Title
Stress and coping in the transition to parenthood of first-time mothers with career commitments, an interpretive study

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Stress and Coping in the Transition to Parenthood of First-time Mothers with Career Commitments, An Interpretive Study

by
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Dedication

To Noah, Bryn and Miranda, from whom I have learned the practice of mothering. Without them this work could never have been written.

Acknowledgements

This is a work that has had many midwives. Most importantly, my gratitude goes to the mothers who shared their stories with me. They graciously included me in a deeply personal and private experience, during a period in their lives when time was a precious commodity. They did so with patience and good humor. My hope is that their trust in me is realized in an interpretation that makes sense and meaning of their experiences as mothers.

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Abstract

Investigations of working mothers of infants generally treat work and family roles as additive, and stress as inhering in the additive effects of multiple role commitments. In this longitudinal, phenomenological study on stress and coping in the transition to parenthood of first-time mothers with career commitments, stress is understood as the disruption in meanings and smooth functioning engendered by the arrival of a new baby. The study examined how personal, familial and cultural meanings of motherhood and career shaped the study participants' experience of stress during the transition to parenthood. Using an interpretive strategy based on Heideggerian phenomenology and elaborated by Benner (1984a; 1984b), and drawing on the stress and coping theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Benner and Wrubel (1989), narrative accounts in transcribed interviews were treated as texts for interpretive analysis.

The study sample included 18 women with career commitments and their families. Participants were interviewed antepartally, and at six weeks, four months, and 10-15 months postpartum. Fathers were interviewed once. Two in-home family observations were done on each family. Interviews focused on narrative accounts of transitions such as the early postpartum, finding child care and returning to

work; and on particularly stressful incidents.

The meaning and content of work, and of motherhood, and the timing of return to work were found to powerfully shape a career woman's experience of the transition to motherhood. While much research has addressed the effects on infants of mothers' early return to work, little research has examined the effects on mothers, particularly on their "self-trust" (Brazelton, 1985) as caregivers, of the timing of return to work. This study found that returning to work prior to four months postpartum was almost universally stressful. Participants expected that having a baby would add a role to their repertoire, when, in fact, they experienced motherhood as world-transforming. Returning to work was stressful for the mothers who worked in a setting which did not recognize the needs and responsibilities which they now had as mothers. Meaningful work mitigated the stress of returning to work as did the economic importance of a woman's income to the family.

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Chapter One

Making Mothering Visible

> A mother's love is a pretty crude affair. There's possessiveness in it, appetite, even a 'drat the kid' element; there's generosity in it, and power, as well as humility. But sentimentality is outside it altogether, and is repugnant to mothers.
>
> D.W. Winnicott, The Child, the Family and the Outside World (1964)

> Motherhood is like Albania-you can't really trust the descriptions in books. You have to go there.
>
> Marni Jackson (1989)

Introduction

This study is about the intimacy of early motherhood, and the challenges and contributions of career commitments to that intimacy. Much of the American cultural dialogue on mothering falls away from the essential meaning of mothering into either sentimentality or rational management techniques. In this work, I will focus on mothering as a central caring practice grounded in notions of good, and undermined and marginalized by cultural practices which obscure and neglect the importance of family life to a society's future. Being a mother, I am fully aware of the constitutive nature of motherhood, and of the need for revealing the power and meaning of mothering without

contributing to the further ghettoization of women as the sole nurturers of children. I am also aware, as Marni Jackson points out above, that writing about motherhood is a bit like writing about Albania: any description of mothering can only intimate and never explicitly capture the raw emotion, the exhaustion or the transcendent joy of being a mother. This puts me in an awkward position. So much of mothering goes unsaid, and I find myself, despite the problematic nature of the project, challenged to say the unsaid; to confirm, and affirm, and perhaps to explicate, what the initiated already know and to disclose something of the experience to those who haven't been there. I am most challenged to honor and make understandable the experiences of the 18 mothers who participated in this study. Many of them did so in the hope that the study findings would foster greater understanding of the dilemmas and needs of modern mothers.

Rather than isolating women in the practice of mothering, I wish to point to the depth of the practice and to invite fathers and non-parents into it. As Mary Howell (1985) has pointed out, the naming of our experience contributes to the valuing of it. Only when the work of family life is named and publicly acknowledged and shared, and children become the meaningful and world-transforming responsibility of <u>all</u> members of a society, will the constitutive nature of mothering be understood and

celebrated.

Mothering in the Context of Career Commitments

In the interest of achieving educational goals, establishing careers and pursuing maturing life experiences, increasing numbers of women now delay childbearing and take up mothering in the context of career commitments. Currently, 58% of mothers of preschool children are in the labor force. In 1990, 53% of mothers with a child under the age of one were in the labor force. For those mothers with a child under the age one and a college degree, labor force participation rose to 68% (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census Bureau). It is estimated that by 1995 two-thirds of all mothers with children under six will be working[1] (Hofferth & Phillips, 1987). It is also estimated that 88% of women in the work force will find themselves pregnant sometime during their working years (Gambler & Zigler, 1986). A representative of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Hayghe, 1993) acknowledged in a recent conversation that the number of mothers of infants under 6 months who are in the labor force is unknown, as is the number of women eligible for either paid or unpaid maternal leave. The lack of such information is telling evidence of

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[1]The term work is used here to designate paid employment. Defining the term in this way is not meant to denigrate or ignore the work of maintaining a household, but merely to avoid having to constantly make the distinction between paid employment and household labor.

the federal government's neglect of family policy in this country. A recent series of articles in the New York Times, collectively called "The Good Mother" (Barringer, 1992; Chira, 1992; Eckholm, 1992; Lewin, 1992), began with an examination of our current ideals of the "good mother" and was headlined by the phrase "Who Is the Good Mother? A Clash of Definitions in a New Age." While conflicting interpretations of what makes a "good mother" have always coexisted in American culture, the confusion currently evident in our society suggests a cultural understanding of motherhood that borders on incoherence. In this ideological and social policy context, new mothers are left to virtually create their own particular (hopefully coherent and meaningful) maternal practices. In the absence of a coherent set of cultural level meanings and practices for mothering, women increasingly find that becoming a mother, particularly in the context of work or career commitments, is difficult. The difficulty of being both a mother and a woman with a career is evident in a recent study of women who graduated from Harvard University's schools of medicine, law and business between 1971 and 1981. Twenty-five percent of the business school graduates surveyed dropped out of the work force altogether after having children and 39 percent said child-rearing had slowed their advancement. Thirty percent said they were denied jobs or promotions because of their family responsibilities (Swiss & Walker, 1993). While

these statistics substantiate the difficulty working women experience in their careers when they are also mothers, they don't tell us of the other side of the coin: the way in which working women also experience distress, anguish and challenge as mothers, particularly while they are the mothers of infants.

A Public Health Service Task Force (1985) report cites the unprecedented entry of women into the labor force, including women with infants and small children, as one of the most important changes affecting women's health today. As these findings suggest, those involved in maternal-child health care are being confronted with a population of women for whom the transition to parenthood occurs in new contexts and possibly takes on new and different meanings. These cultural, developmental and career contexts create possibilities and constraints for the ways in which modern mothers take up the skills and practices of motherhood.

Statement of the Problem

In their efforts to live lives that meaningfully encompass both work and love, modern American women find themselves overwhelmed and bewildered by what Rossi (1993) describes as the work in love and the love in work. These issues are particularly salient in career women's experiences of the transition to parenthood. In a cultural context in which the meaning of being a good mother is

ambiguous, if not contradictory, career women struggle to accommodate the changes that a baby brings. This interpretive study examined how women take up the practice of mothering in the context of career commitments. It builds on a previous study conducted by this author which looked at the psychological experience of pregnancy for older primigravidas, most of whom had career commitments. Using an interpretive strategy based on Heideggerian phenomenology and elaborated by Dreyfus (1990), Benner (1984) and Benner and Wrubel (1989), and drawing on the stress and coping theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Benner and Wrubel (1989), this study sought to uncover and interpret what counts as stressful for these mothers, and their ways of coping, with particular reference to the participants' practical moral understandings and to the cultural meanings of motherhood and traditions of mothering practices. The study was also concerned with describing the trajectory of the development of the skills and practices of mothering, particularly with regard to the timing of the return to work; the traditions or sources a mother with career commitments draws from in developing her expertise and her informal, practical "know-how". Finally, the study looked at how a mother's practical moral understanding, her notions of the "good", in her work and in her mothering practices, shape her experience of motherhood.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to make the experience of new motherhood for women with career commitments, with its associated stresses and pleasures, accessible and understandable to health care professionals. It is also intended to add to the growing body of literature and research on caring practices, with the particular goal of helping to preserve and maintain those practices. In addition to parenting, caring practices include fields such as nursing (Benner, 1984a; Benner & Wruble, 1989), education (van Manen, 1990), and counseling. Traditionally understood as unpaid, informal, "women's work", these caring practices are here understood to be organized, particular practices grounded in an ethos of caring for and about others, and, as argued by Gilligan (1982; 1986), their focus is relationships and responsibility rather than rights and rules. Whitbeck (1984) describes the caring practices as various expressions of what she argues is the "core practice," the mutual realization of people.

In addition to contributing to the preservation and extension of mothering as a caring practice, it is hoped that the study findings will have an impact on social policies related to family life.

Significance of the study

This study seeks to articulate the stresses and concerns of modern career women who are becoming mothers, and the power of the experience to transform a mother's

world. Further, it seeks to describe mothering as a practice potentially rich in moral content and essential for the preservation of cultural traditions of nurture and care. The research findings will have relevance to professionals involved in obstetrics and pediatrics who seek a better understanding of the issues and problems facing working mothers and their families, and also for nurses concerned with identifying and preserving caring practices in our culture. It is hoped that the findings will add to existing research which supports meaningful social policy positions on family and work issues by professional nursing organizations, and point to the need for changes at the Federal level in social policies that shape the lives of American families.

Chapter Two

The Study of Mothers with Career Commitments

As women have increasingly made career an essential aspect of their lives, the research on "dual role" women has burgeoned, as has the more general research on the transition to parenthood in the last decade. As the results of this study will show, motherhood is experienced as world transforming. That is, rather than adding the role of motherhood to an already well-filled out identity which remains static, women find that having a baby re-organizes the world and re-situates a woman in a new identity. The literature on transition to parenthood and on dual role women, on the other hand, treats motherhood as a role that a woman adds to her role repertoire rather than as an identity that restructures her existence. This treatment of motherhood as an additive role, which is ubiquitous in the literature on combining mothering and career, stems from a particular notion of the modern subject, also ubiquitous in rational/empirical social science research, as an assemblage of atomistic traits. This study takes a different approach to human agency, outlined in Chapter Four. It is one grounded in the work of Heidegger (1962/1927; 1982/1975) and Taylor (1985a; 1985b) which argues that persons are

constituted by their work and family roles and that the meaning and significance of motherhood and career are shaped by a woman's personal, familial, cultural and situational context. In this view, stress is not objectively determined to inhere in a situation (Benner & Wruble, 1989).

In this chapter I will review several bodies of literature relevant to the career woman's transition to motherhood. First, I will outline the findings from the transition to parenthood literature. In particular, the following aspects of a mother's experience of early parenthood will be presented: the effects of the marital relationship, changes in self-esteem, social support, and the contribution of infant temperament will be discussed. Then the sociocultural context of parenthood will be described with a focus on the particular historical context of the "baby boom" generation's transition to parenthood. The discussion will then turn to the more specific literature on the transition to parenthood of women in the context of career or work commitments. Finally, this study is concerned with how career women interpret their experience of early motherhood, particularly with what they interpret as stressful. Again, the notion of stress which is ubiquitous in the research literature on dual roles describes stress as a static quality that inheres in the external circumstances a woman encounters in her life. Current empirical research on women's multiple roles

focusses on identifying formal relationships between stressors, coping strategies, and functioning. These formal theoretical relationships offer an inadequate account of how individual women cope with their own multiple roles because they ignore the ways in which persons are constituted by and constitutive of their situations, their human relationships and their concerns. In this empirical view, cultural or situational context does not shape the interpretation of an event as stressful. In this study, stress is understood from a Heideggerian perspective (Benner & Wruble, 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) as the breakdown of taken-for-granted meanings and smooth functioning which require the elaboration of new meanings and practices, or coping, to resolve. This chapter ends with a description of Heideggerian phenomenological stress and coping theory and its relevance for the study of mothers with career commitments.

Transition to Parenthood

Existing research on the transition to parenthood in our culture suggests that for most women becoming a mother is experienced as stressful or challenging (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Cowan, Cowan, Heming, Garrett, Coysh, Curtis-Boles, et al., 1985; Grossman, Eichler, & Winickoff, 1980; LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981; Leifer, 1980; McKim, 1987; Mercer, 1981; Miller & Sollie, 1980; Ventura, 1987) and requires the

development of coping strategies (Amatea & Fong-Beyette, 1987; Anderson & Paludi, 1986; Gilbert, Kovalic-Holahan, & Manning, 1981; Killien & Brown, 1987; Ventura, 1982; Ventura, 1986).

In one of the first studies of the transition to parenthood, LeMasters (1963) examined whether the arrival of a first child could be construed as a crisis. He concluded that adding a child to an urban middle class married couple "constitutes a crisis event" (p.113). An additional finding of the study was that:

> mothers with professional training and extensive professional work experience suffered "extensive" or "severe" crisis in every case...it was apparent that these women were really involved in two major adjustments simultaneously: 1) They were giving up an occupation which had deep significance for them; and 2) They were assuming the role of mother for the first time. (p. 114)

Of course, the prevailing cultural assumption at the time of LeMasters' study was that women with extensive professional experience would automatically give up their careers.

Early studies' claims that the transition to parenthood constituted a crisis have been disputed by the findings of more recent studies that suggest that parenthood is a transition associated with many new demands on the procreative couple (Hobbs & Cole, 1976). It is a disequilibrating event that requires the reorganization of relationships and the generation of new meanings, skills and practices. While the arrival of a new infant may be the source of stress and even dysfunction, it also offers

parents the opportunity for developmental growth and can solicit from parents new ways of being in the world that are profoundly meaningful, although these positive changes are more difficult to conceptualize and certainly to measure (Belsky, 1986; Cowan, 1988a; Miller & Sollie, 1980). Cowan (1992) remarks:

> My colleagues and I have been participating in research that provides extensive documentation of parents' negative changes and distress during the transition to parenthood, but which has not yet systematically investigated *development* in new fathers and mothers. This omission does not stem from deliberate oversight. It follows from that fact that there are reasonably good instruments for assessing problems and stress, but we lack clear concepts of what developmental change should look like, and we lack instruments for assessing when that change has occurred. (p. 13)

While Cowan would argue that it is development that must be assessed in new parents and that tools for assessing that development are lacking, I would argue that, in fact, it is the ability of a child to re-make the world for a parent, and to solicit meaningful commitments, that is the positive side of parenting that rational/empirical research has not been able to articulate because it avoids issues of meaning and significance.

The debates over whether the transition to parenthood is a crisis or a transition have given scant attention to the particular sociocultural and historical context in which parenthood occurs. For instance, the dimensions of many of the stresses involved in becoming a parent for career women in 1989 are likely very different from the stresses

experienced by women in the 1950's who never had careers, or for women in the 1960's who had careers and gave them up to become mothers. In another example, Grossman (1987) et al point out that the dimensions of autonomy and affiliation in the marriage relationship are currently particularly important aspects of the transition to parenthood experience because couples have new expectations for the marital relationship, particularly couples in which both partners have careers and have enjoyed a long period of role equality in their marital relationship before it is joined to the responsibilities of parenthood and the commonly experienced slide toward more traditional and unequal roles. Lack of attention to the meanings associated with the transition to parenthood in particular sociocultural contexts may help explain why researchers differ over whether transition to parenthood constitutes a crisis.

The research on transition to parenthood considers several aspects of the experience: the effects of parenthood on the marriage relationship and, conversely, the relationship of marital satisfaction to adaptation to parenthood; the effects of parenthood on the self-concept or self-esteem of mothers and fathers; the moderating role of social support, particularly spousal support, on the stresses associated with the transition to parenthood; and the relationship of infant temperament to parental adaptation to the parental role.

More recent research which looks at the individual experiences of mothers and fathers in the transition to parenthood suggests that mothers and fathers have very different experiences in this transition (Cowan, et al., 1985; Cowan, 1988b; Roberts, 1983). The following brief review will consider findings that relate particularly to the new mother's experience of parenthood.

The marital relationship in the transition to parenthood: Parenthood is generally associated with negative changes in the marital relationship, particularly for women (Belsky, Spanier, & Rovine, 1983; Cowan, et al., 1985; Miller & Sollie, 1980; Russell, 1974); although couples who are satisfied with their marriages prenatally continue to be satisfied after they become parents, albeit less so, and those with bad marriages continue to have bad marriages and further decreases in marital satisfaction in the postpartum period (Belsky, et al., 1983; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Tomlinson, 1987). Belsky (1981) suggests that the more romance-based a relationship is, the more stressful will be the transition to parenthood. Conversely, the more partnership-oriented a relationship is prior to parenthood, the less stressful the transition to parenthood.

There is a documented shift from more egalitarian marriage roles to more traditional roles in the marriage after the birth of the first child (Daniels & Weingarten, 1982; Gambescia, 1983). Cowan, Cowan, Coie, and Coie (1978)

and Cowan and Cowan (1988) found that the actual role arrangements (i.e. who does what) in a marriage are less consistently related to adaptation to parenthood than *satisfaction* with the role arrangements that do exist, although women in their study did link role arrangements with their stress as parents and as spouses at eighteen months postpartum. Cowan and Cowan also found that nearly 40% of the variance in women's and men's satisfaction with marriage at 18 months postpartum is explained by satisfaction with role arrangements. Marital satisfaction (as measured by tools assessing marital adjustment) has been found to be predictive of a mother's adaptation to the maternal role (Cowan, et al., 1985; Grossman, et al., 1980), and to the quality of parenting styles (Belsky, Rovine, & Taylor, 1984; Bohlin & Hagekull, 1987; Cowan, 1988b).

Changes in self-concept in the transition to parenthood: Mercer's (1981) study of factors impacting on maternal role attainment showed that younger women derived significantly more gratification in the maternal role than older women, and older women experienced a significant decrease in self-concept during the first year of parenthood. This is supported by McKim's (1987) finding that older mothers reported more problems between 9 and 12 months than younger mothers. On the other hand, Ragozin et al (1982) report that primiparous mothers interact with their young infants in a more positively affectionate,

stimulating and sensitive manner the older they are. Russell (1974) also observed that better educated parents derive less satisfaction in the maternal role. Pistrang (1984) found that new mothers who were highly involved in paid work before the birth were more irritable, depressed, and lower in self-esteem when they stayed home. Cronenwett (1980) suggests that perhaps adjustment to the maternal role requires more emotional work for women with more education because they have alternative ways of becoming self-fulfilled. Belsky (1986) maintains that career-oriented women experience the most difficulty in making the transition to parenthood, particularly if they take on increased responsibility for household work as they assume the parent role, because the more traditional responsibilities are inconsistent with their self-image.

Cowan (1988) reports that in his study (1985), women's self-esteem was remarkably stable from pregnancy to 18 months postpartum. Roberts (1983) also found correlations between prenatal and postnatal self-esteem, and between postnatal self-esteem and ease of transition to the parent role. Cowan et al (1985) also found that women with less psychological involvement in the parent role had higher self-esteem and lower parenting stress.

Belsky (1981) suggests that personal psychological resources are the most influential determinants of parenting, not only because of their direct influence on

parenting, but also because the marital relationship and social support may be mediated by parental psychological well-being. This is supported in part by Lewis (1988) who found a relationship between marital satisfaction and psychological health, particularly for women.

Social support in the transition to parenthood: In an early study documenting the importance of social support in the childbearing period, Nuckolls, Cassel and Caplan (1972) found that for women with high levels of life change, there was a significant relationship between psychosocial assets, or social support, and complications in pregnancy. Cowan and Cowan (1988; 1992) report that, in general, women in their study were less stressed and showed greater adaptation as parents at both the six month and 18 month follow-ups when their husbands participated more in the care of their children and in household tasks.

Cowan and Cowan (1978; 1992), and Cowan et al (1985), have developed two intervention studies in which they examined whether emotionally supportive and educational support groups led by trained mental health professionals could buffer the stresses engendered by men and women becoming parents. Results offer strong support for the value of these groups, particularly in improving partners' feelings about their marriage and in normalizing for participants the stresses involved in the transition to parenthood (1987). Follow-up measures also indicate that

improved feelings about the marriage lead to better parenting three and a half years postpartum.

The relationship of social support to adaptation to parenthood has not been clearly elucidated in research in part because the concept of social support is defined so differently by those studying it. Research instruments are not consistent across studies, making comparisons of results difficult.

Infant temperament and the transition to parenthood: Research on the effects of infant temperament on parental adaptation to new parenthood offers evidence that difficult temperament can undermine parental adaptation and functioning (Belsky, et al., 1984; McKim, 1987; Russell, 1974). Roberts (1983) found that the lack of predictability of infant behavior, the frequency of irritability and crying, and unpredictable sleep patterns in the postpartum period negatively impacted parental perceptions of role competence, which in turn negatively affected ease of transition to parenthood. Galambos and Lerner (1987), in a highly educated middle class sample studied in the 1950's, found that during infancy, difficult child temperament was related to the child's mother not being gainfully employed. There is also evidence that the goodness of fit between infant temperament and environmental context (for instance, the fit of the infant's temperament with the temperament and needs of his/her mother and father, and with their work

obligations) has an important effect on parental adaptation (Lerner, 1983).

The sociocultural context for the transition to parenthood of mothers with careers:

In our modern era, this transition, particularly for older women with career commitments, involves a radical shift from the autonomous, strategic, goal-oriented and structured way of relating in the world of work which is, comparatively, predictable and rational, to a way of relating that is contingent, nurturing, and solicited, in a world that is unpredictable, physically demanding, and fundamentally relational. The career woman's experience in the world of work is often one of feeling "omnicompetent" (Daniels & Weingarten, 1982), autonomous, rational and in control. The birth of a baby confronts career women with a situation that requires skills and practices such as pattern recognition and contingent care which are fundamentally different from the skills and practices typically required by the work world. Jackson (1989) describes this unsettling reaction to parenthood:

> For anybody who looked forward to "settling down," this curious, ongoing disorientation can come as a shock. Sooner or later, it sinks in that "normal" is not an option anymore. (p. 35)

For women who work in the caring professions, who have practices that are in some ways parallel to maternal practices, the transition can be less dramatic but is still

challenging because of its unremitting character and by the lack of control that women feel as mothers. Mothering confronts women with the limits of managing and coping via rational control, as infants are neither rational nor predictable nor easily schedulable. Thus, the new mother with career commitments is confronted with a highly demanding new situation at the same time that she is cut off from the world of work and familiar ways of being and coping, and often from familiar sources of social support. Jackson writes of baby boom parents:

> We are an achievement-oriented culture and generation, whereas family life has failure built into it. It is imperfect, ongoing, unsettling-a series of crises, each one demanding some new shift in power, with brief, sunny plateaus of equilibrium in between. No sooner have we nailed down one stage of family life than some fresh new hell arrives. This is life, as any other generation will tell us. But some combination of personal and cultural factors-idealism and self-determination, an obsession with individuality-has made the boom generation so cocky that the fact that the family can't be controlled feels tantamount to failure.(1989, p. 32)

This transition occurs in the context of a romantically idealized cultural paradigm of motherhood which burdens women with the view that motherhood is the ultimate expression of femininity. E.E. LeMasters (1963) argues that "parenthood (and not marriage) is the real romantic complex in our culture" (p. 196). Grossman et al's (1980) research confirms that this idealized myth of parenthood still survives and "tyrannizes most new parents in their efforts to at least approximate the idealized image" (p.254). At

the same time, our culture offers little in the way of cultural practices which support or value new mothers, or families, in their transition; particularly in the current cost-cutting climate wherein "non-essential" services such as home-based post-partum follow-up are being eliminated, despite shortened post-partum hospital stays. And, despite the recent passage of the family leave bill by Congress, most women still find themselves with no paid maternal leave, and many still have no leave at all because they are among those working in small companies which are excluded from the provisions of the family leave legislation.

There is little in the literature on transition to parenthood which addresses how women develop expertise in the skills and practices of mothering. Particularly in our modern, technological, individualistic culture, where membership in a community and in a coherent and meaningful tradition are only marginally possible, becoming expert in the caretaking of an infant is not automatic. It would be hard to articulate the central skills in the work of being a mother. As Howell (1985) points out, "for most of us, it is easier to specify the skills that we exercise in our professional work than to name the skills used in raising children. The naming, of course, contributes to the valuing" (p. 87).

The current cohort of mid-career stage, career-committed couples must also wrestle with the issues and

conflicts particular to their identity as "baby boomers." Women coming of age in the Seventies, the beginning of the "second wave" of feminism, came to view control as the central leitmotif of the decade. Control over their bodies and their work, and their relationships with men, was worked out, if imperfectly, in contentious negotiations with parents, lovers, employers and colleagues. The virtues of autonomy, choice and self-development guided these negotiations and shaped the collective identity of a generation of professional women. The entire revolution in women's ability to take control of their lives was premised on their ability to control their fertility. Pregnancy was something to be prevented or terminated. For some, it was seen as an inappropriate act on a beleaguered and doomed planet; for others, it spelled sure professional disaster and loss of control. Firestone (1970) charged that women's childbearing and child rearing roles lay at the heart of women's oppression. Although women had already begun entering the work force before the "second wave" of feminism occurred, the feminist movement created new contexts in which women were able to take up their work. Regan and Roland (1985) report that in their 1980 survey 40% of college women polled were aspiring to professional careers. Career was of primary importance to them, while family was second. They suggest that women had become more like men in their valuation of money, power, prestige, and recognition

as occupational motivators. Nock (1987) suggests that the relatively low fertility rate of nontraditional women is a result not of practical considerations, but of this shift in ideology concerning the meaning of motherhood, where motherhood is seen as an added role rather than a core aspect of one's identity. That this shift in ideology occurred is supported by Yankelovich's 1981 survey research: "our studies show that, unlike most American women in the recent past, tens of millions of women no longer regard having babies as self-fulfilling."

During the Eighties the rewards of the battles fought in the Seventies were reaped, for some, in the form of promotions and material success. Others hit the "glass ceiling". But there was also a dawning recognition, for some, that a consuming allegiance to career necessarily precluded other aspects of life. By the mid-Eighties, with the biological clock ticking loudly, women were suddenly confronted with the limits to their ability to postpone motherhood. Vogue Magazine declared the ranks of professional women overrun with "baby fever" (Bennetts, 1985).

While the appeal of motherhood to this group of baby boomers was multilayered, it was steeped in an idealism and romanticism about motherhood (cultivated by their longstanding segregation from the everyday experience of nurturing and caring for infants) that was quickly

dissipated by the realities. The challenge of motherhood for this cohort of women was deeply shaped by their identity as baby boomers. Jackson (1989) articulates the intersection of the baby boomer's identity with parenthood:

> The problem here, some people may want to interject, is that children interfere with the boom generation's monumental self-absorption. This is true. However, even though we may be the most selfish parents in history, selfishness is not the whole story. I think the conflicts also arise from our desire to excel, and be good parents, which we know involves not just a martyred focus on the child but a measure of personal satisfaction all around. We are determined to be not role-dominated "parents" but three little individuals, rattling around under one roof. And so we set high standards for ourselves, as well as for our children-without having the first clue about the daily business of childraising. Our expectations of family have gone up, but our willingness to sacrifice has gone down.

The study of women who combine careers and families:

The problems and issues facing employed mothers or dual role women have been the subject of extensive research and theoretical analysis, in addition to numerous books for the lay public. The strains, satisfactions and advantages of combining motherhood and work have been debated, analyzed and placed before an anxious public searching for answers to the problems associated with an "overloaded" lifestyle.

Since so much of the literature on employed mothers comes out of role theory, and assumes the notion of role strain, the concept of role strain will first be introduced and critiqued. The most problematic aspect of the role strain literature is the fact that it embodies the rational/empirical notion of person. This person is an

autonomous, self-contained subject rationally choosing her roles based on enlightened self-interest; on cost-benefit analysis.

The concept of role strain: Much of the research on dual career families is concerned with identifying "role strain", a concept which comes out of role theory; and its causes. Role strain is defined by Goode (1960) as the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations. Role strain may occur when an individual has multiple role commitments which she feels she cannot satisfactorily honor, or when she has unrealistic expectations for role fulfillment. Role strain can lead to embarrassment, and, if unchecked, to frustration, or feelings of insecurity. Strategies identified for individuals experiencing role strain are: restructuring role expectations, reducing involvement, or creating distance from the role (Biddle, 1979, p. 326). It is clear by the language employed that role as defined by Goode and Biddle is not constitutive, but, rather, something one stands in relation to as a subject to an object.

In a critique of the traditional role concepts, Marks (1977) argues that role theorists have commonly assumed a finite, quantitative amount of human "energy" for coping with role responsibilities, with the result that multiple role commitments necessarily result in role strain. Marks argues that, rather than being a "pre-theoretical given" (p. 922), the scarcity approach to energy available for role

commitments should be replaced by concepts of energy and time as flexible, i.e. variables that are socially-culturally conditioned (p. 926). Citing Durkheim, who proposed that social involvement is enriching and vitalizing to human beings, Marks suggests that:

> We need to see the experience of both time and energy as outcomes or products of our role bargains, rather than assuming (like Goode) that they are already constituted for us as scarcities even before our role bargains are made. (p.929)

Marks suggests that our level of role commitment shapes our perception of the amount of time and energy we have for a role. Roles to which we <u>are</u> highly committed maximize production of energy and time, while roles to which we are undercommitted always cause us to feel like we have little energy, because we have more important things to do (in the form of roles to which we are highly committed). Marks' overly cognitivistic and quantitative language passes over the ways in which women do not take up mothering as a "bargain" from which ensues a certain level of energy with which to take up the role. Mothering is not a contractual agreement, as any new mother who has recently fallen in love with her infant will tell you. The infant has a real claim on the mother. This claim is emotional and physical as well as moral. This claim is not experienced as limiting; rather, it provides meaning , purpose and identity. The

baby becomes what Dreyfus and Wakefield (1988) call a "paradigmatic object", reorganizing the background against which all contents appear.

Sieber (1974), similarly to Marks, argues that multiple role commitments or role accumulation, do not necessarily create role strain. Rather, Sieber suggests that 1) roles offer gratifications (i.e. role privileges, status security, resources, personality enrichment and ego gratification) as well as deprivations; 2) the greater the number of roles (which are not inherently offensive) the greater the privileges enjoyed by the individual; and 3) the rewards of multiple role commitments may exceed the costs. Sieber reports that "the two most elaborate studies of role conflict found either no relationship with satisfaction or a weak one" (p. 568).

Thoits (1983) study examining the relationship between multiple role identities and psychological well-being supports the positions taken by Marks and Sieber: she found that the greater the number of role identities possessed, the less psychological distress. No evidence was found for a curvilinear relationship between role accumulation and distress, suggesting "that multiple identity involvements do not necessarily result in role strain or role conflict" (p. 183).

Long and Porter (1984), in their review of the literature on dual roles and role conflict, point out that

role conflict does not appear in research when it "should" given the underlying assumptions of the dual role conflict literature (p. 129). The literature does indicate that role strain can be generated in women by role partners who "challenge the legitimacy of dual role enactment or the adequacy of role performance" (p. 131). Finally, Long and Porter suggest that, contrary to Sieber's hypothesis that role accumulation can generate an excess of role privileges over obligations, women experience an excess of obligations over privileges due to low status, low paying work options and predominant responsibility for household work and child care (which are also low status and non-paying) despite her dual role (employment and family) status. The language of privilege and obligation employed by Long and Porter seems particularly inappropriate for mothering. Is the positive freedom to be involved in family-sustaining activities in one's community a privilege or an obligation? Neither description adequately captures the practices of mothers.

Baruch and Barnett (1985) in their study on how the occupancy of social roles and the quality of experiences within roles are related to psychological well-being in mid-life women, rejected the "scarcity hypothesis" (that well-being is impaired by the overload and conflict inherent in numerous, often incompatible roles) and the "expansion hypothesis" (emphasizing the benefits of multiple role involvement) concerning role involvement. They suggest,

based on their findings, that it is the quality of the social roles a woman assumes which is related to psychological well-being. Further, they suggest that if we conceptualize well-being as a multidimensional construct, and if sources of well-being differ for each dimension, then involvement in multiple roles may be necessary, but not sufficient, for well-being.

These critiques of the role strain concept skirt around what is to this author the primary problem with Goode's role strain theory: that roles cannot be conceived of as formal categories which impinge on every individual in the same way. The "roles" we take up have content, that is, they have particular significance and meaning for each individual. Thus, the effects of multiple roles are not merely additive but are a function of the way each qualitatively distinct role is combined with others in a particular individual who lives in a particular familial, cultural, and socio-historical context. Our involvements in work and family are constitutive of and constituted by personal, family and cultural background meanings and concerns. A critically important point glossed over by the role conflict literature about the conflict between mothering and career is that it involves the clash of two incommensurable worlds to which one individual has commitments. In the managerial world of work, women stand over against the situation, absorbed in their techniques of

manipulation and control. In the world of family, a mother stands in relation, carrying out her responsibility to her children based on an ethic of care, powerfully constituted by her situation.

Further, the strategies outlined by Biddle (1979) for coping with role strain are formal rules which do not acknowledge the meaning or content of the role or the situation. For many women, work is central to their identity. For even more women, motherhood is central to their identity. One cannot take the stance toward these "roles" of distancing or reducing involvement, particularly in mothering, if they are constitutive of one's identity. Only if being a mother is seen as a role that one "possesses" rather than something one is (Sandel, 1982), can one legitimately argue that "restructuring" or distancing one's self from a role are reasonable strategies. As Johnson and Johnson (1976) argue, restricting the content of one's roles may be possible for men but places the career mother in a double bind:

> On the one hand, a reduction in the investment of her career role leads to lowered goals, diminished achievement and (relative) failure in competition with her male colleagues. On the other hand, pursuing a high-commitment career at the expense of mothering violates the most cherished of social norms, and can lead to social condemnation and reactive strategies of anxiety and guilt. (p. 19)

The developing body of literature on women's identity development suggests that women carry out their family and work responsibilities on the basis of an ethic of care

(Gilligan, 1982), based on responsibility and relationships as they are played out in concrete situations rather than on abstract rights, rules, and justice. For this sort of being-in-the-world, distancing or insulating one's self from one's constitutive relationships and commitments is possible only at great cost. Johnson and Johnson (1976) comment:

> Men experiencing role strain have the prerogative to make a sharp dichotomy between their career and family roles. They also may privatize selected segments of each role to prevent knowledge of performance in one area from reaching role patterns in other areas. In contrast, a woman at home and at work generally is expected to move in a more intimate interpersonal environment which is particularistic, personalistic, and responsive to emotional demands. This being the case, insulation and privatization are alternatives she would be less likely to choose. (p. 30)

One of the most persistent findings in the research on role strain in employed women is the importance of the congruence between a woman's desires regarding employment and her employment status. Women who <u>want</u> to work and do so experience less stress than either women who want to be employed and are not or than women who don't want to be employed and are. Here we see clearly the importance of the <u>meaning</u> of taking up paid employment for a woman: if work is a meaningful and sustaining practice, then the difficulties of combining work and family are tempered by the meaning and content of the role. Or, if employment is taken up as a necessary burden then that stance towards one's work makes for a more stressful experience.

