MOMS IN THE MIDDLE: PARENTING MAGAZINES, MOTHERHOOD TEXTS
AND THE "MOMMY WARS."

A Thesis by

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I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Communication.

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We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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Patricia Dooley, Committee Member

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DEDICATION

To my daughter Lola, whose smile and unconditional love kept me going when I wanted to give up. And to my mother, whose choices have allowed me to pursue my dreams. Words cannot express how thankful I am. I could not have done this without you.

"All I am, I owe to my mother" – George Washington

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the role of parenting magazines and popular texts about motherhood in the social construction of the "mommy wars," or the cultural tug-of-war between women who work for pay and women who stay home to care for their children. A critical discourse analytic method was used to examine a constructed 10-year sample of *Parents* magazine, as well as the three best-selling mainstream motherhood texts from 1990 to 2000. Two predominant themes were identified, as well as a number of salient sub themes, all of which contribute to a socially constructed ideology of motherhood. This analysis suggests that these texts perpetuate the "mommy wars" by reinforcing the views working and at-home mothers have of themselves, promoting the ideology of intensive mothering, and discouraging discussion of the ambivalence many women feel about motherhood.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1990, *Newsweek* coined the term "mommy wars" to describe the cultural tug-of-war between women who stay at home to care for children and women who work outside the home. The article, *"Mommy vs. Mommy,"* (Darnton 1990) highlighted the struggles and arguments of both sides. Working mothers view stay-at-home mothers as lazy and uninteresting, while at the same time, they worry about the effects of daycare on their infant or struggle with the guilt of not seeing their children's first smile, first steps or hearing baby's first word. Stay-at-home mothers, on the other hand, think working moms are selfish, materialistic and too busy for their kids, while coping with feeling of insecurity, inadequacy and loneliness.

The "mommy wars" moniker has made a good headline over the years, and the popular media has taken advantage of it. Unlike some media fueled topics, however, this one has never really gone away, not in the media and definitely not on the playgrounds and in the PTA meetings. More than a decade after "*Mommy vs. Mommy*," the debate is still showing up in books, magazine articles, TV shows and Internet chat boards and blogs. Most use the stories of real mothers to demonstrate how the two sides clash when it comes to involvement in the lives of their children, suggesting the "mommy wars" are real and not just a construction of the media. A November 2003 episode of *Dr. Phil* literally pitted working and stay-at-home moms against each other by seating them on opposite sides of the isle. The reaction to the show was heated, drawing 152 pages of comments on the Web site and a joint statement of disapproval by the show's two experts

who insisted the show was edited to make the "intelligent discussion look like a catfight" (Graff 2007 p. 2). Oprah, too, joined the discussion in January 2007 with her episode "My Baby or My Job: Why Elizabeth Vargas Stepped Down." The show featured prominent ABC reporter Elizabeth Vargas, who, after giving birth, chose to resign as anchor of ABC evening news because of the long hours and constant travel. Instead, she took a less demanding but equally high profile position as the host of *20/20*, ABC's popular newsmagazine program.

The discussion of the "mommy wars," however, is more than simply one woman's defense of her choice over another woman's choice. There are larger social and cultural issues involved. This research aims to uncover whether parenting magazines and popular texts about motherhood address these issues (outlined below) in their discourse about motherhood and, if so, how they do so.

A thorough survey of the literature indicates four primary social and cultural issues are at play with regard to a woman's decision to stay home to care for children or work outside the home. With the obvious exception of the economic necessity of two incomes to survive or maintain a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, these issues are "opting-out" of the workforce, the availability of high-quality affordable childcare, corporate inflexibility and the marginalization of domestic work. There is considerable overlap in the discussion of these issues, but each has components that make it unique and thus essential to the overall discourse surrounding the "mommy wars." Additionally, the idealization of the nuclear family structure and the societal definitions of "good mother" and "bad mother," are relevant.

Opting-out

The notion that one woman can have a successful career and a family while another woman feels compelled to quit her job (sometimes against her wishes) to take care of her family is at the core of the polarization between women who work and women who stay home. Opting out, according to Belkin (2003), is the trend of well educated, upper and middle class women forgoing fast-track careers to stay home and care for children. Belkin suggests the current generation of women, after seeing their mothers and grandmothers fight for equality, suffrage and women's rights, "don't want to run the world" (p. 3). In her 2003 *New York Times* article, *"The Opt-Out Revolution,"* Belkin cited dozens of women who have chosen, or opted-out, of the workforce due to stress, inflexibility of scheduling, and the inability to find the ever elusive balance between having a successful career and a family. She comes to the conclusion that the definition of success has changed for women and that "having it all," (i.e. a successful career and a happy family) is no longer the mainstay of what it means to be fulfilled.

In response to *"The Opt-Out Revolution,"* Hirshman (2005) argues women who opt-out are undoing what the feminists of previous generations worked so hard for. In her 2005 study of women whose wedding announcements appeared in the *New York Times Sunday Style* section over a three week period in 1996, Hirshman found 90 percent, or 30 women, had babies and of those, only five were working full-time. Of the other twenty-five women, 10 were working part-time and half were not working at all. The problem, says Hirshman, is that these are the women who were supposed to be making strides for feminism, fighting for workplace equality and family friendly policy changes. But some believe Hirshman took her argument too far by suggesting educated women "marry

down" to avoid power struggles within the marriage. She says, "marry young or marry much older (men). Younger men are potential high-status companions. Much older men are sufficiently established so that they don't have to work so hard, and they often have enough money to provided unlimited household help" (p. 8). She also suggests marrying a liberal, since "conservatives justified the unequal family in two modes: 'God ordained it' and 'biology is destiny'" (p. 8).

Bennetts (2007) argues similarly in her book *The Feminine Mistake.* She believes stay-at-home mothers are doing themselves, and all women, a great disservice by opting out. Her book focuses primarily on the negative effects of female economic dependency and argues the responsible thing for a woman to do is work, so in the event of a divorce, or sudden death or disability of a spouse, the woman can provide for her family if necessary.

Most recently, Stone (2007) a sociologist, expanded on Belkin's (2003) work, asking whether college-educated professional women really are opting out of the workforce. Stone interviewed 54 college-educated women, most of whom were working in male-dominated professions before quitting to stay home with their children. Stone's research found that, contrary to popular belief, these women were not opting-out of the workforce, they were being shut out.

Peskowitz (2005) agrees, arguing that opting-out should not be framed as a choice when the "choices" women are given are not adequate to begin with. She writes:

"We may choose to leave our jobs. But that's only the smallest part of the picture. We don't choose the structures of the workplace that make it so difficult to get

back in when we return, or to work part-time and be paid fairly for it. This workplace predicament is not our choice. Let's be clear about that" (p. 98).

Workplace Inflexibility

The increase in the number of mothers with young children in the workforce has been widely documented (Hayghe 1986; Matthews & Rodin 1989; Stone 2007) and some estimates suggest that more than half of married mothers with children under age one are in the workforce (United States Census Bureau, 2000). Despite their status as wage earners, women's needs seem to be mostly neglected in workplace policy (Glazer 2003). Women in the workforce face a number of penalties when they become mothers, including the "mommy tax," "glass ceiling," "maternal wall," and infamous "mommy track."

The "mommy tax," according to Crittenden (2002) is the lifetime loss of income and benefits a woman suffers when she leaves the workforce, even temporarily. By Crittenden's estimates, the tax can range from several hundred thousand dollars to more than one million dollars. Crittenden argues that this "mommy tax" is unfair, and workplaces should be more accommodating to the needs of families. She advocates for family friendly policies like longer, paid maternity leaves, flexible scheduling for parents, laws against discrimination in the workplace based on parental status, better pay and benefits for part time work. Blades and Finkbeiner (2006) make similar claims. They assert women should not be punished for raising the next generation, and that biased government and workplace policies punish at-home mothers and push working mothers into the home.

The decades old "glass ceiling" refers to the idea that women and minorities can see the top of the corporate ladder, but when they try to climb it, they reach a point where they simply cannot advance any further. Typically viewed as a form of discrimination, Williams (2000) construes it as a type of bonding ritual many women are simply not privy to. She observes

> One day I noticed a toy basketball hoop in the wall of a colleague's office. When I remarked on it, he explained that it was meant to make people feel more comfortable. I'm sure it does make some people feel more comfortable; I suspect those people are predominately male. To men, the hoop signaled his good intentions by recalling the pattern of male bonding through sports. To many women, it may signal they do not belong in a profession where comfort levels depend on competence in masculine gender performance (p. 68).

Williams also recalls the very moment she hit the glass ceiling in her career as an attorney: "I myself decided to quit a law firm practice during a lunch when it became clear I was odd (wo)man out because I knew nothing about football. I had no desire to learn, and realized in a flash I would never make partner" (p. 68).

The "maternal wall" is similar to the glass ceiling, but it is usually reached much sooner by, and only affects women with children. Instead of being unable to reach the upper echelons of corporate American because of gender or race, mothers careers are being sidelined because of the long hours, stressful work, unpredictable schedules and travel requirements of their jobs, which do not mesh well with the responsibilities of having a family. Painton (1993) quoted several successful women whose careers had been jeopardized when they returned from terrifyingly short maternity leaves. "One

lawyer who took four months off was greeted upon her return with a monthly billing report highlighting a $40,000 loss in income because of her absence" (p. 1) Painton (1993) cites another attorney who, after putting in 350 billable hours during her 3-month maternity leave, was concerned that her time off would affect her ability to advance in her practice.

Peskowitz (2005) chronicled several instances where mothers, and some fathers, were fired from their jobs for tending to family and child-related duties. One mother of two young children was fired from her job at the Rochester Psychiatric Institute because she refused to accept overtime on short notice due to lack of childcare. She suggested several alternatives such as working part of the overtime shift, or bringing her children to work, but they were all rejected. After one write-up and two suspensions for similar situations, she was fired. The case was mediated and the woman got her job back, but she was one of the lucky ones (Peskowitz 2005). Another similar case documented by Eyer (1996) found a California woman was forced to take a pay cut because she was regularly five minutes late to work due to her child's school drop-off policy. Although a state administrative judge ruled it was inadequate childcare and public transportation which caused her to be tardy, the state personnel board overruled the judge and cut her pay.

Williams (2000) attributes the "maternal wall" to three factors: the "executive schedule," the marginalization of part-time work, and the likelihood of relocation. The "executive schedule," according to Williams, "typically stretches from fifty to eighty hours a week" (p. 71). This type of schedule drives many women off the promotion track and onto the "mommy track," or a less grueling, more flexible work schedule, often accompanied by less advancement and pay. A survey of female Harvard business, law

and medical graduates found that 70 percent worked shorter hours after having children, though 85 percent believed it would hurt their careers (Williams 2000). The "executive schedule" is based on the ideal worker model, whom Williams defines as someone unencumbered by family responsibilities, able to put in the long hours and meet the demands of a competitive market.

A study conducted by New Ways to Work found that 50 percent of large companies in the sample claimed to offer flextime and other perks, but that it was the top-level supervisors and managers, rather than administrative staff, who were likely to be offered flexibility. "When you consider that 80 percent of all clerical workers and 98 percent of all secretaries are women, even the 'family-friendly' company starts to look less friendly to mothers" (Eyer 1996 p. 31).

