

Institute for Clinical Social Work

IDENTITY AND THE NEW MOTHER

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effect of motherhood on new mothers. Until recently observations were made about mothers in consequence to observations made about their infants who were the primary focus of research rather than the mothers. In this study new mothers were interviewed directly several times between their third trimester and 6 months postpartum. There were 17 new mothers who volunteered for this study. All were first time mothers, educated at the college level, many had master degrees and a few had their doctorates, and prior to motherhood all had been actively involved in either academic or professional pursuits.

Grounded Theory methodology was utilized to analyze the data and formulate the results. The question investigated was, “What does a new mother come to know about herself as she transitions into motherhood?” The research found that in this early period of transition an experience defined as incubated idealism presented among these new mothers. Incubated idealism is characterized as the new mother’s hope to provide an ideal environment that will enable, and facilitate the health and wellbeing of their newborn. Additionally, incubated idealism is about the new mother’s hope for herself that she will be an ideal role model for her newborn. Within this period of incubated idealism these new mothers came to have a deeper understanding about their self-identity.

One discovery revealed how these new mothers approached motherhood with the explicit intention of maintaining some semblance of their pre-motherhood identities.

They wanted to create their own sense of feminism, which reflected an integration of her previous identity with her new maternal identity.

Secondly, once these new mothers gave birth and began to care for their newborns they were suddenly confronted with a broadened sense of their self-worth.

Thirdly, as these new mothers found themselves emotionally affected by their newborn's emotional states they became curious about the nature and origin of their emotions. Consequently, an internal dialogue was invigorated.

Fourthly, an overwhelming preoccupation for these new mothers, which was further processed in each interview, was their coming to terms with their preeminent responsibility for another human being. This deepened sense of responsibility causes these new mothers to think about who and what have influenced their sense of self throughout their life. These identifications and experiences are pondered and at times reworked in light of these new mothers placing themselves in the position of being a role model for their children. The feminine ego ideal is a useful structure from which we can understand how these mothers have internalized and processed a maternal ideal.

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CHAPTER I

IDENTITY AND THE NEW MOTHER

Historically, theorists who study maternal experience draw their conclusions primarily from research that focuses on child development. Consequently, what is known about a mother's experience has been synthesized from child observation. However, this methodology has produced a skewed view of how a mother's identity evolves because it overlooks the crucial component of subjective experience. In an attempt to address this imbalance, theoreticians have begun to redirect their attention to the mother in order to augment an understanding of the way that includes a mother's self-reported subjective experience.

My intent in this study was to expand the current literature by focusing on the new mother's identity and the identity changes she experienced in the process of becoming a mother. A new mother lives through a transition from individual personhood to motherhood. As a result, she has not oriented her affective and cognitive reflections around this new experience. In particular, I was interested in how this transition affects what a new mother realizes about the reorganization of her identity.

Therese Benedek (1959) offers a theoretical explanation for the mother's psychological development. Because Benedek considers "parenthood as a developmental phase," she is recognized as a pivotal figure who inspired interest in the processes of parenthood. She described parenthood as a time of psychological disruption when

internal dynamics are reworked and redefined. Benedek considered the personal challenges that accompany parenthood as having a purpose and places parents as participants in a dynamic relationship that has significant consequences for both parent and child.

A number of contemporary writers, such as Virginia Barber, Dana Breen, Myra Leifer, Joyce Block, Rebecca Shanok, Judith Solomon and Carol George, have participated in shifting the focus toward the mother's subjective experiences. Of these, both Barber and Breen explored how a woman perceives herself as a mother and attempt to correlate these findings with the practice of mothering. Barber (1975) probed into the mother's self-discoveries and placed these thoughts within a context of her perception of an ideal mother.

Although motherhood is ideally a time when parents are compelled to be more introspective, the demands of parenting constantly interfere with this process. Even when the mother may wish to bring private thoughts together in a coherent manner, the external responsibility for her child distracts her. Barber argued that mothers who do not create room for introspection may be trying to preserve some socially prescribed pattern of the good mother. She concluded that once the early period of motherhood ends, the shift in focus is most difficult for those women who try to fulfill the role of an ideal mother. (p. 212)

Dana Breen's (1975) work concluded similarly. She found that if a woman maintains rigid notions of an ideal femininity, her transition into motherhood is more likely to be difficult.

On the other hand, Myra Leifer (1980) studied the relationship between women's attitudes toward pregnancy and the mother's adjustment to motherhood. She set out to understand the psychological effects of motherhood and questions Grete Bibring's (1961) notion that pregnancy evokes a maturational crisis. Her findings suggest that motherhood does stir emotional turmoil, but, in addition, mothers enjoy simultaneous experiences of heightened self-esteem and maturity. Liefner saw this transition to motherhood as one of a woman's major goals in life, which fortified a sense of self. (p. 177)

Separate work by Joyce Block and Rebecca Shanok builds on Liefner's study. While Block and Shanok agreed that a mother's identity expands, Shanok added that resistance to change can result in a difficult adaptation to the demands of parenthood.

Block (1990) agreed with Liefner's idea that motherhood inspires change, but she also argues that an essential component of a woman's identity remains the same. In her analysis, she described the mother's metamorphosis as an integration of her maternal identity and existing personal identity (p. 182). Block suggested that the maternal role inspires change, but it affects an already existing identity.