Despite the problematic nature of the role strain

concept, one can find in the literature information that is relevant to the study of women who become mothers in the context of career commitments.

Sources of role strain in dual role women: As Hewlett (1986) points out, "American society, having produced the strongest and most antithetical dual roles for women, has left them with the weakest support systems with which to mediate these roles" (p. 33). Lack of a coherent social policy acknowledging the needs of working parents with young children is one of the most serious sources of strain in dual role women. Lack of reliable, affordable, quality day care (Kamerman, 1985); and maternal leave policies and sick child leave policies are a major burden for working mothers (Hopper & Zigler, 1988).

Cowan (1987) reports that "if national time studies as well as intensive sociological investigations are to be believed, women still do the bulk of the work at home-and still carry the bulk of the responsibility for organizing and managing it" (p. 172). Anderson-Kulman and Paludi (1986) found the most frequently endorsed areas of conflict for working mothers were home cleaning (63%) sick child care (59%) and general household management (51%). Staats and Staats (1983) compared female and male managers and professionals' stress and stressors, and women reported higher levels of stress and stressors that were family-related. This was also true in Gilbert,

Kovalic-Holahan, and Manning's (1981) study where mothers attributed their role conflict to guilt and fatigue centering on their maternal role. They attribute the conflict experienced by their informants to their deep-rooted value systems regarding the maternal role.

Pearlin (1975) notes that, contrary to his supposition that middle class women would be disenchanted with homemaking because it blocked the realization of aspirations outside the home, role strain and disenchantment in homemakers in his study was, in part, determined "simply by how tough the job is....Role strains result not because women prefer employment outside the home but because they experience severe demands inside the home" (p. 198). O'Donnell's (1985) informants also cited housework as their main burden, one from which they would welcome some relief. It was the one aspect of their lives as mothers that held little reward.

Baruch and Barnett's (1986) examination of fathers' participation in family work revealed that the mean number of hours spent per week by fathers with employed wives in home chores was 5.79 compared with 23.7 for their employed wives. Similarly, Voydanoff (1988) found that women in her study spent 48 hours per week in home chores and child care to men's 25. In both studies, fathers were much more reluctant to do housework than to do child care. Similarly, Pleck (1985) found that husbands increased family work when

their wives were employed, but mainly through an increase in child care, not in housework. Model et al (1982) found that the smaller the difference in income between spouses, the greater the participation of husbands in housework. In Perry-Jenkins' (1988) study of husbands' and wives' attitudes regarding the provider role, fathers' involvement in family work was clearly significantly related to their attitudes regarding the provider role. Regardless of whether their wives were employed or not, husbands who saw their main role as economic provider did fewer household tasks (and reported greater satisfaction in their marriage) than husbands who believed that the provider role should be shared by both husband and wife.

Clearly, the burdens of housework are a universal aspect of family life that both men and women would rather avoid, particularly those in dual job families where time for family life is limited.

Satisfaction in one's job (Anderson & Paludi, 1986; Sekaran, 1986), increased income (Genevie & Margolies, 1987; Lubin, 1987; Voydanoff & Kelly, 1984) and autonomy, or having control over one's work (Katz & Piotrkowski, 1983), are negatively associated with role strain. Having one's youngest child under the age of six (Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985) and the presence of family conflict (Anderson & Paludi, 1986) are positively associated with role strain.

Regan and Roland (1985) point out that women in dual

career marriages may be doubly disadvantaged because they must compete in the work world with career-directed individuals with low levels of family involvement and with men in the traditional two person career couple (in which the wife maintains the home and family while the husband is free to pursue his career). Similarly, Kanter (1977), in her study of men and women of the corporation, found that men whose wives were not employed brought two people to the corporate organization. "Preferential hiring of married men and occasional attention to wives' own characteristics frequently assured that this was so" (p. 106). Thus, career women are vulnerable to strain by virtue of the fact that they don't have the support system and backup that belongs to men with unemployed wives, nor the freedom to invest themselves in their careers enjoyed by other career men and women without family commitments and responsibilities. Johnson and Johnson's (1976) high-commitment career women acknowledged that childbearing and child rearing required very special accommodations and often led to feelings of guilt and failure. Johnson and Johnson suggest that part of the stress created by child rearing for their subjects was caused by the high aspirations that these women had for family life as well as for their careers.

Pearlin (1975) found that women's ego involvement in their work increased the risk of being caught up in role conflict, particularly in middle-class women for whom

employment is valued for itself rather than for what it instrumentally provides outside the job. Similarly, Holahan and Gilbert (1979) found that high career aspirations were positively related to role conflict in their sample. More current studies (Genevie & Margolies, 1987; Lubin, 1987) have found the opposite: women who derive a great deal of satisfaction from their careers, and are heavily invested, experience less role conflict. This was certainly true of Lubin's sample of high-echelon career women. They clearly made their work primary and family secondary, with no hesitancy. This very special group of high salaried, high achieving women was able to enlist an extensive paid support system which most dual career families would have trouble affording. They look more like traditional career males who make career primary while their wives shape and maintain family life. That more recent studies find less role conflict in high-commitment career women may reflect the increasing acceptability of combining work and mothering for women in our culture. It may also reflect the growing acceptability in our culture of making individual self-actualization the primary focus of life.

The number of hours worked by employed mothers seems to have some effect on women's experiences of role strain. In Moen and Dempster-McClain's (1987) sample of families with at least one professional parent, well over half the couples worked the equivalent of more than two full-time jobs. They

suggest that it is career demands which require extended work hours, rather than economic need. Of those mothers working full time, 67% preferred working fewer hours as compared to 23% of part-time workers. Thus, women who work part-time are much more likely to prefer working the hours they work, and to not feel conflicted about their dual role status, as opposed to women working full-time who preferred working less because they felt they had insufficient time for their children (and did spend statistically less time with their children than women working part-time). Holahan and Gilbert (1979) also found that the number of hours worked was associated with high role conflict in dual career parents. Voydanoff (1988) found that for women, the number of hours worked and workload pressure, and having children (of any age) were most strongly related to work-family conflict.

Daniels and Weingarten (1982) report that many of the older first-time mothers with extensive work histories in their study were used to having a sense of "omnicompetence" which was profoundly threatened when they attempted to combine career and parenthood. They were shaken by a sudden inability to simultaneously handle career, infant, household responsibilities and their relationships to their husbands. They were forced, uncharacteristically, to cut corners, to compromise, and they found this very stressful.

Men do not seem to experience the loss of competence

due to over extension with family and work because, as Pleck (1977) points out, the boundary between work and family is asymmetrically permeable: for women, the demands of family are allowed to intrude on work commitments, whereas the opposite has generally been true for men. As more men take up parenting on an equal basis with mothers this may become less true. Although Ehrensaft (1987) found, in her recent study of couples sharing the care of their children, that the fathers had an easier time of drawing and maintaining boundaries between work and family than the mothers.

One source of dual role strain not frequently cited in the research literature is the conflict engendered by having to move between two irremediably separate and different worlds, both powerfully able to constitute and solicit one and both requiring very different ways of being. Abramson and Franklin (1986), in their study of 70 women who graduated from Harvard Law School in 1974, found that for nearly all of the women, their careers came first; and for the 51% who did go on to have children, the experience of motherhood has been problematic:

> While schedules can be adjusted, psychological pressures and the perfectionist expectations...are harder to grapple with. The desire to raise children and devote time to their families runs exactly counter to the driven, workaholic behavior that many of these women developed....The nurturing personality of the mother clashes blatantly with the tough, hard qualities of the respected negotiator and litigator. (p. 166)

Similarly, Howell observes:

> In the world of work we focus quite severely on

> substantive goals: there are tasks to be completed, as quickly and completely and efficiently as possible. Learning to do one's job well means, in part, learning how to stay focused on goal completion and not be distracted by people or events. In the family, on the other hand, it is precisely that flow of people and events that <u>is</u> the stuff of existence. (1985, p. 84)

Raising children is an unpredictable, uncontrollable enterprise requiring patience, humility, good humor and an ability to cope with situations that are ambiguously defined, with very long-term goals. As Lubin (1987) comments on her high-echelon career mothers: "they cannot completely master the development of children as they think they can their jobs. The rules are unclear, so the outcome is uncertain" (p.85). Problems arise for career mothers when ways of relating in the work place spill over into family life, i.e. strategies for maximizing efficiency and emotional distancing. As Howell (1977) points out:

> When caretaking is routinized-children bathed in a herd or in assembly-line succession and rushed into bed, meals no more than nutritious, brusque and painful hair combing and nail clipping (a duty to perform and a duty to submit)-the pleasures of giving and receiving care can be lost in the service of time and "efficiency." (p. 39)

Citing Embers' unpublished doctoral dissertation which explored time management in dual career women, Howell says (1985):

> A recurrent theme for her subjects was not 'living in the moment,' focusing instead on the next hour or the next event or the next stage of career or child development. Many of these mothers felt dominated by a tyranny of time; hoarding it, giving it away, dividing it, saving it, and squandering it became major themes in their everyday lives. Some wondered if they created speed and busyness as a form of 'success.' Others

> suspected that they had become addicted to the stress of too much to do in not enough time. (p. 85)

For these women, mothering practices have been taken over by the technological strategies of production and achievement, as they adopt the stance of "managers" (Chesla, 1988) of their own and their children's lives.

That stresses are involved in combining work and family roles is evident from the plethora of books and magazine articles addressing how women can better cope with their multiple roles. As Leifer (1980) has commented, the prevailing view has been that women should accommodate their parenting to the world of work rather than that labor market and industry should respond to the parenting and family needs of their employees. Even some feminists have argued that motherhood is a personal choice and a private responsibility, one that should not interfere with one's professional responsibilities (Hewlett, 1986). Hewlett quotes former San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein's comments on an important court decision concerning a mother's right to maternity leave:

> What we were asking was to create a special group of workers that, in essence, is pregnant women and new mothers. I just don't happen to agree with that. I don't think the work market has to accommodate itself to women having children. (p. 146)

This coincides with the preponderant view in America that children are privately owned goods (Hewlett, 1986) or property, rather than our commonly held and cared for future, a good that must be preserved and nurtured. Taken

together, these views reflect the dominant individualistic ideology in our culture which revolves around concepts such as rights, responsibility, choice and freedom.

Despite the stresses associated with combining career and motherhood, the benefits, for women who want to work, are numerous. Work has clear boundaries and expectations in comparison to mothering and housework. It provides social relationships with other adults, and a legitimate "social address" (Belsky, 1984) now that homemaking is no longer regarded by many as a legitimate role for women. Further, earning a paycheck confers on women increased power in the marital relationship, builds self-esteem (Pietromonaco, Manis, & Frohardt-Lane, 1986) and feelings of well-being (Baruch, Barnett, & Rivers, 1983), and insures that in the event of divorce or widowhood one will have a means of support (Long & Porter, 1984). Finally, meaningful work confers the benefits of improved physical (Verbrugge, 1983) and mental health (Kessler & McRae, 1982).

In addition to the benefits of working, "dual role" women also experience tremendous gratification from their children. Several researchers have cited career women's unexpected pleasure in their newborns. Many of the mothers studied by Daniels and Weingarten (1982) were surprised to find that rather than feeling that the baby interfered with work and career as they expected, they resented the intrusion of their work obligations on their relationships

with their new infants, when they attempted to combine work and mothering. Similarly, Hock, Gnezda and McBride (1984) found that the mothers in their study increased their orientation toward remaining at home with their infants during the first three months, reflecting an increased salience of motherhood.

The research on combining motherhood and career is multidimensional and far from unified in its understanding of the phenomena. That combining mothering and career can be stressful is apparent. Spousal support and participation are clearly implicated as potent contextual factors shaping women's experiences of early motherhood. That career and work can also contribute to women's physical and mental health, and that motherhood can be a potent catalyst for growth and source of meaning, is also clear. The situational contexts which shape whether combining work and family is stressful or not have yet to be clearly elucidated.

Stress and coping theory from a phenomenological perspective

A phenomenological understanding of stress and coping as defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Benner and Wrubel (1989) is assumed in this study. Benner and Wrubel, extending the work of Lazarus and Folkman, argue that stress is an outcome of an appraisal by a person in a situation and is defined as "the disruption of meanings, understanding,

and smooth functioning so that harm, loss, or challenge is experienced, and sorrow, interpretation or new skill acquisition is required" (p. 59). From the phenomenological perspective of stress and coping, the person is viewed as always in a situation. A situation is always directly grasped as meaningful, and what counts as stress is always understood in terms of the person's appraisal of the situation. The situation is never defined as stressful in an a priori way. As Benner and Wrubel point out, the situation itself has its own power to constitute one, to present one with possibilities, and certain situations have stronger demand qualities than others. For instance, the mother of a highly irritable infant who sleeps little and cries a great deal is powerfully constituted by her situation. She is not free to radically re-define the situation and herself as the mother of a calm, placid, sleepy baby. She must cope with the situation as she finds herself in it. On the other hand, the mother of a quiet, placid infant who sleeps and eats peacefully and regularly is presented with a situation with a quite different demand quality, one that may even cause some mothers to worry that the infant "sleeps too much" and therefore doesn't get enough stimulation. She can experience possibilities for coping and concerns in her situation which the mother of the irritable infant cannot.

In this view, stress does not imply that one is not

"dealing well" with a problem as most stress management techniques assume. Similarly, stress cannot always be "cured" or avoided because it "is the inevitable result of living in a world in which things matter to one" (Benner & Wruble, 1989, p. 61). For instance, a mother's understanding of being a good mother is shaped by the personal, familial and cultural meanings of "good mother" available to her, and by her concerns. If it matters to a woman that she is a good mother to her child, situations that prevent her from being the kind of mother that she understands to be a "good" one will be interpreted as stressful.

Further, disengagement from the situation may not be an appropriate action for the person experiencing stress either, for disengagement from our meanings and concerns leaves us impoverished (Benner & Wruble, 1989). This is particularly true in mothering, where the mother's love for her infant is dependent on an engaged stance. Literature on depression in mothers suggests that the disengaged, flat affect of a depressed mother has serious consequences for her infant as well (Orraschel, Weissman, & Kidd, 1980)). The infant's responses are no longer salient for the mother, and the mother cannot be reliably solicited by the infant. Other forms of parental disengagement such as parental abandonment and narcissism have equally serious consequences for infants and children.

Coping, from the phenomenological perspective, is what

one does about the disruption of meanings, understanding, and smooth functioning (Benner & Wruble, 1989). What counts as coping is defined by an individual's meanings, concerns, and situation. Coping does not involve a limitless choice from coping options defined, independently of the situation, as effective. What one does is limited to those possibilities which inhere in a person's background meanings, concerns and situation. The coping strategies of a teen-age mother would likely look very different from those of a forty year old business executive becoming a mother for the first time. For many young black mothers, becoming a mother is the only tenable option for achieving adult status, and the baby becomes the focus of identity and creates possibilities (Gabriel & McAnarney, 1983; Smith, 1988). For many middle class career women, becoming a mother is only one of many paths open to her and may, in fact, be taken up only because the opportunity to do so is diminishing because of biological parameters. The baby may be seen as <u>limiting</u> personal freedom and independence, not creating them as for the young black mother. What these two groups of mothers might experience as stressful will likely be quite different, as will the ways in which they cope with the disruptions created by becoming a mother.

Suggested and identified strategies found in the research literature for coping with the stresses encountered in "dual roles" are variously, redefining the situation,

management via technique and rational control (Brazelton, 1986), detachment from guilt (Berg, 1986), and mourning the loss of time with the infant (Brazelton, 1986).

Contrary to the phenomenological view of coping, these strategies, identified in the literature, are context-free, abstract and formal rules for coping with the stresses of combining paid work and family. They ignore how a mother's particular situation, background meanings and concerns shape what coping strategies are possible for her. Brazelton's notion of mourning comes closest to acknowledging a mother's real membership and participation in her family life and the ways in which she is solicited by her infant; but even here, there are certainly mothers who are exhilarated at being back at work and relieved to leave the day-to-day care of an infant to someone else, and mourning is an inappropriate strategy for these women. Strategies of detachment and rational control may work effectively in the world of paid employment, but they have drawbacks when used in the world of the family. This exemplifies how strategies are context- and situation-dependent. Only when one examines mothers in their situations and comes to understand what counts as important and what counts as stressful, can one identify coping strategies that work and don't work, and why.

Current research also assumes there is a fixed and clear definition of "mother" and "motherhood". This "motherhood" identity is a normative notion, supposedly

grounded in empirical research. In this study, I have assumed the position that there is no objective referent for "mother" or "motherhood" independent of the background meanings and practices implicit in a culture and inherent in the particular mother's history. These meanings and practices, situated in a particular cultural/historical context, shape our interpretation of what it is to be a (good/bad) mother, what mothering entails, and how meanings and understandings will be disrupted, causing stress. This view, based on Heideggerian phenomenology, contrasts with studies in which the attainment of the maternal role is viewed as a final end point, resulting in the formal stage of having a maternal identity. This view of the maternal role is of something one "has" rather than something one "is." Maternal role, in this view, then, is not constitutive nor transformative of the person. It fits with Sandel's (1982) 'self of possession:' the view of the self as the owner of traits and roles which one can assume at will and, likewise, shed.

The all-or-nothing position regarding maternal role attainment leaves no room for understanding the meaning of motherhood for the person. It is a normative view that imposes categories of good/bad mother which are particularly loaded evaluations in our culture and which limit possibilities for clinical intervention. It is an objectified stance which sees the person as "other," to be

judged or evaluated according to formal rules. This stance also makes it appear that mothers are a stable system of formal attributes or beliefs and that being a mother is a fixed, determinate situation that is clear and explicit. It ignores the ways in which mothering is indeterminate, fluid, changing over time, and open-ended; and it ignores the varied ways in which mothering can be taken up successfully in our society. This is exemplified in the literature on teen mothers where teen mothering is viewed as uniformly deficient (when subjected to this normative view), ignoring the possibilities that do exist for teen mothers to successfully parent their infants, particularly with the help of their own parents (Smith, 1983, 1988, 1992).

In this chapter I have examined the contributions made by researchers studying the substantive areas of transition to parenthood and "dual role" women, and by theorists studying stress and coping, to the problem of first-time mothers with career commitments. While most of the described research is from the rational/empirical tradition, this study will look at the problem from a different ontological understanding of persons: from a Heideggerian phenomenological perspective.

Chapter Three

Methodology

> Finally, we come up against the mystery itself, the unencompassable depth in both things and our non(selves). And then we are brought up short. That it seems to me is where hermeneutics leads us: not to a conclusion which gives comfort but to a thunderstorm, not to a closure but to a dis-closure, an openness toward what cannot be encompassed, where we lose our breath and are stopped in our tracks, at least momentarily, for it always belongs to our condition to remain on the way.
>
> John Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics, (p. 214)

The philosophical position which grounds this study is Heideggerian phenomenology. The ontological commitments of phenomenology are inextricably linked to the method of the study which is hermeneutic or interpretive. This chapter will first briefly describe the philosophical position of Heideggerian phenomenology, with a particular focus on the concept of the person found in Heidegger's work. I include this brief introduction to the philosophy of Heidegger because it so radically differs from the rational and empirical Western philosophical positions which have so thoroughly grounded social science research as to become taken-for-granted. Next, the interpretive method will be generally outlined, followed by a description of the

research design of this study.

The Heideggerian Phenomenological View of the Person

This research is based on a view of the person as articulated by Martin Heidegger (1962; 1982) and elaborated by Dreyfus (1991) and Taylor (1985a; 1985b). Heidegger critiques the Cartesian tradition in philosophy for its search for a foundational view of knowledge. The focus from within the Cartesian position is epistemological. This epistemological tradition asks what counts as knowledge and what our criteria are for evaluating truth claims. The assumption has been that if the criteria for evaluating truth claims could be determined, then knowledge would have a foundation that placed it outside of history and culture. Heidegger argues that this epistemological focus which privileges theoretical knowledge ignores the question of how the world is even intelligible to us at all.

The view of the person described in Heideggerian phenomenology derives fundamentally from Heidegger's shift of emphasis from epistemological concerns centering on issues of the relation of the knower to the known to the more fundamental concern with ontology: what does it mean to be a person and how is the world intelligible to us at all?

> The proximal goal of Being and Time is to develop a descriptive metaphysics. Heidegger is not interested in fanciful speculation about Being. He is concerned with what Being means to us, and this requires at the outset an understanding of the being of that entity which understands what it

> is to be namely, Dasein....Dasein in the course of its everyday activities and practices is characterized as 'Being-in-the-world.' (Guignon, 1983, p. 69)[2]

World is both constituted by and constitutive of the self. This notion of the self as constituted by world is fundamentally different from the Cartesian notion of self as "subject of possession" (Sandel, 1982) who is a "pure, unadulterated, 'essentially unencumbered'" (p. 92) subject whose traits are not constitutive in the sense of being essential to his/her identity but are mere "attributes." The world is constitutive in that the self is raised up in the world and shaped by it in a process that is not the causal interaction of self and world as objects, but rather the non-reflective taking up of the meanings, linguistic skills, cultural practices and family traditions by which we become persons and can have things show up for us at all. The self of possession (Sandel, 1982) is the modern subject: autonomous, disengaged, disembodied, rationally choosing his actions based on explicit, cognitively-held principles and values. The self of possession has a body, and traits or characteristics which belong to it. World, in the phenomenological view, circumscribes our choices and creates our possibilities. World is neither held in the mind nor

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[2]Dasein is the term Heidegger uses to designate human being. "In German the word 'Dasein" means simply 'existence', as in man's everyday existence. But it also means, if you take it apart, 'being-there.' This conveys that this activity of human beings is an activity of being in the situation in which coping can go on and things can be encountered" (Dreyfus, 1987, p. 263).

is it "out there" to be apprehended. While we may each constitute our world in the sense of taking up in a personal way the common meanings given in our language and culture, we nevertheless have some aspects of world in common with all other members who share our language and culture.

A second essential facet of person from a phenomenological perspective is that a person is a being for whom things have significance and value. Dreyfus (1987) points out that it is a "basic characteristic of Dasein that things show up as mattering-as threatening, or attractive, or stubborn, or useful, and so forth" (p. 264), and this mattering is the background for more reflective desiring or evaluating. Another aspect of Heidegger's account of significance is the way in which our activity is directed in a transparent, taken-for-granted, non-mental way towards the future, the "for-the-sake-of." This aspect of the person is particularly relevant for studying mothering in career women because it helps us to understand particularly how a mother's way of being is altered by having a baby. Having something in one's life that matters deeply sets up a world. Career women who lived in the world as though time were a linear succession of nows suddenly find themselves reinterpreting their pasts and being projected into the future, in a non-reflective, taken-for-granted way, as the mother of this particular child. As Dreyfus (1991) observes, "Dasein sees what needs to be done by finding

itself pushed into doing it....Even when Dasein is making conscious, intentionalistic choices of goals it is doing so on a background of for-the-sake-of-whichs, ways of being, that it has been socialized into and that are too basic and pervasive ever to be explicitly chosen" (pp. 319-320). While every human being has "for-the-sake-of-whichs" by which they are projected into the future, modern notions of agency tend to discount and overlook them in favor of a view of human being as an autonomous self, making choices based on abstract principles of self management. Defined by this modern notion of agency, career women are surprised and perplexed when they suddenly find themselves "pressed into the possibilities" created by being the mother of their particular child.

The person as self-interpreting: Another critical piece in the Heideggerian phenomenological view of person is that human being is self-interpreting, but, importantly, in a non-theoretical, non-cognitive way. We are beings who are engaged in and constituted by our interpretive understanding. Contrary to Husserl's belief that these interpretations are a product of individual consciousness, of subjects, Heidegger claims that these interpretations are not generated in individual consciousness as subjects related to objects, but, rather, are given in our linguistic and cultural traditions and only make sense against a background of significance. An example of this is Caudill

and Weinstein's (1969) study of Japanese and American babies wherein they found that "a great deal of cultural learning has taken place by three to four months of age...babies have learned by this time to be Japanese and American babies" (p. 78). Thus, by the age of four months, human beings are already interpreting themselves in light of their background as either Japanese or American: all those hidden skills and practices and linguistic meanings which are so all-pervasive as to be unnoticed and yet which make the world intelligible for us, create our possibilities, and the conditions for our actions. In the phenomenological view, then, persons can never perceive "brute facts" out there in the world. Nothing can be encountered independent of our background understanding. Every encounter is an interpretation based on our background. "What appears from the 'object' is what one allows to appear and what the thematization of the world at work in his understanding will bring to light" (Palmer, 1969, p. 136).

Hermeneutics as a Method Appropriate to the Heideggerian Phenomenological Study of Human Beings

> A being who exists only in self-interpretation cannot be understood absolutely; and one who can only be understood against the background of distinctions of worth cannot be captured by a scientific language which essentially aspires to neutrality. Our personhood cannot be treated scientifically in exactly the same way we approach our organic being. What it is to possess a liver or heart is something I can define quite independently of the space of questions in which I exist for myself, but not what it is to have a self or be a person. (Taylor, 1985a, pp. 3-4)

Appreciating the implications for research of a phenomenological view of person involves going beyond the quantitative-qualitative, objectivism-relativism debate. It involves a fundamental shift in orientation away from traditional notions of objectivity as unitizing and generalizing, with the goal of prediction and control. This notion of objectivity strips human actions of their context and assumes the possibility of an Archimedean point from which a foundational knowledge can be discovered based on "judgments which could be anchored in a certainty beyond subjective intuition"(Taylor, 1987, p. 37). Heideggerian phenomenologists, on the other hand, propose that there is no Archimedean point, no privileged position for "objective" knowing; that all knowledge emanates from persons who are already in the world, seeking to understand persons who are also already in the world. One is always within the hermeneutical circle of interpretation. Researcher and research participant are viewed as sharing common practices, skills, interpretations and everyday practical understanding by virtue of their common culture and language. Also, since human beings are constituted by temporality, all knowledge, in this view, is temporal. Atemporal, ahistorical transcendent knowledge of human behavior is impossible.

> The human sciences, because they are engaged in temporal investigation, are not designed to arrive at an atemporal causal certainty. Instead, their investigations have as their object the rendering of life and the world continually understandable. (Faulconer and Williams, 1985, p. 1186)

Further, since persons are fundamentally self-interpreting beings for whom things have significance, understanding human action always involves an interpretation, by the researcher, of the interpretations being made by those persons being studied. This interpretive approach is called hermeneutics.

In the early 20th century, Heidegger's analysis of human being suggested that interpretation is a foundational mode of man's being. Being and Time (1962) is referred to as "a hermeneutic of Dasein," an interpretive effort through which light is shed on the meaning of human being. Thus, the relevance of hermeneutics to the human sciences today derives primarily from Heidegger's writings. Currently, the hermeneutic approach is being taken up by researchers in diverse human science fields.

The goal of a hermeneutic, or interpretive, account is to reveal, and communicate to others, the meaning embedded in everyday skills, practices, and experiences in a way that facilitates new ways of being engaged with the problem that inspired the investigation in the first place. To this end, one looks for commonalities in meanings, skills, practices, and embodied experiences; "to find exemplars or paradigm cases that embody the meanings of everyday practices...in such a way that they are not destroyed, distorted, decontextualized, trivialized, or sentimentalized" (Benner, 1985, pp. 5-6). Paradigm cases and exemplars are strong

instances of a particular pattern of meanings; and are effective strategies for depicting the person in the situation, and for preserving meanings, and context. The access to everyday lived experience opens up a new understanding of the person and the possibility for overcoming the subject-object split of Cartesianism.

Further, rather than looking for deterministic or mechanistic notions of causality, hermeneutics seeks to develop explanations and understanding which are based on concerns, commitments, practices and meanings. This understanding is such that it "will focus on sufficient conditions and make statements such as, all other things being equal, one expects such and such to occur. Such a statement leaves room for transformations in meanings and changes in human concerns" (Benner, 1985, p. 3).

Hermeneutics as an approach makes several assumptions based on the Heideggerian phenomenological view of person. First, it is assumed that the researcher, based on common background meanings given in our culture and language, has a preliminary understanding of the human action being studied. It is by virtue of our world that we, as researchers, have the questions we have, and see the possibilities we see. Thus, we approach our interpretive project with some pre-understanding, or, as Heidegger called it, a forestructure of understanding, into which, by virtue of the structure of being (care), we are thrust or projected. This forestructure

has three aspects: we are first of all given a taken-for-granted sense of "the totality of relations that constitutes the phenomena" (Packer & Richardson, 1991, p. 343-4) under investigation: the forehaving. Next, we approach our research question with a point of view, from the perspective of a particular interpretive lens (the fore-sight) which orients us globally toward the phenomena in a particular way, and is, therefore, critically important to the study. This is what is meant by entering the hermeneutic circle "in the right way" (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 201). This conceptual orientation to the phenomena functions as a vehicle for gaining access to the phenomena and is open to revision as the analysis proceeds and new meanings and understandings are revealed by the study. The final aspect of the forestructure is the fore-conception: there is always a preliminary sense of what counts as a question and what would count as an answer.

The interpretive process is necessarily circular, moving back and forth between part and whole, and between the initial forestructure and what is being revealed in the data of the inquiry. There is the constant mandate to go beyond existing, available, publicly sanctioned interpretations of things, to follow a more authentic and deeper analysis which is projected in the possibilities available to the project through the forestructure. This demands a deep and enduring commitment (and existential

presence) on the part of the researcher to stay true to the text and to informants' experiences. As Packer (1989) asserts, "a text has its own terms, to which one must accommodate if interpretation is to proceed" (p. 109).

Through systematic analysis of the whole, new perspective and depth of understanding are gained. This understanding is then used to examine the parts of the whole and then the whole is re-examined in light of the insight gained from the parts. The interpretive process follows this part-whole strategy until the researcher is satisfied with the depth of her understanding. Thus, the termination of the interpretive process cannot be determined in advance by objective criteria.

Because there is no "objectively valid" interpretation in hermeneutics, objectivity is no longer a process of decontextualization, of securing abstract, eternal truths that correspond to "things as they are", but, rather, of finding what can show up in agreement in our local cultural clearings (Benner, 1986). Skills, practices and meanings are "objective" in the sense of being shared and therefore verifiable both with research participants and colleagues. They are not objective in the sense of being ahistorical, atemporal, or acontextual; or of corresponding to things "as they really are." Taylor (1985a, p. 7) argues that plausibility is the ultimate (in the sense that it is the best we can do) criterion for any hermeneutic explanation.

It should be emphasized, though, that while individuals may take up common background meanings in a personal way, these personal meanings are not infinitely variable, nor completely relative. They are bounded by the cultural and linguistic meanings which we all share. Thus, while I may aspire to be a hero in labor and delivery, it is not within my background meanings to go off and deliver alone, unattended. My options for giving birth are narrowed by my Western cultural tradition and by my own history. Within that bounded set of meanings I find my possibilities for being a hero. And because the background meanings which create those possibilities for me are commonly shared, consensual validation of a hermeneutic interpretation of my heroic behavior is possible.

In hermeneutics, the role of theory is to show up meanings which arise out of the lived experience, to create new possibilities for understanding and, as Van Manen (1990) suggests, a more tactful and thoughtful practical engagement with the phenomenon under investigation. Phenomenology mandates a new account of what constitutes adequate theory. No formal theoretical assumptions or predictions are made. Formal theory (in the sense of having formal propositions, causal mechanisms and structures) is not to be used as a grid or screen through which all data are filtered. Nor is the goal of research to be the development of formal theory defined as propositional statements which seek to outline in

a predictive way the law-like relationships of atomistic elements in a static structure. The theory which results from hermeneutics involves the presentations of revealed, or "unfolded" (Caputo, 1987) meanings, skills and practices, the practical knowledge which is so hidden from traditional empirical research.

Data collection in a hermeneutic inquiry: In hermeneutics, the primary source of knowledge is everyday practical activity. Human behavior is viewed as a text which is studied and interpreted in order to reveal its obscured meaning. "The interpretive researcher's practical, everyday understanding, although it provides the necessary access from which interpretation proceeds, is an understanding within which events and entities are 'withdrawn'" (Packer & Addison, 1989). The meaning of activities and events is obscured because the understanding which gives us access to them is so pervasive and taken for granted that it goes unnoticed, and can never be made completely explicit.

Text analogues can come from interviews, participant observation, diaries, and samples of human behavior (Benner, 1985). Since our everyday practical understanding of relationships, events and activities is so taken-for-granted as to go unnoticed, it is often through breakdown and the resulting circumspection that the researcher achieves flashes of insight into these entities, although this taken-

for-granted, practical understanding can never be made completely explicit.

Interpretive analysis: The data analysis in a hermeneutic study is carried out in three inter-related processes: thematic analysis, analysis of exemplars, and the search for paradigm cases.

In the thematic analysis, each case (all interviews, field notes, etc.) is read several times in order to arrive at a global analysis. When several cases have been read in this way, lines of inquiry are then identified from the forestructure which grounds the study, and from themes consistently emerging in the data. From this, an interpretive plan emerges. Each interview is then read from the perspective of the interpretive plan. As this microanalysis is carried out, additional lines of inquiry may emerge from the data and are added to the interpretive plan. All cases are then subjected to the additional interpretive analysis. The interpretive effort culminates in the identification of general categories which form the basis of the study's findings.

The second aspect of the interpretive process involves the analysis of specific episodes or incidents: all aspects of a particular situation and the participant's responses to it are analyzed together. The analyzed event encompasses the individual's situation, her concerns, actions and practices, not her opinions, analyses, or ideology. From

this analysis come "exemplars": stories or vignettes that capture the meaning in a situation in such a way that the meaning can then be recognized in another situation that might have very different objective circumstances. An exemplar is "a strong instance of a particularly meaningful transaction, intention, or capacity" (Benner, 1985, p. 10).

The last aspect of the interpretive analysis involves the identification of paradigm cases: whole cases that are strong examples of particular patterns of meaning. Paradigm cases embody the rich descriptive information necessary for understanding how an individual's actions and understandings emerge from their situational context: their concerns, practices and background meanings. They are not reducible to formal theory; to abstract variables used to predict and control. Rather, what are recognized are "family resemblances" between a paradigm case and a particular clinical situation that one is trying to understand and explain (Chesla, 1988).

> All three interpretive strategies...work both as discovery and presentation strategies. They all allow for the presentation of context and meanings. In interpretive research, unlike in grounded theory, the goal is not to extract theoretical terms or concepts at a higher level of abstraction. The goal is to discover meaning and to achieve understanding. (Benner, 1985, p. 10)

The presentation of a study's findings involves distilling the data down to its most essential terms while still providing the reader with enough evidence for the reader to participate in the validation of the findings (Benner,

1986).

