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Canada

**The Good Enough Mother
The Social Construction of Motherhood**

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A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Sociology

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for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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c Wendi Hadd, 1990

ABSTRACT

The Good Enough Mother The Social Construction of Motherhood

Wendi Hadd

This thesis examines the experience of motherhood as it is lived in today's society. Twenty women were interviewed around themes including their intimate relationships with their children, their everyday experiences of mothering and the effect of mothering on their perception of themselves.

The role of women as mothers is established by long standing historical tradition in our society. To further the understanding of the experience of mothering to modern women, the roots of our social construction of motherhood were traced to their origins in the beliefs about the inferiority of women through to the denigration of unpaid labour in a capitalist market economy, culminating in the Victorian ideal of motherhood that remains today.

Women who are mothers appear to be unconcerned with theoretical perspectives on the role of mothers. They are concerned with the everyday aspects of their role and to this end they construct for themselves, each in her own way, what motherhood means to them.

Acknowledgments

There are many people who helped me in the writing of this thesis. My committee, the women who welcomed me into their homes and their lives, my friends in the coding room, my sister and Joe have all contributed to my efforts in their own way and I thank them for all that they have done. But in the end, the bulk of my debt and my gratitude goes to someone else.

And so I extend my thanks and my love to Dylan, who made me a mother as I made him; created in love, brought forth in pain. It is in the suffering, the tension and the joy of our relationship; between the child and the mother/person that this thesis was first imagined. His very existence has guided my thoughts throughout the writing of this thesis even as he has had to vie for my attention with it. So it is to Dylan that I dedicate this work. I hope I will always be a good enough mother to him.

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The Good Enough Mother
The Social Construction of Motherhood

All men are conceived, born and nursed by women. Thence come the little darlings, the highly prized heirs. This honor ought in fairness to cover up all feminine weakness.

Luther

Men write books and poems about the beauty and sacredness of motherhood but if one looks around the world one lives in, one finds that men are, for the most part, not charmed by the motherly qualities in women, and that the women upon whom men have in the past lavished titles and jewels and wealth are not the motherly type at all.

H.M. Swanwick

My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. Sometimes I seem to myself, in my feelings toward these tiny guiltless beings, a monster of selfishness and intolerance. There are times when I feel only death will free us from one another, when I envy the barren women who has the luxury of her regrets but lives a life of privacy and freedom. I love them. But it's in the enormity and inevitability of this love that the sufferings lie.

Adrienne Rich

Sadly enough, women are more often the lightning rod for family aggressions aroused by the speed-up of work and family life. They are the "villains" in a process of which they are also the primary victims. More than the long hours, the sleeplessness, and feeling torn, this is the saddest cost to women. A hundred years from now men may presume it's their role to share. We're in the middle of a social revolution.

Arlie Hochschild

Introduction

There are no good mothers. Indeed, given society's job description of the good mother, there can be no good mothers.

Historically, for women, biology has been destiny; but the destiny has been paradoxical and contradictory. The virtues of motherhood have been extolled, but women have been denigrated. Women were considered inferior and yet at the same time were entrusted with the exclusive responsibility of raising society's children. Being a mother and a housewife were the most rewarding roles offered to women yet unpaid labour has never been recognized nor valued in capitalist society. The history of motherhood is a history of attitudes and professed beliefs in polar opposites.

Denigrated by patriarchy and forgotten by feminists, the role of women as mothers is neglected in our search for equality for women. Motherhood has been ignored for so long **because** it is a women's issue. But if we are to understand the role of women in modern society, we must first come to grips with the traditional view of women as mothers to our children. If we are to see woman enter the world as the equal of man, we must recognize her position in the home. Slowly, slowly we begin to understand the gap between the ideal and the real and from whence this gap springs. We begin to recognize that the institution of motherhood concerns everyone for it touches us all in some way. We begin to know that to be a mother is a profound experience that must, finally, be validated. We begin to acknowledge

that mothers are people doing a job. We begin to accept that even if all mothers fall short of the ideal, even if there are no good mothers, considering all that the job entails, the good enough mother abounds and must be credited for being just that. Good enough.

This thesis examines the experience of motherhood as it is lived by women in our society. It examines motherhood from a historical perspective, from a feminist perspective and from the perspective of mothers themselves. It looks into the social construction of the ideal mother and it shows how the ideal functions to denigrate real mothers, to convince them that they are never good enough. But most importantly, this thesis shows how each mother constructs for herself her own experience of motherhood. The theoretical basis for this type of analysis is the social construction of reality. Berger and Luckmann (1969) postulate that actors construct for themselves what they perceive as reality within their daily interactions with others.

Chapter one is an examination of what a mother is supposed to be. It presents a characterization of the ideal mother and includes some refutations of the ideal. Chapter two is a continuation of the first chapter in that it provides us with a historical grounding of the origins of the ideal mother and of our social construction of motherhood. Chapter three considers the feminist movement of the early sixties and demonstrates how the role of mother was lost in the urgent fight for the rights of women to share in the

world of men.

Methodology is the topic of chapter four. Open-ended interviews with sixteen mothers of preschoolers were conducted. The sample was chosen by convenience but the women are able to speak for mothers in general.

"The Good Enough Mother Person", Chapter five, and Chapter six, "Someone's Mother", are the findings from the personal interviews. Themes examined include women's relationships with their children, the everyday tasks of childrearing, and the effect of mothering on women's perceptions of themselves.

The final conclusion, Chapter seven, is a brief synopsis of the entire study. It includes a look ahead to the future of motherhood with a focus on the changes necessary to enable women to continue to function as women and as mothers.

Chapter 1

The Mother Person

Mother is a female person who has a child. Mother is also a verb meaning "to nurture, to cherish, to nurse, to care for, to encourage, to provide sustenance for, to educate" (Olsen, Edwards & Jussim, 1987:105). The actions entailed in being a mother do not specify that the actor must be female, yet this is what is commonly assumed. Few men have any intimate experience with motherhood. Motherhood as experience is the raising of children. Motherhood as institution is the social definition of a biological function. Institutional motherhood makes demands on a mother that are not necessarily a function of her role but rather, are a function of how the role of mother has come to be defined by society. The history of women, the history of motherhood, culminating in the Victorian ideal, has shown that because women possess the unique and miraculous capacity to give birth, they have been accorded the unique and often inhuman task of raising children.

The Cult of Motherhood

Why do women mother? "Most women have no reason for having children beyond the feeling that it was natural" (Radl, 1973:43). A woman may have a deep desire for a child, but this desire is psychological and not biological (Chodorow, 1978). Her desire is culturally reinforced by a society that perpetuates the belief that all "normal" women become mothers, that a childless woman is lacking an essential part of her identity (Oakley, 1974). The cult of

motherhood rests upon several premises:

1. There is a sacred bond between mother and child that can never exist between a child and its father (Chesler, 1988).
2. Motherhood is the only experience that will complete women's sense of self: women need children (Bernard, 1974; 1975).
3. Children need their mothers exclusively (Delliquadri, 1977).
4. Women have an innate ability to care for children (Kitzinger, 1978).

We locate the genesis of these myths of motherhood in the historical context of ideas about women. Their origins can be traced from the Victorian era to the early 20th century with remnants of them remaining with us even today.

Motherhood as institution is motherhood idealized. We all have an image of a "good mother" that we carry with us. "Mothers are selfless and giving... untouched by anxiety or passion" (Kitzinger, 1978:172). "A mother is a person who loves being a mother, who finds being a mother a snap, who is completely fulfilled by the role, whose children are happy all the time, and whose severest negative feeling toward her kids is one of mild annoyance" (Radl, 1973:12). "Mothers automatically love and sacrifice [for their children]" (Tweedie, 1979:14).

However, idealized motherhood can never be more than an ideal. The image of mother in our society is such that no woman can come close (McBride, 1973). It sets women up to fail and when they do they "look inside themselves for the

answers on the assumption that they lack something instead of questioning the idealized image of motherhood and getting a truer sense of the burdens involved" (Radl, 1973:19).

Women who accept the myths of motherhood as the true nature of mothering are ill-prepared for motherhood; they come to motherhood with an inadequate understanding of what it is really all about (Oakley, 1979). Nowadays, it is not rare for a woman to give birth never having held a baby before in her life, much less have knowledge of their practical care needs (Evans, 1982). Our beliefs were formulated in a time when large families were the norm and therefore nearly everyone grew up in a home with many siblings. Female children were socialized for the one important job ahead of them- that of becoming a mother. Formal lessons in childcare were unnecessary because it was an everyday process. And because female children spent so much time tending to babies, they **did** grow up knowing how to care for them. The cycle perpetuates itself and one result is that it is often believed that women have an innate ability to care for children. But "mothering is learned. The innate ability of most women to bear children does not include information about taking care of them" (Delliquadri, 1977:13).

This idea ties into the belief of a "sacred bond" between mother and child, a bond that is unbreakable, irrefutable. It is a bond that a man could never have with his child; only women can enjoy this intimate relationship. "Mother-infant bonding in utero and/or immediately after

birth are sacred bonds" (Chesler, 1988:1). It is argued that because of this bond, mothers need their children, need to tend to their children. The cult of motherhood promotes this idea its function being "to keep women in their place... convinced that their desire for motherhood is self-constructed and self-fulfilling rather than as it actually is, a convenience to their culture" (Oakley, 1974:190).

Of all the premises upon which the cult of motherhood is based, the most debilitating is that which suggests that children need their mothers' care exclusively. This premise gained in authority with John Bowlby's studies conducted in England.

John Bowlby was commissioned to study children who had been orphaned or institutionalized following World War II. He found children who were stunted in their emotional and physical growth and made many recommendations to the British government as to how to alleviate the problems. His suggestions included "economic aid to mothers in distress" as well as "phasing out institutional care in favour of care in loving, homelike situations" (Ehrenreich & English, 1978:229-230). When Bowlby began extrapolating his data to children in homes with working mothers, he equated the extreme deprivation of the institutionalized children to that of children who were left for part of the day in the care of someone other than their mother (Margolis, 1984). His conclusion was that working mothers were depriving their children of the vital maternal attention necessary to their

well-being. He argued that children needed to be cared for exclusively by their mothers, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week in order to properly grow into stable, happy adults.

In the 1950s the British government used Bowlby's conclusions as the basis for their refusal to provide adequate childcare facilities to working mothers and to implement other policies designed to force women out of the workforce and back into the home (Dally, 1982).

The impact of Bowlby's study is still felt today. While he deserves credit for bringing to light the necessity of love and emotional stimulation to a child's well-being, he, perhaps unwittingly, contributed to the belief that only women can mother children properly. Bowlby, like countless others before him, confused the "unique female capacity to give birth with the cultural preference for maternal childrearing (Oakley, 1980:80).

Labour of Love

The cult of motherhood exaggerates the importance of mothers to their children but the social and economic position of women shows that what our society really values is women's culturally learned ability to take care of their children and not their biological capacity to bear children (Oakley, 1974). Society uses women in their role as mother as a cheap source of labour in the raising of children. "Women's work in the home is one of the most important and necessary labour processes of industrial capitalist society" (Luxton, 1980:13). Yet their labour remains unrecognized and

unrewarded therefore we do not see it as labour. Instead we see it as the natural course of events that women mother, men do not. If they did, the entire structure of power relations would shift toward a more equal balance (Ehrensaft, 1983).

The mother person lives motherhood as experience in her daily interactions with her child. To whatever extent she has or has not internalized the idealized image of mother, she must construct her own image of herself. Motherhood as experience is a personal and private relationship.

But the mother person must construct her experiences within a social context not of her own making. She must construct it within the boundaries of society that through its historical context has dictated to women the limits of their power, their position and their experience as a mother person.

Chapter 2

The Social Construction of Motherhood

It is widely assumed that women's principal role has always been as the caretaker of children but in reality, it was not until the 19th century that mothering became the principal occupation of women (Margolis, 1984). However the perception of reality has proven to be stronger than reality itself. The social construction of motherhood today relies heavily upon the belief that modern ideas of motherhood have a sound historical lineage. Our present construction of motherhood can be understood only by looking at the family and women within a historical and social context.

From Plato to Parsons and beyond, physiology, psychology, biology and sociology have provided "proof" of women's natural inferiority. Because "we define men and women as not simply biologically different but as 'opposite' sexes", the implicit and, at times, explicit inference is that in opposition one is desirable, the other less so (Synnott, n.d).

