patriarchal and capitalist ideologies affect the lived realities of individual women who choose to become mothers. In her groundbreaking book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986), Rich outlines two key ways of thinking about motherhood. Motherhood as experience relates to "the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to her children" whereas the institution of motherhood "aims at ensuring that the potential - and all women - shall remain under male control" (1986, 13, italics in original). For Rich, the institution of motherhood is patriarchy's most effective tool of oppression.

Although feminist scholars and historians may have different views on motherhood and related issues Andrea O'Reilly sees some common ground,

> Feminist historians agree that motherhood is primarily *not* a natural or biological function; rather, it is specifically and fundamentally a cultural practice that is continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and societal factors. As a cultural construction, its meaning varies with time and place (2004, 5, italics in original).

Adrienne Rich certainly subscribes to this constructed notion of motherhood. In her 1986 introduction she reveals that she wanted to "examine motherhood in a social context, as embedded in a political institution" (1986, viii). Motherhood is what it is today as a result

of the social and political forces that have worked purposively to shape it into an

ideology that reinforces the dominant beliefs and opinions of society. For Rich, this is

the institution of motherhood and as such it has,

> ...been a keystone of the most diverse social and political systems. It has withheld over one-half the human species from the decisions affecting their lives; it exonerates men from fatherhood in any authentic sense; it creates the dangerous schism between "private" and "public" life; it calcifies human choices and potentialities. In the most fundamental and bewildering of contradictions, it has alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them (1986, 13, quotations in original).

Although by today's standards the abovementioned statement by Rich could be accused

of being hyperbolic we must not forget that she was writing in an era where intense,

personal narratives formed the basis of much theory.

Rich argues that it is through the institution of motherhood that a woman's status

as childbearer has been made into a major fact of her life (1986, 11). Having a child

signals a woman's official entry into 'real' adulthood according to Rich (1986, 25) and as

such, motherhood becomes the ultimate achievement. Conceiving, bearing and raising

a child is the primary reason for a woman's existence according to patriarchal ideology.

Rich warns that this viewpoint negates any other goals, desires and dreams women may

have and as such, limits their full potential as human beings. She insists that,

"motherhood is one part of female process; it is not an identity for all time" (1986, 37).

Men's identities as fathers are but only one aspect of their personality yet women get

categorized by their identity as mothers.

What is even more troubling to feminist authors like Rich is that the "mother"

identity used to limit women's full potentials is restrictive and narrow in nature.

"Masculine imagination" according to Rich, has polarized women into opposites. They

are either "good", which is understood to be fertile and pure or they are "bad", which is presented as barren and evil (Rich, 1986, 37). In keeping with this, patriarchy presents a monolithic definition of appropriate motherhood. "Natural" mothers are seen as one-dimensional, only gaining gratification and satisfaction through the undying care and nurturance of their children (Rich, 1986, 22). Rich claims that society has come to rely so heavily on the image of the 'natural' mother that it is an unexamined assumption that once women have children they will stay home and not only devote all of their attention to their children but, more importantly, love every minute of it.

No human relationship exists where one person loves the other all of the time yet this is exactly the impossible scenario that has been set up for mothers. Good mothers are said to be those who stay home and lavish their children with attention and care. There is no room in the patriarchal definition of a good mother for a woman with her own identity, separate from her family. Patriarchal ideology demands that once a woman becomes a mother her individual identity is eclipsed. As motherhood is presented as the ultimate fulfillment for women good mothers do not resent the immense emotional, physical and financial effort it takes to successfully raise a child in today's society. In *Mother Outlaws*, Chase and Rogers state,

> We all know the ideal of the good mother. Above all, she is selfless. Her children come before herself and any other need or person or commitment, no matter what. She loves her children unconditionally yet she is careful not to smother them with love and her own needs. She follows the advice of doctors and other experts and she educates herself about child development. She is ever-present in her children's lives when they are young, and when they get older she is home everyday to greet them as they return from school. If she works outside the home, she arranges her job around her children so she can be there for them as much as possible, certainly whenever they are sick or unhappy. The good mother's success is reflected in her children's behaviour - they are well mannered and respectful to others; at the same time they have a strong

sense of independence and self esteem. They grow up to be productive citizens (cited in O'Reilly, 2004, 5).

O'Reilly notes that the above definition refers "to mothering as it is practiced in the patriarchal definition of motherhood" (2004, 5). Patriarchal motherhood, as the dominant ideology, then becomes the mode of motherhood by which all mothers are regulated and judged (O'Reilly, 2004, 5). Feminists have long since written about the contradictions between the way women are supposed to mother and the actual ways they end up mothering. For many mothers, their lived realities prevent them from fulfilling the mandates of patriarchal motherhood (to use O'Reilly's term), while other mothers may consciously decide to embrace alternative modes of mothering such as communal mothering or lesbian mothering (just to name a few). Also implicit in patriarchal motherhood is the associated guilt with not feeling as though you are able to live up to the expectations of the naturally good mother. O'Reilly points out that the,

> guilt and shame women experience in failing to live up to what is, in fact, an impossible ideal is neither accidental nor inconsequential. Rather it is deliberately manufactured and monitored...the current discourse of intensive mothering gives rise to self-doubt, or more specifically, guilt that immobilizes women and robs them of their confidence as both workers and mothers (2004, 10).

One of the strongest features of *Of Woman Born* is Rich's subjective accounts of the day-to-day struggles inherent in mothering in a patriarchal society. We can see through her various diary entries how Rich herself is at odds with the way she actually feels about motherhood and her children and the way she is told she is supposed to feel. In fact, her first chapter is titled *Anger and Tenderness* and we can see her personal struggle in her first diary entry,

> My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence; the murderous alteration between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness...(A)nd I am weak inside from held-in rage... yet at other times I am melted with the sense of their helpless, charming and quite irresistible beauty (1986, 21).

Rich adds that many women like her grew up in a culture where no one discussed the ambivalence of motherhood. She talks of becoming a mother in the "family-centered, consumer-oriented, Freudian-American world of the 1950's" (1986, 25) where everyone spoke about the child-to-be while the mother was overlooked. It was as if her feelings did not matter; why should her feelings be addressed-after all, she was just fulfilling her natural destiny. She admits that she, herself, had bought into this notion of biological destiny and says, "I had no idea what *I* wanted, what *I* could or could not choose. I only knew that to have a child was to assume adult womanhood to the full, to prove myself, to be 'like other women'" (1986, 25, italics in original).

Patriarchal definitions of appropriate mothering fail to take into account the diverse and varied circumstances that surround each woman's journey into motherhood. Women, as mothers, are offered a solitary way of thinking, feeling and acting and as a result those who, for whatever reason, do not 'measure up' are subject to external and internal sanctions. Patriarchal ideologies influence cultural prescriptiveness about images of "good" mothers and as a result, women who mother under diverse circumstances are marginalized and stigmatized.

Patriarchal definitions of appropriate motherhood are also used to reinforce narrow definitions of femininity according to Rich. Myths surrounding motherhood become the basis for which femininity itself is measured. Since being a successful mother is akin to being a successful woman, mothers who fail to achieve superior status

are doubly stigmatized. They are not only bad mothers but are, more importantly, failed women. The discourse surrounding women who choose to remain childless reinforces this unbreakable connection between childbearing and femininity. Women who, for whatever reason, choose not to have kids are viewed as selfish, immature or emotionally flawed. The only 'acceptable' reason for a woman not having a child is infertility and with all of the advances made in reproductive technology over the last few decades this 'out' is quickly disappearing. Society cannot seem to separate motherhood from womanhood.

Rich's theories are grounded in intellectual insights and highly personal narratives and as such, are a way of collectively empowering women. According to Emma Gross, Rich's work makes an important contribution to the feminist thought on motherhood because by choosing to focus on the constructed nature of the *institution* of motherhood, Rich recognizes the possibility for *mothering* to be empowering to women (1998, 269, italics in original). Before *Of Woman Born* was written, much of the feminist work on motherhood tended to focus on the negative aspects: mothers themselves were attacked for colluding with oppressive forces of patriarchy. Gross notes that early feminist writers were highly critical of the choices women made and often criticized their own mothers who they deemed to be "complicit in their own oppression" (1998, 269). The result, according to Gross, was a dismissal of the topic in general. Feminist spirits had been dampened by all the negative writing and it was not until Rich distinguished between the institution of motherhood and the more empowered act of mothering that feminists began to remove the blame from individual mothers.

Rich's focus allowed women to see that motherhood was not, by nature, oppressive. She claimed that her book was "not an attack on the family or on mothering, *except as defined and restricted under patriarchy* (Rich, 1989, 14, italics in original). In other words, Rich was broadening the scope of motherhood to include a critique of the varying social and political forces that worked together to limit the identity of women as mothers. Rich is clear to point out that although she advocates for the destruction of the institution of motherhood this is not synonymous with the destruction of motherhood (1986, 280),

> To destroy the institution is not to abolish motherhood, it is to release the creation and sustenance of life into the same realm of decision, struggle, surprise, imagination and conscious intelligence, as any difficult, but freely chosen work (Rich, 1986, 280).

Andrea O'Reilly refers to the type of mothering advocated by Rich as *empowered mothering* (2004, 12,). According to O'Reilly,

> (T)he theory and practice of empowered mothering recognizes that both mothers and children benefit when the mother lives her life and practices mothering from a position of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy (2004, 12).

By reconnecting women to the power and potential of their bodies, Rich was able to restore a pride in motherhood that had been eroded by patriarchal influence. According to Rich, "female possibility has been massacred on the site of motherhood under patriarchy" (1989, 13). Rich's work not only infused motherhood with a sense of badly-needed pride and dignity but, more importantly, allowed for a alternative ideology to be created. Women were now better able to mother under their own terms and by doing so were able to actively resist the oppressive forces of patriarchy.

Solidarity in Sisterhood?

Feminists, to say the least, are divided in their beliefs about motherhood. There have been contentious debates about the significance of motherhood from within the women's movement. Some feminists believe that motherhood is the ultimate acceptance of patriarchal oppression whereas others believe that it is through motherhood that women access a sense of power. Many of those involved in the early women's movement claimed that the ideology of the movement itself not only ignored the needs of mothers but, more importantly, treated individual mothers with active contempt (Umansky, 1996, 1). It must be noted that when I speak of the women's movement I am referring to the mainstream North American movement of the 1960's and 1970's. I will refer to the "Third Wave" when discussing more contemporary forms of feminism.

Betty Friedan's landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), introduced many women to the "problem with no name". The 'problem' according to Friedan was "the psychic distress experienced by women who had no public careers and were immured in domestic concerns" (Humm, 1992, 182). Women were bound by the oppressive ties of marriage into the "cult of domesticity" and as a result, they were often isolated and alone (Umansky, 1996, 18). Radical feminists rallied around this contempt of the nuclear family and in doing so, traditional marriage and the toils of domestic life became the root of all evil. The Cleveland branch of WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) even distributed a flyer on Mother's Day entitled, "Bury Mother's Day". Their message was clear and to the point,

> Today, one day of the year, America is celebrating Motherhood, in home...church...restaurant...candy shop...flower store...The other 364 days she preserves the apple pie of the family life and togetherness, and protects the sanctity of male ego and profit. She lives through her

husband and children...she is sacrificed on the altar of reproduction...She is damned to the world or dreary domesticity by day, and legal rape by night...She is convinced that happiness and her lost identity can be removed by buying - more and more and more and more (Umansky, 1996, 38).