Evaluation of an interpretive account: The fundamental point to be grasped in evaluating interpretive accounts is that there is no such thing as an interpretation-free, objectively "true" account of "things in themselves": (the traditional positivist definition of the correspondence theory of truth); and there is no technical procedure for "validating" that an account corresponds to this timeless, objective "truth". While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to critique the correspondence theory of truth as it is applied in the natural sciences, I think it can be reliably claimed that even there the idea of a timeless, interpretation-free account has been discredited (Kuhn, 1991). While technical procedures for "validating" interpretive accounts are impossible, there remain effective tools for evaluation. As Packer and Addison (1989) suggest, what must be made explicit is the kind of evaluation these tools provide. Criteria such as coherence, consistency, plausibility, etc. do not help us to determine the degree of correspondence between an account and the way things "really are". Rather, they help us to determine how well an account serves to answer the original concern or breakdown which initiated the line of inquiry leading to the research in the first place. Interpretive inquiry always begins from practical, concernful engagement. Interpretive inquiry never seeks to

simply describe a phenomenon, but is always concerned with some kind of breakdown in human affairs. For instance, in this study I am motivated by an observed and personally experienced breakdown in the meanings, practices and smooth functioning of career women who become mothers. The experience of competing claims that cannot together be accommodated as wholeheartedly as one would like is problematic for women used to being "omnicompetent" (Daniels & Weingarten, 1982) and in control. The point of this interpretive project is to reveal ways of understanding mothering and work that can facilitate women's ability to successfully combine the two, or to at least help mothers name the dilemmas which is the first step in resolving the problem. Thus, the ultimate criterion for evaluating the adequacy of an interpretive account is the degree to which it resolves the breakdown and opens up new possibilities for engaging the problem.

Disputes in hermeneutic interpretation resolve based on the plausibility of alternative interpretations, and the plausibility of an interpretation cannot be reduced to a priori-derived cut-and-dried criteria. As Bernstein (1986) has commented, "a fundamental ontological motif of modernity has been variations on the theme of fundamental indeterminism. Our being-in-the-world is fundamentally indeterminate. Wisdom requires learning to live with this." Thus, while we must live with a plurality of interpretations

of meaning, we can narrow things down. And, importantly, living with a plurality of meanings, or indeterminacy, doesn't mean we don't understand each other. It is a tenet of this kind of research that there can always be another, deeper and perhaps more persuasive, interpretation of a phenomenon. The forestructure may be quite different from one study to the next and will, therefore, produce quite different accounts of the same phenomenon. Competing accounts do not negate each other. Rather, they set up a conversation. This decreased emphasis on one true account of a phenomenon has a further effect beyond the scope of an individual research project: it encourages the creative exchange of perspectives and ideas in human science research.

Certainly, interpretive researchers agree that there are better and worse interpretive studies. A study can be judged by how carefully the question is framed and the initial interpretive stance laid out, how carefully the data collection is accomplished and documented, and how rigorously the interpretive effort goes beyond publicly available understandings of a problem to reveal new and deeper possibilities for understanding.

For the purposes of this study, in which the transition to parenthood of first-time mothers with career commitments was the focus, an interpretive approach as described above

was undertaken. The remainder of this chapter will describe the design of the study and the methodological procedures employed in the project.

The Study Design

This study was undertaken in order to better understand the transition to parenthood of first-time mothers with career commitments. While empirical research on "dual role" women is extensive, little work has been done which furthers our understanding of how personal, familial, work and cultural contexts and meanings shape the transition to parenthood of mothers with career commitments; nor has there been adequate longitudinal research which examines how the content and meaning of work and the timing of returning to work shape a woman's experience of early motherhood. This longitudinal study followed 18 women from the end of their first pregnancies until their babies were 10 to 15 months old.

Forestructure of the study project:

As described earlier, an essential part of an interpretive study is the laying out of the forestructure of understanding so that one can "enter the circle" of interpretation in the right way. The forestructure of the study is as follows:

The Forehaving: This aspect of the forestructure involves having access to the totality of relations that

constitutes the phenomenon being studied; being able to walk around in the world you wish to study, a world which is, in some sense, already understood. My forehaving comes from my own personal involvement in the problem as a mother and from the experiences of friends and colleagues. It also comes from a previous small interview study that I did of older primigravidas' experiences of pregnancy, most of whom were women with careers. I think I am also responding to a sense of cultural level breakdown in the understandings, practices, and smooth functioning of mothers.

The Foresight: This aspect of the forestructure involves the interpretive framework that I brought to the data, which orients my interpretation. Heidegger's (1982, 1962) account of being and Kierkegaard's (1983) phenomenology of commitment provide the interpretive lens in this study for understanding what it means to be a mother with career commitments in our current cultural context. This part of the forestructure is laid out, with the data analysis, in Chapter 4.

The Foregrasp: This part of the forestructure involves our sense of what counts as a question and what will count as an answer to the question. The literature on mothering and on women with "dual roles" generally treat mothering as a discrete set of behaviors driven by a cognitively held set of abstract principles (for example, principles of child development). The literature on dual career women treats

stress as inhering in the roles of mother and worker, which are understood as discrete and additive. The overall picture is one of mothering as a technical skill driven by the desire to instrumentally cause children to develop into productive members of society. I have elaborated another view of motherhood based on Heidegger in which mothering can be understood as a historically and contextually situated practice which is taken up by virtue of being a member of a particular culture. It is a practice that can have moral weight and a moral claim on the mother. Understandings of mothering, in this view, are transparent and taken-for-granted and reflect the valuation of the practice in the culture. Given this understanding of mothering, I am interested in the following:

Study questions:

How do women cope with juggling the two very different kinds of involvement required by career/work and mothering, the competing claims of career and motherhood?

How can these different kinds of involvement be described?

How is a mother engaged with her work, what kind of claim does work have, and how is she engaged with the project of mothering?

For individual mothers, is work a practice, in MacIntyre's (1984) sense? Does it have a moral claim? Is

mothering a practice, does it have a moral claim? What kind of combination of practice/moral claim in work and mothering is most difficult?

What are the structural aspects of a woman's situation which constrain her attempts to combine career and family, which contribute to breakdown in the smooth functioning of the practice of mothering?

Does motherhood give mothers a project that allows them to see their lives as a whole?

How does the spouse's involvement in work and family shape a mother's experience of new motherhood?

Study Procedures

To address the forestructure of the study, I interviewed the mothers who participated four times over the 10 to 15 months of the study; I interviewed fathers once at the end of the study and I did two family observations, usually at the time of the mother's return to work and at the end of the family's participation in the study. The interviews focused on incidents of breakdown in the participants' experiences as new mothers. These incidents frequently involved extensive episodes of infant crying in the early postpartum (i.e., the first six weeks), finding (or losing) childcare, and returning to work. The interview schedules for all interviews are in Appendix A.

The Study Sample

Nature and Size of the Sample: The study sample was comprised of 18 women with career commitments. While the sample was originally intended to include 20 women, recruitment was terminated at 18 because of difficulties in gaining access to the study population, because the costs of transcription became prohibitive, and because I was reasonably certain that the extensive nature of the data collected and the longitudinal design of the study provided sufficient data to accomplish the aims of the study.

Criteria for Sample Selection: Criteria for inclusion in the sample were that the woman had to be in a heterosexual relationship with her husband/partner and they had to be planning on remaining together; she had to be in the last trimester of her first full-term pregnancy; and she had to feel that her career was an integral part of her self-identity. While participants had to have plans for returning to their careers at some point after having their babies, they did not have to be planning to return to work during the study period. Spousal cooperation was solicited, but not required, although all of the spouses in the sample consented to participate and were interviewed once, and all participated in the family observations at least once. Most participated in both family observations. In addition, one father consented to be interviewed at all four of the mother's scheduled interview periods.

Participant recruitment: Recruitment into the study was achieved by contacting local prenatal classes, obstetricians, pediatricians, midwives, and professional women's groups, and by placing advertisements in Bay Area newspapers and parent-oriented newsletters. The sample was largely recruited from prenatal birth preparation and infant care classes in a large, urban, West Coast hospital. Couples in these groups were informed about the general nature of the study, its length, and the number of interviews. Interested couples added their names and phone numbers to a sign-up sheet. They were then given a written description of the study, along with a postcard which they could return if they later decided they didn't want to be contacted about participation in the study. Prospective participants were then contacted by phone and if they were still interested in participating, an appointment was made for the first interview.

Data Collection:

I believed that becoming a mother while accommodating the claims of a career was a complicated process, and took place over time as mothers negotiated the early postpartum and then their return to work. To gain access to this ongoing process, I felt that a longitudinal study was necessary to capture the process I was interested in understanding.

Nature of the interviews: The view which inspired the

interview strategies, articulated by MacIntyre (1984), is that narrative is "the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions" (p. 208). MacIntyre continues, "it is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of the narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others" (p. 212). Similarly, Mishler (1986) points out that "telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning" (p. 67). As it was my goal to elicit mothers' understandings of the meaning of both work and mothering, the narrative form of the interviews became an essential strategy in the study's design.

The research interviews began when the mothers were late in their last trimester of pregnancy and ended between eight and fifteen months postpartum. The schedule for data collection is presented in Table One. (See Appendix B for interview guides)

Table One
Research Plan and Timetable

Last trimester:	Demographic questionnaire Work history and meanings Meanings of motherhood Family Ritual interview
Two weeks postpartum:	Brief phone interview and scheduling of next visit
Six weeks postpartum:	Coping interview Family observation
Four months postpartum	Coping Interview

	Work meanings Meanings of motherhood
Eight months postpartum	Coping interview Work meanings Meanings of motherhood Spouse interview Family rituals interview Family observation

The study interviews were conducted with each mother during the third trimester of pregnancy, at four to six weeks postpartum, four months postpartum, and eight to twelve months postpartum. At two weeks postpartum phone contact was made. Participants were asked about their birth experiences and the next interview was scheduled. Fathers were interviewed at eight to fifteen months postpartum. All interviews were tape-recorded. Though nearly all of the interviews were conducted in participants' homes, four of the antepartum interviews were done in participants' work sites during working hours. Participants were also asked to keep a log of critical incidents in their mothering experience (see Appendix C for an example page from the log), and though few of the them ever wrote anything in their logs, the existence of the logs helped to remind them to bring up incidents at the interviews.

Each interview was semi-structured by a series of interview guides designed for each interview point and informed by the findings of previous research on the transition to parenthood and on combining mothering with

paid employment. In the first interview I asked what they felt they accomplished in the work that they did and how important it was. I asked for examples of both satisfying and stressful or difficult experiences at work. I also asked about their marriages and about their own childhoods, how they felt they were cared for, whether their mothers worked. I asked about their notions of what an ideal situation would be for raising a child, and, in the Family Rituals Interview (see Appendix C), based on the research of Bennett and Wolin (1984), I asked about the way they and their spouses carried out the activities of running a household, both before and after their baby was born. The study participants were encouraged to give narrative accounts of: stressful incidents in their mothering experience and in their careers; how they decided to have a baby (or to continue an accidental pregnancy); their births; and their return to work. In the postpartum interviews I focused on dilemmas, or situations of breakdown, such as finding day care and returning to work. The interview strategies focused on eliciting narrative accounts of particular situations. A Coping Interview (adapted from the research of Lazarus and Cohen, 1977) was done at each postpartum interview. An interview focusing on work meanings and meanings of motherhood were done at Time One, Time Three, and Time Four. The interviews specifically focused on transitions such as the early postpartum, finding

child care and returning to work and elicited the meanings and concerns which shaped their experiences of these transitions. Particularly stressful incidents were elicited in each interview and the Stress and Coping interview, developed by the Berkeley Stress and Coping Project (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977) and elaborated by Benner (1984b), was used to structure the interview around these incidents. In the coping interviews, I asked mothers to describe situations that were both satisfying and stressful or difficult. Mothers were asked what their concerns were in the situation, what was at stake for them in the situation that made it an incident of breakdown or a dilemma. Participants were asked about events leading up to the incident; their thoughts, feelings, and reactions during the incident; and their attempts to cope with the episode. They were also asked what they had learned from the episode and whether it had changed their mothering practices in any way. "Thick" descriptions of the context and situational aspects were sought, as were their interpretations of the incident from their current perspective.

The initial, antepartal, interviews were frequently more formal; the terms of the relationship, though objectively laid out in the study description and in the consent forms, were not usually well-established until after the baby was born. In the postpartum interviews most mothers were anxious to give language to their experience of

early motherhood and to have me bear witness to their reconstituted world. My own experience as the mother of two children gave me special access to the participants' experiences because I found that my status as a mother conferred on me a special kind of authority which allowed me to be both participant and observer in the study participants' experiences. While this special authority gave me access to mothers' experiences that was invaluable, I also found that my grasp of their world was often so taken-for-granted and implicit that I often had to pull back and feign confusion in order to prompt the participant to make explicit what we both understood tacitly.

Nature of the family observations: Additionally, two in-home naturalistic participant observations of mothers and fathers involved in caretaking activities with their infants were done with each family, usually in the evening around dinner time. These observations were done either soon after the mothers went back to work or around four months, and then again at the end of the study, after all interviews had been transcribed, which ranged from 10 to 15 months. This final observation was also used to review questions I had from the interviews and to offer preliminary interpretive comments for the family's response. I found that the final meeting with most families was extended beyond the originally scheduled time of eight months because I often had to wait for interviews to be transcribed, but I also

realized that as the final meetings with these families loomed before me, I had been unconsciously putting off my final meetings out of a sense of loss; I would not be seeing them again unless I planned another follow-up study. I had been a privileged witness to a very deeply important experience in their lives and with many of the families I felt more like a friend than a researcher as the study came to an end. This experience only underscored for me what I had previously believed only theoretically: that both researcher and participant are mutually constituted by the research interview, elaborating a common understanding through the circular process of creating the meanings of both questions and answers in and through the relationship. The family observations occurred most often in the evening, after working family members returned home. Family practices such as meal preparation, infant care and household chores were observed as they naturally occurred. Initially, I participated little during these observations, but it soon became apparent that my anonymity created more artifice in the family's interactions than when I participated more intimately in their family activities. Instead of taking notes while in the home, I resorted to turning on the tape recorder while I was there, only writing down what would not be apparent on the audiotape.

Data Analysis:

Transcribed interviews and observational field notes

were treated as texts for interpretive analysis. The data analysis was carried out via the three inter-related processes described above: thematic analysis, analysis of exemplars, and the search for paradigm cases. Consistent with the forestructure described earlier, my analysis proceeded from my own personal access to the problems and issues of combining motherhood with career, from the substantive literature on transition to parenthood and also from the philosophical insights of Heidegger and Kierkegaard. While the philosophical positions were available to me as I went into the study, it was only through a circular process of moving from the data to the philosophy that the relevance and importance of the philosophy to the project of the study became quite explicit. Mishler (1986) argues that:

> The use of cultural understandings is unavoidable and that analyses of naturally occurring discourse, such as interview narratives, require that the investigator "add to" or supplement text through a step that Labov and Fanshel (1977, p. 49) refer to as "expansion." In this process the analyst brings "together all the information that we have that will help in understanding the production, interpretation, and sequencing of the utterance in question." To accomplish this expansion of meaning, the analyst uses her or his "best understanding," makes explicit pronomial or elliptical references to other material as well as to presumably shared knowledge between the participants, and introduces factual material from other parts of the interview or from general knowledge of the world. (p. 95)

In this way my analysis evolved into an account of the study data as well as a culturally focused commentary on mothering practices in this country.

In the thematic analysis, each case (all interview transcripts plus field notes of observations) was read several times in order to arrive at a global analysis. Several of the cases were analyzed extensively using the computer program Martin (Diekelmann, Schuster, & Lam, 1991), which facilitates the organization and retrieval of qualitative data. When several cases had been read in this way, several lines of inquiry were identified from the theoretical background which grounds the study, and from themes consistently emerging from the data. The experience of mothering emerged as "world transforming" as described by Heidegger (1977) and, for some, "world-defining" as described by Kierkegaard in his phenomenology of identity and commitment as described in Chapter Four. The meaning and content of work emerged as critical for how stressful returning to work was for many mothers, as did the timing of return to work. Each interview was then read from the perspective of the lines of inquiry laid out in the interpretive plan. All whole cases were then re-examined in light of these identified lines of inquiry. The interpretive effort culminated in the extension and differentiation of the lines of inquiry initially described. Paradigm cases which embodied patterns of stress and coping in different meaning and situational contexts were finally identified.

In sum, the methodology employed in the study was dictated by an ontological commitment to the notion of person articulated by Heidegger and Taylor. The philosophical position of Heideggerian phenomenology also informed the forestructure, or interpretive plan for the data and the nature of the study findings.

Chapter Four

Motherhood as World Transforming

> It's like Sam opened this window for us, and all this grace flooded in.
>
> Anne Lamott, Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year

The literature on combining motherhood and career is replete with dualistic terms, such as "dual career couples" and "dual roles". We talk of spillover of work roles into family life and vice versa. I submit that this language reflects a cultural press for a notion of the self in which one's roles are compartmentalized and reciprocally affect one another, similarly to variables, but not constitutive of one another. This notion of the self obscures a more fundamental way that mothers experience motherhood. I would argue that prior to having a baby most career women would agree with a professor who said to me, "I'll do everything I do now, plus I'll have a baby." Many women anticipating motherhood think of the commitment in terms of a role they will add to their repertoire, rather than as something that will completely reorganize the way the world shows up for them; i.e. how they experience their careers, marriages, extended family, community, etc. I would like to offer a

different perspective from which to view this phenomenon, one that I think more accurately describes the experiences of the mothers in this study.

In contrast to the view of the self as an additive set of roles and attributes, and as rationally self-managing based on science and technique, which is ubiquitous in the literature on combining family and work, I have looked to an alternative understanding of human agency to explicate the dilemmas of women with commitments to work and family.

The power and relevance of Kierkegaard's phenomenology of commitment and Heidegger's account of being are revealed when these accounts are used as a forestructure of understanding for interpreting modern cultural phenomena. My access to Heidegger and to Kierkegaard has been through the interpretive commentaries of Hubert Dreyfus (1991) and Jane Rubin (1989; In press) and I am indebted to them for helping me to articulate this rich interpretive lens for understanding mothering. In this chapter Heidegger's (1975/1982, 1927/1962) account of being and Kierkegaard's (1983) account of commitment and identity provide the forestructure of understanding, or interpretive lens, for examining the study data on the meaning of becoming a mother. This forestructure is laid out here, along with the interpretive analysis of the study data on the meaning of becoming a mother.

The world-transforming power of having a baby:

In Heidegger's (1975/1982, 1927/1962) radically re-interpreted account of what it means to be a human being we are all born into an existing fabric of publicly shared cultural and familial social practices. Contrary to the assertions of most Western philosophers since Descartes-that we "know" the world as detached observers through abstract representations held in the mind-Heidegger maintains it is only by virtue of being born into this cultural context of language and practices that the world is intelligible to us at all. The abstract, theoretical knowing which for most Western philosophers since Plato has represented the highest form of thinking, is, argues Heidegger, derived from this more fundamental grasp of the world through our cultural practices and language. This background understanding which grounds all knowing is transparent and taken-for-granted and, as such, can be partially uncovered and revealed but can never be made explicitly and completely clear and intelligible (contrary to what most philosophers in the Western tradition have always believed). This background understanding into which we are socialized as members of a culture creates what Heidegger calls a "clearing" in which objects and people can show up, or be intelligible, to us at all. "This clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are" (Heidegger, 1971,

p.53) For example, as Americans we are born into a culture which shapes what kinds of mothers we can become and what possibilities for combining career and motherhood exist for us. Historians argue that in certain historical periods children were not understood to require the nurture and protection that we understand to be constitutive of mothering today in our culture. One could go so far as to say that "children" as an entity weren't intelligible during certain periods of Western history (Aries, 1962). Thus, mothers are not radically free to individually create or construct meanings sui generis, though they may take up cultural level meanings in a particular way based on their concerns and their personal and familial history.

By claiming that the world is intelligible to us through a world given in our language, culture and practices, Heidegger overcomes the problems of dualism associated with the traditional Cartesian view of knowing in which the person, or subject, stands over and against the world via representations of, or beliefs about, that world held in the mind. Further, Heidegger asserts that it just is part of the structure of our existence as human beings that things <u>always already matter</u> to us because we are born into a world of culture, language and practices which make the world intelligible to us. Being in a culture, whether it is of a country or a company or an institution (and they are not mutually exclusive), or being involved in practices

(such as nursing or mothering or engineering) are ways of having things matter to us. And this mattering is part of what is always already made intelligible to us as human beings by virtue of being born into a shared world.

Particularly relevant to the interpretation of mothering offered in this chapter is Heidegger's notion of an object (in the broadest sense, including human beings) which focuses and gives constancy to the clearing; which re-organizes the background against which the world shows up, an object that has been described by Dreyfus and Wakefield (1988) as a "paradigmatic object." To illustrate this point, Heidegger offers the Greek temple as an example of this kind of object:

> The temple, in standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves....(It) first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. (Heidegger, 1971, p. 42-3)

As a paradigmatic object, the temple "opens up and organizes a multidimensional world by highlighting crucial issues that then become the locus of conflicts of interpretation and the starting point of history" (Dreyfus & Wakefield, 1988, p. 279). The paradigmatic object re-constitutes and transforms the world in a profound sense.

For the mothers in this study, having a baby was a world-transforming experience. The embodied experience of carrying and bearing a child, of being capable of breast-

feeding a baby, and the way in which the newborn baby's embodied (and probably biologically based) capacities solicited her mother, all served to make the baby and her situation into a claim on her mother and father[3] (though the nature of the claim may be different for mothers and fathers). This strong demand quality of newborn babies projects a new mother into a situation in which any move she makes is evaluated in light of the claim of her baby. In this way the baby acts as a paradigmatic object. The world is transformed.[4] Marian is a lawyer who describes the way her world has changed:

I: So what does being a mother mean to you at this point?

M: Well it means having a family of my own....Of really making a family.

I: And how does that feel?

M: That feels really neat. It was only a couple of weeks ago that I was with Sophie and it occurred to me that she was gonna be a fun kid; that we're gonna have Christmas and Thanksgiving and she will be fun to have there as she gets older. She will be a lot like us but she'll also be her own self and she'll provide ... you know, a distinct input

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[3] The experience of a new baby as paradigmatic may apply equivalently to fathers. I do not mean to minimize the meaning of fatherhood to new fathers, but my data from fathers was limited and I cannot support a claim that my account applies equally to fathers.

[4] While it is here assumed that having a baby is a world-transforming experience for mothers, it is with the caveat that we are describing women whom Winnicott (1988) describes as "ordinary devoted mothers." For women who are psychotic or extremely narcissistic, and for whom the baby doesn't exist as a separate person, the baby cannot, therefore, be a paradigmatic object.

into things. That's really exciting. That's the kind, that's the stuff about being a mother that I've grasped. The other stuff, the personal stuff about you know, my self image and how I feel about myself ... I know I feel differently about myself but I can't quite tell you how. I'm a fuller person somehow. My life is more complicated and my emotions are more complicated....I do find that I sometimes just find myself sitting down and thinking about things being happy. (laughs)

I: And is that different?

M: Yeah. You know, there's a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that I didn't have before.

I: Are things just more meaningful in general?

M: Oh gosh. In a way, things are less meaningful. In a way, I'm much less connected with the world around me than I used to be. You know, I feel like I used to be able to really think about the garden, think about the grocery store and all those things. Now they just kind of all get done. I work when I can and in a way I'm less connected because I just can't think about things as much. But I'm much more full somehow. There's more going on.

Marian describes the way in which the world has become a happier and more fulfilling place for her as a mother. While many mothers had similar stories about the affirmative aspects of becoming a mother, there are ways that motherhood reorganizes a woman's life that are difficult. Marian cites the effects of her baby on her time:

I: I have some frustration that I don't have...time to do things that I would like to do. I haven't made very many plans...but the few things that I've planned to do are hard. At the same time, I took the time off to be with her so I can't be too hard on myself (laughs) but my feeling is that she will always make a difference in our time. We have a permanent change in our lives and there's no use being too frustrated about it; it's just the way it's going to be and we just kind of have to keep muddling on through and maybe some time

we'll catch our stride.

Modern notions of time as belonging to me, as within my grasp to organize, control and save are suddenly transformed by having a baby. The career woman is no longer the author of her own schedule. Louise Erdrich (1993) the writer, echoes Marian's comments above:

> Growing, bearing, mothering or fathering, supporting, and at last letting go of an infant are powerful and mundane creative acts that rapturously suck up whole chunks of life. (p. 35)

There were many accounts in the study mothers' stories of a turn in their mothering in which they acknowledged and accepted, and occasionally celebrated, this changed experience of time. The ability to make this "turn" in early motherhood had relevance for how easily a mother could take her baby's perspective. To give up the narrower notion of agency defined primarily by "accomplishment" in the usual strategic and productive sense, was very difficult for these women who came to understand themselves in terms of this productive role. It is a testament to the power of the claim that an infant is able to make that she can persuade her mother to make this very difficult shift, in the context of a culture which does little to honor the endlessly repeated, invisible practices which constitute care in general and mothering in particular. Anne describes her feelings about this turn:

> Well, you know, there's a lot of change. More change than I expected in the way I focus on my day. You know, here I have this new baby and I'm still making

> these, up until a few days ago, I was still making these stupid lists that were really very incredible. So I wasn't expecting that...I think I thought I was going to be able to do more and I 'm kind of surprised that I can express the fact that I can't do all that much and I like that feeling. At first, I was very frustrated because I always - I accomplish a million things ... or used to accomplish a million things in a day. I still do; they're just different and I wanted to kind of keep up that level. You know, I like to cook; I like to cook nice meals. I usually have lists of things that I like to accomplish in a given day and those are changing.

Birth mothers describe another way in which the world shows up differently. For many mothers who choose to give their baby up for adoption, the world will always be the place that conceals this unknown child, and there is an ever-present wondering about who that child is and how they are doing. They are forever the mother who gave up this child. Heidegger captures this way in which we are constituted by our history:

> The Dasein can as little get rid of its (past as) bygoneness as escape its death. In every sense and in every case everything we have been is an essential determination of our existence. Even if in some way, by some manipulation, I may be able to keep my bygoneness far from myself, nevertheless, forgetting, repressing, suppressing are modes in which I myself am my own having-been-ness. (1975/1982, p. 265)

For career women used to a world in which they are rational, self-determining agents used to being competent and in control, this claim of an infant is a dramatically new experience.

For all of the mothers in the study sample having a baby was world-transforming. Even the most career committed

mother in the sample who personified the culturally sanctioned virtues of autonomy and self control, and as a scientist had cultivated and enjoyed a sense of control over her work, found herself constituted by her infant son and was in the world in a new way. While she didn't find her early mothering easy in any way and struggled to cope with the "relentlessness" of breast-feeding and the general loss of the control (in mothering) that she was so used to in her work, and in some ways did adopt a scientist's stance of standing over and against the demands of motherhood, she ultimately found herself claimed by her son in a way that changed the way she was in the world: she began to accommodate to the unpredictability of babies and the lack of control of mothers over babies (itself a deeply important shift in her way of being in the world), she changed her work patterns and despite ambitious career aspirations took a less prestigious job so she could return to the city where she had friends and family who could help her with her mothering responsibilities. This coolly unsentimental woman never described the rush of emotion so common in the other participant mothers in the early postpartum and said at eight months postpartum that "I sometimes have trouble believing I am (a mother)", and when asked if she was primarily committed to family or career, she responded "I guess I'd have to say career oriented," she also nevertheless felt about being a mother:

> It's given me something else very important to focus on which changes the way I deal with a lot of things, I think. It's changed the way I think about children and, you know, the way I react to stories about babies. Those are things that I notice that make me feel like I've become a mother....An example of that is reading a story in The Chronicle the other day about a fetal surgery. They were repairing a diaphragm defect that these babies have, and then they put them back in and let them grow. And there was a picture on the front page of this man holding up this little baby. I looked at that, and I started to feel all weepy reading the story. And probably, before, I would have read it, and thought "oh, isn't that marvelous. What a scientific breakthrough." Now I don't even--I just look at the picture of the baby and think "oh, how wonderful." Things like that: I kind of sit back and go "wow, something changed."
>
> (Being a mother) it's just part of you. Now it just sort of becomes a part of you. So, I mean, a lot of people say that they can just go to work and leave it behind, maybe because at their jobs, they don't talk about it, but I do. I show people pictures of Steven and stuff all the time, ad nauseam, I'm sure.

Another mother, Nora, describes the way in which having her son has re-shaped the way she interprets events in her world:

> I: Can you talk a little bit about how the world is a different place because you had him?
>
> M: I think of things in perspective to parents, parenting and you think a lot about families and I see these homeless people on the street and I think they were once adorable little babies and look at them; what happened? Or these crack babies: I die, when I see them, I die, you know. I think, I worry about education you know because it's all going to hit home so fast; I just really think of family issues so much more....We have to look at the family again on all --- all these crack babies, man look at that. It's just so unbelievably sad. I mean, they don't get a chance and you see all these welfare moms and will never get off welfare and all these kids will never have a chance and all they're gonna be is a burden. I mean I hate to say it that callously but they don't have an education; they're exposed to drugs, crime...what are we doing? What are we doing?

For women whose work has come to be experienced as totalizing, excluding all other commitments and projects and creating a functionally unidirectional life, becoming a mother may offer the chance to recommit themselves to different interests and projects. For many women with careers, becoming a mother is a socially sanctioned way of recovering the relatively relational and expressive world that the work place excludes. Having a baby offers the chance to renegotiate other commitments and to stand back and reflect. As Anne, a lawyer, said:

> I need a break, I mean I need a break even apart from having the baby. You know, I've practiced law for 13 years. Sometimes I've had long vacations like one month at a time, but I really would like the break anyway.

With the arrival of a baby, mothers reinterpret choices about where to accept jobs, what kind to accept, the number of hours they work, etc., in light of their new understanding as mothers. Just as the Greek temple highlighted crucial issues and introduced a cultural level conversation about how to interpret those issues, having a baby, too, introduces new issues and is a kind of turning point in a woman's personal history, signaling a transformed identity.

Being a mother invokes personal, familial and cultural level meanings that are contradictory, confusing and incoherent. One has only to look at the changes in the cultural account of what constitutes good mothering between

the 1950's and currently. These differences between the way the study mothers themselves were mothered and the way they mother their own infants today were frequently the source of guilt and confusion for most of the mothers in the study sample. Grounding all of the currently felt confusion and contradiction in these mothers' lives, and clearly revealed in the study data, is the fact that for a woman to become a mother is to have the kind of mother she is become an issue for her. For these mothers, there was no neutral place to stand as a mother. And since one cannot be a mother in the abstract, but only in relation to one's own particular baby who grows and changes over time, the "good" of the practice gets worked out in practical situations of nurture and care over time. This kind of open-ended, contingent way of being in the world was frequently difficult for the career mothers in the study who were used to being accomplished and immediately and clearly productive in the work that they did as career women. Being good at what they did in their careers was not something that constantly required new skills and understandings. Standing in relation to a moral practice was in itself a world-transforming experience for some women.

In sum, even for mothers who stand back from mothering and have difficulty negotiating the role, the world is still transformed in important ways. Mothers understand themselves in relation to this new baby; there is a core

value that mothers take up as participants in this culture that being a good mother (whatever that means, and this is a fundamental problem for mothers) is central to how a woman understands and measures herself. As one mother commented, "I think the worse thing anybody could say to me right now is to say or imply that you're not a good mother. You know, just send me off the deep end. I think it's the worst thing. I really do." If one is a bad or mediocre teacher or lawyer, one can say "I am better off doing something else" and it may be true. But for mothers, there isn't the possibility of walking away from the project entirely without invoking a sense of failure in what is centrally valued. A mother is always a mother in some way to a child she has born, and thus a baby is a paradigmatic object in Heidegger's sense: reorganizing the way the world shows up and serving as the locus of conflicting interpretations for how one can best be a (good) mother.

Mothering as a world-defining commitment:

Kierkegaard's work begins with an account of modernity in which he claims that all qualitative distinctions have been lost. The world is flat, nothing stands out or solicits one. No one has any real commitments. There is no shared sense of what is important to do. While many moderns live out their existence in this state that Kierkegaard calls despair, albeit in a covered over, or denied, way, some realize their despair and make moves to get out of it

by trying to make "world-defining" commitments of various kinds that give their lives significance. This is a long and very complicated story in Kierkegaard, and the move that finally successfully solves the problems of modernity for the individual is the making of a world defining commitment to a person or a project. A world-defining commitment is one that tells me what person or project is important to me, and also subordinates other commitments, interests and desires I might have in my life to that which is world-defining. In this way, a world-defining commitment to a person or a project gives us qualitative distinctions.

Kierkegaard describes the modern age as one of nihilism, in which all qualitative distinctions have been "levelled" and nothing stands out as "mattering". Without qualitative distinctions we can't make commitments because nothing matters to us, nothing stands out as more or less important. To escape this nihilism, Kierkegaard says, we make a "leap of faith" into various forms of commitment. Two of these forms of commitment are particularly relevant to this analysis of mothering. In the first, one makes a commitment to being radically self-defining: one chooses which values, career, spouse, etc. to make significant. One finds meaning and identity in being the kind of agent who is self-defining, who chooses what to give significance and meaning to. This kind of commitment is perceived as invulnerable because the focus of the commitment is to one's

capacity for choice, not to the particular objects of choice. Thus, if one loses a job or becomes disabled and can no longer do something one has chosen to make significant, one merely chooses something else to replace it. What is world defining for the person involved in this kind of commitment is the sense of being in control and a rational agent, choosing how to live one's own life without recourse to the values, standards and expectations of others. While making one's capacity for choice world-defining is immensely appealing in our modern culture, Kierkegaard points out that for a human being to be the sole arbiter of what is significant ultimately prohibits any reference to standards outside of one's self. When one can choose to give significance to anything, that significance becomes completely arbitrary and one ends up back in the state of nihilism that initiated the commitment to being a radically free agent in the first place. Thus, this type of commitment is ultimately unlivable, and leads to a state of despair.

In the second kind of commitment relevant to the interpretation of mothering, which Kierkegaard argues is the conclusive solution to the problems of modernity and nihilism, a person makes a commitment to a particular project or cause or person that isn't chosen, but, in a sense, "claims" her. It is this second commitment to a project or a person that ultimately gives one a world, an

identity and qualitative distinctions, although one is also, then, vulnerable to the risk of losing the object of one's commitment. Accepting this vulnerability and risk, says Kierkegaard, is an act of "faith". For explanatory purposes, Kierkegaard uses the of romantic love to explain this kind of commitment. While choice is involved in this kind of commitment in the sense that one must be able to refuse the commitment (it can't be an obsession), it is not the kind of radically free choice of the first kind of commitment: for example, you can't choose who you fall in love with, though you can choose not to be in the relationship. Kierkegaard uses falling in love to exemplify the phenomenology of this kind of commitment. When a person falls in love it is not because she is able to describe the objective characteristics that define her perfect lover in abstraction and then go out into the world and select the person who matches her description. Falling in love has <u>something</u> to do with who we are-the kind of lover we want, or would choose if we could-but it is also something that most people describe as "happening to them." It isn't chosen in the radical sense. Further, if a person loses her lover, there is a feeling of irrevocable loss rather than an anticipation of going out and replacing that lover with another one who has the same objective characteristics. In the example of romantic love, falling in love projects a person into the future in a new way and initiates a re-

interpretation of the past. One sees one's life as a whole in light of the commitment to the relationship.