Men have always been the human paradigm, Genesis 2 relates that Eve was made from Adam's rib, therefore Adam is physically closer to the image of (male) God (Synnott, n.d). The male body was perfection, the female body, with its secrets and its' secretions, was less than perfect. "Aristotle argued that the female sex was a deformity of nature" (Russett, 1989: 3). "The female is, as it were, a mutilated male" (Generations, quoted in Synnott, n.d). The female body was a

less evolved form of the male body, much the same as blacks were seen as less evolved than whites in the evolutionary hierarchy (Russett, 1989). In fact, "natural scientists could pinpoint woman's place on the evolutionary scale with some precision- she was at the level of the Negro (Ehrenreich & English, 1978: 117).

The female body, with its menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause, was regarded as infinitely inferior to the male body and all of these physical changes wreaked havoc with her intellectual capabilities. The uterus was "the controlling organ in the female body" and "women's entire personality was directed by her ovaries" (Ehrenreich & English, 1978: 120-121). Widespread medical opinion effectively reduced women to their reproductive capacities. It was, one prominent physician of the times claimed, "as if the Almighty, in creating the female sex, had taken the uterus and built up a woman around it" (Ehrenreich & English, 1978:120).

Before the Revolution

Even while beliefs of women's inferior status were dominant in preindustrial society, they were not used, as they would be later, to exclude women from work. Preindustrial society was characterized by the absence of a differentiation between work and family (Margolis, 1984). Work and family were intricately tied, there was no way to envision them as separate. Therefore, while women were known to be mentally and physically deficient, they were seen, along with the children, as important members of the family. Childcare was not the main occupation of women, who were also

responsible for other tasks necessary for the survival of the family. Actual childcare was limited by need and took very little of women's daily time. Even at four and five years of age, children had chores of their own, they did not need extended physical care by the adults in the family (Aries, 1962).

Male dominance within the preindustrial family was validated by religious beliefs. The Judaeo-Christian tradition held men to be superior. Fathers were responsible for the moral and religious development of their children, which was considered to be much more important than daily care that was the responsibility of the mothers.

While male authority within the family was established on religious beliefs, these beliefs did not include an authority based on the assumption that men's work was more important than women's work. Patriarchy was not established on the basis of women's inability to provide, but rested instead on irrefutable evidence of their inferiority vis a vis the male paradigm.

The Industrial Revolution changed the nature of work and in doing so profoundly changed the role of the family. The family economy was replaced with a family wage economy. Family labour which once directly sustained the family now became a commodity that had to be sold. In the early years of industrialization, women and children worked alongside men in the factories. Gradually the number of available workers began to surpass the number of available jobs. To protect

men's position in the factories, child labour laws were passed, first limiting the hours children could work and then outlawing child labourers altogether (Aries, 1962). Laws governing female labourers also restricted the total labour force. Women continued to work but a middle class was growing and with it a class of women who no longer needed to go out to work (Baker, 1984).

With industrialization, the intricate web of family labour was divided into spheres; the public and the private. The "traditional productive skills of women passed into the factory system. Women would no longer command the productive process" (Ehrenreich & English, 1978: 11). The skills women relied upon to validate her place within the family were removed from her realm and incorporated into the wage labour, market economy.

The Invention of Childhood

At the same time, the development and well being of children came to be seen as an important consideration (Margolis, 1984: 12). Mandatory education for all children became law in an attempt to find a place for children who were displaced by factories no longer needing their labour. In the same way a "cult of motherhood" emerged to convince women that mothering was now a full-time job. Fathers' responsibilities to their children diminished, although their legal claim to them did not. Authority given to the father within the family by religious beliefs lessened but patriarchal authority in the market economy given by law grew stronger (Margolis, 1984). The belief that women's capacities

were closer to those of children than of men was institutionalized in laws restricting her abilities to govern herself. Even though mother was primary caretaker of children, it was father who retained all legal rights and authority. In Canada, the mother had no legal rights to her children into the early 20th century. Only in the 1920s did Canadian law begin to give legal recognition to the rights of mothers to their children (Crean, 1988:23).

The move toward the creation of motherhood as a full-time occupation reached its peak during the Victorian era. The cult of motherhood was born. Scientific expertise and popular culture combined to assure women that their natural place was with the children; a double standard of laws and pay ensured that she would not be the equal of man in the workforce. Still "women continued to pour into the workplace, each a living contradiction of the cult of true womanhood" (Russett, 1989: 10). But the ideal now was of mother at home with her children.

Women as People

The women's suffrage movement emerged as a vocal opponent to male dominated "scientific" knowledge about the inferiority of women in the late 19th century. Women's suffrage can be seen as a fight against the narrowing world of women, a fight against patriarchal domination that had become embedded in the fabric and laws of society. One example of this increased domination can be seen in the origin of abortion laws. In the 1850s and 1860s, historians

estimate the abortion rate at one for every five live births. Most abortions were performed on married women as a method of birth control. There were no laws against it until a combination of factors led to it being banned. One of the most important factors was the declining fertility rates of white middle class women (Margolis, 1984: 32). These women were using abortion to control their fertility at the same time that patriarchal society was trying to push them further and further into the isolation of the family home.

The cult of motherhood established in the Victorian era exalted the virtues of the good mother at the same time as society sought, through its laws, to restrict women's rights as people. On the one hand raising children was seen as a very important task because the children of today would be the adults of tomorrow, yet on the other hand the women who were supposed to prepare the children (especially male children) for the future were not considered competent enough to take a full position in society themselves. These two seemingly irreconcilable issues were reconciled with the advent of experts-male experts whose job it was to counsel women on how to be "good mothers". In the cult of motherhood, the expert reigns as a symbol of the generations of male superiority and dominance. For even as women were given the primary task of childrearing, male experts were continually present to guide her (Ehrenreich & English, 1978).

While the nature of experts' advice has gone from one extreme to the other and back again, the one constant has

been the firm belief that childrearing must be done by the mother but that mothers are not really qualified for the task. Margolis suggests that experts placed so much emphasis on the "right" way to mother and to every detail of childcare for the sole reason of keeping women constantly occupied. For if women were of utmost importance to their children, there would not be time for them to pursue interests and activities outside the realm of the family.

Social Theory and the Family

The long patriarchal tradition that culminated in the Victorian ideal of woman as sainted yet tainted mother is only now in decline. Its modern counterpart can be found in the 1950s when societal changes after the war were such that the level of prosperity enjoyed by most families again enabled women to stay at home with the children. Although the family of the 1950s was an anomaly, it has been commonly accepted as the typical family form. Studies of the family have been conducted with the 1950s family as a model upon which to judge other family forms. For patriarchal society, the 1950s provided justification for the continuation of the cult of motherhood. During this time women were in their proper place, at home with the children. As we have seen, this belief has long-standing historical support. The continued understanding of this type of family as the norm found its support in a strong sociological tradition.

The dominant sociological theory applied to the study of families from the 1950s to the 1970s has been that of

Parsons. Parsons' functionalism legitimated the continued presence of women in the home. Functionalists see society as a system that seeks stability. This is accomplished by each unit within the system performing its proper role. The family of the 1950s provided a function to society and when the family began to change, the functions it performed had to change as well. Because functionalists tend to see change as a negative factor, the changes within the family were seen as detrimental to society. Parsons' functionalism saw the middle class family structure of the 1950s as "functional to society". One particular criticism of this functional view of the family has been that while traditional families with mother in the home with the children and father out in the workplace are functional to middle class men and to the market economy in general, it is not at all functional to women (Baker, 1984:11). In this vein, conflict approaches to studying the family emphasize the dysfunctional nature of the functionalist approach in view of women's role in the family and in the workplace.

Conflict approaches based on Marxism see changes in the family as being linked to economic and historical changes in general. Feminist marxists see the family as oppressive to women and find the source of women's denigration in our capitalist market economy that rewards wage labour as production but does not validate or value domestic labour or the reproductive process (Luxton, 1980). Following Engels in **The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State**, feminist marxists argue that the separation of domestic

labour from other forms of labour is a false separation and that productive processes in the home are vital to those outside the home. In this view, production is seen as a twenty four hour process occurring in the two spheres continually, rather than an eight hour process that begins and ends in the factory (Luxton, 1980).

The social construction of motherhood takes place through our daily actions and interactions. It is formed by mothers themselves but also takes its cues from people who are not mothers. It must be understood within historical and societal perspective as a dynamic process. As the lives of women began to change with the women's revolution so too did the lives of mothers and so too did the social construction of motherhood.

Mother Was not a Feminist

"In the late 1960s and early 1970s, motherhood was the last subject most feminists wished to address" (Levine & Estable, 1981: 42). The women's movement virtually ignored motherhood (Apter, 1985). Seeking equality with men, early feminists saw motherhood as an institution that sought to drown them in a sea of self-sacrifice. Instead they sought selfhood. And it did not seem possible that motherhood and selfhood were compatible. Given their traditional role in the family and their history of oppression, women were questioning whether it were at all possible to be a mother AND a feminist (Stanley & Wise, 1983; Badinter, 1986; Feldman, 1986).

The main item on the agenda for early feminists was the belief that women could only achieve social equality with men if they could achieve equality of employment with them. The world of work was dominated by men and by male rules. Refuting beliefs in their innate inferiority, feminists found one thing still holding them back, their "traditionally exclusive responsibility for childcare" (Sayers, 1982:157). Two solutions were extended to deal with this problem, one which has been identified as a radical feminist approach, the other a more conservative but equally unreachable solution, state control of the responsibility for childrearing. There was perhaps no more vocal and articulate spokeswoman for radical feminists than Shulamith Firestone. Her book **The Dialectics of Sex** (1969) called for no less than the annihilation of

motherhood. Because women were being kept down by their responsibilities and obligations to their children, the only way to free women would be by freeing them from the tyranny of biology. Firestone envisioned a utopia in which methods of artificial reproduction replaced women's role as childbearers, and state run children's homes replaced women's role as childrearers.

Regardless of the rhetoric, many feel that early feminists failed women when they failed motherhood (Dally, 1982; McBride, 1973). Dally identifies four ways in which we may recognize this failure. The first is by trivializing the subject. There is an acute lack of literature on motherhood, an indication that the subject was not thought worth tackling. When motherhood is mentioned by many prominent feminist authors it is more in passing than as a subject given serious consideration. Germaine Greer says that "bringing up children is not a real occupation" suggesting perhaps that it is only a hobby (Greer, 1970). Simone deBeauvoir likewise devotes only five pages of a 685 page book to motherhood (deBeauvoir, 1949). Other publications do not deal with mothering beyond the initial birthing process (Andersen, 1972). Yet giving birth is just the beginning of a relationship that has a profound impact on women and an equal impact on their experiences of feminism (Crawley, 1985).

Secondly, feminism has devoted more time to ways to avoid motherhood rather than examining motherhood as a valid

choice. There is a stress on female control of the female body and an emphasis on issues such as abortion and birth control.

The third way that early feminists failed mothers is by settling for demands for collective childcare that are at best impractical and at worst, idealized utopian dreams. There is no clear agenda on the matter, no actual plan that demonstrates in what ways such a demand could be met. For this reason, it appears that early feminists were not prepared to deal with the issue but tossed out the idea of collective childcare to placate mothers.

A fourth way in which feminism has failed motherhood is by denigrating it. Feminism in the late sixties and early seventies made rather clear that to have a child was to sell out. Motherhood became a politically incorrect act (Ehrensaft, 1983). To become a mother was to be guilty of the ultimate in feminine behaviour (McBride, 1973). Not only was motherhood unsatisfying (Breeze, 1983) it was a "biological trap designed to ensure female servitude" (Kitzinger, 1978: 32). Allen writes that "motherhood is men's appropriation of women's bodies as a resource to reproduce patriarchy" (1983:317). Statements such as Allen's did not deal adequately with the fact that women enjoyed children and that even a feminist could love a child and want to have a child. Thus, while early feminism was virtually ignoring mothers and motherhood, women were continuing to have children. The gap left by the feminist movement

provided space for a new group to form. This group appeared to value mothers and their relationships with their children and in doing so provided women with the sense that becoming a mother was not the sell-out that they had been led to believe it was.