Rebecca Shanok (1990) also investigated the issue of mother's identity, but she believed it entwines with identity and intimacy capacities prominent in adulthood. Shanok states that parenthood is one of many marker events that can occur in adulthood. She described identity and intimacy as twin peaks, which work concertedly with one another. Motherhood is thus viewed as an event that challenges her identity and the capacity for intimacy.

Judith Solomon and Carol George (1996, 2000) are among a few theorists who initiated the call to observe and describe the mother's experience, and made special note

of the baby's impact on the mother. Rather than attempting to understand her through the child, their research observed the mother directly. Their work focused particularly on the mother in her role of caretaker. They argued that much is learned about the mother from the perspective of the infant's attachment behavior toward the mother and less from understanding the mother's caretaking behavior toward the infant. They concurred that a mother's caretaking ability is influenced by her attachment history, but they equally weighed the mother's current experience with her infant and other variables that impact her life, such as marriage, career, and her extended family. Prior to this redirection of focus, we only learned about the mother through observations of her child. Shifting the focal point from child to mother will help to articulate the mother's experience.

Unlike these authors, Daniel Stern (1995) did not operationalize his theory; instead, he gave a theoretical structure to a new mother's experience. He stated that a "motherhood constellation" begins to appear in late pregnancy and persists into the early period of motherhood. Stern articulated how this new psychic organization is temporarily central and overshadows the preceding one. (p. 185) He described four interrelated component themes, the last of which is "identity reorganization." Stern stated that identity reorganization requires a new mother to transform and reorganize her identity. If a mother is incapable of this reorienting process, the ability to execute the other component themes is compromised. Stern's concept specifically informs my study as it provides a guideline to expand our current notions of "identity reorganization" and the new mother.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following review of literature surveys the most pertinent perspectives on these maternal experiences. Although this research may seem somewhat sparse, it nevertheless framed my research as I explored this understudied aspect of identity. Historically, the literature on this subject arises primarily from observations of a new mother through her infant. Recently, however, the focus shifted directly onto the mother. This research project explores how a new mother incorporates the role of motherhood and how this change modifies her self-identity. As a new mother comes to identify with motherhood, she alters her self-identity in a manner unique to her.

The literature review is divided into five sections:

1. Maternal Identity
2. Identity and Influential Factors
3. Psychological Upheaval
4. Observations of the Mother
5. Intersection of Motherhood and Adulthood

Each spectrum of thought has contributed to our present understanding of the mother-infant relationship and each theory has inspired some preliminary insights for this study's investigation of the surmised reorganization in identity a new mother experiences.

Maternal Identity

The authors in this section discuss the mother from psychological, social and political contexts, which all purport to affect the mother's identity. Most theorists discussed in this section are primarily concerned with psychological manifestations relative to motherhood. Daniel Stern, Terry Brazelton, Bertrand Cramer, Dana Breen, Myra Leifer, and Joyce Block emphasized the psychological components of maternal identity. However, as one facet of female identity, maternal identity is comprised of the many historical and current experiences that define a woman's response to being a new mother. Others raise an awareness of the social milieu in which the new mother exists.

Virginia Barber, Meril Skaggs, Nancy Chodorow, Betty Friedan, Susan Douglas, Meredith Michaels and Daphne de Marneffe gave greater weight to the social political environment in which a mother evolves.

Daniel Stern's concept of the "motherhood constellation" was introduced in a treatment-oriented book, and it is only at the end of this book that this term is defined. In *The Motherhood Constellation*, (1995) Stern defined the concept as "the creation of a new central psychic organization that, for a time, replaces or pushes to the background the preceding one." (p. 185) He notified the reader that his term, "constellation," is intentional and meant to be distinguished from Freud's "complex," which is aligned with pathology. Stern also distinguished constellation from Erikson's epigenetic model that connotes something to be expected and inevitable. (p. 184) Ultimately, Stern described the transition from pregnancy to early motherhood as normal, despite variations.

The motherhood constellation has four component themes which are interdependent and which build one upon the other:

1. The life-growth theme
2. The primary relatedness theme
3. The supporting matrix theme
4. The identity reorganization theme.

Stern began with the “life-growth theme,” which deals with the fundamental task at hand—keeping the baby alive. The new mother questions her ability to support the life of another human being, and she wonders if she can contribute to the continuation of the human race. The life-growth theme places special emphasis on the unique circumstances that confront a new mother. Never before has she fulfilled her ability to create life and sustain it outside herself. (1995, p. 175)

Stern called his second theme “primary relatedness,” and it describes a time when a new mother questions her emotional capacity for intimacy, as well as her ability to attune adequately to her child’s emotions and respond successfully. In this discussion, a mother and her infant establish a sense of one another, of what can be known, and relied upon, within their relationship. (p. 176)

The third theme is the “supporting matrix” theme, which “concerns the mother’s need to create, permit, accept, and regulate a protecting, benign support network, so that she can fully accomplish the first two tasks of keeping the baby alive and promoting his psychic-affective development.” (p. 177) Two main functions of the support matrix entail protecting the mother and buffering her from undue stress and strain, so that she

can devote her energy to the infant. Information gathering and emotional resonance assist the new mother in achieving a greater sense of stability and confidence.