Many career women live an existence strikingly similar to Kierkegaard's account of the commitment to radically free choice where planfulness, prediction, choice and control define one's sense of agency and significance. Sandy, a lawyer, exemplifies this notion of agency in the following excerpt from her first interview where she describes how she decided to have a child:

> We had thought about it and we'd both gone through a period of thinking, "Well, maybe we just never would have any kids." And we, uh, I got out of the library a lot of, like, "childless by choice" books and all that kind of thing. I always, I think I always thought I wanted a kid and always assumed I would have some children, but I really wanted to look at it, and we both, we liked, there are a lot of things about being childless that we really like, and we're aware of a lot of that--our friends having kids and all the commitments and how it changes your life and it puts certain restrictions on you, so we wanted to really be sure. Although I think you're never sure and you've got to kind of just close your eyes and jump into it.

In our culture, in which oppressive and patriarchal practices have historically limited women's options, the appeal to a woman of being a radically free agent who can re-make the precepts for her life based on her own needs and talents is understandably enormous. Further, there is in the culture a general subscription to the ideal of the free and autonomous agent. The appeal of this position is, as Taylor argues, that:

> the ideal of disengagement defines a certain-typically modern-notion of freedom, as the ability to act on one's own, without outside interference or

> subordination to outside authority. It defines its own peculiar notion of human dignity, closely connected to freedom. And these in turn are linked to ideals of efficacy, power, unperturbability, which for all their links with earlier ideals are original with modern culture....The great attraction of these ideals...lends great weight and credence to the disengaged image of the self. (1985, p. 5)

Several mothers in the study experienced the first problems with subscribing to the notion of the disengaged, autonomous and independent agent when they were pregnant. Like persons who live with a chronic disease, they felt morally inadequate when they were unable to carry on as equals in their marital relationship because they were experiencing morning sickness, fatigue and emotional lability. Marian, exemplifies her ambivalence over being "taken care of":

> I don't mind being dependent (on Robert, her husband); it's part of the partnership. It's like when you're down. But I often feel like I have asked too much of him and I'm surprised that he doesn't get upset about it. I had really bad morning sickness during the first trimester. I was sick and he was always really great about (it).

Sandy, a lawyer, described a point when her baby was four months old when, faced with the decision whether to go back to work at six months or a year, she found herself in tears:

> It's not that we don't have the money. I mean we have a lot of money in the bank. I could do it. Just a question of what do we want, what are our priorities, I guess. What do we want to do? Do we want to save up money so we can buy a house and move to Marin or the suburbs or whatever? Or is it more important now to go back (to work), or is it more important to be with him....And I guess in a way I feel like either decision is okay if I feel good about it, but I don't know how to really make myself feel good about it.....So I mean, I have all these choices and I feel like anything I do

> is okay if I feel good about it, but I don't know what I really want, and I don't want it to be, to have regrets later and feel like I've screwed up the one chance I really had to--I don't know. I feel like it's a unique opportunity.

As a result of becoming a mother there is, for some women, a radical shift into a new kind of existence that closely parallels Kierkegaard's account of a world-defining commitment to a project (or a person as in Romantic Love), in which a new world-defining commitment to the project of motherhood is realized. Even when the pregnancy was planned, the baby makes a claim that (in its authority) is not chosen or anticipated, but is certainly welcomed, and the mother finds herself with a commitment to the baby that completely reorganizes her life and creates important meanings and qualitative distinctions that did not exist before. A mother writing about the nature of commitment in her life describes this world-defining commitment to her children:

> My strongest experience of...commitment in personal relations is as a parent. My children are almost grown up now, and the unhesitating commitment their presence has called forth from me, from the very bottom of my heart, has surely been one of the liberating experiences of my life. It's easier for me to be wholehearted when there's no choice, no exit. (Moon, 1989)

While the commitment to choice and control is still evident in these mothers, it is now <u>subordinate</u> to the claims made by the project of mothering. In other words, choice is necessary to having a world-defining commitment to the project of motherhood but one's world isn't <u>defined</u> by being

an autonomous, rationally choosing agent; that definition comes from the commitment to the baby. Choice is necessary to motherhood because there are critical choices to be made by a mother concerning the well-being of her child. And, certainly for career women, aspiring to the ideal of the autonomous and self-determining agent may facilitate their career development. But the world-defining commitment to motherhood cannot co-exist with a world-defining commitment to being an autonomous, rational and radically free agent.

Of course, this reconstituting or re-ordering of world is not automatic or universal. For some mothers, a detachment that is consistent with the ideal of the disengaged, rationally choosing agent (or, more extremely, with nihilism) persists even after the baby is born, and commitment to choice and control continue to be world-defining or, worse, nothing matters or stands out to the mother who inhabits what Kierkegaard calls a "levelled" world. This levelled world can be compared to the world of depressed mothers for whom nothing stands out as significant, even their babies, with disastrous consequences for both the mothers and the babies. While some women do not make a commitment to the project of mothering world-defining, I feel that it can be said that even for them (those mothers who stand outside and against the claim made on them by their babies) the baby still functions as a paradigmatic object. Mothers who are not psychotic or

extremely narcissistic will always stand in some relation to the claims made on them by their infants. It belongs to being a mother that it matters what kind of mother one is. It is in this sense that mothering is a moral practice, the substance and purpose of which are understood as internally meaningful "goods." Thus, a mother who abandons her baby because of a drug addiction will always be in the world as the mother who left her baby. How she accommodates that understanding of herself will vary with her situation and with social and familial practices and meanings. For this reason, it is sadly destructive of mothers (as it has always been understood to be destructive of children) when social conditions make good mothering difficult or impossible, because when mothers fail to attain the purposes of the practice (to be a "good enough" mother however that is defined by a woman in her own particular familial and cultural context) they fail in some self-ascribed core value and whether they fail for personal or cultural reasons matters little in the end to their sense of themselves as failed mothers.

Rubin (In press) points out that the contradictions of making a world-defining commitment to choice center in the impossibility of truly radically free choice, of choosing without recourse to any standard outside of one's self for choosing, or to the claims of any person or project that matters to one. In Kierkegaard's account, Rubin argues,

women are a residual category of human being, and function to help cover over the contradictions and despair of this kind of agency, for they are spared the burden of radical choice by being embedded in a network of "tasks and duties" over which they have no control. As they carry out these tasks and duties they create a world that men, by virtue of their relationship to women, have access to, and because of this, men can continue the illusion of being radically free. The character[5] in Kierkegaard's work who represents this kind of agency, Judge William, finds solace when he becomes melancholy in watching his wife as she carries out her tasks and duties:

> The reason she is everything to man is that she presents him with the finite; without her he is an unstable spirit, an unhappy creature who cannot find rest, has no abode. It has frequently been my delight to see women's meaning in this way; on the whole she is to me a symbol of the congregation, and the spirit is in great distress when it does not have a congregation in which to live. (1987, p. 313)

Women occupied a more circumscribed social role in Kierkegaard's "modernity" which made choice (for women) in Kierkegaard's radical sense difficult if not impossible. Moreover, in Kierkegaard's account women are blocked from being radically free agents because of the psychological purpose they served in helping men cover over, or deny, the

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[5] Kierkegaard presents different ways of resolving the problems of nihilism through different fictional characters who represent the different "spheres of existence" in Kierkegaard's work. Judge William is the character who portrays the ethical sphere of existence.

despair (over the ultimate unworkability) of the position of radical choice and freedom (Rubin, in press). Our current cultural context holds out the possibility for (and in its valuation of women's traditional duties and tasks even encourages) women to escape that network of duties and tasks. These women-identified, situated cultural practices are rejected by women so that they might participate as rationally choosing agents; choosing themselves "absolutely" as men have always tried to do. Women are attracted to this kind of agency, despite, as Kierkegaard points out, the ultimate unworkability of the commitment to rational choice as a way to have a meaningful world. Several of the mothers in the study described the contradiction they felt between wanting to be autonomous, freely choosing agents and wishing they could just be "claimed" by their choices.

Whether women continue to be blocked in these aspirations because of the role they <u>currently</u> play in the psychic economy of men is an interesting question. Certainly the world would be a more impoverished place if men and women <u>both</u> adopted the autonomous, disengaged stance (of the rational agent unencumbered by the claims of others) in family life that non-nurturing, traditionally male work requires, and practices of care were further devalued. While men have always gotten away with having this stance in work and in families, this was only a possibility because women took up the duties and tasks of family and community

life. Now, even as women become more autonomous and able to choose their lives, the way they work the "second shift" (Hochschild, 1989) at home, when they have jobs and careers, creates the illusion that men can continue to be both autonomous and fully participant members of intact, functioning families.

Alternatively, men and women, as mothers and fathers, can both share the work of maintaining the "congregation" (Kierkegaard, 1987, p. 313) which is evident in the stories of some of the career women in this study. In a couple of families, mothers returned to work and fathers assumed the primary responsibility for the household and the baby. And in a third of the study families fathers shared the commitment to family and household with mothers pretty equally, according to the mothers and fathers themselves.

A further facet of the way motherhood is taken up by individual women is found in the stance that both parents are able to take in the work place. In the majority of the work settings described by the study participants, the culture was at best tolerant of parental commitments and responsibilities. At worst, it was hostile to parents' needs for flexibility and consideration. Most parents tried to hide the fact that they were claimed by the everyday duties and tasks of family life. New parents returned to work and were expected to participate as equals much as they did before they had a baby. And while the men in the study

were more successful at this than the women, both mothers and fathers suffered from having to deny the reality of their family responsibilities and the fact that their parenthood was now a self-defining commitment. Mothers and fathers need the security of clearly stated and culturally sanctioned work place policies that acknowledge the part both parents play in raising children. When both parents have permission to acknowledge the claims of family life in the work place, there will be less press for women to play the role of maintaining commitments to the contingent and particular world of the family, thereby allowing men to maintain their autonomous, disengaged stance in the context of family life.

Judge William's view of women is not only simplistically romantic, but also overlooks the way women's traditional network of social roles was also limiting and oppressive. As a liberal, Judge William is in the awkward position of espousing equality and at the same time depending on his wife being limited in her choice, being caught in her network of tasks and duties, to cover over the impossibility of his untenable commitment to absolute choice and to being a person for whom things cannot have significance except through his choosing to give them significance. Such a stance makes Judge William unavailable to the claims of the relational and contingent world of the domestic economy, and so it falls to women to maintain that

world. Modern Western middle class women have looked to the freedom of choosing themselves and their commitments as a way of escaping the oppressive and limiting aspects of their social roles, and achieving a more equitable position in society.

One of the most dramatic differences between Kierkegaard's time and our own is women's capacity to choose if and when to bear a child. Most, if not all, of a woman's capacity to choose an education, a career, and an independent, autonomous lifestyle is predicated on a woman's capacity to prevent pregnancy. Grounded in this capacity to contracept, many modern middle class American women with careers, particularly those without children, aspire to an equality with men that levels the distinctions between men and women.

Women attempting to combine mothering with career commitments exemplify the way a commitment to rational choice both opens up possibilities and creates profound dilemmas for contemporary women and their families.

In the antepartum period, many career women anticipate becoming mothers while also remaining firmly committed to a notion of themselves as freely choosing their work, their mates, their interests, the kinds of engagements they have with friends and family, and, finally, motherhood.

While the constant barrage of choices facing modern women is sometimes experienced as wearying and the lack of

any authority as a resource for making decisions as difficult, these women still hold on to their commitment to choice as central to their identities. Their careers offer them a sense of autonomy and competence, and they project themselves into the future with the same understanding of themselves, anticipating only minor adjustments as a result of having a baby. As one mother put it: "the baby will basically not affect my life in the sense that I will not become a different person...it's adding a thing to my life, and a lot of times I think about what I'm going to give up because my life is full now." That they have this view of themselves is not an accident, for this view of the self is deeply ingrained in the culture, particularly for white, middle class individuals with careers.

The centrality of choice, autonomy and control to women with careers embarking on motherhood is first evident in decisions regarding conception. No longer is pregnancy something that happens to one. It is chosen. Couples talk of lengthy efforts to get clear "about their issues" before choosing to become parents in order to prevent transmission of problematic patterns of relating to children. Or they delay pregnancy in order to achieve financial stability or career goals. Even in the case of an accidental pregnancy, the woman for whom choice and control are central considers whether to choose to continue with the pregnancy or to terminate it. She is next confronted with the issue of

prenatal genetic screening: does she want to know what kind (sex, kind and degree of disability or predisposition to disease) of baby she will have and, once this information is known, will she choose, still, to continue the pregnancy? Even for women who reject prenatal genetic screening, it is still understood as <u>their choice</u> to decline the procedure. Some couples try conception strategies that supposedly result in a fetus being a desired sex. Women get very specific about what kind of delivery they want to have, towards which end they develop elaborate lists of demands for clinicians, and often become depressed and disappointed when their plans and expectations go awry.

Frequently, mothers make the choice about when to return to work prior to their infant's birth, prior to having a relationship with the infant that makes a claim on them. The decision is, for the uninitiated mother, organized by the demands of her career and the availability of childcare, since the power with which the infant will solicit her is impossible to imagine prior to the birth of the infant. Lisa is a sales representative. In her antepartum interview she articulated her commitment to her career:

> (My career is) real important. Uh, I don't know that may change when I have the baby. Uh, but right now it's really important. I feel that I went to school for a long time and I didn't get my degree to then come and stay home and be a mom. And even if I were to take time out, that would be what it would be, it would be time out. It wouldn't be never go back to work again....I've worked really hard this last year

> building up relationships with my customers and I feel I have a good potential. And I like what I'm doing. If I didn't, I wouldn't go back, but I really do enjoy it, so it's pretty important right now. It may change in a week, but (laughter).
>
> I: What does your work mean to you?
>
> M: It means independence. Uh, a sense of my own identity and something that I can be proud of, and that I am proud of. And it's a chance to, to do something, you know, totally on my own. I've never really not worked, so I don't really know what it would be like, but you know it's something that I enjoy and it's a pretty important part of my life....This (pregnancy) is kind of a little stumbling block (laughs), that I hadn't planned on.

In this same interview, Lisa described her plans to go back to work when her baby was eight weeks old.

> What I'm going to do is stay home and be a mom for 8 weeks. And then attempt to go back to work. And you know, like I said, do it out of the house where I'm home three days a week, four days a week, and I think I'm going to just be the super mom and be able to do all this work and take care of my baby. And I don't know how realistic that is. I mean, cause I haven't really been around kids.

Lisa planned on working out of her house without childcare, fulfilling a full-time commitment to her company while also caring for her baby. Lisa's plans instantiate the additive view of role enactment, and echo the comment of the mother who said she would just do everything she's doing now and also have a baby.

On the other hand, some career women give up trying to rationally justify having a baby. They can't decide when is the right time (usually no time is right), or they find themselves accidentally pregnant, and they just take the leap. This inability to rationally justify their choice is

the beginning of an important story.

After a baby is born, there is still tremendous cultural press for parents to comport themselves in an autonomous, rationally chosen way. Parenting manuals require mothers to get absolutely clear about what they are doing in their parenting practices. Every move must be examined as to its motivation and the effect on the child. Parenting is reduced to rational technique, unencumbered by parents' "irrational" and "damaging" "baggage" which they carry forward from their own childhood. Emphasis is on rules or general explanatory schemes and on child rearing as a science, not on the needs of a particular child and a particular mother and a mother's intuitive understanding of that child. Mothers themselves emphasize getting clear about or detaching from their pasts and not being "driven by them" in their parenting practices; choosing, instead, to follow whatever child development theory is currently in vogue. Parents are taught to be reflective to the point that what really matters to them starts to show up as pathology. For example, a woman for whom baseball figures prominently resists dressing her child in baseball clothes and stands back from pushing her son to play the game because she wants him to choose it for himself "when he is ready," despite the fact that baseball is one of the defining projects in <u>her</u> life, and she would like it to be for him but sees this desire on her part as illegitimate. Similarly, some parents

were apologetic about wanting their children to go to college, or to have a particular profession. The study participants frequently described not wanting their children to be burdened by parental expectations about career, education, religious affiliation or choice of athletic endeavors. Rather, they only want their children to be happy in "whatever they choose" to do, unfettered by parental desires or concerns. As Taylor (1991) says, we have elaborated a notion of freedom that says "we are free when we can remake the conditions of our own existence" (p. 101). There is a sense of power, Taylor argues, that goes along with accrediting this instrumental remaking of ourselves. This view is expressed by a father of a one year old son when he was asked what he wanted to impart to his son:

> General, like liberal type values--that people have the right to do what they want to do. Vote Democratic, things like that. But no, nothing like "this is the way you should live your lifestyle". I don't want to tell him, you know, this is the way you should do it. I'm really concerned that we don't do that, point him down one path and try to tell him that that's the only way to go. But I'm sure that will be the core of many lively discussions on what we're exactly going to try to tell him about the world.

This stance towards child rearing works well enough with an infant (because infants require more nurturing than authority) but the practical difficulties of the stance become evident when children invoke their autonomy in toddlerhood and choose to express themselves in particularly antisocial ways, at the heart of which is often the child's

plea for authority from his parents. Further, as Hauerwas points out, refraining from imposing our values and expectations on our children essentially "derives from moral cowardice. For to ask that our children adopt our values and way of living "requires that we have the courage to ask ourselves to live truthfully" (1981, p. 166)

The constitutive nature of the autonomous, independent notion of agency is captured in Caudill and Weinstein's study of American and Japanese mothers and infants. In their study, they found that Americans view their newborns as highly dependent and requiring parenting that facilitates the infant's growth into an independent person capable of contending in our competitive society. This American emphasis on fostering autonomy in children is contrasted with Japanese mothers' interpretations of newborns as very <u>independent</u> and requiring parental socialization so that they grow into adults who are appropriately dependent on a network of relations with their parents, family and community. Caudill and Weinstein found these parental beliefs and values instantiated in infant behavior at four months that identified babies as either American or Japanese. Similarly, in comparing traits desired in children by their parents in 1924 and 1978, Alwin (1988) found that contemporary adults prefer child traits that emphasize qualities linked to the autonomy of children, whereas preferences in 1924 reflected a press for greater

obedience to familial and institutional authority. Rossi (1993) argues that child-rearing practices that purportedly promote the well-being of infants and children, such as justifying the early use of group day care because it fosters independence and autonomy, actually "reflects as well what is congenial for busy parents to believe, i.e., that children can prosper with a minimal investment of time and energy on the part of parents" (p. 167).

An important component of being a radically free, autonomous, and self-defining agent is not letting anything interfere with truly choosing at every moment. Once a mother has chosen motherhood it is not revocable. So a major past choice dictates how one chooses in the present. Thus, the mother whose self-understanding is based on choice must continuously re-choose motherhood. Unfortunately, having chosen motherhood, she can't decide that it's no longer significant without seriously undermining her <u>child's</u> capacity to act as an autonomous agent in his life. The implications of being free to choose, then "un-choose" a child are multiple. There is a basic incompatibility of the radical choice notion of agency with the emotional well-being of children (as exemplified in the plight of children whose fathers, or mothers, have abandoned them emotionally, physically or financially). This is ultimately a profoundly nihilistic position. If children are denied their claim to a parent's permanent, stable commitment to

them, then the world really is levelled for mothers and fathers. On the other hand, the mother whose organizing premise is self-determining choice loses the sense of complete autonomous control that governed her life prior to becoming a mother.

The injunction of Kierkegaard's character Judge William: "Choose yourself absolutely" is violated. When you can no longer choose, then you are seen as no longer free and equal, but "driven" or "owned" by something outside of yourself and you are made vulnerable by having this commitment to something outside of yourself that is particular, dependent, unpredictable and vulnerable. Anne describes her sense of vulnerability:

> I: So what does being a mother mean to you?
>
> M: The world right now. Just <u>so</u> much. It really does. It makes me really happy, it makes me really vulnerable, it scares me, it makes me realize that now I'm in for a lifetime of occasional pains and you know, wanting her not to suffer in any way and I realize, you know, her sufferings are mine but her joys are mine too and there's a tremendous amount of joy in having her so...
>
> I: ....this vulnerability that you feel.
>
> M: Oh. That's what it is! That's the word.

In the same interview, in which Anne described her baby's life-threatening illness, she describes the terror she felt at the possibility of losing her daughter:

> I: So what aspect of becoming a mother was most surprising to you?
>
> M: The depth of emotion I think. I think of myself as a person who, while I have a lot of emotions, you know,

> I kind of keep them reasonably in control and I think of myself as being calm, you know, just the depth of terror about what's gonna happen (to her) and I'm just crying and crying and crying and you know, and some nights, still I cry when....you know, I'm pretty emotional about it still, you can see, I have tears in my eyes.

Beth, who struggled for years with infertility, describes similar feelings:

> I: You feel more vulnerable than you did before you had her?
>
> M: In the sense that if something happened it would be more acute? Well, yeah. Obviously. There's more to lose. You have more--kind of like with anything, if you have more, there's just that much more to lose.
>
> I: And you're used to being in control of things in your life--how does that (vulnerability) feel?
>
> M: Scary. I know a friend of a friend who's daughter just got very, very ill and just hearing about that, I realized that there's some things that you can't control no matter what.

Another way in which this despair is experienced is when the commitment to choice can't give meaning and significance to one's life because always choosing what to give meaning <u>to</u> ultimately makes meaning arbitrary. This recognition that rational choice won't work any more generates anxiety in mothers. Sandy expresses this anxiety when she talks about her decision about when to return to work, a decision she had a great deal more latitude about than most of the other mothers in the study:

> I have all these choices and I feel like anything I do is okay if I feel good about it, but I don't know what I really want, and I don't want it to be, to have regrets later and feel like I've screwed up the one chance I really had to--I don't know. I feel like it's a unique opportunity.

This despair is further justified by the response of the work place to the fact that a new mother is no longer autonomous, that she has claims on her that relativize her work commitments. She may be refused advancement, she may feel her conflicts about work and family are unacknowledged, and she often feels her need for flexibility in her schedule is ignored. The message these women get is that these problems are understood as individual problems: you choose to have a baby, you own the problems. Some women (who have the option to do so) drop out of their careers, others work harder at freely choosing at work, and at making the claims of the baby invisible to others. One mother, Julie, coped with her sorrow over not being able to be home with her son by spending her lunch hour "buying him presents since I can't be with him". Others resolved the problem by attenuating their attachment to their babies (Brazelton, 1986), usually assisted in this move by fathers who were willing to be the nurturers.

Choice is, or can be, involved in the decision to have a baby, but once the child is born, the understanding of choice which existed prior to having the baby is no longer sustainable. When choice is made the organizing premise of a woman's life, there is no recourse to standards for choosing outside of one's self. Nor is there the possibility to allow the claims of others to have a part in one's decisions. Of course, Kierkegaard points out, when

there are no standards for choice and things only have significance because I choose to give them that significance, then that significance is completely arbitrary. And herein lies the despair of the position.

Having a baby opens up the possibility for what Kierkegaard (Dreyfus, 1991; Rubin, in press) calls a world-defining commitment to a person or a project, in which one makes a world-defining, constitutive commitment to a particular, concrete person or project, despite the vulnerability and risk of defining one's world by a relationship one might lose. To say that a commitment is world-defining in Kierkegaard's terms is to say that the relationship authorizes what is important: what relationships and projects are important, what aspects of one's self are important etc. Lisa, the sales representative who planned on returning to work eight weeks post-partum, quit her job when there was a disagreement with her boss about what she had committed to do during her maternity leave and her company then offered her only a part-time position when she returned. She describes how, with the birth of her baby, choice was suddenly problematic for her:

> (Trying to decide about whether to go back to work and day care) was really tough. Yeah. You know, I've thought about this. I mean, it's great that the women's movement exists, and now we have a choice and that's wonderful, but making that choice is really hard. You want it all. But deciding not to go back to work was really hard because I really did like my job. But I don't regret it. I mean, I was in Macy's the other day and the girl who helped me was asking if I had a kid and I told her, and she said, "I have an 8

> week old at home." And I said, "oh, and you've already come back to work." And she said, "yeah, today's my first day back." And I said, "oh, how hard," and she said "yes, I've really been crying all morning," and I thought after that--and I mean, I think of this every day, but especially when I talk to someone like that- I'm so lucky to be able to be home with him. I just truly love being home with him....and I think it's so good for him, and he's just a real happy baby and really likes people and stuff. And it makes me feel like we're doing something right.

Louise Erdrich (1993) describes the way in which mothering actions are not "chosen:"

> One reason there is not a lot written about what it is like to be the mother of a new infant is that there is rarely a moment to think of anything else besides that infant's needs. Endless time with a small baby is spent asking, *What do you want? What do you want?* The sounds of her unhappiness range from mild yodeling to extended bawls. *What do you want?*....I do what she "tells" me to do-feed, burp, change, amuse, distract, hold, look at, help to sleep, reassure-without consciously choosing to do it. I take her instructions without translating her meaning into words but simply bypassing straight to action.

The person with a world-defining commitment to a person or a project, the "Knight of Faith", as Kierkegaard calls him, experiences the relationship as a "gift": it isn't chosen or earned; it feels like grace. Anne, who's baby was hospitalized at four months with a life-threatening illness, describes the bliss and vulnerability of the position:

> (Mothering means) the world right now. Just so much. It really does. It makes me really happy, it makes me really vulnerable, it scares me, it makes me realize that now I'm in for a lifetime of occasional pains and you know, wanting her not to suffer in any way and I realize you know, her sufferings are mine but her joys are mine too and there's a tremendous amount of joy in having her.
>
> These feelings come up from inside and you can't believe how strong they are or where they came from or

> why you didn't have ones like this before. I mean I have fallen in love, I've been married...all of those things.

Becoming Leah's mother completely re-organized the way the world shows up for Anne. Leah's hospitalization served to show up the profound connection Anne has to her daughter and how vulnerable and open she is now to both the joys and the sorrows of being Leah's mother. Anne is in relation to Leah in a way that she has never been in relation to another human being and she finds this both terrifying and freeing. She feels opened up to the world in a new way. This new openness extends to Anne's embodied experience of infants and children in general:

> It <u>is</u> different. I mean I'm not a real touchy sort of person. I don't hug people a lot and kiss them a lot and all that and I'm <u>completely</u> touchy with the baby. I mean, it's just like I kiss her all over. I love to rub her behind. You know, I love having her in my arms. I love just hugging her and you know, especially since all this happened you know....but definitely the hugging and kissing, never embarrassed about doing any of that stuff in public (laughs) and I've noticed that I did it right away with somebody else's baby. Actually I've done it with their kids and babies. I haven't done it as much with adults but definitely; boy, you put a baby in my arms now and I'm like all those women, I used to make fun of, you know. (laughs) Let me at it!

This statement is a wonderful example of the change in the embodied difference in being in the world that happened to many of the mothers. The boundaries that were previously so clear are now much more permeable. Physical boundaries between self and others, emotional boundaries shift; women describe becoming highly sensitive to the plight of sick or

vulnerable children. It may be this loosening of boundaries and the regard of all children as somehow belonging to a particular mother that creates what one father called "morally superior beings": beings who feel a sense of responsibility and stewardship toward the larger world as a result of their commitment to their own children.

This openness is analogous to the loss many women feel of modesty after giving birth. How can you feel modest in the same way after being completely physically revealed to total strangers; after your body becomes the food source for a sucking, grabbing creature who thinks your body is hers? As a new mother, you are not an expert any more. And while a mother might gain insight into and skill at being in relation to her children, few mothers ever feel like experts, like they've really got being a mother nailed down. So becoming a mother is a humbling experience, a loss of the predictability and control that are the hallmark of so many career women's lives, that can open a woman up to the world in a new way and allow for new understandings and meanings to emerge. Louise Erdrich (1993, p. 35),in her diary of her third child's first year, describes this love of an infant as "of a different order:"

> Parents...seem surprised at their own helplessness in the face of the passion they feel for their children. We live and work with a divided consciousness. It is a beautiful enough shock to fall in love with another adult, to feel the possibility of unbearable sorrow at the loss of that other, essential personality, expressed just so, that particular touch. But love of an infant is of a different order. It is twinned love,

> all-absorbing, a blur of boundaries and messages. It is uncomfortably close to self-erasure, and in the face of it one's fat ambitions, desperations, private icons and urges fall away into a dreamlike before that haunts and forces itself into the present with tough persistence.
>
> The self will not be forced under, nor will the baby's needs gracefully retreat. The world tips away when we look into our children's faces. The days flood by. Time with children runs through our fingers like water as we lift our hands, try to hold, to capture, to fix moments in a lens, a magic circle of images or words.

Another of the study mothers, Nora, described herself as highly committed to her career before her son was born and was very conscientious and hard working. She surprised herself and her large family by the way she fell so deeply in love with her son after he was born. Here, she describes how the responsibility she felt to her work was something she could choose to "blow off", unlike the responsibility she feels to her son, which is both weighty and not burdensome because of the nature of the commitment she has to him:

> M: You can always blow off work. You know. You can always get by. You can tell your friends, you're not going out. Who had responsibility before kids?
>
> I: So how do you take up that responsibility. Do you ever sort of resent it or rebel against it or ...
>
> M: I thought I would, but I haven't. I thought I would resent it, but I haven't. I thought I'd resent not being able to do the things I used to do but I didn't have responsibility before the kid...No! Work? You know...You had nothing...all the money was yours...No, there was no responsibility; it was all fun. Fun and games. I really think that.

The world-defining commitment that these mothers had to their babies was not just a narrowly focused commitment to

another person as in Kierkegaard's Romantic Love story, but rather to the project of motherhood (more on this later), which may come to include more than one child. This kind of commitment to a project allows mothers to have a particular world-defining commitment (that is, in which the significance of everything is influenced or organized by being a mother to the particular child and to the project of mothering) which gives their lives meaning and qualitative distinctions. Beth recalls an incident in which these qualitative distinctions were suddenly apparent to her:

> M: When Hannah had this croupy cough and I was supposed to go (home), there was a client coming for a meeting and I was going to have to leave in the middle, and I was just reflecting, I was thinking about telling you this because it was, it seemed very clear to me the differences. In the past, if something had come up where I would have had to leave, I might not leave. I might just--or if I did leave there'd be like this terrible guilt and apology. And in this particular case, there was no question that I would leave and there was no guilt or apology for doing it, I just did it. And it was very clear, that little event, and this was all just a reaction that was not consciously thought out, but it was clear to me that, based on that, that what was my priority--that Hannah was my priority. So.
>
> I: So did you feel any conflict in that?
>
> M: No. I didn't feel any conflict. I felt like this was--that was what was so interesting--was that there wasn't a conflict. It was obvious to me what I had to do.
>
> I: So what was at stake for you in that situation?
>
> M: Being in control of the meeting and the client and having the client feel that I was there 100%.
>
> I: And on the other side?
>
> M: Taking care of this most important little life.

> You know, and being there for her. I mean there was no question what was more important.

Nora gave this pointed response to my question about how mothering her son was different from the work she did in her service oriented firm:

> Oh. One (mothering) has meaning! No, I shouldn't say this. Three months from now or when things get a little better, you know my job would probably give me a little more importance in my life but right now, it's just not.

The other side of this kind of commitment is that it also leaves mothers open to vulnerability and risk, because the object of the commitment, the child, may be lost. Anne, 37, a lawyer who vigorously rejected parenthood in her twenties, describes this kind of commitment to her baby, which for her was made more explicit by her baby's sudden, life-threatening illness when she was four months old:

> (I realized) how much she meant to me, how precious she had become, she was not in my life before, and then suddenly, she was the most important thing in the world to me, without question.

In the face of the anguish of the vulnerability and risk, the mother with a world-defining commitment to motherhood and to her child is what Kierkegaard (1983) calls a "Knight of Faith": in the face of "every moment to see the sword hanging over the beloved's head" (p. 50), of seeing the risk and vulnerability of the position, and the absurdity of having faith that a new child could ever mean as much as this child means if this one is lost, she goes ahead and takes up the commitment anyway. The position is constituted

by two complimentary feelings: anxiety and bliss. The anxiety is a result of the vulnerability created by the possibility that the child may be lost or that harm may come to him/her. While mothers frequently talked of feeling vulnerable in a new way, they could not bring themselves to talk about the content of the vulnerability, the fact that this baby could die. Like mothers from a more primitive world where rituals function to protect an infant from death and illness, these mothers could bring themselves to describe their fears of having their babies kidnapped or injured, but only Anne, whose baby did face a life-threatening illness, could bring herself to talk about being vulnerable particularly to death. Anne describes how she felt when her baby was hospitalized with a life-threatening illness:

> (I felt) as strong emotions as I've ever felt about anything. I mean I just cried and cried and cried at night....I remember a couple of nights during this...I read somewhere a description of how involved you can get with a sick child and it was that you feel that you're taking her every breath, you know and I was up and down and up and down and putting my hand over her to see if she was breathing and that kind of stuff....I think of myself as a person who, while I have a lot of emotions, you know, I kind of keep them reasonably in control and I think of myself as being calm, you know, just the depth, the terror about what's gonna happen and I'm just crying and crying and crying and you know, and some nights, still I cry when, you know, I'm pretty much in a bad state, I have tears in my eyes.

Then she describes the bliss, the privilege of having this child:

> When I'm playing her lullabies and rocking her, it just chokes me up...It chokes me up you know hearing some songs and thinking God, you know, just for the moments

> to be able to do this. So that's it, I won't talk about it anymore. You know what I mean.

There is much that foretells this commitment, as the mother has been through the pregnancy and begun to think of herself as a mother and looks forward to the relationship with the baby, but the actual arrival of the infant throws the mother into a completely new relationship with the infant, one that is not anticipated by the mother. Marian describes this feeling at the point when her baby was four months old:

> The thing that is surprising is how our lives have become totally centered around the baby. I had heard that happened but I didn't really know what it meant. And it really has...just kind of everything at home is centered around the baby...everything away from home is centered around the baby.

But the commitment is to more than the infant. The commitment is to the whole project of motherhood; to shaping the kind of world, both immediate and larger, that the child will grow up in, of becoming a "good" mother, whatever that means to a particular woman (what it means goes back to her negative or positive paradigm of mother), to being a particular kind of moral agent as the child looks to the parents for a sense of what is important to do and be, of creating and maintaining the community institutions which will define the kind of community the child grows up in. Decisions about what to do and be are all shaped by this world-defining commitment to the child: what kind of work to do, what kind of friends to have, how to spend free time,

how to vote etc. This father even talks about what he eats as a decision now shaped by being the father to his son:

> F: And you know just trying to be a good example. I mean, it makes me think a lot more about things we do and like having things laying all over the table. Once he starts to recognize that, and the food we eat and stuff like that. You know.
>
> I: What's important about those things?
>
> F: Just, I mean, he's starting to--I mean, before it was kind of like he was, he was aware of the outside world but I don't know if he was reacting to it that much, but now you can tell, he's mimicking things, and he understands words and stuff, so, and I'm like watching too much t.v. and stuff like that. Having him grow up thinking it's okay to have the t.v. on all the time. We're not that bad, but I mean now we're real conscious of it. So I think it's just becoming more conscious of what you're doing yourself.