The route to salvation for women was thought to be, according to this ideology, lesbian relationships. It was only through the rejection of all things male that women could finally be free, and since babies were a common result of marriage and domestic life, they too began to signify women's oppression. Although Radical feminists were largely concerned with the oppressive nature of the traditional nuclear family one could argue that in this case the baby was indeed thrown out with the bath water.

There were, however, many feminists who had children and for these women ideas expressed by Radical feminists were in and of themselves, oppressive and oversimplified. Mothers in the women's movement tended to focus on the patriarchal appropriation of motherhood and by doing so were able to focus on the positive aspects of motherhood and a more pluralistic framework of liberation, particularly the bonds not only between women and nature but between women themselves (Umansky, 1996, 2). For these women, motherhood was seen not only as a vehicle for individual empowerment but a way to restructure traditional expectations and to foster new kinds of families (Umansky, 1996, 30). Feminist mothers taught their children egalitarian modes of parenting which included reducing the gender bias present in mainstream society.

Childless members of the women's movement were forced to take note of their mothering sisters because many meetings went well into the night. Childcare was a

perennial issue and provisions had to be made for mothers in the movement. For one

pregnant member of the San Francisco movement this could not come fast enough.

> The women's movement isn't only for bright, young middle-class women who have decided never to marry or have children...A movement which vomits at the sight of a pregnant woman or a child leaves out quite a few sisters...I somehow can't believe that children are inherently bad, or that having a child is necessarily a sinful thing to do. It is because this society refuses to accept any responsibility for those children that things are fucked up. Who can I turn to now sisters?...I have been so much as told that sisters will not dig my "bringing the kid around to bother them" and will have no part of that child or my life with that child (Umansky, 1996, 35).

This is not to say that mothers were suddenly welcomed into the movement with open

arms. Suspicion and anger continued to surround women who chose to become

mothers. Many feminists continued to believe that while the marriage contract may have

codified women's oppression it was childbearing that in fact cemented it (Umansky,

1996, 39). As Umansky points out however, this was not the majority position. According

to her, "most of the influential feminist groups critiqued the institutions of motherhood

and marriage for the limits they placed on a woman's life choices, but they were careful

to avoid reviling wives or mothers as people" (1996, 43).

Motherhood has not vanished from the agendas of contemporary feminism; in

fact, the topic is as hotly debated as ever. Young women who came of age in the 1980's

make up the majority of this current movement, also known as the Third Wave

(www.3rdwwwave.com). The Third Wave movement began in the early 1990's and the

focus is more on challenging and expanding common definitions of gender and

sexuality. In the early years of the Third Wave motherhood was something feminists

positioned themselves against as many young activists did not yet have children and

were attempting to define themselves against the identities of their mothers (Thompson, 2006, para 3). Thompson points out that this position is changing as many Third Wavers are beginning to navigate the waters of motherhood for themselves. According to her, "young feminists have shown an increased awareness of and interest in their own subject position as mothers" (2006, para 3).

Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender co-edited *Breeder: Real-Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers* (2001). This is a collection of stories, poems and essays written by "real women who came up during the hippie and punk era (discussing) what it means to be 'mama' here and now" (Gore, xiii in Gore and Lavender, 2001). Gore claims that women of her generation have "more choices than our grandmothers ever dreamed of, and less support" and goes on to say that "(A)s the daughters of the 1970s feminist movement, we cherish our reproductive freedom. And as willing breeders, we refuse to be oppressed by the institution of motherhood" (2001, xiii). She concludes the introduction by saying that, " we choose to have our kids *while*, not *instead* of, following our dreams" (Gore, xiii in Gorse and Lavender, 2001, italics in original).

Whether the writers in *Breeder* are tackling issue of class, race, sexuality, or ability, they are all effectively challenging "the assumed normalcy of the hetero-normative, two parent family" (Thompson, 2006, para 7). A single mother who shares an apartment with another single mother states,

> While the four of us dance around the living room in circles, our tiaras bouncing, skirts flying and bracelets jangling, the neighbor downstairs knocking on the ceiling and screaming for us to please stop stomping, I think to myself, we are re-creating family (Gall, 100 in Gore and Lavender, 2001).

The focus for many Third Wave feminists is on choice. The choice to make reproductive choices and or to follow unconventional paths to motherhood is theirs and this is celebrated. Some critics have pointed out that focusing too intently on *choice* "does the ideological work of distinguishing legitimate choice-making mothers from 'bad' choice-making mothers" (Thompson, 2006, para 2). I believe that focusing on choice allows women to gain a sense of agency they may have otherwise not been afforded. Rather than focusing on the particular choice a mother makes the fact that she made one is what matters. We cannot judge the actions of one mother against another. To do this ignores the lived realities of mothers everywhere.

Conclusion

For proponents of motherhood and arch-critics of heterosexual women who celebrated, or at least participated in, childbirth and childrearing, one terrain survived - pervasive myths of what it means to be a mother, both personally and for the wider society. The next chapter centres on some of the most pervasive motherhood myths. Myths of motherhood are a two-fold detriment to society. They are primarily hazardous to individual women as they limit full participation in the public sphere. Secondly, they are dangerous to society as a whole. A society's greatest benefit is to have all members of its constituency living out their full potential. When motherhood myths are perpetuated one-half of the populace remains stagnant. It therefore benefits society as a whole to analyze and dismantle the restrictive myths of motherhood that have allowed the ideology of patriarchy to permeate generations.

CHAPTER THREE
Myths of Motherhood

Introduction

In this chapter I outline specific characteristics associated with "good" mothers and show how these characteristics have changed according to the given needs of (patriarchal) society. It is my contention that motherhood myths exist as a tool to perpetuate patriarchal dominance. It is necessary to outline some of the most pervasive myths surrounding motherhood as this establishes the framework of my exploratory research. To see if contemporary mothers feel constrained by restrictive motherhood myths it is essential to outline and define exactly what 'myths' I am talking about. For the purpose of this paper, myths are conceptualized as fictions or half-truths that function to form part of an ideology. Furthermore, it is through the retelling of myths that certain narratives become accepted traditions in society. Initially focusing on pre-industrial Europe (and North America to a lesser degree) allows for the historical context of both motherhood and the family to be set. Industrialization did not just bring about social and technological changes, it altered the makeup of the family and as a result, I will show how society's perceptions of mothering, family and children were transformed. Social forces continued to work to define the parameters of appropriate mothering well beyond the Industrial Revolution. After each World War, women's roles were reevaluated and this often meant a return to "traditional family values".

Mothering gains societal importance after a war as the focus shifts from defending a nation to rebuilding it. We also see a renewed focus on the importance of

mothering after periods of economic hardship. When there are fewer jobs to be had, women are pushed out of the public sphere and are encouraged to realize their inherent maternal abilities. Mothering is one of the most malleable of all ideologies in Western society. When it is deemed that society needs a greater focus on mothering mothers themselves are worshipped and encouraged but as soon as society needs the labour of women for something else, mothering all but vanishes as one of society's greatest resources.

From Fields to Factories

Prior to industrialization in Europe, the family was the main site of economic production and consumption. As soon as children were old enough to be of any use they were put to work and as a result they were treated with regard to their future earning potential (Hays, 1996, 23). There were no special clothes, foods or laws that pertained to children; they were viewed simply as small adults. Hays notes that "parents have always feared their infants and small children somewhat...(as they are) strange and fragile beings" (1996, 22). Prior to the eighteenth-century in Europe and the twentieth-century in America, children were in fact, routinely conceived of as potentially deviant, sickly, harmful, demonic and animalistic (Hays, 1996, 22). To protect these beings from hurting themselves or others, babies and small children were routinely wrapped in restrictive swaddling clothes, administered opium when unruly, and whipped when all else failed (Hays, 1996, 23). Mothers and fathers put up with their children until they were old enough to be of use to the family business. While mothers, fathers and children worked in tandem to ensure the success of the family, patriarchal rule was

supreme and mothers, like children, were viewed as subordinates. Fathers made the rules and it was the job of mothers to blindly accept and enforce them.

One could argue that childrearing practices around this time developed out of parental anxiety more than anything else. As mentioned earlier, babies and small children were more feared than loved and as a result, many families did not participate at all in the raising of their children. In the middle and upper classes babies were sent out to wet nurses and small children were shipped off to boarding schools. It was not uncommon for infants to die of starvation, disease or neglect whilst in the care of wet nurses and for those who did manage to survive, abandonment was often their fate. Many children sent off to wet nurses were never reunited with their parents (Hays, 1996, 23).

Speaking of childcare in general, Hays concludes, "the attention to children that was absolutely required to maintain their physical health was considered an onerous task preferably left to someone else" (1996, 23). Looking back to pre-Industrial times, we can see that women were indeed the primary caregivers of most children but it is important to note that this had nothing to do with ostensibly innate qualities which better suited them for raising children. After children, women were simply the most subordinate members of society and as such, were relegated to the denigrated position of child minder. It is interesting to note that the more "important" children of aristocrats were raised primarily by men (Hays, 1996, 23). To show off their wealth and prestige an upper class family would hire a male to watch their children. Implicit in this is the distrust of women. Women were considered morally inferior to men and this threatened the upper class way of life. Rich, influential citizens wanted to ensure that their heirs were

well educated and morally intact. This was much too serious of a job to be entrusted to a wanton, immature woman.

This mode of parenting remained relatively consistent until the beginning of the eighteenth-century. It was at this time that Europe was beginning to experience changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Factories and offices replaced the family home as the centre of production and perceptions of childhood and motherhood dramatically changed. Nation building was also one of the key political initiatives during the eighteenth- century and as a result, the state now had a vested interest in lowering infant mortality rates; children were seen as future soldiers of the empire (Badinter, 1980, 118). The burgeoning empires of Western Europe valued children not only for their future commercial value but for their military potential as well (Badinter, 1980, 124-5). To ensure a healthy army and a successful future the state strategically focused on the early stages of infancy, when most babies died (Badinter, 1980, 118).

A strategic campaign was launched by the French state, for example, in which women were praised for their innate mothering abilities. Badinter notes that this early campaign consisted of three separate streams: economic, philosophical and practical (1980, 120). Economically, children were important sources of labour and the focus was on ensuring as many future labourers as possible. Mothers could thereby contribute to nation building by ensuring the sustained health of their children. According to Badinter (1980, 132), the philosophical argument relied heavily on the restructuring of language that had previously been used to describe motherhood. The language of duty, responsibility, and sacrifice was replaced by one of equality, love, and happiness (Badinter, 1980, 132). The final arsenal in the state's assault on mothers focused on the

practicality of mothering. Badinter states that this argument was directed exclusively at women as it emphasized the social value of mothering (1980, 120). Women were told that motherhood was the way for them to secure a new sense of independence and importance.

Mothers were now praised for their innate ability to nurture and protect their children. It was a mother's duty to stay home and ensure that future generations of soldiers and workers grew up strong and healthy. It must be noted that the state campaign targeted bourgeois and aristocratic women almost exclusively as working-class women did not have the option of staying home. Hays (1996, 25) refers to the mothering ideology that emerged in Western Europe during the 18th century as "intensive mothering" and points out that the 'discovery' of childhood innocence was an integral factor in this development. The cloak of fear that had previously shrouded childhood in anxiety was lifted and children were now seen as innocent vehicles of redemption. Mothers were increasingly valorized as a result of this increased focus on childhood innocence, so much so that Hays notes that, "parents went to great lengths to prolong the period of childhood innocence, and affection suffused the mother-child relationship" (1996, 29). By the end of the nineteenth-century, Western Europe had synonymously associated childrearing with motherhood (Hays, 1996, 29).