The marginalization of part-time work is also a factor, according to Williams (2000). After having children, many women choose to scale down their careers, at least temporarily, by working part-time, working from home, or telecommuting. However, part-time work often comes with a much smaller salary, few, if any benefits, no opportunity for advancement or promotion, less job security, less responsibility and sometimes, the hours are not really part time at all. An attorney who cuts an 80-hour week down to 40 hours may be viewed as a part-time employee, even though the standard full-time week is 40 hours. Furthermore, while many companies pay lip service to family friendly policies and flexible leave, anyone who inquires about them may be committing career suicide. Simply because a Fortune 500 company has a one-month paternity leave and four-month maternity leave program does not mean it is acceptable for an employee

to take it. "Any worker who so much as expressed an interest in part-time work was immediately and permanently barred from advancement" (Williams 2000 p. 73).

Relocation is also a factor prohibiting women from career advancement. In this society, families often move to advance men's careers, but rarely do so to advance women's (Williams 2000). This is problematic for two reasons. First, many women uproot their families and successful careers of their own to follow their husbands. Second, many women who are given the opportunity to advance through relocation cannot do so because of family obligations, or because they lack the support of their spouses, a cruel double standard. Because so many professions, like business and academia, often require relocation as a condition of advancement, women struggle to succeed because of the conflicts between work and family.

The structure of corporate America, it can safely be said, is not generally family friendly. While family oriented policies may be in place, it is not always acceptable to use them, and even when it is, some mothers and fathers may find themselves slowly losing career momentum. But clearly, it is mothers who suffer the most. The loss of lifetime income, promotions, raises and recognition in the workplace are all reasons why many working mothers eventually wind up as stay-at-home mothers or as workers in lower paying blue or pink-collar positions.

Childcare

The quality, affordability and access to childcare in many other industrialized countries far surpasses that of the United States (Warner 2007; Eyer 1996; Eberstadt

2004). Judith Warner, author of *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety,*

(2007) recalls her experiences as a new mother living in France:

> "When my children were born, I stayed in the hospital for five comfortable days. I
>
> found a nanny through a free, community-based referral service, then employed
>
> her, legally and full-time, for a cost to me of about $10,500 a year after tax
>
> breaks. My elder daughter…attended excellent part-time preschools…for about
>
> $150 a month – the top end of the fee scale…my friends who were covered by the
>
> French social security system had even greater benefits: at least four months paid
>
> maternity leave, the right to stop working for up to three years and still have jobs
>
> held for them, cash grants, after their second children were born, starting at about
>
> $105 per month" (p. 10).

The social support network provided to new mothers in the United States,

including access to quality, affordable childcare is practically non-existent. But it was not

always this way. During World War II, the typical government-funded childcare center

was open 24 hours a day, and provided services like mending, cooking, sick-child care,

onsite dentists and nurses and hot meals for mothers to take home after work. But after

the war, most of these centers shut down in an effort to move women back into the home

and give the returning servicemen their jobs back. However, not all women went home.

Some chose to stay in the workforce out of economic necessity or personal fulfillment

(Tyler-May 1988).

The increase in women in the workforce, coupled with the closing of almost all

public childcare facilities, left working women in a pinch to find daycare. Not much has

changed since then. Finding high quality, affordable childcare is a monumental

undertaking. Depending on location, choice of provider (formal center, in-home center or private nanny) and the age and number of children, childcare can cost anywhere from $100 to $500 per week or more, and the waiting lists for centers in some areas can be months long (McClure 2007). Government subsidies for childcare are sparse and available only to the very lowest income brackets. Applicants are subject to specific criteria, and the subsidy is rarely enough to cover the entire cost of care.

In addition to simply finding a spot in a facility or a full-time nanny, mothers are saddled with determining the quality of care their child will be receiving. A 1995 study found out of 400 childcare centers, "only one in seven provides a level of quality that promotes child development and learning" (Eyer p. 176). Another study found 56 percent of providers gave only "adequate" care and 35 percent of was so poor it could actually harm the child's development. For-profit centers and in-home facilities typically have the lowest quality care, a result of low wages, high turnover, and little oversight, while employer-based programs and those subsidized by the government are typically higher quality because of the extra funding (Eyer 1996).

The media has also played a role in the stigmatization of the childcare industry, highlighting stories of gross abuse and neglect. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the media suddenly "discovered" sexual abuse in preschools and daycare centers (Eyer 1996). Headlines often called attention to freak incidents, criminalizing childcare providers and condemning women who were careless enough to subject their children to such conditions. Interestingly, at the same time, *Good Housekeeping* was launching a "new traditionalist" campaign, running ads in the country's largest newspapers, encouraging women to stay home (Eyer 1996). The campaign instilled fear in mothers

about the safety of their children, it also placed pressure on parents (i.e. mothers) to have failsafe childcare providers who never show up late or cancel at the last minute. The responsibility of finding, paying for and shuttling children to and from childcare has seemingly become the sole responsibility of the mother. Mothers are often left at the mercy of their employers to be flexible about childcare schedules. As demonstrated in the previous section, this is not a likely scenario.

Marginalization of Domestic Work and Caregiving

The combination of workplace inflexibility, lack of childcare options and penalties on working mothers makes it easy to see why so many would make the sometimes difficult decision to stay home. However, once that decision is made, mothers may face a whole new set of issues, including a shift in marital equality, loss of identity, and feelings of inadequacy and boredom, all of which stem from the view American society has about domesticity, house work and caregiving.

As glorified as it was in the 1950s, domestic work is now regarded as marginal, and is undervalued both economically and socially (Coontz 1997). Betty Friedan's groundbreaking work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) argued women were suppressed and discontented by domesticity because their whole identities were supposed to be formed around the home and family.

I've tried everything women are supposed to do; hobbies, gardening,

pickling, canning, being very social with my neighbors, joining

committees, running PTA teas. I can do it all, and I like it, but it doesn't

leave anything to think about – any feeling of who you are. I never had

any career ambitions. All I wanted was to get married and have four

children. I love the kids and Bob and my home. There's no problem you

can even put a name to. But I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no

personality. I'm a server of food and putter on of pants and a bedmaker,

somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I?

(Friedan 1963 p. 21).

Of course, not all women felt this way. Many of the well-educated, middle and

upper-middle class women used to illustrate the opting-out trend have broken

through the gender barriers at work in Friedan's era. They have access to quality

higher education and well paying professional positions. They, for one reason or

another, chose to put their careers on hold to stay home with children.

Presumably, most are comfortable with their decisions, but that does not change

the social stigma placed on "housewives" and stay-at-home mothers. As

Byrkman wrote:

When people learn I am a stay-at-home mother, they start on bland

subjects. They don't probe for depth – I have to lay it out for

myself…When people ask, 'what do you do?' the question makes me feel

so small; that wall comes right up. Working moms feel superior to me;

they turn away from me as if I cannot possibly have a brain or anything

interesting to say. They make me feel like I have nothing to contribute just

because I am not punching a time clock. I work – I just don't get paid for

it. I raise twins (Byrkman 2006 p. 15).

This statement, in as many different forms as there are women, is written over and over again throughout literature on the "mommy wars" and other related topics. At the core of the devaluation of domesticity is not choice – it is stereotypes, the same ones that fuel the "mommy wars" fire. Even Hillary Clinton contributed her two cents several years ago while defending her career. "I suppose I could have stayed home, baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was fulfill my profession" (Williams 2000 p. 146).

There are a few ideas about why care giving and domestic work are so marginalized. One is that the fruits of feminism backfired. By opening so many doors for women, it in essence told them they had to use them by going to college entering the professional workforce and rejecting the "feminine mystique" lifestyle of domesticity. Women who do not follow this path or who do go to college but do not "contribute" to society by working are traitors to the cause (Williams 2000). Those who opt-out or who have not utilized the fruits of the feminist movement are then seen as failures who simply could not cut it in a professional career. "Domesticity divides women against themselves. Until feminists acknowledge this dynamic and defuse it, alliances among women will remain fragile and difficult" (Williams 2000 p. 146).

Another hypothesis centers around the idea that unpaid work is not work at all. America's capitalist economy is driven by profit and the bottom line, thus any task that does not create a monetary profit is not valuable. This creates a mindset of at-home-mothers as worthless; because they are not paid, they are not of worth economically. Despite all the rhetoric surrounding the importance of

children and taking care of the home, childcare and domestic work are two of the lowest paid jobs (Eyer 1996). Most childcare workers make minimum wage, or slightly above, and housekeepers are often paid similarly. If this kind of work was indeed so valuable, why are men not doing it?

Hochschild's 1988 book *The Second Shift* identified the division in household labor that exists whether one parent stays home or if both work. Women, Hochschild found, still do far more housework than men regardless of who works outside the home and who does not. Prior to Hochschild, Oakley (1975) discovered a similar trend reinforcing Friedan's (1963) assertion that women feel trapped by domestic work.

> I always say housework is hard, but my husband doesn't say that at all. I think he's wrong, because I'm going all the time. When his job is finished, it's finished…Sunday he can lie in bed till twelve, get up, get dressed and go for a drink, but my job never changes. When I think of a housewife, it is of something not very nice to be – somebody who's got no interests outside the home" (Oakley 1975 p. 99- 100).

Any discussion of the "mommy wars," whether in the media or on the playground, will likely center around women's choices and doing what is right for the individual family. But as the literature demonstrates, sometimes the options are limited and less than ideal to begin with. The opting-out trend is a product of workplace inflexibility and lack of affordable daycare options. And with domestic and childcare work so marginalized, it seems as though no woman can really "win" the "mommy war."

Research conducted specifically on the role of parenting magazines in the discussion of the mommy wars is minimal. Johnson and Swanson (2004) explored the effect on mothers of polarized characterizations of motherhood. These polarized characterizations were that working mothers are harried and preoccupied with work, and stay-at-home moms are "toxic with Prozac" and obsessed with fulfilling the every whim of their children. The research concluded that the rhetoric of the "mother war" does affect mothers. Mothers in this study perceived their roles as not being valued by society. Johnson and Swanson (2003a) found parenting magazines were more likely to portray at-home mothers as being uninvolved in the public sphere. Working mothers, though rarely depicted, were shown in both the home and public spheres. Another study by the same authors (Johnson & Swanson 2003b) revealed how parenting magazines promote particular ideals of motherhood, then condemn mothers for achieving that ideal. For example, at-home mothers were presented with ideologies of domestic success but also represented as inept and incapable of achieving such success.

In a comparison of the social construction of motherhood in the narratives of at-home, full-time employed and part-time employed women, Johnson and Swanson (2004) found work status has become the standard for evaluating "good" mothers. Essentially, they said, mothers construct their definition of "good" based on their individual situations. These definitions usually exclude mothers different from themselves. For example, stay-at-home mothers usually define "good mothers" as being

> …always present and accessible, thereby excluding employed mothers from the
>
> definition of a good mother. Good mothers were defined as self-sacrificing,
>
> according to at-home mothers, and as not putting their own needs (e.g. career)

before the needs of their children. In turn, employed mothers believed that a happy mother makes a happy child and that a mother's happiness is derived from multiple roles and interests outside motherhood. This position is used to exclude those at-home mothers who do not have a socially recognized identity separate from their mother-role (e.g., volunteer activities). (Johnson & Swanson 2004 p. 2).

