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GENERATION "X" PROFESSIONAL WOMEN LEAVING THE WORKFORCE TO BECOME FULL-TIME, STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MOTIVATION, MEANING, AND MINDFUL PARENTING

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THE WORKFORCE TO BECOME FULL-TIME, STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MOTIVATION,
MEANING, AND MINDFUL PARENTING

A Dissertation

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

in

The Department of Sociology

**by
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B.S., University of Southern Mississippi, 1990
M.A., University of South Alabama, 1994
December, 2006**

This dissertation was written in memory of my great-grandmother, Alice Laverne Westmoreland Sabin, "Mama-Dear," and in dedication to my grandmother, Violet Lorraine Sabin McWhiney, "Mamaw," both of whom were from generations without these choices but whose life sacrifices appeared effortless and whose love for family was ever present and always without question.

Also, to my mother, Sally Ann McWhiney Miller, my aunt, Patricia Ann Shackelford Proctor, and my stepmother, Theresa Torres Shackelford, my "steel magnolias," each of whom, in her own way, has exhibited the courage and strength that was required of women in their generation.

Lastly, to all women, regardless of parental status, of whom life requires much, and by whom many sacrifices are made.

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ABSTRACT

Using qualitative data gathering and analysis, the current trend of professional women leaving workforce to rear their children full-time is examined. Women in the second generation to enter the labor force in large numbers indicate that there are factors that push them out of the workforce, such as a non-family friendly workplace, and factors that pull them back home, such as a profound need to rear their own children. While the transition from professional to stay-at-home mother is a complex process, the women in this study deal with this identity shift, and its attendant resistance, by framing their change in terms with which they are familiar – success and achievement. Through these lenses, they are able to reconstruct motherhood roles, using a combination of traditional gender normative expectations and new expectations based on changes in the social structure over the past twenty to thirty years.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> My mom worked when I was growing up. [My husband's]
> mom was at home. I want to give them more than I had
> and we can afford it. – Dana Graham, mother of four and
> former certified public accountant.

BACKGROUND

When Betty Friedan wrote about the plight of beleaguered housewives who were slowly,

silently, going both mad and brain dead from their dreary lives at home (Friedan 1963), little did she

know that forty years later, many women would be still going mad and brain numb – if not brain

dead – from ALL that is expected of them (Bolton 2000; Crittenden 2001; de Marneffe 2004;

Hochschild 1997). The Baby Boomers and their mothers who fought for "liberation" so that women

could be afforded equal opportunity in the workplace, did not realize that this choice could, in itself,

also become a constraint on women. Rather than having too little in which to use their creative

energy and intelligence, the current generation of child bearers and child rearers may feel that they

are spread too thinly. They are not only expected to continue to hold primary responsibility for their

households – including rearing "successful" children - but they are also expected to bring in their

share of the household income, as well as to move up the career ladder (Ferree 1991; Hays 1996;

Mederer 1993; Spain and Bianchi 1996). The equal *opportunity* that was promised a generation ago

has turned into yet another role *mandate*. Within two generations, the ideal role for young middle-

class women has gone from married housewife to a combined role of career woman and homemaker

(Giele and Holst 2004).

Now, some women in the next generation, generation X, who can afford to not *"do it all"*

are opting out of the workplace – at least temporarily. Generation X has been defined as a smaller

generation born directly following the baby boomers, 1965-1979 (Chung 2004). Because baby boomer women were the first to enter the labor force in unprecedented numbers, generation X women are the second generation to be in the workforce in large numbers. A few years ago, the "buzz" about this phenomenon received a name, "the opt-out revolution" by Lisa Belkin (2003) in a New York Times Magazine cover story, in what was an ongoing examination of the issue by many sides, including liberals and conservatives, journalists and academics (c.f. Armour 2004; Briggett 2003; Catalyst 2000; Chung 2004; Crittenden 2001; Crittenden 1999; Crosby, Williams, and Biernat 2004; Hewlett and Luce 2005; Hulbert 2004; Jeffrey 1996; Wallis, Chapman, Cole, Kloberdanz, Dale, Rawe, Rubiner, Steptoe, and van Dyk 2004; Warner 2005).

While not every woman can afford to stay or return home, those who are making the choice may also be consciously *reconstructing* the roles of stay-at-home mom. Drawing both on traditional motherhood roles and the skills that they learned through higher education and career management, these women are creating new roles – in many ways these are hybrid roles that combine aspects of the former housewife and the former career woman's roles. In this way, they are in a sense, "role-making" (Williams 1993: 89), creating a new version that combines both traditional and new role expectations.

Between 1997 and 2000, the employment rate for married women with children under one year old dropped from fifty-six percent to fifty-one percent, with statistics in 2001 (U.S. Department of Labor 2002) and 2002 (U.S. Department of Labor 2003) remaining the same, and then dropping again in 2003 to fifty percent (U.S. Department of Labor 2004a) and in 2004 to forty-nine percent (U.S. Department of Labor 2005), and remaining at forty-nine percent in 2005 (U.S. Department of Labor 2006). Arguably this trend has been seen as due to the slowing of the economy, but it is also true that this is the first-ever reversal for this group of women since the Current Population Survey

began following the figure in 1976 (U.S. Census Bureau 2002), including other times when the economy was slow. In addition, the decrease in paid employment was mostly among women who were white, over 30, and well-educated [at least a bachelor's degree] (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). During the decade of the 1990s, then, there was an increase in the number of professional class women opting to be at home with their children rather than work full-time (Armour 2004; Catalyst 2000; Wallis et. al 2004). For example, while thirty-three percent of women with an M.B.A. are not working full-time, only *five* percent of their male counterparts hold the same employment status. To look at it another way, only thirty-nine percent of male M.B.A. graduates had spouses who worked full-time, while eighty-nine percent of female M.B.A. graduates had spouses that worked full-time (Catalyst 2000).

In some senses, women who spend a considerable portion of their early adult lives obtaining credentials for professional careers should, theoretically at least, be the last ones to forgo climbing the career ladder in order to rear children. Given the very real consequences to not only their own economic future, but also their children's economic stability should something happen to the full-time breadwinner (Crittenden 2001; Presser 1995; Waldfogel 1997), leaving the workforce does not make rational, economic sense. After all, professional-class families are also those that can *most* afford quality childcare and professional careers are more likely to provide job autonomy, both of which have been shown to have a significant positive relationship to psychological wellbeing for working mothers (Hughes and Galinsky 1994). Taken together, these factors – education/career investment, financial security, and factors shown to promote positive wellbeing – strongly suggest that mothers in professional, dual-career families should be the *least likely* to leave their careers to rear their children full-time. But, are career building, future economic security, job autonomy, and having access to daycare that is safe and staffed by educated workers the only considerations?

Drawing upon a century of psychological writing and research on the subject of motherhood, psychologist Daphne de Marneffe (2004: 3) suggests that the strongest influence on whether a mother stays home is what she describes as, "the desire to mother" or "maternal desire," or the profound need to rear their own children. Despite the women's liberation movement and women's unprecedented entrance into the labor force in the 1970s, de Marneffe suggests that women still have a deep need to be with their children. Further specifying this phenomenon, Marneffe states that maternal desire is,

> …not the duty to mother, or the compulsion to mother, or the concession to mothering when other options are not available. It is not the acquiescence to prescribed roles or the result of brainwashing. It is the longing felt by a mother to nurture her children; the wish to participate in their mutual relationship; and the choice, insofar as it is possible, to put her desire into practice. (2004: 3).

From a sociological perspective, though, this maternal desire, or drive, may be explained by the pervasive gender role ideology with which we continue to socialize girls *and* boys to believe that childrearing is not only a woman's responsibility but that the mother can do a better job of it for her own children than can anyone else, including the children's father (Chodorow 1978). This traditional gender role ideology is so pervasive in the culture that rarely does society, save a few academics, activists, and a smattering of journalists, ever question it. More often the issue involves the best ways in which *mothers* can deal with/juggle/balance both work and family responsibilities.

Thus, overall, the motives for professional women staying home to rear their children consist of factors that both *push* mothers out of the workplace and *pull* them back to the home front following the birth of a child (Hewlett 2002a). Although the factors that push women out of the workforce, such as non-family friendly workplaces are substantially influential, the factors that pull women into the home may be the more influential of the two.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The objective of this research is to explore the motivations for professional women to leave the paid workforce to rear their children as full-time mothers. Specifically, this research contributes to scholarly knowledge in the areas of women and work, the division of household labor, and gender inequality in general, by using individual, in-depth interviews to explore the ways in which former career professionals negotiate the meanings of full-time motherhood and the choice to stay home in their everyday lives.

The project differs from other work in these areas by focusing on career professionals from upper-income brackets. Because these women have invested a large portion of their adult lives in their educations and careers, going home as a full-time mother represents a substantial life course trajectory change and runs counter to the evidence supporting reasons for women in this social location to stay in the workforce. Having been raised by "baby boomer" mothers who tried to do it all, have some women in "generation X" decided that doing it all is doing too much? Do the original "latch key children" not want to find their own children in the same situation? Bolton (2000: 144) suggests that this second generation of women who are approaching equal opportunity in the workforce may be, "women who grew up on the receiving end of feminism, with mothers who had tried to do it all and whose legacy to their generation X children was indigestion." But, on the other hand, is leaving a hard-won career a betrayal to one's education or to the progress women have made in the past thirty years?

While the transition from professional to stay-at-home mother is a complex process, the women in this study deal with this identity shift, and its attendant resistance, by framing their change in terms with which they are familiar – success and achievement. Through these lenses,

they are able to reconstruct motherhood roles, using a combination of traditional gender normative

expectations and new expectations based on changes in the social structure over the past twenty to

thirty years.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the following chapter, a brief history of the institutionalization of motherhood is addressed, along with its relationship to women's participation in the paid labor force. Today's gendered workplace and gendered home front are examined, including discussion of the possible factors that *push* mothers out of the labor market and *pull* them back home. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of ways in which women respond to structural changes in normative expectations for motherhood, with an emphasis on reconstructing roles (or role-*making*) as a reaction to social structural changes.

WOMEN'S PAID AND UNPAID LABOR

Many professional women exit the career track at some point before retirement. There are a number of factors that influence this decision, both pushing them out of the workforce and pulling them back home (Hewlett and Luce 2005). The history of women and work is one in which labor in the paid and unpaid sectors has been, historically and currently, deeply intertwined. Never before have women had such widespread opportunity in the paid labor market, yet such opportunity does not come without costs. For example, the opportunity to compete in the marketplace has not carried with it a substantial decrease in domestic responsibilities. Until a paradigm shift occurs and the burden of home and family falls equally on both parents' shoulders, women will be forced to make hard choices with regard to their life priorities. Receiving equal treatment and equal *perception* in the workplace could not make up for continuing to be nearly solely responsible for the housework and childcare at home. To some extent, then, parity in the workplace depends upon parity on the home front.

History and the Institutionalization of Motherhood

The pervasiveness of "traditional" gender role ideology is part of the reason family care is still mostly performed by, and viewed as the responsibility of, women (Becker and Moen 1999; Bird, Bird, and Scruggs 1984; Kamo 1988; Presser 1994; Ross 1987). Historically, the family was a single working unit when agriculture was the primary means of production (Lopata 1993). All family members had responsibilities in order for the farm to run properly.

With the rise of industrialization, workers moved from the family farm to the market where they were paid wages rather than producing their own goods and services (Lopata 1993). This change created a separation between paid work and the household and, with the high wages that accompanied it, provided the opportunity for many women to remain at home (Davidoff and Hall 1987; Reskin and Padavic 1994; Skolnick 1991). These separate spheres were reinforced for middle class women in the late 1800s by the Victorian cult of domesticity that emphasized the spiritual and moral importance of a woman's submissiveness and subordination to her husband, her family, and her household. The ideal woman was a wife and mother who took her duties seriously due to the importance of rearing morally upright future citizens. Monetary compensation for "caring" work was not something a "good" wife and mother would even consider (Lopata 1993; Skolnick 1991). And, thus, in contrast to earlier generations of women who were considered essential economic assets for their contributions to the successful running of the family farm, "the moral elevation of the home was accomplished by the economic devaluation of the work performed there (Folbre 1991:465)." As a result, the late 19th century wife was to perform her domestic duties out of love rather than for any sort of monetary gain. She was to be an "angel of the hearth" and tend to her home and family in joyful submission (Crittenden 2001: 47). These feminine ideals further

institutionalized the division of gender roles and the female, domestic, unpaid worker (Lopata 1993), a socially-accepted normative role for women.

This normative role is so entrenched in the culture that even when women went to work during the first and second World Wars, they were still seen primarily as wives and mothers, working only to come to the aid of their "boys" overseas (Weatherford 1990). Following the wars, women were expected to return home to their "rightful place" rather than to stay in the workplace and compete with men for jobs (Kossoudji and Dresser 1992). So strong was this normative role for women that, despite proving their competence in the workplace, women were encouraged by not only their peers but also by the U.S. government and the media in a campaign to return to their place as homemakers (Cho 2005; Friedan 1963; Halberstam 1993; Weatherford 1990). The decade of the 1950s saw an economic boom that enabled many working and middle-class married women to stay home and rear a family while their husbands earned a living wage (Halberstam 1993). The cultural and economic climate surrounding pre-baby boomer mothers, some of whom were college graduates, led to only one appropriate "choice" – that of perfect wife and mother (Friedan 1963; Grant 1994; Kossoudji and Dresser 1992; Lopata 1993; Skolnick 1991; Weatherford 1990).

However, by the 1970s many women felt that they deserved more than a life of domestic drudgery. The solution to the lack of opportunity for women was an additional *choice* built into the system, such as the choice to have and build a career outside that of wife and mother, becoming fully self-sufficient and self-actualized human beings (Friedan 1963). Employment rates for women aged twenty-five to sixty-four increased from fifty percent in 1970 to seventy-five percent in 1994 and wives at all educational levels increasingly began to work outside the home (Spain and Bianchi 1996), in part, to help compensate for declining real hourly wages (Bluestone and Rose 1997). In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, participation rates increased most rapidly for married women

with children; by 1990 nearly three-fourths were employed. From the 1970s to the 1990s, with each successive cohort, women's rates of full-time employment have grown to resemble men's (Spain and Bianchi 1996), and acceptance of women's market work has increased (Brewster and Padavic 2000). Work now appears to be a major source of satisfaction for many women, as it is for men. In light of the reinterpretation of the meaning of domestic motherhood to include paid employment and the increasing educational and workplace opportunities for women, the new image of motherhood has become the employed "supermom" (Hochschild 1989: 230), or the mother who does everything – employed full-time and responsible for all or most of the childcare and household labor (Thurer 1994). However, at home, women still bear primary responsibility for housework (Barnett and Shen 1997; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Hochschild 1989; Milkie and Peltola 1999; Robinson and Godbey 1997, Schor 1992), and the work/family conflict continues to adversely affect family functioning (Coltrane 2000; Glass and Estes 1997).

Thus, despite the institutionalization of motherhood as the ideal type for women, over the past quarter century, cultural expectations for women have morphed to *include* paid labor market work as well. Currently, women are expected to hold primary responsibility for the household and childcare, and to *bring in their share* of the family income (Bolton 2000; Crittenden 2001; de Marneffe 2004; Giele and Holst 2004; Hochschild 1997). In addition to becoming more liberated with increased workplace opportunities, women have, in some senses, also become more constrained due to increased responsibilities of home *and* paid employment.

The Gendered Workplace

Overall, in the past twenty years, women have made significant strides in approaching equality in the workplace. Unfortunately, this progress has not applied to all women. Women who have come the closest to closing the income gap and breaking through the glass ceiling are women

who are not mothers. For example, as women begin to approach pay equity in the workplace, now earning approximately seventy-six percent to seventy-eight percent of the amount men earn, *mothers* come no where near equality (Bolton 2000; Crittenden 2001; Crosby et al. 2004; U.S. Department of Labor 2004b; Marini and Fan 1997). Essentially, for women, the career road is not nearly as blocked as it used to be, unless they happen to be one of the ninety percent of women who is also a mother (Crittenden 2001). When comparing the average earnings of full-time workers, married mothers (of children under 18) earn seventy-five percent of the amount that married men of *any parental status* earn. Even worse, single mothers earn only sixty-one percent of what married men of any parental status earn (U.S. Department of Labor 2004b). Even when controlling for human capital factors such as marital status, experience, and education, Waldfogel (1997) shows that being a mother of one child reduces a woman's earnings by six percent and two children reduces earnings by thirteen percent, while Budig and England (2001) show that motherhood in general produces a wage penalty of seven percent per child. This very real penalty for becoming a mother – though not a father – is what Crittenden (2001: 88) calls the "mommy tax" and what Budig and England (2001: 205) describe as the "wage penalty for motherhood." While this issue is complex and the reasons for it are numerous, it is explained in large part by the nature of the labor market and the amount of unpaid labor for which women remain responsible, including unpaid caregiving to children and elderly relatives (Ferber and O'Farrell 1991).

In addition to inequality in pay, there are a number of other *push* factors that may prompt mothers to leave the workforce. While mothers may be overcome with *pull* factors, such as the desire to rear their own children (de Marneffe 2004), and decide to leave their hard-won careers to stay home, lack of family-friendly workplace policies may also play a role in the reasons that women do not return to work following maternity leave (Crittenden 2001; Glass and Riley 1998;

Hewlett 2002a; Hewlett and Luce 2005; Hochschild 1997; Wallis et al. 2004). Even when family-forward policies are officially offered, many may hesitate to take advantage of them for fear that they will not be seen as "serious" about career advancement, as well as the perception that management is not supportive of these policies (Crittenden 2001; Crosby et al. 2004; Glass and Estes 1997; Hewlett 2002a; Hochschild 1997). Employer perception of mothers as being less serious or dedicated to their job can do irreparable damage to one's career path. This perception, coupled with the fact that women are still the primary caregivers of children and elderly parents, and, thus, they *are* less willing and/or able to work extremely early or late hours, to travel, and to accept a promotion or transfer that requires them to move (Crosby et al. 2004), makes career advancement much more difficult for mothers.

Hewlett and Luce (2005: 43) call the this phenomenon of highly credentialed women leaving the workplace to rear children, "brain drain," referring to the loss of valuable female talent. Brain drain occurs, in part, because the linear career path that men have taken for generations does not mesh with women's continued domestic responsibilities. After all, a person's prime childbearing/childrearing years and prime career-building years are the same (Hewlett 2002b) – approximately twenty-five to forty-five years of age – leaving women who choose both to become mothers and build a career heavily burdened. While some companies have adopted flexible career paths with plans for reduced work hours and extended leave periods, the majority of companies (or leading law firms or academia) have not adapted their traditional career trajectories to allow room for those who bear and rear children and, because of this, either talent is wasted or lost completely (Crittenden 2001; Hewlett 2002a) or women forgo having children altogether (Ropers-Huilman and Shackelford 2002).

> One of the worst-kept secrets of the past two decades is the quiet
> exodus of highly trained women from corporations and the leading

professional firms. Faced with institutions that have no tolerance
for anyone with family responsibilities, many mothers have
taken the only available option – just say no (Crittenden 2001: 28).

Support for family-friendly policies by management and unaffected workers (men; women
without children) is difficult given the cultural understanding that childcare is still a woman's job –
and, it is a job that is certainly not important enough to interfere with "real" work, that is, paid work
(Crosby et al. 2004; Sheppard and Zietsma 1997). For example, Glass (2004) found negative effects
on wage increases if employees made use of any of the family-friendly work policies that were
already in place, such as flexible work schedules, telecommuting, reduced hours, and dependent
care assistance.

Not only is this negative effect on wages problematic, but over the course of a career, losing
paid work time (lost benefits, wages, retirement, and promotion potential) in order to perform
unpaid caregiving costs women dearly (Crittenden 2001), and it is one of the primary reasons for
the high level of poverty among women over 65 years old (Bolton 2000). Even if caregiving women
plan to re-enter the labor market after years away, finding employment at the same level at which
they left may be difficult, if not impossible (Hewlett and Luce 2005). In contrast to baby boomer
mothers who were less likely to return to work after being out of the workforce for a substantial
period of time, generation X women are more likely to want or need to return to the workforce
following an extended period of time at home (Chung 2004). However, failing to be "plugged in" to
professional networks, not maintaining professional licensure, and rusty job skills lead to what is
known as career "atrophy" (Groot, Schippers, and Siegers 1988: 220), especially among career
professionals with specialized skills and education that need updating periodically. The longer a
woman is absent from the professional workforce, the more atrophy may be compounded.

[A]s a woman does not work during certain periods, less
working experience is accumulated. [Moreover] during

13

periods of non-participation, the human capital stock suffers
from additional depreciation due to a lack of maintenance.
This effect is known as atrophy (Groot et al. 1988:220).

In addition to career atrophy, some women may find difficulty transitioning from a "career woman" identity to a "stay-at-home mom" identity. While many women experience what Bolton (2000: 1) describes as the "third shift," psychological torture over their personal and professional choices and whether they are good enough at anything they do, some women find a sense of meaning in their paid work that would otherwise be missing. Thus, when women, who have invested so much into their education, their careers, and their identity as a professional, step out of that role – even temporarily – they may find the loss of identity much more challenging than the loss of income. Being asked what one "does" usually refers to paid employment and stating that one is a stay-at-home mom, regardless of prior career or future aspirations, may be a cocktail party conversation ending nightmare (Bolton 2000; Crittenden 2001; Wallis et al. 2004).

<u>The Gendered Home Front</u>

With a generation of anecdotal and empirical evidence behind them, educated professional women know that, while women entered the labor force in unprecedented numbers in the 1970s and 1980s, men have not made up the housework deficit at home (Bolton 2000; Crittenden 2001; Hochschild 1989; Kamo 1988; Shelton and John 1996). Although men's participation in housework has marginally improved (Coltrane 2000), the majority of housework is still performed by women whether or not they also work in paid employment (Crittenden 2001; Hochschild 1997; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003). Recent studies suggest that women perform two to three times as much housework as do men (Barnett and Shen 1997; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Milkie and Peltola 1999; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Schor 1992). The result is that working women must either

perform housework themselves *after working an 8-12 hour day* or hire a housekeeper (Becker and Moen 1999; Hochschild 1989, 1997).

In addition to the time spent in paid employment, performing housework at the end of the day and on the weekends contributes to the growing leisure gap between women and men (Crittenden 2001; Hochschild 1997; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003). Specifically, leisure time for women decreased two percent between 1965 and 1998, while men's free time *increased* three percent during the same period, or an extra one hundred-sixty-four hours of leisure time over the course of a year. While that may not initially sound like much of a difference, if calculated as in the workplace this would equal an extra four weeks of paid vacation each year! In addition, for women, "free time," as shown through time-diaries, often includes multiple tasks such as watching children in addition to a "leisure" activity (Mattingly and Bianchi 2003). So, despite the popular notion that mothers are spending less time with their children nowadays due to working full-time, time studies indicate that mothers in the 1990s actually spent more time in the company of their children than did mothers in the 1960s (Crittenden 2001). The difference is that today's mothers have cut out their own leisure time to spend more time with children after work and on the weekends, running from one activity or sport to the next (Crittenden 2001; Douglas and Meredith 2004; Hays 1996; Hochschild 1989, 1997; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003). So, the time that used to be spent playing bridge with "the girls" is now spent on the sidelines of little Susie's soccer match or taking little Johnny to tee-ball practice.