To best protect her child a mother needed to stay home; away from the stresses of the outside world. As Industrialization expanded, so too did society's fears. Evil and sin were no longer thought to lurk inside one's children; they were now to be found in the alleys of the newly created cities. As children needed to be protected from the harsh realities of street life and servants were said to corrupt moral development, the solution

seemed clear: mothers had to stay home to raise and protect their children. The family home was now seen as the safest place for society's most precious members and as such it was a mother's duty to remain well protected in the private sphere. Staying home in itself was not all that was required of these new mothers however. The success of a child's development depended on the strength of the mother-child bond and, as such, a 'good' mother was expected to lavish all of her attention and care on her child.

As the dominant mothering ideology changed, so too did specific childrearing practices. Badinter points to the new desire for mothers to breastfeed their children as one of the first signs of this change (1980, 169). As mentioned before, it was common for mothers to send their babies to wet nurses; mothers simply could not be bothered to be "latched" to their screaming, fussy babies. Swaddling clothes were no longer commonplace as babies were seen as needing the freedom to move and experience their environment free from restrictive clothing (Badinter, 1980, 171). Clean linens, daily baths and special baby foods were but a few of the tasks advocated under this new ideology. Mothers now spent more time organizing and establishing routines for their babies than they had ever spent on themselves in the past. Despite questionable sanitary living conditions, mothers were expected to provide immaculate conditions for their newborns. This presented numerous problems for working-class mothers who lacked the facilities or income and were thus, unable to adhere to this new mode of mothering. Although the list of specific tasks was long and diverse, the ideology of intensive mothering centred on one constant - the selfless mother.

Restrictive childrearing practices such as those mentioned above allowed mothers the freedom to actively participate in the family economy. Despite the

unyielding attempts put forth by the state, the ideology of intensive mothering was not embraced by all women. Working-class mothers, for example, did not have the luxury of choosing whether or not to adopt the childrearing practices advocated by the proponents of this new mothering ideology. For working-class mothers life was a daily struggle in which children continued to be seen as an obstacle. Mothers of the newly developed middle-class could afford to devote all of their time and energy to their children and as a result, were some of the most fervent supporters of intensive mothering (Badinter, 1980, 183). Economic security did not guarantee a mother's acceptance of this new ideology however. Many upper-class women adamantly rejected the ideology of intensive mothering. Refusing to adhere to the restrictive guidelines of intensive mothering was seen as one way for upper-class women to distinguish themselves from the "petty bourgeoisie" (Badinter, 1980, 185).

Implicit in the ideology of intensive mothering was that mothers were now expected to be the keepers of the home and hearth and, more importantly, the keepers of morality as well (Hays, 1996, 30). Hays notes that by the second half of the 19th century the dominant ideology of appropriate mothering was a mix of "pervasive sentimentality, purity, piety and patriotism" (1996, 29). The 'tender years doctrine' developed by the courts in the later half of the nineteenth-century was one of the first legal statutes to formally recognize the importance of mothers (Boyd, 2003, 41).

The tender years doctrine stated that a child was in need of their mother until the age of seven yet Boyd notes that the entrenched protections were deemed null and void if it was proven that a mother acted immorally (2003, 55). Boyd shows, for example, that if a mother deserted her children any special rights or guarantees afforded under the

doctrine were nullified (2003, 55). No attention was given, however, to special circumstances that may have contributed to a mother leaving the family home. Domestic abuse and adulterous husbands were overlooked in favor of mother blaming; the father's morality was moot. The courts were primarily concerned with the morality of the mother and furthermore, were not shy in admitting this. Over 200 years later we can still see this insistence on a mother's morality. Lord Denning, in deciding the 1962 case Re L. formally stated,

> [T]o be a good mother involves not only looking after the children, but making and keeping a home for them with their father...In so far as she herself by her conduct broke up that home, she is not a good mother (Boyd, 2003, 62).

The morality of mothers is constructed along many different lines and society's insistence on maternal morality has not vanished over the years. Romano (1998) addresses the issue of interracial marriage in her article and shows how American courts have historically responded by denying custody to white women who remarried black men after a divorce. Romano notes that judges often perceived racial transgressions as gender transgressions and custody was denied not only because these women married black men but in so doing they demonstrated that they were not good mothers (1998, 231). Moreover, a willingness to transgress racial boundaries was proof of a mother's greater moral default (Romano, 1998, 231). Judges contended that moral mothers would not be willing to sacrifice their children's upbringing to satisfy their own selfish desires. The courts were not reticent, stating that, "innocent children should not be forced to suffer the sins of their mother" (Romano, 1998, 237).

Sexual immorality seems to be one of the most consistent themes in addressing whether or not a mother is fit to raise her own children. Wolf (1997, 159) points out that Western culture has had a history of equating motherhood with a loss of sexuality. Buskins (2002, 35) adds that mothers are not thought to be sexual beings; instead, she insists that they are supposed to be prudent and to platonically love all. Maternity is desexualizing and this has significant repercussions for women who refuse to surrender their womanhood to their motherhood. In ancient Rome, divorcing mothers were forbidden to engage in any sexual activity and if it was proven that they disobeyed this order they not only lost custody of their children but also were often stripped naked and banished from their village (Wolf, 1997, 76). Addressing more contemporary times, Reich notes that dominant ideologies of ideal motherhood are used to demand chastity from mothers (2002, 46). In her article, Reich discusses the implications of sexual behaviour on a mother's interaction with Child Protective Services (CPS) in the United States. Sexuality is often used as a "litmus test" for a mother's level of commitment to her children and a mother should demonstrate to CPS that her children are the centre of her life, proving she is prudent, chaste and moral (Reich, 2002, 46). According to CPS, mothers who engage in sexual behaviour with anyone other that the father of their children are deemed to be selfish, immoral, and unfit to parent (Reich, 2002, 50).

In *The Myths of Motherhood* (1994), Shari Thurer analyzes twentieth-century Western motherhood, breaking it into three distinct areas. *Scientific Mother* is the term she uses to describe motherhood from 1900-1940 where the "rise of science contributed to mother's fall from grace" (1994, 225). It was in the early years of the twentieth-century that many lay people were beginning to be exposed to the wonders of scientific discovery. A rash of astonishing scientific discoveries were made during these years

and whether it was electricity, telephones or automobiles, they all contributed to the betterment of everyday life. Thurer notes that servants were no longer readily available and as such, the invention of labour-saving devices dramatically improved many people's quality of life. It only followed then that if science made everyday life easier it must make child rearing easier as well.

Motherhood underwent a technological facelift in the early years of the twentieth-century as mothers were armed with thermometers, growth charts and schedules (Thurer, 1994, 226). Rigorous attention to detail was all that was needed to successfully raise a child. Moreover, mothers were now seen as professionals. These "details" that mothers were supposed to follow however were arbitrarily decided upon by male experts and as a result, the Scientific mother was faced with a double-edged sword. She may have been endowed with the gift of professionalism yet she was still scrutinized by experts who were continually second-guessing her own innate, refined abilities. The maternal instinct that had been her gift only years earlier was now not to be trusted. The word of the expert reigned supreme in this scientific era. Thurer notes that upgrading motherhood to a bona fide profession did not advance the status of women but rather, "provided females with a calling in which they could excel without being threatening to males" (1994, 234). Moreover, Thurer states that under the ideology of scientific motherhood mom herself became obsolete (1994, 237). If all she had to do to successfully raise a child was to follow the guidelines determined by experts then she was in essence, no more than a robot. Mothers as a distinct category received no special attention nor were they praised or rewarded for the actual work they did; they were merely following the rules.

Empathetic Motherhood dominated the scene between the years 1940-1980 according to Thurer (1994, 247). In the early 1940's the West was at war and this meant that many men were off fighting for freedom. Women stepped in out of necessity and took over where many men left off. Factories needed workers and families needed food. Women became major players in the public sphere and as all labour was needed mothers were not exempt from this newfound employment. It is ironic that it took a World War for women to gain full access to the public sphere. Unfortunately, this access was only temporary. As soon as the war ended many women were once again forced back into the home.

Men returned home from overseas and expected to return to the jobs they left behind. For this to happen, it was necessary to lure women back into the home. Mothering ideologies had to change though as according to the tenets of scientific motherhood anyone could successfully raise a child provided they followed the specific guidelines set out by childcare experts. In her historical analysis of mothering ideologies, Thurer notes how childrearing goals of the late 1940's and early 1950's no longer focused on repressing the natural inclinations of infants but rather encouraged children to have free reign (1994, 248). Children's spontaneous impulses were seen as natural and were no longer feared. The individual child was seen as knowing what was best for them and as such it was a mother's job to recognize and support these individual needs. According to Thurer,

> Mother's job was to respond to baby's emotional needs (in effect, to read baby's mind), gratify its wants, tolerate its regressions, stimulate its cognitive development, and, above all, to feel personally fulfilled in carrying this out. The overriding emotion was (and is) empathy (1994, 248, parentheses in original).

Mothers were expected to live for their children and implicit in this was an unconditional devotion to the home. Mothers were not only expected to lavish all their time and attention on their children, in their "down time" they were expected to keep a neat and tidy home. This was all part and parcel of "good mothering" whereby women did not have the time to work outside the home. Cultural icons of the time reinforced this notion that a mother was fulfilled by all that her home offered. North America watched as June Cleaver, the mother character in *Leave it to Beaver*, not only cleaned her house and doted over her boys, she did it all wearing a string of pearls and a big smile. At this time, the West was reeling with fear around the Cold War and this also contributed to an increased desire to keep women in the home. Containment and protection were sentiments society identified with and as such, the home was identified as a safe haven. Bomb shelters were present in many backyards and in order to keep the future generation safe and protected mothers needed to stay home and vigilantly watch over their children. This mode of mothering remained fairly consistent until the late 1960's.

The revolutionary movements that swept Western society towards the beginning of the 1970's contributed to a profound reevaluation of motherhood. Individuals were beginning to take a stand against many of society's inequalities and as such, many women began to question the underlying assumptions inherent to patriarchal mothering. As touched on earlier, a byproduct of the women's movement was that some women rejected motherhood altogether. Thurer has dubbed the period from 1980-1990 as *Reinventing the Myth* (1994, 288).

From Factories to Fear

The 1980's were characterized by backlash and some pockets of extreme conservatism. Moreover, this was the decade where the women's movement was said to have 'reaped what they sowed". Many mothers had left the home and were now working full-time jobs. Rather than redefine mothering to include more active fathering or shared parenting in general, dominant mothering ideologies now insisted a mother could have it all. This was the decade of the 'supermom'. Women were expected to work full time and then come home and take care of the children and home. As consumerism flourished during this time as well, there was an increase in specialized toys and products geared towards maximizing a child's development (Thurer, 1994, 296). Mothers were now responsible for buying the right products to ensure that their children got the best education possible. Good mothers invested in their children's future by buying the right toys/books/videos/etc.