This research suggests the mommy wars are indeed a real phenomenon; real mothers feel the need to defend their choices and construct their sense of what is a "good mother" based on individual circumstances. Not addressed in previous research, however, is the how "mommy wars" are discussed in terms of larger social and societal issues.

This thesis attempts to examine the popular discourse surrounding these themes in parenting magazines and popular texts about motherhood since the term "mommy wars" was coined in 1990. Parenting magazines, although under represented in mass communication research, are popular resources for parents, offering parenting tips, advice and occasionally taking editorial stances on controversial issues related to childrearing. Millions of American mothers and fathers subscribe to these magazines and millions more read them in the waiting room at the pediatrician's office or pick up free copies in the baby section of department stores. By examining the editorial content of the widest circulating parenting magazine, *Parents*, and the discourse about motherhood present in popular books about the topic, this study will help to elucidate prevalent themes with regard to motherhood discourse and attempt to answer how these themes and their practical implications contribute to "mommy wars."

Chapter two will outline the use of critical discourse analysis as the methodology of choice, as well as lay out the theoretical framework and provide historical context for the study. Chapter three will discuss relevant themes and findings, and chapter four will consist of conclusions, directions for future research and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research examines the role of parenting magazines and popular texts about

motherhood in the discussion of the "mommy wars" by presenting a critical examination

of the larger issues and themes addressed within them. A critical discourse analysis

(CDA) was chosen as the methodology for this study because, unlike other qualitative

methodologies, it allows the researcher to view discourse "in relation to social problems;

to social structural variables such as race, gender and class; and above all to power"

(Wood & Kroger 2000, p. 21). This methodology goes beyond the linguistic concerns

characteristic of other discourse analytic methods to consider the ways in which

discourses construct objects and subjects. Phillips and Hardy (2002) and van Dijk (1996)

emphasize the use of CDA to help "describe and explain how power abuse is enacted,

reproduced or legitimated by the talk and text of dominant groups and institutions" (van

Dijk 1996, p. 84). Phillips and Jorgensen (2002), drawing upon the work of Fairclough

(1995a, 1995b), present five features that they believe are common among all the

different approaches to CDA. First, "the character of social and cultural processes and

structures is partly linguistic-discursive" (p. 61). This essentially means that discursive

practices are seen as a social practice, which contributes to the constitution of the social

world and thus helps to construct the practices of everyday life. Second, "discourse is

both constitutive and constituted" (p. 61), meaning that not only does discourse constitute

the social reality, it is constituted by other social forces and practices. "It does not just

contribute to the shaping and reshaping of social structures, but also reflects them"

(Phillips and Jorgensen 2002, p. 61). Third, "language use should be empirically analyzed within its social context" (p. 62). To look at discourse outside of its proper social context does not allow one to fully understand the importance of what is happening or being said. Fourth, "discourse functions ideologically" (p. 63). A society's discourse about a given topic inherently works to create and reproduce widely accepted values and ideological standards. These ideological standards often lead to an imbalance of power between two or more social groups, such as social classes, men and women, racial and ethnic minorities, etc. Finally, "CDA does not understand itself as politically neutral but as a critical approach which is politically committed to social change" (p. 64). These five characteristics provide the backbone of any CDA. Ultimately, Phillips and Jorgensen define CDA as;

> …an explanatory critique…that takes its starting point in a problem that the research should help to solve. This can either be a problem identified by individuals or groups in society, perhaps formulating an unmet need, or it can be identified by the researcher who may want to disclose a 'misrepresentation,' that is a mismatch between reality and the view people have of this reality that functions ideologically (p. 77).

Communication scholars, as well as researchers in other disciplines, have used CDA to study social problems. Phillips and Hardy (1997) employed a CDA to study refugee systems and how certain groups within the system were allowed to speak and voice their opinions while others were not. Wethrell and Potter's (1992) study attempted to understand racist discourse in New Zealand and how it worked to legitimize and explain the political, social and economic context. Lutz and Collins (1993) used CDA to study

the role of *National Geographic* in shaping American understandings of non-Western cultures in the United States (Phillips & Hardy 2002).

The use of a CDA method for this study allows us to look not only at what is being constructed by parenting magazines and motherhood books about motherhood and mothers' choices about working or not working, but also to explore what could be done to alleviate the tensions between mothers who made different choices. Allowing for this added dimension of analysis made a CDA the most practically and functionally valuable methodology.

Two theoretical frameworks are valuable in the understanding of this research: the social construction of reality and cultural studies. Social constructivism, or the social construction of reality, was pioneered by Berger and Luckmann in their classic 1966 work, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.* Berger and Luckmann argue "the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity." (p. 61) In other words, the institutional reality of an individual is created and reproduced by a larger social system. Searle (1995), for example, asks "How can it be a completely objective fact that the bits of paper in my pocket are money, if something is money only because we believe it is money? And what is the role of language in constituting such facts?"(p. 3).

These questions are rooted in a fundamental ontology, or an explicit specification of a conceptualization. The word "car" will undoubtedly bring to mind an image of an object with four wheels, doors and windows, but the ontology lies in the specific

characteristics of one person's idea of a car as compared to another persons. One person might immediately imagine a red 2007 Chevrolet Corvette, while another person may think of a more generic automobile, like a silver car with four doors. While the various physical characteristics of the individual cars may be different, both people had the same essential image in mind when asked to picture a car. That is the ultimate product of social construction. As a society, we assign language to objects, which then become part of our daily lives. We take these linguistic signifiers for granted as objective pieces of reality, but the fact is, they are anything but. The word "car" signifies the automobile we all picture because our society has agreed to allow it to do so.

The assignment of a word to an object, however, is only part of the way we construct our realities. The distance of social elements from direct experience is also critical in understanding the social construction of reality. To reference the car example once again, perhaps the individual who pictured the red 2007 Chevrolet Corvette actually owns a red 2007 Chevrolet Corvette. The likelihood is that he or she pictured that particular vehicle *because* they owned it. That is, there is a closer proximity between the individual's image of a car, and their reality of owing the vehicle they pictured. The second individual may have pictured a more generic automobile because they do not own a car, or because their identity is less tied to their vehicle (after all, Corvettes are not inexpensive, and it can be presumed that a person with the means to purchase such a sporty car would view it as a part of their social identity).

The use of social construction as a theoretical framework has been popular across the social science and humanities disciplines, but it is especially relevant to communication and mass communication scholars given the pervasiveness of the media.

Media effects scholars are chiefly concerned with the short-and long term effects of the media on a given population, such as children, teens or ethnic minorities. Their primary interests lie in how the media help to construct people's realities, or at least their perception of reality. Studies too numerous to mention have been published using this theory to help explain the impact of the media. Douglas and Michaels (2005), however, focus several chapters of their book, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined all Women*, on how the media help construct the reality of parents and particularly mothers.

Chapter three focuses on the media's fixation with the criminalization of everything from day care (using the McMartin daycare child-molestation scandal as a stepping stone, followed by other similar scandals) to summer camp. Douglas and Michaels explain how the media's consistent coverage of certain issues created a culture of fear among parents.

These anxieties got expressed and amplified in a variety of media panics mostly sensationally manifested in the news, women's magazines, and made-for-TV movies. The image of the lost or sexually defiled child became the dominant metaphor for the risks and cost of the feminist inspired motherhood. The favorite journalistic word in the 1980s about the family was 'epidemic,' as in the epidemics of child molestation, child abuse, runaway teens and teen pregnancy. Media panics identified a person or a group, an event or a condition, as a profound, deeply destructive threat to society. The person or group is then represented in a highly sensationalized and stereotypical fashion, and certain authorities, including reporters, assume the role of moral police, expressing

outrage and demanding swift punishment and a massive dragnet of all other

potential threats. The media thus become central to providing information to the

public about the 'shapes the devil can assume' (p. 88).

By permeating the airwaves and headlines with stories of child abuse, or whatever child-related issue is making news on a given day, the media, Douglas and Michaels argue, created (or socially constructed) an illegitimate fear among parents that their children were at constant risk for abuse, neglect or some other yet-undiscovered ill fate. It is particularly powerful, they assert, when the media coverage of an issue is salient, lasting several weeks, months or in some cases, years. Additionally, there is a sort of domino effect in which one major story gets reported (like the McMartin sex abuse scandal), then subsequent stories that otherwise probably would have been overlooked, also get reported, building on the epidemic theme. This creates a view of reality that is not accurate, but that functions ideologically and can impact the decisions of parents. The same is true of discourse about the "mommy wars."

Proponents of social constructivism argue that regardless of whether a woman works or does not work, if she is consistently, and over an extended period of time, exposed to messages that either reinforce or contradict her decision to work or stay home, there is a level of internalization that will undoubtedly occur. This is why the study of discourse in parenting magazines and popular texts is important. A typical parenting magazine is published 12 times per year and usually consists of at least 100 pages of editorial and advertising content. Popular texts about parenting have a long shelf life. If each issue or publication contains undertones or direct references about the "right" decision for a woman to make regarding working or staying home (or any childrearing

practice for that matter) it will almost certainly be absorbed into an individual's frame of reference, which helps to form personal identity and inform decisions about what choices to make.

The second theory informing this research is the cultural studies framework. Developed out of Leavisim, a form of literary studies pioneered by Britain's R.S. Leavis in the 1950s, cultural studies' roots are found in the works of Richard Hoggart, who eventually founded the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in England. Hoggart's first book, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) suggested traditional working-class industrial communities had been relatively unscathed by commercial culture, which he critically attacks in the latter part of the book. This assertion was mostly true until the late 1950s and early 1960s when television sets, telephone services and increasing numbers of consumer goods and higher education opportunities became widely available in Britain (During 1999).

This increase in media accessibility led to three significant changes in the way culture was perceived. First, culture became fragmented into two categories, "high" and "low," with low culture being those forms of media available to the masses (movies, television and radio) and high culture encompassing the more elitist forms of media, like the symphony, theatre and the arts (Baran & Davis 1995). The second shift was that culture began to expand from local to national to global, with the highly industrialized and glamorized culture of some American and British cities impacting smaller cities, transcending oceans and influencing one another (During 1999). Third, a "culture industry" (Adorno & Horkheimer 1972) or highly structured and developed music, film and broadcasting industry was developed, allowing culture to be created, packaged,

marketed and sold to the masses. This did not seem to bother most Americans, however, and mass culture gained acceptance and popularity with little criticism (Baran & Davis 1995).