The final component of the motherhood constellation is the “identity reorganization” theme which focuses on the necessity for the mother “to transform and reorganize her self-identity.” (p. 180) Stern believed that “the new mother must shift her center of identity from daughter to mother, from wife to parent, from careerist to matron, from one generation to the preceding one.” (p. 180)

The new mother’s self-identity must transform in order to accomplish the first three themes. Otherwise, her identity remains embroiled in a fundamental questioning of who she is, what her purpose is, and what she wants to achieve from life. Stern cautioned that if a mother resists the changes inherent to motherhood, she will find herself in a futile attempt to resist what already exists (motherhood), and is moving on with or without her. (p. 180) Unfortunately, he devoted little time to his last and pertinent theme. I intend to integrate this notion and expand upon it as I explore the transformation in a new mother’s identity.

Stern’s ideas about identity reorganization are similar to those of Erik Erikson. (1950, 1980) Like Stern, Erikson viewed the disorganization a new mother initially feels as part of a process that eventually leads to necessary identity reorganization. Erikson describes a “crisis in identity” that occurs in adolescence with an awareness of one’s reproductive capacity and the psychological uncertainty that often accompanies this phase. Erikson considers the ‘crisis’ a turning point in one’s life, and a period when some disequilibrium is typical. He felt motherhood also precipitated a crisis of identity similar to adolescence. Erikson’s (1980) theory was premised on an epigenetic model,

which promotes the belief that with each developmental phase coming and going we are further strengthened and as a result, the process fortifies our self-esteem.

Brazelton and Cramer's book, *The Earliest Relationship: Parents, Infants, and the Drama of Early Attachment* (1990) concurred with other theorist's sentiments that pregnancy and the early period after the birth of the child is a time of "major psychological upheaval" (p. 30). What results is the forming of a new maternal identification, one which reflects the consequences of an irreversible new reality. (p. 30) During pregnancy, a woman begins the psychological process by contemplating many wishes for her unborn child, most of them relating to wishes not yet realized or met in her own life. These wishes reflect "her whole life prior to conception." (p. 5) All that she knew before is up for debate and is susceptible to change after the birth of the baby. "Her experiences with her own mother and father, her subsequent experiences with the oedipal triangle, and the forces that led her to adapt to it more or less successfully and finally to separate from her parents, all influence her adjustment to this new role." (p. 5) How the mother proceeds with this "reshuffling" of emotions and fantasies directly impacts her identity in her new maternal role.

A new mother finds herself preoccupied with intrapsychic conflicts, and must incorporate how she was influenced and in what manner these conflicts influence the present. Brazelton and Cramer (1990) identified three influences in a mother's wishes for a child: identification, the fulfillment of various narcissistic needs, and the attempt to recreate old ties in the new relationship to the child. (p. 9) Identification refers to a woman's early experience and imitation of being the mother and being mothered. The

authors believed that a mother's childhood play patterns reflect how she was mothered, which she incorporates into her developing identity.

The wish to maintain an idealized view of oneself and the wish to fulfill one's ideals are the narcissistic motives which fuel the wish for a child. (Brazelton and Kramer, p. 11) The authors cited "one of the basic postulates of the psychoanalytic theory of narcissism is that there is a tendency to gratify these fantasies of completeness and omnipotence, and that on this gratification is built a human being's sense of self." (p. 11) For a mother to establish a bond with her newborn, she must learn to extend her focus beyond herself, so that her child can be cared for and nurtured. The comfort she found in her identity prior to having children is challenged now and must be re-established with the inclusion of one more person. New parents may "imagine the future child as succeeding wherever they failed. However young they may be, by the time they conceive a child, parents are confronted with limitations and the need for compromise." (p. 13)

The authors referred to "double identification" as an experience when the mother simultaneously identifies with her own mother and her new baby. The promise of birth renews hope that past relationships can be re-invigorated, and, as the new mother begins her self-discovery process, mother's mother takes center stage. That is the experience of being with her mother and memories of herself as a baby. (Brazelton and Kramer, p. 15)

...by bearing a child, she will achieve a long-cherished dream of becoming like her own mother, making her own the magical and envied attributes of creativity. She will now match her all-powerful mother, reversing her submissiveness to her and her sense of inferiority in the oedipal rivalry. (p. 15)

Brazelton and Cramer's ideas about the various factors that contribute to a woman's maternal identity helped to create my interview questions.

Breen (1975) and Leifer (1980) conveyed how women have striven to transform the maternal role and experience, from one of conformity, to one that emerges from diverse choices. In her research, Breen learned that the more a woman invoked an ideology around her preconceived notions (derived from cultural or familial projections) of femininity, the poorer she transitioned into motherhood.

Leifer has observed recently expanded choices for women, choices that she believes result from vast changes in American society. Consequently she said, “motherhood is now likely to play a far smaller role in the lives of adult women than at any other point in human history.” (p. 3) Early feminists perceive the maternal role in a pejorative light, while Liefer’s study found motherhood adds a “new dimension of meaning to their lives.” (p. 4) To her surprise, mothers experienced a heightened sense of self-esteem and maturity at the same time they experienced emotional disequilibrium related to the maternal role. “It appears that the lifelong socialization to bear children culminates in a feeling of having achieved one’s major life goal and a concomitant enhancement of one’s sense of self.” (p. 177)

These studies inspired me to reconsider preconceived notions of maternal response and to realize the importance of previously dismissed ramifications of motherhood.