REAL Women (Realistic, Equal, Active for Life Women) championed the role of mother. Their stated goals are "To advance the equality of women and to lobby for the issues concerning the preservation of traditional family life in all government policies and legislation" (Canadian Almanac, 1990:4).

The most vocal spokeswoman for the REAL Women movement is Phyllis Schlafly.

The dogma of the women's liberationists is that, of all the injustices perpetrated upon women through the centuries, the most oppressive is the cruel fact that women have babies and men do not. Within the confines of the women's liberationist ideology, therefore, the abolition of this overriding inequality of women becomes the primary goal. This goal must be achieved at any and all costs—to the woman herself, to the baby, to the family, and to society. Women must be made equal to men in their ability **not** to become pregnant and **not** to be expected to care for babies they may bring into the world.

[The REAL Woman] looks upon her femaleness and her fertility as part of her purpose, her potential, and her power. She rejoices that she has a capability for creativity that men can never have.

Caring for a baby serves the natural maternal need of a woman.

Mrs. Schlafly goes on to argue against birth control, against abortion, against anti-discrimination laws in the workplace, against laws designed to remove the stigma of illegitimacy from children born to single women and against any and all legislation designed to end the traditional role of women in the family. Her professed goal is to save the family by validating women's second class status within the family.

REAL Women were not the only women arguing against the feminists. Selma Fraiberg's book **Every Child's Birthright. In Defense of Mothering** was written with the underlying thesis that mothers have a unique biological and psychological bond with their children. For this reason, Fraiberg counsels women to stay home with their children for the first six years. "Around the age of three, but sometimes later, most children can tolerate separation from the mother for a half day, morning or afternoon" (1977:84). Fraiberg asserts that she is examining the issue (of working mothers) from a child centered point of view and therefore she is concerned mostly with the child's needs; but this devalues the needs of mothers, pretending they don't exist, pretending they are less valid.

Whereas REAL Women argue that the traditional role is not sacrifice but a pleasure for women; Fraiberg argues that it is a sacrifice but one that must be made.

Fraiberg's argument arises from conflicting research of the impact of working mothers on their children. Conclusions

vary from study to study with some declaring that the working mother is detrimental to a child's ability to bond and will therefore result in the "disease of nonattachment", while others found that the children of working mothers were quicker to develop a sense of autonomy and independence. Finally, there were those of the middle ground who found that "the more closely children of working mothers are studied, the more they appear just like the children of mothers who are not employed" (Berg, 1986:58-59).

Regardless of research conclusions, women who leave their children in the care of others and go out to work invariably feel guilty because society has taught them that there is something their children need that only they can give (Oakley, 1974). This was borne out by the mothers I interviewed.

When I went back to work I thought this child will not be able to survive without me, I have to be there or she won't survive. You just figure no one can take as good care of them as you can whether or not you're going it right or wrong.

(Kim)

I was very picky about daycare. I wanted me only better. The me that would do everything right. The me that didn't exist.

(Dianne)

Following the post war boom of the 1950s rising costs increasingly made it necessary for women to work to support the family, this was equally true for married mothers as well as single mothers. Women still felt guilty about going out to work. The idea of quality time became a lifeline to women

who tried to cram an entire day's interaction into the precious hours between dinner and bedtime. Debates raged over how much quality time the stay-at-home mother actually spent with her children. Women were pulled between the traditional ideas about mothering they had learned from their mothers and the necessity to reconstruct the image of mother into one that included the new economic realities of the day.

"It is productive to worry because that makes mothers try harder, however guilt is unproductive" (Genevie & Margolies, 1987). **The Motherhood Report** analyzed the responses of 1100 women to a questionnaire about their experiences as mothers. The women's words fill the pages with honesty and pain, giving the details of the good, the horrid and the everydayness of mothering. Mothers ranged in age from eighteen to eighty. It is Dr. Louis Genevie's analysis that is, in the end, the most telling. A professor of psychiatry, Dr. Genevie makes some rather troubling statements.

It takes time and energy to be a good mother, an investment that the conflicted mother was not making. The more loving mother was usually the more patient mother. Indeed, if one were to ask "What can I do to increase my patience with my children"? the best answer would be, "Work on your ability to give and to love". We found that mothers who did **more** for their children, even at the expense of having time for themselves felt better about themselves, their children and motherhood (Genevie & Margolies, 1987:30-33).

The Motherhood Report supports the Victorian ideal of mother as nurturing, sacrificing and selfless. The working

mother, and especially a woman who sought a career for her personal rather than financial needs, was suspect because she was not selfless. She wanted to have it all. The phrase "having it all" conjures up images of self concern and greed and tells women that "it is selfish to seek public responsibilities-that such a demand disrupts the natural division of labour between men and women and imposes appalling social costs in the process" (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988:111). Tellingly, the phrase "having it all" is never used for men; men are expected to be able to comfortably combine career and family. Yet women were expected to work full-time and still maintain the home as though she were home all day. This was the price for having it all because housework and childcare were still seen as a woman's primary responsibility. Early feminists saw women enter the world of men but they were never able to leave the world of women behind. The fight for equality in the workplace opened the door to women, the battle was won but the war had not even begun yet.

The Supermom myth that convinced women they could have family and career neglected to show the real wages of such a combination. Like all myths, it was a beautiful story but a difficult reality. Feminists "overlooked the real difficulties and conflicts mothers would face in dedicating themselves to demanding careers. Inadvertently, they helped perpetuate the myth" (Berg, 1986:48). If women were equal to men in the workplace but had to race home to be housewives after five then inequalities would persist. Research shows

that a working mother works nearly twice as many hours as a working father (Tellingly, the term "working father" is not a part of our vocabulary). "Although research indicated that men help more in the home when their wives enter the labour force, it also shows that, in general, the division of labour remains unchanged" (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1978: 55). In fact, a married woman with two children did on average four hours more housework per week than did an unmarried woman with two children. Those four hours, then, would presumably be devoted to housework generated by the presence of a husband. Or, more specifically, a husband who did not pull his weight (Oakley, 1974). Lest we dismiss these figures as outdated, Arlie Hochschild found in 1989 that over one year women worked an extra month of twenty-four hour days and that over twelve years this amounted to an extra year of twenty-four hour days (1989: 2-3). "Extra" meaning beyond that which men worked.

The situation for working mothers showed few signs of easing. Pressured at work and pressured at home, women began urging others not to try to combine both work and family because the personal costs were too high. Betty Friedan, in an interview, said that "the superwomen who are trying to have it all, combining full time careers and stretch time motherhood, are enduring such relentless pressure that their younger sisters may not even dare to think about having children" (Berg, 1986:50).

Women, who were having fewer children than their own

mothers had, began to see the preschool years as very fleeting. Increasingly, women who were able to begin to opt for career interruptions that enabled them to stay home with their children (Walter, 1986). Their desire to be full time mothers, even if only for a brief period, surprised even them (Boulton, 1983). Unfortunately, stay-at-home mothering is more and more a non issue for most women as financial need forces them to remain in the work force regardless of any desire she may to the contrary. In 1986, 62.2% of women with children under 6 worked outside the home. The average family income in families where both parents worked was 51.8% higher than that in families where only the father worked. It is estimated that if all women with children were to pull out of the workforce, the number of families living under the poverty line would increase by at least 50% (StatsCan, 1986).

The absence of good, affordable daycare contributed to women's difficulties when they went out to work and may often be the deciding factor in some women's decision to stay home. When a mother goes out to work, it is she, and not the father, who is responsible for making childcare arrangements. It is mother who stays home when the sitter is sick or the child is too sick to go to daycare (Hertz, 1986).

Because the responsibility for their children's care is borne predominantly by women, issues such as availability and accessibility of daycare facilities have been targeted by government and the popular press as a "women's issue". When the conservative government used daycare as part of its

campaign election strategy, i' touted the importance of quickly creating more daycare spaces and the importance of putting long needed funds into the existing daycare structure. The long awaited project was shelved when it became clear that it would be a very expensive undertaking. Despite loud and angry protests from women's groups, the daycare issue was taken off the agenda.

To politicians daycare is an issue that is not urgent because the ultimate responsibility for children will remain in their mothers hands. Because women who need daycare, need it now, they must make whatever arrangements they can for the here and now, thus fulfilling the politicians beliefs that children can be placed on shelves, children and their needs can be made invisible, can be hidden in the homes of individuals. It is not only politicians who negate the importance of available, affordable quality daycare. Arguments against government support range from people not wanting their tax dollars spent on daycare to more theoretically based opposition.

Complete state support for children would be totally unfair to men. Suppose, for instance, that there were free state-run creches at which women could leave children all day, or any other arrangements which allow women to have children while imposing no serious financial or other burden on them. The upshot would be that women could, if they wanted to, keep children to themselves and not share them with men, but that men would still have to pay for them through the state system. That...would put women in a most unfair position of advantage over men (Radcliffe-Richards, 1980:301).

Janet Radcliffe Richards neglects to mention that

when women do try to "share" their children with men, men very often do not appreciate the gesture. The default rate for court ordered child support payments varies in Canada from province to province going as high as 85% at any given time (Crean, 1988:46). The only way seen to ease the burdens of mothers was by forcing society to recognize children and to take some responsibility for them (Duval, 1985).

The early eighties saw women and feminists evaluating the progress that had been made. But for women with children, the feminist movement had brought them through a circuitous route that landed them back not far from where they had begun. They had earned the right to work, but had retained their responsibilities at home. They had fought the women's revolution, but for mothers in the early 1980s, the revolution had stalled. "Feminist ideology is experiencing a return to pronatalist values, though with the desire to change the institution of motherhood as designed by patriarchal ideology" (Rowland, 1987: 76). Whereas early feminism sought to assert women's equality by showing that women and men were the same and therefore equal, late feminism restructured the argument to show that women and men could be different but still were equal (O'Brien, 1981).

This turnaround in feminist thought came with the recognition that to denigrate motherhood, to push for the joys of childlessness was not the message of liberation it was intended to be. Rather it was the opposite message, as imprisoning as the dictum that all women must have children.

And in its rigid dictum it was as patriarchal as the original message.

Instead of valuing the natural biology of women, this repudiation of motherhood thoroughly denigrates it. It rejects woman's birthright in favor of the right to do what men do. But why is what men do automatically declared "better"? Implicit in this valuation is the assumption that woman's natural function is inferior to participation in the public sphere in which "work" takes place (Rabuzzi, 1988:4).

Despite the rhetoric of the early feminist movement, women continued to have children. Despite REAL Women's push back toward the home, mothers continued to enter the workforce. The social realities that early feminism and REAL Women saw as the everyday life of women and mothers did not correspond to the social realities of the women and mothers themselves.

People perceive the reality of everyday life as being organized around the "here" of their bodies and the "now" of their present (Berger & Luckmann, 1969:22). The social reality of everyday life takes place in different zones, but the zone that is of most importance to individuals is the zone which is directly accessible, the immediate world in which individuals maneuver. Other zones interest people less directly even though what happens in those zones may have an effect on their everyday lives.

Since everyday knowledge is dominated by the pragmatic motive, recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge limited to pragmatic competence in routine performances, occupies a prominent place in the social stock of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann,

1969:42).

The post feminist movement is one that recognizes that the social construction of motherhood is enacted in the daily movements of mothers. It has made a commitment to women that early feminism (especially radical feminism) did not by recognizing and validating the desire of women to mother. In addition, it has not reverted to the denial made by REAL Women of the need and desire of women to work outside the home. Because the working mother is no longer a statistical, social or psychological anomaly we can no longer afford to avoid her and her problems (Gerson, 1985). "The problem modern mothers face is not to choose between paid work or unpaid family work but rather to find ways of integrating the two, of creating a viable synthesis" (O'Donnell, 1985:73). Feminism and feminist theory must speak to the reality of women's lives in the here and now if it is to be seen as valid.