One of the reasons that multitasking may be a coping strategy that is necessary to do everything required of working mothers, is because today's mothers feel pressure to engage their children nearly around the clock in a myriad of enriching activities, sports, and lessons. This phenomenon is what has been labeled as "intensive mothering" (Hays 1996: 4), the "new momism"

(Douglas and Meredith 2004: 4), and the "mother mystique" (Warner 2005: 13). Reinforcing a traditional gender-based division of labor (Arendell 2000), this new momism drives women to continually seek the "best" daycare and schools, along with much more structured learning time and activities than any other generation of children has had (Douglas and Meredith 2004). Professional women are also more likely than less educated women to use intensive, time-consuming child rearing techniques, such as talking and reading more and giving their children choices rather than demanding strict obedience to unquestioned rules (Hays 1996), all requiring more attention and resulting in less down-time for mothers.

But the amount and level of self-sacrifice required of women in this age of intensive mothering is the most insidious element of the new momism. The push for success may be a reflection of a cultural reality that screams that no level of achievement is ever enough and climbing the ladder of success in life must begin as soon as possible (Warner 2005). Many mothers who try to create ultra-successful children while simultaneously building a professional career find that they are running on empty most of the time (Arendell 2000; Crittenden 2001; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Wallis et al. 2004; Warner 2005) and may eventually throw up their hands out of sheer exhaustion and go home full-time. For those mothers who have the financial means to do so, having it "all" still may be possible – just not "all" at the same time.

To combat this situation in which mothers find themselves, Ann Crittenden (2001) writes that the struggle for civil and economic equal rights for mothers is (or should be) the new feminism, suggesting that the heavy burden placed on women who wish to have both children and a career is as unfair and unnecessary as was the unequal treatment of women in the workplace in previous generations. In comparison with motherhood in France, for example, Warner (2005: 16) says that the general culture of motherhood in America is unnecessarily "oppressive" and points to specific

ways to alleviate much of it, such as federally-regulated – and supplemented – childcare, along with

a substantial change in cultural norms regarding women and motherhood, chief among them

changing intensive mothering norms.

In addition to the second shift of housework and intensive mothering, and the resulting

increased leisure gap, many working mothers may spend a good part of what little leisure time they

do have second-guessing their choices, trade-offs, and decisions regarding career and family

(Bolton 2000). Bolton (2000) suggests that this "third shift" of psychological worry may be an

important part of the stress and exhaustion that many working women experience. The third shift

may be a result of internalized gender role expectations or simply pressure from our "age of

anxiety" (Bolton 2000: 3) cultural norms that suggest that women can and *should* "do it all."

Bolton (2000: 4) illustrates this "relentless mental yo-yo" of the third shift with the following quote:

> A woman who leaves her child in day care worries that she is
> failing as a mother; but if she leaves her job temporarily to stay
> home with her child, she worries that she will fail in her career.
> A woman who cries at work worries whether crying is good, since
> she is a woman, or wrong, since she is a professional. A woman
> who spends endless hours taking care of her husband and ailing
> parents feels that she is doing the right thing as a woman, but the
> wrong thing as an independent person (Tavris 1992: 23).

These feelings of guilt include concern about leaving young children at daycare and the

desire to rear their own children (de Marneffe 2004), even after the children are in school. Latch-

key children themselves, many generation X mothers feel that having a parent at home in the

afternoon is more beneficial for older children, giving them structure and guidance that might

otherwise be missing (Alter and Gegax 1998). Many mothers feel that daycare situations are not

ideal and prefer not to leave their children with low-paid workers who may not share their values

and may not provide much undivided attention or learning opportunities (de Marneffe 2004;

Holcomb 1998; Wallis et al. 2004). Rather than the tough questions being answered by the daycare

workers who may not share their values, many women may want to be the ones who guide and instruct their children (Wallis et al. 2004). However, in measuring the development of 6,000 children over several years, Harvey (1999) found no significant differences in language development, academic achievement, self-esteem, and general behavior between children whose mothers worked during the first three years and children whose mothers stayed at home. Whether mothers worked did not matter. The aspects that mattered most were the *quality* of the day care and quality of the parent-child bond. For highly educated, career professionals who can afford quality child-care, the issue may be more about both the quality and the *quantity* of time that they, as mothers, are able to spend with their children (Briggett 2003; de Marneffe 2004), rather than the ability to afford quality outside care. This generation of parents is not satisfied with doling out spurts of "quality" time, long taken as a sufficient substitute for spending a lot of time with their children. They want *quantity* time and some mothers and fathers (Chung 2004) are willing to make career sacrifices to provide it (Briggett 2003; de Marneffe 2004).

<u>Summary</u>

Taken together, these lines of research suggest that although women are achieving ever-increasing pay equity and equal opportunity in the workplace, mothers still earn far less than women who are not mothers and men of any parental status, and there is no housework/childcare parity between the genders at home, even though men have increased their participation marginally. Working the "second shift" of housework and childcare after working a full day at paid employment, leaves women with an extreme lack of leisure time and may leave them physically exhausted; the third shift of psychological concern may leave them emotionally exhausted. Exiting the labor force, then, may be an attractive solution when, financially, there is the option to do so. Many women, however, do not have this option.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We know that some professional women, who have spent years obtaining an education and credentials, finding work, and then moving up the career ladder, are opting to quit following childbirth and return home to rear their children full-time (Armour 2004; Catalyst 2000; Crittenden 2001; de Marneffe 2004; U.S. Department of Labor 2002; Wallis et. al 2004). What we have not been as sure about are the motives for and the meanings attached to this decision and how they go about constructing this new role. That is, we have lacked in depth knowledge about how these women "frame" their decision and this major change in their lives. Overall, I explore how certain factors in their lives interacted to bring these particular women to their present situation (Seidman 2006), their process of remaking the motherhood role, and the meaning that is constructed.

Gender Role Ideology

Women as full-time homemakers is not a new concept (c.f. Becker and Moen 1999; Bird, Bird, and Scruggs 1984; Davidoff and Hall 1987; Kamo 1988; Presser 1994; Ross 1987; Reskin and Padavic 1994; Skolnick 1991). However, *these* women, given the number of years they have spent on education and in the professional labor force, surely do not simply throw down their PDAs to enthusiastically embrace the "housewife" roles of their grandmothers. Although they have technically adopted the classic housewife jobs of stay-at-home wife and mother, they bring with them years of education and career management that their grandmothers – and even their mothers – did not bring. Using traditional roles and skills learned through higher education and career management, these women create new roles, or what Williams (1993: 89) describes as "role-making;" creating a new version of full-time motherhood that combines both traditional and new role expectations. These highly-educated career women-turned-mothers are consciously (or even in some sense unconsciously) *reconstructing* the role of stay-at-home mom. For Williams (1993),

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combining traditional gender role expectations and new role expectations in reaction to structural changes allows a person to "role-make" rather than simply take on the established role.

Following the entry of an unprecedented number of women into the labor force in the 1970s and 1980s (Spain and Bianchi 1996), the normative roles for modern married women with children began to both include paid employment *and* the traditional home-based responsibilities of motherhood (Barnett and Shen 1997; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Hochschild 1989; Milkie and Peltola 1999; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Schor 1992; Stryker and Statham 1985; Thurer 1994). For baby-boomer women, this expectation about "doing it all" ushered in the first generation of "latch-key" children since World War II when the original use of the phrase referred to children left at home while their mothers went to work in the war industry (Random House 1996). Because of their social location as upwardly mobile, educated, and financially successful adults, some of these former "latch-key" women have the option to quit paid employment in order to stay home full-time to rear their own children. In this case, there are no normative full-time stay-at-home mother roles from which to draw unless they turn back to their grandmother's generation. Rather than taking the antiquated housewife roles of generations past or taking the current normative roles of the "do it all" baby boomer mother, these women may reconstruct the roles of full-time housewife based on their own education and career experiences as well as those of traditional homemakers of the past.

In order to consider how familial roles have changed and are changing, we must first consider the importance of roles within society in general and within families specifically. Discussion of the general notions of the construction of self and roles to an elaboration of role-making versus role-taking with regard to women's location within their families follows in the sections below. Role-making, or the reconstruction of motherhood roles, includes an additional element that conventional role-taking does not.

<u>Process and Structure</u>

Social constructionists suggest that role-taking is an active, fluid, process by which actors take the role of others within the constraints of social structure (Berger and Luckman 1966; Mead 1934; Stryker 1980). Mead explained, in part, how this occurs by explaining the process of the reflexive self who first learns to take the role or attitude of others. Taking the role or attitude of others is a tool used by individuals, through interaction with others, in order to understand that which constitutes appropriate role behavior (Cook 1993). If one takes the role or attitude of another, (s)he is able to respond to the anticipated response of the other individual, leading to situationally appropriate behavior (Mead 1934). Out of this social interaction, individuals can "construct" meaningful behavior, leading to a fairly stable construction of self (Mead 1934).

Seeing oneself as others do is taking the attitudes of others, allowing one to imagine other's reaction to his or her behavior. Social structure or society (in the Meadian sense) is created when people align themselves and their roles in this way, and while it is fairly consistent, the resulting social structure is not completely rigid. Mead's pragmatism states that behavior is a process only verifiable in terms of outcomes – the more we interact with others and, thus, with the norms of society, the better the outcome of the process (Mead 1934), implying an institutionalization of sorts. Mead's model of human behavior shows that instead of just reacting, human beings constantly reflect, anticipate, and adapt, according to the situation, supporting a cybernetic-type model, or one that involves feedback from both self and others (Cook 1993).

Blumer (1969) emphasizes both meaning and interpretation. He states that the way humans interact with things (people; society) is based upon how they view that particular thing and that these perspectives or meanings are derived from interaction with other people. The *process* makes the thing real, not the thing itself. Because of this, the same thing may have different meanings at

different times due to differing interpretive processes. Motherhood, for example, will be interpreted differently based on social location and temporal factors, such as the generation within which someone was reared. Thus, for Blumer, while taking into account the influence of social structure, the interaction of individuals with others to create meaning is of the utmost importance. He suggests that humans act toward things according to our meanings for them and that meaning comes from interaction (Blumer 1969). However, Blumer (1969: 5) also suggests that meaning is a "formative process" and can be and is continually revised. In this way, he implies normative roles formed through interaction *and* social structure but, like Mead, does not make these points explicit.

In contrast, Stryker's model explicitly includes both interaction and social structure. He suggests that any analysis of social life must start with the person, move to the level of structure, and then be able to go back again to the person (Stryker 1980). In this way, social scientists can capture the essence of human nature - group life and individual interaction - and the influence each has upon the other (Stryker 1980; Thoits 1995). Thus, while actors do act and react to situations based on interactions with others in the situation, they also are constrained by the social structure (role, organization, social location, institution) of which they are a part (Stryker 1980; Thoits 1995; Turner 1962). Social structure provides the resource for social interaction. Roles provide the basic building blocks of society. For Stryker, the process between social structure and interaction is circular; similar to Mead's cybernetic model but more inclusive of social structure.

Agency

The social structures in which identities are constructed exist, in part, because many individuals tacitly agree that they serve an appropriate or useful purpose (Berger and Luckman 1966; Stryker 1980). In other words, because certain social structure has been perpetuated, it is stronger in traditions and social norms, becoming a "typification of one's own and others'

performances (Berger and Luckman 1966: 72)." Social structure, then, provides explicit and implicit guidelines for establishing and maintaining identities within certain contexts (Berger and Luckman 1966; Stryker 1980).

But what if those certain contexts or "typifications" no longer fit the situation? What if there are structural changes, such as women entering the labor force in unprecedented numbers, which have resulted in changes in normative expectations that women have experienced over the past thirty years? Williams (1993) suggests that when faced with structural changes, individuals will "reconstruct" normative roles, rather than simply applying the established role to a situation that has changed. However, those who are reconstructing roles have, historically, met with opposition from the *status quo*. In her findings from research on tradition and change in Mexican-American families, Williams (1993: 89) discusses the "resistance" encountered when trying to reconstruct roles. That is, when actors try to remake roles rather than simply take on established roles, they experience resistance not only from others but also from themselves, supporting the idea that social roles are both socially constructed and reflexive. Now that the second generation of mothers are in the labor force in large numbers, change in normative expectations for the meaning of motherhood may be occurring again, especially for those most able to afford to have choices. The role of "do it all supermom" that was established by baby boomer mothers may be beginning to be reconstructed by generation X mothers who have the choice to do so.

Role-taking and Role-making

Ralph Turner (1962) first introduced the concept of role-making by utilizing role theory in conjunction with process, structure, and agency. He suggests that actors *organize* their interaction according to the consistent expression of behavior by another. While emphasizing the interaction, he also focuses on the social structure that limits the type of interaction that is available. In addition,

Turner suggests that while the interaction (process) may define the situation and the structure (conformity) defines the possibilities of the situation, actors may also reinterpret the situation and its possibilities, if necessary (agency).

While Turner's model of role-making is more subtle, Williams (1993) discusses a more intentional approach, based on a *reaction to changing social structure*. Rather than simply taking a role – acting how they believe others expect them to act – those who "role-make," according to Williams (1993), are more proactive in creating new roles for themselves, often consciously incorporating both traditional (or socially stable) roles *and* emerging ones. As a result role-*making* is viewed, specifically, as a reaction to structural changes.

Overall, roles reflect, and are constrained by, the current social structure of any given time period in history. When structural conditions change, roles change also. Each generation of women reconstructs motherhood – to a greater or lesser degree – to fit the social structure of which they are a part. Within generation X, there are many women who cannot financially afford the choice to go against normative motherhood roles brought forth by baby boomer mothers. They must participate in paid employment in order to help provide the essentials for their families. However, certain social locations allow some within this generation the opportunity and choice to reconstruct these role expectations. For those women who have the option to become role pioneers, the question then becomes – what is involved in the process of going against established role expectations? That is, how do women in certain social locations reconstruct the role of stay-at-home mother?

Small groups in society have always violated role-taking and have encountered the sanctioning that resulted in order to preserve the normative role. However, as more people violate roles, the sanctioning holds less persuasive power and becomes weaker, eventually changing the role altogether. Because baby boomer women were the first generation to enter the labor force in

such numbers, they were more concerned with proving their merits in the market than with pressing for "family-friendly" policies at work (Hochschild 1989). On the other hand, generation X women, because they are the second generation of women in substantial numbers in the work force, may not feel the same pressure to prove themselves, since sanctions are now applied to much lesser degree. As a result, members of generation X in general – women and men – are shown to have much greater emphasis on family and family-friendly workplace policies, such as sequencing, telecommuting, reduced work hours, and flexible work hours (Chung 2004).

<u>Summary</u>

Taken together, the social construction of roles, self, and identity, points to the way in which members of society create normative roles and create the expectation that those who follow will take on established roles. However, this process is also a cybernetic one that allows reflection not only with self and others in any given interaction but also allows consideration of social structure, especially when that social structure is in flux. Motherhood has always carried with it substantial normative expectations and, despite resistance, changes when the social structure surrounding it changes. Addressing these changes is an ongoing process within which generation X mothers now find themselves. Speaking in depth about this process to several mothers in this generation and social location has provided insight into the process of meaning-making regarding their choices and how they are reconstructing the normative expectations for motherhood.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using qualitative methods and analysis, this investigation explores the participants'

experiences with work and family, motivations for their life course change, and meaning-making

within this context. This chapter outlines my research design, including reasons for choosing to use

qualitative methods and analysis, the data collection process, descriptive statistics, the interview

protocol, and the procedure that was used for analysis and interpretation of the data set.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This exploratory research project uses qualitative methods, including a focus group and

individual, in-depth, interviews to examine the motivations for some generation X career

professionals to exit the workforce to rear their children full-time. Utilizing methods that provide

the most insight into the question at hand is vital in social research. When trying to understand

reconstructed family roles, along with the meanings of these new roles to the women who are

interviewed, hearing the words of the respondents themselves is essential.

Description of the Sample

To obtain respondents, I employed the snowball method (Burgess 1991) with contacts that I

have through friendship circles, professional associations, and acquaintances. The respondents were

at least "once removed" from myself. That is, the participants were women who are affiliated in

some way with my contacts instead of the contacts themselves. Thus, every precaution was taken to

preserve the integrity of the data that were collected. Throughout the process I found additional

respondents opportunistically (Honigmann 1991), by asking those I interviewed to refer me to

others. In this way, I was able to interview women from a variety of professional occupations.

Inclusion criteria required that participants have a number of characteristics relevant to the study. Specifically, the women needed: a) to be born between 1965 and 1979, and thus, members of generation X (Chung 2004); b) to be married; c) to have a minimum educational attainment of a bachelor's degree, with a post-graduate degree preferred; d) their last paid employment to have been professional in nature; and e) to currently be a full-time stay-at-home mother. These criteria ensure that respondents are all members of the cohort that is theoretically salient for this research. That is, they are women who have spent significant time obtaining educational credentials and building professional careers, can afford the choice to quit paid employment, are in their early to middle child-rearing years, and are in the post-baby boomer generation, known as "generation X."

As was expected, the respondents formed a fairly homogeneous group. Overall, twenty-eight interviews were scheduled. However, due to respondent family issues and conflicts, summer schedules and vacations, and time constraints, twenty-three interviews were completed.

Race, Age, and Region. All twenty-three participants were white and ranged in age from twenty-nine to forty-one. There was a mean age of thirty-six with a modal age of forty-one. Most respondents were in the upper half of the age range. Unfortunately, I was not able to find many respondents at the lower end, twenty-seven to thirty-two years old. Most of the respondents lived in the deep south, with four telephone interview exceptions from the southwest, the west, the north, and the northeast.

Socio-Economic Status. Nearly all of the respondents in this study had a current household income above seventy-five thousand dollars. Many had a household income well above this amount; seven selected the highest bracket listed, "over two hundred thousand," for their current household income. However, several respondents noted that their family income had decreased by

half or almost half when they quit work and that making up the difference had been a struggle, sometimes lasting years.

The group was comprised of former professionals married to professionals. Every respondent had at least a bachelor's degree, with a little over half of the respondents also having post-graduate degrees, including, three master's degrees, eight juris doctorates, one doctor of philosophy, and one medical degree. Because my initial contact was a law firm partner, the "snowball" began with attorneys, leading to a little over one-third of the sample being comprised of attorneys. In their interviews, several of the attorneys note that the field of law is especially non-family friendly because of the demands on employees' time, competition for partnership, and because it is a client-driven business. However, other professionals note some of the same characteristics in their careers, most notably, certified public accountants and medical professionals.

All of the respondents' spouses had bachelor's degrees, with the majority also having post-graduate degrees, including, six master's degrees (one of which was a master's of business administration), three juris doctorates, three doctors of philosophy, one doctor of dental surgery, and one medical degree.

Religion. All but one respondent selected a Christian denomination as their religious preference, with "Catholic" being the modal selection. Religiosity seemed to be fairly high for this group; sixteen selected either "one or more times per week" or "two to three times per month" as the number of times they attend church. One respondent selected "none" for religion and "not applicable" for religious participation.

Time. The amount of time that the respondents had been out of the workforce varied greatly from one year to seventeen years, with the average amount of time being around four and a half years and the modal number of years being three. The large majority of the respondents were

married for several years before starting their families, with the average being around five years. Only one respondent was pregnant before getting married.

Children. The number of children ranged from one to six with the average being nearly two and a half and modal number of children being two. Children ranged in age from eight months to eighteen years, but the two oldest children, seventeen and eighteen, were step-children. The large majority of the families were first marriages with their own children. Of the children, twenty-four were female and thirty-two were male, including one set of fraternal twins and one set of maternal triplets.

Generalizability of Sample. While we know that data gathered from a small number of respondents cannot speak for everyone in a particular category, it is an important beginning for understanding the meanings and motives these women have for their rather substantial life course change. The goal of this study, then, was not to generalize to the population-at-large, or to speak for all families, but to explore the experiences of some members of a specific category of women. Access to the richness of these women's experiences and how they actively construct their daily lives were the objectives. This project was not designed to be generalizable to or to speak for all families. In exploratory research, the objective is to examine the possibilities of a particular situation rather than speak for an entire category or population of people. By exploring these possibilities, new questions may be raised and additional research formulated.

Research Instruments

In order to obtain the most complete picture possible, I conducted a focus group to clarify areas of interest and used individual interviews to gather respondent data. An interview guide containing areas of interest was discussed during the focus group (see Appendix A) and refined and reconsidered before proceeding with the individual interviews (see Appendix B).

Focus Group. Focus groups are shown to be particularly helpful in generating discussion about topics that might not emerge as easily in one-on-one interviews. Participants in focus groups have the advantage of responding to issues brought up by other participants in a supportive environment (Darlington and Scott 2002; Morgan 1997). The focus group members did discuss issues among themselves and made suggestions for the interview schedule. Because this is an exploratory project, additional themes emerged in the focus group that could be further considered during one-on-one interviews with other participants.

This is a project that focuses on the meaning that the participants have for a certain life change. By conducting a focus group prior to the interviews, I had an opportunity to understand the meanings that these decisions have for the participants and to further clarify any assumptions that I, as the researcher, had before going into the field (Blumer 1969).

The focus group consisted of three participants and had one meeting to discuss the project and the issues I wished to examine in individual interviews. Focus group participants were not included as respondents in the study but were asked to suggest others who would possibly be willing to be interviewed. From the focus group referrals, I was able to begin to build my participant pool. Although I requested that respondents email me over the following week with any further thoughts, none did. Using focus group comments and dissertation proposal committee comments regarding the interview schedule and demographics worksheet (see Appendix C), I revised the interview guide and emailed the guide to focus group members for review as a final step in preparation for the individual interviews. No member of the group made any additional suggestions.

Individual Interviews. Following a review of the focus group and any subsequent comments and the discussion of the interview guideline with the focus group participants, I completed the guideline to highlight the general areas that need to be covered in each interview. Starting with the

same question for each respondent, I covered all of the areas of interest, without being too rigid concerning order. For example, many times respondents discussed an area of interest without specifically being asked. In those cases, I was able to follow the respondent's lead and comfort level while still ensuring all areas of interest were covered.

Burgess (1991) suggests that, in order to obtain ideal information, it is essential to allow the respondent to first imagine those about which she will eventually discuss. Because I wanted the respondent to discuss people with whom she is close (family) and her recent life change, I began with the general inquiry, "Please describe what has been going on in your life since exiting the paid labor force." This very general question enabled her to look back at the people and events with which she has been involved and to compare life before and life after she left the workforce, adding context to her narrative (Seidman 2006). Depending upon her style and necessity for probing, this part of the interview lasted several minutes and allowed the respondent to begin to frame the discussion in terms of her motivations to return home full-time. From this response, several participants launched into how the decision to stay home was reached or the process of coming to the decision.