Recently, certain theorists have attempted to validate the complex nature of maternal identity. Block (1990) was the first theorist to emphasize the fact that mothers come to motherhood with an identity in place and although this idea may not always be a conscious one, motherhood is a significant event that may stimulate self-examination. Block drew upon a perspective that is more synergistic. She explained how “a woman’s

sense of herself undergoes a metamorphosis as she gradually integrates her identity as a mother into her identity as a person.” (p. 182)

Block believed that, as the mother experiences change, she also remains connected to experiences of continuity. Before becoming a mother who is affected by her child, she is a woman. How these two identities balance out over time depends upon the individual person. A mother’s identity is an unknown entity, and according to Block, it is like a Rorschach test, which reflects projections that emanate from her subjective experience. Motherhood changes women’s self-perceptions. Block concluded,

Our subjective experience is our reality, and the baby is part of our subjectivity as we are a larger part of his. The crisis of identity precipitated by motherhood is resolved when the new picture of the self is experienced as more Me than any of the earlier versions, and when this feels right, at least for the time being.” (p. 225)

Motherhood, which is actually a process, activates subjectivity rather than adopts a preconceived notion. Eventually, most mothers find a modicum of self-acceptance. This study helped me to understand how a first-time mother integrates her existing identity with what she is learning about herself in a new role.

In contrast to the psychological perspective, feminist theorists wish to explain how larger contextual circumstances manifest in motherhood. Although feminist theorists consider psychological processes to be vital references, they place greater emphasis on influential social and cultural experiences. They believe the environmental context in which a woman mothers, affects her behavior and how she experiences her role. It is not only the unique experience of a mother’s home life that impacts, but also that of the larger culture in which she lives.

For a long time, women have understood motherhood from a cultural context; the mother needed to be seen as kind, patient, and blissfully in love with mothering.

However, this rosy picture does not depict the challenges that mothers face. Barber and Skaggs (1975) compiled a series of conversations that reveal mother's self-discoveries, and one woman's quote particularly stands out because she acknowledges that motherhood poses a formidable challenge.

As difficult as is the relationship with one's parents, or with one's husband, the most endlessly difficult is with one's child. I can never get on top of it...and I think no other relationship forces us to examine ourselves so closely, so bitterly and so critically. (p. 194)

This sentiment is echoed by most women interviewed in this book, which leads the authors to conclude that “motherhood quite simply confirms what we knew before—that pleasure and pain are rarely far apart.” (p. 217) As most steps taken in life, the process typically involves a myriad of emotions—good being on one end of the continuum and bad on the other.

These theorists have brought to my attention the conflict between the urge to self-examine and the restraints imposed on such self-examination. One reason for the resulting tensions may be that some males and females are troubled by what they learn about themselves after becoming parents. This process of introspection requires time and honesty, but, as the authors point out, a new mother finds it difficult to accomplish this task once a baby is present. Barber and Skaggs believed that the limits imposed on a mother's time, which includes the opportunity to introspect, contribute to the threat she feels in maintaining a sense of herself. (p. 205) For some interviewees, the questions that ask the new mother to contemplate and interpret perceived changes in her identity may be something to which she has not given much thought. The design of the study allowed for multiple interviews, which gave the new mothers time to think about some of the ideas presented in the interview.

Chodorow (1978) explored social and cultural notions of why a woman chooses to mother, and in doing so she added a complexity around mothering that is beyond biology. Chodorow argues that the biological perspective on mothering has contributed toward narrowing the female role in society, and consequently, opportunities for change. She explained how “women’s mothering, then, is seen as a natural fact. Natural facts, for social scientists, are theoretically uninteresting and do not need explanation.” (p. 14) She argued that a woman becomes a mother not just because of social and cultural expectations, but also because it is her choice to mother. In addition, a woman is influenced by her intrapsychic identifications with other women who have chosen to mother and help perpetuate a set of maternal images. These identifications serve to expand a mother’s world, opening opportunities for diverse experiences of self and other. (p. 212) This theorist stimulated me to think about how women come to make choices.

In her work, Friedan (1983) portrayed the quiet discontent felt by women in the 1950s and 1960s; this unease reflected the lack of tolerance for hearing an authentic expression of a mother’s thoughts and emotions. Friedan argued that when a woman conforms to an image that restricts her identity, her full being remains unrecognized. Her argument challenged the image of wife and mother as completely happy and fulfilled. Friedan’s notion of the “feminine mystique” is the image of conformity. A woman, she argued, is a mystery because while her identity is based on real experiences both internal and external, and it remains unacknowledged by society. At the time Friedan originally explored female experience, society was promoting the idea of mother as a Madonna-like figure.

This study looked at a new mother's identity not only from the perspective of constraints, but it also considered those aspects, which in more recent times, have contributed to a broader experience of identity.

Contemporary culture also influences how mothers perceive their choices. Recently, the media has brought to our attention the increasing numbers of young mothers deciding to step out of the work force in order to stay home with their children. The theory which explains these phenomena is that younger women want and expect more choices, not only in the workforce, but also in their family life.