Further, there is the willingness to sacrifice anything on behalf of the commitment. This is an essential aspect of a world-defining commitment to a person or a project. And while this kind of sacrifice might appear burdensome from the perspective of the observing outsider, mothers don't experience it this way. Julie describes this:

> It doesn't (feel like a burden). Occasionally, once in a while there'll be a twinge of "gee I wish I could go off and have a lunch with a girlfriend, but I can't do it today," but it's very rare. It's really funny: there's just something about your own kids; they're so special and wonderful and they change every day. It's so amazing. It's really funny, I would have thought--I was a little nervous about that being pregnant, that "oh boy, here goes my life and it's going to change and I'm going to have some miserable times about it," but it really doesn't matter.

The meaning of a world-defining commitment to a child is clarified by contrasting it with the liberal tradition's view of the family as an assemblage of individuals related

by contract (as in marriage), or by the laws of property (as in the relations of parents to children) rather than commitment (Hauerwas, 1981). In the modern liberal tradition in which the autonomy and choice of the individual are paramount, there isn't, according to Hauerwas, a moral account of why we commit ourselves to having children (1981). Instead, becoming a parent is a matter of rational choice. In this view, with its focus on autonomy, rights and choice, Wolff (cited by Hauerwas) argues:

> The ties of blood are merely one source among many of the desires whose satisfaction we seek rationally to maximize. One man enjoys eating, and puts his money into fine food; a second races fast cars, and allocates his resources for carburetors and tune-ups; a third man raises his children-his own-and he finds himself possessed of the strong desire that they should be happy and healthy. So he puts his resources into their schooling and food and clothing, and spends his spare time with them. If his desire for his children's welfare is stronger than his taste in fine cars or fine food, then rationality will dictate that he spend more on them than on eating and transportation. But if his desire is not essentially different from those of his fellow citizens, (then) the state has no reason to treat his interest in his children as taking precedence over his neighbor's interest in racing cars or fine food. (Wolff, 1976, p. 132)

Hauerwas argues that we must recover the moral language we need to talk about what we do as parents in a way that acknowledges that caring for children is substantively different from racing cars or eating gourmet food. Having a world-defining commitment to a child, to his or her care, cannot be accounted for in terms of desires. Without a language with which to describe the moral claims made by children on mothers, mothering as a practice gets

marginalized. While I can hire a mechanic to fix my car and a chef to fix my food, I cannot hire an expert to teach my children what matters to me and what kind of people I want them to become. Nor can I decide that I would rather race cars than raise my children if I have a world-defining commitment to them. Losing a child is not the same as losing a car or the ability to eat gourmet food.

In Kierkegaard's story of the world-defining commitment to a person or a project, it is necessary to have available a paradigm or an exemplar of someone who has such a commitment in order for a person to have a world-defining commitment one's self. This kind of commitment cannot be rationally justified; there are no formal, rational/empirical criteria for having such a commitment. It is a particular and individual commitment and cannot be generalized. One understands about such commitments via paradigms. A mother's mother, or a substitute mother figure, may serve as an exemplar (either negative or positive) of what it is to have a world-defining commitment; When asked about what makes a good mother, mothers had vague responses but when asked to identify someone they thought was a good mother, they generally had no trouble identifying a particular person who they thought was a good mother. Further, they described learning how to be a good mother first by learning to <u>know</u> their own babies, but, second, by watching friends and acquaintances whom they felt were good

mothers. While there are general cultural prescriptions for parenting such as providing a safe and loving environment, and socializing a child into the language and practices of the culture, there are no objective criteria for how these general demands should be realized in mothers' ongoing care, in a situation, of their particular children. The difficulty of parenting can be partly attributed to this nonrationalizability of the practice. Maternal care, however dependent on the experts and the manuals, always depends on the interpretation of the rules and advice for a particular child in a particular situation. Each mother necessarily works out for herself what being a good mother to her particular child means. It is a challenging and unnerving job for a woman used to being autonomous, rational and omnicompetent. The role of one's own mother can certainly be understood as paradigmatic, either of what being a good mother looks like, or as a negative paradigm, what a bad one looks like. In having a paradigm, a mother doesn't adopt the caring practices of another mother wholesale but takes up her own practice of mothering in a way that bears a family resemblance to that of her paradigm.

This marginalization of a mother's commitment is an important part of why having a world-defining commitment to the project of motherhood in the context of a career can be so difficult. There is so little public space, language and

legitimization given to mothering and to the strong claims and transformative experience of being a mother. They are left inarticulable in the public world of work and in accounts of adult identity. This social blind spot and lack of language make it impossible to rationally justify why one is no longer an equal participant in the work world, why one should have special consideration in scheduling work hours, in deciding the number of hours worked, in being able to use sick time to care for a sick child etc. This is particularly true as mothering becomes more and more a marginal practice in our society, and children are seen as one's private responsibility or property to be cared for instrumentally. Nora describes an inarticulable difference between her world and that of her non-mother friends:

> They're really nice and they're really supportive to me but it's not the same. They still go out to night clubs. I just laugh. I go, "You guys, I don't even <u>own</u> black clothes anymore." You know, I was joking, I go, "You guys are in a different world from me and they say, "No, you think we go out all the time;" I go, "You <u>do</u>. You're in a different LIFE." I don't talk to them about a lot of things because I think I'm boring them. Because I think I would have been bored.

Nora's comments serve to underscore Heidegger's point that practices such as raising children are culturally given: It is hard to imagine a comment like this in a culture like the Hopis' where children are understood to be a <u>community</u> responsibility, where the idea of being bored by a discussion centered on raising children is probably not even a possibility because the notion of confining the rearing of

children to biological mothers is not part of a Hopi's self-understanding.

Multi-leveled cultural practices that undermine and marginalize mothers' commitments to their children can be identified in the study data. The lack of a federally mandated and universally available paid maternal leave policy is the most obvious. Mothers were clearly ill-served by having to make maternal leave decisions before they had their babies and before they knew how they would feel about leaving them, particularly before four months postpartum. Lack of opportunity for part-time work was also widely decried by the mothers in the study, most of whom would have preferred to work 3 or 4 days a week. Lack of a high quality system of infant care was also lamented and child care disasters which were not uncommon seriously undermined mothers' ability to be both self-assured mothers and responsible employees.

In decisions about work and mothering, women are counseled to get free of guilt, to get more organized. These strategies of detachment fail to recognize the way babies lay claims on mothers such that the only response to separation may be a recognition of the sadness on separation that honors the depth of the connection and the nature of the commitment.

There is a transformation in the early months of mothering from a commitment to being a rational, self-

determining agent to one of "being open" in Heidegger's sense[6] to what the baby's existence demands, of being open to having something outside yourself lay a claim on you. This process is thwarted by work place pressures that do not allow for the demands of child rearing. The temporality of a mother's working life can prevent this kind of openness from developing vis-a-vis an infant or child, particularly when she feels pressed to return to work before the baby's emerging self can particularize the relationship and what it requires. Mothers who choose to stay home describe the way time is no longer theirs to control or schedule-it belongs to the infant. Working mothers, on the other hand describe the circumscribed time that is available for being with an infant outside in which mothers have an agenda for spending "quality time" with a baby. Whether this is possible depends in large part on the state of the baby at that particular time: is he cranky, or quiet and alert, or asleep? Perhaps, in the end, it isn't the ideal moments of play in which a world-defining commitment is forged but in those very demanding and intense moments when the baby asks everything of a mother.

The cultural press for women to return to work within two to three months of a baby's birth also undermines a world-defining commitment to a baby. Mothers of two month

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[6] The idea of being open involves being "receptive" rather than willing one's self into the situation.

olds who have gone back to work describe the sadness of being separated from their infants before they really feel they know them.

While a commitment to being the kind of agent for whom rational choice is central is basically unavailable for a mother with any kind of meaningful relationship to her baby, Kierkegaard argues that by making a world-defining commitment to something particular and outside of your self, you get back the commitment to choice relatively. That is, your capacity for choice is still important, just not absolutely important. For example, it is important for mothers with a world-defining commitment to make informed and caring choices on behalf of their children. And while commitment to a child may be absolute, it does not preclude having a meaningful and satisfying career when the work place acknowledges (by allowing space for and adjusting policies for) a mother's commitment to her infant. As Anne commented when asked about the importance of her work when her baby was a year old:

> Oh, it's just as important, more important because the work (employment discrimination law and environmental law) is for her now, for the world she'll grow up in.

While a world-defining commitment is not rationalizable, there must be a way for social practices to acknowledge the way in which children and career both very much matter to many women in a way that is outside of their choice. Motherhood and career are, for these women,

constitutive of who they are. The difficulty for career women in the best of situations is in being pulled by these two irremediably separate commitments. Anne, the lawyer quoted above could not have given up her career as a lawyer and her commitment to challenging discriminatory practices in employment and to protecting the environment without losing a part of her self. In this sense, her commitment to her work, which may have been chosen originally, can no longer be unchosen. Her work and her mothering commitments simply lay claims that have to be honored.

While Kierkegaard suggests that world-defining commitments are rare, I suggest that perhaps he might have found them less rare had he really examined the phenomenology of mothering and the nature of women's world and concerns in their own terms. The existence of a mother with a world-defining commitment to motherhood is made difficult by the risk and vulnerability built into the position and by the way cultural practices undermine and violate a mother's commitment. Being a mother is hard work and there is nothing to be done about the risk and vulnerability of the position, but changing social practices to be less undermining of women's world-defining commitments to their children seems a workable and desirable project.

In this chapter I have argued that becoming a mother involves two kinds of engagement. In the first, a baby serves as a paradigmatic object, reorganizing the way the

world shows up for a particular mother. The way in which the world changes is dependent on the particular situation and the meanings and practices of the particular woman who becomes a mother. It was argued that for all the women in the study having a baby was world transforming. It is proposed that this may be true for all women in this culture except for those who suffer from extreme narcissism or psychosis in which the baby can never be experienced as a separate object.

The second kind of engagement that some mothers in the study had with their infants was described in Kierkegaard's terms as a "world-defining commitment." In the case of the study mothers, it was a commitment to the project of motherhood. Such a commitment, says Kierkegaard, can't be rationally chosen but is something one can only be "open" to and claimed by, much as a lover can only be open to falling in love. When one experiences this kind of commitment it is as a gift. This kind of commitment cannot be rationalized; there are no criteria for having such a commitment. It is through the identification of a paradigm who embodies this kind of commitment that a person can have access to it at all. This kind of commitment gives a mother an identity and meaningful distinctions in her life by subordinating other commitments. On the other hand, this kind of commitment makes a person vulnerable because the object of the commitment which gives her her world (in the case of a

mother, an infant or child) may be lost. So that because of the vulnerability and risk of the commitment the self with a world-defining commitment experiences anxiety as well as bliss.

These two ways of being engaged by an infant are undermined by cultural level practices, particularly those of the work world. To facilitate the transition to parenthood, new cultural definitions of the relationship of work and family must be articulated and instantiated in policies sensitive to the transformed commitments of new parents.

Chapter Five

The Meaning and Content of Work

For the 18 mothers in this study, their careers were an important, if not essential, part of their self-understanding. Prior to having their babies, work structured their lives and grounded their identity. Many of the study participants made statements similar to this one by Nora which came in the course of a discussion in which she weighed the costs and benefits of continuing to work after her son was born:

> People our age are <u>used</u> to (working). They have worked for ten years. Work has been their only concern, basically, besides relationships or this or that; and that's their <u>life</u>. Well, it's hard to give up that easily, that part of your life. Its such an intrinsic part of things.

For many of the participants, their careers represented long years of academic work, sometimes in disciplines traditionally inhospitable to women. Their careers also frequently represented years of time and effort building a business or a position of authority and responsibility in a firm or company. As Joan, a lawyer, said:

> I've got too well trained a tool up here in my head that I just can't sit here, doing nothing. I need some sort of outlet; doing the kind of work I'm doing and constantly contacting people and having challenges, intellectual challenges.

Additionally, their work also frequently situated them in a

community of similarly committed colleagues and friends and made an autonomous and independent lifestyle available to them. Also, the economic and status rewards of having a career figured (centrally for some) in the participants' descriptions of the meaning of their work.

Antepartally, the study participants looked quite similar as a group, in the way work was so central to all their lives, even though the content of their careers varied widely. It was only after they had their babies and began to measure the meaning and content of their work against mothering did deep and important differences clearly emerge within the study group. It is this difference in the meaning and content of work and the associated differences in the experience of stress on returning to work which I address in this chapter.

The content of work:

Work as a practice: In describing the content of work in the study sample, I have found MacIntyre's notion of a practice a useful heuristic device. MacIntyre defines a practice as:

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and particularly definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (p.187)

Several women in the study had careers that embodied

socially constituted practices in MacIntyre's sense, with clear internal goods which drove the commitment to the work which was experienced as meaningful and satisfying in this internal sense. The work had moral weight and the commitment that these women had to their work can best be described as passionate. These internal goods, or ends, were not taken for granted but, rather, were the subject of thought and care. Anne, a lawyer with her own firm, specializing in employment discrimination and environmental law, described her commitment to a circumscribed kind of practice that served social ends that she believed in:

> I draw very black and white lines....It has to be socially useful. I help people individually and that's really important to me; when someone's really happy that they've gotten their job back or they've gotten some sort of vindication, or some system has been changed...And then in the environmental cases its a less personal thing, no one particular person smiles at you but you know there's less radiation in the air because of what you've done; or I can go to certain places and know that they look like they do partly because of the work that I've done, and that's very satisfying.

Prior to her daughter's birth, Anne had a world-defining commitment to her work. It constituted her world and gave meaning and content to her life. She was established in her career and owned her firm. She experienced herself as having legitimate authority in her field, based on the skills she developed in the practice while serving socially valuable ends.

Work as managerial: In contrast to the mothers whose work constituted a practice, several mothers in the sample

functioned in their careers as what MacIntyre, (1984) and Bellah et al (1985) in Habits of the Heart, call "managers": "organizing the human and non-human resources available to the organization(s) that employs (them) so as to improve (their) position in the marketplace" (p. 45). Meaning, in this context, centers in achievement rather than purpose. These women were primarily solicited by external goods such as money, power, autonomy, control, independence, collegiality, and prestige. This concern with status and achievement, and the degree to which status can ground self-esteem, is reflected in Julie's description of one of her first jobs as a secretary:

> I started as a secretary which was quite demeaning. I used to come home at night and cry; I couldn't stand it. I never thought I'd get out of that position; but working hard, I got out and was promoted.

For the managers, the content of the work had no intrinsic value, no intrinsic good was accomplished and it was not a practice in MacIntyre's sense. For instance, a mother who sold long distance phone service might switch to selling advertising to large customers. The work is purely instrumental in its content. The ends given by the corporate entity, usually the "bottom line," are unquestioned and collapsed into the means of accomplishing them. Julie, a partner in a small advertising firm, describes this kind of work:

> So, for me, what I accomplish is to make sure that (the) process (of producing an advertising piece) goes through smoothly. And I try to add any strategic value

> to that to make sure that pieces do what they're supposed to do: to sell to their audience, have the right message, stay on time-wise, don't go over budget. So I'm sort of...for me, what I accomplish is this sense of helping usher it through, in making it a successful piece in the end.

Hopes for the future for the managers included further personal challenges, promotions, increased income and benefits, and, ultimately, an early retirement. The managers frequently enjoyed the self-esteem derived from their work status, the contact with clients and colleagues, and certainly the economic benefits; but there is a noticeable absence of any sense of internal goods driving their commitments: a sense of their work as a coherent and meaningful practice with a moral claim. Which is not to say that women doing these jobs derived no satisfaction from them. On the contrary, many felt very much defined by and committed to these kinds of careers. They took pride in doing their jobs well, which meant improving their company's position in the market place, as well as establishing satisfying relationships with pleased customers or with fellow employees.

Julie was paradigmatic of the managers who thoroughly defined themselves by their work, and while she was gratified by her success, she never-the-less acknowledged the difference between the kind of work she did and the kind of work which is framed by internal goods, by a moral claim:

> Unfortunately, I think I'm lacking in (the larger meaning to the work that I do) and it's a bit of a frustration. It doesn't...it's one thing I don't feel

> that I'm making any major contributions. You know, it's not like I'm a social worker or a nurse, or I'm contributing to the betterment of the world in any way, and if there's anything that's lacking in the business it's something like that because it's very business oriented. So, yeah, that's a hole for sure.

Because their infants became paradigmatic objects, and, for some, being a mother constituted a world-defining commitment in Kierkegaard's sense, the world looked and felt differently for these mothers, and frequently the past, particularly the importance and meaning of work in the past, was reinterpreted in light of this newly reconstituted understanding. Julie most poignantly exemplifies this process in her four month postpartum interview:

> M: There were times when I was real, I would be real depressed before I had Brad and before I thought I could have him. And that there, again, wasn't a lot of purpose. And now, whether it's right or wrong, the purpose in my life has a lot to do with Brad and with (my husband) and with the family, it's become a family thing now that I never felt I had before, and that was a <u>big</u> gap for me.
>
> I: And so where did work fit in for you?
>
> M: Before?
>
> I: Yeah.
>
> M: I think it's where I threw myself because I had a hole.
>
> I: Okay. But it didn't give you that same sense of being situated that you have now?
>
> M: No....Although at the time--it's funny--because at the time, during that time, maybe it did. But when I go back and look at it in perspective, it doesn't fill the hole. That's probably the way it is in life.

Past choices around career direction were relativized by the incomparable moral weight of the commitment to an infant,

particularly a newborn, and the choices that issued from that commitment, and the responsibility that one assumes by virtue of that commitment. Julie again describes how she examines her work commitments at her four month postpartum interview:

> (Having Brad) has definitely made me rethink (my career) and how important it is. It's made me rethink about how I'm really challenged by what I do, and there are some real issues I was facing before I had the baby about whether I really liked what I was doing on a daily basis, drumming up the new business. And so those, now those become more important for me to really examine and decide whether they mean that much to me to give up the time with Brad.

Nora, a partner in a small service-oriented firm, who was extremely career-focused in her antepartum interview, also did some reinterpreting of the meaning of her work after her son was born:

> People say to me "what are you doing here, go home and be with your son, he'll be all grown up before you know it" and they speak to my heart, I know they're right. Other people say "you need to keep your career going" and I know that intellectually, but it doesn't speak to my heart (and) I keep asking myself "why am I doing this?".

Sandy, a lawyer for the State, describes the way in which the lack of an internal good to her work is problematic for her:

> There's not that much satisfaction in the job that I have. I think maybe it's partly the field of law that I'm in. I mean, I think some areas of law have maybe-lend more satisfaction as far as doing something positive, like to help society or to help certain people. I don't know. I mean some people get fulfillment in their career just like by having status or making money or, you know, and I'm not really that oriented, and so I think for me if I had a job where I felt like I was making some big contribution, maybe it

> would have some parallels to making the contribution that you make in nurturing a child.

Sandy said several times over the course of the interviews that she worked for the money, and that if she could have the money without working she would be quite happy not to work. She conceded that money was important to her, and she wasn't willing to give up her job and absorb the financial loss; but she could see that if her work had a moral claim on her it would be less stressful for her to think about going back to it. Sandy embodies the problem of experiencing increased stress due to diminished commitment to and involvement in work.

Lisa, whose work was managerial and had little of the trajectory of a career, found her work stressful because as her husband describes:

> Because she works full-time she felt like there wasn't much meaning to her life really, because she doesn't have a fulfilling job that's a life work or love or something she's studied. It's just something she did.

For the mothers whose work was a practice, with internal goods and a moral weight of its own, returning to work constituted re-assuming another moral responsibility, and their transition was less stressful. For these mothers, the conflict was less severe than in many of those mothers who were the "managers," for whom the moral weight of their responsibility to their infants far outweighed the responsibility they felt towards their work.

<u>The meaning of work</u>:

Work meanings for the study mothers were multilayered and sometimes contradictory. Work served as both a source of stress and as a coping resource, as a source of meaningful engagement with the adult world and as a burdensome obligation that threatened their self esteem as mothers. Overall, whether work continued to be compelling or not, babies significantly impacted mothers' feelings about how much they wanted to work. Except for Susan, who was a scientist with ambitious plans for making it in her field and who was the only mother who felt she was more career focused than family focused, every mother in the sample wished she could work part-time, at least while her children were infants. The rest of this chapter will deal with work meanings. The meanings which emerged from the study mothers were as follows: work as an essential part of one's identity, the meaning of work as shaped by developmental status, the meaning of work to the family's material well-being, work as a coping resource.

The relationship of work to identity:

Identity and self-esteem issues complicated the meaning of work for many of the study participants. For several women, work was central to their identity and grounded their self-esteem, even when their work was not a practice and had no moral claim. In her antepartum interview Julie described her work (in an advertising firm, described above) as essential to her self-esteem in this way:

> (Work is) extremely important and it is very much the way I identify myself and the way I see myself is very much related to that, to the work that I do, and the success I've had at it.

While these mothers' worlds were transformed by parenthood, and the moral claims of their infants made quitting their jobs a compelling option, the self-esteem and identity of these mothers were profoundly threatened by the possibility of leaving their jobs. This constellation of meanings in which there was no moral claim in a woman's work as there was in mothering, but work was central to her identity and self-esteem and thus impossible to give up without terrible cost, was the most stressful of all the work meaning contexts uncovered by this study. These mothers, exemplified in Julie, faced a loss of identity, of their world, by leaving work on the one hand, and the perceived attenuation of their moral practice of mothering, by continuing to work, on the other.

For mothers with less of their identity invested in their careers, giving up work, temporarily, in the face of the moral claim made by motherhood, was less problematic and stressful, particularly for the managers. Sharon was a mother who enjoyed her work, which was managerial, but in the service of a non-profit organization whose purposes she supported, and she felt it was important, though it wasn't as <u>central</u> to her identity as it was for Julie, which she indicates here in her antepartal interview:

My work is very important. It's important for me to

> be--I'm the kind of person that needs a structure and needs a place to go outside the home. I've kind of learned that through my periods of being unemployed and also being at home, and I tend to give a lot to the job that I'm in and to feel very involved in it, so it is important to me.
>
> The work I'm doing now, though it's a part of me (and) I feel pretty committed to it, it's not my identification. It's not what I would say would be, you know, I identify wholly with this; this job.

When Sharon was faced with going back to work when her baby was three months old, she made the decision to leave her job. Though she eventually took very part-time (one day a week) employment when her baby was six months old, she did so primarily for financial reasons and for the structure and adult company that it gave her, not because staying home threatened her identity. On the contrary, she found, surprisingly to herself, that being a mother was a deeply satisfying experience. She enjoyed the structure and adult interaction of work, but her primary commitment was to mothering. She always expected to re-enter her career path at some point, but as she cared for her daughter her reasons for returning to work in the short run were more practical than existential. Her role as a mother provided a meaningful identity. Sharon rued her earlier criticism of her own mother who had made the decision to stay home and care for Sharon and her brothers and do meaningful volunteer work, noting, with guilt, that it no longer seemed such a limiting commitment as it had when Sharon was single and working full-time. Given her family's economic situation,

Sharon couldn't really make the choice to stay home and find meaningful projects to work on voluntarily while caring for her family, though she admitted that she wouldn't mind if that were an option available to her.

The meaning of work has a developmental context: The meaning of work for these women was also connected to developmental status. For the mothers who were in their thirties, the decision to become a mother coincided with an interest in more generative, and personally meaningful, endeavors that coincide with the developmental tasks of generativity which are associated with this age group. Research on adult development also suggests that by the thirties the issues of identity and autonomy recede and there is a shift from a more stereotypical, culturally defined belief system and values toward beliefs and values that are more personally relevant and authentic (Gould, 1978). In a search for authenticity and meaningful commitments, many women in the study looked to motherhood as a way of redirecting their sense of purpose. This process is exemplified in this comment by Sharon:

> (Deciding to have a child) sort of correlated with my decision to wean myself a little bit from my job. Not be as intensely committed to a very high pressure situation which it is; sort of drop back a little bit and think about other things. There's more to life than just 9 to 5, there's got to be. And there's more to myself and I started to think more and more, more than a year ago, about having a family.

Anne describes similar feelings about her work:

> I feel (my work) has overwhelmed things and one thing

> I've tried to do, probably starting a year to a year-and-a-half ago is...I mean, there are a lot of other things that I like to do outside of work, and I want those to play a greater role. I don't want to lose my enthusiasm for my work but I probably want to spend fewer hours working and thinking about work and more about other things.

Becoming a mother, for some women, was a socially sanctioned way to disengage from career plateaus that no longer engaged them emotionally or intellectually in quite the same way, yet continued to demand major investments of time and energy. Motherhood was also seen as an opportunity to cultivate a relational dimension which focused on the infant but also included the spousal relationship as well. Joan, a lawyer, described this shift in her life:

> I was working around 2,000 hours a year, which averages out at least one full day on the weekend and not getting home until eight, nine o'clock at night, and that's billable hours. And that, you know, I wasn't even seeing my husband much less having time to have a family. So I decided to change jobs, got out here in (a smaller community) and once the pressure was off became pregnant very easily without even really planning it.

Work which is essential to a family's economy: Another aspect of the meaning of work which stood out as centrally important in shaping how stressful it was to combine mothering with work was the importance of the financial contribution made by a mother to her family's material well-being. For two of the mothers in the study, working was essential for the economic survival of the family. They were the main breadwinners and they were the ones who received benefits through their work. In both families, in

a complete reversal of traditional roles, the fathers cared for their infants and the household while their wives were at work. In both cases, the fathers took on the traditional "mothering" and experienced many of the stresses and the isolation frequently experienced by mothers who stay home to care for their children. They also had more intimate relationships with their infants and coached their wives on how to handle their babies when their wives returned home at the end of the day. For these mothers, their work was central to the economic well-being of their families. These mothers generally enjoyed their work as "managers" and while they were at times uneasy about the reversal of roles, they were grateful to have their babies cared for at home by a parent, even if it couldn't be them. For these mothers, the stresses in their situations issued from the sheer physical demands of full-time employment combined with part-time motherhood and from being physically away from their babies all day, but not from preoccupying conflicts over whether they were doing the right thing by working. Their work was understood as promoting the good of providing for the material needs of their families, and they didn't feel that working was something they had much of a choice about. One of the mothers, Lisa, worked full-time so that her husband could have a career as a musician, something he loved and very much identified himself with, though he was frustrated by his inability to earn an income sufficient to support his

family. His work constituted a practice, with its own internal goods, as he describes here:

> So it's important to me--my career is very important to me. I define my identity by it, but in a way, it's sort of like a mistress, a mistress that turns into a drug addict. Because all it is is it sucks up money and you don't really get anywhere. Even though you get better, it's like you get a certain type of better, but it doesn't get you anywhere hardly in life. So, I love it; I identify myself as a musician but it's not very fulfilling in itself. I mean, it's only fulfilling for itself. Art for art's sake.

In Lisa's family, her work can also be understood in the context of her husband's practice as a musician: by virtue of her work she gives her husband the license to pursue his practice as a musician. So Lisa's work had meaning to her family financially, and to her husband professionally.

For Julie, whose husband was a very successful professional, the importance of her income to the family's well-being was minimal. She felt no financial pressure to maintain her career (except for her long term concerns about being able to support her son should she ever become a single parent) and she acknowledged that this made her situation more stressful because she realized that she did have a choice, and she could walk away from her job (which she often experienced as alienating) after her son's birth and embrace mothering fully without imperiling her family economically. She was stymied in her decisions by the fact that her self-esteem so centrally issued from her work.

Work as a coping resource:

For Lisa, besides being the main source of material

support for her family, work was also a coping resource in the early months after she returned to work. She had trouble coping with unscheduled time as a new mother and felt badly when she couldn't keep the house cleaned up or write thank-you letters for all the baby gifts:

> I'm really terrible with unstructured time. I've been piddling around here all morning and I haven't gotten nearly enough done, but I feel like I should have been able to do (it) this morning and I just don't do well with unstructured time and I guess that's why in some ways I feel a lot more productive at work, because it's real clear cut what I need to do, and it's all right there, and maybe I function better that way. I don't know, but you know, sometimes when I'm at work I do wish I was home. I guess I wish I would have had the option to work maybe part-time, even a little bit less than full time; I think that would have made a difference.

Her transition back to work was relatively easy because, as she says:

> I've always worked, especially the same hours and just the (same) routine. With the exception of feeding him, it's the same. You know, drag yourself out of bed at this ungodly hour (laughs), put on the coffee, get in the shower, you know, just all the things that you just kind of do mindlessly. I've been doing them for so long.

Unlike the other study participants, Lisa's work didn't have the developmental trajectory of a career. Her work involved detailed attention to product labeling and she felt a sense of mastery and control over her work that she didn't experience at home. She also enjoyed the social relationships with her colleagues.

While the structure and meanings of work sustained Lisa in her return to work, by nine months postpartum she was feeling more conflicted about being away from her son so

much of the time:

> But you know, because he's just getting so much more mobile and alert and active, I just feel like I'm missing a lot more than when he was little. You know when I first went back to work he was just, you know, just sat there all the time, you know, he wasn't really very active yet.

Her feelings were generated by her son's increasing activity and development, but they also coincided with the downsizing going on in her company, which disrupted her social relationships and introduced uncertainty into her work responsibilities and routines. These changes disrupted previously stable work meanings. The change in the meaning and content of her work initiated feelings of stress, and Lisa had yet to elaborate satisfactory ways of coping with her situation at the last interview.

For Lisa, as for most of the other participants, part-time work was something she desired but couldn't secure in her company. By nine months postpartum, her lack of time with her son was increasingly stressful, and Lisa assessed it as a moral problem:

> I keep wondering how responsible is it, you know, to have a kid and not be able to spend time with it, you know. But we knew that this is the way it would be. I guess I just didn't anticipate how strong the feelings would be. You know, that's something that kind of surprised me.

For Lisa, work's meaning inhered in it's value to her family's material survival, and in the social relationships and structured rhythms and routines embedded in her work context. Because her husband, and occasionally her mother,

cared for her son while she was working, she felt less stress about not being her son's primary caretaker. Had she needed outside child care when she went back to work at three months, she acknowledges, her transition back to work would have been much more stressful, and her "self-trust" as a caregiver threatened by the (for her and her husband) ethical implications of placing her son in the care of strangers at such a young age. While Lisa experienced sadness at not being able to participate more extensively in her son's development, she didn't experience the distress that Julie lived with throughout her son's first year, over whether she had made the right decision. For Lisa, there was no "decision" to be made. She had to work to support the family.

In sum, work meanings in the study sample were diverse and fundamentally shaped by mothers' personal, familial and cultural contexts and their concerns. I would be remiss, however, if I didn't also point out that these mothers' work meanings were also shaped by our cultural de-valuing of mothering work. It is in a cultural context in which valued work is paid work, that the relative meanings of mothering and career get elaborated. It is a testament to the powerful capacity of infants to lay their claims, that these highly career-committed women experienced such profound changes in their feelings about, and their commitment to,

their work in the postpartum period.

As I stated at the beginning of this Chapter, work has been a very important aspect of these mothers' lives. While one mother decided to stay home with her baby, and had no plans to go back to work, every other mother felt strongly that work provided them with what Belsky calls a "social address." Nora, who struggled with whether to continue working, clarified part of the issue for herself by invoking a description of a cocktail party in which she imagined being asked what she did. Without her career, she imagined being a non-person, without legitimacy or value. And this cultural attribution of non-personhood is in stark contrast to her private experience as a mother, of being deeply important to her son. This lack of societal valuation of mothering work inevitably forces women to value their careers as a way of feeling valued in the culture, but it also isolates and undermines women as mothers.

Chapter Six

Returning to Work

> Am I crazy? Another deadline? I've got to call back and just say no! So O.K. So what if I want to make a show about this. That's a clown show and this is an article. An article has to be profound. This? This is common. No one will read it anyway. O.K. Here. These things: Life is hard, but often funny. Deadlines are hell. Real hell. Time is divided into short short spots of concentration and if this scheduled moment doesn't jibe with your creative juice clock-Too Bad! Forget about that deep dark trance you once traveled to for inspiration. Your life is now one continual sleep-deprived intuitive trance. Cut cut cut away all the extras-time, money, "diversions," what remains is surprisingly close to the bone-and very essential.
>
> Sandy Spieler, Artistic Director of In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater, on the relationship between being an artist and being a parent

There was nothing in the early experiences of the new mothers in this study that so effectively made the rewards and satisfactions of mothering stand out from the exhaustion and confusion as thinking about having to leave their babies and go back to work. To understand the way in which a baby matters to his mother, confront her with a deadline for returning to work. That motherhood was demanding, and, often, problematic and confusing for these mothers cannot be overstated. As one mother put it, when I asked what was easiest about becoming a mother, "is any of it easy?" Yet, in spite of the demands, returning to work was, for most of

the mothers who returned full-time, a wrenching affair, and involved considerable grieving. This chapter follows the study participants from the antepartal decisions with regard to length of maternal leave through their transition back to work. It particularly examines the timing of return to work, as this was found to be an important element in how stressful the experience of returning to work was for the study mothers. Several mothers' situational contexts exemplified ways in which the stress of returning to work could be either exacerbated or mitigated, and these situational aspects are described in three paradigm cases.

The developmental needs of mothers for adequate maternal leave:

In 1993, the United States remains one of the few Western countries to have no universally available, federally mandated, paid family leave policy, and most women have little choice about whether or when they return to work after the birth of a baby. While there is much controversy, and concern, over whether this current situation best serves infants, there is little discussion or research on mothers' experiences of having to return to work when their infants are only weeks or months old. The psychological and developmental implications for a mother, of the timing of her return to work after having a baby, have been inadequately considered. This study's findings on the

timing of return to work suggest that an adequate maternal leave policy has important implications for women's experiences of early motherhood and their understandings of themselves as mothers.

Antepartal decision-making about whether to return to work:

During the first interview, when the participants were in the last trimester of pregnancy, they were asked about their plans for returning to work; if and when they planned on returning to work, how they had come to their decision and what factors shaped it. Returning to work was not a criterion for participation in the study, but all of the study participants planned on returning to work after their babies were born (See Chapter Five for a description of the meaning of work for the study participants).

Reflecting evolving cultural expectations about women's roles and their economic realities, in the antepartal interview the study participants never really addressed the question of whether to go back to work after they had had their babies. While many mothers saw having a baby as a way to restructure their priorities and make more time for "family", not one of the study participants planned unequivocally to stay home with their babies permanently. Working was an accepted aspect of their world. For myriad reasons, they all planned on returning to work soon after their babies were born. Each one described a plan for when they would return, and the longest any woman planned to be

out of work was six months. While economic factors figured in this decision, and were more compelling for some than for others, overwhelmingly these women felt that their work gave substance and meaning to their lives. They enjoyed the sense of accomplishment, control and independence that their careers afforded them. Further, many cited the increasing incidence of divorce, and of women with children being plunged into poverty because of divorce, as a salient reason to continue working. They felt strongly that it was important to be able to be self-supporting should they ever <u>have</u> to be in the future. Joan, a lawyer, describes it this way:

> Being an attorney...it gives me my own sense of security. If something happens to (my husband), either he leaves me or, which is not planned obviously, or he dies or something else, I can fully support myself and that for having been brought up by a mother who was fully housewife to a father who's a doctor, I somehow got the idea in my head that (having a career) is a good thing to do and I'm very pleased with it; that I have my own career to fall back on.