The focused interview portion lasted from forty-five minutes to two hours, with the mean time and the modal time being around an hour and a half. Although a structured interview schedule was not used, a semi-structured guideline was necessary to ensure that the interview stayed focused and covered the areas of theoretical interest. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. An interpretive summary was written following most interviews and included personal impressions (Briggs 1992), the tone and mood during the interview, and any other relevant considerations (Richardson 1994). Case numbers were assigned at the time of the interview to insure participant anonymity upon the initial drafts of findings. Names and other identifying material that correspond

to the case numbers have been kept in a separate location. Because of the snow-ball design and the likelihood of some respondents being acquainted, pseudonyms were assigned for additional confidentiality and anonymity, but specific descriptive information will not be linked to specific quotes. Instead, descriptive statistics of the respondent pool are given in a separate section to illustrate the characteristics of the group.

Before beginning each interview, two copies of an informed consent form describing the study, respondent rights, and researcher contact information was given to each participant to sign (see Appendix D). In the first two interviews, standard demographic questions were asked at the end of the interview. However, upon realizing that the information gathered from the demographic questions would be useful during the interview, I began asking demographic questions at the beginning of the interview. The demographic worksheet gathered the following information: year of birth, marital status, educational attainment (respondent and spouse), professional licensure, former occupation, spouse's current occupation, number of years/months since paid employment, number of children, ages of children, genders of children, respondent's former income range, former household income range, current household income range, religion, and religiosity.

Interview Style/Location. To assist with any sensitivity respondent may have about revealing personal information such as relationship stability, financial stability, and religiosity, I used what Oakley (1981) suggests a collaborative style of interviewing to lessen the possible feelings of exploitation and trepidation on the part of the respondent. In this conversational way, the participants were given the freedom to regulate their contribution to the interview. I allowed the respondents to feel in control of the situation by asking them where and when they would feel most comfortable doing the interview; by yielding operation of the tape recorder to the participant; as well as by promoting a non-intimidating atmosphere. This style of collaboration lends respect to the

participant's wisdom regarding her own situation. When reciprocity or "the research bargain" is an issue, trust will be the deciding factor for whether the interview will be granted (Warren 1977). When trust is preserved between the investigator and the respondent in this way, she is assured that her "voice" will be represented in a fair manner. Trust is also gained in part by assuring the respondents in this investigation total confidentiality in the interview situation and anonymity in reporting (Darlington and Scott 2002).

The majority of interviews were conducted in respondents' homes but, due to this flexible style, it was necessary for some of the interviews to be conducted in other places: a public library (very challenging), a park, a college courtyard, a coffee shop, my office, and over the telephone. The four telephone interviews concerned me initially but upon transcription, I discovered that they were actually very clear and very similar to the face-to-face interviews, with the exception of not being able to read body language.

Validity and Reliability. When interviewing respondents, it is important to regularly keep a check on the validity of the measure. Kirk and Miller (1986) suggest that particular attention given to asking the right question is, of course, one of the most important ways to assure validity. Continuous comparison to previous interviews, published research, and the theoretical literature also enhance construct validity. Although the order of the interview changed, each area of interest was covered with each respondent. The problem of reliability is addressed by keeping rich accounts of procedures and routines. Throughout the process, I examined the interview procedure to ensure as much reliability as possible. However, it may be impossible to absolutely replicate this (or just about any) investigation because the real world constantly changes (Kirk and Miller 1986; Marshall and Rossman 1995). Kirk and Miller (1986: 42) state that, "general applicability of diachronic reliability is somewhat diminished by the fact that it is only appropriate to measurements of features

and entities that remain unchanged in a changing world. In the study of sociocultural phenomena, it is often dangerous to assume that configurations of data would be isomorphic across substantial intervals of time." Thus, while obtaining reliability over time was not my goal, I adhered to methodological strategies that make the results of this investigation a compelling contribution to current family sociology. Those strategies included: taking notes of procedures and interviews; tape recording and transcribing the interviews; and, making style or order modifications, if necessary, after each interview (Darlington and Scott 2002; Seidman 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

DATA ANALYSIS

Data gathered from the individual interviews were coded inductively (Strauss 1987) to explore reconstruction of motherhood and role-making in these women's daily lives. Preliminary analysis began with the first interview. Following the first individual interview, each subsequent interview was compared with the interviews before it. As these cases became available, a rough review was conducted to look for areas to modify or more fully explore. This preliminary analysis strategy was repeated after each interview. Strauss (1987) suggests this continual data negotiation as a way of forming a more complete picture of the findings and also as a way to locate missing areas that are yet to be explored which will provide additional depth to the data. The resulting benefit of this procedure was additional probes that, while staying true to the original interview goals, provided greater detail than what might have been gained without the procedure. Utilizing this method also gave me an opportunity to begin to see the "big picture" of the data set through out the process of data collection.

The Researcher's Role

Necessarily in qualitative research as an interpretive process, the researcher is the primary, albeit human, instrument by which data are collected and analyzed. Exploration, description of

process, and search for meaning-making within narratives do not lend themselves well to numbers, machines, or finite answer possibilities. Although the interview process is a social interaction between the interviewer and the respondent, ideally the interviewer will come to the process with as much of an open-mind as possible (Seidman 2006).

At the end of one of the initial interviews, the respondent asked whether I had children. When I said that I was not a parent, she remarked that she was relieved because during the interview she had been hesitant to discuss the depth of her feelings about being a stay-at-home mother for fear that I would be offended. In her mind, I was obviously working and if I had children, I could possibly be offended that she believed strongly that mothers should stay home if at all possible. After my disclosure, she described how important it is for children to be reared at home and not put in daycare. As a result of this conversation, I then very briefly described my parental status – not a mother – prior to each interview. Several other respondents noted their relief that they could express their opinions freely due to my non-parental status. I had to wonder how this project would have differed if I were, indeed, a working mother.

Transcription

Because the initial impressions of data begin when first interacting with them during transcription, I transcribed the interviews myself rather than hire an outsider to perform this task. Although transcribing the data myself was labor-intensive, intimate knowledge of the respondent's words, tone, and inflection greatly aided analysis and comparison with others in the study (Marshall and Rossman 1995). There is no substitute for this task, however laborious. Regarding transcription of one's own data, Riessman (1993: 57) suggests that, "It is here that analytic induction is most useful. A focus for analysis often emerges, or becomes clearer, as I see what respondents say." Transcribing one's own data following each interview also serves as a reflexive check on the

effectiveness of the interviewer (Briggs 1986). However, during several weeks of data gathering I was interviewing several respondents a week. For some of the interviews in the middle of the project, I listened to the entire tape following the interview but did not transcribe until later. This process seemed to serve the purposes of reflexive check and probe modification as well as transcribing immediately following the interview.

Coding

Qualitative computer software to identify themes and patterns was not used, but rather an organic, hands-on approach served this process thoroughly and intimately. Using the research purpose and questions, and previous literature, to form a general direction for the investigation of patterns that may emerge from the data, coding began with broad themes (Darlington and Scott 2002; Strauss and Corbin 1998). The following broad areas were given a corresponding color tab and noted, by color, in the transcripts: process of leaving workforce, workforce difficulties, division of household labor, role overload, self-esteem and identity, and future issues (work, finances, divorce). As these broad themes became more concrete and more specific areas of interest emerged, notes were written on the colored tabs to correspond with more specific codes, such as non-family friendly workplace, maternal desire, gender differences, traditional gender role ideology, divorce, future work, and others. Lastly, the transcripts were reviewed numerous times and notes were taken as a "picture" of data patterns began to become clearer, including the surprising pattern that emerged involving factors "pulling" mothers home being emphasized more strongly by the respondents than factors "pushing" them out of the workforce.

The coding process in qualitative analysis is one of reduction (Seidman 2006). Starting with comparing broad patterns during the data collection phase, analysis continued by becoming increasingly familiar with the transcripts. In this way, more intimate knowledge of the entire data

set produced more specific patterns and areas of interest. In addition to closely reading and comparing the data, judgment based both on training and previous literature should be used by the researcher (Mostyn 1985). Inductive analysis requires allowing the data to form our understanding of them and provide emergent constructions of the participants' lived experience and meaning-making. Thus, the findings of the project were produced through a triangulation of respondents' voices, the human research instrument, and scholarly literature on the general topic.

Interpretation

Preliminary analysis began with the first interview and continued with each interview throughout the data gathering process, creating the foundation for interpretation of the data set as a whole.

> Interpreting is not a process researchers do only near the end
> of the project. Even as interviewers question their participants,
> tentative interpretations may begin to influence the path of their
> questioning. Marking passages that are of interest, labeling
> them, and grouping them is analytic work that has within it the
> *seeds of interpretation* (Seidman 2006: 128 – emphasis mine).

While respondents' words are the data with which I have worked for this qualitative research project, they cannot *only* "speak for themselves." The raw data must be analyzed and interpreted, just as quantitative raw data must be interpreted after being run through a statistical package. The triangulation of the raw data, my research and analysis skills, and previous scholarly work will, together, produce an interpretation of the findings. There are several steps in this process: conducting interviews, transcribing and reading the transcripts, organizing common concepts, themes, and patterns, and making connections (Seidman 2006). Chief among these, for the purpose of interpretation, is making connections. Common threads that are found throughout the data and that are also theoretically salient formed the bases for interpretation.

SUMMARY

        In this chapter, I have discussed the logic supporting the choice to use qualitative methods,

the data set, and data analysis for this research project. For a project that explores new or

reconstructed social phenomena, use of a focus group and in-depth, open-ended interviews is most

appropriate. Allowing patterns to emerge and comparing those patterns with other interviews,

interpreting common threads throughout the data, as well as scrutinizing for theoretical salience,

produces a thorough and compelling project on the topic of career professionals leaving the

workforce to rear their children and for the areas of gender, families, and work in general.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: MOTIVATION

>I had the sensation that I was on a merry-go-round and it was
>just spinning, FAST, FAST, FAST, FAST, FAST, and that
>everything was an effort to get to the next thing….Hurry up
>and eat so we can hurry up and go to school so we can hurry
>up and come home and go to dance so we can hurry up to feed
>you so we can hurry and go to bed so we can hurry up and do it
>again. I mean, I never felt like I could just relax – ever.
>– Anne Planchette, mother of five and former health care provider.

>I couldn't leave her….There was no way I could fathom having
>a baby. You know, I wasn't really into it and when I had her, it
>was such a different thing than what I ever thought. Like before
>I had her I thought, 'oh well, have the baby and she just will
>work around our schedule; she'll fit into OUR schedule and just
>kind of move on.' You know, we'll just take her with us. And,
>that's just not how it goes. I just could not imagine having a
>baby….If you have the opportunity to stay home and you can
>financially swing it, I could not imagine letting someone else
>raise her from seven [in the morning] to seven [in the evening].
>There was no need in it and I just didn't want to miss out on
>anything. So, I didn't want to send her to daycare when I didn't
>need to. – Amanda Renoit, mother of two and former advertising
>executive.

Two main trajectories regarding motivation emerged from the data in this project: factors

that *push* women out of the workforce and, factors that *pull* them into the home, reflecting the

scholarly literature on women's motivations to leave the workforce to rear children full-time.

Although many more women may feel these push and pull factors, professional women are the ones

who are most able, financially, to make the decision to quit work in order to stay home full-time.

They are also the ones who, logically, should be the least likely to do so.

Overall, the respondents in this study emphasize the influence of the pull factors much more

so than the push factors in their decisions to leave the workforce. Although workplace challenges

played a part in their decisions, the pull of home and motherhood weigh more heavily than a non-

family friendly workplace. These respondents arrived at the decision to stay home full-time from two general positions: either they had always imagined themselves staying at home with their children so they postponed motherhood until it was financially possible, or they, unexpectedly, realized that they simply "could not" leave their baby in daycare or even with a nanny. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which respondents initially framed the decision to quit the workforce to stay home with their children full-time.

PUSH FACTORS

Non-Family Friendly Workplace

While women have entered the workforce and the professional world in unprecedented numbers over the past three decades, there continue to be numerous obstacles for women who decide to become parents. Unlike the "father premium" that men may receive in the workplace when they become parents, women employees are still penalized for becoming mothers (Bolton 2000; Crittenden 2001; Crosby et al. 2004; U.S. Department of Labor 2004b; Marini and Fan 1997).

Several respondents discuss how, beginning in pregnancy, they were not only viewed differently but were also given less responsibility, as if their employers did not expect them to return from maternity leave. Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for nine years, says that even though she had worked at her firm for several years and her work was of exceptional quality, when she became pregnant with her first child, "they just started assuming you're not coming back, assuming that your work will change, assuming that your priorities will change….It was very obvious that a couple of my higher profile clients were not my clients anymore." She does note, however, that in her opinion, mothers' priorities do and should change but that after giving birth, the nature of her business made it nearly impossible to continue to work in the same capacity or at the same pace as she did before becoming

a mother. She says that "at the end of the day if the work wasn't done, they expected you to stay." Before the birth of her first child, she routinely worked eighty to eighty-five hour weeks and this was not possible, nor desirable, after she became a mother.

Not only are women viewed in a different way professionally once they become parents, but over the course of a career, mothers are given less responsibility, less compensation, and less opportunity for promotion (Budig and England 2001; Crittenden 2001; Crosby et al. 2004). Some of the reasons for these differences are strategic; employers want employees to be fully available and present in their job. Some of the reasons, however, are socially constructed in that how mothers are perceived in the workplace is much different from – and much less professional than – how non-mothers (men and childfree women) are perceived (Budig and England 2001; Crittenden 2001; Crosby et al. 2004; Waldfogel 1997). Honey McAllister, a mother of two and a former attorney who has been out of the workforce for two and a half years, notes that because she was the only woman professional in her office, she was expected to socialize with the men. So, she went to lunch with them, participated in the fantasy football pool, would have a beer with them after work, and other similar interactions because she felt that she would not be viewed as a peer if she went to lunch with the only other women in the firm – the secretaries. When she became pregnant things changed. She explains,

> Being pregnant, I saw some kind of…shift in how I was
> perceived. I wasn't just one of the guys anymore; I had
> more of a female side….I didn't lose my edge because
> they never disrespected me in any way but it was more
> 'how are you doing with the pregnancy'….I was more
> [of a] girl….And, so you have to watch that also in the
> workplace….[because] they're thinking in the backs
> of their minds 'is she going to be on maternity leave?
> Is she going to come back?' And they can't not hire you
> or fire you because of that…but, they think about it.

Some of the motivation for leaving the workforce, then, even for professionals, lies in the way in which the workplace is structured. The ideal employee, or employee model, continues to be the male model (Crosby et al. 2004). That is, employers expect that the successful professional employee will have a linear career path without any substantial breaks beginning after college or post-graduate work, will devote the mainstay of his or her focus and attention to the job (especially in the early years), and will continue to seek increasing responsibility over the course of time (Crosby et al. 2004). Carla Brown, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four years, describes how this "male model" of the successful professional was pervasive in her work environment. She says that before she had children, "they loved me there because I worked every Saturday…but I knew they would have never hired me if I would have had a kid or if I would have been pregnant." Another respondent talks about the structural bias against mothers, or future mothers, that is clearly evident in the professional world. Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, says that during her job search, in several interviews she was asked about where she saw herself in ten years. She says,

> that was a hard question for me [and] I'm not sure if it
> is a very fair question for women….I think there is
> some prejudice built into that [but] you're not legally
> allowed to ask women about their plans for the future
> as it relates to children.

One of the problems with this linear, male model of the employee, then, is that during the peak career-building years, people also tend to begin their families (Hewlett 2002b). Because childrearing is still viewed culturally as primarily the responsibility of the mother, many women professionals must make the choice to forgo having children, quit work at least temporarily, or accept being on what is now become known as the mommy track (Crittenden 2001; Hewlett 2002a;

Ropers-Huilman and Shackelford 2002). In the professional world, the mommy track is one that includes less time and responsibility and very little chance of promotion to the highest levels (Schwartz 1989) – partnership or tenure, for example. Carla Brown notes that the women at her firm who were successfully able to negotiate a reduced schedule, waited to have children until they made partner. She says that, "once you're partner, it's easier to negotiate a good reduced schedule….If you negotiate a reduced schedule before making partner, *you're not going to make partner*."

Several respondents mention the mommy track, saying that they either had been on it before quitting (a staff attorney versus a partner-track attorney, for example) or that they would have liked to have had the option but tracking in this way was not possible at their workplace. Mary-Louise Kendall, a mother of three and former bank officer who has been out of the workforce for seventeen years, describes the improbability of being able to be on a mommy track in her career,

> You couldn't just say 'well I want to stay at the
> level I am and not have any more responsibilities'
> …you had to play the corporate game like you
> wanted to keep getting promoted….It wasn't good
> enough that I would be an assistant manager, that
> way I could leave at a decent hour and wouldn't
> have as many responsibilities. No, you couldn't let
> that be known.

Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, talks about her desire to be on the mommy track and the impossibility of it in her profession,

> I couldn't see myself ten years down the road as this
> partner who was very busy working all the time….
> You can't tell them that. No, I don't think you can
> go into the interview telling them, well I want to go
> on the mommy track….So, I just kind of said what
> they wanted me to say.

Another respondent, Amanda Renoit, a mother of two and former advertising executive who has

been out of the workforce for four and a half years, notes that client-driven professional careers,

such as advertising, law, accounting, sales, and medicine, do not fit well with parenting

responsibilities. She says,

> It's not family-friendly. It's very demanding of your
> time because you're always working on someone
> else's schedule, because the client really dictates
> everything….I would work late [and] get up early.
> I would be there until 10:00 at night getting packets
> ready for presentations.

In recent years, many companies have worked to address some of these issues by offering

family-forward policies to assist those who are building their career and family simultaneously.

Following the "Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993" signed by President Clinton (U.S. Congress

1993), which allows men and women in the workforce to take up to twelve unpaid weeks to care for

a family member and still maintain job security, many companies began to outline additional

policies that took family situations into consideration. Although companies, firms, and universities

may offer reduced work schedules, flex-time, telecommuting, stopped tenure clocks, and other

policies, the expectation is that any professional who is *serious* about his or her career will not make

use of the policies (Crittenden 2001; Crosby et al. 2004; Glass and Estes 1997; Hewlett 2002a;

Hochschild 1997; Spalter-Roth and Kennelly 2004). So while the official policies sound promising,

professional employees may find that actually using them can be career suicide or, at the very least,

a large career handicap.

Several respondents address the issue of being taken seriously as a professional while trying

rear children. One woman emphasize the importance of putting in "face-time" at work as way for

superiors to measure dedication to the job. Carla Brown, a mother of two and former attorney who

has been out of the workforce for four years, talks about how difficult it was to balance the

appearance of dedication with the practical concern of picking up her daughter from daycare. She says that her husband picked up their daughter around four-thirty in the afternoon and then she would "have another two more hours while he was at home with her [daughter] just because *nobody* left that office before six [at night]." Carla emphasizes that even if her work for the day was complete, it would not have been in her best interest, professionally, to leave the office early.

If, after trying to balance work and family, a professional woman does decide to leave the workforce for several years to rear her children, because the workplace remains unfriendly to non-linear career tracks, she may have trouble later returning to work at her former career level. Honey McAllister, a mother of two and a former attorney who has been out of the workforce for two and a half years, understands this reality and talks about perhaps doing something part-time in order to keep up her skills. She says that it is,

> something that you really worry about, being a
> woman….I think you're already down for being a
> girl 'cause of the good ole boy network *every*where
> you turn, and then you've left work to have kids and
> you haven't worked in five or six years. You've lost
> your skills plus you've lost your edge. I mean, the
> workplace has gone on and you're sitting there – you're
> not the young thing anymore coming in straight out of
> school.

Many of these former professionals either have considered working part-time or have taken part-time work, mostly in the form of consulting, to keep up their skills and their networks. Like several other respondents, Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for nine years, points to that fact that when she initially quit work, consulting was an important way to not entirely lose touch with the work world. She says, "after I was home for six months, I did a little consulting with the same clients, previous clients…through my employer." Another respondent, Michelle Bailey, a mother of two and former attorney who has

been out of the workforce for a year, says, "I would do contract work from home….It is really just writing briefs, doing some research, writing memorandums, appellate briefs." And, Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, notes that she did try a little consulting "at first but I found it so distracting that I felt my attention needed to be on my child." In this way, some respondents either eased out of the workforce or are planning to try to ease back into the workforce before losing too many years of experience.

While overall, respondents do not want to return to the workforce in the same capacity as in their previous career, if at all, several of the respondents indicated their awareness that they should keep up their skills in order to be able to re-enter the workforce at some point if they want or if it becomes financially necessary. Many of those who say they would consider re-entering the workforce at some point, also say that they would most likely choose another, less stressful career, because of what Kim Gaines, a mother of one and former sales and technical consultant who has been out of the workforce for two and a half years, describes as the "lifestyle." Kim, with other respondents, concludes that the pace of her former work and family lifestyle together did not allow for much "down-time" or relaxation. Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for nine years, offers that perhaps in the future she would like to do something "more creative," while Mary-Louise Kendall, a mother of three and former bank officer who has been out of the workforce for seventeen years, says that she might be willing to "work in a friend's store" if the opportunity ever arose. Another respondent, Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, says that she is opening a children's book and toy store in six months. She adds that this is not something she would have ever considered before she had children.

Thus, overall the respondents indicate that the modern, professional workplace still remains unfriendly to those, mostly women, who choose to attempt to balance career and family. However, in addition to workplace difficulties, time spent trying fit in everything after work and on the weekends proved highly stressful for numerous respondents. They not only had limited time to spend with their families, but felt stress and guilt due to trying to juggle everything.

The Third Shift

Many respondents who had children before leaving the workforce speak about the "whirlwind" of activities that filled their daily lives prior to quitting their job. In trying to "do it all," women often find themselves questioning whether they are giving enough to their families or they worry that being a good professional will lead to being a bad mother (Bolton 2000). Anne Planchette, a mother of five and former healthcare provider who has been out of the workforce for one year, talks about how "crazy" her life was when she tried to balance a demanding professional career with caring for her two young children. She explains,

> I had the sensation that I was on a merry-go-round
> and it was just spinning, FAST, FAST, FAST,
> FAST, FAST, and that everything was an effort
> to get to the next thing….Hurry up and eat so we
> can hurry up and go to school so we can hurry up
> and come home and go to dance so we can hurry
> up to feed you so we can hurry and go to bed so
> we can hurry up and do it again. I mean, I never felt
> like I could just relax – ever.

Anne and her husband, who is in the same profession, decided that she would stay home after giving birth to triplets last year. She talks about the toll that this pace and worry had on her family and her marriage. Anne feels that this is a common experience for professional women but that most women do not talk about it, thinking that the experience is unique to them. She explains that her friends and her clients had "no idea that I was, you know, jumping out of my skin most days."