In the boomer generation, women felt that the choice to have both a fulfilling career and a family life were not seen as options open to females. Feminists pushed for women's rightful place in the workforce and women responded in droves to this new option. But because of the pressure to succeed in their careers, women failed to set time aside to decide how to achieve a balance between work and home life. Not until the next generation, "generation X," did women take the feminist movement to the next stage. These women see themselves as having choices that were not seen as viable options to their predecessors. The hope is that, in response to these expanded options; society will find a way to develop a more flexible work environment that reflects family needs.

In their recently released books, authors Douglas, Michaels (2004), and de Marneffe (2004) wrote about these current trends. Douglas and Michaels argued that "new momism" expects a new mother to meet and care for every need of the child, without complaint. (p. 4) This image recreates the classic dichotomy of mother as villain or saint, thereby reinforcing the untenable goal of perfection. In doing so, the authors modernized Friedan's "feminine mystique." In addition, they challenged the followers of

new momism to reconsider their drive for perfection and to recognize how it confines and reduces motherhood to a competitive playing field.

Douglas and Michaels advocated loosening the new mother's bounds in an effort to give permission to discuss the challenges inherent in motherhood. Mothers who fall in the new momism category are faced with the challenge of multiple choices, many of which equally satisfy them. It is anticipated that the subjects who participate in this project will represent new mothers who face the dilemma described. This may involve making choices among numerous experiences, all of which help shape their identities.

De Marneffe (2004) took great exception to those feminists who she felt stifled a woman's joy in mothering. Instead, de Marneffe contended that caring for children is mutually satisfying to child and mother, and she challenged those who once felt too inhibited to reveal these sentiments. In many feminists' camps, motherhood has been described as an act of submission. De Marneffe's notion of "maternal desire" speaks about the enjoyment, fulfillment, and love, which accompanies motherhood. For most women today, motherhood is a choice pursued and "an authentic means of self expression," not simply a surrender to maternal instinct. (p. xii) She sees maternal desire as a positive aspect of the self. A woman's desire to become a mother is thought to be an expression that emanates from her autonomy.

This study considered how a new mother feels about her identity and how she integrates these changes as she proceeds into motherhood.

Identity and Narcissistic Development

A general review of identity is necessary, for several reasons. First, a woman's identity cannot be separated from her identity as a mother, because they mutually enhance each other. Secondly, prior to becoming a mother, a woman has been an individual person whose identity has long been influenced by intrapsychic experiences and by the environment in which she had been raised. Finally, identity and narcissistic development are most often discussed outside of the context of motherhood. Erik Erikson articulated a general definition of identity applicable to both men and women. Robert Stoller's theory specifically focused on a woman's identity. I included Sigmund Freud and Heinz Kohut's discussion about narcissism.

According to Erikson's psychosocial definition of identity (1980), identity is realized when an inner sameness and continuity is found to be mutually compatible with an outer experience of one self. He added that improved self-esteem is fortified as one learns, "effective steps toward a tangible future, that one is developing a defined personality within a social reality which one understands." (p. 94-95) Erikson implied here that as life proceeds, it is inherent challenges that help to solidify one's identity and self-esteem. A new mother's identity is challenged as her prior internal understanding of herself attempts to integrate and find harmony with the anxiety experienced as she includes her child within her concept of herself. This study considered aspects of identity that cause states of equilibrium as well as disequilibrium.

Stoller (1976) argued that for women, development includes conflict and non-conflict laden processes, and that these experiences converge in a way that allows a woman's "primary femininity" to emerge. (p. 76) Stoller defined "primary femininity"

as an experience of the feminine that is not surrounded by conflict. It was his belief that there is a core gender identity derived from psychological and environmental influences—all of which culminate in a “primary femininity.” (p. 76)

Conflict stems from the tumultuous nature of oedipal relationships where both maternal and paternal figures are identified with and internalized. Non-conflict laden contributions include those positive connections with women with whom a feminine identification is internalized. According to Stoller, it is a woman’s primary femininity that is drawn upon as she comes to know herself through mothering. (p.76) The contemporary mother is likely to have interfaced with women from diverse experiences outside of her family that might include: school, work, and friendships. Many of these women encountered in a mother’s life might contribute to how she presently identifies herself a mother. This study will inquire about the new mother’s identifications and explore if and how they inform her identity.

While Freud never specifically investigated parenthood or motherhood, he did relate psychological phenomena to these experiences. Freud’s (1914) paper, “On Narcissism,” is the most frequently referenced in the literature explored in this study. He explained the evolution from self-love to object-love culminating in an eventual synthesis between the two. Freud stated: “a strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love.” (p. 85) This notion of “falling ill” for love supports the premise that early motherhood gives the appearance of illness, and is viewed as normal and necessary in order to strengthen the mother-infant relationship.

Freud believed that in order for human relationships to thrive, a certain level of self-focus and attention must be placed aside in an effort to establish an attachment with someone outside of ourselves. According to Freud, object love can influence us by emphasizing either the “narcissistic type” or the “anaclitic (attachment) type.”

Narcissistic love resembles “what he himself is (i.e., himself), what he himself was, what he himself would like to be, someone who was once part of himself.” (1914, p. 90)

Anaclitic love reflects “the woman who feeds him, the man who protects him and the succession of substitutes who take their place.” (p. 90) According to Freud, newborn infants revive their parents’ narcissism and love for the infant staves off concerns about death.