Nora, who was struggling with working full-time at the time of her four-month postpartum interview, but feared leaving her partnership in a small firm, invoked the experience of a relative who left her social work career for ten years to raise her children:

> She's now looking to go back in and she <u>can't get in</u>; she's been out of the field, so she's not up on all the current stuff. She looked at jobs for $7.00 a hour; it's not worth it; she feels lost and trapped, lost and trapped. And what if my brother left her? I mean, I don't think that's gonna happen; but what if? Then what does she do; what do you do? I just think I don't want to be at that point when I'm 50 years old; I want

> to be able to control my own life, and that includes financially being able to take care of myself.

Another factor which figured in the decision to return to work as a new mother was the participants' aversion to being economically dependent on their spouses. As a sign of changing cultural values, no subjects described husbands who opposed their working, while several described husbands who wanted wives who were career women, and discouraged them from pulling back from their careers. Deborah was one of these:

> I think his preference was for me to work and I think it's really for two reasons. One, that it certainly does make it easier on a financial level....there really is something real about that, but more so than that even, I think, is that he views himself as having a wife who is a professional, as opposed to someone who, who uh ....

For some women, this spousal pressure created dilemmas after the babies were born, when the pull of motherhood diminished their enthusiasm for their careers and yet they felt pressure from their spouses to maintain their commitments to working and to being a career person. Marian, a lawyer married to a lawyer, who is also a partner in his firm, describes the dilemma she feels as a wife:

> We really thought that we would both go back to work full-time and that we would share (Sophie) fifty-fifty; and during the course of my being at home, I've really decided that that wouldn't be enough time for her; that if we continued to work full-time it just wouldn't be enough time at home.I had often talked about going to work part-time even before I got pregnant, and even though Robert has talked about (working part-time), he's never really been serious about it....And so when I started talking about going back to work part time, I don't think he was very encouraging at first, because

he really thought we would do it as we had planned.

I: What do you suppose was his feeling about your working full-time. I mean why?

M: Well, I think that he thought that I had great potential at the firm, that if I was there full-time, I could become a partner and that we would both be happy about that, we would both be proud of that; and he just had this vision about- kind of-how it would be and it seemed right to him that we would kind of continue on as we had been before but we spent a lot of time talking about it; it was kind of fun talking about it; it helped both of us gel our opinions on the subject; he still doesn't think that she needs as much attention, as much time from us, but he is more than willing to concede that if I feel that way, my feelings are important....The decision to go back to work part-time was a really, really big turning point. I had planned on going back to work full time until about 4 weeks ago (when Sophie was three and a half months old) when I realized that I really was going to be going back to work very soon and when I would think about it, it would make me very unhappy and I started having bad dreams about it and I just couldn't imagine doing it.

I: Why was it upsetting?

M: Oh, just not enough time at home. Not enough time with her. I knew that I wouldn't be able to do the job at work if I went back and that's upsetting; to kind of deliberately go back knowing that you're not going to be able to do well cause you just won't have the time so I was unhappy because I thought I would be a bad mother <u>and</u> be a bad lawyer, and I thought a lot about what the right solution to that was, and going back part-time seemed unsatisfactory for a long time because I thought Robert wouldn't be happy with it and...

I: Was it because you felt he would be disappointed in you?

M: Yeah. Yeah. And I guess I don't know how else to explain it. You know, he was a real feminist all through school and really believes that women can do it all and I was afraid it would be a disappointment to him to, you know, realize that the woman he married can't do it all or maybe could and has no desire to.....And it changes his image to the world, you know; it affects him by-and-large because people know Robert and people know Robert's wife is working part-time because they've had a kid and Robert isn't working

part-time and you know, that reflects on him.

This new twist in the way in which women function in the psychic economy of men exemplifies the continuing commodification of women. While men found it difficult to climb the corporate ladder in the fifties without a wife at home whose domestic and community duties supported his career, some of those same corporate men now interpret a career as an asset (if not a requirement) in a wife, both economically and professionally.

Another common theme in the decision-making around returning to work was being uncomfortable with putting a husband or partner in the position of being the sole breadwinner for the family. This was frequently interpreted as an unfair burden.

Antepartal decision-making about the length of maternal leave:

Since career commitment and working were accepted as a permanent fixture in these women's lives, the most salient themes in the interviews centered around finding the right way to balance the competing demands of career and family. The first real instance of this balancing is observed in antepartal decisions around maternal leave.

Many of the mothers in the study described the lengths of their leaves, whatever they were, in terms of maximizing whatever conditions were offered. They finagled; they budgeted; they made their cases; they hoarded sick and

vacation time in anticipation. Few had paid leaves beyond sick- and vacation- time. They described their plans for maternity leave as being dictated by company policy, or by their perception that their work places could only tolerate their absence for the length of time that they planned to be away. Many felt resigned to accepting what they could get, while still wishing there could be more. Though, for some, there was considerable fear that if they were out too long, they would have difficulty maintaining their sense of competence in their work. The study participants seldom felt that they were in a position to insist on longer leaves. Nor did they have well developed arguments for why one leave length was better for a baby than another. For most mothers, more time was better, though two mothers were planning on returning as early as six weeks: Susan, a scientist, described "having things (she was anxious) to get back to" and was content with her plan to return to work six weeks postpartum; the other, April, was a teacher in a child-care center, and planned to take her baby to work with her. Interestingly, no one described basing their decision in any way on the research literature on day care or on infant development, neither the academic literature nor the popular literature, though several of these women described reading "50 books" or "a million books" on pregnancy and parenthood. No mother mentioned the controversy over the effects of day care on infants. This mother weighed the pros and cons of

working part-time, but seemed to have no sense of the possible effects of early day care that took the parents out of the house for 50 or 60 hours a week:

> M: I don't know. I can't evaluate what the effect (of my working full-time) on her would be.
>
> I: But was that something that concerned you?
>
> M: Yeah. It did concern me but it's so hard to evaluate what that means and frankly I think that that's an issue that I haven't really addressed yet. I'm not sure that she needs me right now. The effect of my being at work full-time versus part-time will matter to her now as much as it will four years from now or especially ten years from now, fifteen years from now. You know, it could be that when she starts junior high or something I'd want to work less; that I'll want to be home when she gets home from school and talk to her about what's going in her life. I really don't know what the effect on her is. That's a tough one. Some women...I feel kind of inadequate about that. Some women have very strong feelings that they're the mother and that the kid needs them, that my kid needs me because I'm his mother and I don't feel so much that way. I think that she can be a happy kid without me being there all the time and I'm not really sure where, you know, what number of hours is required.

While the work place severely constrained the lengths of maternal leaves available to most of the study participants, their decisions were further complicated by economic factors. While some women had maternal leave policies that allowed for up to a year of unpaid leave, few women were willing or able to sustain the economic consequences of being without an income for a year. For some, there was an absolute need for the income (approximately a third of the participants were the main breadwinners in their families), while for others there was a reluctance to make the shift towards a more modest

lifestyle.

Another factor that figured in the decisions of many women to return to work sooner, rather than later, was a fear that they would lose their "edge," or their feelings of competence, of being secure in the performance of their roles at work. Sandy, a lawyer, described it as follows:

> I actually considered taking longer because in my work I can take up to a year's unpaid leave, (but)...it would be a long time without a pay check, although that wouldn't be the primary reason because we could have afforded it. Part of me felt that if I took a whole year off I might not go back. I was kind of worried about that....You need a certain sharp edge to you to really deal with litigation all the time and just...you need a sharp edge and I thought after a year I might lose that and really it'd be more difficult to go back and so I think that was kind of it. I thought (six months) would be enough time to not feel rushed and to really give the child at least a good start of bonding with the parents and yet not so long...that it really would be difficult for me.

In sum, the antepartum decision regarding the length of maternal leave was primarily constrained by work place policy, but multiple factors figured in the participants' decision-making around this issue. Several mothers described a vague notion of what would be "good" for the baby and for "bonding," but few seemed to ground their decision in objective facts about infants and day care. Further, they viewed their attempts at securing what they considered adequate leave as an individual problem requiring an individual solution. None of the mothers in the study seemed adequately to anticipate the degree to which they would fall in love with their babies and the extent to which

they would find themselves wanting to be home with them.

The post-partum: When mothers went back to work:

The experience of balancing the competing demands of career and family is most pointedly and poignantly realized in the women's descriptions of what it was like to return to work after their babies were born. Overwhelmingly, mothers were astounded by the degree to which their worlds had been transformed by having babies as was described in Chapter 4. As one mother succinctly put it: "(At work I am expected) to be the same person I was before I had a baby, and that's not me." Five of the mothers in the study changed their plans for returning to work after their babies were born: One mother decided to stay home indefinitely, despite serious economic hardship; two lengthened their leaves and two quit jobs because they couldn't return to work as soon as the job required and didn't want to work full-time.

One mother returned to work full-time at six weeks, and two returned part-time. Seven mothers were back at work after two months (three part-time and four full-time). By three months, ten mothers were back at work, all full-time. By five months, twelve mothers were back at work, eleven full-time and one part-time. Four mothers had, or took, leaves of six months or longer. Two mothers quit their jobs when they realized they couldn't return to work by two or three months, and returned to very part-time work at around six months. The six mothers who were compelled by

external factors to return to work at two months were either particularly anguished over having to return to work so soon or later interpreted two months as too early.

It is striking how all the mothers in the sample who were compelled to return to work full-time within three months postpartum (ten of the 18 mothers) wished they had had a longer time to be home with their infants, and all but one wished that they could work part-time. They spoke in very poignant ways of the embodied differences in their babies between two months of age and four or five months ("she was so much sturdier;" "he could hold his head up;" "she was so much bigger;" "he could eat 'real' food"); and of the ways they felt they knew their babies at four or five months that they couldn't at two or three months. All of these mothers regretted having to return to work when their infants were less than three months old. They felt that their babies were too young; that they didn't really yet know their babies well enough. Several mentioned being worried about whether their babies would know them as their mothers, and whether they would know their babies well enough after being absent so much. To illustrate the contrasting experiences of mothers who, by their own admissions, went back "too soon," and those who felt "ready", three paradigm cases are presented.

Paradigm Cases of the Return to Work Experience:

Julie's story: Going back too soon: Julie is a 34

year old advertising executive who was a partner in her own firm with another woman. She strongly identified herself with her career and expressed some anxiety about how she would balance her career and her family. She had a history of infertility and this pregnancy was a much welcomed surprise. She planned a two-month maternity leave:

> I'd like more but I think it's going to be hard on the business for me to be away that long and I'm going to try and do a little bit of it while I'm home...but if I had my ideal situation I'd take six months off minimum but that's just not the way it is.

She said that she decided on two months because that was the precedent set by her partner when she had had a baby: "I've watched my partner do it pretty effectively, though. She came back to work right away after two months, and so I'm hoping I can do as well." Julie had her baby and fell in love with him. She described having a hole in her life that she never knew she had until her baby was born. Julie did return to work at two months and struggled with her decision:

> I was really kind of ripped apart inside to do it because two months just seemed so, he seemed so young and still so needy; and he still is, but then it was just really hard. And I remember crying on my way to work, and hating being there, and actually not being very effective while I was there, because I think two months is still early, for my physical adjustment to it as well as the emotional adjustment. Like, now I feel just tons better than I did at two months, and he's what? four and a half months.

She described not being able to talk to her business partner about her feelings of sadness and grief at not being with her son more, and recounted how she would spend her lunch

hour alone, buying things for her baby in order to feel closer to him. She commented:

> Something I'll probably always think I'm missing is that real bond of understanding his personality 'cause I'm just not there most of the time.

For Julie, the meaning of her career (which antepartally had clearly been the source of her identity) was now purely instrumental: it provided her with power and status and economic independence, particularly in her husband's eyes, and while these external goods were important to her, they didn't have the kind of powerful moral claim on her that mothering did. Julie's stress was compounded by the fact that, on the other hand, her career was so central to her identity and self-esteem.

In anticipation of returning to work, and reflecting her own insecurity about her mothering abilities, Julie hired a young nanny:

> That was part of the selection of (the nanny): the age that she is, because I looked at an older woman and I almost felt like I would be coached maybe too much by somebody who had so many years of experience.

The nanny had strong ties to her own family who lived several hours away. Julie felt positively about this because it meant that she and her husband would have weekends to themselves now and then. While Julie and her husband expressed comfort in their relationship with their nanny, it was not a familial relationship. The underlying tension created by Julie's worrying about her baby preferring his nanny to her was evident throughout the

interviews. Julie's relationship with her nanny is in contrast to Anne's relationship with her live-in child care person, Leah. Anne hired a nanny who was an older woman with grown children of her own. Anne sought someone older and wiser than she in the practice of mothering. Her nanny, Janet, was an integral part of the family and functioned in the family as a grandmother or an aunt. Anne, secure in her status as Leah's mother, welcomed Janet's participation in Leah's life and Anne looked to Janet for advice in her own mothering. She hoped that Janet would stay a part of their family for all of Leah's childhood.

The predominant theme throughout Julie's interviews was the conflict she felt over not being home with her son. Her husband preferred a wife with a career; her partner in the firm was very ambitious and career-oriented and provided no space for Julie to flexibly accommodate her longing to spend more time with her baby. Part-time work was viewed as incompatible with the needs of the company. She feared that her son wouldn't know that she was his mother. At two months she breast fed him awkwardly. At three months she handled him adoringly but tentatively. At four months she quit breast-feeding:

I: Are you still nursing him?

M: No, I stopped about five weeks ago.

I: And how was that?

M: It was hard. I got <u>really</u> sad. I wasn't really willing, though, to express, so I knew there was the

> chance to dry up, which is basically what happened. If I'd come home at night he'd have to suck for like an hour, hour and a half, and I'd still have to give him half a bottle. But when I let it go, there was a...you know..a real depression that set in for a short time because I missed it. And that was my one way of getting connection quickly when I came home at night and so... I don't know, if I were to do it again, or if I were to have another child I think I'd really try to do it a lot longer, try to; maybe I would express at work.

At ten months Julie still wasn't certain if her baby knew she was his mother, and she worried about her baby's attachment to his nanny. When asked whether she would change the timing of her return to work, Julie responded:

> M: If I could have, I would have wanted more time basically. I just would have wanted four months leave, six months ideally.
>
> I: Why would you choose four months or six months?
>
> M: I just think there's some attachments that really can happen in those months between the baby and the mom that sooner than that you're missing out on some pretty important early bonding, and you know, what we talked about earlier about getting to know him, I'd just barely--he was still a little meat loaf at that point, and now at four and a half months, he's completely different and he smiles when I come in the room and things like that...

At 18 months Julie still admitted conflict about whether to continue working, though she felt secure that her son knew she was his mother and her interactions with him were relaxed and affectionate. She felt that he was doing fine and was well-adjusted, though she didn't know if <u>she</u> would be fine. Though she laughed when she made this comment, there was an edge of sincerity to it. I think it can be reliably claimed that Julie's feelings about herself

as a mother were unnecessarily undermined by having to return to work at two months postpartum. As she put it:

> It's maybe because I didn't stay home with him long enough in the beginning--you know, six months would have been great. I always wish I could have done at least that, but it was kind of a sharp and rude break at two months. So, you know, I didn't get my fill.

Pressured by her business partner's expectations and her clearly felt association of her own identity with her career, yet utterly transformed by motherhood, Julie experienced the severest conflict over her work-family commitments of anyone in the study. At 18 months she looked back with this assessment:

> It's hard for me...to hear it played back because I have those feelings of, like, being a wimp in the mothering, in the handling of it all; because in so many ways I bowed to my partner's wishes, when in some ways what my husband felt or said was so important to me and sometimes, I think, to the detriment of what I was really feeling. And in the end it's worked out OK, but I think that built up so much--it mounted the conflict in me...and that's a lot personality driven. Some women may have just automatically stated their points of view and the directions they were going to take and if it was different, the business would have gone by the wayside, or whatever, and I just wasn't prepared to do that.

While she seemed to have recovered her equilibrium as a mother, and developed a reasonably strong sense of herself as a <u>good</u> mother by 18 months, there remained an element of self-doubt in Julie that harkened back to those early weeks when she felt so conflicted about being back at work and leaving her son. And when she spoke of her early return to work, she expressed a sense of irretrievable loss over those early months when she relinquished her son's care to her

nanny and returned to work. Here she describes what she understands as her 'lost opportunity' to be a different person as Brad's mother

> I: But do you feel like being a mother has sort of opened up this other way of being? Has that happened, and so you have this comparison, and that's why you sort of resent this way you have to be at work?
>
> M: Well, I think what I resent, and in some ways its my own choice right now so I resent myself I guess, but that I don't <u>have</u> the opportunity to <u>see</u> what that other person really is like because it's often squelched five days a week from nine-to-five or eight-to-five, so I'm feeling that there's something in there that really wants to emerge and tries to at night and on the weekends, but it's just not complete enough in some ways. Like I really want to try it for six months or a year, and then maybe make some decisions on, you know, how to balance those things. All mom at home, or half-mom half-working, or working full-time. You know, I don't know.

She also acknowledged that:

> Having just gotten married and been a very independent, for awhile a pretty independent...you know, I was earning my own keep and all of a sudden married somebody where I could have stayed home, probably; (though) it would have been a little bit of a hardship. But for me there was the fear...that if I stopped working and I'm not able to get back in and I'm not with anybody or we split up and I have my child, that I want to be able to support him and me and all that. I think probably more women feel that these days, too. You just don't know, you want to be able to be on your own and I don't want to be completely dependent on (my husband).

Julie's fears of not being able to "get back in," and of being left to raise a child on her own, were echoed by other mothers in the study. Given the statistics on the rising numbers of single mothers, these women had good reason to be worried. Yet, the difference between returning to work at two months, as opposed to four or five months, ultimately

should not matter in the scheme of a woman's career, seen as a whole. If maternal leave policies were thoroughly embedded in the bureaucratic culture, so that there was no question about the legitimacy of such leaves, then the impact of a four month leave would be quite different from the experiences women have now, which range from being the target of hostile attitudes to serious and permanent loss of seniority and legitimacy.

Julie's case underscores the need for a federally mandated family policy that includes a guarantee of at least four months of paid maternal leave to all women, plus access to more flexibility in hours worked, including the option of part-time employment. The ultimate benefit of such a policy would be the institutionalized acknowledgement that mothers have a right to spend (at least) the first four months at home with their infants, and a right to take time to fulfill the responsibilities of family life as their infants grow to children. If such a family policy were enacted and a resulting cultural shift in the valuation of family life occurred, women like Julie would not have to look back and feel as though they had "caved in" to the demands of others for an early return to work, which undermined their sense of competence as mothers. For women whose identities and self-esteem are so centrally defined by their careers, as Julie's were, having a protected leave, which guarantees their right to remain at home for four to six months in order to

solidify their relationships with their infants and their right to return to work after having a child, would prevent women from having to return to work before they were ready in order to protect their careers, and their self-esteem.

Deborah's story: Appropriating time in which to get to "know the baby" and the practice: Deborah is a 33-year-old lawyer who is an associate in a large law firm. She managed to piece together a six-month maternity leave: three months paid, one month vacation, and a two month unpaid leave. Those extra two months cost her a year's worth of seniority at her firm. When her son was four months old, she began to have misgivings about going back to work. She commented: "he just seemed so helpless." She describes some additional feelings about staying home with her son:

> I'd like to say that (staying home) was...completely unselfish, that...we have certain values and we think those values would be better for David and we think that it would be better for him, for him to be around us more. I'd like to say those are the reasons and it's completely for his benefit, but it's not. It's also for me and for me to have that relationship with him.

Deborah's statement suggests that she feels that her desire to spend time with her son is an illegitimate reason for staying home with him. She construes his needs as the only legitimate justification for staying home with him. Sandy, a lawyer, trying to decide whether to go back at six months or a year, had similar feelings:

> I: So what feelings does (going back to work) bring up?

> M: Uh, well, a lot of different feelings. I think guilt of leaving him in some ways, but not just for his sake. I guess for my own sake, and I have this feeling like, well, am I making the wrong decision and am I really going to be regretting this later.

The notion that a mother, or a father, might have important developmental needs for extended contact with her/his infant in the early postpartum period seems obvious, and yet arises seldom in current cultural-level discussions of family needs in the early postpartum period.

Deborah requested additional leave until her baby was nine months. Her firm countered with eight months, and she accepted the compromise. When her son was five months old, with the anticipation of having three more months at home with him, Deborah could at last begin to feel comfortable with the idea of leaving her son to go back to work. She described how she was feeling about going back to work in three months:

> It doesn't seem that, the idea of going back to work doesn't seem that horrible to me now. It did before. It seemed like, oh God, I really didn't want to deal with it at all. And now I feel like, well, I'm ready.

Deborah describes why, at five months, she felt that her son was no longer "helpless":

> I: So you don't worry about him being so helpless anymore?
>
> M: I certainly don't, yeah, and that's a big thing. Certainly, now he's at the point where, I mean, he can, he can--he's mobile, you know. He can roll around from side to side. If you sit him up, he'll sit. He obviously can't get into that position himself. But you know while he can't really take care of himself right now in any way, it doesn't look like it's that far in the future until he will. I mean, especially if

> I go back to work when he's eight months, then by the time he's a year old, he can do things. You know, he eats regular food.

Deborah's own experience of motherhood also began to change at around five months. While the first four months saw the increasing convergence of her world with David's, and her perception of David as helpless, needy and dependent, at five months she began to see him move on a different trajectory. As he began to learn to sit up and eat solid food, Deborah noticed the seeds of independence. From here on out David was on a trajectory of becoming his own independent person. She now projected herself into the future in a different way than she did as a brand new mother. In a sense, because she is still home with him, she sees David as moving away from <u>her</u>; in contrast to Julie who sees <u>herself</u> moving away from her son at two months to go back to work. Here Deborah describes this shift in her world:

> On the one hand I'm a little less of a mom now than I was a while ago, because it was almost like I was in this cloud, where I was so consumed by it and just keeping your head above water. You know, it's sort of as if you were thrown in the ocean and you didn't really know how to swim all that well and someone asked you, well, what percentage of yourself are you thinking of as a swimmer--well 100% because you're just trying to keep your head above water. And in one way now, I see that my other interests are coming up to the front and there are other things that I want to do....But on the other hand, at times I do feel like, I'm just like this invisible person, it feels like there's less of me because I think of myself as, yes I do have these other interests that are coming back, but if you look at my actions and what I'm doing all day, it does seem as though I'm almost, that I am kind of like this non-person other than the fact that I'm a mother. Because

that's...how I spend all my time.

As Deborah's "cloud" begins to clear, she finds herself reminded of the aspects of her work life which she enjoyed, and she is pulled to them. There is a strong contrast here between Deborah's being drawn back into her work and feeling ready, and even anxious, to get back to it, and Julie's feeling of being dragged back into work, still engulfed in the "cloud" of early motherhood.

Deborah's return to work at eight months was complicated, over time, by child care problems, and many times she very nearly quit. While she absolutely refused to work full-time, she came to experience the "downside" of part-time work:

> If anything they assume you're not going to live up to--I mean even if you did work just the same number of hours, they assume that you're not going to hold up to it, so it's almost like they, uh, you've got to be better almost to kind of overcome the fact that people expect that you're not going to be able to do what you have to do. Yeah, there doesn't seem to be a general feeling that it's better for society if moms are allowed to spend more time with their kids.

In addition to the culture of the firm being difficult, Deborah also recited the multiple financial penalties she experienced working part-time, resulting in a dramatically reduced salary from what she earned before she left for maternity leave. And there were other "petty" issues; Deborah:

> Then there's sort of the--the things that sound incredibly petty but they kind of get you, like for instance, they took away my office and gave me a teeny office. You get a pick of office after all the

> attorneys including the people who are right out of school, you know. And it's a whole lot of things like this that my husband will describe as being death by a million cuts, and that's kind of what it is. It's this slow bleeding that in every way they try and kind of get you, take advantage of you, I think, every little way they possibly can. Which is intended to try to discourage you, and they say they're not trying to discourage part time, but they clearly are.

But, despite the problems Deborah experienced going back to work, she acknowledged that she felt that while she was giving something up by not being home with her son, she felt that he wasn't being harmed by her working. She pointed out that the income she brought home did give them a cushion financially and, she acknowledged:

> I like my job....Actually it surprised me how much I enjoy just using my mind....I don't want to say that you don't use your mind taking care of a child because there are a lot of judgments that you make, but it's a different type. It's much less analytical and I like using my mind that (analytical) way.

Another lawyer, also 33, had similar feelings about what she got out of her work after going back at five months, also part-time:

> I have a lot of identity there (at work). I'm competent there and...people know me. I have somewhat of a reputation, and I'm competent and I like what I do. I like the process of what I do. I like the...dealing with people to solve problems....I like all that.

Deborah's story of finally turning her attention back towards her career, around six months postpartum, is echoed in other stories of mothers who stayed home at least that long. For these mothers, the trajectory of the infant's development was viewed as shifting away from seeking more

intimacy and closer bonds with the mother to a beginning independence. Deborah describes this phenomenon:

> I hate giving (breast-feeding) up, and I know that's part of being a parent. It's like maybe the first three months that they get more and more attached to you and then, like, from three months on it's a process of 50 years of pulling away and it's really...I think it is very sad, but I do get real excited about his little accomplishments, of being independent. But I do think with each one of them that he does pull away from me a little more.

Deborah's interactions with her son were warm and nurturing. She was comfortable and relaxed in her care-giving practices, and she obviously enjoyed her son immensely. Her pleasure in him was quite palpable. While she continued to weigh the risks and benefits of balancing career and family, her reflections were not filled with misgivings, as Julie's were. Deborah was secure in her mothering abilities, was absolutely secure in her identity as David's mother and considered her work satisfying and not threatening to her relationship with her son. While a woman's sense of her own identity, and her ego strength, certainly figured in how the length of maternal leave was negotiated and decided upon by the study participants, and in how competent they felt as mothers, the timing of return to work was clearly an important factor in shaping the participants' feelings of "self trust" as care givers (Brazelton, 1985).

Mothers' intuitive grasp of the developmental changes in their infants, as they move from symbiosis to

separateness, and of the change in the nature of mothers' relationships with them, is confirmed by the theoretical accounts offered by Mahler (1975) and Stern (1985) of the infant's emerging sense of self. Mahler describes the first four-to-five months as a period of "developmentally normal symbiosis," with the mother, or primary caretaker; followed by the separation-individuation stage, which "involves the child's achievement of separate functioning in the presence of, and with the emotional availability of, the mother" (p. 3). Stern describes the first sense of the self as:

> the physical self that is experienced as a coherent, willful, physical entity with a unique affective life and history that belong to it....It is an experiential sense of self that I call the sense of a core self. The sense of a core self is a perspective that rests upon the working of many interpersonal capacities. And when this perspective forms, the subjective social world is altered and interpersonal experience operates in a different domain, a domain of core-relatedness. This developmental transformation or creation occurs somewhere between the second and sixth months of life, when infants sense they and mother are quite separate physically, are different agents, have affective experiences, and have separate histories. (p. 26-7)

This emerging of the experiential self is followed by the emergence, between seven and nine months, of a sense of a "subjective" self:

> This happens when they 'discover' that there are other minds out there as well as their own. Self and other are no longer only core entities of physical presence, action, affect and continuity. They now include subjective mental states-feelings, motives, intentions-that lie behind the physical happenings in the domain of core-relatedness. The new organizing subjective perspective defines a qualitatively different self and

> other who can 'hold in mind' unseen but inferable mental states, such as intentions or affects, that guide overt behavior. These mental states now become the subject matter of relating. This new sense of a subjective self opens up the possibility for intersubjectivity between infant and parent and operates in a new domain of relatedness-the domain of intersubjective relatedness-which is a quantum leap beyond the domain of core-relatedness. Mental states between people can now be "read," matched, aligned with, or attuned to (or misread, mismatched, misaligned, or misattuned). The nature of relatedness has been dramatically expanded. (p. 27)

While Mahler and Stern and others disagree about the process by which a sense of self emerges, and about when in the first year the nascent self first becomes evident, these researchers agree that sometime between two and four or five months, the core self begins to emerge. The period of emerging selfhood coincides with mothers' descriptions of beginning to have a relationship with a person (as opposed to a "little meat loaf," as Julie put it). For mothers returning to work at, or prior to, two months, the infant has not yet emerged as a person to know. There is the innate, global, embodied appeal of the newborn, which probably ensures the survival of the species, in the context of parents' physical exhaustion and sleep deprivation, but mothers seem to become more secure in their understandings of themselves as mothers when they know who their baby is prior to returning to work. Brazelton describes critical stages in mothering that need to be addressed before a mother returns to work because they ground what Brazelton (1985) calls a mother's "self-trust" as a caregiver. He

argues that in the first four months of her baby's existence, a mother learns about her baby, but also about herself. She learns that when her baby smiles, he is smiling *at her*, and she learns a complicated, skilled capacity for identifying her baby's alert moments, his readiness for play and the appropriate patterns and rhythms that facilitate communicative interaction between the two of them. Prior to four months, Brazelton argues, parents are still adjusting to parenthood and the baby's periods of colic or "evening fussiness" often make parents feel "unsuccessful":

> They need to get through this three-month period and into the fourth month-the period of playful interaction at the end of the day-and be able to predict when the baby needs sleep, needs to fuss, or can be expected to play. (1985, p. 60)

This process of coming to "know the baby" is based on experiential learning, not on formal rules or "cognitive schemas" and can only be accomplished when a mother is able to spend uninterrupted time "dwelling in" the mothering experience with her particular baby.

Susan's story: Returning to work before self trust as a mother is established: Susan is a 32-year-old scientist, very committed to her career as an academic research scientist, who was in the midst of pursuing academic positions when she had her son. At the time of her first interview (two weeks before her due date), she had just decided to put off her job interviews until after her baby

was born. She describes her work as:

> Very important to me. It's really been the only thing. It's been my identity up till now, really. It means a lot to me.

Prior to the arrival of her son, Susan and her husband regularly worked 12-14 hours a day in the lab, including weekends. Their lives were centered in the laboratory, and they described few other activities in their lives besides their science. Susan was clearly defined by her work, and approached the world with a scientist's gaze and understanding. Her world was clearly defined, and her practices were constituted by the scientist's need for instrumental control in the laboratory. She was used to the experimental manner of learning; the experiential learning so essential to being a mother was unfamiliar to her. At the time of her first interview, just a month before she delivered, Susan felt positively about making room for something else in her life besides her work, though she remained highly motivated to succeed in her field.

> I don't think, I don't necessarily think, my commitment to (my work will change), because it's still going to be just as important to me, but I think probably my, maybe my feelings about it, you know. I won't just see myself as a scientist, I'll also hopefully see myself as a mother. It's hard for me to think about it because I don't have any identity as a mother yet.

Susan also asserted the importance of a mother making a child feel like he comes first when there is a career involved, though she also voiced concern in the antepartum interview over whether she would be able to do that:

> I hope that I will be able to do what I just told you I think is most important, just to make the kid feel that he's always most important, and I'm afraid that sometimes I won't be able to do that because I'm, I'm a pretty high strung person and I can take stuff at the job pretty seriously, and I hope that I can continue to keep things in perspective.

Susan worked in a university setting where she was allowed six weeks paid maternity leave. When pressed about whether she could take more time if she wanted to, she replied that her supervisor was very supportive of her and probably wouldn't say anything if she took longer, but that she hadn't asked. When asked again why she chose to come back at six weeks she replied:

> Because I've got a lot of things to do, and if I'm feeling well, I would like to get back into things. We've also discussed the possibility of my husband taking six weeks off after that, so that would still be three months that somebody was home with the baby.

She delayed her job interviews until after her baby was born, and at two weeks postpartum began scheduling them for six weeks postpartum. In the interim period (from two to six week) she felt tremendous pressure to prepare her seminar for the interviews, while also feeling physically exhausted and emotionally overwhelmed. She described the "relentlessness" of breast-feeding as the most difficult part of the early postpartum.

> I felt like everything was really out of control then. I was just really dissatisfied not being able to plan some of these things....I was holding him (her baby) and I just sort of looked at him and started to cry and handed him to my husband and I just wanted...you know there were several times during the first couple of weeks that I wished he'd go away. You know I didn't

> feel attached to him....And in some ways I looked forward to being away at the (job) interview a little bit.

Susan's mother stayed with her and her husband until the baby was nearly two months old and cared for the baby while Susan tried to work or to sleep; and while she went on her first two interviews. Susan was quite happy to have her mother tell her how to care for her son, or for her mother to simply care for him. Susan was very tentative about handling her baby, especially when he was crying. Because her mother and her husband were concerned about the pressure she was under to prepare her talk and do her interviews (during which she would be gone for two to three days at a time over a three week period), they took over a great deal of the care of the baby. At one month she weaned the baby during the day, in preparation for being gone. When asked whether she considered taking the baby with her during the interviews she quickly dismissed this as impossible, saying that someone would have to accompany her if she did. After her job interviews (at two and a half months), Susan placed her baby in child care with an immigrant woman who spoke little English. When asked about why she liked the day care provider, she responded that she knew people who had used this woman and they spoke highly of her. She was also pleased that:

> She'll take him from 8:00 until 6:00 which is really good. And even longer if you pay her a little bit more. And it's very reasonable, and it looked to me very good, and she had a lot of toys and I think she'll

probably play with the baby.

At four months Susan was still tentative in her handling of her baby as indicated in the following statement:

> I: Last time you talked about how you were uncomfortable spending a long time alone with him.
>
> M: Yeah. I still am occasionally. I mean, I, not nearly like I used to be. I enjoy him. I enjoy being with him. I'm not afraid he's going to start crying and I'm not going to be able to make him stop. I know I can help him stop now, but you know Mike (her husband) will say to me, "I'd like to go up to the gym," which is a perfectly reasonable thing to want to do for an hour. Big deal, right? But my first response will be, "No." And then he'll--he points it out to me and he's right, you know, there's no reason for me to say stuff like that. I'm perfectly capable of taking care of him, but that's my first response and I always have to stop myself and go, okay, you know, go ahead. So I think that's still a hangover from just, I don't want to be left alone with him. You know, "what if?" So I'm not really--it's obvious I'm not really totally comfortable yet.

Susan also conceded that while she was glad she waited until after the baby was born to have her interviews (because having the baby caused her to re-frame her decisions on where to accept a job and she ended up returning to the city where she grew up and where her family was), she also understood that having to focus on her interviews and prepare her seminar so soon after her baby was born was problematic for her:

> Knowing what I know now, I would definitely not plan, I would try to plan really to have nothing else to really do in the first six weeks....(I had to) write the paper and write my seminar and everything, and that came even before I went on the interviews which was six weeks after. And so I think--I didn't enjoy that--so knowing what I know now, I would definitely plan to, say, have six weeks just to enjoy the baby or get to know the baby and have nothing else to do. And maybe

returning to work after three months maybe.