Noting that her marriage suffered and she believes other peoples' marriages are suffering because of the pace, anxiety, and fatigue, she says,

> and then people wonder why their marriages fail and everybody takes antidepressants [looking for] a pill to fix it – never mind that my life is out of control and I need to fix it, you know, just give me a pill.

Anne adds that she realized she was in the middle of an unmanageable situation when all the while she was counseling clients to slow down and spend more time with their families, she was not doing so and it was causing a great deal of stress and fatigue.

Several women discuss the difference that they see in themselves now compared to when they were working and participating in what has been described as the "third shift." Bolton (2000) describes the third shift as the additional layer of worry and guilt that many employed mothers feel due to the frenetic pace they must endure in order to care for their family and have a career. Susan McSwain, a mother of six and former certified public accountant and attorney who has been out of the workforce for nine years, says she could never fully focus on her job or her family. She explains,

> It's kind of hard, because one is always – when I'm at work I'm thinking about the kids and are they okay; when I'm at home, I'm thinking about what I need to do at work tomorrow.

Although stressed from juggling a professional career, most of the housework and childcare, some respondents did not even fully realize the psychological strain that they were under until after they quit work. Michelle Bailey, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for a year, says,

> I did not realize how much of my time when I wasn't even working was spent thinking about work. At night in bed, your mind is racing through what you are doing the next day. To completely walk away so that your mind is…so much more at peace. [After quitting work] I

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> would get up in the morning and there was nothing that
> I had to do. You know, I do not have to placate a client
> or justify a bill….I don't have to do that.

Mary-Louise Kendall, a mother of three and former bank officer who has been out of the workforce for seventeen years, sums up the difference in working mothers and fathers, especially with regard to the third shift and the "details" for which women remain responsible.

> Men don't have to struggle. They don't. If [my husband]
> has a meeting until ten at night, he is there because that's
> his job…and all he has to think about is work….But when
> a woman works, she is still over the kids and all that. So
> while she's at work, she's still micromanaging her kids from
> her desk where her husband isn't.

Anne Planchette also reflects what several respondents say about being the one who was responsible for the details of the children and household, even while working full-time. She says that her husband will do anything she asks him to do and that she is extremely satisfied that he is a willing partner and a "good dad." However, she emphasizes that even though they were in the same demanding profession, when she was working

> he would do [anything I asked] but I still felt like there
> was a load on me because I had to keep track of all that.
> It was all in my head what was going on, what needed
> to be done, the schedule of this and that.

And, Carla Brown, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four years, notes that before she quit, she was responsible for about "seventy-five percent of the kid stuff, like doctor's appointments, eating time, when she was sick and that sort of thing." She adds that because her workplace was not flexible enough to accommodate additional child responsibilities, her husband "did about twenty-five percent" and that if her firm had been more accommodating, she would have done all of the "kid stuff."

Many respondents discuss that they think their marriages are healthier and their family is, overall, better off because they are now at home full-time. Much of this improvement is related to mom's more relaxed state of mind and slower pace, or, less of the third shift. Andrea LeBlanc, a mother of four and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for five years, emphasizes this difference now that she is at home full-time. She says that not only is her family "much happier" now because she is not so "stressed out…having to *think about all that* and *do all that*," but that she thinks that going back to work "would result in divorce because it would be so much stress." Amanda Renoit, a mother of two and former advertising executive who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, talks about her role model at work before Amanda realized that she wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. Initially, she thought her role model had it all but found out that even with a flexible workplace, the stress of the third shift affected her role model's well-being. She explains that,

> she always felt guilty, you know, she always felt like she
> wasn't doing one thing right. Either her job was slacking
> because she had family problems or family situations
> came up or the kids needed her….So, she was always
> torn….Little did I know under the surface it was all falling
> apart.

Leslie Smith, a mother of two and former university administrator who has been out of the workforce for fourteen months, emphasized the "morning stress" at home and how it affected her entire day at work. She says that getting the children up and ready was an "ongoing argument" in her marriage because her husband, a university professor, was "incapable" of getting up early enough to pitch in. Although it stressed Leslie for the remainder of the day, she truly does not believe that her husband had the ability to get up early to help her. She explains that,

> if you start your day off like that, it just puts you in a
> pissy mood and you have to drop off tired kids…and
> you feel like a crappy mom….[And] it's not like I let it

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go when I got to work.…It wears you down.…It makes
you feel like you're doing a shitty job at home and you're
not putting forth one hundred percent at work either.

Leslie adds that once she quit working, she still had all of the same issues at home but without the

added pressure to get to work in the morning and be at the top of her game, her stress level went

down and family life improved dramatically. For Jessica Renault, a mother of one (and currently

pregnant) and former healthcare provider who has been out of the workforce for two years, the

improvement to family life is a big incentive to stay home. Specifically, she says that some of what

continues to motivate her to stay home is to be able to have "appointments and routine things taken

care of during the week so weekends can be more relaxing and less chore-driven for both parents."

She adds that, "my husband and I just generally feel more relaxed on weekends."

So, although non-family friendly workplace issues can and do affect a woman's desire to

leave her career, the third shift of trying to juggle all of her responsibilities and worrying that

nothing is getting her full attention also greatly influence the decision to go home. Many of these

third shift worries, however, are intensified by the socially constructed gender role ideology that

says a mother "should" be the one to rear her own children and that no one can do it better than she.

For these respondents, factors pulling them home seemed to have greater bearing upon them leaving

the workforce than did workplace related challenges.

PULL FACTORS

Socially Constructed Maternal Desire

While psychologists may focus on the internalized drive or "maternal desire" (de Marneffe

2004) that compels women, even career professionals, to quit work to care for their children when

they become mothers, a social construction perspective would frame this "compulsion" quite

differently. Despite women's nearly equal participation with men in the workforce, traditional

gender role ideology has remained quite culturally entrenched. That is, childrearing and housework remain cultural imperatives for women, while men's roles in the household have only changed marginally (Bolton 2000; Coltrane 2000; Crittenden 2001; Hochschild 1989; Hochschild 1997; Kamo 1988; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Shelton and John 1996). The roles of "mother" do not seem to have substantially changed over the past thirty years; the most significant change is really an addition – that of paid employee. The result is that even for highly trained and educated professionals, the pull to be home after becoming a mother seems to be as strong as ever. For the respondents in this study, that "pull" included not only the desire to rear their children but also the need for excellence in *this* job, like in their education and careers before.

Within this group of professionals turned stay-at-home mothers, some never thought they would give up their career to stay home, while others always knew that once they had children, they would stay at home, at least for a while. For the "career-driven" mothers, some of the motivation to leave the workforce resulted from circumstances, such as the difficulty and stress of managing the household and childcare, a husband's demanding career, children's needs, and/or a large decrease in leisure time. For other women who had always envisioned themselves at home with their children, "stay-at-home-focused" mothers, professional careers were developed prior to having children for several reasons, including family of origin expectations, to gain a sense of accomplishment, to support their husband's continued education or career-building, and/or "just in case" they need to support themselves in the future due to the death or disability of their spouse or due to divorce. However, with very few exceptions, women in *both* categories indicate a very strong desire to teach, nurture, and be present for their children, both emotionally and physically. That is, they want to be *the ones* to rear their own children. For some, this desire surfaced after giving birth and was completely unexpected.

Career-Driven. A few respondents initially questioned whether they would even have a family. Others knew they would have children but definitely saw themselves climbing the career ladder simultaneously. These women either found the juggling act of career and childcare to be unmanageable or they simply could not tolerate leaving their children in the hands of someone else in order to return to the workforce. Many of them were unaware that they would feel this way prior to giving birth. For some, the realization was not at all expected and the depth of their feelings completely took them by surprise.

Susan McSwain, a mother of six and former certified public accountant and attorney who has been out of the workforce for nine years, always pictured herself as very ambitious and not really planning to have children. She explains that while in college and law school,

> I really didn't imagine myself having a family. I really
> didn't and my parents to this day are like, 'who *are*
> you?.'….So I think…it was a little surprising how
> strongly my feelings became the opposite once I did
> have children….That just didn't seem to work anymore.
> It was kind of big.

After the birth of her third child (in addition to three older stepchildren), Susan and her husband decided that it would be best for their family for her to stay home. She says that, "I started feeling that I wanted to spend more time with my children." At the same time, her partner track career was becoming more demanding and her husband was beginning to travel more in his career. She says that with everything going on, she "had too many mixed feelings about trying to maintain that balance." For Susan, the decision to stay home happened over the course of a few years rather than at once. She says that having the children in daycare for so many hours a day began to really bother her and she did not want to put her third child through daycare. At the same time, her older stepchildren began to need her around more, she felt, for guidance.

Although she eventually planned her husband's post-graduate education around having her children, Amanda Renoit, a mother of two and former advertising executive who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, talks about how she initially did not envision getting married or having children. Once she married her husband and they began to discuss family, things changed.

> When I was in college I really didn't think I would get married…then I met Ryan and so I wanted to but I never really planned on having kids….It wasn't this great desire of mine, like I wasn't going to plan it and take off and do all this work to have a kid. It just wasn't something that I really planned on….It wasn't something that I really saw for myself, especially in college….Ryan was more into it….I really didn't like kids that much….So he was more interested and as some of our friends started having kids I would get that little twinge.

Amanda says that while she was hesitant, Ryan kept planning their work/family strategy "just in case we did it" because they both seemed to know that they would have children eventually. Even while pregnant, though, Amanda says she did not feel strongly about staying home. Strong feelings about staying home with her baby soon emerged once she gave birth. Amanda explains the sentiments that many respondents also discuss,

> I couldn't leave her….There was no way I could fathom having a baby. You know, I wasn't really into it and when I had her, it was such a different thing than what I ever thought. Like before I had her I thought, 'oh well, have the baby and she just will work around our schedule; she'll fit into OUR schedule and just kind of move on.' You know, we'll just take her with us. And, that's just not how it goes. I just could not imagine having a baby….If you have the opportunity to stay home and you can financially swing it, I could not imagine letting someone else raise her from seven [in the morning] to seven [in the evening]. There was no need in it and I just didn't want to miss out on anything. So, I didn't want to send her to daycare when I didn't need to.

Leslie Smith, a mother of two and former university administrator who has been out of the workforce for fourteen months, talks about how she always thought she would go back to work after

her maternity leaves because "I knew in my heart that I probably wasn't a stay-at-home-mom-with-a-baby type of gal" and even remembers telling a friend of hers that she would definitely always work full-time. So when she finally quit, "it was kind of this weird shock and revelation, but also really freeing" because she was able to focus on "trying to do things that made [her] happy and [her] family happy."

Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for nine years, says that she always expected to work and rear children at the same time. Speaking about how she envisioned her career and family when she was in college, she says,

> Well, I guess I didn't plan on having four kids at that point in my life. I think after, you know, as far as going through the career thing, I really thought I would be a career mom throughout my whole [life]….I didn't intend on having any more [children] than I could manage with my career.

Dana adds that perhaps because she had been "very career driven, motivated, [and] ambitious," once she had her first child, she had trouble setting boundaries with her firm. After her maternity leave, Dana set up a flexible work arrangement with her company but "from day one" they began "infringing" upon her time and "asking more" of her than she was willing to give. She says, "I wasn't willing to sacrifice" family life for the career.

Although some respondents unexpectedly had the desire to stay home with their children after giving birth, several of them were not able, financially, to leave the workforce after their first child. However, whether in their original plan or not, many decided to quit working as soon as it was financially possible to do so. This desire, or socialized expectation to rear their own children, proved to be a powerful force for these mothers that was not planned. When Carla Brown, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four years, was pregnant she

assumed that she would return to work following her maternity leave and that putting her baby into daycare would not be a problem. But, once she gave birth,

> and, I got this child and as soon as she was born I thought
> 'oh, my God, what have I done?' and, you know, I wasn't
> in a position then to quit. I [also] wasn't at a [firm] where
> I could cut back [my hours]. So, I spent the next two years
> saying, 'This is terrible. This is terrible.' I couldn't stand to
> leave her there [at daycare].

Carla elaborates by saying that she really was not comfortable with someone else spending more time with her daughter than she. The sheer number of hours was part of Carla's problem with daycare. She says that it was "just a lot of time" and that her daughter spent "most of her waking time with those ladies who were sweet, sweet, sweet, but *they weren't me*." Even though she liked the daycare workers and appreciated that they were loving toward her daughter, she says that "if someone's going to do it, I wanted to be the one doing it." Carla describes her unexpected maternal desire when she says that it "wasn't until I had my sweet little girl that it was like, you know, I don't want to leave her." And she adds, "I *never* would have thought this is what I'd be doing. But, here I am."

Julie Thames, a mother of four and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for thirteen years, also talks about her surprising inability to leave her child to return to work. She says that when her first child was a year old, she thought about going back to work because they were living on her husband's stipend from his post-doctoral fellowship, but decided that she could not leave her child. Elaborating on her absolute need to be with her child, she says, "I just could not do it. I just sort of freaked out at the thought of leaving this baby with someone that I did not know." After staying home for three years and living very frugally, she became pregnant with their second child. Her husband, a scientist, finished his post-doctoral work and found a much better paying position and immediately she became pregnant with their third child. Julie says that after the third

child, "I had no thoughts of going back to work…with three kids" even though she emphasizes "I just always, always thought I would have a career."

Leslie Smith discusses that she always thought she would work but, ultimately, she decided that she wanted to be at home. She says that things started to get to her more when she gave birth to her second child and needed to manage two children instead of one while trying to juggle a successful career. She says,

> I was trying to do what working women do, work full-time
> and spend quality time with your family, be a good mom
> at home, plus maintain supportive girlfriend relationships, try
> and be a loving wife and, you know, be perky and friendly
> with your husband, and all that crap that you can't maintain.
> You know, it's impossible. So, then there was this sort of tug
> at my heart…and I wasn't feeling like a good mom and I was
> tired and stressed out and mean to my family, and I just
> thought 'okay, this has got to go – life is too short, and I just
> want to enjoy time with my son before he goes to school.'

Leslie's story is a good example of the burnout that many respondents say they felt when they tried to juggle so many responsibilities.

For some, the work-family balancing act did not include leisure time and eventually led to exhaustion and the longing for a simpler schedule and less demands on their time. Andrea LeBlanc, a mother of four and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for five years, talks about her unmet need for social relationships when she was in the workforce. She says,

> Something that was getting to me toward the end of
> working was that most of my friends didn't work.
> Everybody was having fun and doing things and when
> you're working *and have kids*, you have no time. I mean,
> you really have no time. You can socialize, you know,
> chit-chat with people at the office but there is no regular
> friendship – girlfriends.

Besides lack of social support, other respondents discuss the lack of hobbies or any outside activities whatsoever. Kim Gaines, a mother of one and former sales and technical consultant who

has been out of the workforce for two and a half years, says that because her job required sixty to eighty hours a week and some travel, she was not able to compete in athletic events that she wanted to do and began to be unhappy with the pace and demands of her job. She and her husband were trying to get pregnant so they decided that she would quit work and try to relax before having children. Kim notes that even though they were officially trying to get pregnant before she left the workforce, it had not been successful because "It's hard to get pregnant when you're not in the same state as your husband." Within a few months after quitting, Kim became pregnant. Now, she has the time to compete in triathlons and is considering having another baby. So, for these respondents and others, there was a large leisure gap when they were working. For them, working moms have no spare time to pursue individual interests and that lack of time was one of the motivators prompting them to quit work.

Despite their original goals of being career women, the "need," "desire," or socialized normative expectation to be home with their children is abundantly clear for these respondents. Nearly all of the respondents in the study discuss their overwhelming motivation to stay home, regardless of their initial catalyst for quitting work.

Stay-at-Home-Focused. For some respondents, leaving the workforce after establishing themselves professionally seemed to be the natural order of things. Although highly educated, career professionals, some of them say that they did not ever envision a "high-powered" career. Instead, having a profession gave them the satisfaction of accomplishment and also a safety net in case something happens to the primary breadwinner. When they became mothers, home was where they wanted to be and believed that they *should* be, pointing to a well-socialized acceptance of traditional gender role ideology. Honey McAllister, a mother of two and a former attorney who has

been out of the workforce for two and a half years, exemplifies what several other mothers discuss

about choosing a profession when she says,

> the reason I went to law school – and this is horrible
> to say – I wanted to be a schoolteacher – but my
> mother [a teacher] said that I needed to get a degree
> where I can provide for myself and my children,
> so I could leave a marriage if I had to. I mean, that's
> a hard thing.

She adds, "I don't know if I ever planned to be a stellar lawyer because I was already in love and

knew I was going to marry this guy….But, if something were to happen, I'd go back to work."

Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four

and a half years, mirrors this understanding by saying that being able to support yourself and your

family in case of divorce was "part of the reason I was told to get an education."

For other women, though, choosing a high-paying career, law instead of education for

example, was done in part to support a husband's additional post-graduate education. These families

in particular exhibited a deliberate, proactive approach to their careers and family planning. Amy

Taylor, a mother of three and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce

for six years, sums up this type of career decision-making process when she says, "I almost went

into education and then I realized that I needed a solid job for him when he was in law school and

we needed to make some money." Since she enjoyed mathematics, Amy decided to go into

accounting rather than into math education, her original plan. Amy adds,

> I just wanted to be with my kids….I always wanted to
> be at home and when we made the decision to have the
> first one [child], there was no way I could be home,
> financially. He was just finishing up law school….I
> wasn't looking to climb the ladder…I didn't want to get
> on the partner track…that's not where I wanted my family
> life to go.

Amanda Renoit, a mother of two and former advertising executive who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, explains that once she and her husband decided to definitely have children, they created a plan for him to complete a masters of business administration and additional post-graduate education in finance in anticipation that she would stay home with the children. After several lean years of struggling financially, their sacrifices lead to Amanda being able to quit her demanding position to stay home with their two children.

Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, explains that when her first child was born, she had an "intense bond" with him and felt that she "just could not leave him." However, she adds,

> I didn't think we could afford [for me to stay home]
> at the time….My husband was just getting started in
> his business and was actually still a student…so we
> needed my income. But, once my son was born, it was
> so apparent to me that I couldn't put him in daycare.

So even though she was concerned that they could not afford for her to stay home, in part because she had been the primary breadwinner until that point, Caroline could not imagine putting the baby that she had bonded with so intensely into daycare. She explains this powerful need to stay home,

> I felt like this [staying home] was my job to take care
> of him and in giving him to someone else to take care
> of, I was not doing my job and that just made no sense
> to me at the time. How do people drop their child off all
> day long and let someone else watch them when it's your
> baby – you brought them into the world. It was a very
> dramatic feeling. It was just too hard. Luckily, my husband
> said 'okay, we'll give it a try.'

Many of the respondents always planned to stay home with their children, but only temporarily until the children were in school or somewhat older. Sarah Perkins, a mother of one and former radio station administrator who has been out of the workforce for three years, explains that she planned to stay home, at least for a while. She describes the decision to stay home,

> Well, before we had even gotten married, when we
> would talk in generalities about having kids and what
> it would be like, we both actually felt pretty strongly
> about me staying home, at least for the first few years
> of the baby's life. So, when I was hugely pregnant and
> getting close to delivery, the whole time I had been
> pregnant, we talked about it, and talked about it, and
> talked about it….It was not a long drawn out process
> for me because that's the way I had always pictured it.

Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, discusses that she "always knew" that she would want to be home with her young children. She says she discussed it with her husband when they got engaged and that he was ambivalent, but supportive. During their discussions, her husband stated that whether she stayed home or went back to work did not matter to him. Even though she always thought that she would return to work, now because of her husband's demanding career as a patent attorney, she feels that he would not be available to help juggle the practical aspects of coordinating daycare and other child responsibilities. So, all of the child duties would fall to her and she is not sure that she is willing to take on the stress of working full-time and also rearing children full-time. Jennifer says that, "I'm just not sure that I want to add that stress to the family."

For stay-at-home focused mothers, leaving their career, even a professional career, was not unexpected. However, the depth of their need to rear their own children combined with the third shift of trying to get everything done added to the intensity of their desire to stay home. Some of these respondents do not plan to return to workforce; others plan to return at some future point in a much less intense manner or in a completely different field. Several respondents mention that if they return to the workforce, they would consider going into the field of education because it seems to work better with a family schedule.

SUMMARY

Both push and pull factors influence a woman's decision to leave her career to stay home full-time with her children. The corporate world has made some progress in beginning to understand the needs faced by mothers who are also professionals and have offered innovative ways to deal with these hurdles, such as flex-time, reduced schedules, and other creative solutions. While these ideas offer some respite, taking advantage of them often comes with a price. Many times the price paid for a creative work/family balance is the perception by employers that any professional utilizing these options is not *serious* about his or her career.

However, for these women, the pull to go home seems much stronger than the workplace challenges that they faced. Whether initially career-driven or stay-at-home focused, the respondents in this study overwhelmingly share the deep desire to be home with their children and the understanding that they could do a better job of teaching and nurturing their children than could anyone else. Although not many respondents expect to return to the workforce in the same capacity as before, career-driven mothers seem a little more eager to keep up their skills, "just in case" they change their minds.

Still, there is a much more complex sociological issue at hand. That is, our socially constructed roles for women with children – mothers – are that they, not their husbands, are still burdened with child-rearing, and in many ways household labor, as primarily *their* responsibility. Thus, it is possible, within this socially constructed gender role ideology framework, to not only question the "male-model" of employee and its accompanying linear career track, but also to question the continued female hegemonic role of primary caregiver.

While the women in this study do not, for the most part, question their role as primary caregiver, many of them are aware of the ways in which their household configurations appear to be

reminiscent of the 1950's "traditional" household. They discuss this awareness both in terms of

identity crises and meaning-making in their lives and in the lives of their family members. The

respondents emphasize role-making by discussing the ways in which they choose to proactively

fulfill their roles as stay-at-home mothers.

CHAPTER 5

MEANING

> When I saw [my boss's] life – which I thought was so perfect
> and so great – kind of start to fall apart, I realized something's
> going to give. You just can't do it all. – Carla Brown, mother
> of two and former attorney.

> I am a strong believer that 'quality' does not take the place
> of 'quantity' in a child's life….The more time you spend
> with them, whether it is one hundred percent focused on them
> or letting them be a part of your routine, the quantity [of time]
> at a small age matters. – Dana Graham, mother of four and
> former certified public accountant.

The former professionals in this study indicate that they proactively chose to become stay-at-home mothers. Many of them discuss the ways in which their childrearing practices resemble that of their own mothers or grandmothers. At the same time, though, they are reconstructing motherhood based on a new set of circumstances. They have had educational opportunities and professional success that have become normative for those in a certain social location. However, unlike generations before them, neither motherhood – nor their career path, is a situation into which they defaulted. For some in this second generation of women in the workforce, then, first a career was chosen and then motherhood was chosen. Drawing on these choices allows them to reconstruct motherhood roles based on these changes in the social structure.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which respondents frame their transition from career to home and discuss how they reconstruct the roles of motherhood, given the influences of traditional gender normative expectations and new expectations. Beginning with these respondents' attitudes regarding gender role expectations, I explore the ways in which that ideology informs their daily lives through household division of labor and breadwinning. In examining the traditional

family patterns that the respondents describe, the influence of traditional roles in their families-of-origin is also discussed.