Mothers were in a no-win situation in the 1980's when it came to employment outside of the home. Not everyone had children in school and even if they did, many had to work long after their child was done for the day. Others had small children who needed care during the day. These women were unable to even try to live up to the standards of the supermom. Their only alternative (provided they had no willing family to help out) was to place their children in daycare. This provided even more fuel for the antifeminist fodder. A moral panic overtook the 1980's and daycare centres were at the centre of it all.

Richardson et al (1991) assert that America experienced a "Satanism Scare" in the late 1980's and demonstrates how daycare centres were often at the centre of this

controversy. According to the media, Satanists were preying on daycare centres, trolling for their next innocent victims. Everyone from Geraldo Rivera to the local news anchor was airing stories dealing with the ritual satanic abuse of children in daycare centres (Richardson et al, 1991,12). Douglas and Michaels add that "epidemic" appeared to be journalist's favorite word during the 1980's (2004, 88). There was danger everywhere and implicit in this was the notion that it was a mother's duty to stay home and protect her children. The nation's children were at risk because mom had gotten selfish; she wanted it all. The conservative right was there to let everyone know that equality for women was far too costly for children (Douglas and Michaels, 2004, 107).

Another epidemic swept America in the late 1980's and early 1990's and this too was attributed to greedy women. "Crack babies" were suffering everywhere according to the evening news (Douglas and Michaels, 2004, 153). Who can forget the gruesome images of tiny babies (mainly black) shaking uncontrollably, crying out in what we were told was constant pain? Police often raided dilapidated houses in poor black neighbourhoods and the disturbing images were shown to us on the evening news. Douglas and Michaels claim "the crack baby epidemic served as the most powerful metaphor for motherhood poisoned by the excesses of the 1970's and 1980's" (2004, 153). It was a mother's self-indulgent lifestyle that lead to the bulk of society's ills, especially where children were concerned. Moral panics like the ones surrounding daycare abuse and crack babies contribute to a vigilante culture in which mothers have to be carefully policed as they are potentially their child's worst enemy (Douglas and Michaels, 2004, 170).

The fact that mothers were at the centre of a number of moral panics reveals a lot about the nature of society in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Stanley Cohen coined the term "moral panic" in 1972. It refers to,

> ...those processes whereby members of a society and culture become 'morally sensitized' to the challenges and menaces posed to 'their' accepted values and ways of life, by the activities of groups defined as deviant. The process underscores the importance of the mass media in providing, maintaining and 'policing' the available frameworks and definitions of deviance, which structure both public awareness of, and attitudes towards, social problems (O'Sullivan et al, 1994, 186).

Conservatives believed that unconventional mothers threatened to displace power imbalances that had remained fairly consistent (and geared towards their interests) throughout the years. As such, we can see how emancipated mothers were seen as blameworthy for a host of social problems.

Conclusion

Dominant mothering ideologies demand a relinquishment-or diminishing-of one's individuality. Sexuality is not the only aspect of a woman's personality that she is forced to relinquish upon becoming a mother however. Mothers are not permitted to exhibit anger, aggression, resentment, jealousy or any other trait that detracts from their caring, nurturing self.

Caplan (1998,128) contends that the more a given group is devalued, the easier it is to target its members as scapegoats. Motherhood has undoubtedly been devalued since its "official inception" in the eighteenth-century and we can see how this has lead, over the years, to the punishment of mothers for almost all of society's ills. I agree with Caplan that the act of mother-blaming allows society to pretend as though it cares about

children without having to change any of the social/economic/political circumstances that may have contributed to the "problems" in the first place (1998, 128). In blaming mothers for the wrongs of their children society does not have to address any of the issues that may be at the root of the problems. Issues like poverty and domestic abuse go largely unnoticed while blame is surreptitiously shifted from society to the individual mother.

It benefits dominant sections of society to blame and label individual mothers as bad. Patriarchal power inequalities are maintained while capitalism is free to flourish. Implicit in the definition of appropriate mothering are definitions of appropriate femininity. Qualities such as passivity, docility and asexuality are used to define good mothers and in doing so, are superimposed onto women in general. Good mothers become the representative of ideal women.

More and more, women are refusing to be pigeonholed into narrow definitions of appropriate motherhood. Despite the pervasive nature of dominant mothering ideologies modes of resistance do exist. A Foucauldian analysis of power and resistance is appropriate in addressing the ways in which women refuse to conform to the constricting nature of mainstream mothering. For Foucault, power is not monolithically held, it is something negotiated by various groups and as such, exists at varying levels at varying times. Sawicki interprets Foucault's theory of power in her analysis of mothers and new reproductive technologies. She notes that, "individuals and groups do not possess power but rather occupy various and shifting positions in this network of relations - positions of power and resistance" (1999, 191).

In decentralizing the notion of power one is free to locate and occupy multiple sites of resistance. Foucault's approach to the analysis of power expands the arena within which women may collectively confront, conceptualize, and try to change the character of their lives. Just because one may feel powerless in certain situations this does not preclude them from exerting power in others. Resistance occurs in the pockets of life where women find themselves powerful. Not all women occupy the same social, economic or political status and as a result, their modes of resistance differ.

The ideology of appropriate motherhood is no doubt pervasive and resilient. Values over 300 years old continue to provide a basis upon which modern mothers are judged. It benefits the system of patriarchy to confine women to the private sphere and as a result, the dominant mothering ideology remains relatively constant. Many mothers, however, refuse to be complacent and continue to challenge these archaic ideals. Patriarchal conceptions of motherhood are undoubtedly weakened as more and more women struggle to mother in their own way.

In the following chapter I address the findings of my exploratory study to see whether those who mother in contemporary Western society feel the need to resist or embrace patriarchal definitions of appropriate mothering.

CHAPTER FOUR
In Their Own Words:
Interviews with Eight Greater Vancouver Mothers

Introduction

Although there is no shortage of material dealing with motherhood, so much of

what is written and known about this subject has not come from mothers themselves.

Many authorities purport to speak both for mothers and about mothering yet ironically

the voices of the true authorities are often left out. Amy Rossiter addresses this

discrepancy in her research on mothering and the perpetuation of patriarchy. She

demonstrates that the knowledge often created by experts pressures women to comply

with a narrow and unrealistic definition of appropriate motherhood. According to

Rossiter,

> ...it was clear... that images of "mothers", when produced by experts,
> come to define mothering-that is, to lay claim to all that can be said about
> mothering, to become final statements of how mothers *naturally* are. This
> process leaves mothers attempting to relate their experiences to such
> images, rather than themselves making images which conform to their
> concrete experiences (1988, 17, quotations and italics in original).

In Western society great emphasis is placed on the written word and other

experiences by so-called 'experts'. The knowledge they in turn produce contributes to

the cultural understanding of a given subject. Motherhood is one of many areas where

'experts' produce knowledge, often without consulting the immediate participants. By the

second decade of the twentieth century "the weight of expert opinion had it that all

details of the home life...could be successfully taught outside the home by experts in the

schools" (Ehrenreich and English, 2005, 235). Experts present themselves as well educated, experienced, objective and unbiased, yet Ehrenreich and English (2005, xii) show how, "whether coming from physicians, psychologists, or more marginal professions like domestic science, the advice all pointed women towards domesticity".

Mothers have rarely been acknowledged as central to the production of discourse surrounding motherhood. Mothers have traditionally been presented as examples or object lessons of a given theory and have generally not stood as experts in their own right. The idea that mothers are skilled authorities due to their extensive practical experience is often overlooked. We can therefore see how mothers are left to fit themselves into pre-determined theories about motherhood. Unfortunately for many mothers, they just do not fit and this can lead to feelings of low self-worth, guilt and frustration. Kitzinger (1978, 34) points out that, "mothering can itself make some women feel very insecure". In school and in work we are taught to be both task oriented and to measure our successes in terms of a finished product. Kitzinger asserts that motherhood is not like this as the needs of babies and small children are ever-changing (1978, 34). Just when you think you have something figured out your baby's needs and your strategy no longer works. Kitzinger points out that, "after having a baby a woman confronts enormous emotional challenges while simultaneously facing physical work that may be harder than any she has tackled before" (1994, 3). She adds that, "if at times you feel completely unqualified for motherhood because you loose emotional control and...wonder why you ever had this baby, you are not alone" (1994, 4). According to Kitzinger, mothers in Western cultures often feel guilty and she attributes this to the existence of "professional experts who, often have no personal experience of caring for

children twenty-four hours a day (who) tell mothers what they ought to do, and even how

they should feel" (1994, 4). In speaking to mothers everywhere, Kitzinger notes,

> There always seems to be other mothers who are coping much better
> than we are, too. They are better organized, more contented, always
> consistent, calm, and understanding. Their babies sleep four hours at a
> stretch from the very beginning, wake, feed, play, and then sleep again.
> They have a regular routine. We are in a state of chaos (1994, 4).

Adjusting to motherhood can be very frustrating and can lead some women to feel as

though they are failing the mothering game.

By providing a venue in which mothers speak for themselves I am able to

present an exploratory account of what it means to mother in a still-patriarchal society.

There are many ways to mother and through the exploratory findings in this chapter I

hope to challenge a one-dimensional definition of appropriate motherhood. Patrice

DiQuinzio states that focusing on the 'experience' of mothering,

> ...allows for a greater recognition of the complexities and ambivalence in
> mothering as this does not presuppose a singular universal motive for
> women's becoming mothers or a singular and universal response on the
> part of women to mothering (1999, 207).

Mothering has been venerated and devalued through patriarchy's repeated

insistence on its naturalness and/or instinctiveness and it is through the act of

interviewing that I counter this assumption, seeking a "more nuanced account of

maternal subjectivity" (DiQuinzio, 1999, 207) by focusing on the "intellectual and

cognitive aspects of mothering" (DiQuinzio, 1999, 208). To combat patriarchal

ideologies one must theorize motherhood such that difference is not only recognized but

also appreciated. I present each mother as an authority figure in her own right and do

not judge the actions of one against the other. It is important to note that individuals

mother according to a particular set of circumstances and because of this, we must be sure to respect and acknowledge the uniqueness of each situation.

Reinharz and Chase (2003, 74) claim that, "the interviewing of women is not a 'one-size fits all' type of activity". Along with paying attention to the intersections of class, race, and gender, researchers must be aware that different groups of women may present diverse ideas about "the way (they) talk to strangers or the way (they) think about research" (Reinharz and Chase, 2003, 74). It is important to keep these key points in mind because even though I am a woman this does not mean I am going to be able to build a better rapport[5] with my interviewees and therefore uncover 'better' information than a male interviewer would be able to.

Researchers must keep in mind that interviews are formulated exchanges. They are not natural conversations, no matter how much rapport has been established. That said, as a feminist researcher, I worked hard to increase the amount of comfort and trust my interviewees felt. I did not want them to feel as though I was the one asking the questions and they were the ones simply answering them. I was careful to let each woman know that my questions were only meant to act as a guide and that they were free to explore whatever tangents they felt necessary. Scientists, in the positivist tradition, have traditionally regarded the interviewee as subject matter merely to be watched and explained. I wanted to work towards changing this limiting view by showing that the interviewee is indeed an integral part of the interview process. They are thus not merely objects of study but are rather, subjects of knowledge.

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[5] Rapport is defined as, "a relation of mutual understanding or trust between people" www.dictionary.com).