The study of mass culture, or popular culture as it is referred to today, is typically referred to as cultural studies, and it arose primarily out of the concern that traditional social science research methods placed too many limitations on what kind of questions could be answered. Influential scholars like Horkheimer, Ardono and Lowenthal of the Frankfurt school argued that traditional scientific approaches were inadequate to study media and culture. First, they said, traditional scientific approaches "reduced large cultural questions to measurable and verifiable categories" (Campbell 2000 p. 472). Second, they "depended on an atmosphere of rigidly enforced neutrality" (p. 472) and finally, they refused to "place the phenomenon of modern life in a historical and moral context" (p. 472). While researchers at the Frankfurt school did not discount the value and usefulness of traditional scientific methodologies, they did believe strongly that more "historical and cultural approaches to media would be more useful when trying to understand the long-range processes of the mass media and their complex relations with audiences" (p. 472).

This shift in thinking regarding traditional methodology challenged the mainstream media-effects models of the 1960s (Campbell 2000), and research began to focus more on the ways in which mass communication shapes and is shaped by politics, history and economics (Campbell 2000). Stuart Hall (1978) for example, examined the media and police as forms of urban surveillance, concluding that political, economic and

cultural constraints aided the news media's success in mobilizing public opinion about crime (Campbell 2000, p. 473).

As a framework for modern media research, cultural studies are typically characterized by five trends (Anderson & Ross 2002). First, it tends to deny that communication or mass communication can be analyzed apart from other aspects of a culture. Because cultural studies scholars study culture as a system, they believe that modern theorizing and research uses a somewhat restrictive definition of communication (Anderson & Ross 2002; Carey 1989). Second, cultural studies theorists stress the historical role of language in forming both culture and its institutions (Williams 1981). Third, cultural studies approaches frequently reject the objective nature of traditional theory and method, choosing instead to take a critical approach, or stance, on the issue in question. Fourth, Marxist thinking is popular among cultural studies scholars and critical theorists. Their focus tends to be on power, class and economic differences in social life, and they are usually concerned with ideology and hegemony in social groups (Anderson & Ross 2002). Fifth and finally, cultural studies theorists usually focus on creative explanation in social science, rather than on precise prediction, causing their works to read more like a commentary or social criticism than traditional theorizing. Carey (1989) wrote:

> Cultural studies does not attempt to predict human behavior; rather, it attempts to diagnose human meanings. It is, more positively, an attempt to bypass the rather abstracted empiricism of behavioral studies and the ethereal apparatus of formal theories and to descend deeper into the empirical world (p. 56).

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Kellner's (1995) study of popular media images and political ideology and Radway's (1984) exploration of romance novels and their unconventional reader derived meanings are examples of how cultural studies takes into consideration social and political context, as well as cultural understanding. Kellner (1995) argued that he "could show how certain Hollywood films produced images that could be mobilized to produce consent to the United States war against Iraq in the early 1990s" (p. 6). Kellner was less concerned with the intentions of the screenwriter than he was with how the political, social and cultural discourses of the era would impact mainstream ideology about the war. Radway (1984), analyzed the content of popular romance novels, arguing:

> [The] characters and plots are derived from patriarchal myths in which male dominated social order is assumed to be both natural and just. Men are routinely presented as strong, aggressive, and heroic while women are weak, passive and dependent. Women must gain their identity through their association with a male character (Baran & Davis 1995 p. 323).

After completing the content analysis, Radway (1986) interviewed women who regularly read romance novels and was surprised to find that many of them used the texts as a silent rebellion against male domination, and that they did not buy into the patriarchal myths Radway had found in the books (Baran & Davis 1995).

In order to place the research that follows into a cultural studies framework, it is critical to first understand the context in which "mommy wars" and motherhood discourse is taking place. This includes discussion of the feminist movements of the 1920s, 1960s and 1990s, as well as an understanding of the evolution of women's roles in

the home and workplace. Additionally, a familiarity with the structure of parenting magazines and popular texts about motherhood is required.

First wave feminism is typically categorized by the suffrage movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States. During this time, women banded together all over the country and demanded the right to vote. Many were persecuted and jailed for their efforts. Women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone were influential to the movement, which won women not only the right to vote, but also helped to bring about reforms in education, workplace rights and healthcare.

Nearly half a century later, Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963) almost single handedly began the second wave of feminism. Friedan had noticed a certain discontent among women who were by most standards the privileged class. While not all of them were wealthy, they were comfortably middle class. Most had a high school education and many had college degrees. They were happily married with beautiful homes, kitchens full of new appliances and a station wagon full of children. And yet these women seemed plagued by something, discontented, but not with their marriages, homes or children. Friedan called this "the problem that has no name," and she made it her mission to articulate exactly what it was.

The second wave of feminism in the 1960s and the women's liberation movement of the 1970s was a culmination of women's frustration with the expectation that domesticity and childrearing would fulfill them. They wanted careers, egalitarian marriages and social lives that were not attached to their husbands. The creation of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, headed by Eleanor Roosevelt, reported

that women were discriminated against in nearly every facet of life. This era yielded several major victories for women, including the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned employment discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion and national origin. The National Organization for Women (NOW) was created in 1966 to function as a legal watchdog for women, and Title IX was passed, forbidding discrimination in educational institutions. Title IX gave women not only greater access to higher education, but also to sports activities and campus organizations. One of the more infamous legal victories of second wave feminism came in 1973 with Roe versus Wade, when the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in all 50 states (Kramer 2000).

These advances for women were groundbreaking, and Friedan's "problem that has no name" was suddenly out in the open, the topic of media discourse and coffee shop chatter. It was not without negative side effects, however. The second wave essentially told women "you can have it all": a successful career, a happy family, and an active social life (Straus 2000). A generation later, however, came the third wave of feminism, which concerned itself primarily with criticizing the second wave and fighting the system of patriarchy that governs American social and cultural institutions. The focus of third wave feminists was more global than their second wave counterparts, and there was more discussion of sexuality, sexual freedom, and sexual oppression (Kramer 2005). Women were beginning to discover that perhaps "having it all" was not all it was cracked up to be. This revelation is presumably the force behind the opt-out revolution discussed previously. Interestingly, many of the women who are a part of the opt-out revolution consider themselves feminists, but not necessarily in the traditional sense.

"Choice feminism," the term coined by Linda Hirshman (2005) in her scathing indictment of the opt-out revolution, is the notion that feminism is about giving women choices; the choice to work or the choice to stay home. As long as it is the woman's choice, it is acceptable. What these women failed to realize, however, was that oftentimes their choices were limited to begin with. Hirshman asserts that "feminism needs to become more judgmental and tell traditional women that their choices are bad for society and bad for them because the lives they are leading allow too few opportunities for 'full human flourishing'" (Young 2005 p. 1). This debate about the status of feminism is sure to wage on, as is the debate about women's roles both in the home and in the workplace.

It is an undeniable fact that women have always worked (Kessler-Harris 1981), but the context in which their work is done has shifted dramatically since the turn of the century. While an in-depth historical account of the working lives of American women is not plausible here, it is important to understand the major shifts in women's roles with regard to employment outside the home and duties inside the home.

In 1920, only about 20 percent of women were in the workforce (Baxandall & Gordon 1995; Kessler-Harris 1982) but their rate of labor participation was growing rapidly. Most of them, particularly married women with children, worked night shifts doing industrial labor, or in traditionally female occupations such as teacher, nanny, nurse or secretary (Baxandall & Gordon 1995). By the 1940s, women constituted 36 percent of the workforce, and of those, 35 percent were married. Between 1940 and 1944 alone, more than five million women began working, many of them in high paying industrial positions created by WWII that were previously unavailable to them (Kessler-Harris 1982). Unfortunately, there was still an ambivalence about women's workforce

participation, which led to a lack of basic support services necessary for women with children to work effectively. The government was hesitant to fund childcare facilities, and even when they finally did, courtesy of the Federal Works Administration (FWA), most were too expensive, understaffed and inconveniently located. This was perhaps a symptom of the apologetic nature in which they were offered in the first place. Florence Kerr, director of the FWA childcare project admitted as much, saying "We have what amounts to a national policy that the best service a mother can do is rear her children in her home. But we are in a war. Whether we like it or not, mothers of young children are at work, so we do need care centers" (Kessler-Harris 1982, p. 294). Interestingly, while women were struggling to find decent, affordable childcare, doing the weekly shopping became exponentially easier due to the extended hours of many department and grocery stores (Baxandall & Gordon 1995). Despite the lack of social services for working women and mothers, employment rates continued to climb throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Just as the climate was changing for women in the workplace, their domestic lives were changing too. The end of the war brought an economic boom, allowing many middle-class families to purchase the myriad of new household appliances designed to make women's lives easier. Dishwashers, washers and dryers, microwaves, vacuum cleaners transformed lives of both suburban homemakers and working women. No longer did middle-class women need to slave over a sink, washboard, or hot stove. The creation of these appliances, however, also created new expectations for domestic work. There was no longer an excuse for a sink full of dishes or a basket full of laundry. Women, working or not, were now held to a new, higher, standard of household organization and

cleanliness. And, it should be noted it was *only* the women who were held to this standard. A study conducted in Detroit in 1955 indicated that in more than two-thirds of all households, the wife alone was responsible for making breakfast, doing dishes and cleaning the house (Andre 1981) regardless of whether she worked outside the home or not.

The "second-shift" phenomenon, first written about by sociologist Arlie Hochschild in the 1980s, was alive and well long before there was a name for it. The lack of equity among men and women with regard to household labor was predicted to shift after women entered the workforce en masse. It was thought that a woman earning a paycheck would achieve equity her household, with her and her husband sharing the responsibility of making household decisions and doing household labor. But this was not the case. "In spite of the women's movement, and in spite of the rapid increase in the number of women in the paid workforce, in the majority of households today, sexual equality in housework has not been achieved" (Andre 1981).

In the mid-1950s, many women were displaced from their industrial war factory jobs when the men came home from the war. While some chose to return to the kitchen, others took up work in traditional female positions. Despite the conservative cultural turn, many women continued to be activists for peace, education, housing, childcare and integration, "planting seeds for the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s" discussed previously (Baxandall & Gordon 1995, p. 247).

Women's work in the 1960s and 70s was a hotly debated topic given the status of the feminist movement and Betty Friedan's revelation about the status of housework, childcare and domesticity. The discontent many homemakers felt did not necessarily

materialize into voluntary workforce participation. More likely, the skyrocketing rates of women in the workforce during this decade can be credited to the also skyrocketing divorce rates, which forced women to find work to support themselves (Goldin 1990). The increasing divorce rate may have been partially a product of the war, partially a product of the "problem that has no name" and partially a product of the no-contest divorce laws passed in all fifty states (Crary 2007).

The 1980s and 1990s yielded conflicting trends in female employment, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). In the 1980s, for example, women were more likely to leave or scale back employment relative to their husband's wages. In other words, if the man of the house got a raise, the woman would likely either quit her job or cut back her hours. This was not the case in the 1990s. More women were continuing to work full time or pursue professional careers regardless of their husband's income (Blau & Kahn 2006). These trends may have also been the result of an increase in women's wages relative to men's wages.