Second, I examine how before reconstructing motherhood roles, the respondents must initially process a shift in identity, from professional to stay-at-home mother. For women who are accustomed to success in their educational and professional endeavors, this transition is described as a sometimes rocky, continual negotiation over time. Although the respondents say that they have felt resistance to their changing roles from family members and outsiders, and sometimes even from themselves, ultimately their overachiever attitude helps to foster the transition.

Finally, I discuss the reconstructed roles that these respondents describe. Again, although their family configurations *appear* to be reflective of traditional gender roles, underneath the surface, these women reject normative expectations and, instead, reconstruct new motherhood roles. By not taking on the current normative role of the "do it all" mother in the workforce, these women are creating a hybrid of sorts, described by Williams (1993) as role-*making*. For Williams (1993), role-making includes drawing from traditional normative expectations and from new role possibilities based on changes in the social structure. These mothers utilize traditional gender role expectations by having a fairly traditional division of household labor, by assuming marital continuity, and by focusing their parenting efforts around the value of quantity rather than "quality" time. They utilize new role expectations by viewing this new status, stay-at-home mother, as a job and, thus, drawing on the achievement and success mindset that they had in their professional careers. Success in this job, for these respondents, means proactively working to achieve marital continuity and focusing their parenting around *not* pushing their children into the myriad of extracurricular activities, sports, and "structured learning" that is characteristic of the "do it all" baby boomer mother.

GENDER ROLE IDEOLOGY

Deeply entrenched within the culture is the sense that childcare and most household duties should fall to mom (Barnett and Shen 1997; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Hochschild 1989; Milkie and Peltola 1999; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Schor 1992). Even if dad is willing to "help," he is much less willing to tackle the *managing of the details* of daily household and childcare responsibilities (Bolton 2000; Hochschild 1989; Hochschild 1997). Being the one who is actively managing the household, along with working in a professional career, leads to what is described as "the third shift." Bolton (2000) describes the third shift as the stress and worry that result from trying to balance work and home and the constant concern that nothing is being done well. The gender role ideology that assumes mom will not only balance work and home, but also the scheduling and the stress that comes along with being responsible for the details of family life, is so well-socialized that rarely does society question these normative expectations. For example, a recent *Good Morning America* ongoing segment involves ways in which "mom" can better juggle career and the responsibilities of home. The segment offers several suggestions, including working from home and flexible schedules (Johnson 2006). At no time in the segment does the journalist question the assumption that "mom," rather than "dad," will be the one to juggle all of these responsibilities.

Briefly, during the women's liberation movement's early and most active years, the 1960s and 1970s, women's normative role expectations in the family were questioned and examined (c.f. Chodorow 1978; Friedan 1963). However, once women began to gain acceptance and momentum in the workplace, those questions fell out of fashion. For all of the advances that women have made in the workplace, then, the home is still their responsibility. The respondents in this study occasionally

discuss this assumption but little questioning of the traditional normative expectations for mothers occurs. Instead, respondents describe the ways in which they have adapted these roles.

<u>"Traditional" Household</u>

What is commonly understood as the "traditional" household – dad in paid employment, mom at home and responsible for all or most of the childcare and housework – is well represented by the respondents, although some respondents are not completely satisfied with the arrangement. For those respondents, child-rearing should be their focus – or job – *not* housework. It is a point of contention for some respondents and their husbands.

<u>Division of Household Labor</u>. In most cases, especially if a respondent had children before leaving work, current division of household labor is similar to what it was when the respondents were working full-time; she performs the majority of the household labor. However, now that they are not juggling two full-time jobs, many respondents note that they feel less stress even though they are responsible for the same amount or an increased amount of household management and labor.

Leslie Smith, a mother of two and former university administrator who has been out of the workforce for fourteen months, says that although she remains responsible for the majority of the household labor, her attitude about her university professor husband's lack of contribution has improved since leaving the workforce. Even though he still does not contribute to the household labor in a meaningful way, Leslie feels less stress and irritation.

Julie Thames, a mother of four and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for thirteen years, describes her frustration with her husband's contribution to the housework, even before they had children and when she was still in the workforce,

> Housekeeping was my job from the beginning – it always
> has been. It was a <u>pain</u>. I can remember being angry about

it because I would get up on Saturday morning and clean
the house before I did anything on Saturday. So, he did not
help and he was a pig, you know. He still is….I think it
just does not bother him at all for the house to be filthy
and things to just be out everywhere. He just has this huge
tolerance level for it and it drives me insane. So, I think he
is like, 'if it bothers you then you clean it, it doesn't bother
me.' I know, really nice.

Julie notes that he does contribute some by being responsible for outside things, such as the cars and

the lawn. Julie jokes that her husband also "picks up the bugs" and that is really the reason she got

married, saying, "so I'd never have to pick up another bug." Several other respondents also discuss

that they are more than willing to leave the workforce to rear their children but that they are less

than enthusiastic about the fact that this job also includes being responsible for all or almost all of

the housework.

While some respondents discuss their frustration at their husband's lack of participation in

household labor, others describe it as being somewhat expected. Dana Graham, a mother of four

and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for nine years, says,

I still feel like I should be able to do it all because I don't
contribute to the household financially. I feel guilty using
our money to pay for things [housework] that I feel like I
should be able to do.

And, Honey McAllister, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for

two and a half years, says,

I've always been the one who does house-stuff….I mean,
he does help around the house but he's not washing dishes
or washing the sheets or changing the linens and that kind of
stuff….[He does] big stuff – rewiring lights, putting up fences,
that kind of stuff. But, I do day-to-day, all the housekeeping.
We don't have a maid. You know, if I'm having a break-down,
he will step in.

For some, though, the decrease in the husband's household labor participation was huge and fairly immediate upon her departure from the workforce. For many of these respondents, this decrease is justified because he is solely responsible for supporting the family financially. That is, because "he works hard," he should not have to also share the household labor. Whether or not they shared the housework before she left the workforce, then, their *current* arrangements reflect very "traditional" gender role expectations. Many respondents are aware of this but either justify the family configuration in some way, or dismiss it because that is the way it *should* be. Mary-Louise Kendall, a mother of three and former bank officer who has been out of the workforce for seventeen years, agrees by saying that she can sometimes get her children to help her with household chores, but that her husband "never does" because he has "*worked all day*."

Susan McSwain, a mother of six and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for nine years, notes that before she left the workforce she and her husband, a venture capitalist, shared the housework more than they do now. She says,

> My husband took more of a role than he does now, you know, he would load and unload the dishwasher or do loads of laundry, just whatever he would see needed to be done. But now, I try to not do that in the evenings or weekends *when he comes home*. I try to get all that done during the week.

Carrie Santos, a mother of three and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for three years, says,

> My husband used to do a lot [before I left the workforce]. He would help cook, do the laundry. Now the rule is – inside the house is mine, outside the house is his. And, I mean, *that's fair, he works*.

She added that he "helps" a little more now because they have a new baby. However, she continues to be the one primarily responsible for housework and childcare.

The inside-outside division is fairly common among these respondents, again, supporting a

traditional arrangement (Hochschild 1989). Amy Taylor, a mother of three and former certified

public accountant who has been out of the workforce for six years, says that her husband is

responsible for the outside and she, the inside. When pressed, she elaborates,

> I clean the toilets. I make the beds. I wash all of the clothes.
> I fold his clothes, but I don't put them away. I hang up all the
> clothes. If I cook, he does the dishes because I bathe the
> kids....He won't wash the pots, but he'll soak them....I do
> all the bathrooms. I dust mop [and] water mop....I try to make
> it where *when he gets home*, everything is upstairs [where the
> children's rooms are located].

Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical

researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, says that although their division of

household labor was fairly equal before, now that she is out of the workforce,

> I am primarily responsible for the cooking and the grocery
> shopping, all the laundry, the bulk of childcare, and the
> responsibilities that a child requires. He does all of the outside
> stuff – the yard and any kind of little fix-it jobs that need to
> be done.

Amanda Renoit, a mother of two and former advertising executive who has been out of the

workforce for four and a half years, says that,

> [My husband] does the yard stuff....As far as household
> cleanup [my husband] does not do a whole lot, but he is
> not here a lot....He helps clean up after dinner [but] I do
> all the cooking basically, unless he grills. I do all the laundry.
> I do all the shopping.

Amanda emphasizes her understanding that this is a "traditional" household configuration

when she notes,

> So as sickening as it makes me – it is kind of like the 50s
> around here sometimes – I don't mind it because *he really*
> *works hard* and he's bringing home good money....So, I
> try to make it nice. I don't resent...basically doing all the

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> cooking [and] try to have the house picked up and [not have]
> the kids going nuts *when he gets home*.

Several other respondents specifically point to their understanding that the arrangement is very traditional. Like Amanda Renoit, a few describe their situation as either "1950s" or "June Cleaver-ish." Amy Taylor, a mother of three and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for six years, says,

> He talks about his friends whose wives work and how we
> eat so good and they eat out all the time. He tells them what
> he ate for dinner and they say 'just a home-cooked meal
> would be nice' and he laughs….I mean, like, well *yeah*, but
> I [also] pick up the dry cleaning and I make sure the house is
> picked up and he likes that. *He works hard* and comes home
> and it's relaxing for him. It's almost June Cleaver-ish.

At the same time, Amy is deeply aware that all of her work and care does not guarantee the security that she once thought it might. Her parents were divorced after thirty years of a marriage that was shaped by a very traditional household arrangement. Amy says that she has "mixed feelings" about her current "traditional" family configuration because,

> that's how it was at my house [as a child], but thirty years
> into my parents' marriage, my dad left. If you would have
> asked me [about the traditional arrangement] ten years
> ago, I would have said that's exactly how you're supposed
> to be. But, when dad left ten years ago, I was like, 'okay,
> *it doesn't mean security for sure*.'

Thus, even though some respondents recognize the lack of financial security that a traditional arrangement provides, this socially constructed maternal desire is so pervasive that they still are willing to risk it in order to stay home and rear their own children. Carla Brown, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four years, explains her understanding that, in the future, she may pay for choosing to leave the workforce,

> …when you make that decision to quit, at some point you
> could pay for your decision later and in a bad way. I can say

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> now that I wouldn't trade [staying home] for financial security.
> I can say that now 'cause it's not an issue but you just never
> know. Who knows?

Carla adds that in her case, even with being out of the workforce for several years, she could still go back into the workforce and earn a decent living. She wonders, however, about women who do not have a professional degree and choose to stay at home, "If she wants to leave her husband, what is she going to do? She can't get a [decent] job."

There are a few respondents, however, who seem to have a more egalitarian understanding of the division of household labor. These respondents note that their understandings and their husbands' understandings of family responsibilities are that she is responsible for the children and he is responsible for the finances but that they both should share the housework. Lisa Williams, a mother of one and former managing partner in a technical consulting firm who has been out of the workforce for one year, says that her husband, a police detective in a large, urban city, shares the housework quite well. Her husband has told her that her "job is actually to take care of [the baby] and play with her and he'll help with the house because that's not [her] job." In another case, this is the respondent's understanding and her husband verbally supports the understanding that both of them are responsible for housework, but his behavior does not match his belief system. Kim Gaines, a mother of one and former sales and technical consultant who has been out of the workforce for two and a half years, explains,

> We are having a power struggle about it a bit, because if
> you talk to [my husband], he'll say that it's…my job to take
> care of [our son] and his job is to earn money….Then there's
> the house stuff on top of that and, you know, we do that
> together. But that's *not what's happening at all*….It's been
> very frustrating.

Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, says that this understanding took some time for both she and her husband, a residential construction contractor, to fully put in place. She explains,

> I said to myself, 'okay, I quit my job to take care of my child.' I wasn't crazy about doing all the housework and that was a bit of a struggle between us because he got busier [in his job] and I found it hard to be in the house all day….So, it was hard and it caused conflict because I was so frustrated at the end of the day, *not because he was being unreasonable;* actually*, I was*.

Caroline and her husband were able to resolve the issue but not without resistance on her part, pointing to well-internalized gender role expectations. She says that "he gradually took over some more responsibilities which was a little hard for me to let go of, even though I was frustrated" and now they have occasional hired help.

Hired help seems to be a solution for a few respondents. Anne Planchette, a mother of five and former healthcare provider who has been out of the workforce for one year, and her husband, also a health care provider, agree that taking care of the children is her primary responsibility but rather than share the housework, they hire outside help. She says that she feels justified, especially now since in addition to the two older children, they have triplet toddlers! Similarly, Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for nine years, says that her husband, a commercial construction contractor and investor, emphasizes to her that rather than spending time cleaning, he thinks her priority should be spending time with their four young children. Instead of sharing the housework, though, he repeatedly suggested that they hire outside help. He told Dana that he did not want to come home and "do laundry" after a long day because he would rather spend that time doing activities and talking with his family. Dana says

that she has just recently accepted that it is okay if she "plays" with the children and hires someone else to clean the house, do the yard work, and take care of the cars. She says,

> Only recently, in the past year, I have realized that it's okay, we can afford to hire somebody. I can spend time playing and be with the kids, which definitely puts me in a better state of mind and makes me not so cranky and angry or grumpy.

So, with few exceptions, regardless of attitude, the respondents' division of household labor reflects traditional gender role normative expectations, supporting the findings of Hochschild's (1989) research of *two decades ago*! In her qualitative research on gender role ideology and division of household labor, Hochschild finds that even when middle and upper-middle class couples espouse egalitarian gender role attitudes, they are still likely to divide the household duties along fairly traditional gender lines.

Breadwinning. Because many of the respondents were able to achieve their own financial success and were either primary breadwinners or co-breadwinners prior to becoming stay at home mothers, the idea of being supported financially by their husbands now does not, for the most part, seem to negatively affect their psychological well-being. Most have come to terms with not currently making financial contributions to the household. Some mention that they struggled to make up for the lost income but several note that once they quit work and were able to deal full-time with the childcare and household management issues, their husbands' incomes improved dramatically.

Andrea LeBlanc, a mother of four and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for five years, says that in the months leading up to her departure, she began "stocking up on clothes" in anticipation of her family's lower household income. However, soon after she quit, her husband, a medical equipment representative, "got a job that made up for my salary." She says that

she was relieved that "we never had to go down" because "kids are extremely expensive." Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, says that even though at first they were not sure that they could make it financially if she quit, her husband, a residential contractor, was very supportive. She says that he "understood how I felt" and that "luckily things went in the right direction [financially] almost immediately" after she left the workforce. She adds that when "he started making more money and his business started to pick up, it got easier and easier." Sarah Perkins, a mother of one and former radio station administrator who has been out of the workforce for three years, notes that although her husband's salary was okay, "it would have been tough for us to live on just his one salary." They were determined for Sarah to stay home and right before she gave birth, "he got an offer…[and] the salary almost completely made up for what I was making."

With very few exceptions, respondents speak of their husbands either being supportive of them staying home or actually preferring that they stay home, even if it means extra stress and work for him to provide for the family financially. Many of the respondents talk about being grateful or expressing their thankfulness to their husbands for being able to stay home.

Prior to a job offer that substantially raised his salary, Sarah Perkins' husband, now a vice president of operations for a large warehouse company, said that he would be willing to get a second job if necessary in order for her to be able to stay home. Amanda Renoit, a mother of two and former advertising executive who has been out of the workforce for two years, describes a similar display of support from her husband, an equities' analyst, for her to stay home with their first child. She says that when she initially quit, their income was basically cut in half but that they were determined to make it work. She explains,

> He would have crazy ideas like 'I think I'm going to start
> mowing the neighbor's lawn.'….I wasn't having him go out

> and get two jobs but *he never suggested* that I [go back to work] because he never wanted [our daughter] to be put in daycare….It took him about two bonuses and two raises to catch up to where my income was covered….It took about a year and a half to get back to where we were and it has gone up from there.

Although a few respondents note ambivalence about not contributing financially to the household, many respondents discuss how they supported the family in other ways in the past. Because of past support or contribution, they do not feel guilty about not contributing financially at the present time. For these respondents, then, past support, along with current childrearing and household management, allows them to feel that they are still contributing substantially to the family.

Lisa Williams, a mother of one and former managing partner in a technical consulting firm who has been out of the workforce for one year, says that in order to buy their current house after they got married, she sold her condominium and used the equity as a down payment. Because she contributed to buying their home, she says that she does not feel guilty for not contributing financially to the household currently. Amanda Renoit reflects this sentiment and the same perspective that many respondents share about being the primary breadwinner when their husbands were either in school or beginning their careers. She says,

> I made it possible for him to [continue in school] and when I get down about things, he will remind me that….I stayed in job that I hated so he could continue to go to graduate school….I sacrificed a lot in the beginning and he's sacrificing a lot now by working like he does.

Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, does exemplify that ambivalence about not currently bringing home a paycheck, especially since she was the one to support the family when her husband, a patent attorney, was in law school. She explains,

When [he was] in law school, I was the breadwinner. Even in graduate school when we were both bringing home stipends, I felt more like I was an equal as far as financially….Now, I don't feel that 'cause I don't think I'm bringing money to the table. I can look at it on the other hand and can say, 'well, I really am saving us all this money in childcare and other expenses.'

However, like some other respondents, since Jennifer has been home, her family has seen a dramatic increase in her husband's income.

Many respondents express that they feel grateful to be able to stay at home and know that they are only able to do so because their husbands earn incomes that will support an entire family. While they see his increased stress level and work hours, due to being the sole breadwinner, as a sacrifice that he is making for the family, very few respondents discuss leaving their own careers to stay home in terms of sacrifice. Rather, they frame being able to stay home as a privilege and describe themselves as "lucky" to be able to do it.

Amy Taylor, a mother of three and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for six years, explains her gratefulness,

…he allows me to live the lifestyle that I want. Because I know women who want to live, not the financial lifestyle, but live to do what I do [rear my children]. I mean THIS is my job. This is the job that I want to do and he…allows me to do that….The finances are easy and so that allows me to do it, but he's supportive in it, I guess I should say.

Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for nine years, says that she has friends and family members, who are mothers in the workforce, who say they are happy for her but also say that they are a little "jealous" that she is able to stay home. One friend commented that she feels that she is "missing out" on her daughter's childhood because she works and is away from her daughter for so many hours every day. Katie Gautreux, a mother of two and former college instructor who has been out of the workforce for

three years, says that she tells her husband, a civil engineer, that she is "thankful" that he is

supportive and that he earns enough money so she can stay home with the children.

While they may feel thankful to their husbands for earning enough money to support the

entire family, many respondents also recognize that by them staying home, their husbands lives are,

in some ways, easier. By staying home and taking care of the family, their husbands are free to

concentrate on moving up their own career ladder and providing for the family financially. Carla

Brown, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four years, talks

about the understanding that her husband, an engineer, has about Carla's support of his success. She

explains,

> I think he knows that he wouldn't have the professional
> success that he has if he had to either deal with me being
> miserable or actually do some of the stuff. He's with it
> enough to appreciate [what I do] which is, you know, lucky.

And, Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the

workforce for nine years, stresses that her husband, a commercial contractor and investor, has a

"strong sense of providing for us, making sure we're provided for in the future." They both know,

she says, that he would be less able to provide so well for their family if she were in the workforce

and not able to take care of things at home. Mary-Louise Kendall, a mother of three and former

bank officer who has been out of the workforce for seventeen years, talks about her ability to ease

the burden he has of being the sole provider. She explains that,

> …his life is so much easier because I don't work….[When
> he gets home], the laundry is done, there's food in the
> refrigerator, I usually have something fixed for us to eat.
> The kids are where they need to be or I'm helping them with
> homework. Sometimes he will help with homework, but I feel
> like it is my responsibility because that's my job and I need to
> support him. His job is stressful. So, it definitely makes life
> easier. And, it's helped too over the years that he's made more
> money.

Jennifer Moore, a mother of one child and former doctoral level medical researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, says that although her husband has not ever said that he is glad she is at home, she thinks "his life would be ten times worse, if I was not home, and not able to pick up the loose ends and that kind of thing."

Traditional Roles. Although respondents indicate that educational and career successes were important to them, many respondents also talk about the influence that their own mothers had on how they decided to configure their own families. Most respondents speak about how women's "traditional" roles helped to shape their understanding of motherhood roles. For some, their family of origin had a "traditional" gender role arrangement or they missed having a stay-at-home mother. For others, seeing the difference in the ways in which they were reared compared with their husbands, influenced them.

Jennifer Moore, a mother of one and former doctoral level medical researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, says that her mother stayed home when they were young. After Jennifer's youngest sibling began school, her mother worked as a teacher and basically had the same schedule as the children but was not there when Jennifer returned from school in the afternoon. Because she remembers wishing her mom were there, if she returns to work in the future, she will schedule her days around her children's school hours. Jennifer adds,

> the women in my family all stayed home while their children
> were little [and] I'm sure that played a part in one of the reasons
> I wanted to do it too. It is valued in our family [of origin].

Amy Taylor, a mother of three and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for six years, says that her mom did exactly what she is doing now. When Amy's daughter was in daycare before she was able to quit work, she remembers thinking that the caregivers were "very sweet but my mom always stayed home." Although Amy's mom worked

part-time as a bookkeeper during tax season, "she was always there when we got home [from school]." Amy decided that she wanted to "be there" as soon as she could afford to quit working.

Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, says,

> My mother was home. She was a teacher, but she didn't teach until we got in junior high school. She stayed home and I took it for granted at the time. But once I had my own children, I think back on all the events that she attended and things she did for us and what it would have been like if she hadn't done it and I can't imagine how much you miss….I didn't want to miss out on all that stuff. To me, the job is not as important as being with the children.

Discussing how her mother's traditional roles initially prompted her to go to law school, Julie Thames, a mother of four and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for thirteen years, notes that her understanding of motherhood changed when she had her own children.

> It's embarrassing. [My mom] really is like the stereotype, you know. She stayed home, she cooked dinner every night, she was room mother…Brownie leader….To the point of being annoying – like, get a life….I remember, I so much did not want to be like my mother growing up. I wanted a life [and] thought she had no life. You know, just wanted a career, wanted to not spend my whole life caught up in my children and my husband. That was probably what drove me to law school and to work because I wanted to be so different from her. Then, of course, when I had kids…it turned out I've been home for thirteen years. So, you never know.

Other respondents explain that having a mother who worked outside the home, or being married to someone whose mother worked, influenced their decision to stay home and rear their children full-time. Sarah Perkins, a mother of one and former radio station administrator who has been out of the workforce for three years, says that her mother worked the entire time Sarah was a child. She explains,

> She worked and worked and worked all the time with a full-time job. She was never available for after school activities

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or being homeroom mother or going on field trips or being a
Brownie leader or any of those things. Although my mom and
I have a GREAT relationship, and I admire that she worked so
hard all those years, I miss those things and I was jealous of my
friends whose moms stayed home and were able to participate in
all those things. I thought, you know, if at all possible, I want to
be able to do that…do those things with my children and their
schools, field trips, and be able to…do some of those things that
my mom didn't do because she was working.