Post feminism speaks for the women in my interviews in a way that no other theoretical perspective does. The mothers I interviewed constructed their own reality outside of and apart from theoretical expression. The knowledge they used in their individual experience was an ongoing form of "recipe knowledge". Their interests did not lie in theoretical speculation on the meaning of motherhood but rather in the everyday routines of their own personal relationships with their children. The women I interviewed were well-educated and we can assume that they were informed of and aware of the large-scale implications of mothering for women, but they

were not concerned personally with this kind of knowledge. The women are examples of post feminism in practice. They are not concerned with a body of theoretical knowledge that tells them the capitalist market economy exploits women's labour as women, they are not concerned with the assertion that women mother because our patriarchal system socializes them to want to mother against their best interests. For women as mothers, these issues take a back seat to the everyday reality of their personal motherhood. They are focused on the area of everyday life that is immediately accessible and of most importance; their relationship with their children. From this area they draw what they need to construct for themselves the reality of everyday life which is the reality of motherhood. It is this highly personal experience that has been neglected by the feminist movement in the past and which is the focus of post feminism of the present and into the future.

Chapter 4

Methodology

I interviewed twenty women who ranged in age from twenty one to thirty five. Their children were aged between ten weeks and five years. The interviews were conducted in one of three places; my home, the respondent's home, or an office at the university. The location of the interview was decided by the interviewees, who were asked which would be most convenient for them. Interviews lasted between one and two hours. The interviews were taped and were later transcribed verbatim onto a computer. Due to problems with the tape recorder four interviews were 'lost'; the results therefore are based only on the remaining sixteen interviews.

The case study method used in the research process has been faulted on the issue of generalizability of findings. However, the ability for the data to be generalized to a global, or universal population, is always in question with a small sample. What is of most importance is not whether or not the data can speak for mothers everywhere but what it is able to say for mothers within the smaller realm of the study. The experiences of the few are valid even if they are seen as the experiences of a particular class, race and culture. Because of the intensity of the interviewing process and the intimacy of the subject matter, the positive aspects of the case study method far outweigh any negative ones.

The subjects of the case studies were limited as to the

age of the children; that is it was restricted to mothers of children under the age of five. It was necessary to limit the scope in this way for two reasons; to keep the project at a more manageable size, and because it was believed that women with older children would have had more time to reflect upon the events of their early mothering years and to place them into a perspective that would have subdued her initial reactions to becoming a new mother. Since early motherhood is the time when women are forced to deal with the changes that come with children, it was felt that these mothers would best be able to recount their experiences with candor and without subconsciously editing the events discussed.

The interview schedule was designed to elicit information concerning several areas of the mothering experience. These include: the mother 'self', everyday tasks of mothering, the mother/child relationship, and expectations of mothering as contrasted to the reality of mothering. It was informed by previous research in this area as well as by my own experiences as a mother of a preschool child. Several other issues including the problems of the working mother and the single mother were raised by the mothers themselves in the course of the interviews and are interwoven with the main themes. Also included in the interviews is a woman whose child was born through the services of a surrogate mother. Through these different themes we see the differences in the mothering experience but even more striking are the similarities between all mothers.

The working universe was defined very broadly as mothers

and from this universe sixteen case studies were conducted. The case studies were chosen through convenience and a snowballing technique. There were two initial contacts; a friend of a friend's sister and a co-worker. Following each of these interviews, the women were asked if they knew of anyone who would be willing to be interviewed. They would call the women they had in mind and I would contact them within two days, allowing them time to consider the proposal. The procedure repeated until twenty case studies had been completed.

The formal interviews were only one part of the research project. In addition to these interviews I had many, many informal conversations with women in the course of my everyday comings and going. Both the case studies and the informal conversations were facilitated by a common bond I had to the women involved. As a mother of a young child, I was able to establish an instant connection to other mothers, based on our common realities. With my son as an ice breaker, I was able to approach women in public and begin conversations that recognized our shared roles. Because of my own role as a mother I was able to talk to women at daycare, on buses and metros, in stores, on the street. I had conversations with strangers and with friends, in public and in my kitchen over coffee. Women who were mothers, women who were considering becoming mothers, foster mothers and adoptive mothers, everyone had an important thought to contribute. As I talked to these women it became clearer and

clearer to me that the experience of mothering is an experience that women continually reflect upon and continually reconstruct in their daily lives. "Being a mother is like any job", said one mother of teenage daughters, "And like any job some women like it and are good at it and some women do better at something else". I spoke to a girl who gave birth to her son two weeks after her sixteenth birthday, "It's a lot of work", she told me quietly and I couldn't help but feel my heart go out to her. Some of the stories were stories of pure pleasure but others were full of sorrow that I could only witness but could not alleviate. I found myself living their stories, constantly re-evaluating myself, looking at my own son in a different light. And when I began to despair I spoke to a woman at a bus stop who confided in me that she was eight-four years old and that she had never had children.

I couldn't have children and although it was easy to adopt then, we never thought of it. We had a busy life always here and there and at parties. But now my family has all died, my husband has died and I'm all alone. Children can be difficult and it is often a hard job but you are lucky to have one, it is my one great regret because a child will be a great joy to you all of your life."

Through the use of case studies a cross section of the population was interviewed including Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Mennonite, married, unmarried, cohabitating, wealthy, poor, working, students and stay-at-home mothers. The women were well-educated one; with one exception all the women had some post secondary education.

Because of this the women were found to be very articulate and expressive. They were able to reflect upon themselves as mothers in a way that may not be indicative of the general population of mothers. This does not invalidate the data but it does account for the level of introspection and the ability of the women to converse about their own construction of motherhood. Regardless, the data has a richness and a fullness that provides us with a good micro-view of what motherhood is today.

Chapter 5

The Good Enough Mother Person

When we speak of pregnancies as being planned or unplanned and debate the characteristics of each, we are in fact drawing a false demarcation point; a maginot line as it were, for women themselves are frequently hard put to firmly place their pregnancy into one of these two categories.

When out of wedlock pregnancies were seen as just that--pregnancies that occurred without benefit of marriage--the line between planned and unplanned was easy to see. Married couples had planned pregnancies, unmarried people had "accidents". Increasingly now however, unmarried couples, and single women are choosing to have children. It is false to place these pregnancies into the "unplanned, accident" category. Marriage or lack of it has no bearing on the matter.

When I asked women how they felt when they first learned they were pregnant, eleven of sixteen volunteered that they were surprised, the pregnancy had not been intentional. Only five women had consciously tried to have a child. Yet of the eleven who had not made conscious plans, many believed that unconsciously they had allowed events to transpire in a particular way. Of these eleven it must be noted that the women were involved in a variety of ways with the father of the child. Some were married or living together, others were involved in serious relationships and still others felt little if any attachment to the men.

Because questions about birth control were not part of the interview schedule, we can only surmise as to how and why so many women could become pregnant without meaning to. Perhaps the answer can be found in the spiritual sense of two of the respondents.

I got pregnant the first time that I slept with this person. I'd had two abortions before and I said I was not going to have a third one. It's really strange but I swear she spoke to me and said "I want to live". It was so strong that her father and I had even laughed about the fact that we didn't want to sleep together, we weren't sexually attracted to each other. So somehow we felt that she even had the power to make us sleep together once and be conceived.
(LeeAnn)

This spiritual power was in evidence to another woman who became pregnant after doctors had told her she would be unable to ever conceive.

I thought if I'm actually pregnant it means that my life is together enough for me to support another life. So I felt karmically that I had worked out bad karma and had straightened out my life so that I would be able to have a child.
(Wendy)

The implicit suggestion in Wendy's response is that pregnancies may occur simply when the time is "right"; that perhaps we know intuitively what we reject consciously. Actually planning a child includes envisioning the future in a way that many understand as not in their best interests, career-wise and financially. On the emotional level, however, Wendy and LeeAnn felt that a child may come at the right time even when they consciously "knew" the time was not right. Society places so much emphasis on getting

established, finishing one's education, getting a job, buying a home, becoming financially secure. In doing so we are frequently taught to ignore our more immediate emotional needs. When a pregnancy occurs we are then able to shift gears, to gear down, all the while making it quite clear that were it not for this sudden occurrence we too would still be on the fast track to monetary reward. Unplanned pregnancy excuses the woman who wants a child but is still unestablished.

I think if you had to plan them no one would have them. We always thought "oh, we'll have a baby" but we kept putting it off. We'd say "Oh, we have to get our education and we have to do this and that and we have to do x y z. If I had waited til I was ready to have a baby, I would've never had a baby.
(Cynthia)

I think if I had to wait until I was ready myself to make the decision to get pregnant I would be 45 and still wouldn't have made it. It would've been after my M.A., after my PH.D., but then I want to go to Africa and this and this and this.
(Wendy)

We thought we wanted to wait until we were more settled or had more money or were older or more responsible and all those things and then we thought we'll never be all those things so what the hell, let's just go ahead and have a baby.
(Marlene)

One flaw in the data presented here is that all the women were mothers. It therefore stands to reason that had they been unhappy with an unplanned pregnancy, they could have aborted and consequently not been part of the sample.

In this respect the sample is restricted, restricted in the sense that after any initial shock, these women welcomed their pregnancies.

It was quite a trauma. [Our] situation was very unsettled. I didn't think about the good things, I just thought about screwing up my life and all this responsibility. [But] I don't necessarily believe in planned babies, maybe that's because he wasn't planned and I realize the benefits of it.

(Diana)

When I first found out I didn't know if I would have it. At first I wasn't sure what I was going to do. [But] as far as I'm concerned babies are a part of what's supposed to happen. [There are] women walking around thinking it's the most unnatural thing [to have a child]. I think it's really strange and sad.

(Janalyn)

[Babies are] a continuation of life, an extension of yourself through your children. It's part of the life cycle.

(Kim)

It's a gut reason and it has to do with having a baby and my husband and I looking at each other and saying this is right. Somewhere in the context of what it is to be human this is right. And that's sort of an amorphous answer but it has to do with just being a human being.

(Cynthia)

As long as there are women who feel that children are a part of the life cycle, a part of what it means to be human, there will be unplanned and planned pregnancies. One point that became obvious during the interviews was that the rules of fertility frequently operate outside our understanding. So we have children who were a surprise to their mothers

alongside children who were conceived through a larger plan their mothers had established. And at the far extreme there are children whose existence is a miracle to their mothers.

Women who conceived unplanned can be placed alongside the lucky women who decided to have a child and became pregnant immediately.

I felt pregnant very very quickly, within a week of going off the pill I was pregnant. I was really happy, really pleased.
(Marlene)

I felt happy. We were lucky we succeeded without any problems. I knew right away within half an hour[that I was pregnant].
(Kim)

We were very very excited as we really wanted one. We were surprised when there were two[twins] but we were excited.
(Josie)

But what happens when it doesn't happen right away. With so many unplanned pregnancies, it seems impossible to believe that it is not always immediate.

It had taken me almost two years to get pregnant so I was exhilarated. I was very very excited.
(Lois)

And finally from a woman who had an acquaintance act as a surrogate when she, herself, was unable to conceive.

I was thrilled, excited and terrified all at the same time. I started jumping up and down saying "I can't believe it". I didn't know how I would be able to wait nine months! I had waited for that moment, it seems, all my life.
(Dianne)

Dianne sums up the feelings of most women when she says "I was thrilled, excited and terrified all at the same time." Perhaps it is in these words we find the reason behind so many women leaving pregnancy up to chance, pleased when it occurs but too frightened to actively pursue it. Once she is pregnant, each woman has taken the first step on a long uncertain journey.

After we came home[from the doctor] we said "What have we done?" and then we realized oh, my god, it's pretty scary. It's a lifetime commitment so it's pretty scary.

(Marlene)

I cried, I was so nervous.

(Lynne)

At first I didn't feel anything, I didn't think anything. After awhile I started feeling I was pregnant and I started facing into it. Then it became kind of scary. It's just the whole change in your priorities.

(Adriana)

For many women their pregnancy meant dealing with changes in their relationships and their lives that they had not previously envisioned. If they did not feel 'settled', they felt that they would have to come to some form of organization before the birth of the baby.

We weren't married, we had been living together for five years but we weren't ready then [for children]. The marriage business didn't really bother us that much [but] it bothered his parents and for that we felt bad. Our lifestyle was totally different, we used to go clubbing every night of the week.

(Carol)

He came a year earlier than we had planned and we ended up having a wedding during the pregnancy and it meant a lot of changes in our lives that we weren't expecting.
(Lynne)

We ended up getting married when I was four or five months pregnant. I was riding on these hormonal changes and it just wasn't ion my best interests to get married. By the time she was three months old it was real obvious that we weren't going to get together at all.
(LeeAnn)

LeeAnn points out one of the greatest strains on the new mother-the necessity to establish or to re-establish her relationship with her partner. The relationship that existed when both were simply separate individuals changes once they are placed into a situation that calls on both of them to form a relationship which recognizes each other in relation to the new child.