At the most touchy point in the narcissistic system, the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality, security is achieved by taking refuge in the child. Parental love, which is so moving and at bottom so childish, is nothing but the parents’ narcissism born again, which, transformed into object love, unmistakably reveals its former nature. (p. 91)

The love displayed by parent and child is represented in many variations. For the new mother, parenthood is a dynamic juncture when “a person who loves has, so to speak, forfeited a part of his narcissism, and it can only be replaced by his being loved. In all these respects self-regard seems to remain related to the narcissistic element in love.” (p. 98) How this unfolds between mother and infant depends upon the mother’s experience and internalization of self and object love. As a mother describes her self-love and her love for her child, this will not only give an indication of her narcissistic development, but also about her capacity for intimacy. As a trained clinician, I utilize these concepts to further explain the complex nature of identity.

Unlike Freud, Kohut considered the capacity for self-love and object-love to be a mature form of narcissism. Kohut's ideas were premised on a psychology of the self, and in this frame he argued that the nuclear self immediately begins to take shape in infancy within the self-object matrix—generally, this means mother, father, and child. He explains his perspective in *The Restoration of the Self*, (1977) where he views narcissistic development in terms of self-object relationships.

The explanatory power of drive psychology postulates that, in normal development, narcissism is transformed into object love and that drives are gradually 'tamed,' and the explanatory power of psychology of the self postulates that, in normal development, self/self-object relations are the precursors of psychological structures and that transmuting internalization of the self-objects leads gradually to the consolidation of the self. (p. 83)

When the environment is comprised of parents who are responsive to the mirroring and idealizing needs expressed by the infant, the infant's nuclear self forms. However, the function of parents' responses is not merely to praise the child. Kohut stated that the nuclear self is formed by, "deeply anchored responsiveness of the self-objects, which, in the last analysis, is a function of the self-objects' own nuclear selves." (p. 100) He intentionally did not define "the self," and argued that we can only know its essence, not an exact account of its meaning. He articulated the belief that manifestations of the self are observable by means of introspection and empathy, but that we should not conclude that these insights lead to an absolute self. (p. 310-311)

For the purposes of this study, "sense of self" was utilized for the purpose of understanding changes in a new mother's identity. New mothers were asked to comment on their identity and their understanding and interpretation of it. In light of the grounded theory method chosen to study maternal identity, Kohut's flexible interpretation of self appeared to be compatible with this study's interview model.

Psychological Upheaval

While most people agree that parenthood initiates a psychological upheaval, Therese Benedek, Donald Winnicott, Grete Bibring, and Mariam Elson described this psychological disruption as an opportunity for change. Benedek, Winnicott, and Bibring heightened our awareness of the serious and profound affects that parenthood stimulates. They also postulated that alongside the discomfort associated with parenthood, parenting can create an opportunity for reworking and resolution of internal conflict. While these authors recognized that the child's personality and temperament has a significant role in the parent-child relationship, it is Mariam Elson who pointed out how the parent-child relationship can be both mutually healing and injurious. The changes which result from psychological upheaval impact maternal identity profoundly.

An earlier psychoanalytic thinker precedes all of these authors. Helene Deutsch was one of the first to write about pregnancy and motherhood. Deutsch viewed pregnancy in the classic psychoanalytic sense as the consequence of penis envy. Moreover, the success of motherhood is realized only when she withdraws from all masculine wishes. (1945, p. 307) Deutsch pathologized any other ambitions, as they are aligned too closely with masculine characteristics—that is, assertiveness, self-determination, and interests outside the home. Of course, today we view such characteristics positively as they contribute significantly to maternal experience.

Contrary to Deutsch, Benedek considered parenthood to be a developmental phase when mother and child engage in a reciprocal relationship, and where each affects the emotional life of the other. Benedek recognized the parent's formidable journey, and

at the same time, its generative possibilities. Her seminal article, “Parenthood as a Developmental Phase: A Contribution to Libido Theory” (1959), elaborated a metapsychology of parenthood.

Parenthood is rightfully acknowledged as a time when the parent is challenged to understand one’s self as coming from and belonging to a larger complexity. Benedek enables us to appreciate the complex nature of parenting. This reciprocity is understood as a dynamic “interaction between mother and child, which through the process of introjection-identification creates structural changes in each of the participants.” (p. 392) Benedek explained that change derives from the reviewing and modifying of introjects and identifications experienced within the parent-child relationship. The word ‘phase’ was later changed to ‘process’ so that parenthood would not be considered a part of development where specific tasks were required to achieve higher psychic organization, but implies ongoing movement. (Parens, 1975)

Benedek described how parents concurrently project their own conflicts, along with unrealized hopes and ambitions, onto the child, and she explains how inevitably “the parent cannot help but deal with his own conflict unconsciously, while consciously he tries to help the child achieve his developmental goal.” (p. 405) As a mother responds to her infant’s needs, she introjects “good-thriving-infant” as meaning “good-mother-self,” thereby achieving a new integration in her personality. (p. 392)

Likewise for the infant, Benedek suggested that the introjection of “good mother” works toward building the infant’s confidence. (p. 392) Ego change occurs in both mother and infant as “mother’s gratification in satisfying her infant’s needs, as well as

her frustration when she is unable to do so, effects her emotional life and again reciprocally that of the child.” (p. 392)

In the process of interaction between infant and parents, parents recognize a mirror image of themselves, which elicits feelings of personal success and failure. (p. 407) Parenthood is a process in which multiple levels of consciousness are in play, and open for critique and change. Benedek’s seminal thoughts make it possible to discuss parenthood as an event that creates an opportunity for psychological change in adulthood.