Amy Taylor says that, in addition to the influence of her own mother being a stay-at-home mom, Amy's husband, an attorney, was reared by a single mother who worked the whole time he was a child. Although Amy says that she is happy that her husband learned to clean the house and take care of himself, she also feels that he missed out on important childhood structure and time by not having a mom at home. And, Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for nine years, says that her mother always worked and this helped Dana be an independent, yet strong-willed, child. Still, when she and her husband, a commercial contractor and investor, initially discussed the issue of family life when they were in college, he emphasized that he would like her to stay home at least part of the time while the children were young, like his mother had done. Now that they have four young children, the issue of whether to stay home is a moot point because, she says, her husband "would *die*" if she seriously "entertained the idea of going back to work."

For the respondents in this study, whether or not initially planned, traditional motherhood roles were influential in their decisions to rear their children full-time. Many respondents use their past experiences with these traditional roles, along with their experience in higher education and in the professional workforce, to reconstruct their current motherhood roles and practices, including their childrearing philosophies and techniques.

So, despite being educated professionals who have competed successfully in the workforce and despite being aware of the financial risk they are taking, many of these respondents' household configurations reflect "traditional" gender role normative expectations. For them, mom being in the support role has ensured financial success for dad and, ultimately, for the family. However, although they do not directly frame their change in terms of sacrifice, many respondents discuss their loss of identity in the transition from professional to stay at home mom and the ways in which they have proactively reconstructed the roles of mother.

RE-CONSTRUCTING MOTHERHOOD

Viewing their current status as privilege rather than sacrifice allows these women to reconstruct the meaning of leaving a professional career to become a stay at home mom in terms of accomplishment. Rather than a respondent's job being in the paid workforce, her *job* becomes rearing the children and taking care of household management. While commonly construed by past generations as an insult, for these respondents, framing the stay at home status as a job helps to bring its value on par with their previous career efforts and successes. Most respondents frame staying home in this way; a few specifically discuss the importance of viewing staying home full-time as a *job*.

By exploring the changes in mainstream terminology over the past three generations for women who do not work outside the home, and the meaning that accompanied these changes, shifts in focus become apparent. Initially, in the 1950s and 1960s, the married woman who did not work outside the home, the "housewife," was viewed primarily in relation to her husband, regardless of whether they had children. Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, in an attempt to imply broader worth and, perhaps, broader skills, a woman occupying the same status became the "homemaker," to show her relation to the home and to lend respect to all that she contributed to family life in general, rather

than specifically in relation to her husband. Lastly, beginning in the 1990s, as a reflection of a changing social structure that now *assumed* mothers would also work outside the home, the phrase "stay-at-home mother" became widely used to highlight the focus these women have on their children. They are so focused, in fact, that they are willing to "give up" paid employment in order to rear their children full-time. For the respondents in this study, the term "stay-at-home mother" seems to be most appropriate for two reasons: 1) they were previously peers with their husbands in the workforce, and 2) although they speak about caring for their husbands and home, they largely frame their decisions to quit paid employment in terms of caring for their children and reducing the stress of the third shift. For many respondents, though, accepting the identity of stay-at-home mother rather than career professional was a challenging process.

Respondents describe their motherhood practices, or roles, as the results of going through several stages. Initially upon leaving the workforce, most mothers describe an "identity shift" stage when they transitioned from thinking of themselves as professionals to thinking of themselves as stay-at-home mothers. For some the process was fairly quick; for others it was drawn out and much more painful. After working through the identity shift, or crisis, they were able to use the skills gained in their profession to organize their household to work in the best interests of their children and to promote a calm, relaxed family life. Using their professional skills at home allows them to continue to feel productive, while focusing on their children rather than their careers. Respondents indicate that they reconstruct their mothering roles primarily along two trajectories: 1) traditional, gender role normative expectations – the assumption of marriage continuity and staying home rather than working outside the home, and 2) new expectations in reaction to the changing social structure – seeing themselves as equals with their husbands and using proactive decision-making in their childrearing practices while not being overbearing or forcing their children into numerous activities.

Identity Shifts

For many respondents, the transition from career professional to stay at home mother was fraught with complex emotions regarding identity. On the one hand, they had experienced being known as a successful attorney, or successful health care provider, or successful business woman, or other successful professional. On the other hand, the pull toward home was very powerful and many of them felt strongly about rearing their own children, even if they did not initially think this way. For some, letting go of their professional identities has been difficult and did not happen immediately upon leaving the workforce. Several say that the transition from identifying themselves as a career professional to identifying themselves as a stay at home mom was a drawn out process that took years. For others, the transition has been fairly seamless.

Respondents who have been out of the workforce for a while describe how they processed the transition by initially introducing themselves by their occupation, then by their occupation and current stay at home status, and now, unless their former occupation is relevant to the situation in some way, they introduce themselves as a stay at home mother. Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four and a half years, describes what several other respondents also say about how overwhelming "maternal desire" made the transition from career professional to stay at home mom a little easier. Even so, it was a process that took a while and went in stages. She explains,

> For a long time [after leaving the workforce] I was saying, 'well, I'm an attorney.' [But] over time I got more comfortable saying [that] I don't work and I am with my kids but that I used to be an attorney....Now, I really don't bring it up that I'm an attorney to most people unless we get to know each other because I don't feel the need to brag that I'm an attorney. It's not as important to me as [the fact that] I could not leave my child. I had not thought about all the ramifications of it really; I just did not want to leave [him]. I couldn't leave. There was a little guilt about my professional career, but as I've done it more and more, my feelings

have grown stronger about how important it is to be at home. I'm
feeling more proud of it – that I've been at home and I don't mind
saying it whereas I might have in the beginning.

Jessica Renault, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former health care provider who has

been out of the workforce for two years, mirrors the process that Caroline describes,

I am still adjusting but I am definitely more comfortable with it
now….At first I would always introduce myself by saying I'm a
[health care provider] who is staying home *for now*. Now, I feel
more comfortable just saying I'm a stay at home mom, period.

Another respondent describes how, initially, her ego got a little bruised by her husband's career

success as a scientist following her departure from the workforce. Julie Thames, a mother of four

and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for thirteen years, says that before she left

the workforce, she had achieved a great deal of success in her profession. But when her husband

began winning awards and being told, "what a great young scientist he is," she wanted to tell them

that she was "smart too," especially when having dinner with a Nobel Laureate and having to tell

him that she was a "stay-at-home mom." She notes that she would also tell people that she used to

practice law and that she graduated from a prestigious law school. Now, she says, "I feel more

comfortable in my own skin and it just doesn't matter anymore."

The transition from career professional to stay at home mom included more of a crisis for

some respondents. Amanda Renoit, a mother of two and former advertising executive who has been

out of the workforce for four and a half years, discusses her feelings of identity loss,

You know, you think of yourself as this sort of career
woman…I was doing what I wanted to do, I was getting
to travel, I had some good clients….I was having a lot of
fun at work and you go home and go a little stir crazy, and
who are you? You're a mom, you sit at home, you miss your
friends, you miss going out to lunch with friends, you miss
having a normal conversation, you know, all those things….It
was like an *identity type crisis for me*.

Amanda adds that she dealt with the transition by "focusing on [my daughter]" and knowing that she was "doing the right thing" by staying home. Even though she feels good about her decision, she emphasizes that "it took a while to get there." And, now she knows that being a stay at home mom is "a *job*…to produce good people." Amanda points to the difficulty of this job by adding that she also is trying to "not lose my mind in the process."

Trying to juggle a demanding career and a busy family actually made one respondent ill. Michelle Bailey, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for a year, talks about her family of origin's expectation that she have a career and her own expectation that she would work. Her family's expectation and her perceived loss of identity kept Michelle working even while battling migraines. Michelle is still early in the transition phase and does not have many friends who are not in the workforce. She discusses a recent event in which being identified as a stay at home mother, rather than an attorney, caused anxiety. Michelle and her daughter are in a "mother-daughter" book club. At a meeting, the hostess introduced a new member and went around the room introducing the current members. Michelle describes how painful it was for all of the other members to be introduced by their occupation while she was introduced as a stay at home mother. Because she was so invested in not only her career, but especially in her *identity* as an attorney, the transition continues to be difficult. However, since she quit working, her migraines have decreased substantially and she says that her family life is in a much better state.

With few exceptions, the respondents report that their husbands were supportive of them leaving the workforce and supportive of their shift in identity. When husbands did have concerns, they were mainly financial but for a few, the concerns were about possible changes in the marital relationship. Anne Planchette, a mother of five and former health care provider who has been out of the workforce for a year, describes her husband's concerns about her leaving the workforce.

Because they have always been peers – first in college and then in the same profession, he was

initially concerned about the change in their relationship that her shift in identity might bring. She

explains,

> So, he worried about me, like my whole identity, or our
> identity as a couple. How was that going to change?....I've
> always had a job. He and I [have] always been in that
> playing field together. We've never had that difference.
> We had the common ground. So, I think he worried about
> how is that going to change our relationship.

She adds that over the past year, he has had a change in perspective, now telling her that,

> …he does not think that I've been happier since we've been
> married and our marriage has not been better since we've
> been married. And, it's true. I mean…I've turned into a nicer
> person….I just used to get riled up about everything – none
> of that anymore. Our relationship is so much better because
> I'm not griping at him about things, I'm not short-tempered.

Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the

workforce for nine years, discusses her feelings about having had an education and a professional

career but now caring for her children full-time. She explains,

> …it's an identity crisis for sure….There have been some
> breakdowns on occasion, because you do feel like, 'where
> am I?' and 'who am I?' Why did I work so hard for so long
> to have a career that I do nothing with now? But, it gave me
> a whole lot more than the accounting knowledge. The process
> of college and using my mind and thinking, I mean, it's made
> me a better mom and it's made a better life and it's made a better
> person because I DID it and I CAN do it.

She adds that her marriage went through some rough patches at the beginning but now she feels that

because she has this level of confidence, she can better "empower" her children to believe in

themselves and to take care of themselves rather than relying on someone else to do it. Dana says

that her individual achievements have helped her to have this confidence. That confidence, she

believes, helps to keep her marriage healthy and her family happy. She explains,

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> [My husband] says 'when you're feeling good about you, it makes
> me want to be with you that much more.'….So, for him to leave a
> stressful [work] environment and come home to a stressful
> environment with me being insecure or me not having things under
> control, it just wears him down. But, if he comes home and I'm
> happy and feeling good [then he's happy].

So, for Dana, having a professional background and identity increased her confidence and she sees how that confidence improves her marriage and family life. Those improvements helped ease the shift in identity from work to home.

Several respondents note that although they have worked through the identity transition from professional to full-time mom, they still strategically use their identification with their profession when appropriate. One former attorney feels that her profession wields power in certain situations and does not hesitate make her former profession known. Carla Brown, a mother of two who has been out of the workforce for four years explains,

> So, like, if I'm filling out an application and it asks for
> occupation, I'll put 'attorney/stay-at-home mom' – like
> at the doctor's office or something because I want these
> people to know that I know what's up and if I need to take
> care of something, I can take care of it….It makes a huge
> difference, especially because most of the time I'm in jeans
> and a t-shirt but if someone finds out I'm an attorney, it
> definitely makes a difference. *You get way more respect*.

In addition to personal gain or influence, numerous respondents say that they continue to use their profession in volunteer positions. Continuing to use their skills, even if unpaid, has helped mitigate any identity crisis associated with their transition.

Because many of these moms have framed their identity in terms of achievement, in dealing with the shift in identity, an appreciation of their contribution to the family and society seems to alleviate regrets and second thoughts. Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, reflects

the sentiments of many respondents when she discusses the importance of staying home versus the importance of her former career. She says,

> I think some people need that external validation, you know.
> I think they need that re-enforcement from the outside world
> that, you know, you are intelligent, you do have value….Where,
> I *know* I'm intelligent. I have a Ph.D. but I think what I'm doing
> now is more important than what I would be doing [if I were]
> working….I know that what I am doing [now] is important work
> whether somebody places a premium on it or not….I do think,
> [though], that it is a lot harder to be at home than even I anticipated.

Overall, each of these respondents has gone through an identity transition process. Many of them continue to use their professional skills in some way and have re-framed their career orientation to include being a stay-at-home mom. In this way, then, they are able to see staying at home as a job. For them, this job is viewed as equally as important as or more important than their prior professional work and, thus, can be seen in terms of an achievement or a success.

Overachiever. Because many of the respondents view staying at home and caring for their children as their job, they realize that success is not optional. Just as they achieved success in school and professionally, they are working to be successful stay-at-home mothers. As part of their shift in identity, they not so much compare themselves with other moms, but compete against themselves to be the best moms that they can be. Competing in this sense appears to be as meaningful for the respondents as competition in the professional world.

Andrea LeBlanc, a mother of four children and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for five years explains,

> I think most of us who did end up going on to some sort of
> graduate degree, you're used to being an overachiever and
> doing everything really well – and then all of a sudden
> you're going to stink at something? You know, I couldn't
> deal with the thought of people saying 'She's not very good'
> – for *either* one [career or mom].

Andrea adds that,

> And, obviously, one is *way* more important than the other,
> in my opinion – the children and family, so that [to leave
> the workforce] was kind of the only option…because you
> cannot do both well. You can do a mediocre job at both or
> you can do one really well and the other is going to really,
> really suck.

Carla Brown, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four years

talks about her need to be in control of her success – whether in the workplace or at home. She says,

> I'm a control freak and…I think there are tons of female
> attorney control freaks like me. Like, you know, 'I want to
> be number one, number one, number one, attorney' and then
> you have kids and you're like, 'I want to be number one,
> number one, number one mom.' I think that's a lot of it
> sometimes….I mean, you want to be the best. And, not
> like, I want to be better than someone else but just that I
> want to do the best job that <u>I</u> can. And, you can't do that if
> you're at the office for sixty hours a week.

Beth Johnson, a mother of two and former certified public accountant who has been out of the

workforce for three years, also discusses her desire to control her success at home. She says that

even though she saw success at work, she was not able to feel like a "successful mom" until she quit

working and went home full-time. Part of the problem, for Beth, and for other respondents, was that

so much fell by the wayside when she was working. She felt as if nothing, neither her job nor her

family, received her full attention. Now that she is home, her family is on an easier schedule and

they have more time to "relax and enjoy each other" rather than "always running everywhere." This

difference has made her feel like a much better mom and like she is achieving success on this job as

well.

Milestones are easier to measure in the workplace than in family life. Part of the identity

shift, then, is knowing that success will come but gratification will deferred for about twenty or so

years. Respondents with older children, especially, seem to identify with the difficulty of not having

immediate feedback for hard work, as one would in the workplace. Susan McSwain, a mother of six

and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for nine years, talks about a recent incident

with one of her teenagers. The child was caught lying about drinking alcohol. Susan questioned

whether giving up her career was worth it if the children do not heed the advise given to them

anyway. She elaborates,

> …you are trying to communicate to them the standards of
> behavior…and this is not sinking in and it is frustrating
> because with your professional life there is always – it's
> easier to measure your accomplishments or, you know, 'I
> have completed this agreement, this document,' or the case
> is settled and a big deal got done….Kind of the benchmarks
> are easier to see….With parenting, you can't measure it. Just
> when you think you're doing a good job, [their behavior]
> just absolutely throws you for a loop.

For women who are overachievers and success oriented, this deferred gratification can be a hard pill

to swallow. Especially when they were used to moving up the ladder in their careers. However,

having an overachiever attitude helps some stay-at-home mothers continue to feel good about their

achievements. Before, their success was in school and career; now, success and achievement are

measured at home. Overall, respondents indicate that success on *this* job is just as important as or

more important than their previous achievements.

Changing Roles

While their family configurations may appear to be reminiscent of the 1950's "traditional"

families, beyond that façade are mindful, proactive mothering roles that are not products of

defaulting into the stay-at-home mother status because they had no other choices, but rather are the

results of conscious decision-making in what respondents view as the best interests of their children

and family life. Although this conscious decision-making includes elements of the traditional roles,

it also includes elements of the achiever mindset that these women acquired through their education and their professional careers.

For many women, focusing on success and achievement in the workplace and at home simultaneously leads to role overload. Rejecting the role overload that they felt as mothers in the professional workforce or knowing they did not want the role overload that they saw in other working mothers' lives, was one way these mothers began to reconstruct motherhood roles. In trying to construct new motherhood normative expectations, not only did some of them encounter resistance from friends and family members, but also from themselves, questioning whether they should give up the career for which they worked long and hard. By rejecting role overload and the pressure to "do it all," these respondents reconstructed motherhood by using traditional gender normative expectations, such as traditional division of household labor and assuming marital continuity and by adding new expectations, such as expecting an equal position in marriage and proactive childrearing decisions and practices.

Role Overload. For these mothers who married professional peers and, thus, had the financially capability to have the *option* to leave work, the experience of being a mother while simultaneously working in a professional career was, in many cases, "too much" for their vision of family life. Not all of the respondents were mothers prior to leaving the workforce but, those who were frequently speak about the stress and pressure of trying to live up to today's expectations of mothers. Others, who did not have children while in the workforce, discuss what they have seen in the families of friends, co-workers, and family members. Many respondents discuss their conclusion that, in the end, the chaos and strain were not worth being able to live up to today's "ideal" normative expectations for mother.

Caroline Kenough, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce

for four and a half years, says that she and her stay-at-home friends wonder about how mothers in

the workforce can do everything and be okay with that. She describes a neighbor's daily activities,

> She was a physical therapist and she had two children and
> I would watch her come and go….She would leave very early
> in the morning, be gone all day, come back and maybe go out
> to dinner or to something in the evening….I would wonder
> how she would do that, you know, how do you leave them
> [the children] that much?

And, Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical

researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, that a good friend tells her that during

the week, family time is "a blur." Jennifer explains,

> She had very limited time with her children in the mornings.
> Her youngest would sit in the bathroom with her when she
> got ready in the mornings, to talk to her. And then she would
> go pick them up at daycare, at the sitter's house, then it was
> just boom, boom, boom, as you go home and get dinner on
> the table, you do homework, bath time, and bedtime. It's like
> a whirlwind, you know. She commented when the baby was
> an infant, there was many a night when she would cook
> dinner with this baby on her hip because the child would not
> want to be put down, wanted to be held, you know.

In contrast, Jennifer explains how her schedule is so much different in the mornings and through out

the day,

> In the morning, [my son] gets up, he crawls in the bed with me, we
> cuddle, he watches a little bit of TV while he eats his breakfast.
> We do errands in the morning, we eat lunch, and he has time to
> play in the playroom with his toys. We go to the pool every
> afternoon…and he gets to play with his friends….We also read
> stories during the day together.

Several respondents describe women whom they previously viewed as role models until

they saw that "having it all" did not work. Carla Brown, a mother of two and former attorney who

has been out of the workforce for four years, describes an attorney for whom she used to baby-sit while she was in college,

> She was a lawyer….So, I thought she was a super-rock star
> and she dressed nice. I did think sometimes that this is kind
> of weird, you know, her kids are hanging out with me – which
> is all fine and good – but they'd rather be hanging out with
> her….But, you know, I saw her doing it [all] and she seemed
> pretty happy but, you know, she was on her second marriage
> and she's now divorced from that guy….When I saw her life –
> which I thought was so perfect and great – kind of start to fall
> apart, I realized something's going to give. *You just can't do it all*.

Other respondents discuss their ideas about daycare and that it did not work for their families. Rather than a concern about the *quality* of the daycare, because most respondents are in higher income brackets and can afford quality childcare, many respondents either were concerned about the absolute number of hours that a child must be in daycare or that they did not want to hand their children over to someone else. Carrie Santos, a mother of three and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for three years, says that when a woman works what amounts to more than full-time in a professional career, her children and family life will suffer. She says,

> They were in daycare longer than I was at work. So, they'd
> get home and they're exhausted and they're irritable. I mean,
> how do you interact with a kid that you haven't been around?

And, Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, emphasizes that,

> …you can have quality childcare but it's never going to be
> the same as when it is your child. You carry that child for nine
> months, you've given birth to that child, it's just totally different
> [with your own child]. I think that is just an intangible between
> the two that they [children] get.

For these stay-at-home mothers, rejecting either their own role overload or that seen in other families helps them reconstruct their understanding of how they want their families to operate.

According to these respondents, trying to "do it all" does not work for them, nor for their children. Although these families do not have trouble finding and affording quality daycare, being at home full-time is more important to their ideas about the needs of children.

Resistance and Social Control. Although roles for a status such as mother are constantly changing somewhat, those attempting to substantially change normative expectations frequently encounter resistance both from outsiders and from themselves (Williams 1993). For the past twenty years, increasingly, the normative roles for mother have come to include paid employment. When these respondents, who are members of a privileged, educated, high-income category, made the decision to leave their careers to rear children full-time, they encountered resistance. Michelle Bailey, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for one year, talks about the feeling that her professionally-oriented family of origin was disappointed in her decision to leave work,

> Everyone [in my family] is college educated; everyone
> has a successful career, so I felt my parents were
> disappointed….They were concerned that I would not want
> to, that I would not like being at home, that it wasn't going
> to be enough for me, and they are still worried about that….
> I felt like I was disappointing them.

Carla Brown, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for four years says that she encounters resistance to her reconstruction of motherhood from outsiders and also from family members. In particular, her father-in-law tells her that she is "too smart to not be using [her] degree." But, Carla says that in response to her father-in-law, she has said, "I'm taking care of your grandkids, doing a better job than anybody else could, and you're saying that I need to go work sixty hours a week just so I can make money?" To others, she just says that her education and professional experience, "make me a nice, smart mom who takes care of her kids."

Several other respondents note that they feel resistance from family members, especially sisters, when they make the choice not to be a mom who stays in the workforce. In these cases, the respondents do not point to specific comments made directly supporting resistance but mainly they talk about the feeling that they get from family members, such as "disappointment" in them, or that they are "not politically correct" because they are not using their degree.

Some respondents have felt these social control attempts by other mothers in the workforce and some say that when they were in the workforce, they felt the same way about stay-at-home mothers. Several of these former professionals turned stay-at-home mothers, say that they feel subtle hostility from other women who are still in the workforce, perhaps due to the respondent going against current normative expectations for mothers. Julie Thames, a mother of four and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for thirteen years says, that when she first quit work, there were very few stay-at-home mothers. She explains,

> [At the time] a lot of the women were still in the midst of
> careers and pursuing careers and, so, you know, I felt like I
> had nothing in common with them. And, I almost felt like
> they were looking down on me….It was awful.

Another respondent talks about the way *she* viewed stay-at-home mothers when she was still in the workforce and the fact that she still has the same view, even though she is now a stay-at-home mother. Michelle Bailey, a mother of two and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for a year, explains,

> I don't have any stay-at-home mom friends. And, frankly, I
> don't know if I would particularly identify with them. It's like
> I feel like they've copped out. And that's terrible and I don't
> know why I feel that way. It's like they're not realizing their
> potential….I don't know what their reasons are and I don't know
> how they were raised or anything, but if it weren't for my health
> [migraines], I would still be in there [at work] *fighting the good fight*.