> Since 1990 though, the increase of women in the workforce and the relative increase in wages compared to men's wages have both slowed from previous decades. Women's labor force participation rose only from 57.5 percent to 60 percent between 1990 and 1999. The female/male annual earnings ratio barely increased, from 71.6 percent in 1990 to 72.2 percent in 1999 (NBER 2006)

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, came the opting-out trend, which ignited a firestorm among feminists and the media. While the opting-out trend is applicable primarily to well educated middle and upper middle class white women, it is indicative of a movement of women back into the home, something that concerns feminists like

Hirshman. It is the case that the division of household labor between men and women, however, is beginning to break down, although women still bear a larger share of housework and childcare responsibilities than men (Blau & Kahn 2006). A discussion of the role of popular parenting magazines and mainstream texts about motherhood is also relevant to the understanding of this research in a cultural studies framework.

Derived from traditional women's magazines like *McCall's*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, parenting magazines have become a staple for most new mothers. They are prevalent in pediatrician's offices and children's clothing stores. Some publishing companies even offer free subscriptions to their "feeder" publications, or smaller versions of the full magazine. A paid one-year subscription to a parenting publication typically costs $10 to $12, and discounts are often available if ordered online. There are four mainstream parenting magazines on the newsstands today; *Child, Parents, Parenting* and *Working Mother.* While traditional women's magazines like *Family Circle, Ladies' Home Journal* and *Redbook* often feature articles about children and parenting, it is not their primary focus and thus those magazines are excluded from the category of parenting magazine.

The first magazine of this genre, *Parents*, has been published continuously since 1926. Unfortunately, very little information is available about the history or evolution of these magazines. While numerous books have been written about the history and impact of traditional women's magazines (Walker 2000; Beasley & Gibbons 1993; Damon-Moore 1994; Humphreys 1989; Ferguson 1982), discourse about parenting magazines and their role in women's lives is grossly underrepresented in both academic research and popular texts about motherhood. There is no shortage, however, of mainstream literature

about motherhood. Thousands, if not tens of thousands, of books have been published on motherhood in the past two decades. These books have covered nearly every topic imaginable with regard to motherhood.

The magazine selected for this research is *Parents*, because of its large rate base, or advertiser quoted distribution rate. According to the *Parents* media kit, the magazine reaches more than 2,200,000 households per month, the largest circulation of any parenting magazine on newsstands. The year 1990 was chosen as the starting benchmark because *Newsweek* coined the term "mommy wars" in June of that year, giving a title to the issue in question. The analysis ran through 2000 because it was the most recent year with 12 full issues published.

A constructed year sample of *Parents* was utilized, beginning with January 1990 and ending with December 2000. A total of four issues per year were analyzed for a total of 44 issues (see Appendix). Thirteen articles addressing the issues of women who work, women who stay home, the conflict between women who work and women who stay home, childcare, part-time work, maternity leave and women's choices about work and home were identified. After reading through the texts thoroughly, a baseline content analysis was performed to identify major themes with regard to women's choices about their work and home lives. Finally, each text was read closely in order to identify themes issues related to the larger discussion of the "mommy wars."

The popular motherhood texts were chosen according to their sales rank on Amazon.com, the world's largest online bookseller. A keyword search for "motherhood" yielded more than 56,000 results, and the top 20 pages were analyzed for books published between 1990 and 2000 that related specifically to motherhood as a cultural phenomenon.

The following texts were identified and chosen as representative samples of the motherhood discourse of the decade: *Of Woman Born* by Adrienne Rich (1995), Amazon sales rank #52,449; *The Mask of Motherhood* by Susan Maushart (2000), Amazon sales rank #155,598; and *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* by Sharon Hays (1998), Amazon sales rank #277,931.

The best selling of these texts, *Of Woman Born*, is part memoir and part manifesto, a compilation of Rich's personal observations, feminist theory, anthropology, psychology, sociology, mythology, philosophy and literature. Originally published in 1976 during the height of the feminist movement and sexual revolution, this text examines motherhood as it functions in a patriarchal culture. While it does not explicitly, or even implicitly, discuss the "mommy wars" as it relates to the current discourse about women who work or women who stay home, some of the discussion in the text is nonetheless relevant to the topic. The author, a mother of three, self-proclaimed feminist, lesbian, and renowned writer and poet, explores motherhood as a product of biology, culture and history, flushing out elements of the motherhood experience that many contemporary women neglect to consider. Rich's notions about womanhood, motherhood, patriarchy and feminism are similar to those discussed by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

In *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996) Sharon Hays, a sociologist and professor of Women's Studies, traces the evolution of the ideology of intensive mothering by exploring ideas about mothering in the middle-ages, as well as examining contemporary parenting manuals. She also draws upon interviews with mothers from a range of social classes. She approaches motherhood from what she calls "a cold,

calculating" point of view, in an attempt to explain why mothers absorb this unrealistic

ideology of motherhood. Hays asserts that this ideology, along with the advice offered in

popular parenting-manuals, has helped create the division between working and at-home

mothers.

In *The Mask of Motherhood* (1999), Susan Maushart, a sociologist and mother of

three, explores how motherhood affects women's lives, including their marriages,

friendships, relationships with parents, their sex lives, and their self-esteem. She

addresses the range of emotions women feel after they become mothers and examines

why it is that women are so hesitant to talk about the impact motherhood has on their

lives. She argues that "the mask of motherhood" is used to "disguise the chaos and

complexity of our lived experience" (p. 2), which ultimately leads to a discontented

existence.

Each book was read and evaluated for discourse surrounding women's choices

with regard to work and home, and for discussion of the "mommy wars" and related

issues. Primary and secondary themes were identified and combined with the themes

present in *Parents* magazine to construct the analysis. A discussion of these themes is the

focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Books and magazines are distinctly different genres of publication. While each text was analyzed using the same critical discourse methodology, there is a need to explain the structure of each and how they functioned for this analysis. The parenting magazine articles are all structured similarly. Most use one or two families as examples of the real-life implications of an issue, such as quitting ones' job, then use the testimony of various experts to bolster credibility and provide helpful advice to readers about the subject at hand. These articles are typically no more than five hundred to seven hundred words in length. They also lack depth and analysis and are stylistically easy to read. The books about motherhood, on the other hand, focus on providing readers with in-depth discussion and analysis of relevant issues. While they also use the testimony of experts and real mothers to provide examples and credibility, books generally rely on more than just one or two individuals to reinforce important premises and assertions.

The majority of themes and sub themes present in this analysis were derived from the texts about motherhood, while the articles in *Parents* magazine served to reinforce the proliferation of these themes to the general public. Because the books about motherhood are able to probe deeper into important topics then are the magazine articles, this allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the prevalent themes then look at how they are played out in the pages of the most popular parenting magazine on newsstands.

This analysis yielded two salient themes with regard to motherhood discourse in parenting magazines popular motherhood texts. The themes were found to run throughout all of the sample texts, and were different from the themes present in the literature

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reviewed in chapter one. A number of sub themes have also been identified, however, the nature of these sub themes does not allow for a tidy discussion of each separate from the others, as they are not mutually exclusive. There is a considerable overlap, for example, in the discussion of guilt, sacrifice and intensive mothering in the following section. While an attempt has been made to separate them for the sake of clarity, the reader should be aware that these themes are intertwined in such a way that extricating them entirely is not feasible and is ultimately unhelpful, in gaining a broader understanding of the socially constructed nature of motherhood.

The dominant finding of this work is that regardless of the "mommy wars," all women were first and primarily constructed as mothers, and those constructions of motherhood reveal the underlying causes of tension between working and stay at home mothers.

Mother as Primary Caretaker

The first significant theme with regard to these texts is the common sense assumption that mothers are the primary caretakers of children and home. This is demonstrated clearly in *Parents* magazine, with nearly all of the articles in the sample depicting mothers, categorically, as being responsible for the daily work of caring for children and maintaining a household. For mothers who did not work outside the home, this depiction was more salient than for employed mothers. Seid (1996), for example, writes about her experiences as a stay-at-home mother of one. She describes how her days were consumed by housework and the necessary tasks of childrearing.

When I quit my job four years ago to stay home with my baby, I imagined

peaceful, carefree days making modeling dough, building block towers, and

reading Dr. Seuss…the reality turned out to be a little different. By the time the

clock had raced its way to suppertime, I'd spent almost no time actually playing

with Zachary. Instead, I changed him, cleaned his face, washed the floor,

consulted with the plumber, juggled unpaid bills and taken care of a hundred other

jobs that absolutely had to be done (Seid 1996, p. 85).

Employed mothers, on the other hand, were frequently found to overcompensate in the

domestic and childcare spheres to make up for their time spent at work. This

overcompensation likely stems from an internalization of the conflicting views American

society holds about combining motherhood and employment. It seems as though

American culture idealizes the nuclear family structure of the 1950s (Coontz 1992).

Since working mothers do not fit that mold, they feel a need to prove themselves in both

the domestic and professional spheres. This is especially evident in Groller (1990):

Although I have a highly rewarding job for reasonable pay and a lot of respect, I

work because I have to and would trade it in a minute for the opportunity to stay

home with my baby and five-year-old daughter. But neither my husband's nor my

own salary is enough to live on – and I don't mean living extravagantly. We have

a modest three-bedroom home with a monthly mortgage of $750. Then there are

groceries, utilities, and insurance. We budget scrupulously. We haven't taken a

vacation in six years of marriage. Our entertainment consists of the occasional

dinner out or staying home and renting a movie video (Groller 1990, p. 67).

In stating that she has a "rewarding job for reasonable pay and a lot of respect" this woman is first establishing herself as successful in the professional sphere. However, she quickly downplays that and reinforces her primary role as a mother by saying she would gladly quit her job to stay home with her children. Next, she justifies her employment by stating her income is necessary to the wellbeing of her family. She also confronts the stereotype that working mothers are selfish and materialistic by including a description of her monthly bills and concluding that she and her husband do not live extravagantly. This leads to the first sub-theme with regard to mothers as primary caretakers – self-sacrifice.

Self-Sacrifice

Women, and particularly mothers, are supposed to embody the virtues of patience, kindness, gentleness, nurturance, passivity and industriousness, among others. But one condition of motherhood that is understood, almost universally, is sacrifice, which is articulated by one mother cited in Hays (1996):

When you talk to women who don't have children, there's a real barrier there. I think they have a hard time understanding the closeness that you have with your own child. They have a hard time understanding why I would want to give something up to see my kids have something, why I would want to give it up, why I would want to go without something. They have a hard time understanding, but it's just a matter of priorities…It's just that love that you share, that caring feeling, that makes you want to give up something so that somebody else could have something. When you only have yourself to depend on, you can kind of set your life up exactly the way you want to because it's only you. Then when there's kids, there's their needs to think about (p. 127).

Women cited in all of the analyzed texts felt that they had made sacrifices when they became mothers. These sacrifices, however, came in a number of different forms and varied, to a degree, by employment status. At home mothers often felt as though they have sacrificed a part of themselves in order to take care of their children. "I find myself, now that I'm not working, not to have as much in common [with other women who don't have children]. We don't talk that much because I don't have that much to talk about. Like I feel I'm not an interesting person anymore" (Hays 1996, p. 138).