As subjects of knowledge, the mothers themselves provided much of the basis of this chapter. After closely analyzing all the interviews, I came up with what I deemed to be the four most salient issues affecting the mothers in my study. I went through all of the transcribed interviews and highlighted issues and themes individual mothers emphasized. I then made a list of the issues that overlapped into all of the interviews. There were four common themes repeated by the majority of interviewees and I determined that they were the issues I needed to expand on. I did not set out to "prove" any particular point but rather, was open to listening to what each mother had to say. I was careful to word my questions as openly as possible to avoid possibly influencing the mothers' responses. Keeping my questions clear and concise allowed the mothers to interpret what each question meant to them and also allowed for the most genuine of answers to be given. Clearly, I had ideas of my own but I was clear to not let my own biases or preferences affect the interview process[6]. In the end I was pleasantly surprised. Issues that I had thought were going to be of key importance to the mothers were irrelevant in some cases, whereas other matters that I had not anticipated proved pivotal.

Research Findings

What is it like to mother in contemporary Western society? In the following sections I will provide a partial answer to this question by analyzing some of the most significant statements from the interviews. Ideas, constructs and opinions shared by more than one mother were highlighted for further analysis. After compiling a list of

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[6] The potential research problem is called demand characteristics and refers to the idea that people being studied have a tendency to behave in a way that reacts to what they think is expected of them (www.usabilityfirst.com/glossary/term_1109.tx).

these shared themes I chose the four that I interpreted to be of key importance. It must be noted that this decision was subjective and guided solely by my own opinion of what would be most beneficial to the contribution of knowledge in this area. In preparation of this thesis I had read numerous articles on motherhood and was therefore better able to pinpoint areas upon which I wanted to expand.

I interviewed eight Greater Vancouver mothers, all with unique and varying backgrounds – see Table 1 below. After the interviews were transcribed I was able to see what themes, if any, were repeated throughout all of the interviews. The four key themes mentioned at one point or another by each of the interviewees were:

- Support was essential – no one can "mother" alone

- Most women were not adequately prepared for motherhood

- Motherhood is only one aspect of identity

- Who exactly are these "good mothers"?

Table 1 Profile of Interview Subjects

Name	Number of Children	Marital Status	Employment Status
Catherine	3	Single (Divorced)	Unemployed
Diana	2	Single (Divorced)	Full-Time Student and Part-Time Worker
Lauren	2	Married (Common-Law)	Full-Time Worker
Lisa	1	Married	Full-Time Worker
Paula	1	Married	Full-Time Worker
Rachel	1	Married	Part-Time Worker
Stacey	3	Married	Full-Time Student
Susan	1	Single	Full-Time Student and Part-Time Worker

1. Support is essential - No one can "mother" alone.

Support networks were crucial for all eight women. Dominant mothering ideologies tend to focus on individual mothers caring for their own offspring. Once a woman has a child she is not only supposed to know what to do instinctively, she is, more importantly, supposed to be able to do it alone and be the responsible one. In Western society, new mothers are afforded a 'grace period' where it is assumed that family and friends will help out with the new baby. It is important to note, however, that mothers are quickly expected to establish a system where they have everything under control when partners go back to work and the in-laws return to their own homes. All the women I interviewed, regardless of age or marital status, spoke of the importance of having a continuing network of support when raising infants and children.

Extended families were the primary support systems for over half of the interviewees. Four women who relied exclusively on the support of their extended families conceded that they could not imagine raising their children without this familial support. Lisa (to protect the identity of interviewees and their families, all names used in this thesis are pseudonyms) is married, works full-time, and relies extensively on family support,

> I do shift work. Four 12-hour days on and four days off. It is a very long day. Thankfully my husband is very helpful in that he does dinner and cleans the house. When I am working, I don't get home until 7:30 at night so he takes care of Maria. During the day when we are both working his sister baby-sits her, which is good 'cause she has four really good kids so it's like a mini daycare and it's family so she's trustworthy. When I work nightshift he's here all night with her so he gets up in the middle of the night when he needs to. He doesn't enjoy it but he does it because he has to.

Lisa's parents live in the same city and are available to provide childcare when needed. Having the support of her family not only eased Lisa's transition back to work but alleviated the financial burden of child care.

Rachel is a married mother with one son. Her husband works full-time and she works part-time. Her husband's parents are their primary source of childcare. According to Rachel, "we are very lucky that way that we don't have a stranger or a daycare to have to look after him". She adds that her transition back to work was eased greatly by the knowledge that family would be looking after her son, "I'd probably have a hard time with that, not having family to leave him with". Rachel was also quick to point out that the costs of daycare are outrageous, "Oh yeah, it's ridiculous. I have a girlfriend that lives out here and she pays $900 a month for her kid to be in daycare. So imagine the kind of money you have to be bringing in to pay $900 a month in daycare". For Rachel, family support is both an emotional and financial necessity.

Paula is married and works full-time. Her parents are the primary caregivers for her daughter Sofia. Paula acknowledges how lucky she is to have the family support that she does,

> [My parents] look after Sofia every day and that's part of the reason why I'm so comfortable being back at work. I know she is with them. There is no one I trust more in this world to look after her.

Paula emphasized how her transition back to paid work was eased by the knowledge that her parents would look after her daughter. Although she misses Sofia while she is at work she does not have to worry about where she is or who is taking care of her,

I miss her terribly throughout the day. I mean sometimes I get so busy that I can't think of anything but work but like I said my mom and dad are looking after her. I think that if she was at a daycare I would worry a lot more and I think I would be a lot less happy to be back at work.

Susan is a single, full-time student who has relied on the support of her parents and extended family from the moment her son was born. Susan works part-time on the weekends so her family support is crucial. Susan became pregnant at a young age and the father was not involved in the early years of her son's life. (He has since returned and is now "very much involved" in their son's life.) In describing her support system Susan said,

I think the support network that I have is un-typical because it is amazing. I have my family and I also have people who I consider extended family who are not necessarily-blood related, but they are very much involved...I am very lucky. I can get my breaks when I need them. My parents live close by and that is amazing help.

Susan also spoke to the issue of paying for childcare. She admitted that if it were not for the support of her family her options in life would be severely limited,

There have been times when I'm so broke I don't even know what I'd do if my family wasn't around. Paying for childcare, it's insane. I've looked into prices for after-school care and it's just ridiculous. There's a part of you that's like, "oh I am putting too much of a burden on my family" but then I can't afford that though. Sometimes I think about other single parents who don't have the support system that I have and people blaming them for being on welfare and it just ticks me off, 'cause like I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have the support network that I have... my options would be very minimal. I know I wouldn't be in school and I wonder if I would even be working.

Susan is keenly aware of her precarious situation as a single parent. She acknowledges that she needs help at times, but she still feels guilty for the assistance she so desperately needs and receives.

Diana, a full-time student and single mother of two, disagrees with the imperative of individual mothering and instead advocates communal parenting,

> Prior to this time in history there was no such thing as this independent little household where women stayed all alone with their children everyday. I think that this mythology is more damaging than any other mythology to women. There used to be kids running around the streets and the whole community watching out for them and now either your children are out with strangers or they are at home locked up. There is nothing healthy about either idea. I am such an advocate about childcare issues and it's not just about supporting working women - it's about getting children and families connected to communities.

The women in my study speak directly to one of the biggest motherhood "myths" of them all. They all state explicitly that they could not imagine mothering without assistance. Although the interviewees all come from different social, economic and religious backgrounds this is one area where they could all agree. None of them could imagine coping with the stresses of motherhood all by themselves. For Rachel, having a support network was not only financially beneficial but it allowed her and her husband to spend some quality time together. She mentioned that making time for the two of them was very important and that without the help of her in-laws this would not be possible. Paula addressed this issue as well when she spoke about adjusting to the first few weeks as a new mother. For her,

> It was not hard physical work but hard emotional work. You are completely attached to this baby and are responsible for this precious little breathing baby. The first few weeks were so hard. I was so tired. I'll tell you right now – hats off to single moms and to those without family to help them out. I would be completely screwed if I did not have my parents or my in-laws.

In the West, dominant mothering ideologies focus on individual mothering. Mothers are expected to be the sole caregivers of their children yet very few women can

live up to this unrealistic standard. Practicality states that in order for a mother to be the sole caregiver of her children she must not engage in any work outside the home for once she leaves the home she is in need of childcare. The situation is compounded by the fact that when mothers do work outside the home they are still expected to be the primary caregivers once they return home.

Much has been written about this "second shift" many women encounter once they return home from a day of work. Arlie Russell Hochschild coined this term and has written extensively on the topic. She notes that, "just as there is a wage-gap between men and women in the workplace, there is a 'leisure gap' between them at home. Most women work one shift at the office or factory and then a 'second shift' at home" (2003, 4, quotations in original). Women are not only staples in the professional world today. Since 1984 they have outnumbered men on all American graduate school campuses (Ansell, 2005, 1). From the outside it may appear that women are winning the battle for equality. Ansell writes,

> (T)he wage gap is slowly decreasing and the fight for proper day care services along with insurance coverage for birth control pills are passionate issues for women across America. From the outside, it seems we have come a long way. But step closer. Stop looking at the fights we have won and are continuing to fight as measures of our success. Look deeper. Look into the everyday life of a working woman today in the United States. What you will find there tells a very different story (2005, 1).

All but one of the women I interviewed were either full-time students or engaged in some form of paid work outside the home. This means that they had to negotiate their own career with the work of raising their child. Traditional, once-dominant mothering ideologies do not allow space for this negotiation. Mothers are supposed to stay home

and raise their young children, end of story. The women in my study are challenging this myth as they work to redefine not only "family" but also the roles played by each of its members.

Stacey attends school full-time while her husband looks after their infant daughter. Their other two daughters are in school during the day and although her husband would prefer to be working it is a blessing that he is not. According to Stacey, "if he didn't stay with the baby I could not do anything. Childcare is just not an option, it is too expensive". Stacey's husband was present for most of our interview and during this time he fed, changed and played with their daughter. Whether they set out to or not, Stacey and her family are re-working the traditional understanding of familial roles.

2. Most women were not adequately prepared for motherhood.

Six of the eight women I interviewed explicitly stated that they were not prepared for motherhood. Each of these six women experienced varying degrees of fear, anxiety and apprehension upon bringing their babies home. All of the women in my study admitted to reading books about pregnancy, birth or parenting and all but two of them stated that they were not adequately prepared for what motherhood really had to offer. Lauren, a self-employed mother of two boys and who works full time, reflected that,

> The interesting thing is that there are all these prenatal classes and the birth to me was the easiest part. The hard part is after. I have read the books and it is not like having kids...I was the first one in my group [to have kids] so I was charting new territory and that was really hard.

During her prenatal care Susan read many books geared towards pregnant women and she now states that the information contained in them was too general. Her

wry comment is that, "nothing prepares you for a baby like bringing one home". Susan

admitted to feeling completely overwhelmed the day she left the hospital,

> I remember coming home from the hospital. My parents came to pick me up and they took me home and they were like, 'okay we are going' and I'm like, 'you're going? Where are you going?' I was totally freaked out. I was scared to be alone with the baby...There wasn't a whole lot of sleep...You are already feeling alienated and not sleeping makes you feel that more so.