So, for Michelle, not only does she perceive resistance from her peers who are still in the workforce, but also, she is feeling resistance from herself. Williams (1993) describes this self-resistance as an early stage in the role-making process.

While the transition from professional to stay-at-home mother is a process, these respondents believe that any identity crisis or shift that they have endured was worthwhile in the end. Because they feel that being at home is best for their children and for their family life, these women go against the norm to reconstruct a hybrid of sorts. Role-making is a process that begins, for these women, after rejecting the role overload experienced as a mother in the professional workforce and going through resistance about leaving the workforce from themselves and others.

Re-constructed Roles

Concerning the "hybrid" roles that women make by drawing on traditional and new role expectations, respondents discuss two primary trajectories: 1) the marital relationship and, 2) childrearing practices. In each case, clear relationships between the two statuses can be seen. Within the marital relationship, they draw on traditional role expectations by performing the majority of housework and childcare, *and* by assuming marital continuity. They draw on new expectations by assuming they are peers with their husbands due to having previously been peers with them in the professional world and by having contributed substantially to household breadwinning prior to leaving the workforce, and by proactively working toward marital success. In their childrearing practices, these respondents follow traditional role expectations by staying home with the children and, thus, by valuing the large quantity of time that they have to spend with their children and by consciously *devaluing* the small bits of "quality time" that mothers tout as being just as good. They also work to limit the amount of extracurricular activities in which their children are involved, pointing to children's need for free, unstructured time. Overall, these respondents say that they

consciously work against the rush and hurry that is characteristic of children in two career households.

Marriage Continuity. While the respondents know that there is always a possibility that death or disability will impact their family life, and they are well-insured for this possibility, they indicate that they are not nearly as well-prepared in case of divorce. During the interviews, several seemed genuinely surprised that they were asked about their plans if divorce should happen. Thus, one of the ways in which these mothers reconstruct their roles as former professional turned stay-at-home mother using traditional gender roles, is to assume marriage continuity. When questioned about the issue of divorce, *almost without exception*, there were two main responses – dismissal in some way or complete denial. Mothers do not the possibility of divorce by either making a joke, such as "I'd kill him first," "I'd take him to the cleaners," or "I'd nail him to the wall," or by changing the subject, or by denying that it is a possible issue by saying that "divorce is not an option," or that they have never thought about this possibility, or that they and their husbands have never discussed the issue.

Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, says that divorce is "not really an option" and that "we don't even discuss it as a viable option." She adds, "I tease him that it would be cheaper for him just to stay married to me…but, no, we don't talk about that as a real possibility."

Leslie Smith, a mother of two and former university administrator who has been out of the workforce for one year, responds to the divorce issue by sort of going around the subject. When asked what would happen to her family financially if she and her husband divorced, Leslie states,

> Um, if we divorced? Who would I lean on support-wise? It
> would absolutely be my parents. Yeah. And that's an interesting

topic you bring up, because that's another thing. Even though
I hated my job a couple of years ago, it was immensely good to
me to know that I was bringing in that kind of income, I had
retirement, I had life insurance….so if something happened to
[my husband]…I could take care of myself….That sort of freedom
does get taken away when you quit a job….[But] I don't really
entertain those thoughts [about divorce] too often.

When pressed, many respondents do explain that because they have a professional degree

and have experience in a professional career, they would be able to go back to work to support

themselves and their children if their marriage failed. Even respondents who have been out of the

workforce for many years, optimistically assume that they could pop back into the workforce at a

similar level. Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been

out of the workforce for nine years, says,

…even after nine years, I'm not up to date but I know enough
about the business and the consulting part of what I did. I mean,
I know within a year's time, I could be *right back where I was*
when I left.

And, Leslie Smith, a mother of two and former university administrator who has been out of the

workforce for one year, adds,

I know my capabilities and I know my skills. I can easily get
a full-time job if I needed to….It's not what I want to do
right now, but if something catastrophic happened in my
life, I would do it.

There were a few notable exceptions to the assumption of marriage continuity. In such

cases, the respondents had some previous experience with loss or tragedy, such as their parents'

divorce or marital problems, serious illness or death, such as cancer or the loss of a child, or their

own brush with divorce. Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who

has been out of the workforce for nine years, says that her early marital problems probably account

for the reason that she and her husband have talked at length about what would happen if they

divorced. She elaborates,

> [In the case of divorce] he would provide for us beyond what
> I ever asked. I know that because of the way he puts everything
> in my name. He makes sure, like on retirement things, I'm trustee
> along with him. We have an estate plan which specifies what all
> of our kids would get….We've talked about even divorce….We
> talk about it because of our history [of early marital problems].
> We talk about how important the mother is to the children….
> [He says] no matter what happens, 'I WILL take care of y'all.'

And, Dana adds that,

> …probably the reason my answer is different [from other
> respondents] is because of our history. And, the reason we
> survived that experience is because we said so many tough
> things. When it's happening to you, it makes it a whole lot
> harder to file for divorce when no one in your family [on either
> side] is divorced.

Overall, with few exceptions, these respondents' families of origin and their husbands' families of

origin were still intact. Similarly, in large part, these marriages were first marriages for respondents

and their husbands. Because the divorce cycle does occur generationally (Wallerstein, Lewis, and

Blakeslee 2000), if parents on both sides of the families of origin are still together, the couple is less

likely to divorce. The respondents in this study may realize that their likelihood is lower so they are

not concerned about the possibility of divorce.

While not acknowledging the possibility of divorce, many respondents do note strategic

ways in which they consciously work toward *success* in their marriages. For example, several

respondents describe the deliberate actions they take to continue to be attractive for their husbands

(both physically and intellectually), to foster a calm, comforting home atmosphere, and most

notably, to express appreciation for his hard work for the family. Hochschild (1989) suggests that

the essential foundation for an enduring relationship is being grateful to one's spouse for his or her

sacrifices. Overall, these respondents showed an appreciation of their husbands' sacrifices in order for them to be able to stay at home.

Mindful Parenting. One of the considerable differences between the current normative expectations of mothers, labeled as "intensive mothering (Hays 1996: 4)," the "new momism (Douglas and Meredith 2004: 4)," and the "mother mystique (Warner 2005: 13)," and these respondents' reconstruction of mother roles was a concentrated, yet *less-intensive*, focus on children. That is to say, while these respondents do focus their energy on their children and cite children's well-being as one of the main motivating factors to leave work, they proactively choose *not* to engage their children in a constant whirl of activity, including structured learning, sports, and other extra curricular activities. While these respondents do involve their children in some activities, several respondents note that this need for *constant* engagement and activity is a by-product of having two working parents. Drawing also on their own experiences as children with stay-at-home mothers, some respondents say that allowing children to have free play time or "down-time" to direct their own activity or lack of activity is reminiscent of their own childhood. These respondents feel that by having this non-directed time to engage their imaginations, children learn to be internally motivated and they learn the value of calmness.

Amy Taylor, a mother of three and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for six years, talks about the importance of unstructured "down-time" for her children,

> I think they need that down-time. I think that's another
> thing that kids whose moms work, they don't get to just
> veg out. You know, just chill out. Normally, about now,
> I have my three year old who naps so everybody has quiet
> time. From two to four [in the afternoon], while he sleeps,
> they read, play in their rooms, they have down-time. I mean,
> that's mental – everybody needs that down-time…in order to
> gear back up to have the energy for the rest of the day. And,

> I don't think that kids ever really get that down-time being
> shuffled around in the car and that kind of stuff.

Related to the issue of unstructured time, one of the most consistently discussed topics in the interviews was many of the respondents' disdain for the idea that the right "quality" of time is a sufficient substitute for a larger "quantity" of time. They are most adamant about quality time *not* making up for quantity time. Over and again, respondents relay that having a large quantity of time with at least one parent adds, in their opinions, to a stress free, calm, and stable environment for children.

Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, says that the amount of time spent with a child is important because you cannot predict when something will happen. She explains that,

> …you can't really plan those quality moments. They just
> happen and you need to have the *quantity* of time in order
> to catch those quality moments….I think a lot of working
> mothers release some of their guilt [about] not being there
> by saying that when they're there with their child, it's all
> quality time….[Children] have their own little schedule,
> their own little moods and you just can't sit down and say,
> 'Okay, now it's time for mommy and Junior's quality time.'
> You know, 'Let's have fun, let's be on our best behavior,'
> you know, 'be cute.' You just kind of have to, I mean, it
> just happens while you're changing a diaper that you'll kiss
> and hug and have those…little moments….You just can't plan
> it, it just happens. The more time you have with each other,
> the more likely you're going to experience those moments
> together.

Numerous respondents echo what Jennifer says about the value of having time and not being rushed. The unhurried childhood seemed to resonate through out the interviews as a theme for these mothers. Anne Planchette, a mother of five and former health care provider who has been out of the workforce for one year, says,

I'm here with them [now] and that is just invaluable. They're
playing in there and I'm in here doing something totally
different, but it's those minutes when they come in, 'oh yeah,
by the way' and this big conversation gets started, which
might have been missed if I hadn't been there….Things just
come up a little more naturally now, rather than 'we have an
hour' or 'hurry up and tell me what happened today before
we have to go to dance or we have to get dinner.' That kind
of thing….They just seem a bit calmer overall, I think.

And, Dana Graham, a mother of four and former certified public accountant who has been out of the

workforce for nine years, believes firmly in children needing a large quantity of a mom's time. She

says,

I am a strong believer that quality does not take the place of
quantity in a child's life. I don't think that a child can understand
that ten minutes of undivided, focused time with them in your
lap reading a book in their minds does not equate to washing
the dishes and having a conversation for an hour. To them, an
hour is more important. The more *time* you spend with them,
whether it's one hundred percent focused on them or letting them
be a part of your routine, the quantity at a small age matters to
them.

Strong opinions about the need for quantity time surface regardless of the ages of the

respondents' children. In fact, several respondents with older children and teenagers talk about how

older children need someone around, sometimes even more so than younger children. By parents

being at work in the afternoons, teenagers may be more likely to get into trouble. Mary-Louise

Kendall, a mother of three and former bank officer who has been out of the workforce for seventeen

years, explains,

I think a lot of what is wrong with the world is because
nobody has paid attention to these kids – not just poor, not
just underprivileged kids – but our group too. I think a lot
of kids get into trouble when they are teenagers and the family
unit had broken down and, you know, not enough attention was
paid, or the right kind of attention.

Susan McSwain, a mother of six and former attorney who has been out of the workforce for nine

years, explains that having a parent "there" for the children, to notice and nurture their gifts and

talents, no matter what their ages, is important for children's well-being. Describing what several

respondents also note, she explains,

> I think if they're less anxious about whether there is
> somebody there that they can depend on, then it allows them
> to focus on doing the best they can in whatever areas that
> they can. And, there are so many things that as the children
> become teenagers, I guess the focus is a little bit different.
> They start to pick up…on what their subtle gifts and talents
> are, and you have time to…be there to help direct them with
> that. And, so I think it's beneficial for them in that way too,
> if there is somebody who not only is there to notice some
> of their strengths, but also to help guide them toward
> developing those strengths….And, I think that's really good
> for them.

And, Tina Sardaux, a mother of two and former education specialist who has been out of the

workforce for ten years, says that when she was in the workforce, she saw behavioral similarities

between underprivileged children and children from two-income families. She explains,

> I worked in two very different schools, one was an inner-city
> school and the other was in an upper-middle class suburb. The
> kids there were very similar in that those who were given very
> little attention did much worse in terms of grades and behavior
> problems. There was *virtually no difference* in learning outcomes
> between a kid from the inner city whose parents weren't around
> for whatever reason and the privileged kid who never saw mom
> and dad because they were always working. The common
> denominator was that kids in both groups were being neglected.

Tina adds that having those experiences reinforced her desire to stay home once she had children,

and continues to motivate her now that her children are older.

Having the time to discipline children, according to respondents, seems to be an important

part of mindful parenting. Several respondents comment that children of working parents tend to be

less disciplined, perhaps due to mom not wanting to be the "bad guy" after being away from them

all day. One respondent speaks about this issue in terms of the difference she sees in her own

children. Anne Planchette, a mother of five and former health care provider who has been out of the

workforce for one year, says,

> I do think there are [improvements] with discipline. I mean,
> they're spoiled rotten and a lot of that is because of a lot of
> my guilt when I worked. You know, I was gone all day long,
> I would come home and the last thing I wanted to do was
> argue with them or fight with them or punish them when I
> was home. So a lot of things I let slide. Now, being off, 'I
> can't believe I let you act like that, No, you can't do that.'
> So, you know, I try to set more boundaries and I have a
> little more structure to our day.

And, Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical

researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, says that when mom stays home,

discipline is "more consistent." She elaborates,

> I think that when you're home, you're more likely to start
> [discipline] earlier [and] to follow through. Whereas, if you're
> working, I think by the time you get the child home from
> daycare, you're so pooped, you just want to have a good time
> with your kid, that you tend to let discipline slack….You just
> don't want to come home and play 'bad mommy' after you
> haven't seen them all day. That's the area where I think being at
> home improves.

Hays (1996) suggests that highly educated mothers are more likely than less educated

women to use time-consuming child rearing techniques, such as talking and reading more and

giving their children choices. The mothers in this study uniformly reflected this pattern. Although

they engage their children in these time-consuming techniques, the respondents emphasize that

these techniques do not cause stress for them nor for their children now that they are at home and

have plenty of time. However, for respondents that had children while still in the workforce, trying

to "be a good mother" in this way, was difficult in combination with the other responsibilities that

they were also juggling.

Jennifer Moore, a mother of one (and currently pregnant) and former doctoral level medical researcher who has been out of the workforce for three years, notes how her relaxed schedule allows her son to learn at his own pace. She says,

> When they use that time to play with toys, read books, play with blocks, play with animals, I think it is an early learning jump start to learning. And I'm not talking about flash-cards, we don't do flash-cards or anything, but it's just that one-on-one, individual reading….He kind of lets me know what his interests are and we can kind of talk about that, read about that, you know, delve further into his interests. So, I think that…time is invaluable while they're young.

Amy Taylor, a mother of three and former certified public accountant who has been out of the workforce for six years, says that the relaxed, yet structured, schedule that she can provide by staying home is better for her elementary age children, because,

> …when my kids come home, we do homework. It's not rushed. You know, they get a snack and they get homework. This is another deal….I think obesity, I think it's all driven by the way our lives are so crazy. I truly believe obesity is the two parents working craziness….They're not home, they're not playing in the yard, they're not riding their bikes. [Instead] they're sitting playing gameboys or playing games and eating chips, where I can choose. You know, my kids eat chips, but I can also choose fruit as their other option, and so they don't have another bag of chips.

Amy sums up the thoughts of many of the respondents when she adds, "I do believe that being at home is…much better for the kids."

Despite resistance and attempted social control measures, these respondents are reconstructing normative expectations for motherhood. Overall, respondents combine traditional gender role expectations with new expectations to reconstruct motherhood roles. Drawing on traditional gender norms, they are staying at home rather than participating in the paid labor force, their division of household labor is divided along traditional lines, and they assume that their

marriage will not end prematurely due to divorce. Utilizing new expectations, they consider themselves to be equal partners in their marriages, they work toward success in their marriages, and they are not following the "do it all" mom norms that focus on numerous structured activities and learning "opportunities" for children. Instead, these moms' discussions of their standards for childrearing include a lot of "down-time" and time for their children to use their imaginations and play.

SUMMARY

Although these respondents' family configurations reflect traditional gender role normative expectations, the reconstruction of motherhood roles for these families is a much more complicated process. These women did not simply default into motherhood, but rather proactively chose motherhood, and to be stay-at-home mothers. They are influenced by the changes in the social structure over the past twenty years, which include the normative expectation that mothers will also be in the paid labor force and the expectation that the "do it all" mother should have her children involved with structured learning, sports, and constant extracurricular activities. The stress and role overload that results from the combination of these norms has women, especially those who financially have the option to do so, throwing up their hands and leaving the workforce.

By reframing the job of stay-at-home mother to include the expectation of achievement and success, these women are able to better process the transition and identity shift that accompanies their change. Even so, several respondents had and continue to have difficulty shifting the focus of their identity from professional to stay-at-home mother. Trouble with shift in identity can be compounded by resistance from others to their reconstruction of the normative expectations for motherhood. While in some cases, mothers were told that they should be doing "more" than just being a mother, many of the respondents feel that their education and professional career help to

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make them better parents. So, just as in the work world, previous education and experience add value to a current position.

Through out their lives, the *work* that these mothers perform may have many different configurations. Although many of these moms talk about their career/motherhood trajectory as being the opposite of linear, nearly every respondent reports being happy or satisfied with her current position. At the same time, several speak of future endeavors that may or may not involve work in their previous career field. Most who say they would like to go back into the paid workforce would rather go into either a less demanding field, or a less demanding aspect of their former profession.

Overall, these women say that they use their background to better inform and empower their current position of stay-at-home mother. Part of the empowerment lies in the knowledge that because they previously contributed substantially to the family finances and because they were peers with their husbands in the workforce, they now expect an equal position in the marriage. In addition, they draw on their educational and workplace skills to be better informed about detail management and household management. They seem to want to avoid the rush of childrearing that is sometimes the result role overload and the stress of the third shift. Because they have experienced this stress when they were in the workforce, now they work hard to preserve a calm and relaxed family atmosphere.

For the privileged category of mothers who have the option to leave the workforce, finding a new way to mother is a process. Because there have been structural changes, they cannot only draw information from "housewives" and "homemakers" of generations past, but must reconstruct their own motherhood roles, also utilizing new expectations. Primarily, these new expectations revolve

around being an equal in the marriage and a proactive, yet not overbearing, decision-maker in their childrearing practices.

The women in this study construct new meanings of motherhood by creating a family configuration that reflects traditional gender role ideology. Regardless of their past division of household labor, current configurations are divided along traditional gender lines; frequently an inside-outside division. In addition, because many respondents contributed substantially to the household income prior to leaving the workforce, they have come to terms with not contributing financially to the household currently and with their husbands being the primary breadwinner. They understand that their households appear to be very traditional in terms of gender roles. The difference, for these women, is that because they were peers with their husbands in the workforce and because of their professional experience, they do not envision themselves as women who have defaulted into a "housewife" status due to no other choices. Clearly, they consider themselves proactive decision-makers with regard to the best interests of their families.

In addition to the process of accepting what appears to be a very traditional household arrangement, these women indicate that shifting the focus of their identity from professional to stay-at-home mother is a transition that takes time and energy. As they move through this transition, the mothers describe not only resistance from others to their change in roles, but also from themselves. Framing their change in status, and thus, roles, in terms that are similar to the professional workplace aids this transition process. Overwhelmingly, the respondents indicate that they view their new roles in terms of success and achievement. In this way, they are able to continue on a successful career path; the path is just one in which their *career* is now rearing their children fulltime rather than being in the paid workforce.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the highlights of the findings will be described as well as study limitations and suggestions for future research. Beginning with limitations, a discussion of the future of motherhood and possible solutions for the work and family balance are addressed. Finally, the conclusions are presented.

SUMMARY

By reframing their career paths to include time away from the professional workforce in order to stay at home with their children, these respondents are able to view being a stay-at-home mother as a job. In this job, just as in school and in the professional world, success remains the goal so they view staying home in terms of achievement.

In order to continue along their path of achievement, respondents reconstruct the roles of motherhood to better fit their circumstances. Respondents indicate that they reconstruct their mothering roles primarily along two trajectories: 1) traditional, gender role normative expectations – the assumption of marriage continuity and a traditional division of household labor, and 2) new expectations in reaction to the changing social structure – seeing themselves as equals with their husbands and using proactive decision-making in their childrearing practices while not being overbearing or micromanaging their children.

With the increase in percentage of women in their late thirties and early forties becoming first-time mothers, an increasing number of women with college degrees and careers, and the "stalled revolution" regarding the household labor contribution of fathers, the timeline of motherhood for upper-middle-class professionals may be beginning to look quite different from

even a generation ago. For these cutting-edge mothers, and perhaps future mothers, a family-work timeline may look something more like this: college, post-graduate degree, career building and marriage, career success, giving birth, staying home with children, rearing children, part-time work or new, more relaxed paid employment or career as a volunteer. Of course, death or disability of a spouse, or divorce, could change this timeline significantly.

Just as the privileged women of the 1960s were dissatisfied with being expected to only be "housewives" and saw life at home as drudgery and mind-numbingly boring, privileged women in the 21st century may see juggling a professional career along with the second and third shifts as intolerable. In the 1950s, housewives just wanted a chance in the exciting world of careers. Now, perhaps this second generation of women who entered the labor force and found success at the professional level just want a chance to stop the spinning and get off the merry-go-round for a while and go home.

The organization of the main points of this study include motivators for the respondents to exit the paid workforce and influencing factors in the role-making process of motherhood, including traditional gender role ideology and new normative expectations. The section ends with a discussion of the reconstruction of motherhood roles that emerges from blending traditional expectations and new expectations based on structural changes.

<u>Push Factors and Pull Factors</u>

Hewlett and Luce (2005) suggest that, for mothers, there are either factors that *push* them out of the workplace, such as employers who are not responsive to the needs of parents, or role overload from trying to do it all, or factors that *pull* them home, such as the need to rear their own children and to have a less stressful family life. While the respondents in this study note both push

and pull factors, they emphasize the factors pulling them home when they discuss motivation to leave the workforce.

Most respondents, especially those in traditionally male-dominated fields or in client-driven fields, discuss the non-family friendly workplace issues with which they had to contend prior to leaving the workforce. Outright discrimination and/or sexist bias definitely played a part, but mostly, subtle, yet powerful, messages about employer expectations were the most influential issues with which they had to deal. Employer expectations of a linear professional employee career track, including availability for travel and overtime, and very limited time off for maternity leave and other childcare responsibilities, prevail as the most troublesome workplace concerns for these respondents. Although some companies touted "family-friendly" workplace policies, such as flexible and reduced schedules, respondents indicate that they were aware of the price they would have paid for taking advantage of these policies. The cost for even asking, much less using, the "official" policies is that the professional employee would not be taken seriously, and thus, would not, for example, be competitive for promotion, partnership, or tenure.

In addition to issues directly related to work, respondents also indicate problems indirectly related to work, such as the stress associated with trying to get everything done and trying to keep everyone happy. Being responsible for two highly demanding jobs – professional careers and rearing children/household management – requires a lot from women and often leads to role overload. The respondents in this study indicate that it is nearly impossible to perform both of these roles well. At best, they produced mediocre role performances and the respondents say that they never felt like any part received their full attention. Bolton (2000: 1) describes this as the "third shift" – psychological torture over their personal and professional choices and whether they are

good enough at anything they do. Many respondents describe participating in the third shift because their lives prior to leaving the workforce were highly stressful and guilt-ridden.