When asked about why she chose three months she replied:

> I think at that, at that point I felt like I finally, finally felt like I kind of knew what I was doing with him. But before then I didn't, and I think that...if you sent the baby to a baby sitter at six weeks, you just wouldn't really--at least for me, I wouldn't really feel like I knew what I was doing.

Susan's confidence as a mother at four months was still fairly shaky, and of all the mothers in the study, she had the most difficulty with knowing her baby. And even after four months, she describes how her lack of time with him interfered with knowing his habits and changing capacities:

> Saturday he was really unhappy. He wasn't feeling very well, and I just sort of held him and he fell asleep. And that felt really, really good. Things like that where you really feel like you're involved with him. It's just spending more, after I've spent any length of time with him I feel much better than say the days where by, say by the end of Friday when he's been away all day and I've only seen him in the evenings, those may be the most tense times because then he's my responsibility again and I have to sort of learn again and also he's changing so much all the time.

At four months Susan was still apprehensive about her son's crying: whether she could "make him stop". It was most clearly around this issue that Susan's insecurity about mothering stood out. While other mothers at four months described being drained or exasperated and frustrated by a baby's crying jag, they didn't have this sense of apprehension that Susan had about their capacity to handle it. They had a repertoire of skills and practices that, by four months, were essentially taken for granted. In their handling of their babies there was an embodied sense of

authority, visible in the sureness of their comforting strategies and they were untroubled about being left alone with their babies. Unlike the other mothers who understood by four months the contingent nature of maternal practices, and the need for a repertoire of approaches for calming a screaming baby, Susan seemed to grasp at the notion that there was a "right" way to handle her crying baby (much as there is a "right" way to run an experiment in the lab) and she hadn't yet learned what that was. While Susan demonstrated insecurity in her handling of her son, Steven, her husband was comfortable and at ease in caring for him. By four months his contact with Steven had been fairly extensive, because of Susan's job interviews, when he cared for Steven alone for several days, something Susan had not yet done at four months.

Susan is a paradigm case of how institutional policies and personal proclivities can combine to undermine a mother's sense of herself as a "good enough" mother, and inhibit the ordinary experience of joy and delight in a new baby. Both Julie and Susan experienced the press of their careers before they had even physically recovered from the experience of childbirth. There was no time to simply dwell or inhabit the world of their new motherhood. The leisurely getting-to-know-one's-baby that mothers who stay home for four to six months experience was unavailable to Susan and Julie.

All of these mothers regarded the problem of balancing career and family as an individual, private problem that required an individual solution. Some lamented the lack of social policy for families, but only one father felt empowered to push his own case for working part-time based on principles he clearly held about the importance of family commitments and the need of infants to have close nurturing relationships with their parents. There were different reasons for this, but I think the over-arching reason is our cultural understanding of parenthood as a private, individual responsibility and of children as property, to be maintained and cared for by individual family members. This point is exemplified by recent court battles over the custody of children where the rights of the biological parents are given precedence over the rights of the child to loving parents and a secure home. Parenthood, in this view, inheres in the biological ownership of genetic material.

The rewards and costs of working part-time versus full-time:

Part-time work was preferred overwhelmingly to full-time work by the mothers in this study. Nearly all mothers in the study who worked full-time regretted having to do so. None worked full-time out of choice. They either were principal partners in their own firms, and felt the responsibility to their firms to work full-time, or they worked for corporate entities or institutions that did not offer the possibility of part time work at the same level of

responsibility and rate of pay. Several mothers suggested that they would have liked the opportunity to go back to work more slowly, starting with going back part-time and later moving into full-time. While there were multiple aspects of the situation shaping individual experiences of returning to work, the overwhelmingly uniform feeling of the study participants was that they would have preferred more time with their babies and more flexibility in the options available to them upon returning to work. While only one mother stayed home full-time to care for her baby, none of the other mothers who returned to work wanted to give up their careers altogether. What they wanted was a greater balance in their lives. While the advantage of part-time work centered primarily in having more time with their babies, the disadvantages centered in the effects part-time status would have on their careers. For eleven of the study mothers, part-time work was deemed completely unobtainable. They felt that they had only two choices: to stay home or to return to work full-time.

While part-time work had tremendous appeal, even in the antepartal interviews, some mothers saw potential problems with part-time work. Sandy, a lawyer, worked for the State in a large agency that allowed for more flexibility in working hours and arrangements than most of the firms in which the other lawyer participants worked. As a result, she had the advantage of observing colleagues in her office

who solved the problem of balancing work and family in various ways. Having models in her office of these different solutions made those same solutions seem like real options for her and, antepartally, she had a better thought-out grasp of the issues surrounding the different options than most of the other mothers in the study. She described a particularly work-absorbed mother of a toddler in her firm who worked full-time:

> And it's interesting for me to see, 'cause she has a lot of health problems. She has, like, migraine headaches, and is getting back problems and a lot of stress-related things that her doctor told her 'you've got to really go on a de-stressing campaign.' And I told her, "Well, you might want to maybe consider going part-time, and it's like she really wouldn't consider it.

She describes the tensions created by this full-time person in her office:

> M: And she's made comments before, sort of resentful of people who are half-time, that they're not carrying their burden, or "I'm tired, we have enough half-time people already." And she's kind of, and I can tell she's kind of, resentful of people who are half-time. So, but then there are other people who are (supportive of part-time employees). So there's support and there's also animosity at work, I mean, there's both.
>
> I: And so how do you feel about that animosity?
>
> M: It kind of bothers me but, uh, well, I'll see how it is when I go back, and if I do go back part-time, and how I feel personally about it then. I feel sorry to see (the animosity) and I feel like people should support--I mean I like the flexibility that people are getting now in work and I think that people should support that. And both men and women. And I think we'll see a lot more men that want to maybe work half-time and spend time with their kids. And uh, and yet I see the realities, I do see the realities that it's

> hard to deal with people who are half-time, as far as them putting in the same kind of time that other people put in, or being available to do rush projects that other people that are full-time have to do. Or some of the bigger litigation that we have in our office that you have to be around more to go to meetings (for). So I don't know. I feel bad about the animosity and I also feel like I need to be careful to make sure that what I'm objectively doing is not putting an extra burden on other people, at the same time.

Marian, a lawyer, was very relieved when she decided to return to work part-time, but she also remarked on the problems with working part-time:

> M: I was also disappointed about not becoming a partner in the firm because I care about that and it means a lot to me, and I'm impressed by people who are partners, and I was disappointed that I wasn't going to be able to achieve that myself, but I just talked with Robert about it a lot and talked with people in my women's group and thought about it a lot and just decided that, it's also an honorable profession being a mom and that what I need to do is to make my life happy and to put myself in a position where I can't be good at either one is just stupid and I can do work part-time....That was really the biggest turning point, was making the decision...to go part-time. It was like one day I felt miserable about it and the next day I felt great.

<u>Contextual factors which shaped mothers' experience of returning to work:</u>

Several factors further shaped mothers' experiences of returning to work. Medical problems of both mothers and babies were unforeseen and stressful. Two families had infants with serious symptoms suggesting a potentially life-threatening illness. In both cases, the medical workups required many appointments with physicians, and in one case, an extensive period of hospitalization. The balancing of career and family during these episodes was particularly

demanding, mitigated in one case by a supportive work environment, but exacerbated in the other by an unsympathetic and insensitive firm which considered a family illness a private problem.

The physical adjustment to birth and to sleep deprivation was notably stressful in this group, and this was largely unforeseen. Deborah, the lawyer, describes this:

> I: You talked before about also how surprised you were at just the physical problems and how hard it was physically to recover.
>
> M: Oh, yeah, that absolutely shocked me. That absolutely, absolutely shocked me. Now, it took me--looking back on it, it doesn't seem like it was all that long. I think it took about six or seven weeks of just really not functioning, and even now, I mean, I'm not the way that I was before he was born, basically because I'm tired from waking up in the middle of the night.

Several women had unanticipated health problems which they experienced as interfering with their time to be at home with their infants. Deborah, who had a serious postpartum infection (which required that she quit breast-feeding and pump her milk while she took antibiotics), describes her surprise at this physical aspect of the postpartum:

> It's just kind of a shock to me because I didn't expect to go in and come out with any of these difficulties...and I guess...one of the thoughts is just that there really is a disability. Having a child, there's really a physical aspect to it that I just didn't focus on.

And her distress that her recovery so preoccupied her:

> I've got 6 months which a lot of people look at as a ton of time to be taking off from work to be home with

> my baby, but I feel like I'm being cheated each day that I'm being sick because I always feel like I've given up a month already,... and it's 6 months and it's not like after that they're going to ship him off and he's going to live with someone else; but after that I am going back to work and I'm not going to have this time that is just a lot of time with him and I should be able to be well and have a fun time with him.

Chagrinned, she recalls her role in shaping maternity policy prior to having her baby:

> Actually I feel like such a traitor to every woman that I work with because right before I left work to have the baby, there was a meeting at my firm...and the firm was trying to decide whether or not to give paid paternity leave. What it was--the question's supposed to be, what should we do? Do we want to pay men? What kind of policy do we want to have for women, and do we want to encourage this, do we want to discourage this? And I remember saying at one point, during that meeting--this is why I feel like such a traitor--that we should just acknowledge that what we're doing is we're trying to encourage women to stay home, which I think is fine because we want, we're interested enough in the children of the people who work here, that we want to give them a good start; and let's just face it, that except in the case of someone who has like a C-section, there's very little physical and this isn't disability and so to call it disability is kind of ridiculous and now I'm sitting here thinking, what-are you crazy?

Child care: Another aspect of the situation that shaped women's experiences of returning to work was the issue of child care. For all mothers, the prospect of evaluating and choosing child care was one of the most difficult and stressful tasks of motherhood. The idea of substitute care was loaded with multiple levels of meaning, and threatened many women seriously. While many women found satisfactory, even exemplary, day care for their infants, those most satisfied were the five mothers whose husbands

either temporarily or permanently took over the care of the infant either part-time or full-time. In all instances, these mothers described the sense of security they felt in knowing that their infants, particularly the two-month-olds, were at home with their fathers, at least part of the time. The anguish of separation was particularly mitigated by the fathers' participation in child care. Lisa was one of the two mothers in the study whose husbands cared for their babies full-time while they worked:

> I: Do you think you'd feel differently if Jay (her husband) weren't the one taking care of Jeremy?
>
> M: Oh, I think I'd feel really differently.
>
> I: And how do you think you'd feel?
>
> M: Nervous, very insecure. Very...I think it'd make me very sad. Because knowing what I know about how observant he is, and how much he's learning right now, to have somebody else be the one teaching, that would really make me sad.

Not only did these mothers feel confident in the care their infants received, they were also delighted at the relationships this care engendered between fathers and their babies. Both praised their husbands' patience and "mothering" practices, and wondered if they would be able to do as well were they at home being the primary parent. The fathers took on practices of nurture and care (that I have described in Chapter 7 as "mothering"), though clearly mothering practices are available to fathers, as evidenced in the following description by Lisa's husband, Peter:

> I notice that there is a certain type of intimacy I

> believe that's tied to breast feeding between he and his mother that I wouldn't even try and have, but frankly, when she's out (in the evening) like this, there's been times when he's snuggled up to my chest and I jam the bottle in his mouth and it's like I'm sitting there going, "God I feel like a woman." I mean, because it's like I'm trying to create that warm, cozy, wonderful cave-like atmosphere that he needs, you know. So I guess what's happened because of my role--I'm incapable of having a real macho, bring home the bacon, dad image. I can't. I'm more of a good <u>parent</u>.

These two mothers also saw the committed and engaged fathering of their spouses as deeply important to their infants. Lisa describes this relationship:

> What really pleases me is to see how well Ben (her son) gets on with Peter (her husband) because for the first three months, when I was home most of the time and (Peter) was so busy, not that (Ben) didn't know him or recognize him or anything, but I just see so much more now. It's like if I'm holding the baby and feeding him; what I've noticed is if I'm feeding him or nursing him, Peter walks by or starts talking to me, Ben'll turn and get distracted because he'll want to listen to (Peter's) voice or look at him or that sort of thing. That's good and I'm glad that they seem to have such a good relationship. I mean I think it's important. I think, I'm sure it's getting more and more common, but in the past, I think it was unusual for the babies to get to spend as much time with their dad as he gets to now. I think it's good.

One Asian father who took over the care of his infant for a month and a half until she could be placed in a day care center at three months, poignantly described his experience:

> I: When you stayed home with her, do you think that changed your relationship with her?
>
> F: Well, there was no relationship with her previously, you know, before that time. That was, that was the first relationship. Well--but uh, that was the most important experience I've had...
>
> I: In your life?
>
> F: In my life maybe.

I: Really?

F: Yeah. I developed my relationship with Emily and at the same time I had spent a lot of time with my mom and that--for the first time I learned...I got to know my mother. I didn't know her very well. And by raising Emily together, she talked a lot about me when I was a baby. So lots of memories came back from her and my mother's a very, very bright person. She's very sharp. And uh, it was just wonderful....And I learned a lot from her, too. And uh, so that was very important.

Only one father described a commitment to permanently working three days a week so that he could care for his son part-time, after his wife went back to work at six months postpartum. When asked how he negotiated part-time work as a lawyer, a notoriously difficult field in which to work part-time, he responded:

> I didn't negotiate it. I went in and quit on Mondays and Fridays. My work was valuable and they needed me so when my pay check was reduced by two fifths I knew I had gotten it.

This father exhibited unusual determination to be a fully equal participant in the rearing of his son, and, in fact, was one of the few participants in the study who saw the issue of work place policies on parental leave and part-time work a public, rather than a private, individual issue; and he took a principled stand based on his beliefs.

For several mothers, having live-in child care, whether it was fathers or nannies, gave them access to their infants' daily worlds. Upon returning home, they heard about the day's events and the baby's activities and accomplishments, so that while a mother may have been absent, she wasn't unaware of the texture and content of her

infant's daytime life. Seemingly insignificant snippets of information were tremendously important to mothers and afforded them a sense of control over their infants' care. Ellen, who works in management in a large corporation, talks about the advantages of having her husband, Jay, take care of their son, Jeremy:

> The other thing (about having Jay take care of Jeremy) is when I come home, the person who was with him all day is now interacting with me, whereas a day care person would probably turn the baby over and they're kind of gone and then you're left with this baby, you know, who you have to get reacquainted--kind--of with. Whereas there's this buffer there that allows Jeremy and me to kind of get back into the groove of things. That's the big thing, is kind of keeping me up to date on what is progressing: "Jeremy did this today."

Seemingly insignificant information was greatly desired and appreciated by these mothers. Ellen, again, describes how this access to the day's details situates her in her family in a different way:

> When I come home from work now, I feel part of the day. I feel like I'm a part of the family, an integral part and I get to hear about the things that took place.

Lisa similarly describes how the details of her son's day are important to her:

> I feel like every day it's like I kind of--Peter might get a little impatient with me, but I want to know all the details. What did he have for breakfast? What did he have for lunch? When did he take a nap? What did he do today? You know, that sort of thing.

For mothers who didn't have live-in child care, gaining access to the minutiae of a baby's day was a challenge. Joan, a mother who experienced a disastrous series of child care calamities, was elated when she finally found an

elderly woman to care for her daughter, Emily, a person who reliably recorded everything that went on with Emily during the day in a diary. Joan showed me the diary and it was a tender and thoughtful document that clearly served to knit all of them together in a circle of care and concern, focused on Emily. This day care person clearly understood the importance of caring for both Emily and her parents.

While all the families eventually settled into satisfactory day care situations, there were several unmitigated disasters in the study sample. Two families went through four different care givers in the first year. Most commonly, families went through two. Only four of the fifteen families using non-parental care had the same caregiver throughout the study period of 12 to 15 months. While this is not unusual, it is significant in that the families who experienced these disasters were highly educated, loving, concerned and affluent. These are the families who can afford high-quality child care and yet, still, they experienced care that was unreliable, unresponsive to their infants' needs and potentially emotionally damaging. Mothers described, in retrospect, how they just didn't know how to evaluate child care before they had used child care, finding themselves, thus, in a real dilemma. Finding good child care for inexperienced parents was largely a matter of good luck. And that is how happy parents described themselves: as very lucky. The lack of an

organized, regulated and high quality day care system clearly ill-served even these educated and mostly affluent parents. While they felt like relative experts in choosing child care after experiencing problems and disasters, and after they had lived through the experience of using day care, they were unnecessarily traumatized by this trial-and-error learning. Because new parents cannot possibly be experts in choosing child care, it is necessarily incumbent on government to mandate a system of care that establishes standards and maintains them. In the absence of such standards, parents will continue to fumble through their early child care decisions and grieve over disasters that they could not foresee, or rejoice in good care that is interpreted as "lucky". If one tries to stand outside of this cultural situation and think about the implications of experiencing good quality child care as "good luck," one is struck anew with the incomprehensible blindness of leaving the care of our most fragile and treasured social members to such tenuous circumstances.

Day care dilemmas and disasters were powerful elicitors of stress in all of the study mothers who experienced them, regardless of when they timed their return to work, but were especially so for families of infants who were three months old or less, and such disasters even called into question whether attempts to balance career and family were really worth the costs.

The spousal relationship: The spousal relationship was a particularly important factor in the study participants' experience of returning to work. I am struck by the high regard in which particularly the younger fathers in the study were held by their wives. Half the sample described fully equitable relationships in which men did at least half of the cooking and household chores, and participated in the care of their infants willingly and extensively. Whether this is an aberration of this handful of families from the Bay Area in California or whether it reflects a trend toward the "unstalling" of the revolution is hard to say, but it is an encouraging finding. As expected, fathers who were not wholly engaged in the project of fatherhood let more of the parenting burden fall on their wives. This proved difficult in two respects. Mothers felt sad for both the fathers and the babies, because they were missing out on their relationships with each other; and mothers who were doing, as one mother put it, "200%", never had time or space to think of their own needs, even to just be alone, and felt resentful and angry about the slide toward traditional roles. Not surprisingly, this created strains in the marital relationship. Further, there were fathers who shared the parenting tasks more equitably but avoided and resented having to share the household work. For some of the more traditional role couples this problem was avoided by buying the child care and/or household services from

outside help. For those who couldn't afford to buy their way out of the problem, the discrepancy between the participants' idealogy of fairness and the reality of their lives created tension in the marital relationship. Two of these families considered going into counseling to deal with these role inequities. The fathers who were less engaged with fathering and/or household tasks tended to be the older fathers in the sample.

These findings suggest that returning to work prior to four months after a birth may threaten a woman's sense of herself as a mother and make for a more stressful experience of the transition to parenthood. This work supports the claim by Brazelton (1986) that mothers need at least a four month maternal leave in order to feel that they know their infants and to feel competent as mothers. It also underscores the value of providing leave for fathers, so that they might experience being the primary parent for their babies. The findings also point to the need for more flexibility in work hours for both mothers and fathers so that they can better respond to the demands of parenting young children, while also maintaining career commitments.

Chapter Seven

Mothering as a Practice

> Interruption, contradiction, and ambivalence are the soul of motherhood. It's a curious biological fact that even mothers forget the raw data of mothering as their children grow up....Sooner or later, we all turn our backs on the truth of motherhood, because our culture makes it too punishing to side with it too long. Better to get a crack nanny, buy some decent clothes and get back into the real world, the marketplace. But lingering doubts remain that those hours of pure feeling and blazing frustration, spent rocking, cleaning, feeding, and *not harming* the baby, are the real world. (Jackson, 1989, p. 35)

In our modern culture we have a limited and disengaged way of describing mothering: We sentimentalize and trivialize it as in greeting cards and television shows; we indict it as the first cause of our neuroses; we reject it as a restrictive and oppressive role for women. Government policies treat the early postpartum transition as a medical problem. Work places treat parenthood as a private responsibility, invisible to corporate policies. In our modern cultural narratives mothers rarely embody the heroic and define the good in a way that shows mothering as moral, honorable and centrally important to our cultural life. In rational/empirical studies, researchers approach mothering as an aggregate of decontextualized variables (Entwisle & Doering, 1981; Grossman, et al., 1980; Mercer, 1985). They

disembody the experience, and pass over the ways in which mothering both gives content and meaning and a notion of the good to women's lives; and serves, via an ethic of care, to nurture and preserve both individual children and important meanings and traditions within families and in the culture. Because context is minimized or excluded in research on mothering and purpose and meaning are ignored, we gain little insight into the ways in which our modern cultural practices and meanings make mothering difficult and stressful, and threaten to undermine its moral content.

In this study my particular concern has been to highlight the ways in which career women are marginalized and undermined in their attempts to meaningfully include both mothering and careers in their lives by this limited understanding of mothering. As the study participants negotiated the demands and pleasures of early motherhood, I was struck by the power of familial and institutional meanings, decisions and practices to both subvert and to strengthen a woman's commitment to her child. While ego strength and a woman's own early experiences of being parented also certainly shaped early mothering in the study sample, I have focused more substantively in this chapter on bureaucratic and cultural influences because they are more appropriately addressed by a cultural level discourse on the policies and attitudes which shape family life.

In this chapter, I will use MacIntyre's (1984) notion

of a practice as an interpretive framework for understanding how mothering gets taken up in our culture. Understood as a practice, mothering is revealed as potentially rich in moral content and essential for the preservation of cultural traditions of nurture and care which are mothering's purpose. Mothering as a practice will then be contrasted with the increasingly evident understanding in our culture of mothering as rational technique and children as raw material to be developed. A paradigm case, from the study sample, of mothering as a practice supported by a cohesive family tradition of care and a work place sympathetic to family concerns, will then be described. Finally, to conclude the chapter, I will turn to a cultural level analysis of the difficulties created by the cultural context in which modern women practice mothering, and an analysis of the resources available to recover mothering as a practice and bring it to the center of our culture.

MacIntyre (1984) defines a practice as:

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and particularly definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (p. 187)

Practice is here distinguished from technical skills. The goods internal to a practice can only be specified in terms of the practice and by means of examples from the practice.

In this view, the emotional content of mothering is taken seriously because it reveals how the mother grasps her situation and what matters to her, which in turn makes her mothering activities intelligible.

MacIntyre notes that in the ancient and medieval worlds, the creation and maintenance of human communities was a practice (p. 188-9). Borgman's (1984) discussion of practice substantiates the position that practices embody a notion of the good in our culture, despite the fact that they are no longer prominent in our technological world in which the products of our labors are increasingly understood as commodities. Borgman argues that a commodity is "truly available when it can be enjoyed as a mere end, unencumbered by means" (p. 44) and contrasts commodities with "focal things" which orient our lives by virtue of the practices through which we are engaged with them.

Mothering is a morally coherent practice, the concrete expression of which affords us an opportunity to understand the content of nurture and care, although it is a practice that is marginalized (that is, left over from an earlier cultural tradition, it exists only at the margins of our society, not as a central focus). Unless it is recognized as a moral practice and brought to a more central place in our culture, it will lose its moral coherence and will then necessarily disappear as a practice. Children will join other aspects of our environment that have become what

Heidegger (1977) calls "standing reserve": commodities to be produced; their particular needs for nurture and care indiscernible to the technical procedures required to produce commodities.

The reasons for the marginalization of maternal practices are multiple. For lower class minority mothers, mothering as a practice is often marginalized by socio-economic factors. Mothering in the context of poverty places constraints on mothering (Scheper-Hughes, 1992), although it does not preclude good mothering practices. Some of our best examples of mothering as a practice come from poor mothers (SmithBattle, 1992). For the mothers in this study, mothering was frequently marginalized by work place practices that ignored parents' commitments to their children and regarded parental responsibilities as the private problem of individual employees, as shown in Chapter Six.

Mothering is also threatened with being subverted by the technological self-understanding which is so endemic in our culture. This self-understanding is marked by seeing the world purely as raw material to master and control, and seeing ourselves and our children as projects, self-created and self-defining, unencumbered by tradition or commitment. This view is embodied in our language of "self-control, self-efficacy, stress management, cost-benefit analysis, rational calculation, enlightened self-interest" (Benner,

1987). If mothering is taken over by the strategic view embodied in technological self-understanding, how will caring show up for us and what kind of culture will we be left with?

Feminists have made a strong argument that nurture and care, which are embodied in maternal practices, and identified with traditionally female activities, shape an alternative way of being in the world and a particular moral stance which do not view the self or the world as resources to be managed, or commodities to be produced. This perspective has been overlooked by the larger culture which has instead held up a male moral stance, (particularly the articulation of values as distinct from the practices and relationships which produce them (Borgman, 1984; Gilligan, 1982)) and way of being in the world as the norm.

Several feminists have discussed mothering as a practice. Whitbeck (1983) and Ruddick (1983; 1989) each maintain that caring practices traditionally associated with women's work embody particular virtues and ways of being in the world that must be articulated and accorded a central position in our moral thinking. Gilligan (1982) argues that women's moral thinking is grounded in an ethic of care and responsibility based on relationship.

Whitbeck (1984) identifies what she calls the "core practice": the mutual realization of people, one form of which is mothering. This core practice assumes an

ontological view of the person as in-relation rather than assuming a traditional dualistic ontology based on oppositions. This core practice involves activities usually regarded as women's work and described as "nurturing", although Whitbeck warns that "the creativity and responsibility of all parties in the conduct of the practice in its full, liberated form is inconsistent with the sentimental picture of women's self-sacrifice" (p. 65).

Whitbeck (1984) argues that girls form their identities by virtue of being cared for by mothers, with whom they identify, who share "the same socially defined possibilities of a female body. As a result, the self-other distinction is neither symbolized by a distinction between the sexes, nor does it involve the assumption that the self and other possess opposing characteristics" (p. 73). A girl's identification with her mother or other nurturers also extends to an identification with the skills and virtues necessary for the practice of mothering, or, more generally, the practices of mutual development. This developmental trajectory results, then, in the development of an ontology that assumes a self-other relationship between persons who are, in some respects, analogous beings rather than opposites. In this view, then, relationships to others are a fundamental aspect of becoming a person, and define an ethic of responsibility that is fundamentally different from the ethic of justice, which follows from the ontology of

opposition. Whitbeck's ethic of care is supported by MacIntyre's (1984) claim that "all morality is always to some degree tied to the socially local and particular" (p. 126).

Whitbeck argues that the non-oppositional, self-in-relation notion of agency undergirds an entirely different notion of the moral person from the rights view of ethics in which the concept of rights is the fundamental moral notion. In the rights view, says Whitbeck,

> People are viewed as social or moral atoms, armed with rights and reason, and actually or potentially in competition and conflict with one another....If any attention is given to relationships on the rights view, it is assumed they exist on a contractual or quasi-contractual basis and that the moral requirements arising from them are limited to rights and obligations. (p. 79)

The "responsibilities view" of ethics which follows from Whitbeck's ontology takes the responsibilities which grow out of relationships as the fundamental moral notion. Relationships, argues Whitbeck, are <u>constitutive</u>, they are not contractual. She contrasts relationship with role: something that a person adopts and discards similarly to a piece of clothing, leaving the self unchanged. Relationship is exemplified by the relationship that "the ordinary devoted mother" (Winnicott, 1958) has with her child: the child has significance and value for the mother and maternal care is the fulfillment of a mother's responsibility to her child, although the responsibility is not reflectively articulated as a list of tasks or goals. This

responsibility, says Whitbeck, is essential to the maintenance of moral integrity for both mother and child. Further, a person comes to be able to act morally only by having been in relationships with others, through the practices associated with the mutual realization of people. While the rights view has a place in Whitbeck's ontology, it is only in preserving the person's ability to carry out the moral responsibilities entailed in human relationships. Justice is not a foundational virtue in Whitbeck's ethic.

Gilligan's work (1982; 1986) has elaborated a view of morality similar to Whitbeck's in which the self is known in connection, defined by interaction, engagement, and attachment. Care and responsibility within personal relationships are constitutive of a person's moral outlook.

> For Gilligan, each person is embedded within a web of ongoing relationships, and morality, importantly, if not exclusively, consists in attention to, understanding of, and emotional responsiveness toward the individuals with whom one stands in these relationships....Care morality is about the particular agent's caring for and about the particular friend or child with whom she has come to have this particular relationship. (Blum, 1988)

Care morality figures prominently, though not exclusively, in women's moral thinking, reflecting women's traditional involvement in relationships of care with their own mothers and with their children.

Borgman's (1984) discussion of technology and its disruption of focal concerns and practices is also relevant to the consideration of mothering as a practice. He

describes focal concern, similarly to Kierkegaard's notion of a world-defining commitment, as centering one's life. "It is a final and dominant end which alone truly matters and fulfills and which therefore assigns all other things and activities their rank and place" (p. 211). Borgman describes the purpose of a practice as guarding "in its undiminished depth and intensity the thing that is central to the practice, to shield it against the technological diremption into means and ends" (p. 209). Challenging technology, Borgman argues, is only possible through the practice of engagement. A single engaging action without an attendant practice can only be a momentary light in our life; it cannot provide an orienting focus. Much as a momentary exchange with a small child can be enjoyable, it does not provide the focus and way of being in the world that being a mother to that child provides. Borgman continues:

> Competence, excellence, or virtue, as Aristotle first saw, come into being as an *ethos*, a settled disposition and a way of life....Through a practice, we are able to accomplish what remains unattainable when aimed at in a series of individual acts. (p.207)

Borgman's discussion readily applies to mothering. An infant, for a mother, can be a focal concern. It orients her and defines all other demands. She is engaged in the practice of maternal care. She resists the diremption of her child into means and ends. Borgman points out that home and family are the space in which housewives preserve many

pretechnological features of "stability, tradition, warmth, and engagement...But they stand outside the ruling paradigm and fail to have its sanction" (p. 138). Of course, we can see many examples of strategic mothering in our culture in which children are seen as means, as objects to be produced and developed, and do not embody a mother's focal concern. But such examples only serve to point out the existence of mothering as a practice. When we see examples of strategic mothering we are troubled and uneasy because the paradigm of mothering as a practice which is left over from an earlier historical period exists and shapes our understanding of mothering and our recognition of it (or its lack) in particular mothers.

Mothering as Practice versus Child Rearing Techniques:

It is critical that mothering as a practice be distinguished from child rearing techniques. Child rearing techniques vary with cultures and families and do not have the focusing quality nor the moral content of mothering as a practice. As MacIntyre (1984) points out, practice is never just a set of technical skills. Child rearing techniques, understood as technical skills, may, in fact, subvert the practice of mothering, creating a strategic climate in which the particular child's needs and abilities are ignored. Means and ends both count in mothering as a practice. The purpose of mothering is found as essentially in the everyday, repetitive and contingent acts which are their own

ends as it is found in the final product, the child, grown to productive adult, capable of both work and love. In child rearing techniques, means and ends may be separated. In the strategic view, child rearing practices are realized in a child who walks, talks, and is toilet trained according to the canons of child development, a child who develops the requisite skills and mental abilities to admit him to a "good" nursery school, primary school, and college. In the strategic view, the tasks of mothering are merely technical procedures, performed by any one with the requisite skill, much as any one can repair an automobile; no relationship with the vehicle is required in order to perform the task. The content of care and concern, by which means and ends are merged in mothering as a practice, are absent here. In strategic mothering, the child isn't allowed to show up as a person, but remains essentially an object to be dealt with. This essential stance of letting the child appear is evident in this mother's response to my question about expectations she has for her child:

> Well, I don't know if I have expectations; I have hopes for him. You know, I try not to have expectations 'cause you just, you can't really count on anything in life and you know he could grow up to be, a, uh, smoking Republican, you know; or a Ku Klux Klan member or something; I don't know. So I just feel like I try not to have expectations, but I have hopes that he'll be a happy person; that he'll be gregarious and like people. Hope that he has a social conscience, and you know, that he has, like, a concern for the environment and tries to live a good life and be good to other people and the world, and that he's happy and he finds, like, a happy location.

This mother understands that mothering isn't a technical procedure with a clear and determined outcome. Reflected in her comments is the understanding that one starts, as a mother, with notions of good that one would like to see realized in one's child, and the mothering is framed by these notions of good. But it is only in the working out of the practice with a particular, as she goes along, that these goods may get realized. In the ongoing, practical engagement of a mother with her child, the particular ways in which her practices can reflect notions of the "good" get worked out through practical deliberation and the cultivation of her ability to recognize her child as a person.

Of course, child rearing practices may also embody a cultural tradition supportive of the practice of mothering and of the good embodied in the practice. This mother describes her appreciation for her mother's "burping" skills:

> The first week was great. My Mom, I mean it was hard, but my Mom was around a lot. My Mom and her friend would come over in the evening and they would bring us dinner, and just, you know, my Mom's a real good burper. It took me a while to get the burping thing down. It's like I'd feed him and then he'd be fussy afterwards and I realized finally that he needed to be burped, and I just wasn't very good at it. My Mom's a real good burper.

This description of a mother's helpful expertise was unusual in the study sample. More often, women would say that their mothers had little or nothing to teach them about mothering;

that, as one mother put it, it was like "apples and oranges," and their mothering practices were pretty discontinuous with those of their own mothers. This lack of a coherent tradition to draw on attracted many mothers to "expert" theories of baby care or to the practical knowledge of their friends and acquaintances.

Paradigms of Mothering as a Practice versus Mothering as Management via Technique:

By contrasting the paradigms of mothering as practice and mothering as management via technique I hope to make maternal practices more explicit. Of course, the practice of mothering does not belong to any individual mother, but is taken up by particular mothers in ways that are shaped by their own family and cultural meanings and traditions and by their material and situational contexts and concerns.

Mothering as a practice: In the practice of mothering, the child has a real claim on the mother. This claim is emotional and physical, as well as moral. This claim is not experienced as limiting; rather, it provides meaning, purpose and identity. The baby becomes what Dreyfus and Wakefield (1988) call a "paradigmatic object", reorganizing the background against which all contents appear as described in Chapter Four. The baby is at once an object in the background and sets up or constitutes what is foreground and background. The mother does not view her child as an autonomous equal deserving of care by virtue of his or her rights. Rather, the mother is solicited in her

care by his helplessness and need, by his relationship to her. Her care is governed by an implicit notion of the good. Meaningful family traditions (understood as practical and not cognitive knowledge) and common sense, based on the mother's own intuitive understanding of her child, figure as a resource more prominently than prescriptive child development manuals in guiding her care. Her practice is particular to her own infant. The practice itself provides the paramount satisfaction. Play and "non-productive" care activities like feeding, bathing, and changing also figure prominently both as constitutive practices and as ways of being a mother to this infant.

The child is a focal point in the mother's life. She sees her mothering as a "calling" and all other concerns and commitments as relativized by her commitment to her child. Satisfaction in her child's achievements is not framed by an ultimate concern with the external goods of status and achievement but, rather, in terms of her moral obligation to help her child realize her particular talents and interests and to raise a child who is equipped to become a responsible member and participant in her family and community. Within the practice, a mother develops skill and an understanding of mothering, thereby extending the practice. She measures herself against paradigms of mothering which embody excellence for the practice. When she seeks substitute care for her child, she makes an ethic of care a more salient

requirement than professional knowledge of child development and child rearing strategies.