Paula was not prepared for the emotions that overwhelmed her upon returning

home from the hospital,

> I cried from the moment we packed her up and brought her all the way home. I was so incredibly overwhelmed with joy, fear, and holy crap – how did I get that huge baby out of my womb! She's so fragile looking, how am I going to be around her and be a mom? You read all these magazines and you think it's supposed to be like a Gap ad. A cute Gap baby and a beautiful mother with flowing tresses and totally styled to the nines and that ain't motherhood at all. It's not! They warn you a bit about what to expect physically...but they don't warn you at all about how you are going to feel...Aside from that no one prepared us for how the [lack of] sleep would affect us.

Lisa also experienced intense emotions once she was home with her daughter.

Asked how to describe her first few months as a new mother, she replied,

> Pretty overwhelming. I remember the moment we got home with her I just looked at her and we said, 'what do we do now?'. We didn't know what to do... she ended up being a cluster feeder where she would nurse every half hour to forty-five minutes. So for the first few months, especially because I had lost so much iron when I lost the blood, I was very, very weak and lost all confidence in going out into the world with this little thing who wanted to eat every half hour. I wasn't comfortable nursing in public so we just did not go out that much. It was very stressful I'd say.

Lisa mentioned that one reason she participated in this research was because,

"motherhood is a really tricky thing and it's not easy. I think women do need to be

informed for all that they are in for if they are planning to do this because it is not as easy as it sounds". Every woman I interviewed brought this point up in one way or another. It seems as thought they all felt that mainstream representations of motherhood were somewhat inaccurate. According to Stacey, a married full-time student who is also a mother of three, "I feel that representations of the mother in the mass media only show one side of the issue. And as well maybe pregnancy advice books have a tendency to show only a small part of the picture". I asked Stacey to elaborate on this statement as I was curious to see whose "side" she was referring to. She said that she was talking about the magazine ads and television commercials that show "nothing but glowing, happy moms in love with their babies". Stacey believed that this lack of preparedness for the reality of mothering took an emotional toll on her eventually,

> The books didn't give all that much information and there was nowhere I could go or find the answers. I internalized it when I did not know what to do and I was depressed. This is the real life of having a baby and I think I am crazy. I thought I was not handling this properly but now I know it was because no one told me what it was going to be like.

The fact that so many of the mothers in my study commented on a lack of preparedness shows that the myth of the inherently prepared and/or skilled mother is exactly that--a myth. Kitzinger (1994, 3) contends that, "the emotional intensity of becoming a mother and caring for a new baby is demanding". Expectant mothers prepare for the arrival of their babies by reading books and taking classes yet what they should really be doing is talking to other mothers. Stacey verbalized this idea as well,

> I think it would be good if all people had the opportunity to take care of a baby for a while before they have kids because I was not prepared. If you really want to have children go out if you don't have small children in your family like nieces and nephews and watch families with small children.

> Look at what it is really like to have babies and talk to these people and
> try and figure out what their daily life is like.

Dominant mothering ideologies do not appear to work *for* women but rather, seem to work *against* them in many cases. Many mothers in my study attested to feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, or guilty at one point or another. The unattainable expectations set out through the proliferation of dominant mothering ideologies can negatively affect mothers by contributing to a sense of failure. The myth that motherhood comes naturally to women appears to have been de-bunked when you look at what the women in my study are saying. It would appear as though the journey into motherhood can be more accurately described as one of trial and error.

3. Motherhood is only one aspect of identity.

All eight of the women I interviewed identified strongly with being a mother but they also spoke of the importance of additional roles in their lives. Careers were vehemently important to some of the women while pursuing their education was paramount for others. Lauren acknowledged that her ideas around motherhood were definitely shaped by the fact that both of her parents had well-established careers,

> There is no question that I come from a long line of academic people who are all working...I thought a lot about what I was going to do in regards to education after high school and I thought a lot about what I was going to do with myself in the workforce but I never as a young woman thought a lot about what I was going to do as a parent...my adjustment to becoming a new mother was really, really, difficult for me because I was in a social environment where the girls and women I knew were seriously career oriented people.

After graduating from university, Lauren entered the "extremely male-dominated" field of television production and worked for five years before having children. When her

first son was born Lauren made a conscious decision to return to work although this time she decided to do things a bit differently. She left the commercial production houses behind and started her own company,

> I deliberately chose not to go to an office environment. I worked at home and had someone there with my kids. I work on a project-to-project basis so I can regulate the time I devote to my career. I have had to make sacrifices professionally and those were the choices I had to make. I made the choice to spend time with the kids. It's a real juggling act and it is not easy... What I can say about the male-dominated production industry is that I never mix my life as a mother with my role at work. You don't mention that you are a parent at work...Only if it is relevant with what I am doing would I bring up the topic that I am a parent. Whether or not it's a conscious decision I suppose it is a strategic one.

Her professional accomplishments are a significant source of Lauren's identity and as such, she has found a way to negotiate motherhood without giving up her passions. For her, becoming a mother was just like adding another layer to herself.

Susan returned to work six months after her son's birth. As much as she loved her son, she recognized that she needed a life of her own: "I ... by nature am a really independent person so the idea of just being a mother and nothing else did not appeal to me". Susan grew up in a very traditional household where her father was the breadwinner and her mother stayed home with the kids. Susan reflected, "I come from a traditional family. If you are a mother then you're a mother and there is nothing else. It took me a while to realize it does not have to be that way." By actively pursuing her own goals Susan believes that she is teaching her son to be independent and that this will, in turn, foster his personal growth: "I do not see how I am teaching my son anything by not developing myself". Just before her son was about to start school Susan said that she felt this incredible urge to go traveling. She has a substantial network of extended family

support; because of this, she was able to travel for six months. The decision to leave her son and go traveling was a difficult one, "I was guilt-ridden but realized that I was doing this for my personal well being. I am glad now that I did it even though at the time I was conflicted, it was something I was doing to improve myself".

Paula returned to work after a one-year maternity leave,

> It is good to be back in an adult environment and I happen to be someone who enjoys her job and who she works with. It's good to be back and it is good to bring home a paycheque again and it is good to have my own desk and my own pen and my own computer, little things like that. My own identity.

Paula concedes that she can say, "it's great to be back to work and I have no guilt saying that" but a part of her "always has a sense of guilt when I say that I'm glad to be back [to paid work]". Motherhood is only one aspect of Paula's identity and despite the occasional feelings of guilt she manages to negotiate her career and mothering entities effectively.

Once again, we can see how another infamous motherhood myth has been shattered. The women in my study unanimously spoke to the importance of having a variety of identities beyond that of "mother". Although all of the mothers mentioned the importance of furthering their education or career, Diana was the only one to address issues of sexuality. She spoke about an ex-boyfriend whose mother thought she should not be dating at all as "she was a mother now". Diana refuses to let the fact that she is a mother preclude her from anything life has to offer and this includes expressing her sexuality. She said that as a single mother she has encountered a lot of resistance when it comes to the issue of her sexuality. According to her, "people expect that once you become a mother that part of your life is over. You have a kid and that is it, you

suck it up and focus on being a mother now". Diana is actively fighting to change this misconception as she believes children should grow up knowing their mothers are sexual beings. She states,

> I want my children to know that I am a sexual person, but that I am an individual. That part of mothering is the only way they can grow up to respect women they date someday, if they date women. The separation between the Madonna and the whore is so damaging. The Madonna is the woman I marry while the whore is the one I sleep with. I don't ever want my boys to think that.

4. Who exactly are these "good mothers"?

Preparing for this research project I anticipated that the most controversial aspect would be gathering the interviewees' definitions of good and bad mothers. The more I thought about it, the more I came to believe that the answers to this single question could provide more information than the rest of the interviews combined. Would the women just duplicate characteristics common to dominant mothering ideologies or would they challenge these traditional ideals? As it turns out, each answer was as unique as the women themselves.

For Lisa, being involved with your children signifies that you are a good mother. She spends considerable time with her daughter reading and encouraging her as well as providing the proper nutrition. Fresh, unprocessed foods are key. When asked to describe a bad mother Lisa answered, "A couch potato mom who just lets her kids do whatever. Kraft dinner for lunch...no nutrition, boxed foods you get at the grocery store. Whatever's easiest".

Paula associated a good mother with a good baby. She said that when she closed her eyes and thought of a good mother she saw,

> A really well behaved baby or child, it doesn't matter what age. A mom who's walking with another mom having a latte. You know the mom with the $1500 stroller and her kids playing with the toys hanging from it, to me that's the ideal but I think a good mom from birth to adulthood is really someone who teaches discipline, honor, integrity, all these things but can still give shit when they need to...I think a mom needs to command a certain respect.

Conversely, when Paula was asked to describe a bad mother she said that, the first image that comes to my mind is pushing the stroller and dragging the kid who is crying and the mom saying, "that's enough!" and not understanding or spending anytime figuring out why the baby is crying. We can see how Paula echoes Lisa's emphasis on involvement. Paying attention to the underlying causes of their baby's behaviour and development is crucial for both women.

Good mothers, according to Rachel, "love and guide their kids and put them before themselves". Rachel clarifies her answer by saying that doing things for yourself on occasion does not make you a bad mother. She goes on to say, "there are some situations where you have to put yourself first or you will go crazy. I guess just being selfish and not caring about your child makes you not a very good mom".

For Lauren, "time is the best thing you can give your kids" and, "a good mother is someone who definitely gives time to their kids. There is no substitution for that. You can have a career but you have to balance that. You don't have to be Martha Stewart; you just have to be there".

Susan states that a good mother "is a combination of someone who is a nurturer while at the same time someone who provides guidance". She accepts that "you cannot possibly be someone who provides guidance if you are not taking care of yourself ". Because Susan grew up in a household where parental authority was unquestioned she made a conscious effort to parent differently. She says that she does not just tell her son to do something; she provides reasons why he should act or behave a certain way. According to her, "a good mother respects her child".

Stacey mentioned that she was reluctant to use the term "good mother" because it was so ideologically charged for her, "it was like a demand". She did answer that a good mother, "encourages their children to be themselves and to develop their potential and to help them to discover this potential". Conversely, "the worst thing a mother can do is to manipulate her children emotionally". She explains that this puts a lot of pressure on children and they end up doing what they think is expected of them as opposed to what they really want to do. Stacey says that she will encourage her children to discover what makes them happy in life and even is she disagrees with some of their choices she will support and love them unconditionally.

For Catherine, a single, unemployed mother of two adult children, a good mother provides for her children and "looks after their needs". Clean clothing, proper nutrition, and a parental presence after school are very important to her. Catherine also emphasizes being open-minded and accepting of others.

Diana is a single mother of two boys and a full-time student. For her, a good mother "is kind to herself and can be forgiving of herself". She also mentioned that the term "good mother" is loaded and fraught with misconceptions. She revealed that a

good mother "knows when to ask for help" and emphasized the importance of being able to forgive the mistakes you inevitably make along the way.

Whether they recognize it or not, all of the women I interviewed are confronting and challenging the traditional conceptions of what it means to be a "good mother". By continuing to follow their own dreams and goals the mothers in my study are widening the scope of acceptable motherhood to include space for mothers who make time for themselves. It is important for a space like this to exist where mothers are free to enjoy the many pleasures of life without feeling guilty for doing so. Scheduling some time for yourself does not mean you are neglecting your children yet this has often been the assumption implicit to many motherhood myths.