Winnicott and Bibring agreed with Benedek’s idea that parenthood stimulates tremendous psychic activity. In his work, Winnicott (1956) invoked the term “maternal preoccupation,” in which a mother’s attention becomes narrowly focused on the functioning state of her infant. Maternal preoccupation is described as a state beginning toward the end of a woman’s pregnancy and lasting a few weeks past the birth of her child. During this time, mothers assume a heightened state of sensitivity and may even appear ill to some people.

Winnicott believed that if a mother is incapable of suspending herself in a state of maternal preoccupation in the early phase of her infant’s life, then the infant will experience this lack as a threat to its personal self-existence. A woman’s personal capacity to reach this state of maternal preoccupation, meaning a complete dependence between mother and child, demonstrates a high level of maturity known as “extreme sophistication.” (Winnicott, 1956, p. 302) In other words, mother and infant engage in uninhibited reverie. Today we would say her ability to achieve Winnicott’s maternal preoccupation is reflective of the mother’s capacity for intimacy.

In contrast to Winnicott, Bibring (1961) called pregnancy “a period of crisis.” Bibring argued that the mother comes to evaluate and cope with the multifaceted representations of the baby that converge in pregnancy. These include: the reproduction of herself, the relationship between herself and her partner, and an independent being onto itself. (1961, p. 12, 13) Bibring’s reference to pregnancy as a period of crisis allows us to see this particular period as normal and intense, rather than abnormal.

In their work, Benedek, Winnicott and Bibring described how parenting conveys an understanding of a developmental process that is emotionally and psychologically complex and includes the potential to transform the individual. The anticipation and arrival of a child sets in motion a new context in which a woman’s previous psychological understanding of herself is disrupted. The added responsibility of caring for another person outside herself challenges the mother to know herself in this new circumstance. A new mother’s identity and the subsequent changes made are observed within this context.

In contrast, Elson incorporated Kohut’s understanding of narcissism in her article, “Parenthood and The Transformations of Narcissism” (1984) in which she argued that when parents support the psychic structure of their infant, the infant’s response can augment parental psychic structure. Elson called this process a “double helix,” whereby “the forming and firming narcissism in the parents is within the child and the further transformation of narcissism in the parents is essentially a twin process.” (p. 299) Parents demonstrate mature narcissism when they respond empathically to their child’s needs, and parental narcissism evolves out of the child’s response to their nurturing care. (p. 298)

Elson drew attention to the fact that lapses in maturity (i.e., empathic failures) do occur, and she saw these occasions as a reactivation of parents' self-object deficits.

However, she believed,

... as parents offer themselves as precursors of psychic structure, that the forming self of the child is supported and that parents may be able to fill in their own earlier deficits or distortions or manage more effectively with what they now learn about themselves." (p. 300)

While parents often experience a magnified sense of their limitations after a child is added to their family, they also utilize these limits as a catalyst for change. Interview questions in this study were designed to extrapolate how the new mother perceives her child's ability to compensate for deficits in her life.

Theoreticians Who Focus on Observations of the Mother

Theorists in this section reach conclusions about the mother by soliciting the mother's direct involvement in the study. Such a list includes: John Bowlby, Judith Solomon and Carol George, Selma Fraiberg, Serjo Lebovici, Peter Fonagy et al., Ammaniti, and Stern. This section begins with Bowlby, Solomon, and George whose work progressed from interest in the child's attachment experience to the mother's role as the caretaker within the mother-child relationship.

Fraiberg's work remains foundational, as her discoveries alerted us to the effects of the mother's forgotten affect. Lebovici discussed the psychological transformation the infant undergoes in the mother's mind. He discussed how the infant can evolve in some cases, and in other cases takes on a psychological meaning that has less to do with the reality of the infant and more to do with the mother's uninformed projections. Fonagy et al., Ammaniti, and Stern studied maternal representations and correlated them similarly

with the quality of attachment observed between the mother and child. These researchers utilized the research tools associated with Ainsworth's Strange Situation Inventory and Main's Adult Attachment Inventory as a means to assess the mother's various maternal representations and impact on the mother-child relationship, but research studies about the new mother and expected changes in identity are largely absent because this aspect remains unstudied.

Attachment theory broke from traditional psychoanalytic theory by defining attachment as an instinct necessary for survival. In accordance with this theory, Bowlby (1958) formulated the belief that mother-infant relationships are motivated not solely by instinctual drives, but more importantly, by the need to attach. From earlier research on primate familial behavioral patterns, Bowlby (1958) concluded that the need for human infants to attach to their mothers parallels primate patterns. This idea has been controversial from inception; because it went against conventional wisdom that attachment reflected the infant's need for oral gratification. For Bowlby, attachment requires the infant and mother be in close proximity in order to promote survival. Otherwise, the life of the infant is in imminent danger. (1958, p. 369)

Bowlby's inquiries into the capacity for mother and infant to engender a relationship which realizes a satisfying attachment experience led him to argue that the infant must activate the maternal care, via the attachment behavioral system, while the mother must respond to the expressed need of the infant, via the caretaking behavioral system. Bowlby recognized that a mother's capacity to respond adequately to her infant's attachment needs is affected significantly by the quality of her own attachment relationships. He assessed these relationships historically, but he limited his examination

to her early childhood. Consequently, he conveyed attachment as a static entity and he failed to consider that attachment relationships evolve beyond childhood to include current maternal experiences. My study focused on current developments in the new mother's life with regard to emotions, responsibilities, and roles, in addition to childhood attachment relationships.