Women who were established in a committed relationship, either married or unmarried, before their pregnancy felt that their husbands were a source of help in raising the child. Yet it was necessary to continue working at the adult relationship. Women stressed the need for security in the relationship before the baby arrives because the arrival of a child places a great strain on the relationship.

It's so hard. You are so tired and you go through so many changes. Things are different and you don't have time to talk. If you have a good relationship and you want to have a baby-that's good. But if you want to have a baby to improve your marriage then no, no, no.
(Adriana)

You really have to make an effort to focus on your marriage.
(Cynthia)

My husband worked [nights] for two years. [And] you are being a single parent because he was home all day and I was home all night, and you never had any support form anywhere. When [he] first started working [days] I would come home [and he would be there]and I would say "Whew, I'm going to lie down for an hour".
(Kim)

[It's good] if you have a good relationship, if you have someone, because you need [support]. I have the utmost respect for single women who have children by themselves, it's amazing.
(Marlene)

Single women who tried to improve or strengthen the relationship in preparation for the arrival of the baby had a hard time. They felt that men were an added work, were like babies themselves and instead of helping were an emotional and physical hindrance.

I [wish] there would've been a few more things settled in my relationship with [the baby's] father because that's been pretty difficult. Sometimes I feel I have a three month old child and a fourteen year old. I wasn't prepared for that. I wish I had been more prepared for the kind of relationship you're in when you have a baby and a man.
(Wendy)

For single women the prevailing belief is: better no relationship than a bad relationship. In 1986 12.7% of all families were single parent families and 82% of those were headed by a woman (StatsCan.,1986). It is not so much the absence of a father figure but the absence of a father's

income that can be said to account for many of the problems in single mother homes. In 1985, 50% of all female headed single parent families had a total income of less than \$15 000 with that figure rising to 93.5% when the mother was under 25 years of age. 37.1% of single mothers live on welfare compared to only 18.4% of male headed single parent families (StatsCan, 1986).

The single mothers I interviewed did not mention the added income a husband/father would have contributed to the household. Instead they talked of the fathers of their children solely in terms of emotional support. It is difficult to know whether to be encouraged by women who clearly did not look to men to support them or to be discouraged by the fact that single mothers had no way of forcing the fathers of their children to contribute to the children's financial upkeep. In any case, while all the single mothers expressed the wish that they had been in a secure, enduring relationship before the child came, they recognized the difficulties of trying to work at a relationship at this point in their lives. For these women, it was better to be alone than to be in a relationship that was tenuous and needed constant work. For LeeAnn, who married and then separated from her husband when the child was three months old, it was a lesson she learned through experience.

I never regretted [the baby] throughout my pregnancy or after she was born but I regretted-well, out of the worse relationship I ever had came the best thing in the world. I didn't know him

that will, he's an alcoholic, he's a troubled person. So [I was] humiliated, depressed and upset by this marriage that had no hope of working out.

(LeeAnn)

Rather than helping with the child, the men in these relationships were a further strain on women trying to adapt to the new responsibilities placed on them.

He was just an awful person, just very selfish. I was living on welfare and he used to tell me how lucky I was. Finally when the baby was about seven months old, I asked him to leave because I felt that he was just draining me, I had no energy to take care of the baby, I was always unhappy. It was a relief when he left. Now looking back I should have never ever involved him.

(Debbie)

When single women hear stories like Debbie's and LeeAnn's it prepares them more realistically for the decision they must make of whether or not to involve the child's father. Because it is difficult if not impossible to force these men to take financial responsibility for their children, any involvement they do have is usually limited to voluntary and occasional visits. They can try to exert their influence over the women as to their own childrearing philosophies but they generally are not concerned with accepting partial responsibility. Legal Aid lawyers counsel women in this type of situation **not** to try legal tactics to force the fathers of their children to assume their obligations. All a man in this situation has to do is say that he is not the father of the child. The burden of proof falls upon the mother. We should not be surprised then, when

Janalyn tells us

When I decided I was going to have a baby I decided on my own and I didn't involve the father at all. I guess in a way I'm glad of that because I've talked to a lot of people who have confused relationships right now because there's always a lot of struggling and tension over the rights to the baby and how the baby will be raised. I'm glad I have sole say. That's really important to me.
(Janalyn)

Basically what women such as Janalyn and Debbie are saying is that if they are going to do all the work, they don't want unsolicited advice from the father. And make no mistake, women still do nearly all the work involved in childrearing. Even the women who were involved in long-standing, committed relationships rarely mentioned their husbands doing any childcare or housework. Asked if their husbands/boyfriends did half, most women just laughed. Kim was the only one whose husband came close. They both worked and for two years while she worked days, he worked nights, spending his days caring for their two daughters. But still he "doesn't do half. Maybe 40%. He's getting there."

My husband helps out with childcare but not half. He spends some time with them when he is home. I put them to bed, read stories and tuck in 95% of the time. I help my son with his homework. I go to parent-teacher meetings. I decide if they need new shoes or mitts or take them to the dentist. Even though my husband does spend some time with them, he'll often ask me what to do or how to do it like, Can they have a piece of cake?, or Where is this or that?
(Vicky)

It is easy to allow a situation to develop where the father spends time with the children but is little more than a token figure or a larger playmate. Fathers "help" mothers, but only when they are asked to do specific tasks, only when they are given specific instructions. Father involvement is not automatic like mother involvement. Fathers rarely have the intimate relationship that mothers have with their children, they know so little about their children that they are not even sure when the child can have a piece of cake or where she keeps her pyjamas. Headlines proclaim the era of the new involved father but there were none to be found in this sample. Fathers were for the most part physically and emotionally absent. They may take pride in their children and take pleasure in their children but they don't take care of their children. As we will see later on, women felt that their total responsibility for their children was what led them to feel so much love for them. If fathers do not accept responsibility for their children can we be surprised when they do not have the same attachment to them. It is not so much a question of biology but of proximity where the more time spent the more love and responsibility breeds. Women understand this and realize that there has to be a conscious effort to include fathers in the care of their children.

If there's a father at home [it's important] to make sure he gets involved with the care of the child because if you don't make an effort it's easy for the mom just to do it all herself.
(Lois)

Some women do not question the primacy of their involvement with their young children but others recognize that they are being pushed toward a total responsibility. While the responsibility can be rewarding, it results in a leisure gap between men and women. One result of this is a tension in the relationship when father and child expect mother to do everything.

When I go home he hangs onto me and won't let me go, I have to be there all the time. [Even if] we are both at home he wants to go with me and I say but look Poppy's home.
(Adriana)

Poppy may be home but he is doing little to relieve mommy of the care of the child. The main excuse used is that he knows nothing about babies and women agree. But these same women would later state that they themselves knew little or nothing about childcare. They did not equate the two statements, that is; if they were able to learn childcare, their husbands should also be able to acquire this vital information. Instead they did without help for the most part, viewing gratefully any little bit of help they did get.

He did look after him a little at first but you always felt as though you were nudging someone along.
(Diana)

This same woman went onto explain that she was initially frightened and insecure with the new baby and as a result wanted her husband to stay home as much as possible to help her to feel "okay". But "he had other things he wanted to

do". She also had things she wanted to do but she was the mother so she couldn't do them.

It is painfully obvious that children are men's progeny but women's responsibility. As Arlie Hochschild (1989) has pointed out the women's revolution was stalled because men do not share the raising of their children and the caring of their homes. Whether married or not women who have children find themselves 100% responsible for their children. And while their husbands/mates remain essentially the same as before the child's birth, women undergo a profound change in their daily lives, their thoughts and their sense of themselves.

Chapter 6

Someone's Mother

"I'm not the person you knew,
I'm someone's mother now."

What does it mean to be someone's mother. We can be someone's spouse, someone's friend, daughter, sister, niece but none of these relationships will ever demand of us the things that our own child will. None of these relationships will ever have the same impact as becoming someone's mother.

I ran into a friend I hadn't seen since before the baby was born and she said "oh, you haven't changed a bit" and I thought 'God, yes I have' and I wanted to say to her I'm not the person you knew, I'm someone's mother now.
(Eda)

Some people talk about mothers as though they are angelic beings. They deify mothers, they worship the mother/child bond. On the surface it seems that these people must think that mothers are truly special, wonderful people. They reiterate the myth of the good mother and the virtues she must certainly possess. But as we have seen, this deification of mother does not translate into real admiration of real mothers. Rather it is admiration for an idealized image of what mother **should** be. A good mother is selfless and giving, patient and kind, loving and sacrificing. To these people a mother is something, someone, apart from regular, ordinary people.

But mothers are regular, ordinary people. They are regular, ordinary people in that they have selfish desires,

they can commit unkind acts, they may not be willing to constantly sacrifice, there is a limit to what they have to give and their level of patience runs the gamut from lots of to very little.

When we hold up an image of what a good mother is we forget that before mothers are mothers they are first of all people. Regular people are allowed to be all the negative things written above. Regular people don't have an idealized image they are expected to live up to and so they do not as a group find themselves lacking. Regular people occasionally feel guilty but mothers often feel guilty. Some mothers always feel guilty.

That's what motherhood is, guilt and more guilt.
(Vicky)

Mothers are regular people underneath, they are regular people first. But it is true that becoming a mother changes a person. What needs to be understood however is that it is not the process of giving birth that changes a mother it is the ongoing relationship with her child. And we must never forget that even though becoming a mother changes a person, underneath she is always a regular person, no more inclined to virtue than a non-mother, no less entitled to her selfhood than a non-mother.

In an attempt to prepare themselves for their new role, many women turn to reading books about pregnancy and early childrearing. Yet "no book adequately analyzes the changes that becoming a mother may bring-changes in the woman's own self-concept, or personality" (Barber & Skaggs, 1975:7).

Rabuzzi (1988) suggests that women spend too much time wondering if they should have a baby and never address the issue of whether they want to be mothers. For these two issues are not synonymous. Considering whether or not to have a baby is usually undertaken in light of whether the parents feel that they have enough room in their lives for another person. People talk of being "ready" to have a child and what they mean is whether they are at a point in their career where they can relax and take a maternity leave, or whether they have enough savings in the bank, or whether they have enough space in their house for another person. In our society, it is easy to think of a child as something to have, to "acquire" when the time is right, a consumer durable. But when a woman asks herself if she should become a mother, the focus shifts to where it realistically belongs--onto her own selfhood. This is an important consideration because it is often unclear to women just what it will mean to them to be a mother.

The self she has always been will be irrevocably changed once the baby comes. She will never be exactly the same self she has previously taken for granted she is. She will be a new self entirely, a motherself. Besides the physical changes effected in her body over these nine months, emotional, mental, and spiritual changes will take place as well. As a function of these other, nonphysical aspects of pregnancy, a woman typically finds herself reassessing her values, her life, her sense of herself as a woman. Such questioning constitutes one of the major ordeals of a woman progressing along the way of the mother (Rabuzzi, 1988:120).

Without such an important and necessary questioning, women will continue to fall into motherhood without an adequate understanding of the extent of change that will be required of her individually. Changes that go beyond a change of routine and reach into the inner part of herself, requiring a change in personality and in the way she has always known herself and accepted herself as being. This is a change that every good enough mother will go through and she needs to be prepared for its' eventuality.

"This mother time was the making of me as a person", writes Michelle Landsburg and the mothers in this sample agreed. May women find a truer sense of themselves through their relationships with their children and emerge happy and victorious. Women who are able to construct their own sense of motherhood can emerge stronger while mothers who must struggle to live out an ideal myth of motherhood may lose themselves and their children (Price, 1988). Whether the end result is negative or positive, the relationship we have with our children can nourish us or leave us debilitated but either way it will change the way we see ourselves, other mothers and the world.

I didn't know how to view myself as a mother. It didn't fit in with my vision of myself. I'm a mother now. I'm not a student anymore. I'm not an independent woman earning my own money. I stay home. I look after a baby.
(Diana)

Women who are pregnant with their first child often are party to the myth that there exists out there a MOTHER. For this reason, they find it hard to envision themselves, whom they've always considered regular people, as mothers. They know they do not conform to this myth but they don't know that no one conforms to the myth.