Conclusion

The interviewees' thoughts on good and bad mothers showed me, more than anything else, that a shift is occurring in the way women in my study conceptualize motherhood. I set out to see if mothers felt any pressure to conform to ideals they may have felt were unrealistic and from the answers I received I would have to say that no, they do not. Although many of the women did say that at times they experienced guilt over things like going back to work, spending time studying or just losing their temper they were all able to identify where this guilt was coming from. For them it was linked to societal expectations of 'good' mothering. Diana spoke about the struggle to negotiate between what she knows intellectually and what she feels emotionally,

> Intellectually I know that my children are going to grow up knowing that I love them and [that] I took care of them but emotionally I think they are going to only remember that one day last week when I freaked out on them. There is this weird dialogue in your head and it is all based on

society's expectations. Like film and television, where you always have the perfect mother or the creepy mother who goes right over the edge. It's difficult to define in those terms. I do the best that I can and support mothers where I can.

Susan Maushart (1999, xi) speaks to this sense of disconnection felt by some mothers. According to Maushart (1999, xi), many mothers experience an identity crisis brought on by the mismatch between the expectation of motherhood and the actual experience of it. Society disseminates relatively relaxed images of motherhood and Maushart refers to this as the "easy mix lifestyle" (1999, xiii). Dominant mothering ideologies are well versed at convincing women that motherhood is an easy, natural transition to which they will seamlessly adapt their lives. As women's true experiences as mothers have often been (and continue to be) locked out of history Maushart claims that this is why the identity crisis also continues.

As the twenty-first century unfolds, more and more women are challenging the archaic notions of motherhood upon which patriarchal power imbalances rest. While mothers are working to redefine traditional notions of motherhood women who remain childfree are challenging the very basis of womanhood. Women who work outside the home are proving that you don't need to stay at home to be a good mother. Compulsory heterosexuality, which has been inextricably tied to the patriarchal ideology of motherhood, is also weakening. As Canada and other countries around the world legally recognize same-sex unions, conceptions of the family and all it entails are widened as well[7].

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[7] Bill C-38 (The Civil Marriage Act) legally recognized same-sex unions and passed in Canada in 2005. Many European and Scandinavian countries have passed similar legislation (www.wikipedia.org).

As society changes in response to a shifting social, economical, and political climate so too does motherhood. Mothers are not stagnant beings; they adapt and adjust to the situation at hand. The twenty-first century is proving to be a very complex environment through which mothers must navigate and explore. In the next chapter I will discuss some key challenges facing mothers in this new millennium.

CHAPTER FIVE
Mothering in the Twenty-First Century:
Where Do We Go From Here?

A Brief Overview

I have shown that dominant mothering ideologies have incorporated a multitude of social, economic, and political standards in constructing "good' mothers. Although most women are biologically capable of becoming mothers they are not automatically considered good ones. At any given time people have had concrete ideas about what defines a good mother and unfortunately, for many women, these ideals may be unattainable. We first saw this in the Industrial period when women were advised to stay at home to devote their care and attention to their babies. I showed how this ideology was adopted by mostly middle-class women as they, unlike their working-class counterparts, could afford to spend the day doting over their children. Working-class mothers were considered inferior as they not only toiled all day but were even known to put their children to work as well. This did not bode well in an era where childhood innocence was paramount.

The early twentieth-century saw an increased professionalization of motherhood. All sorts of scientific discoveries were being made around this time and as a result, motherhood entered a new territory. Scientific discoveries were making all sorts of improvements on people's lives, and in keeping with this tradition, it was thought that motherhood could also benefit from a little scientific assistance. Mothers were now seen as professionals who followed strict guidelines for success. Mothers measured, charted

and recorded almost every aspect of their childrens' lives. Routine was key during the early decades of the twentieth-century.

This idea of intense, individual mothering remained relatively consistent until the 1940's when World War Two began. As men were away fighting women were encouraged to step up and help with the war effort. Motherhood took a back seat to protecting one's country yet as soon as the war was over and the men returned home, mothers were once again relegated to the private sphere expected to get married and stay home and raise a family; this was their destiny.

The Women's Movement of the 1960's shook this notion of compulsory domesticity to its foundation. As more women refused to blindly accept their "destiny" society saw an increase in working mothers. As women entered the workplace in higher and higher numbers we began to see yet another backlash. Women were blamed for abandoning their children and were often labeled selfish, unfit or unstable. Motherhood, it seemed, was the only legitimate profession for women.

Adrienne Rich responded to this intense criticism in her book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. She criticized motherhood as conceptualized by patriarchs and in doing so, recognized that the experience of motherhood could actually be empowering to women. She noted that motherhood, free from patriarchal interference, was one way in which women could tap into their innate power and therefore represent a vehicle for empowerment and change. Individual mothers were not criticized; instead, she focused her energy on the oppressive forces that manipulated notions of motherhood for their own benefit.

I wanted to see if twenty-first century mothers felt pressure to measure up to a set of mothering standards they felt were unrealistic. The results of my interviews were positively surprising. It appears that some mothers felt pressured to act or behave a certain way but none of the women I interviewed let this affect the way they chose to live their lives. Several mothers even explicitly stated that they needed identities beyond that of "mother". Although many of the oppressive factors inherent to dominant mothering ideologies may still be present today, my research showed me that just as many mothers are working to dismantle these unsettling forces.

Introduction

Motherhood has been the subject of endless praise and criticism ever since its "official inception" in the eighteenth century. Nowhere else in society do we see a role surrounded with as much ambivalence. Douglas and Michaels (2004, 3) show that mothers are,

> Subjected to an onslaught of beatific imagery, romantic fantasies, self-righteous sermons, psychological warnings, terrifying movies about loosing their children, and totally unrealistic advice about how to be the most perfect and revered mother in the neighbourhood, maybe even in the whole country.

Mothers have not been completely passive in their acceptance of this dizzying assault of pressure, however, and in this chapter I will expand my analysis of how twenty-first century mothers cope with such pressure and explore how they mobilize resources and reconceptualize motherhood.

It may appear to some that North American mothers today have nothing to complain about. Some may think that the grandmothers and mothers before us are the

ones who really struggled. They fought for so many of the basic human rights many of us take for granted and mothers today are better able to control their own reproduction and limit the number of children they have which results in not only healthier children but healthier mothers as well. Mothers are also able to work outside the home and pursue any number of careers if they so choose. For many centuries these two basic human rights were not afforded to mothers.

The twenty-first century world thus seems set up to make mom's life easier. There are an endless amount of products available whose sole purpose is to simplify what is often a mother's daily routine. We have disposable diapers, throwaway wash clothes, ready-made baby foods and pre-portioned toddler snacks just to name a few. There are also baby-friendly movie theatres, restaurants and fitness classes. Having a baby has never been easier, or so it seems. The reality for many women is unfortunately less rosy than this advertised lifestyle.

The "New Momism"

In addressing the plethora of stresses twenty-first century mothers have to deal with, Douglas and Michaels refer at length to what they call the "new momism" (2004, 4) which involves,

> [A] media-focused insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers, and to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children. The new momism is a highly romanticized yet demanding view of motherhood in which the standards for success are impossible to meet.

Douglas and Michaels add that as the standards of what makes a good mother have risen, leisure time for most Americans[8] has dramatically decreased (2004, 4). The twenty-first century mother is somehow expected to be all things to all people. She can have children, a career, and still have time to make her family a healthy dinner. On top of setting unattainable standards, the new momism defines women through their relationships to children, and in doing so, all "other" identities take a backseat to mothering (Douglas and Michaels, 2004, 22).

It is important to note that the new momism exists in a framework of the dominant ideology of the family. Marlee Kline (2000, 195) points out that the ideologically dominant family form is "heterosexual and nuclear in form, patriarchal in content and based on assumptions of privatized female dependence and domesticity". Mothers who, for whatever reason, do not measure up to the ideals of this new momism or the dominant ideology of the family are often stigmatized.

Caplan (1998, 128) claims that the more a group is devalued the easier it is to target its members as scapegoats. By ignoring the social, political and economic conditions that may influence a mother's decision-making process, society is able to avoid responsibility and shift the locus of blame to individual women. "Bad" mothers become the root of many of society's problems while politicians and lawmakers are able to maintain their sense of moral superiority. Pointing to a breakdown of "traditional family values" as the cause of many of society's ills allows patriarchal interests to be maintained at the same time as freedom of choice for women is squashed.

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[8] I feel this statement applies to Canadians as well.

Resistance is Alive and Well

Mothers have not sat idly by, however, and allowed themselves to be the scapegoat for all that ails society. Human beings have historically resisted societal oppression and mothers are no exception. As agents of change, mothers have long sought out ways to resist and redefine restrictive mothering ideologies. O'Reilly (2004, 46) defines resistance as "the effort of oppressed groups to challenge and act against aspects of dominant discourse". She adds that resistance falls along a continuum, thus, that it is not a simple process but is one that, "entails the negotiation of many different, and often conflicting discourses" (2004, 46).

Twenty-first century mothers face a unique challenge. At no other time in history have women possessed the ability to be or do so many things. Despite all of the public opportunities available to women today there remains a relatively stagnant view of what lies ahead for women privately.

It is still a relatively common belief that women will eventually become mothers and when they do, they will follow the guidelines of dominant mothering ideologies. This puts both women who choose not to become mothers and those who incorporate alternative ways of mothering in a precarious position[9]. To choose either of these life paths means you will more than likely be subjected to intense scrutiny and increased criticism.

Destabilizing the dominant discourse surrounding mothering allows women to redefine their roles as mothers (O'Reilly, 2004, 47). O'Reilly adds that, for mothers,

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[9] It must be noted that as the focus of this thesis is on those who choose to become mothers I am unable to address the complex issues surrounding women who choose to remain childfree.

another "key mode of resistance is to actively engage in questioning the expectations placed on them by others and society" (2004, 49).

Using these guidelines we can see how some of the mothers in my study were clearly challenging the dominant mothering discourse. All of the women worked to redefine their role as mothers by maintaining identities outside of the home. Having an identity separate from that of "mom" was vital for all of the eight women in my study.

It was not just the fact that the mothers possessed alternative identities that I found so impressive. What stood out for me more than anything else was the recognition that this was crucial to their sense of well-being. As much as all of the participants stated that they loved being a mother it was necessary for all of them to have identities beyond this. Enriching their own lives allowed them to more completely affect the lives of their children. Helping themselves in the short term allowed them to better help their children in the long run.

This may seem like common sense yet it is one of the most persistent areas of struggle faced by mothers. Proponents of dominant mothering ideologies do not recognize that mothers are full, complex human beings. It is as though as soon as women become mothers they relinquish their individual human rights. Tenneva Jordan is credited as saying, "a mother is a person who seeing there are only four pieces of pie for five people, promptly announces she never did care for pie" (www.quotegardem.com). Although this quote may seem silly and lighthearted it is representative of the many sacrifices mothers are expected to make. By insisting on maintaining diverse identities mothers are not only resisting archaic discourses but are also redefining motherhood to be more consistent with their twenty-first century lives.