Another at-home mother featured in *Parents* magazine sacrificed in a very different way. Patch (1996) talks about the hectic lifestyle she and her husband were living and for a desire to spend more time with her children. In order to do that, however, her family had to move 700 miles away from their home in Los Angeles, CA to a rural community in Oregon where housing prices and the cost of living were lower. Patch details the logistics of the move and the changes her family had to make in order for her to be able to stay home, but includes that the financial sacrifices have been worth the extra time with her children. She also addresses some of the emotional difficulties that went along with staying home, uprooting her family, and moving. Patch wrote:

> I knew the hardest part of the move would be the loneliness, and I was right. I feel as if it will take me years to make good friends like those we left behind, but I'm working on it. I don't miss the work I was doing, but I do miss the day-to-day interaction with other adults (p. 16)

She continues, discussing the material sacrifices she has made in order to stay home with her family.

Basically, we have no disposable income…We've given up many conveniences because conveniences are designed to save people time, and right now I have more time than money. For example, we never order takeout or go to a restaurant. Greg, who used to buy lunch, brown bags it almost every day. Most of our other savings comes from being frugal on a daily basis. We cancelled call waiting on our phone. Instead of making long-distance calls, I write letters. I used to buy paperback novels, now I go to the public library. And I haven't bought myself any new clothes since we moved (p. 16).

Working mothers also felt they had made sacrifices in order to provide for their children. Maushart (1999) sees some of these sacrifices as a form of self-neglect. "The sacrifices such women make may include not only leisure time pursuits, but such basic needs as sleep, food and exercise" (p. 131). The primary sacrifice made by working mothers, however, was time with their families. According to Black (1997), 68 percent of working moms said they did not spend enough time with their families. This figure might seem dramatic, but when one considers the variance in what individual mothers consider "enough time," this statistic becomes less meaningful.

Not all of the women felt their sacrifices had been negative, however. Some believed their employment had been beneficial to their families, not only in terms of financial gain, but emotionally and intellectually as well. One mother, a waitress featured by Ruppel-Shell (1999), said her children have benefited in a number of ways from her employment.

Marey says that now that her children have grown accustomed to her working outside the home, they've come to appreciate the benefits. Not only do they enjoy

the extras that a second income helps pay for, but they also realize that work has added another dimension to their mother's life…'having a job has made me feel more connected to the world. I think my children sense that and understand that I really like what I do' (p. 107).

Working mothers also frequently sacrifice (advertently or inadvertently) career advancement opportunities in order to more effectively balance the demands of work and home. Typically referred to as "the mommy track," working mothers are frequently placed on the sidelines for promotions, important projects and other opportunities at work because of their responsibilities to their families. This is because mothers are usually the ones called upon to pick up sick children from school or day-care and to take time off to attend recitals, games and conferences. In short, working mothers sacrifice the success of their careers to take care of their children, while simultaneously sacrificing time with their children to go to work.

The assumption that motherhood is intrinsically linked to sacrifice is warranted, because the mother who does not sacrifice for the sake of her children is not a good mother (Hays 1996; Douglas & Michaels 2004; Swigart 1991). For some women, the definition of "good mother" is directly linked to the concept of self-sacrifice. "I think I am a good mother because I sacrifice a lot for my daughter," (Hays 1996, p. 87). A second mother feels similarly. "I want to make the sacrifices now…I didn't like [my son] at all when he was born. I didn't want to have anything to do with him, but I definitely do now. It's something I don't mind doing, for his happiness, I would do anything for him" (Hays 1996, p. 82). And so does a third; "To raise these kids these days, you've got to

make sacrifices. It's like, I don't get things for myself, but I get things for them. And I'd be the last one to satisfy myself. My kid's don't have it, forget it, I don't have it" (p. 85).

The concept of sacrifice in relation to motherhood reverberates throughout *Parents* and the motherhood books, making it a significant element of the social construction of motherhood in media. What is striking is that, beneath the rhetoric of the "mommy wars," all mothers are constructed similarly.

Guilt

A second predominant sub theme with regard to the mother being the primary caretaker of children is guilt. Guilt is explicitly associated with working mothers, although at-home mothers experience it too. As Maushart (1996) explains it "…guilt lies at the crux of the crisis of mothering affecting young women today. To an extent unprecedented in previous generations, we suffer guilt over things we do as mothers and the thing[s] we leave undone" (p. 33).

A number of the articles in the sample of *Parents* magazine address the issue of maternal guilt. Jackie Prieto, a working mother of one featured by Jones-Lee (1992), felt guilty about missing her daughter's childhood. "I'm missing her growing up and it just kills me. I only get to spend a sliver of time with her in the morning, and then just a couple of hours at night" (p. 121). A second article discussing maternal guilt (Black 1997) reassures working mothers that they should be proud of their dual roles, not guilty about them. A third article about childcare also addresses the topic, as it is one that frequently cultivates feelings of guilt in mothers.

Hays (1996) also addresses the issue of guilt, with one mother she interviewed making an interesting point about the sources of maternal guilt.

I think I do feel guilty about working 'cause it takes time away from [my oldest daughter]. But it struck me that it's acceptable to have a second child that takes just as much time away from the other child. *That* I'm not supposed to feel guilty about. But in some ways this [pointing to the infant she is holding] takes my time away from her more than my work does. Because this is constant (p. 146).

This quote demonstrates the limited social acceptability of maternal guilt. Mothers are only allowed to express feelings of guilt about certain elements of motherhood. For example, a woman can feel guilty about her job taking time away from her children, but she cannot feel guilty that her children take time away from her job. One mother cited by Hays tries to articulate this contradiction.

Honestly, I don't make that much money. So that in itself brings a little bit of guilt, 'cause I know I work even though we don't have to. So there's some guilt associated…I felt really torn between what I wanted to do. Like a gut-wrenching decision. Like, what's more important? Of course your kids are important, but, you know, there's so many outside pressures for women to work. Every ad you see in magazines or on television shows this working woman who's coming home with a briefcase and the kids are all dressed and clean. It's such a lie. I don't know of anybody who lives like that. There's just a lot of pressure that you're not a fulfilled woman if you're not working outside the home. But yet, it's just a real hard choice (p. 144).

This quote also articulates the core of the 'mommy wars" and how real women feel torn between working and being valued socially, and staying home and being viewed as "unfulfilled."

Maternal guilt can also stem from feelings of inadequacy or deficiency in certain aspects of parenting, as discussed by Rich (1995).

> Later, as a young mother, I remember feeling guilt that my explosions of anger were a 'bad example' for my children, as if they, too, should be taught that 'temper' is a defect of character, having nothing to do with what happens in the world outside one's flaming skin. Mother-love is supposed to be continuous, unconditional. Love and anger cannot coexist. Female anger threatens the institution of motherhood (p. 46).

The underlying assumption here is that working mothers *must* feel guilty about their employment. A lack of guilt about working might indicate that a mother is more concerned with her social or socioeconomic status than with her children, and those are not characteristics consistent with the ideal of a "good" mother. After all, one of the salient stereotypes present in "mommy wars" discourse is that working mothers are selfish and greedy. But is this actually the case? Ruppel-Shell (1999) interviews a number of mothers who say their families are content, even happy, with their employment situations. "Nancy doesn't harbor guilt about being a working mother and thinks her children benefit form her confidence in the choice she has made. 'I feel perfectly comfortable with what I'm doing, and I think [my children] do too'"(p. 110). Other mothers quoted in the article expressed similar sentiments. Is their satisfaction with their jobs and lack of guilt about employment indicative of a disinterest in their children? Doubtful. While maternal guilt is very real and inevitably affects all mothers at some point, guilt over employment is not necessarily universal, although the social construction of motherhood would lead one to believe this was the case. It is encouraging that *Parents*

magazine features, however rarely, employed women who feel positively about their jobs and roles outside the home, since a number of articles (Groller 1990; Jones-Lee 1992; Patch 1996; Seid 1996) feature mothers who are discontented by their employment situations.

<u>Intensive Mothering</u>

Discourse about guilt and sacrifice with regard to motherhood and the primary caretaking role of women leads to the discussion of intensive mothering, which lies at the very core of the "mommy wars" and both of the predominant themes presented in this thesis.

Intensive mothering, according to Hays (1996) is "a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy and money in raising their children" (p. x). She argues that intensive mothering is a socially constructed ideology perpetuated by the media, accepted cultural and social values, and patriarchy. While intensive mothering is principally discussed by Hays (1996), Maushart (1999) and Rich (1995) touch on it as well. *Parents* magazine, in this context, functions as a case study in the ways intensive mothering plays out parenting media.

Hays (1996) argues that the intensive mothering ideology is excessive, unnatural and unnecessarily strenuous.

> …this form of mothering is neither self-evidently natural nor, in any absolute sense, necessary; it is a social construction. Child-rearing ideologies vary widely, both historically and cross-culturally. In other times and places, simpler, less time-and-energy consuming methods have been considered appropriate, and the child's mother has not always and everywhere been the primary caregiver. The

idea that correct child rearing requires not only large quantities of money, but also professional-level skills and copious amounts of physical, moral, mental, and emotional energy on the part of the individual mother is a relatively recent historical phenomenon (p. 4).

Furthermore, Hays (1996) asserts, intensive mothering contradicts basic principles of reasoning and logic.

…the ideology of intensive mothering seems to contradict the interests of almost everyone. Paid working women might like to avoid the extra work on the 'second shift,' stay-at-home mother might enjoy a bit more free time, capitalists surely want all of their paid laborers' energy and attention, and husbands might prefer the career promotions of a woman who dedicates herself to bringing home the bacon (p. 5).

Hays (1996) presents an analysis of three best-selling parenting manuals authored by "parenting experts" (if such a title is even possible) Dr. Benjamin Spock, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and Penelope Leach. She concludes that these manuals, along with other popular parenting texts, present elaborate representations and constructions of intensive mothering, and that the popularity of these manuals and the "ubiquity of this child rearing advice…represents a reflection of the dominant cultural model of appropriate child rearing today" (p. 70).

An analysis of the articles in *Parents* supports this claim. At-home mothers are portrayed as totally focused on their children (Patch 1996; Seid 1996). Seid's (1996) narrative about finding ways to spend more time with her children provides a particularly vivid example of the principles of intensive mothering. Seid talks about how she

incorporates her children into every facet of her daily routine and invents games to entertain them at every moment. She does briefly address the boredom repetition often brings, but quickly explains the benefits she and her children receive from the time together. A number of mothers quoted by Groller (1990) also symbolize this ideology.

> I can't remember the last time I sat down to read or take a long leisurely bath. Even if I want to go shopping, I'll come home from work first and get the boys. A lot of it is self-imposed. I have a babysitter at my house, so I could stop on my way home and do what I need to do, but I really don't want to. It's the end of the day, and I want to get home to my kids (p. 116).

This mother acknowledges, although not by name, her commitment to intensive mothering. By going out of her way to get her children and take them to the store with her, she is expending unnecessary time, and likely money as well, to demonstrate her commitment to good mothering. This could be a means of compensating for her time spent away from her children while she is at work, or, it could be something else entirely. The fact that this mother goes out of her way to take her children to the store with her when, undoubtedly, going alone would be easier and less costly, is a testament to the power of intensive mothering.