I always pictured my mom as a mom but I never could see myself as a mother.
(Carol)

I think I have trouble accepting the whole mother role. I'm the baby of the family and I still think of myself as a kid.
(Lynne)

It was always really strange when someone would use that word [mother]. I even had a hard time when I was packing my hospital bag and I was going through all the things I would need and I thought 'Oh, I'll have another person with me, I better pack clothes for him too'. **My pregnancy, the idea of having a baby, and then having to mother seemed really separate to me.** It was hard to relate to the fact that that huge stomach was going to turn into a person that I had to have a special kind of relationship with. The odd time it ever came up-the word mother-it was weird. I was pregnant but I wasn't projecting forward. (my emphasis)
(Wendy)

It was sort of weird because being a mother for me was having one of my goals fulfilled. I had always wanted to be a mother.... I don't think I thought of it [being a mother] one way or the other. I just wanted to have a family.
(Kim)

Kim and Wendy thought about having a baby but not about being a mother. However, after the arrival of the child, the

women found themselves reassessing themselves and their lives. Some women stated that their world view changed because of their child, many said that having a child had made them better people. The honesty and forthrightness of the replies indicated to me that this was indeed an issue close to each woman's heart. It was clearly something many women had already given thought to in their own quiet time. As Rabuzzi has stated "A woman typically finds herself reassessing her values, her life, her sense of herself as a woman. Such questioning constitutes one of the major ordeals of a woman progressing along the way of the mother"(1988:120).

I noticed that I see the world in a different light now. Everything is seen through their eyes.
(Josie)

Having a child does change one's outlook on the world. It makes me see the world with them in mind.
(Vicky)

You just have to reexamine the way you look at life and slow down and take everything moment by moment,
(LeeAnn)

By slowing down, re-examining their lives, women by and large felt that any long term changes in their "selves" were positive.

Establishing a relationship with a child requires a different set of behaviours, a different repertoire of mind set and action. Aspects of a personality previously felt to be deficient or lacking altogether surfaced when the needs of a child demanded them. Perhaps like the U.S. Army, with its

strict regimen, motherhood helps women to "Be All You Can Be".

I am a different person since Lindsay was born. I feel much stronger now. I can stand up for my rights and what I believe in. I've learned how to say No to people.

(Dianne)

Having the child brings out things that you didn't think you had. Some facets of your personality, some strengths that you didn't think you had, some good qualities that you didn't realize you had or you never used them or you didn't have an opportunity to really show them. Having a child can bring out the best in a woman. I've grown as a person.

(Marlene)

That growth is for some women, the most positive and satisfying outgrowth of their role as mother.

I think it's a really good test for being a better person in life. You have to examine your life. It's learning who you are and relying on your intuition and not being afraid, you can't be afraid. You have to make some really important choices and you have to follow your intuition to know what's right.

(LeeAnn)

You cannot imagine for a second that you're going to do your child any good if you do not want to become any different from the person you are when you're single and independent. I'm definitely a different person, much, much less self-centered.

(Wendy)

Having a baby helps some women to center themselves, to use the responsibility demanded of them in a positive way.

I'm a different person now. [Having a baby] makes a person mature quickly and become more responsible.

(Vicky)

I knew that once I had the baby I would have to be responsible for the first time. I knew it would be an opportunity to grow. All of these changes have been changes for the better as far as making me more grounded, it's slowed me down enough that if it wasn't for him I still probably would be running in circles. I wouldn't be any closer to sitting down and figuring things out. I really feel that none of the changes that have happened because of him have been bad, they've been good. I feel a lot more open. I'm a lot more receptive to people, a lot more friendly, a lot more accepting. I'm a lot better in a lot of ways-my personality- for it.

(Janalyn)

Having a baby so young and alone was very very hard at first but it allowed me to stop and kind of step out of things. It was like an opportunity to look inside myself and see who I really was. And I am different now, I really plan for our future, I feel responsible for his life as well so it's very important for me to do things now that will have pleasant results for us in the future. Whereas I know a lot of women my age who don't have children are still allowed the luxury of being selfish and it makes them very complacent, very lazy kinds of people.

(Debbie)

Children provide women with a previously untapped opportunity for growth. But when does that growth become stunted? They teach responsibility but there comes a point when being responsible for a child means neglecting yourself. We are taught that mothers are supposed to sacrifice. They are supposed to give to the child at their own expense. Wendy spoke of becoming less self-centered, Debbie hinted at it, both meant it as a virtue but we don't see this as a

virtue in the general population, only in saints and mothers. The overwhelming needs of an infant surround the new mother, for the first month those needs are her whole world until she looks around one day and comes to the conclusion that all her opportunities for growth are about to wither away from neglect. Being 100% responsible for another helpless life is a 24 hour, 7 day a week job. It is a job that many women are completely unprepared for, they often have absolutely no practical hands-on childcare experience. Later I will discuss what happens when women begin to feel they have neglected themselves. For now I will take a look at what happens when a new infant is given into the hands of an inexperienced woman who has suddenly become a mother.

When a woman becomes a mother she does not know intuitively how to care for her child. The most common answer to the question "How did you feel when you first brought the baby home? was "Overwhelmed".

When I got home I was petrified that I wasn't going to be able to take care of him. I was a nervous wreck.
(Lynne)

It was scary for me at the beginning because I wasn't sure that I could deal with this experience.
(Adriana)

The extended family is often thought to have disappeared from society but proof of its' existence can be found in the support offered to most new mothers. As perhaps one of the most comforting traditions, new mothers called upon their own

mothers to help them to overcome the initial adjustments to life with an infant. Of the sixteen women I spoke to, only four did not have their mothers with them the first day of the homecoming.

I was nervous and excited but I was very lucky because I had a very good support system. My mom and my sister lived right down the road and I think they spent more time at my house than their house.

(Josie)

I felt overwhelmed. I was lucky because my mother was here and she took really good care of me. She took over all my household chores and let me take care of the baby. That was perfect because I didn't know how to take care of a baby and that way I learned how. But I remember being very overwhelmed.

(Cynthia)

I was scared when I came home from the hospital. The hospital was not a fun place to be but people took care of you there. My mother spent the first 10 days with me and it was great because she cooked and cleaned. She really helped me get through it. You feel so overwhelmed and I had to think at one point 'It's just one day at a time'.

(LeeAnn)

Not all women were overwhelmed. Some women had little if any problems adjusting to the new child, but they too, came home to their mothers help. Vicky says that "I was a little nervous about the belly-button and the circumcision, but that was probably due more to a weak stomach". And Lois' answer was brief and to the point, "I was thrilled. I was thrilled to pieces just to have him". Perhaps no one shared more in Lois' sense of joy more than Dianne, who had to count on the generosity of another woman for her daughters' safe

delivery. Coming home with her child was the end of years of anticipation and the beginning of a dream.

I cried all the way home. It was such a relief having it all over. I couldn't wait to get home. I wanted to start using all of her things. I had to bathe her right away. I wanted people there all the time otherwise I would cry just looking at her, she was so beautiful. Taking care of her was so natural. I felt this is what I was meant to do.
(Dianne)

It was incredible. I was so glowing. I'll never forget that feeling. I was on top of the world. I was on a real high. I brought her home and I was on a real high. And then I went into a real low. For the next four months.
(Carol)

The low that Carol went into for the first four months of her daughters' life is known as post partum depression. Experts seem to agree that this depression is caused by one of two things or a combination of both; a sudden change in hormones brought on by the birth, and the total exhaustion that most new mothers endure (Kunz, 1982:642-643).

It is hard to understand this type of depression if one has never lived through early infancy with a child. Too often nonmothers offer advice to the depressed woman to "cheer up, it's not so bad, it will pass". While it is true that the situation will pass, children can't help but grow older every day, for a woman trapped in her depression, the daily grind feels as though it will never pass.

I would just start crying for no reason, just out of the blue, while talking to someone. It was just so sad. I couldn't shake it, no one took it seriously, they would just say "oh, it will pass" but I couldn't see that happening. I nursed that child twelve hours out of twenty-four for weeks and I couldn't see beyond it to where it would end. I couldn't see beyond the day I was in never mind look to weeks or months to come.

(Eda)

It is when listening to women describe their post partum trials that one gets a clearer picture of what a mother is. She is a person who suddenly finds herself at the call of a helpless infant frequently trying to breastfeed, and suffering from a lack of sleep that cannot in any way be seen as healthy. And so aside from the emotional wear and tear of new motherhood, the physical exhaustion undermines the beginning of these new relationships. Hochschild found in her interviews that "women talked about sleep the way a hungry person talks about food" (1989:9). I found much the same responses in my interviews. Women talked about the effects of sleep deprivation, particularly in their child's first few months, as though they couldn't believe they had endured such an experience.

People used to say I had bags under my eyes for three months cause I was up every four hours and I slept maybe four hours a day for three months. I can remember feeding my daughter all night long and she couldn't eat and she was colicky and throwing up and my husband would bring her to me and say she wants to eat again. I would just cry when I was feeding her and say I just can't do this anymore.

(Carol)

When you're trying to get through another day you don't believe you're going to live. When he was six weeks old he had an operation on his stomach and then we went through a really rough time because I'd lost a lot of my milk cause he couldn't nurse. So I went through a really rough week, he would nurse six hours straight. [After that] I was really tired and depressed. But I look back and I think "My god, I did that. I think the only thing worse than three months with a colicky baby would be nuclear war. But I think I could probably live through that.

(Janalyn)

The lack of sleep is really hard because it affects the rest of your life because you're really exhausted all the time. I was very overwhelmed because I was nursing and it was very painful. It's not something that comes just like that, although I thought it would be. I felt that I was always feeding this baby. One day I added up the hours and I realized I had spent ten hours just feeding and changing diapers.

(Cynthia)

I'm always tired. I guess it's just indicative of what age the kids are right now. I get tired and easily irritated.

(Lois)

She had scarlet fever for a week and so of course she wakes up every hour and I don't get enough sleep so the next day gets even worse because I don't get enough sleep.

(LeeAnn)

He's not sleeping at all. I have to work with him day and night. Even if I put him in his bed he screams and screams and screams until he falls asleep but then he wakes up so I don't get enough sleep and then in the morning you get up and have to deal with him.

(Adriana)

The worse thing is knowing I'm never going to get eight hours of sleep in a row.
(Wendy)

Perhaps the worse thing about children is that they deprive their mothers of sleep and in doing so rob them of the energy they desperately need to deal with the children. Lack of sleep is not always limited to the first three or six months or even the first year. Mothers of children two, three and four years old said that their children still woke up at least once during the night.

The effects of the lack of sleep show themselves in the everyday activities of the women. They lack sleep and lack energy. As the responses indicate women can spend up to ten hours a day doing nothing but feeding and changing a child. While the time spent on these tasks decreases as the child grows older, equally time-consuming tasks replace them. Women with small children can spend inordinate amounts of time with the custodial care of a child and the house.

The lack of sleep, coupled with the demanding nature of small babies, led many women to feel that they were no longer in control of the daily events in their lives. It takes a conscious effort to keep the needs of the child from totally taking over their own need to go about their daily activities, to get things done. Getting a schedule and sticking to it was one way women had of minimizing the amount of control the child had over their lives.

I always wanted him to be on a schedule and nurse at a certain time because otherwise everytime he cries I'll be there with my T-shirt hiked up. I didn't want him to have that power over me. I wanted to be able to at least impose some type of schedule so I could do things in between. Otherwise he would have too much control over me if the only nursed for two minutes twenty times a day. I saw it as a fight for control and I wanted to keep that control over my own life. For me to have it rather than him.
(Diana)

He pretty much made up his own schedule but once it seem pretty much stable I stuck with it because I don't want to have to change things everyday. I have things to do.
(Wendy)

When you realize you're not in control-I don't want to control her but I don't want her to control me either and in between is what's going to happen. It's real tricky because neither of you are manipulating to get what you want.
(LeeAnn)

Women feel the need to retain control of at least some aspects of their lives. They are unable to control their lives in the area of sleep, they must follow the pattern of their child. Tied to but separate from these two aspects is the lack of freedom and time for themselves. This lack shows itself in minor daily annoyances such as not being able to drink a full cup of tea without being disturbed as well as larger, more complex issues concerning when, how and if women will be able to get their own ambitions back on track.