Anne's story: Motherhood as a world-defining commitment:

To exemplify this understanding of mothering as a practice, I will present a paradigm case from the study findings. Anne, 38 years old when her baby was born, was a lawyer. Her work was world-defining as described in Chapter Five, and she was quite passionate about her work involvement, to the point where she had rejected motherhood during her twenties. Following fertility problems and a complicated antepartal course, she delivered a healthy baby girl. Her parents came to stay with Anne and her husband, Bill, before Anne's baby, Leah, was born. They stayed for about a month.

Anne had a long honeymoon in the postpartum with her parents living in the house and energetically and enthusiastically helping her, especially since she enjoyed their company and appreciated their help. As a new mother Anne drew on a family tradition of care that was made palpable by her parents' involvement in caring for her and for her baby after her birth.

One of the stressful incidents described by Anne in the early postpartum period occurred when she ate something that gave her baby terrible gas and caused her to scream for

hours. During the incident, she was able to recall the family story about her own babyhood in which she would sleep only when her very patient father's hand lay on her back. This memory facilitated her acceptance of his help in this situation. Acknowledging that she was emotionally and physically unable to help her baby at a certain point in the evening, she went to bed, leaving her father to comfort her daughter, as she herself had been comforted as a baby. Anne's understanding of herself as well-loved and worthy served her well in this difficult incident early in the postpartum period.

Recalling her parents' departure, she commented, "I remember having tears in my eyes when they were leaving, also because they were so nice and I was so grateful." Her parents didn't take over the care of the baby, but, rather, helped and coached Anne. When they left a month after Leah's birth, Anne was alone with her baby for the first time, but unlike the other mothers in the study who faced their babies alone much earlier, she had by then acquired a repertoire of caring practices. She knew what <u>worked</u> and she had a sense of knowing who Leah was as a person. The coaching and care and nurturing she received from her own parents in the early postpartum period seemed to have given her a platform from which she was successfully "launched" as a mother at five weeks postpartum. She commented after her parents' departure,

> In fact, in some ways, it's nice because I don't have to share her so much and it's also nice just because I know I can manage it and it's not that big a problem. I have a whole list of things to do under various circumstances like, you know, she's fussy and I want to do something, you know, I'll try to put her down. If she cries, then I'll either try the swing - she likes the swing a lot - and if that doesn't work, then the third thing is usually the snuggly and she's very good about the snuggly. That almost always works and if that doesn't work, draping her over my shoulder. She loves that. And then if that doesn't work and I don't even know if I've gotten to that yet. I think I guess one time. Then I just give up whatever I'm doing and I sit down and, you know, rock her and do something like that.

Further, by the time her parents were ready to leave, she had regained her strength physically. This provided her a cushion unavailable to any other mother in the study. The downside to her parents' departure was that she could no longer accomplish what she was used to accomplishing in a day. At five weeks or so postpartum, she confronted her limits and was forced to choose between accomplishing everything on her lists and just being a mother to her baby. She commented,

> At first, I was very frustrated because I always - I accomplish a million things ... or used to accomplish a million things in a day. I still do; they're just different and I wanted to kind of keep up that level. You know, I like to cook; I like to cook nice meals. I usually have lists of things that I like to accomplish in a given day and those are changing.
>
> I went from a phase where I was happiest if I changed her, fed her and put her down and she went to sleep because then I had sleep time during which I could do my things you know and then I started actually wanting her....one day, I realized how much fun she was and I wanted her to stay awake more. I changed.

Anne's notions of good can be seen to shift from those that

involve accomplishment to the seemingly nonproductive, endlessly repeated practices that constitute mothering, the being-with or dwelling-with that is afforded no place in the efficiency driven world of work . This "turn" in the early postpartum was experienced by other study mothers, though some never seemed quite able to give up being "productive," especially those mothers who went back to work before three months. Fortunately, Anne was able to stay home long enough with her baby that she was available to enjoy these developmental changes in the baby which so solicited her "to change" her way of being a mother to Leah.

> I've decided, shoot, I'm home, let's just do all this stuff that's related to her and she's fine and I just sort of gave in in a way and gave up some of the sewing, the cooking is a lot less elaborate, and I find that errands that I just thought I had to do on a particular day I really don"t have to do on that day. Even if I don't go to the store, Bill or I can go to the store later. If I can't get something cooked, I can ask him to bring food home.

Anne breast fed her baby and talked of her pleasure in feeding Leah. In response to my question of what she enjoyed about breast-feeding, Anne described a practice in which the needs and goods of both mother and baby intertwined and were met in a very satisfying and symbiotic way. Her breast-feeding exemplified the merging of mother and infant that Winnicott calls "primary maternal occupation" (1988, p. 93). Watching Anne breast-feed Leah I could see for myself the obvious pleasure Anne got in breast-feeding. She talked to Leah about the feeding, about

changing breasts etc. in a high, sing-song voice, stroking her head. For the first family observation, Anne was dressed in old clothes that had been spit up on and she was unperturbed by this evidence of her breast-feeding and mothering activities.

When she returned to work, Anne hired a live-in nanny to care for Leah. Anne chose Janet because she was older and had raised her own children. Anne regarded Janet as a member of her family and wasn't threatened by her experience in mothering practices. Not only did Janet mother Leah with Anne's blessings, she also mothered Anne, coaching her and modeling for her, nurturing her and reassuring her. What was remarkable in this situation was how Anne responded to Janet's care. Many of the other mothers in the study had more problematic and competitive relationships with their child care providers. Anne described working at her relationship with Janet, overcoming her usual reluctance to confront problems as they developed, because she felt it was so important for Leah that she and Janet be able to communicate well. This is another example of how the kind of person one is as a mother matters deeply and prompts new ways of being in the world. I imagine that in cultures where mothers and daughters aren't so alienated from each other, as they are in the United States, their relationships would appear similar to that of Anne and her nanny, Janet.

Anne was the owner of her law firm and worked with

other lawyers who also had infants. She described a work place that cultivated practices that were supportive of parents. Her firm accommodated four parental leaves, including one for a father, in a year, and while she described a certain amount of upheaval which resulted from these leaves she ardently believed in their necessity and argued that if her small firm could afford this degree of accommodation, then other, larger, firms could too. She purchased a breast pump for all of the mothers in the office to use, and regarded this as a worthwhile service to her employees. She described an unwritten office rule that everyone went home by five o'clock because of their parental responsibilities. To stay, and break this rule was viewed as making the others feel badly about leaving on time.

Just before Anne was to return to work, at four months postpartum, her baby suddenly developed a life-threatening illness and was hospitalized. Anne coped with her fear that Leah might die by trying to be as helpful as she could to Leah and to the doctors, and by focusing on maintaining breast-feeding. Anne coped by being the most complete and up-to-data source of medical information on Leah. She was her advocate and her guardian. She allied herself with the health care team and actually became one of the team. She saw herself as the one who knew the <u>whole</u> story about Leah because she had been there for everything that had transpired. It was as though by knowing Leah's story she

could somehow affect its denouement.

> I: So were there any principles or rules guiding your behavior in this incident?
>
> M: Probably you know trying to find a role for myself in everything that was going on that was as constructive as possible, you know, just trying to see if there was anything that I could do that would help.

With Leah's illness, Anne's plans for returning to work were put off. When I asked her whether this was a moral issue, she seemed perplexed, and responded:

> Probably. But it was just sort of the obvious, natural decision but...it didn't even enter my mind that I would ever go to work while she was in the hospital. I mean it just didn't even occur to me even though maybe I could have gone for an hour or two. Never occurred.

Anne's response reflects the taken-for-granted moral claims of mothering, which form an ethos of care that informs, transparently, every decision a woman makes in her practice as a mother.

Anne's baby survived the illness, although it was unclear whether she had been affected developmentally. Anne acknowledged that Leah's illness served to point out how profoundly her life had changed:

> I think my feelings (about being a mother) are just much stronger because of the crisis...just much deeper, stronger feelings. I mean I thought they were deep and strong before but now... you know, she's just the world to me right now.

Anne had a remarkable ability to see her situation positively, even when faced with her daughter's possible neurological problems. While she confessed to feeling unlucky at moments, her predominant feeling was that she was

lucky to be a mother and to have this precious baby who was so hard to get, and Leah's health problems didn't change those feelings. Even when Leah was diagnosed as developmentally delayed and placed in a special program, Anne continued to express feelings of gratitude for her baby and described the things that Leah did that so delighted her: "she's just a joy", and Anne's feelings of love and commitment to her. While she confessed to moments of panic, these issued from her anxiety over how Leah would fare in the world, rather than from any feeling of rejection because this baby was less than "perfect".

As she reflected on her feelings as a mother after her baby's illness, I asked her if she felt more vulnerable now. She responded:

> Oh. That's what it is! That's the word....These feelings come up from inside and you can't believe how strong they are or where they came from or why you didn't have ones like this before. I mean I have fallen in love, I've been married...all of those things.

Anne's vulnerability arose out of her recognition that when a person, her baby, sets up her world, she also becomes vulnerable to losing that baby: she is limited in her ability to control the situation. The baby must have the freedom in the relationship to be who she is: Leah is both lovely and has neurological problems.

In the final interview, Anne described an incident in which her nanny made a comment that Anne (mistakenly) interpreted as a criticism of her as a mother, which

devastated Anne. In this comment, Anne described the extent to which being a good mother mattered to her:

> It really got to me. It is because I care--I think the worst thing anybody could say to me right now is to say or imply that 'you're not a good mother.' You know, just send me off the deep end. I think it's the worst thing. I really do.

It was this overarching ethos of being a good mother to Leah which defined Anne's maternal practice. Her delight in her daughter, in every way, and in spite of her illness, exemplified a focal concern which organized and oriented Anne's world. Her pleasure in the everyday maternal practices, in the means of mothering were never subordinate to the end of child as product or commodity.

Mothering as management by technique: The manager sees mothering as a role (among several), not as a defining way of being that organizes and defines other projects. Her ethos for mothering involves maximizing her own and her child's potential and her capacity to be a rationally choosing agent. Her child is someone she freely chose to have, and the child doesn't have a central claim on her. She focuses on the external goods of mothering; for instance, how soon her child walks, talks, is toilet trained, and learns to read; what schools her child is accepted into; what sports the child plays and how well. She uses manipulative techniques to resolve discrete problems. Tradition and ritual, for the manager, are enslaving and stultifying, and she rejects them for herself

as well as for her child, unless she creates them herself as prescriptive for good family life, in which case they are not constitutive. Child development manuals and professionals are resources for techniques of care. Since the hallmark of this kind of mothering is technique, rather than care predicated on the moral responsibility of relationship, the task can be carried out by substitute caregivers who have the right techniques, who may, in fact, be better at providing the "right" kinds of stimulation for developmental growth.

These two positions are extremely drawn, but they help to reveal mothering as a practice with moral content; a practice that needs to be brought in from the margins and honored, lest the paradigm of mothering by technique take over and obliterate the practice of mothering.

Parenting as technical skill: The rationalization of parenting by the "experts": To exemplify the cultural tendency to rationalize parenting practices I will describe a recent example of a popular parenting manual. Dinkmeyer and McKay's Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP): The Parent's Handbook (1989), is a current example of the highly managerial strategies advocated by child development professionals. The STEP handbook represents current notions of parent learning in the popular literature. The views expressed in this handbook are grounded in a foundational notion of knowledge: "Our basic

beliefs are often faulty. Why? Because our interpretations of our experience are often inaccurate" (p.22). The "accuracy" of our interpretations of our experience is undermined, or contaminated, by our beliefs, generated from childhood, about who we are, who and what others are, and by questions of valuation: what is important and how we should live. In other words, we have to stand outside of our basic understandings of ourselves and the world, our social and familial practices, in order to "influence our children positively" (p. 22). The implicit assumption of this view is that there is an ahistorical, atemporal position from which one should ideally raise children and that all past parenting was not worthy of being handed down. This is a breakdown view of parenting that can offer improvement in the parenting of those who have themselves experienced devastating parenting or abuse and have no coherent or meaningful family traditions of parental care; but it undermines those family traditions which do work to facilitate maternal practice. It also ignores the gap between acquisition of formal guidelines for parenting and the experiential learning which is required in order to know-how and know-when to apply the techniques.

This book advocates a program of behavioral modifications by which parents can modify the behavior of their children. Parents are drilled in the advantages of positive, rather than negative, reinforcement. The rules for

parenting are formal, abstract and are to be learned by parents via reading and study. Parents are then tested by a series of "quiz" questions to see if they have "learned" the material at the end of each chapter. Finally, the parent is given a form on which to chart his or her "Plan for Improving Relationships". The very brief narrative examples do not develop a notion of the particular child of a particular parent. No distinction is made between mothers and fathers, between male and female children, nor is age of the child ever an issue. They are universal examples assumed to be relevant to all families, regardless of gender or class distinctions. The role of culture or ethnicity is ignored. The book is replete with reductionist statements such as "All behavior has a social purpose. The goals of misbehavior are: attention, power, revenge, or display of inadequacy" (p. 17). The inherent ambiguity and open endedness of the parent-child relationship are ignored. Parents are not encouraged to trust their own instincts. In fact, they are told that those basic intuitions are frequently "faulty." Learning or "training" is purely a formal process.

It is relevant that the book in its entirety deals with problems of breakdown in the parent-child relationship. It is indicative of the degree to which parents' confidence in a coherent and meaningful, taken-for-granted tradition of child rearing, historically taken up in a transparent and

uneffortful way, by virtue of being a member and participant of a particular culture, has been undermined. Such coherent traditions are increasingly becoming marginalized by the media attention given to "experts" who offer their advice in the service of producing a better "product." For middle-class Americans who reject the parenting traditions of their own mothers, there is no taken-for-granted everyday of child rearing. It is a painful, deliberate and conscious process to "learn" parenting, much as one learns how to play chess or be a nurse or an airline pilot: One learns in a very explicit, formal, conscious way certain facts and rules that are then taken up haltingly and with great anxiety in the situation. There is no acknowledgement of everyday familial and social practices as resources for learning how to mother a child. Rather, these practices become suspect and must be unlearned. Frequently, it is only with a second or third child that the skills and practices of parenting come to feel taken for granted and everyday, as the "experts" recede into the background.

A troubling aspect of this shift from learning coherent everyday traditions of child rearing to learning from the "experts" is the fact that the everyday practices and traditions included inherent notions of the good, which fit the cultural milieu of the family. The experts, on the other hand, are never explicit about what goods they, in fact, offer their expertise in the service of, other than a

more efficiently produced "quality" product. This parallels the drive in rational/empirical social science research to set aside questions of value, preferring to consider only isolated, neutral "facts", a project which has come under considerable criticism (Taylor, 1985a, 1985b). What is overlooked, in this view, is the way in which the STEP position, in fact, does establish certain values, or goods, and undermines others. In particular, it promulgates a normative view of parenting in which those who deviate from the norm because of class, ethnicity or gender show up as deficient parents. In sum, in the view of experts such as Dinkmeyer and McKay, parenting is a set of technical skills, not a coherent social practice of experientially learned skills grounded in implicit notions of individual and social goods.

The Relationship of Cultural Institutions to the Practice of Mothering:

Nowhere in our culture is mothering's status as a marginalized practice more evident than in the dearth of cultural institutions that support and encourage family life. Birth is a private, and often technical, affair, and modern women frequently see childbirth rituals as something they have to invent, not as something given in the community and the culture. Rituals around childbirth are largely restricted to the giving of gifts at the baby shower. Women no longer look to their own mothers for material help or for

advice and support. Whitbeck (1983) describes the lack of cultural stories showing childbirth at all, let alone women in childbirth as heroes, whereas men are frequently portrayed as heroes in stories of war (and frequently as heroes in labor and delivery when they function as labor coaches). When an infant is born, the mother frequently returns home with her baby within 24 hours, to a house where there may be a flow of welcoming friends and neighbors, but little in the way of material support, or acknowledgement of the difficulties and exhaustion engendered by the new infant and the reorganization of the household, to say nothing of meaningful rituals or traditions for facilitating mothering practices or for honoring and welcoming the new family member. One need only read descriptions of community practices around childbirth in the colonial period, where women in the community descended on a birthing woman's home and set up housekeeping for weeks while the mother recovered from childbirth (Cott, 1977) to realize the vacuum of social practices into which new mothers are now thrust. Fathers are generally denied the right to any kind of parental leave, effectively denying them the possibility of providing meaningful material and emotional support to mother and infant, and access to their infants for the purpose of developing a relationship.

For women who leave a job to have a baby, maternity leave is often equated with disability leave, as we have no

federally mandated, universally available paid maternal leave policy in this country, and disability leave is frequently invoked as a pseudo-substitute. Childbirth is thus treated as a medical condition. When the uterus and episiotomy are "healed," the mother is expected to return to work as though everything is "back to normal." Recent research on women's physical health during the first postpartum year suggests that recovery from childbirth commonly takes longer than the six weeks it is currently allotted by physicians and work place policies (Gjerdingen, Froberg, Chaloner, & McGovern, 1993), as did the women in this study by their accounts of their postpartum recoveries. Instead of feeling physically or emotionally "back to normal," a new mother returning to work has had her world transformed. She has been newly constituted by her status as mother of her particular baby. Furthermore, on returning to work she must cope with an incoherent, disorganized, inaccessible and expensive childcare system. Often, she must also cope with feelings of guilt and sorrow at leaving her infant in the care of some other person. The significance of her relationship to her infant is ignored or trivialized in modern organizational--particularly corporate--life; where any felt responsibility to worthy ends is overwhelmed by subscription to the canons of bottom-line efficiency. As children in our culture are increasingly viewed as the private property of individual

parents, the business world becomes ever less unencumbered by any responsibility for facilitating mothering practices. Any overarching sense of the good which frames a working mother's ethic of care is challenged by the company's demand for her primary allegiance. Hewlett (1986) forcefully documents the lack of a clear social policy supporting working women and their families in America today.

In our contemporary culture we are so imbued with the importance of productivity that it is hard to "just be' with an infant. The endless job of cleaning, feeding, changing and playing with an infant often feels unproductive, empty of meaning and importance, especially since mothers aren't paid for it: the cardinal measure of productivity in our culture. In a 1986 Harvard-Stanford alumni poll (Harvard Magazine, 1986), almost half of the respondents thought that women who stay home with families are less respected than those who work. Borgman (1984) points out that as the family's responsibility for the material circumstances of its survival are gradually eroded, so are the coherent and meaningful traditions which shape family life and give parental responsibilities meaning and weight, with the result that "parental love is deprived of tangible and serious circumstances in which to realize itself" (p. 226).

Our cultural self-understanding in the United States makes mothering as practice problematic. Our highly individualistic notions of agency, grounded by the values of

rational choice and autonomy, are inconsistent with the experience of mothering as practice. As Swidler (1987) points out, present day adult commitments represent the demise rather than the fulfillment of the search for identity:

> In contemporary literature even the sacrifice of parents for their children has been brought into question. Several modern novels portray a conflict between sacrifice for someone else, including children, and the necessary attention to the imperiled self. Novelists can now portray children as predators or enemies who demand without giving, who threaten the necessary self-nurture of their parents....Self-sacrifice, which once seemed the ultimate proof of love, now seems suspect. (p. 120)

Mothering as a practice seeks to reassert the moral value of commitment and connectedness, of the self who finds identity through being in relationships and finds moral significance in an ethic of care. I subscribe to feminists' contention that the ethic of care embodied in maternal practices must be drawn in from the margins where it is private and invisible and made an organizing principle for all human relationships.

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Appendices

A: Demographic Questionnaire

Name_____ ID#_____

Address_____

_____

_____

Telephone_____

Age_____

Spouse's age_____

How many years have you spent in school?_____

Do you have any professional degrees?_____

Are you presently married? yes____ no____

If yes, how long? _____

Did you live together before being married?_____If yes, for how long?_____

Have you or your spouse been married before?
_____
_____
_

Are you presently employed? Yes____ No____
Full-time____ Part-time____

What is your occupation?_____

How long have you been working in this occupation?_____

What is your spouse's/partner's occupation_____

What is your approximate annual household income?
less than $10,000_____

$11,000 - $20,000_____
$21,000 - $30,000_____
$31,000 - $45,000_____
$46,000 - $60,000_____
$61,000 - $75,000_____
$75,000 - $100,000_____
greater than $100,000_____

What percentage of your household income is contributed by you?

What is your ethnic background?

Asian_____
Black_____
Caucasian_____
Latina_____
Native American_____
Other_____

Do you consider yourself a religious or spiritual person?

If yes, what do you mean by being religious or spiritual?

What is your religion?

Catholic_____
Jewish_____
Protestant_____
Other_____
None_____

Are you actively involved in a church or synagogue?_____

Did you grow up in or are you now involved in a larger social network, a community, that has a particular focus (for instance, a church, a labor union, an ethnic group, a political organization) and helps shape your identity?

B: Interview Schedules

Work history and meanings (Time 1):

1. Can you tell me the story of how you got to this point in your life? Can you tell me the story of this pregnancy?
2. What kind of work do you do?
3. Can you tell me the story of your career, how you came to be where you are now? How do you know when you've made it in your career? Do you plan to "make it"?
4. How important is your work to you? Why? What does your work mean to you? What does your career mean to you?
5. Are you satisfied with your progress in your career?
6. What are your plans/hopes for the future?
7. In what ways do you think your work has influenced you; the kind of person you are?
8. What do you feel you accomplish in the type of work you do?
9. Can you tell me the story of how you decided to have a baby now?
10. Describe a particularly satisfying experience at work.
11. Why was this satisfying?
12. Describe an incident at work that you found particularly stressful.
13. Why was it stressful? What did you do about it?
14. Do you anticipate returning to work after your baby is born?
15. If yes, when?
16. Why did you choose that time? Do you have to return to work for economic reasons?
17. What kinds of supports do you have for your dual roles at work and at home? i.e work colleagues, family, friends.
18. Are there any people in your life who are critical of your choice to combine career and childrearing?
19. Do you have maternity leave? Paid?
20. How do you think having a baby will affect your career?
21. How do you feel about that?
22. Are your work demands flexible, i.e. will your work easily accommodate the time demands and inevitable problems a new infant brings (like illnesses, childcare problems)?
23. Do you anticipate changes in your commitment to and feelings about your work after your baby is born?
24. How many hours do you typically work per week? Your spouse?
25. Do you now or have you had a mentor? Male or

female? With children?

26. Overall, on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how satisfied would you say you are with your career?

27. What effect does your work involvement have on your marriage?

28. What effect does your spouse's work involvement have on your marriage?

Work Meanings (Times 3, 4)

1. Have you returned to work? If no, do you miss work? What aspects?
2. Can you describe how the transition from home to work was for you.
3. What kind of person do you feel pressured to be at work? At home? Are there any important differences between the way you are at home and at work?
4. How important is your work to you?
5. Are you satisfied with your progress in your career?
6. How many hours are you working? Are you satisfied with the number of hours you are working? If no, would you prefer to work more or fewer hours? Why?
7. What are your plans/hopes for the future?
8. How do you think having a baby has affected your career?
9. How do you feel about that?
10. Describe a particularly satisfying experience at work.
11. Why was this satisfying? Was there anything stressful about this event?
12. Describe an incident at work that you found particularly stressful.
13. Why was it stressful? What did you do about it? Was there anything satisfying about this event?
14. Knowing what you know now, would you have timed your return to work differently? Why?
15. Who cares for your infant when you are at work?
16. How do you feel about his/her care?
17. If you could alter professional policies related to maternity leave, how would you alter them?
18. How important are your social relationships with co-workers?
19. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest, how satisfied are you with your work? What is satisfying? What is not satisfying?
20. How do you experience time these days? As you go through your day what does time feel like? Do you find yourself thinking about time a lot? Do you find yourself guarding it, conserving it, making the most of it? Or does it flow without much thought?
21. What effect does your career have on your marriage?
22. How do you and your spouse negotiate your respective work schedules/commitments?

Meanings of motherhood (Time 1):

1. Do you have an image of yourself as a mother? What do you look forward to in being a mother? In having a child? What about your spouse?
2. Did you always intend to have children?
2. Can you tell me what considerations led to your having a baby at this time? Was this pregnancy planned? What were your spouse's feelings about having a baby now?
3. What aspects of mothering appeal to you most?
4. What is a good mother like? What qualities does she have? Where do your notions of "good" come from?
4. Is there anyone in your mind who stands out as a particularly good mother? Tell me why you think so.
5. Is there anyone in your mind who stands out as a particularly bad mother? Why?
6. What is most important for you in raising your child? In how your child turns out?
7. Have you had any experience with infants?
8. What do you expect being a mother to be like?
9. Do you have any particular hopes, fears, concerns about being a mother?
10. What's the ideal situation for raising a child?
11. Do you think your own mother was a good mother to you while you were growing up? How much like or unlike her are you? How do you feel about that?
12. Do you plan to breastfeed? How long?
13. What plans have you made for childcare, if any?
14. What percent of you is mother? and what percent other?
15. How long have you been married
16. Are you happy with your marriage?
17. What kinds of things do you enjoy in your marriage?
18. What kinds of things are problematic?
19. On a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied are you with your marriage?
20. Is your marriage more romantically based or is it more like a partnership or friendship?
21. CAn you talk to your husband about your feelings/concerns? How do you solve problems?
22. Some women experience increased feelings of dependency during pregnancy. Has this happened to you? If yes, how do you feel about that?
23. Have you ever had problems with depression?
24. On a scale of 1 to 10 how self confident would you say you are? Is self-confidence ever a problem for you? Do you worry about whether you can "handle" things that come up for you in your life?

Phone Interview at two weeks:

Type of delivery?_____

What was delivery like? (How was it different from what expected)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Baby's name_____

Baby's sex_____(Hoped for?)_____

Baby's health_____
_____
_____
_____

Breastfeeding?_____
_____

How's it going?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

When planning return to work?_____

Meanings of motherhood (Time 3):

1. How do you feel about yourself as a mother? What do you like best about being a mother?
2. How has motherhood changed your life?
3. Tell me about your baby. What is s/he like? What kind of temperament does s/he have?
4. What aspect of becoming a mother was most surprising to you?
5. What aspect of becoming a mother was most difficult for you? Easiest for you? What does mothering ask of you? What skills does mothering require?
6. Who do you talk with about mothering issues?
7. How has parenthood affected your marriage? Do you feel satisfied with your marital relationship?
8. How do you feel about your child's affect on your time?
9. What does being a mother mean to you?
10. What expectations do you have for your child?
11. Can you think of any turning points that changed your thoughts or feelings about being a mother?
12. What is most important to you in raising your child? In how your child turns out? What personal qualities would you like your child to have when s/he grows up?
13. How has being a mother changed who you are as a person?
14. How has being a mother changed how you think about your life?
15. How have you been learning how to be a parent? How does one learn how to be a "good" mother?
16. Who do you turn to for advice on caring for your child?
17. Do you look to your own parents for help and advice in parenting?
18. Has the experience of being a mother been what you expected it to be before you had your child?
19. How has your experience of mothering been different from your experience of working as a_____?
20. How is your mothering style similar to or different from your own mother's? Did your mother ever work? How did you feel about that?
21. How do you and your husband divide the household and childcare responsibilities? Who does what percent? Are you satisfied with this arrangement? Does this arrangement fit with your self-image of yourself? If you aren't satisfied with these arrangements, have you tried to change them? To what effect? If not, why not?
22. How does your spouse support you?
23. When did you return to work outside the home? How many hours a week do you work? What number of hours would

you prefer to work? How do you feel about having to work more/less than your ideal? What problems does it present for you?

24. Do you cope with other things differently from the way you cope with motherhood?

25. What happens when being a good mother conflicts with being a good_____? Give me an example of when this has happened to you.

25. What aspects of mothering are you best at?

26. What aspects of your life do you draw on to help make mothering easier? Whom do you feel nurtured by?

27. Describe a situation that epitomizes for you how you were cared for by your parents.

28. Are there things that you want to convey to your children that your parents passed on to you?

29. How much of you is mother?(%) How much of you is other?(%)

30. Do you get out by your self? Do you get out together as a couple alone?

31. What happens in the evening when you and\or your husband returns home from work?

32. What's the ideal situation for raising a child?

33. Are you still breastfeeding? What is it like? Does anything stand out about it? How long do you plan to breastfeed? What do you enjoy about breastfeeding?

34. Has your relationship to other women with children changed since you became a mother?

35. How do you feel about responsibilities to the larger community? Have these feelings changed since you had your baby?

36. Tell me about your childcare arrangements-how did you come to choose this situation? What do you like about the situation your child is in? What concerns do you have about it?

37. How do you feel about your body now? ARe you satisfied with the way your body looks and feels now? Are you surprised by the way your body looks and feels?

38. AS adults, we tend not to have a lot of close physical contact with others like we have with a baby. What is that close physical contact like for you?

39. How do you feel about yourself as a person?

40. How does your husband's work involvement affect your experience of motherhood? Your family life? Your marriage?

41. On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with your marriage? Can you talk to your spouse about your feelings/concerns? How do you solve problems?

42. Do you feel that you are primarily career oriented or family oriented? Which comes first to you?

43. Are you aware of times in your mothering where you lose a sense of time and awareness of what is going on around you?

Family Rituals Interview*

Most families have certain ways of carrying out the activities of daily life. Some aspects of daily life are more important for some families than for others. I'd like you to tell me about how these activities occur in your family.

1. Morning routines: Describe what happened in your home this morning. Who got up first, cared for the baby (if born), who left for work, and what other chores were taken care of? Was this morning fairly typical of your mornings? Are you conscious of the clock? How do you experience time during these morning routines?

2. Evening routines: Describe what happened in your home last evening or the last evening that you were home together. How was dinner prepared and by whom, who cleaned up after the meal and what activities occurred up until bedtime. Was this a fairly typical evening routine for your family? Are there any particular feelings associated with the dinner hour, with preparing the meal?

3. Bedtime routines: Describe how you put the baby to bed in the evening. What was important to you about that event? Do you believe its important for a baby to have or be on a schedule?

4. Play routines: Describe a recent episode of playing with your baby. What happened and who was involved? Was this a typical episode of playing?

5. Routines for household chores: Please describe how chores get done in your family. Who does what, when. How do you feel about this? How do you feel about this work? Are there some aspects you find more satisfying than others? What about your spouse? Is there anything meaningful about this work?

6. Routines for caring for ill children: Has your baby been ill recently? What happened and who cared for your baby? How typical was this episode of illness and the way you dealt with it?

7. Special family events What is the most recent family celebration or family event that occurred. Describe what happened. What was important about it for you? Has the importance of events like these changed since your baby was born?

8. If you had a Saturday or Sunday to do anything you wanted, what would you do? Why is that important to you?

How is that different from a typical Saturday?

In general, how predictable are things around your home? Can you pretty much count on what will happen from day to day or is it hard to predict what will happen next?

What activities are important for your family? i.e. visiting family or friends, getting away on vacation, participating in church or community events.

What family rituals/celebrations/memories do you recall from your childhood?

Looking back at your family, what did they place the most value on; what was central in their lives? What did they go by?

*Adapted from Bennett & Wolin, 1984

Coping Interview*

I am interested in learning about what aspects of becoming a mother are difficult or stressful. Can you tell me about a recent event that stands out for you as being particularly stressful?

1. Tell me what happened.
2. What led up to the situation?
3. What were your thoughts, feelings and reactions to the situation? What were your priorities during this incident?
4. What did you do? Were there any principles or rules guiding your behavior in this incident?
5. How did you feel afterwards?
6. How did the action change the situation?
7. What else did you consider doing?
8. Who was most helpful to you in this situation?
9. Looking back on it now, is there anything you would do differently?
10. Did you learn anything new from the situation? Did it change your mothering practices in any way?
11. Is there anything about this situation that my questions haven't covered?

Can you now describe a situation that was particularly satisfying and meaningful for you as a mother?

1. Tell me what happened.
2. What led up to this situation?
3. What were your thoughts and feelings about the situation?
4. Were these feelings different from previous feelings you had about being a mother?
5. Did you take any action in this situation?
6. Did you learn anything new in this situation?
7. Was anyone else involved in this situation?
8. Is there anything else about this situation that you think I should know about, something my questions didn't cover?

*Adapted from Lazarus & Folkman (1984)

Spouse Interview

1. Were you and your wife in agreement about the decision to have a baby?

2. What has becoming a parent been like for you? For your wife? How has becoming a father changed your life? How you think about your life?

3. What has been most surprising to you about becoming a parent? For your wife?

4. What has been most difficult for you about becoming a father? Give me an example-when did this last happen to you? For your wife in becoming a mother? Tell me about a recent event where you felt like a good father. How does one learn how to be a good father?

5. How has your marriage affected the way you parent your child?

6. How has having a baby affected your marriage, your finances, your relationships with your own parents, your energy, the way you and your wife communicate, your sex life?

7. What happens in your home at the end of the day? How do you and your wife "touch base" with each other at the end of the day?

8. Do you feel that your wife is supportive of you as a parent? AS a career person?

9. CAn you talk with your wife about your feelings/concerns? How do you feel about the level of ommunication in your marriage?

10. Do you get out by yourselves as a couple?

11. How do you feel about your wife having a career?

12. How do you share the responsibilities at home with your wife (who does what percent, divided into childcare and household)? How did you come to have this arrangement? Are you satisfied with it? If not, have you tried to change it? If not, why? Do you think your wife would like you to do more or less or is she happy with the way things are? Do you feel differently about household vs. childcare responsibilities? Do you and your wife share a common view of how clean the house should be kept? If not, is this a problem?

13. What do you think is most difficult for your wife about combining career and motherhood?

14. How important is your work to you? What do you feel you accomplish in the work you do?

15. Would you describe yourself as primarily career oriented or family oriented? What is most difficult for you in combining parenthood and work (give an example)? Would this change if your wife wasn't working?

16. Do you feel disadvantaged in your career by having a wife with a career? What are the advantages/disadvantages

of having a wife with a career?

17. What happens when being a good father conflicts with being a good _____? When being a good husband conflicts with being a good ____?

18. What is the ideal situation for raising a child?

19. How much of you would you say is father and how much is other (i.e. percentage wise)?

20. How has work affected your transition to fatherhood?

21. Do you think about your baby at work much?

22. How do you feel about your wife returning to work? The timing?

23. On a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied are you with your marriage? Your career?

24. Describe a situation that epitomizes for you how you were cared for by your parents.

25. Did your mother ever work?

26. Are your parents living? Do you look to them for advice or help in parenting? What is your relationship with them like?

27. Are there things that you want to convey to your children that your parents passed on to you?

28. How do you feel about having another child?

Appendix C
Log of Critical Incidents

In this log I would like you to keep an account of events in your experience of mothering that are either very difficult or stressful, or very moving and meaningful to you (sometimes events have both components!). You can be as brief or as extensive as you wish. If you need more room, please use the back of the page.

Date_____
Time_____

Setting_____
Describe
incident_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Why was it stressful or meaningful to
you?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What did you do about
it?_____

_____