Mothers occupy a variety of social, economic and political positions in society and because of this it is tempting to say that certain groups are more effective at resisting dominant discourse than others. This is problematic on many levels. In addressing resistance we must look at the choices mothers make on a day-to-day basis. We must first ask each mother if she feels oppressed. Some mothers may feel that motherhood empowers them like nothing else whereas others may feel as though dominant mothering ideologies oppress every aspect of their existence. We cannot ignore the desires of those who choose to stay home and focus their attention, energy and passion on raising their children full-time. Instead, we must look at how this decision came about. Franca Iacovetta, in writing about Italian immigrants in Postwar Toronto, points out that many immigrant women contributed to the family economy by taking in laundry or babysitting (1992, 39). It may appear, *prima facie*, that these women were simply fulfilling their domestic duties but upon closer inspection we see a real sense of agency emerging in what would otherwise appear to be a repressive environment. The wives, mothers, and sisters in these newly-populated towns may not have been permitted to work alongside their male counterparts yet they found ways to actively participate in the informal economy.

We cannot use our own biases to judge the behaviour of others or we run the risk of becoming just as oppressive as the discourses we are trying so hard to resist. We need to be supportive of the decisions mothers make and instead of focusing on why they did not do something more, we need to work towards changing the circumstances that may have prevented them from making an alternative decision.

Mothers need to feel supported, not judged. Dominant mothering ideologies have set up and supported a system whereby mothers are subjected to constant supervision and surveillance. Whether it be the ads on television that advertise products designed to simplify mothers' lives or the reminders on the back of bathroom stalls that pregnancy and alcohol don't mix, everyone has an opinion on what good mothers should and should not do. Instead of focusing all our attention and energy on watching mothers we should be more concerned with preventing situations where mothers are only left with unhealthy choices. Daycare subsidies continue to be cut at both the provincial and federal levels. To put it rhetorically, what choice does a mother have, then, if she is in an abusive relationship? Her income alone will not pay for rent, food, transportation and childcare so her only option is to stay with an abusive partner. If she leaves she will not be able to afford childcare for when she is at work. Her only other option is to stay home on social assistance and we all know of the stigma surrounding the "lazy single mother". In this situation there is no easy solution. It is much easier for society to judge the individual decisions made by mothers than to acknowledge where society itself has failed. Focusing blame on the individual allows the status quo to be maintained.

Compounding this is the fact that there is little social recognition of what is actually involved in the "fatiguing task of being a mother" (Kitzinger, 1978, 37). According to Kitzinger,

> Women are usually made to explain their post-partum experience entirely in terms of internal states, hormones, their psyches, and their own inadequate personalities, instead of realities of the situation as they adjust to the new occupation and emotional tasks of motherhood, tasks which are challenging for every woman (1978, 37).

Mothers occupy many roles. They are cooks, cleaners, chauffeurs, babysitters, and personal assistants just to name a few. Despite all of this hard work very little recognition is allotted. Dominant mothering ideologies set the stage for this omission as the aforementioned duties are just part and parcel of being a mother. Focusing on the instinctual nature of mothering allows society to overlook the actual work done by mothers. According to Kitzinger,

> (O)nce the baby is born everything is different. Time is no longer your own. New mothers often feel as if it has been snatched from them. They are anxious that they will never catch up, be able to organize themselves, plan ahead with confidence, or take charge of their lives again (1994, 2).

In devaluing mother-work, society is in essence, devaluing mothers.

As someone who has long wanted to become a mother, how was I to digest all of this information? It would appear that despite all of the advances women have made over the last 40 years, motherhood is one area that has remained relatively untouched in some aspects. Although women are now free, in theory, to pursue whatever career they may choose they are still expected to somehow slot motherhood into the mix and when they do, they are eventually expected to make a choice between motherhood and career. Very few spaces exist where women are free to experience both.

My feminist beliefs undoubtedly compound this issue as well. How am I going to negotiate my feminist beliefs within a mothering ideology that doesn't recognize such choice? After writing this thesis I have only begun to think of the answer. In the end, I will do what many feminist mothers before me have done, make conscious decisions and stay true to my beliefs, regardless of the fallout. Change is a slow process and to

establish a more diverse understanding of mothering we need to keep moving forward, albeit one slow step at a time.

Conclusion

There was no way of knowing how personal this subject would become for me when I embarked on the start of this journey two and a half years ago. In the process of writing this thesis I became pregnant, miscarried, and am now pregnant once again. Motherhood has thus become much more than an abstract concept and is now a deeply personal issue. While conducting research and extensive literature reviews I have been forced to look at my own biases and presumptions surrounding issues of mothering. Some questions have been raised for me along the way:

- How am I going to incorporate all that I have discovered into my personal style of mothering?

- Is being a feminist going to affect the way I will mother? Why or why not?

- How can I work towards destabilizing dominant mothering ideologies through the decisions I make on a daily basis?

From where I stand right now I can only speculate on my answers. There is, however, one thing I do know for sure and that is that I plan to mother with awareness; awareness of my values and intentions. Incorporating my feminist beliefs does not mean that I will make certain decisions over others; it is not that black and white. I plan on mothering without losing myself. I agree strongly with many of the women in my study when they say that you cannot possibly be the best parent by neglecting yourself. Teaching by example is one of the many gifts we can give our children. If there is one

thing I have learned from this process it is that nothing can prepare you for the realties of motherhood. Mothering styles are as unique as the individual mothers who employ them. The choices women make in relation to their mothering will depend greatly on their circumstances. Because of this we cannot continue to judge and asses mothers based on a set of objective characteristics. Becoming a mother is one of the most subjective experiences one can go through and to deny this is to deny the lived realities of women around the world.

One way to start the ball of change rolling is to rethink how we discuss mothering. Rather than focusing on "mothering" we need to begin speaking about *parenting*. For too long now mothers have shouldered the majority of responsibility when it comes to raising children. It does not need to be this way. The circle of responsibility needs to open up to include other members of the family. By allowing extended members of the family to be involved in the child-rearing process stress is not only removed from the mother but the child is exposed to a much wider network of support and care. Fathers and other partners are better able to bond with their children as they are more involved with their day-to-day activities. It would appear that this is a win-win situation.

If parenting ideologies were to truly replace archaic ideologies focusing extensively on mothering, society would have to make some serious changes. As fathers and other partners helped to shoulder more responsibility we would need to see an increase in not only available daycare, but in flexible work hours as well. Both partners would also have to factor in childcare after the dissolution of their relationship. The courts have historically granted primary custody to mothers after a separation or

divorce and this has allowed fathers (and other partners) to proceed with their lives relatively unencumbered by the daily responsibilities inherent to childcare[10]. It is for these abovementioned reasons that I believe parenting ideologies will be a hard sell.

Not to be deterred from a good fight, mothers and their supporters are refusing to give in. Change is inevitable as mothers continue to fight for the right to mother in their own way. Although many of the women in my study noted that they felt guilty about going back to work or taking time out for themselves none of them let this deter them from achieving their goals. Dominant mothering ideologies have been around far too long to simply disappear overnight. They will continue to linger around for as long as there are supporters. As long as we continue to chip away at the foundations of this oppressive ideology change is inevitable.

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[10] Kerry Daly, a professor at The University of Guelph's department of family research and co-chair of father Involved Research Alliance, notes that an increased number of fathers are taking a more active role in child-rearing and therefore, suffer equally from the separation from their children after divorce/and/or breakup (www.canadiancrc.com/articles/Nat_Post_Study_Of_Fathers_04DEC03.htm).

APPENDICES

Appendix One – Interview Framework

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.
   - Where and when were you born?
   - Number and ages of children?
   - Who are the other members of your family?
   -
2. Tell me a little bit about your life.
   - What do you do?
   - Who takes care of your children?
   - What kind of support do you receive?

3. Why did you choose to participate in this research?
   - Have you ever had an oppurtunity to discuss your life like this before?
   - When?

4. Which best describes your educational background?
   - some high school
   - high school diploma
   - some college
   - college diploma
   - some university
   - undergraduate degree
   - graduate degreee

5. Have you always wanted children?

PREGNANCY / CHILDBIRTH

6. Please respond to the following statement using the scale provided
   PREGNANCY WAS AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE
   - strongly agree
   - agree somewhat
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - disagree somewhat
   - strongly disagree

7. How would you describe your pregnancy/pregnancies?

8. What did you enjoy most about being pregnant?

9. What did you enjoy least about being pregnant?

10. Have you ever read any books geared towards expectant mothers?
   - if so, was it before, during or after your pregnancy?
   - did you buy them or were they gifts?
   - was the information helpful?
   - would you recommend these types of books to other expectant mothers?

11. Tell me a little about your birthing experience(s).
   did things go as you had originally planned?

MOTHERHOOD

12. How would you describe your first few months as a new mother?

13. Please respond to the following statement using the scale provided
   MOTHERHOOD WAS A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE
   - strongly agree
   - agree somewhat
   - neither agree nor disagree
   - disagree somewhat
   - strongly disagree

14. How would you describe your journey into motherhood?
   - What are the easiest aspects?
   - What are the most diffficult aspects?
   - In what ways are you similar to your own mother?
   - In what ways are you different?

15. What qualities/characteristics come to mind when you think of a "good" mother?

16. What qualities/characteristics come to mind when you think of a "bad" mother?

17. How did you come up with these characteristics?

18. How would you describe your own mothering in relation to the characteristics you have just listed?

19. As a mother, have you ever felt judged by others?
   - When and why?
20. Do you identify in any way with the term "feminist"?
   - Why or why not?
   - What does the term mean to you?

21. Are there any issues you feel we did not address in this interview?

22. How did you find the interview process?

Appendix Two – Research Information Sheet

My name is Caitlin Holmes. I am a graduate student at Simon Fraser University and will be the one conducting this research project.

The purpose of my project is to investigate and document the experiences of mothers in the Greater Vancouver area. I want to allow mothers to speak about their own mothering experiences in a way that fosters and encourages empowerment and agency. I shall be interviewing a number of women in order to gain an understanding of their unique experiences as mothers.

Although each interview will be tape-recorded the name of the individual being interviewed will not be recorded nor will it appear in any written record of the interview. Pseudonyms will be used and your name will not appear in any report or publication connected with this project.

Your willingness to participate in this project is greatly appreciated. Before we start the interview, I would like to explain that:

* your participation in this interview is completely voluntary.

* you are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.

* you are free to withdraw from this interview at anytime without explanation or apology.

* your interview will be kept completely confidential and will be available to only myself unless you wish to receive a transcript.

* excerpts from this interview may appear in my final research report and other publications but your name will not be included in either.

This project is supervised by Dr. Brian Burtch at the School of Criminology and Dr. Helen Hok-Sze Leung at the Department of Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. Dr. Burtch can be contacted at 604-291-4038 and Dr, Leung at 604-291-4404 should you have any questions or comments that you would like to address with them. Any complaints should be addressed to the Chair of the Department of Women's Studies, Dr. Marjorie Griffin Cohen at 604-291-5526. Should you have anything you would like to add to the interview, or questions or comments about it, or of you would like to receive information on the results of my research I can be reached at 604-684-5995.

Thank you for taking the time to be part of my study.

Caitlin Holmes

Your signature below indicates that you have read this information sheet and are giving your informed consent to be interviewed

Signature   Date

Appendix Three – Confidentiality Agreement

I,_____, agree that I will keep confidential any personal information about interviewees that comes to me as a result of carrying out my responsibilities as transcriber for Caitlin Holmes. I will not discuss any of the material covered in the interviews with anyone other than Caitlin Holmes.

_____   _____

         (name printed)   (signature and date)

_____   _____

    (witness name printed)   (signature and date)

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