A stay-at-home mother also quoted by Groller (1990) takes intensive mothering a step further:

> I choose to play with my kids and devote time to them instead of getting other things around the house done. If course, then I have to stay up and night to clean. I'm also doing a lot of thing s that I wasn't doing before, like sewing their clothes

and cooking from scratch – even baking my own bread so I just don't have a lot

of extra time" (p. 70)

And so does a third; "I give my son *all* my attention and the other things I need to do –

like going food shopping or trying to clean the house – take twice as long as they used to

before I had a child" (p. 70).

All of these women have completely embraced the ideology of intensive

mothering, which demonstrates that both working and at-home mothers are affected by

the demands it requires. The challenges intensive mothering creates for individual

mothers leads one to question why women accept it in the first place, particularly when it

is the source of so much guilt and stress for so many mothers. Unfortunately, there is no

simple answer to this question. Intensive mothering is promoted simultaneously by so

many different sources that mothers are pulled into it without their knowledge. Some

women are affected even before they officially become mothers by the barrage of

pregnancy related books and magazines promoting it. The constructions and portrayals of

mothers in the media, the popularity of the celebrity "super mom" profile (Douglas &

Michaels 2004; Maushart 1999) and the perpetuation of the ideology by mothers

themselves are certainly factors. Patriarchy also plays a part, forcing women into

subordinate rolls where they feel they must excel in order to be legitimized (Rich 1995).

Ambivalence Toward Motherhood

A second significant theme present throughout the sample texts is ambivalence

toward motherhood. This ambivalence, however, is something women are not typically

permitted to express. Maushart (1999) explains why, saying, "experiencing ambivalence

about motherhood is one thing. Expressing it – and by extension, legitimizing it – is quite another. The mask of motherhood ensures that the face of ambivalence, however widely or keenly felt, remains a guilty secret" (p. 111). Given the previous discussions of guilt, sacrifice and the demands of intensive mothering, the mixed feelings women have about motherhood are not a surprise. What is surprising, however, is the lack of discourse about these feelings in parenting magazines. Not a single article in the sample of *Parents* addressees this issue, nor do any of the mothers quoted in the texts mention it. There are hints of boredom, identity loss and frustration with work, all elements that contribute the ambivalence, but no discussion, implicit or otherwise, about the conflicting feelings women have about motherhood as an experience.

Maushart (1999), Hays (1996), and to a lesser extent Rich (1995), all address these feelings in varying degrees of detail. But it is largely absent from motherhood discourse in parenting magazines. This is not a surprise to Maushart (1999), who argues concealing feelings of ambivalence is part of the "mask of motherhood." "Ambivalence," she writes "is a large part of the game. Equally striking is our reluctance to admit it" (p. 111). However, Maushart also found that when women were given implicit permission to express their ambivalence "their masks could disintegrate with disarming speed" (p. 111).

One mother interviewed by Maushart expressed her mixed feelings about motherhood, saying she simply did not understand or appreciate the twenty-four-hour a day seven-day-a-week commitment children require. "Have you begun to realize yet that all you wanted was to see what it would be like to have a baby, play the game a bit? Don't worry, I've thought it already. There are times I wish I could send her back. Yet I don't. You know what I mean?" (p. 111).

An extreme and tragic example of the effects of maternal ambivalence gone unchecked is described by Rich (1995) in the final chapter of her book. In the summer of 1974, 38-year-old Joanne Michulksi, a married mother of eight, took a butcher knife and decapitated and dismembered her two youngest children on the lawn of her suburban Chicago home. Michulski, as described by her husband, neighbors, psychiatrists, clergy and police, was a conflicted woman. She had not wanted any of her eight children, and after the birth of each, she suffered from deep bouts of depression. Her husband said that she had never been violent toward her children and that she "seemed to show extreme love to the smallest of the children at all times" (p. 257). He also described her as a "fairly good wife and mother; not the best" (p. 257). The pastor next door, however, observed her to be "quietly desperate from the moment the family moved into the home" (p. 257). Other acquaintances observed her to be withdrawn and messy. She rarely cooked and often talked to herself. Her husband was frequently absent for long periods of time for work, and Joanne seemed to withdraw further when he was away.

There was no doubt, according to one of Joanne's caseworkers, that she loved her children. They were indeed the center of her universe. Rich describes Joanne's life of domesticity as the "violence of the institution of marriage" (p. 264). Joanne told her husband after her third child was born that she did not want to bear anymore. She was a victim, according to Rich, of institutionalized motherhood and deep seeded patriarchy.

Undoubtedly, Joanne Michulski suffered from extreme and untreated postpartum depression and likely other undiagnosed psychological disorders. But her ambivalence toward motherhood is also undeniable. She loved her children, but she also never wanted any of them. She was victimized and abandoned by the man who was supposed to be her

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partner and supporter. She reacted in this extreme manner because the institutions of patriarchy, motherhood and marriage refused to allow her to express her frustrations, admit her weaknesses and get help for her disorders (Rich 1995).

<u>The Devaluation of Motherhood and Domestic Work</u>

One factor that likely contributes to the ambivalence women feel about motherhood is the overall cultural devaluation of mothering. For all the lip service paid to the importance of raising children, society certainly does not reward mothers who dedicate themselves to it. Stay-at-home mothers are often penalized financially, alienated socially, and vulnerable psychologically (Bennetts 2007; Black 1997; Hays 1996; Maushart 1999). And even though the ideology of intensive mothering would lead women to believe that childrearing is their primary purpose, and that all of their time, energy and money should be dedicated to bettering the lives of their children, mothering from a sociocultural and economic standpoint, is essentially worthless.

Hays (1996) presents the argument that motherhood and domestic work are devalued because they are not revenue earning enterprises. The capitalist economic system in the United States dictates that money is what matters, and if it is not paid, it is not work. Feminism, according to Maushart (1999) is also partly to blame.

American women have traditionally been the keepers of the home and the caretakers of children (Tyler-May 1988). In previous decades, the 1950s is a prime example, domestic work was valued socially and culturally. Women took pride in their homes, children and husbands, and their contributions in the domestic sphere were considered important. Rich (1995) discusses this ideology and relates her experience as a young wife and mother.

I have a very clear, keen memory of myself the day after I was married; I was

sweeping a floor. Probably the floor did not really need to be swept; probably I

simply did not know what else to do with myself. But as I swept that floor I

thought; 'Now I am a woman. This is an age-old action, this is what women have

always done.' I felt I was bending to some ancient form, too ancient to question.

This is what women have always done (p. 25).

Rich's life as a homemaker and mother mirrored the lives of countless other women of

her generation. She recognized her role and played it dutifully, yet all the while

questioned the authenticity of her existence. Her husband at the time was supportive,

affectionate and helpful, but his helpfulness was "an act of generosity…his work, his

professional life, was the real work in the family" (p. 27).

The feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s challenged this ideology, telling

women they could "have it all" by combining careers and motherhood. This led women

to believe they were traitors to the cause if they were not working outside the home. They

were constantly reminded that the "only work that counts is work for pay outside the

home" (Maushart 1999, p. 179). This mantra only helped to reinforce the devaluing of

domestic and childcare duties.

Hays (1996) and Maushart (1999) quote several mothers who felt their roles are

no longer valued by society or their husbands. Interestingly, mothers themselves seem to

perpetuate the devaluation of domestic and childcare work, like this mother; "[When

you're working outside the home] you're doing something. You're using your mind a

little bit differently than just trying to figure out how to make your day work with your

kid" (Hays 1996, p. 135). By saying that working outside the home is "doing something,"

this mother is clearly reinforcing the idea that domestic and childcare work is not really work at all. For men and society to devalue the work of women is unfortunate enough, but when women themselves begin to buttress the argument, it only works to further divide women, further perpetuating the "mommy wars." A study cited by Maushart (1999) found that high-income-earning women considered paid work to be very important and did not "respect or value homemaking – whoever was performing it" (p. 193). However other women, Maushart adds, do respect homemaking and childcare, and so much so that they impose impossibly high standards making it difficult for their partners or anyone else to live up to their expectations.

Whether a woman chooses to work or stay home, she is generally still expected to do the lion's share of housework and childcare, providing another reason why ambivalence affects both at-home and working mothers. In another study cited by Maushart (1999), couples in the last trimester of pregnancy "anticipated a somewhat unequal distribution of tasks after the baby's birth, particularly with regard to primary child care. What they never expected was the extent of the inequality" (p. 189). The findings of a large-scale 1991 study supported this inequality, concluding that a woman's domestic workload increased by 91 percent (for a total of 55 hours and 48 minutes a week) after the birth of the first child whereas men's domestic workload did not increase by a single minute.

The overwhelming burden placed on women domestically, and the decreasing social value of their work has most certainly had a negative impact on their level of satisfaction with motherhood and arguably life in general. However, it is not culturally or

socially acceptable to discuss these feelings, which frequently leads to marital tensions and emotional stress, increasing ambivalence toward multiple roles.

In a roundabout way, *Parents* addresses the devaluing of domestic and childcare work. Groller (1990) for example, quotes a number of mothers who feel they are underappreciated by society. One woman is frustrated by the way society views at-home mothers.

> Mothers who go out to work get all the sympathy now. Everyone thinks mothers who stay home are living high on the hog, and that's not true. I know it's hard for moms who work, but it's hard for us, too. There's a total lack of understanding in society for mothers who stay home (p. 66).

A second mother voices her aggravation with the labels imposed upon mothers. "Even the labels – 'working' and 'nonworking' – bother me. I work harder now that I did when I was employed. But those who work don't understand the issues of mothers who are at home. I remember when I was working, I wondered what they did all day" (p. 66).

Rosen (1995) discusses traditional gender roles and their impact on the division of domestic labor.

> Usually, the wife winds up in charge of everything inside the home – most of the childcare, cooking, cleaning and bill paying – as well as directing the family's social calendar. By contrast, the husband is in charge of everything outside, such as home maintenance, car repairs, and yard work (p. 119).

She also confronts this stereotype, discussing the origins of the gender division. "For many men, housework is still considered women's work. Their mothers picked up after them, and they subconsciously assume their wives will do the same. At the same time,

most women were not encouraged to develop an interest in the so-called male domain" (p. 120).

Rosen's (1995) assertions that men and women possess different skills that allow them to more effectively complete certain household tasks is echoed by Maushart (1999). But Maushart is quick to add that women do nothing to close the gap and may, in fact, contribute to widening it.

It is a common complaint among today's women that their partners continue (just as their fathers before them) to perceive their domestic contributions as 'helping' - - as in 'I helped you clean the house all day Saturday. What more do you want?!' Yet we reinforce this delusion more often than we realize by treating men's efforts as 'help,' and often inferior help at that (p. 195).

In spite of the frustration most women experience as a result of their spouses' meager contribution to the household, it is the case that many women use their status as homemaker and childrearer to widen the domestic labor gap. Women are often critical of the ways men perform household or childrearing tasks. The laundry might not be folded "correctly" or put in the right place, or the children may have mismatched clothing or not be dressed appropriately for the weather. Women will, almost certainly, point these deficiencies out to their partners and, rather than correcting them and thanking them for their efforts, become frustrated and just do it themselves. This ultimately sends the message that men's efforts are inferior and these types of tasks are just better left to women.