A large part of the third shift comes from being the ones responsible for "the details." Some respondents note that even though their husbands were willing "helpers," they were not willing to take responsibility for the myriad of details that are associated with household management. Responsibility for daily household and childcare management fell to the respondents, producing substantial stress and anxiety. Demands on their time and energy were so high that, for these respondents at least, leisure time was at a premium when they were trying to juggle everything. Friendships and time to pursue hobbies or other interests were nearly non-existent.

Although not generalizable, findings in this study on the division of household labor, role overload, detail management, and leisure gap are consistent with Hochschild's (1989) findings nearly twenty years ago. Hochschild suggests that there is a "stalled revolution (1989: 11)" due to women entering the labor force in unprecedented numbers but still being responsible the large majority of household labor. Whereas the baby boomer women in Hochschild's study remained in the workforce for the most part, some of the generation X women in this study went home. However, these women, who are members of a privileged class, had the financial means to be able to make this choice. Even so, two decades later, the revolution may still be stalled. But, rather than continue to juggle the second shift of household labor and the third shift of guilt, stress, and anxiety, along with their demanding careers, the women in this study exited the labor force.

Whether or not they initially planned to stay home, many respondents describe a deep need to be with their children. That is, they have the need to be the ones to rear the children, not only because they feel that they "should" but also because they feel that they are the ones who could best do the job. For the most part, husbands are supportive of their wives staying home, indicating that

the men, as well as the women, are socialized to believe that women are the most appropriate

caregivers (Chodorow 1978). Although this maternal need to rear their children is not questioned by

the respondents, this need or socially constructed "maternal desire," points to an internalized, well-

socialized, traditional gender role ideology that is prevalent even in these highly educated, former

professionals.

Although access to quality daycare has been shown to be positively related to psychological

well-being for employed mothers (Hughes and Galinsky 1994), because these respondents'

household incomes are well above average, access to quality daycare was not problematic. Instead

of access being the issue causing stress for these respondents, the biggest issues with daycare were

the absolute number of hours that children spent there and the fact that the childcare workers were

someone other than mom. Even when respondents were satisfied with the daycare staff, they were

not comfortable with their children essentially being reared by someone other than themselves.

Together, factors pushing women out of the workforce and pulling them into the home

motivated these respondents to leave the paid labor to rear their children full-time. Once they made

the decision to stay home, their motherhood identity and practices have been shaped not only by

traditional motherhood roles of generations past, but also by their experiences in higher education

and in the professional workforce, as well as in reaction to changing social structure.

Traditional Gender Roles

Although reconstructing motherhood roles involves consideration of new normative

expectations, those who are role-making also draw from traditional, or socially stable, roles. The

division of household labor is one area in which the respondents adhere to traditional gender norms.

Whether or not household labor was divided in this way before they left the workforce, respondents

indicate that their division of household labor is currently divided down traditional gender lines. For

some respondents and their husbands, this unequal division of household labor is a point of contention. For others, the inequality is considered part of *her* job because he is working "so hard" at breadwinning for the family. Like Hochschild's (1989) upper-middle-class families, a few couples view housework to be a joint effort but, for these couples, reality does not always reflect ideology. Even though these households claim to hold more egalitarian attitudes regarding division of household labor, in reality, the housework is divided along traditional gender lines.

In addition to division of household labor, these respondents also draw upon traditional gender roles by assuming marriage continuity. Most respondents say that they have not considered the possibility of future divorce. Those who have considered the possibility said that in the case of divorce, they are quite sure that they could go back into the workforce at a similar level as before or that they would be provided for by their husbands. In a twenty-five year longitudinal study on children of divorce, Wallerstein et al. (2000) find a much lower likelihood of future divorce for children from intact families. Because most of the respondents' parents and their husbands' parents are still married, their optimism may be warranted. Even so, the cost of being out of the workforce for several years and then losing the primary breadwinner is high and one of the primary causes of poverty among women over sixty-five years old (Bolton 2000). Even if they re-enter the labor market, finding employment at the same level at which they left could be difficult, if not impossible (Hewlett and Luce 2005). The few respondents who recognize this risk, admit concern but also say that the risk is worth the benefit to their children and family life.

In recognizing that their household configurations are similar to 1950's "traditional" family households, some respondents express concern. Others, however, point out that while their households appear to be similar, *they* did not default into being a stay-at-home mother for lack of choices, as did women in other generations. Rather, they chose this job in the same proactive way

that they chose to attend college and that they chose their professional careers. For many respondents, this *choice factor* helps to frame their new roles, again, in terms of achievement, which seems to make leaving the workforce more acceptable.

New Expectations

Because these women were peers with their husbands in college and in the professional world, they expect to be peers with them in the home. While their division of household labor follow traditional gender lines, these respondents expect equality in their relationships and in decision-making. In addition to being peers with their husbands, many of the respondents contributed to the family financially in such a way that they do not feel guilty for not contributing financially now. For example, several respondents were the primary or only breadwinners while their husbands finished school or started their careers. Taken together, peer relationships and prior breadwinning led these women to expect equality in their marriages.

Although the prevailing motherhood norm today is "intensive mothering" (Hays 1996: 4), these mothers proactively structure their children's lives around a calm and relaxed family life. Respondents note the value of down-time, of "being there" for their children, and of large quantities of time, regardless of the ages of their children. Nearly without exception, the mothers in this study emphasize the need for *quantity* time rather than just *quality* time, as is the norm for working, baby boomer mothers. These findings are consistent with other recent findings that suggest that perhaps because this generation of women, generation X, were the children of the first generation of women in the workforce in large numbers, they attach value to a large amount of family time together (Bolton 2000; Chung 2004). However, many respondents make it clear that although they believe in spending a lot of time with their children, they do not follow the prevailing norm of micromanaging their children's lives, another aspect of intensive mothering.

Overall, these respondents combine traditional gender role expectations with new expectations to reconstruct motherhood roles. Drawing on traditional gender norms, they divide their household labor along traditional lines and they assume marriage continuity. Utilizing new role expectations, based on their educational level, professional experience, and changes in the social structure surrounding normative expectations for mothers, they are proactive decision-makers. Just as they did in their education and in the professional workforce, these respondents *chose* to be stay-at-home mothers. They duplicate this practical attitude when dealing with their spouse and with their children. Because they have achieved success in other areas, they assume that they will be successful in this area of their lives as well. They consider themselves to be equal with their husbands in the marriage and they make deliberate decisions about childrearing. While being proactive and structured in their childrearing philosophies, these mothers are quite the opposite of the "do it all" baby boomer mothers. Instead, these mothers' discussions of their standards for childrearing include unstructured time for their children to use their imaginations and play.

While the transition from professional to stay-at-home mother is a process, these respondents believe that any identity crisis or shift that they endured has been worthwhile in the end. Because they feel that being at home is best for their children and for their family life, these women go against the norm to reconstruct a hybrid of sorts. They combine traditional gender expectations with new expectations based on the changes in the past twenty years. For these respondents, the results are happier and healthier children and a calmer, more relaxed, and more smoothly-run family life.

<u>Role-Making</u>

While traditional gender role ideology informs the "maternal desire" so strongly felt by these respondents, attitudes are not the only factors influencing their motherhood roles. These

mothers also draw from their professional experience to frame their new roles as a *job*. In the home, just as in the workplace, then, they view this job in terms of achievement. Just as they found professional success, they work for success as a stay-at-home mother. For these high-achieving women, being at home is another career and in this new career success is not optional. Framing their new job in terms of achievement indicates that these mothers take seriously their position and use skills and attitudes learned in the workforce, along with traditional role expectations, to reconstruct new roles for stay-at-home moms.

Although when reconstructing new roles for a given status, resistance to change – by self and by others – is often experienced (Williams 1993), respondents indicate that most resistance comes either in the form of feeling guilty about not using their education or from others challenging the importance of being a stay-at-home mother compared to their potential contributions in the workplace. However, despite resistance, these mothers are working to reconstruct what it means to be a stay-at-home mother in today's world.

Thus, these mothers began reconstructing motherhood roles by drawing on traditional gender role expectations. However, because they were experiencing them in the context of new expectations based on structural changes, and found that they did not fit their family situations, they began to reconstruct, or role-make, new hybrid roles. These hybrid roles combine traditional gender role expectations taken from the general culture, and their own mothers, with these respondents' own experiences with achievement and success.

LIMITATIONS

The goal of this qualitative, exploratory study was not to generalize to the population-at-large, but to explore the experiences of some members of a specific category of stay-at-home mothers. While we know that data gathered from a small number of respondents cannot speak for

everyone in a particular category, it is an important beginning for understanding the meanings and

motives these women have for their rather substantial life course change. Access to the richness of

these women's experiences and how they actively construct meaning in their daily lives were the

objectives.

However, because these data are unique, certain limitations should be discussed. Although

not intended to speak for all families, the data from this sample only begins to address the issue of

professionals leaving the workforce to become stay-at-home mothers. Data gathered and analyzed

covers a range of possibilities but the information does not reach a saturation point and more is

needed. For example, because the initial contact was with a law firm partner, the snowball began

with attorneys. One consequence for this project of sampling in this way is that nearly one third of

the respondents are former attorneys. While other professionals mention similar workplace

challenges as do the attorneys, a more diversified sample might have produced different results. An

issue that several attorneys discuss is that perhaps the demands of the practice of law are especially

difficult to balance along with the responsibilities of a family.

Other limitations with this sample include region and religion; the sample consists of

respondents primarily from the deep south and who are mostly Catholic. Because gender attitudes

tend to be more traditional in the south (Powers, Suitor, Guerra, Shackelford, and Mecom 2003),

this sample may be skewed toward being more likely to adopt traditional gender roles in their

household configurations. Additional data from respondents in other parts of the country might

provide a more comprehensive indicator of overall traditional gender role configurations in

generation X in comparison with prior generations. Although the respondents show high religiosity,

perhaps due to the Catholic practice of weekly church attendance, they do not indicate that their

religious beliefs influenced their decisions to stay at home. If, perhaps, the sample had included

more respondents from protestant and, especially, from evangelical denominations, religious beliefs may have been more of an influential factor.

Finally, these respondents represent members of a very privileged class. While they do provide information about a growing trend, the trend only applies to a small proportion of women in the workforce. The large majority of employed mothers do not have the option to choose whether to remain in the workforce. However, the sociologically interesting aspect of this trend is that changing normative expectations have often been initiated by those from privileged classes because they have options. For example, in the 1960s, middle class housewives fueled the push to get women out of the house and into the workforce. While there were many working class women already in the workforce, the push by middle class mothers to have educational and professional opportunities led to increased participation of *all* women in the workforce. This participation increased so much that now it is the normative expectation. Perhaps the growing trend of upper-middle-class former professionals going home to rear their children full-time is indicative of a future normative expectation for women of other classes.

Despite the limitations of this study, these respondents represent one possible response, among many, to the problem of the work and family balance. While not all women, or men for that matter, can afford to leave the workforce in order to focus on their family, many families are looking for solutions to the frenzied pace that rearing children while working full-time demands. While this study focused on those who left the workforce entirely, a compromise of time might be an alternative solution. Part-time and flex-time professionals are becoming more common and may address the issue of building and maintaining a profession while successfully rearing children. Other combinations of paid employment and family responsibilities may also be possible. Additional research may provide future work and family options.

Even though these respondents are from a privileged category of women, this study raises important questions about normative roles for mothers, for fathers, and about what is most healthy for children and family life in general. Most notably, that even though women have made substantial progress in the workforce, there continues to be a "stalled revolution" at home in terms of responsibility for housework, childcare, and detail management. The solution for some in this generation of working mothers was to exit the workforce.

Because of the recent statistical trend of professional women leaving the workforce to rear their children full-time, only women who chose to quit the workforce were interviewed for this project. However, further research exploring motivations for women to *stay* in the professional workforce would be of value. Investigating factors motivating upper-middle-class professional women to stay in their careers might shed additional light on what has been termed "brain drain" (Hewlett and Luce 2005: 43), referring to the loss of valuable female talent when highly credentialed women leave the workplace to rear children.

Interviewing professionals who have chosen to balance work and home by working part-time or on a consultant basis, or in flexible work arrangements might provide additional information about other possible solutions. Rather than a zero-sum solution – work *or* home – perhaps a compromise of time and location could provide an arrangement that would suit the demands of a professional career and a growing family.

Finally, by interviewing men whose professional wives have exited the workforce to stay at home, additional information regarding gender role socialization and internalized gender role normative expectations could be further investigated. Not only are girls socialized to expect that they will be the ones primarily responsible for household labor, but boys also continue to be

socialized to expect this. In addition, boys continue to be socialized to expect that they will be primarily responsible for finding and building a successful career.

In any case, what is needed is a continued cultural conversation about gender role expectations. Although the women in this study found a new way to frame the sacrifice of their career for the well-being of their families, should these choices be necessary? If so, should these choices only be asked of women?

CONCLUSIONS

The current trend of professional women leaving workforce to rear their children full-time is explored in this project by interviewing a small sample of this privileged population. Through qualitative analysis of the data, certain patterns emerged. The richness of these women's experiences and their active reconstruction of motherhood in their daily lives are examined. Although this small sample cannot speak for all families, the findings may be a useful beginning for addressing the issue of the work and family balance. These respondents provide one possible solution, among many, by discussing their experiences with leaving the professional workforce to rear their children full-time.

The study respondents, who are women in the second generation to enter the labor force in large numbers, indicate that there were factors that pushed them out of the workforce, such as a non-family friendly workplace and role overload, and factors that pulled them back home, such as a socially constructed maternal desire or a profound need to rear their own children. While the transition from professional to stay-at-home mother is a complex process, for the women in this study, staying at home to rear their children full-time became their new career. Reframing their career sacrifice in such a way, allows them to continue to view their current position – stay-at-home mother – in terms with which they were familiar – success and achievement. Through these lenses,

they are able to reconstruct motherhood roles, using a combination of traditional gender normative expectations and new expectations based on changes in the social structure over the past twenty to thirty years.

Thus, although these respondents represent a small, privileged class of women, their reconstructed motherhood roles draw on solid, traditional gender normative expectations and new expectations based on structural changes. Although their family configurations were reminiscent of their grandmothers' households, they utilized *choices* that their mothers' generation, the baby boomers, brought forth, namely the opportunity to participate in the workforce. Those increased opportunities for education and professional careers led to the expectation that today's mothers will be in the workforce. For the mothers in this study, then, the new normative expectation of achievement and success in anything they attempt fosters a willingness – and ability – to reconstruct a new hybrid of motherhood, rather than simply take on the expected motherhood roles of the past.

Because this study is limited by size, occupation, region, religion, and, especially, social class, the data and findings cannot speak for all working families. Only time will tell whether the trends of a privileged class of professional women will eventually extend into the general culture. However, understanding the process that the women in this study use to reconstruct the roles of motherhood provides a useful starting point for sociologists in the areas of work and family to begin to explore these issues. Although these respondents chose one possible solution, to exit the workforce entirely, other responses may include part-time or consulting work, flex-time or job sharing.

In addition, family sociologists should continue the conversation addressing gender role socialization. At the heart of this issue of the work and family balance is the assumption that women will continue to bear responsibilities for both family and for outside employment. We ask how

women can better juggle everything that is required of them. We do not ask why they should be expected to "do it all." Would a more egalitarian gender role socialization process change these assumptions?

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INTERVIEW GUIDELINE: ORIGINAL VERSION

Excluding the first question, these areas of interest may not be addressed in this particular order.

However, all of the areas of interest will be covered in the interview.

- Please describe what has been going on in your life since exiting the paid labor force.

Motives

- What factors led to your decision to leave your career to rear your children full-time?

- Was leaving planned or did you make the decision after you were pregnant/the child was

  born?

Decision-Making Process/Gender Role Ideology

- How did your husband feel about the decision-making process?

  o What was his reaction?

  o How did he say he felt about the decision?

- How has your decision to stay home affected your family, including your children?

  o Better for children to have stay-at-home mother?

Role Overload Issues

- If you were already a parent before leaving the workplace, how were your parental

  responsibilities balanced with your work responsibilities?

- Describe your husband's involvement with household tasks, including childcare, before and

  after you left the workplace.

- Describe any extended family involvement with the children, before and after you exited the workplace.

- Are any outside caregivers utilized now, including extended family members, paid care, and "bartered" care with other stay-at-home mothers.

Future Plans

- What are your plans for future career involvement?

  o If you plan to return, when do you plan to return?

  o Have you made any arrangements for your return?

    ▪ If so, what do the arrangements include?

- How did the decision affect your family financially?

  o Future financial stability/security?

    ▪ Does your family have a specific plan for future security?

      • If so, what does that plan include?

  o If something happens to your husband (divorce/disability/death), please describe your financial plans for you and your children.

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE: FINAL VERSION

General

- Please describe what has been going on in your life since exiting the paid labor force.

Motives

- What factors led to your decision to leave your career to rear your children full-time?

- Was leaving planned or did you make the decision after you were pregnant/the child was born?

Decision-Making Process/Gender Role Ideology

- In your mind, what is the normative family model? What do you see as the "ideal" family arrangement?

- Please describe your mom and dad's arrangements for work and household tasks/childcare? How did they work it out?

- If religious, how have your religious beliefs influenced your decision about whether to stay home?

- Was there a particular incident or feeling that triggered your decision to stay home?

- Do or did you have a role model for this decision (e.g. someone in a similar situation that decided to stay home)?

- How did your husband feel about the decision-making process?

  o What was his reaction?

     ○   How did he say he felt about the decision?

     ○   If supportive initially, is he still supportive? If so, how does he indicate his support?

- How has your decision to stay home affected your family, including your children?

     ○   Better for children to have stay-at-home mother?

<u>Role Overload Issues</u>

- If you were already a parent before leaving the workplace, how were your parental responsibilities balanced with your work responsibilities?

- Describe your husband's involvement with household tasks, including childcare, before and after you left the workplace.

- Does he seem satisfied or has he indicated that he is satisfied with the current arrangement regarding household tasks and childcare?

- Are you satisfied with the current arrangements?

- Describe any extended family involvement with the children, before and after you exited the workplace.

- Describe any outside help with household labor that you received before you left work and that you now receive.

- Are any outside caregivers utilized now, including extended family members, paid care, and "bartered" care with other stay-at-home mothers.

- Does your social circle (other women friends) include SAH mothers?

     ○   If so, were they in the paid labor force prior to becoming SAH moms?

<u>Future Plans</u>

- What was your career path prior to leaving the workforce?

- What are your plans for future career involvement?

  - If you plan to return, when do you plan to return?

  - Have you made any arrangements for your return?

    - If so, what do the arrangements include?

- How did the decision affect your family financially?

  - Future financial stability/security?

    - Does your family have a specific plan for future security?

      - If so, what does that plan include?

  - If something happens to your husband (divorce/disability/death), please describe your financial plans for you and your children.

<u>Regrets</u>

- Please describe any second thoughts or apprehensions that you had when you first left the workforce and that you may now have.

- How have you resolved these issues?

- Did you or have you noticed a difference in your self-esteem between when you were in the workforce and now (either positive or negative change)?

- Please describe any change in self identity from when you were a working woman to now being a stay-at-home mother.

- Overall, which do you see as more important – a career or being a stay-at-home mother?

- Is there anything at all that you would like me to know or that you would like to add?

DEMOGRAPHIC WORKSHEET

DEMOGRAPHIC WORKSHEET (Respondent #2006-____)

1 – Year of Birth: _____

2 – Current Marital Status:
    ___Married
    ___Separated
    ___Divorced
    ___Widowed
    ___Never Married

3a – Your Highest Educational Attainment   3b – Spouse's Highest Educational Attainment
    ___Less than a high school diploma   ___Less than a high school diploma
    ___High school diploma/GED   ___High school diploma/GED
    ___Some college/Associate Degree   ___Some college/Associate's Degree
    ___Bachelor's Degree   ___Bachelor's Degree
    ___Post-Graduate Professional Degree (i.e. Law)   ___Post-Graduate Professional Degree (i.e. Law)
    ___Master's Degree   ___Master's Degree
    ___Doctoral Degree   ___Doctoral Degree

4 – Professional Licensure/Certification (i.e.
CPA):_____

5 – Your Former Occupation:
_____

6 – Spouse's Current Occupation:
_____

7 – Number of Months or Years since Paid Employment: _____Years _____Months

8a – Number of Children: _____ 8b – Age(s): _____ 8c – Gender(s):_____

DEMOGRAPHIC WORKSHEET, page 2 (Respondent #2006-____)

9a – Your Former Income Range (wife only – from wages, salaries, and investments):
___$20,000 to $40,000
___$41,000 to $60,000
___$61,000 to $80,000
___$81,000 to $100,000
___$101,000 to $125,000
___$126,000 to $150,000
___$151,000 to $175,000
___$176,000 to $200,000
___Over $200,000

9b – Former Household Income Range (from wages, salaries, and investments):
___$20,000 to $40,000
___$41,000 to $60,000
___$61,000 to $80,000
___$81,000 to $100,000
___$101,000 to $125,000
___$126,000 to $150,000
___$151,000 to $175,000
___$176,000 to $200,000
___Over $200,000

9c – Current Household Income Range (from wages, salaries, and investments):
___$20,000 to $40,000
___$41,000 to $60,000
___$61,000 to $80,000
___$81,000 to $100,000
___$101,000 to $125,000
___$126,000 to $150,000
___$151,000 to $175,000
___$176,000 to $200,000
___Over $200,000

10a – Religion:
___Catholic
___Protestant (Denomination: _____)
___Jewish
___Other (Please list: _____)
___None

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DEMOGRAPHIC WORKSHEET, page 3 (Respondent #2006-____)

10b – If religious, average participation?
     ___N/A (not religious)
     ___Once or more per week
     ___2-3 times per month
     ___Once a month
     ___Only on holidays
     ___A few times a year
     ___Only for family occasions (weddings/funerals/christenings)
     ___Only on holidays and family occasions

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM (Nonclinical)

Study Title: Supermoms No More: Generation X Professionals on Having It 'All' And Letting It Go

Performance Site: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. 4:30 p.m.

                            Monisa Shackelford 225-578-1645, 228-223-8531

                            Dr. Michael D. Grimes 225-578-1645

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is: 1) to explore motives for former

                      career professionals to leave work and become stay-at-home mothers, and 2) to understand their meanings of motherhood.

Subject Inclusion: Married, college-educated, stay-at-home mothers between the ages of 26 and 41 who previously worked as full-time career professionals.

Number of subjects: 20-30

Study Procedures: The study will be conducted in one phase. Subjects will spend about one and a half to two hours discussing questions in a taped interview setting.

Benefits: Subjects will be part of a study that may yield valuable information about motherhood.

Risks: There is no known risk to participating in this study. Any sensitive information will be kept confidential (unless release is legally compelled) and files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigator has access.

Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Monisa Shackelford was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on November 29, 1967. She graduated from the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, with a Bachelor of Science degree, in 1990. In 1994, she graduated from the University of South Alabama, Mobile, Alabama, with a Master of Arts degree. After working for several years in medical research, first as a co-investigator for a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention project on women with spinal cord injury and next on a joint schizophrenia project for both the North Little Rock Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, she returned to Louisiana to attend Louisiana State University and complete her doctoral degree.