Every woman said that the most difficult thing to accept about being a mother was the lack of personal time. The least enjoyable part of motherhood for these women was the fact that they were on duty every minute of every day.

As one woman said "Even when I'm not with them I'm thinking about them and worrying about them". Although it was expected that there would be a difference between single mothers and married mothers, it is nearly impossible to discern from their responses which women are alone and which have husbands/mates who are "sharing" in the childrearing.

The weight of responsibility presents the flip side to the promise of personal growth many women felt a baby had given them. There comes a point when the challenges of childrearing becomes its defeats, when the immersion of the motherself into the child threatens to drown the person inside the mother.

You have no rest, not even to go to the bathroom. You feel like saying "Couldn't you just be away from me for five minutes?" I experienced total desperation from being locked up in the house. You really couldn't develop your mind. You didn't even have time to sit and read the newspaper. I felt so tired physically but mentally I wasn't doing anything.
(Adriana)

Many women touched on this idea of mental boredom, they weren't doing anything for themselves, to keep themselves alert mentally.

I just don't have time to pursue my interests right now. I can only find five minutes here and there. I don't have time to just sit and think or sit and write in a journal.
(Lois)

The inability to snatch more than five minutes at a time for themselves led many women to feel "brain dead". Some women got this feeling soon after the birth of the child

while for other women it took longer for the mental inertia to register as a problem.

Right now I'm trying to go to school and I haven't been able to read because I've just been too tired to concentrate to think even. Your mind turns to mush after about a month.
(Cynthia)

At this point I feel really brain dead. I wonder about when I start trying to do things like finishing my degree whether I'm going to feel resentment for the fact that I can't do things I wanted to .
(Wendy)

You realize how much time you had on your hands before you had a child and you could just sit and read. You're brain goes into slow gear. My friend calls it MMF-Mental Mother Fuck.
(Lynne)

For some women the solution to the problem seemed to lie in making sure their own ambitions were not forgotten in the needs of the child. Many had been students when their children were born and they were waiting for the day they could resume courses at least part time. The question of "Who am I if I am only a mother" appeared at the forefront of women's thoughts. In a society that places little if any value on childrearing, mothers come to doubt themselves, to feel bored and unfulfilled, to feel that somewhere out there is a fuller life. A life that will validate them as human beings.

[When I went out to work] it was very difficult to admit I needed a break. I was getting bored with the day to day routine at home. I wanted to be able to say, "Yes, I work, this is what I do." I wanted people to ask my advice, talk to me as an equal not just as a housewife.
(Dianne)

Only two women worked because they needed to, others said that while the extra money was nice, it wasn't necessary. While this would suggest a very affluent sample, it did not appear to me that the women were in general more well off than most. Only three women in the sample owned their own homes, the remaining thirteen were living in rented apartments and duplexes. It would seem from my informal observations that none of these thirteen women were what I would consider rich, some were obviously living below the poverty line. And yet this group of women did not feel it necessary to work outside the home while their children were young. They were able to get by on one salary or on welfare and felt that this was the best route for them to take.

I've really thought about this a lot and contemplated, if I could get a good job, especially since Bruce is in school, financially it could prove worthwhile. But I just see too many benefits to staying home with the kids.
(Lois)

I was working full time for three years and then I stopped working and it paid off. I think poverty has made us better! It's hard, we used to make \$50 000 a year and now we're down to \$25 000 and we're four people so that's not a lot. But I had to spend a lot of time [with my children].
(Carol)

We're living on welfare and I know that I could provide better for us but I can't be in two places at once. I can't take care of her and go out and get a job as well. I don't have any intentions of putting her in a daycare center until she's about twenty-two months old. So in that sense I feel that I'm in a tug of war, I'm freaking out because winter's

coming and the big gas bills will be coming and I'm having a hard time paying the bills. The other side of me says that I'm lucky because I spend the first two years of her life with her constantly and not have to feel that I'm depriving her. We could be living in a better financial situation and I've made a decision that's contrary in that I've decided that I'm going to keep her home for two years.

(LeeAnn)

But for some women, it is not a question of being able to make a choice to stay home. They feel that it is vitally important that they go out to work. It is important for financial reasons as well as for their sense of themselves, of knowing who and what they were.

I had lost my identity and my confidence. I was starting to climb the walls and was ready to get back to the world. I made two phone calls and had two job offers, so it was quick. I'm working three days a week and it's perfect.

(Lynne)

[Working] is hard but at the same time by working it gives me that freedom during the day that I'm still a person. It makes me a better person and better able to cope. It would be harder for me to be at home with just a two year old and four year old for company. What do you do and who do you talk to. I like my time away from them and then I am a person. I don't know if you're home all day if you are fulfilled, if you can be yourself. I don't get much satisfaction out of cleaning the house but I can go to work and clean out my desk and feel great. I guess it's personal fulfillment.

(Kim)

Work outside the home can be the road to personal fulfillment but it depends on the person and depends very much on the job. Kim says she has a very understanding boss who allows her to take time off if her children need her.

Lynne spoke of finding the perfect job, three days a week. But Dianne, who felt a need to be a person, discovered that the toll it took on her as a mother was too great. "I couldn't find what I wanted part time so I took a full-time job. I had four offers, my self-esteem was way up there." But the wonderful home daycare she found for her daughter turned out to be less than perfect. Her child became angry and sullen, their home life changed from a happy one to one full with constant arguments and little sleep. "The end came when one day it took both of us to dress her and get her out the door by force. I told Marc to give a notice at the daycare and I would do the same at work".

Carol also had a dismal experience at work, one that left her completely exhausted.

I look back and I don't know how I did it. I used to go to bed at three a.m. and get up at six. Some nights I didn't sleep at all. They called me back early when my son was born for a new project and I had to work fifty, sixty hours a week for the first three months and my kids were four months and twenty-two months old. I was dead. My doctor told me I have to stop something or I have to get someone to help me because I couldn't cope anymore. I think children and working really tests a persons endurance. It was the most grueling experience of my life.

(Carol)

What begins as a search for identity, as a way to have a part of her life that is hers, ends with the woman more exhausted than ever with her homelife teetering on the edge. The solutions are to grin and bear it, hoping it will improve, to quit the outside job or to take a job that

provides less rewards but can be more easily combined with a homelife.

The work I do is taking care of a child in my home, so it's like an extension of my home life. I chose this because I thought it would be easier on all of us. It saves me from having to find childcare for my two children. I would've had to find two babysitters-one full time and one part time after school.
(Vicky)

For too many women the only solution is the one Vicky settled upon. This results in women being streamed into low paying, often part time, jobs that are more compatible with young children. The hidden economy of home care provides women with very little pay, no job security, no benefits, no pension plan. Similarly neither do most part time jobs. Part time employees are beneficial to the employer because they require less of a financial commitment. And because they cannot afford to be choosy, women with children take these jobs and consider themselves lucky.

Mothers constitute an undervalued and unpaid labour force in the home and remain, for a large part, undervalued and underpaid in the labour force. This no longer happens because they are women, instead it happens because they are mothers. Women still face inequality in the work force but for women with children, the difficulties multiply. Women are being forced to decide if they will pursue the fast track or the mommy track. Some people look at this as a step forward but most of us recognize it for what it really is; it is a way of denying women equality because they are forced to

tend to society's children, it is a way of denigrating women who are mothers, it is a way of placing the burden of children and childcare on the shoulders of the few even while our society recognizes that children are a benefit to the society as a whole. It is another way of saying that men can have it all but women must choose. We must wonder, where is the daddy track? and we must understand that the revolution has indeed stalled. It has stalled and stopped women in their tracks. The revolution has been stalled by men who refuse to accept responsibility for their children and by a society that condones and encourages and rewards their behaviour.

Babylove

If it is at all possible to strip down the mother-child relationship, to isolate it from outside factors, the place we would discover its essence is in the love we have for our children.

The question of bonding was not included in the original interview schedule. However, it was added after the first two interviews when respondents broached the subject themselves.

Love is intangible and while it can be discussed, it cannot ever be truly measured. Love is rarely the basis for serious research but without the pull of love, motherhood as a research topic remains only half alive. Without love, children are but work and responsibility. It is because we love them that we insist on new ways of experiencing them.

The myth of maternal love declares that women feel instant waves of love for their newborn children. This is one myth that REAL women and feminists appear to hold in common. REAL women mythologize the mother/child bond as a means of keeping women tied to their babies. Feminists have taken up the myth and used it to fight for more "humanist" birthing practices. Both sides appear to agree that through the act of giving birth, a mother feels intense love for her child, they "bond" within minutes or hours. Anything that interferes with this bonding is thought to seriously impair the future relationship of the mother and child. This myth can be compelling but it is also very dangerous. We must consider what it means to adoptive parents and their children, already it is being used in the argument against surrogate mothers. It is a delicate question, many feel that we are questioning a mothers' love for her child, but it is an important question. "Though love may be immediate it is often not so", says Jill Tweedie, "I was never told that love has it's time as much as life and death" (1979:19). The women in my sample would appear to agree with her. Women have been conditioned to believe that bonding is instant, prenatal courses often feature films of women gushing in ecstasy before the afterbirth is even expelled. However, the women in my sample indicate that the bond is built not on maternal "instinct", not as a result of giving birth but through the establishment of a relationship built primarily on responsibility.

I was slow to warm up. I thought I would have overwhelming rushes of love, waves of emotion, but I didn't.
(Cynthia)

One thing that surprised me was that everybody talks about this instant bonding and it surprised me that it wasn't automatic. I thought "Who is this strange human being".
(Marlene)

As time goes on and women become more immersed in the care of their children, they then begin to feel the growth of love.

When he was first born I was pretty indifferent but as the weeks went by and he smiled at five weeks I've never fallen in love so hard. I fell in love so much it was frightening. I felt very vulnerable like if anything ever happened to him I don't know how I would cope.
(Lynne)

At first I didn't feel anything really. I was happy that he was there but basically I took care of him because I was supposed to but then around six weeks I remember thinking to myself one day that I did love him. It sort of snuck up on me. It came from somewhere else, a part of my heart I didn't know I had.
(Debbie)

If bonding means a sense of responsibility then we can say there is instant bonding, for each of these women felt a strong sense of needing to care for their children, but if bonding is supposed to mean instant love then it was not to be found in this sample. Perhaps like love at first sight it exists only for a chosen few. When I asked "How does a mother's love for her children differ from her love for other people?", the women I interviewed felt that love came as a result of the intense care the children needed, it arrived on the coattails of responsibility.

A mothers love is different because she feels responsible for her children. You can love other people but you do not feel that their existence depends on you but with children you do.
(Vicky)

When you love someone, a 1872 Hare
(Carol)

For some women the fact that the child was nurtured inside her body does contribute to the love they feel toward the children.

I think it's different in that you had them inside of you for nine months and you develop a closeness. They sort of come from you so you develop that intimate closeness that you don't have with other people. And also they're so dependent on you for all their and so there's responsibility that breeds love.
(Lois)

She spent eight and a half months inside of me and I have been her caretaker since the day she was conceived. I have an unconditional love for her and she has an unconditional love for me. In the 1980s people are so much into themselves, when the slightest thing goes wrong in a relationship people just want to run. People always have one foot in one door and one foot out the other door ready to make a quick exit so they don't get hurt too badly. With a baby you can't do that and because of it you grow and you understand a lot more what it is to love somebody.
(LeeAnn)

The love a person has for her child is unconditional, no matter what happens, the love remains. It is this aspect of love that allows us to endure the hardships of mothering with our relationships with our children intact. We don't expect things to always go well, we expect the lack of time, sleep and the endless need for giving and we know not to ask

anything in return for all we give to our children. All we do want is to be able to give to our children the love we feel for them.

With another adult you always expect a certain amount of give and take but with a baby it's all give and you can't expect anything back. If the baby does give back, if the baby looks up at you and smiles then you say "Oh, wonderful, frosting on the cake." generally speaking we're not willing to make that kind of commitment even to the people we marry. There's always a give and take in [adult] relationships.
(Cynthia)

It is unreserved. You just love these little people for what they are. You don't reason it. I don't think I could love another adult or human being in the same way you can love a small child because you tend to be on guard with kids whereas with kids you don't have to be.
(Kim)

With almost everyone else, spouse, friends, parents, you love them but you expect something in return, some give and take in the relationship, whereas with a baby you just love it no matter what it does.
(Diana)

A child doesn't judge you so you can give that child as much love as you want and it is unconditional. You don't need something, you're not asking for something from them. When we try to have a relationship with an adult, they need something from you and you need a lot from them and it's not necessarily something you can give. You expect them to be something, to do something in particular.
(Janalyn)

Love for a child eclipses the love a woman may have for the other adults in her life. It is at the forefront of

her life, stronger and more important than other loves. It is a love that can make us strong and a love that can make us understand our own vulnerabilities.