Summary

Overall, the sample of *Parents* magazine and the three motherhood texts selected for analysis were found to contain two predominant themes, that of the mother as primary caretaker and of an unspoken ambivalence toward motherhood. These primary themes were underscored by a number of interconnected sub-themes, including maternal guilt, self-sacrifice, intensive mothering and a cultural devaluing of motherhood and domestic work. *Parents* magazine, for the most part, reinforced the in-depth discussion of these themes present in the motherhood texts, providing solid ground for the assumption that motherhood ideologies are socially constructed in part through these publications.

The next chapter will answer the research question posed in chapter one, as well as explore the impact of this discourse on the "mommy wars." Finally, it will discuss the limitations of this study and ways in which this line of research could be expanded.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This thesis explores how the "mommy wars" are discussed or implied in *Parents* magazine and the three best-selling motherhood books between 1990 and 2000. Two primary themes were uncovered, as well as a number of salient sub-themes, all of which contribute significantly to the divide between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers.

The first primary theme identified is "mother as primary caretaker." This theme, which assumed women to be the primary caretakers of children and home, ran throughout all of the texts. It is subordinated by the sub-themes of maternal guilt, maternal self-sacrifice and intensive mothering. The second primary theme, "an ambivalence toward motherhood" is a product of the first, and is subordinated by the sub-theme of the cultural devaluing of domestic and childcare work.

The assumption that mothers will be the primary caretakers of children, and the resulting ideology of intensive mothering, coupled with the guilt and self-sacrifice this ideology entails, functions as a means of pitting at-home and working mothers against one another. It seems likely based on the preceding analysis that working and at-home mothers both accept the ideology of intensive mothering. By doing so, most mothers inherently see themselves as failures because the demands of intensive mothering are such that no woman can succeed. The devotion of one's entire being to the care of another is simply unrealistic. Combine the emotional and physical investments with the amount of money and time required for intensive mothering, and it becomes clear that no

mother can really ever be completely successful at intensive mothering. Parenting media, and the media in general, are so saturated by the ideology of intensive mothering that many middle class women simply do not recognize it, and are thus pulled into it without their knowledge. Hays (1996) cited a 1981 study, that found 97 percent of American mothers read at least one child-rearing manual, and nearly three-quarters consult two or more for childrearing advice. She also found the best-selling parenting manuals promote the ideology of intensive mothering, and with combined sales of more than 40 million copies, these manuals and the ideology they promote are profitable. The same can be said for parenting magazines. *Parents* paid circulation is more than

2.2 million issues per month. *Parenting,* the second leading parenting magazine on the market boasts 2.1 million issues per month. Circulation figures were not available for *Child*, the third most popular parenting magazine. While magazine circulation rates may seem to rates pale in comparison, one must take into consideration that these figures are *per month*. *Parents* magazine alone circulates more than 26 million magazines a year. This does not include circulation figures for *Parents* "feeder" publication *American Baby,* which is offered free of charge at many children's department stores and pediatrician's offices.

As this analysis suggests, intensive mothering is promoted by one of the three major parenting magazines, and likely contributes to discourse engaged in by the other two as well. Furthermore, traditional women's magazines regularly feature articles on celebrity "super moms," who have wildly successful careers and demanding travel schedules, yet still manage to breastfeed or attend their child's soccer game. No mention is ever made of the entourage of nannies, butlers, cooks and other hired hands who help

these mothers get through their days. This leads average mothers to think combining a high-profile, demanding career is possible, when it is out of reach for all but the most affluent mothers (Douglas & Michaels 2004). This sense that one will never be "good enough" leads to a feeling of ambivalence toward motherhood. A mother may deeply love her children but still question whether motherhood is worth the effort. However, mothers are not allowed to talk openly about these feelings and relieve some of the pressure and stress that comes with harboring them.

The fear of failure conjured up by the unrealistic demands of intensive mothering and the tremendous domestic burden placed on women results in ambivalence towards motherhood, causing mothers to become defensive about their choice to work or stay home. Stay-at-home mothers are able to devote more time to their children, leading them to say they are better mothers because they see their children more often. They believe working mothers are selfish because they leave their children in the care of others to pursue employment. Working mothers frequently justify their employment by saying a second income is necessary to provide for their families. They believe they are good mothers because they are role models or because they have the means to provide their children with material comforts. Working mothers see at-home mothers as lazy and uninteresting since they do not have interests outside of their home and children.

The social construction and acceptance of intensive mothering is what ultimately led to the social construction of the "mommy wars." This debate over who is the better mother allows women to defend their choices in a forum where they feel supported by mothers who have made the same choice. Working mothers are supportive of other working mothers and at-home mothers are supportive of other at-home mothers. The best

example of this was a November 2003 episode of Dr. Phil, in which working mothers and stay-at-home mothers were literally seated across the studio from one another. When a working mother made a comment, all of the other working mothers would clap or nod in agreement, but when an at-home mother would say something, they would shake their heads with disapproval or remain silent, and vice versa. The "mommy wars," particularly in this context, provides women with a sense that they are not alone, and allows them to reinforce their decisions by criticizing other women's choices.

The social construction of the "mommy wars," and motherhood in general, through, the media promotes not only intensive mothering, but the idea that "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." Even though working mothers and at-home mothers stereotype one another and apply negative labels like, "lazy," "selfish," "boring," and "greedy," each admits, as demonstrated in both the motherhood texts and *Parents* magazine, that there are certain elements of the other lifestyle they find appealing. At-home mothers sometimes crave the interaction with other adults enjoyed by working mothers, and working mothers occasionally wish for the ability to just spend more time with their children.

Parents magazine, for the most part, works to reinforce the beliefs working and at-home mothers have about themselves. For example, working mothers are portrayed as role models and good mothers even though they may not spend all of their time with their children. At-home mothers are portrayed as child-focused, which is how they want to be seen. By framing mothers the same way they frame themselves, parenting magazines avoid alienating a sizable portion of their readership and steer clear of the controversy that comes along with discourse about the "mommy wars." It works in their favor to tell

women what they want to hear about themselves, yet it also works to further the division between working and at-home mothers. Furthermore, by not talking about the potential negative consequences of their choices, parenting magazines leave women in the dark about the future implications of their decision to work or stay home. It is, however, encouraging to see *Parents* include depictions of working mothers who enjoy their employment and feel it benefits their families, since more often than not, the working mothers featured in *Parents* were discontented by their employment situations.

The implications of this research are primarily practical, as opposed to theoretical in nature, which is often the case with cultural studies. By identifying the predominant themes in discourse about motherhood in popular books and parenting magazines, this thesis provides a new lens and cultural context through which to view the discussions taking place in these publications. If the readers of parenting magazines recognize the pervasiveness of the ideology of intensive mothering being perpetuated, they are better able to accept or reject it of their own accord. As it is, mothers are consuming this unrealistic idea about what motherhood should be like, leading to the previously discussed feeling of ambivalence and dissatisfaction. Additionally, if mothers were aware of the socially constructed nature of motherhood and mothering ideologies, they would be better prepared to handle the criticism they receive from mothers who made other parenting choices. It may not change the tone of the discourse, but it could allow individual mothers to change the way they respond to it.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations that apply to this thesis. First, the nature of discourse analysis leaves plenty of room for interpretation. That is, it the texts used for analysis could have as many interpretations as they have readers. Each reader brings a unique frame of reference to the texts they consume, which inherently leads to a different understanding of what is being read. A second limitation is the size of the sample of *Parents* magazine. The use of a constructed year sample greatly limited the amount of articles available for analysis. However, this method was necessary to ensure a manageable number of texts. A third limitation is the method through which the motherhood texts were chosen. Using Amazon.com sales rankings only identifies texts that sold well via that Web site. Had another site or method for choosing these texts been used, it is possible that different titles would have been identified and perhaps different themes would have been salient. A fourth limitation of this research is that the "mommy wars" seems to operate in somewhat of a vacuum. It affects only a small segment of the population: mostly middle and upper-middle class heterosexual white women. The socioeconomic status of this group of women is such that working can be viewed, from an economic standpoint, as optional. Lower income families do not have this luxury, since providing food and shelter is of critical importance. Furthermore, the "mommy wars" do not apply to wealthy families, because they are not susceptible to the same cultural constraints as middle-class families. For example, finding affordable daycare is not as much of a challenge for a wealthy family who can afford a private nanny.

Directions for Future Research

There are hundreds, if not thousands of texts that discuss motherhood in different contexts. Some look at the historical context, others examine the economic and social implications, but none examine the role of parenting magazines on the construction of motherhood ideologies. An expansion of this research to include a larger sample and variety of parenting magazines and motherhood texts would be beneficial and may uncover additional themes present in motherhood discourse. Furthermore, expanding the time frame for analysis may expose trends in the literature from one decade to another, which may be helpful in understanding the roots of intensive mothering. An examination of mothers uses of parenting magazines might also be beneficial in understanding whether or not the discourse present in these publications actually impacts mothers' parenting ideologies. Why do mothers read these publications? What do they gain from them? How is the information they read used on a daily basis? Do these publications really have an impact on mothers parenting decisions and methods? Answering these questions is critically important in gaining a better understanding of the significance of this genre of publication on discourse about motherhood.

Conclusion

This research suggests the social construction of motherhood discourse in parenting magazines and popular texts about motherhood help to perpetuate the "mommy wars" and divide women into two opposing camps. Even though ultimately all mothers want the best for their children, the ambivalence they feel about motherhood forces them

to defend their choices in a socially acceptable way, and the media has provided this

forum by sensationalizing the rhetoric of the "mommy wars."

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APPENDIX

CONSTRUCTED YEAR SAMPLE OF PARENTS MAGAZINE ARTICLES BY YEAR

1990
January
April
July
    Groller, I. Women and Work: Results of Our Poll Part II. 64-70, 116.
October

1991
February
May
August
November

1992
March
June
September
    Jones-Lee, A. "Can I Afford to Quit?" 121-126.
December

1993
January
April
July
October

1994
February
May
August
November

1995
March
June
September
December
    Rosen, M. Her Work vs. His Work. 119-122.

APPENDIX (continued)

1996
January
    Patch, L. "I Quit My Job to be Home with my Kids". 15-16
April
July
    Levine, K. "Easing Into Work." 97-98, 100.
    Seid, N. "Why I'm Home." 85-87.
October

1997
February
May
    Black, R. "Lose the Guilt." 123-124.
August
November

1998
March
June
September
    Herbst, A. "Making Time for Eachother." 173-176.
    Graeber, L. "Easing Into Child Care." 181-184.
    Hogarty, D. "Can Part-Time Work for You?" 188-192.
December

1999
January
April
    Ruppel Shell, E. "Mommy, Why Do You Work?" 106-112.
July
    Anidjar, G. "Great States for Working Mothers." 94-103.
October

2000
February
May
August
November