I love my family, my mother and my brothers but it is second or third place now, I have to bring it out. But the love for my son is right here. I'm always showing it on my face all the time.
(Adriana)

Other people come and go and it will break your heart but you can go on. With your child the bond is so strong that nothing could ever make you feel so strong in love again.
(Dianne)

If anything ever happened to him I don't know how I would cope.
(Lynne)

If something were to happen to my children I would be lost, totally lost.
(Carol)

The love the women in this sample felt toward their children is what impelled them down the path toward becoming the best mother each knew how to be.

When I asked women what makes a person a good mother, I received many answers that I had expected but I was also surprised by many of the responses. Judging from the range of responses it appears that women no longer accept a list of virtues that every mother must have. Or maybe the list they had before they became mothers has been modified by their experiences. With the relaxation of rigid norms governing other aspects of our lives, mothers as well seem to feel the judgments on them as less harsh, less unforgiving. The relaxation of norms has left some women wondering about just

what it means to be a good mother.

I don't know. Everybody wants to be a good mother, whatever that means. I love my mother but I was always complaining about the way she was doing things. I'm sure she wanted to be a good mother.

(Adriana)

It is with a certain sense of relief that we can construct for ourselves what we believe a good mother to be. Women in this sample have done away with old notions of twenty-four hour care and life long sacrifice. A good mother is no longer a martyr. She is more likely to be a person whose sense of love, responsibility and concern guides her relationship with her child.

Being a good mother is always putting the baby first, always doing whatever the baby needs.

(Janalyn)

A part of being a good mother is sacrifice. There's a lot of sacrifice involved and you put the priorities of the baby's health and happiness before yours.

(LeeAnn)

As always, being a good mother demands patience, patience and patience.

Patience, compassion and love. (Marlene)

She has to have lots of love and patience.

(Josie)

All sorts of virtues spring to mind. Love and patience and imagination.

(Diana)

It takes a certain patience. (Lynne)

Patience. An awful lot of patience is the necessary ingredient.

(Lois)

Coupled with the patience, women believed that a good mother was one who loved her child but recognized where the boundaries between them as separate people were drawn.

You have to treat your child as a person,
not a possession.
(Dianne)

You've got to get away from the idea of
owning your child.
(Cynthia)

A good mother has to respect his
independence, to try not to impose her
ideas, try not to force him to go with
her beliefs.
(Adriana)

Children need a lot of love and attention
and care and time spent with them. We
treat our children like people.
(Kim)

In continuing to recognize their own selfhood, mothers are able to distance themselves from their children enough so that each one's own identity is valued and respected. A good mother understands that she can guide a child but the child will have ultimate responsibility for his/her life.

If he turns out to be a juvenile
delinquent I won't have to feel like a
failure s a human being because he's got
his own karma.
(Wendy)

You have a tremendous responsibility to
provide your child with a good home but
you can't make them an extension of
yourself. If you're a great parent
there's no guarantee you're child will
grow up to be a great person.
(Cynthia)

There are times when I think "What am I
doing wrong" but then you come to the
conclusion that this child came out this
way, I did not cause it.
(Janalyn)

Women feel that on the whole they are good mothers to their children. Like any relationship, or perhaps more than any other relationship, the mother/child relationship has its' very bad days. On those days women feel that they are not fulfilling their own idea of a good mother.

Every once in a while you have a day and you think everything I'm doing is wrong- I've done everything wrong, this girl is going to grow up and be a mess!
(LeeAnn)

There are days when I take stress out on them and I scream and yell at them.
(Kim)

It depends on which day you ask me. If I'm really tired I think I'm just a lousy mother.
(Lois)

There are days when I seem to spend the whole day yelling at him and I crawl into bed at the end and I think I'm a horrible mother and that he deserves a better mother than he's been given. It's just a feeling of utter failure and defeat.
(Debbie)

Fortunately, children judge their mothers less harshly than mothers judge themselves. And the very nature of childhood means everyday is an opportunity to start fresh. So women are able to take the bad with a large dose of good and to feel that overall they are good mothers. They come to this conclusion based on the reactions of their children, because the children are happy, they must be good mothers to them.

I think so because he's obviously happy and healthy.
(Janalyn)

Yes. So far she's happy and healthy.
(Cynthia)

I think so. I think my kids are happy.
(Josie)

My kids seem well-adjusted and happy, so
I take that as a sign that I must be
doing something right.
(Vicky)

I judge myself on how he is. I think I'm
a good mother because he's a good kid.
I'm doing the best that I know.
(Marlene)

Maybe we've finally come to accept that there are no
perfect mothers, no one does everything right. Mothering is
a difficult task. "It's nothing less than the most difficult
task you'll have in your entire life and it's also the most
rewarding" (LeeAnn).

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The institution of motherhood has a history of its own, apart from but closely parallel to, the history of women. Motherhood begins in the family but it does not rest there. It reaches out into the world, and in turn the world reaches back into the home, influencing and creating what motherhood can and cannot be. The social construction of motherhood has deep roots in the social construction of womanhood; the beliefs in women's inherent inferiority have been used at once to denigrate women and to elevate them to the lofty status of the keepers of our children.

The women's movement worked toward the emancipation of women from their principal role as childrearers; the movement fought for the recognition of women as people entitled to as many expressions of their identity as were men. Early feminism proved that women could be more than mothers but in its earnestness neglected the very real desire of many women to have children. The turmoil of the early feminist movement tried to throw the baby out with the bathwater; confusing the call for liberation with a denigration of things distinctly female, that is, the ability of women to reproduce. In their eagerness to make a place for women in a man's world, early feminism fell prey to a line of reasoning equally insidious as that of patriarchy. They mistook freedom as meaning free to do as men do. REAL Women called them on this, returning to the status quo with calls for the return of women to their

traditional role in the home. But for the majority of women and mothers, REAL Women spoke of a time long since past. They did not want to return to traditional ways nor did they want to feel that they had to compete in a man's world on men's terms.

The post feminist movement is concerned not with whether women should combine work and mothering but with how they will be able to do so. The future of motherhood will have to deal with this type of issue on all levels. Changes will have to be made in the family to ensure that men carry their share of the responsibilities toward their children and their homes. Changes will have to be made on the policy level if the government wants to encourage couples to have more children. Changes must be made by the business world that continues to operate as though every employee has a wife waiting at home, even when the employees are female. Arlie Hochschild has pointed out that women now work a second shift at home that is sapping their emotional and physical strength. Society can no longer afford to burden women with a double work load; it must be shared. We have to understand that the ideas we continue to espouse of what a good mother is and what a good mother does no longer fit in with the reality of life in the nineties. These are changes that will benefit not only mothers, but fathers as well, as men, too, will profit from a society that recognizes the importance of family life to people. Men, too, will profit when the women they are so intimately involved with no longer bear an unbearable burden.

It must begin then with a reconstruction of motherhood. The women I interviewed had already begun to change what it means to be a mother for them. They refused to be judged by archaic ideas of what a good mother is. They insisted on constructing for themselves their own motherhood. The social construction of motherhood is organized within the larger social construction of reality. It is a concrete act by everyday women who seek to define for themselves their place in society. It is important to recognize what motherhood is and means to those who are involved in it as experience and institution. The women in my interviews are not just defining a personal experience, they are also defining the boundaries of a role. They are involved in concrete interactions with others in society and they insist on participating on their terms. To this end we must hear their words and understand them as an important contribution to our knowledge of motherhood and hence to our understanding of the role of women in society. Through their own social construction of motherhood, they seek to reaffirm the meaning and importance of their role.

"We must find our own ways to affirm the human qualities we associate with our mothers as we go about our business lives, our community activities, our struggles for legislation responsive to our needs. ... only then will we be able to understand our separation from our mothers for what it really is: a rejection, to be sure, of all that was excessive, subordinate, menial; but a glorious preservation of what was nourishing, warm, human. When we know this-truly know it-when we work to

integrate those values that we have taken from our mothers into those we have taken since we left her, we will know that we have neither repudiated nor failed to meet the best of our ideal standard of mothering" (Berg, 1986: 217-218).

We will know then that we are indeed good-enough mothers to our children.

Appendices

- 1 Case Studies: Background Information
- 2 Interview Schedule

Appendix 1
Case Studies: Background Information

Janalyn

22

Sebastian, 5 months
education 1 year university
single
Canadian
religion-none

Diana

26

Alexander, 11 months
B.A.
married British
religion Anglican

Marlene

26

Dylan, 10 months
B.A. Art History
married
French Canadian
religion Roman Catholic

Kim

30

Vicky, 4 years
Pamela, 2 years
incomplete university
married
Canadian
religion Anglican

Adriana

33

Joseph, 2 years
2nd year university
married
Mexican
Catholic

Wendy

26

Karlie, 3 1/2 months
completed 1st year M.A. (philosophy)
single/cohabitating with child's father
Danish
Buddhist

Carol
28
Jennifer, 5 1/2
Adam, 4
B.A. Commerce (in progress)
married
Canadian
Christian

Lee Ann
35
Marlise, 10 months
2 years university
divorced
American
religion none/Catholic

Lynne
29
Ryan, 17 months
B.A. (psychology)
married
Canadian
Catholic

Josie
26
Christopher and Christian, 4 (twins)
Matthew, 3
B.Sc. (nursing)
married
Spanish
Catholic

Cynthia
25
Laura, 10 weeks
4 years university, no degree
married
WASP
Christian

Lois
31
Cameron, 20 months
Karyn, 5 months
B.A. married
Mennonite
Christian

Vicky
27
Jeffrey, 8 years
Maeghan, 4 years
D.E.C. (Special Care Counseling & Early Childhood Education)
married
Canadian
Anglican

Dianne
35
Lindsay, 2 1/2
High school leaving
married
Canadian
United Church of Canada (Protestant)

Eda
28
Zoe, 3 years
D.E.C (Office Automation)
married
Polish
Catholic

Debbie
25
Tyson, 2 1/2 years
D.E.C. (in progress)
single
Jamaican
religion-none

Appendix 2

Interview Schedule

The interviews were done with a written interview schedule but the schedule was used as a guide and the interviews were not bound by it. Questions were used to stimulate conversation and to keep the interview from digressing too far afield. It was rarely necessary to go through the schedule question by question because one answer would lead into other areas naturally through the flow of conversation. Not all the answers to each question are reviewed in the thesis, neither are all the questions explored. This would have resulted in far too much data to adequately treat. Instead, the data was sorted to ensure the proper coverage of principal themes.

name
age/sex of each child
age of respondent
highest level of education
marital status
ethnicity
religion

What do you enjoy most about being a mother?

What do you enjoy least about being a mother?

In what ways do you think a mother's love for her child(ren) is different than her love for other people?

How did you feel when you learned you were pregnant/learned you were going to have a child? Was it different for the second/subsequent child(ren)?

How did you feel when you brought the baby home? Were you apprehensive? Did you have a lot of experience with babies? Did you feel love right away?

What do you think makes a person a "good" mother?

Do you mother your child(ren) any differently than the way your mother mothered you?

If you had it to do all over again, would you have children?

Do you think you are a good mother?

How do you combine work and family? Do you find it difficult? What type of child care arrangements do you have? Does your husband/partner help? Does he do HALF the housework and childcare?

What do your children say or do that makes you angry? How do you handle these types of situations?

What has been the most difficult thing for you to accept as a mother?

Do you treat your children differently?

Do you treat your male children differently from your female children?

If a woman who was considering motherhood asked; "Tell it to me straight, what is motherhood really like, the good parts and the bad parts" what would you tell her?

What special advice do you wish someone had given you concerning motherhood?

What kind of advice did you receive? Was it mostly practical advice?

Before you had a baby, did you think about what it would mean to be a "mother". Do you feel that you are a different person now that you have a child? Do you consider yourself to be principally a "mother"?

What fears or worries do you have for your child(ren)?

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