While attachment has been studied extensively through infant research, Bowlby's concept of the caretaking behavior system has only recently attracted researchers' attention. Solomon and George (1996) argued that the caretaking system is organized to protect the young and "to keep the infant or child close to the caregiver under conditions of threat or danger (i.e., keep the child safe)." (p. 186) Even though attachment and caretaking require reciprocity, they are distinct from each other and have their own lines of development (1996). The authors believed that this new emphasis on the caretaking behavioral system is crucial in order to appreciate parents as developing adults. (1996, p. 185) As with attachment, caretaking is a behavioral system that is goal-corrected (Bowlby, 1958; Solomon and George, 1999a). These behaviors are typically most active after the first few months of the infant's life, and then gradually taper as the mother's and child's needs change.

Solomon and George (1999a) discussed this evolving dynamic in attachment and caretaking behavioral systems. Change reflects the infant's natural striving toward independence, and gradually, the parent must contend with other competing behavioral systems (i.e., work, spouse, mother to other children, and a child to her own parents). (p. 186) The authors noted, "the parent must strike a balance between her need to protect and nurture the child and her need to pursue other goals." (p. 186) This necessitates a flexible

strategy, whereby the mother demonstrates a capacity for sensitive care toward her child, picking up on cues, and responding to them in an effort to achieve the goal of protection. (p. 187) The strategy remains flexible, so that both child and mother remain open to potential growth. The child works toward a greater sense of its own independence, and in reciprocal fashion, the mother pursues goals outside the parent-child relationship. As a greater sense of security is achieved between a new mother and her baby, a mother expands her self-interests.

According to Solomon and George, the caregiving behavioral system is defined by historical experiences, as well as by lived experiences associated with the mother-infant relationship (1996). They reiterated Bowlby's understanding of mental models as mental structures based on real experiences that remain dynamic and open to change, a distinct difference from psychoanalytic theory because in that Bowlby emphasized the real experience rather than the fantasized experience. (p. 189) Continuing the separation, Solomon and George said,

. . . that the care giving behavioral system has its roots developmentally in the construction of working models of self and other in the context of attachment relationships during childhood, but is, under normal conditions, a distinct model of relationships with its own developmental trajectory." (p. 190)

They believed that caretaking representations begin in parallel to attachment representations, and that caretaking is the developmental endpoint of attachment. (George and Solomon, 1999a)

George and Solomon focused on a developmental course in caregiving, with stages in childhood, adolescence, and finally adulthood and the transition to parenthood; they viewed the pregnancy, and the birth, and thereafter as a period of time when the caregiver undergoes the most dramatic change. In their article, "The Development of

Caregiving: A Comparison of Attachment Theory and Psychoanalytic Approaches to Mothering” (1999b), George and Solomon identified several themes.

First, as a child, the future caregiver begins to cultivate an understanding of herself as caregiver and protector in the form of role-play (i.e., playing house). Later, the awareness of one’s reproductive capacity intrudes upon adolescence with the initiation of puberty. During this time, a young woman begins to contemplate the possibilities around mothering. Finally, for most adults, caregivers experience the transition to parenthood as an enormous challenge to their identity. Once the baby arrives, mothers become aware that caretaking is a transactional process between infant and mother. The infant-mother (caretaker) relationship is then brought into a larger social contextual milieu, reflecting the extent and nature of other competing behavioral systems. (p. 657-661)

While caretaking representations are being formulated and ultimately become a reality, the woman’s construction of herself as “mother” absorbs her with the lingering question of whether she will be a “good-enough” mother and what kind of child she will raise. Consequently, a mother begins to review both the caretaking she received and her feelings about significant attachment relationships. (George and Solomon, 1999b, p. 190)

In a subsequent article, “Toward an Integrated Theory of Maternal Caregiving” (2000), Solomon and George argued that a mother’s level of security is judged as being a predictor of infant attachment security. They reiterated: “although the mother is seen as pivotal in the unfolding of this relationship, interest has focused on what she does for the infant and how well she does it, but the mother herself is largely unknown.” (p. 327)

A mother’s mental representations are viewed as a compilation of her individual past and present experiences with her child. As the mother engages in a process where

she weaves past with present, “expectations about herself as a mother and her particular infant are repeatedly tested and potentially confirmed or disconfirmed in ways that may lead to profound changes in mother or infant.” (p. 349) The consequence of this dynamic process is that it permits the mother to rework past attachment representations. (p. 349)

Solomon and George aligned themselves with Bowlby’s emphasis that mental models are dynamic and remain open for potential growth. A mother can evolve beyond her existing mental representations, which can then promote her maternal competency.

Fraiberg was primarily concerned with memories and affects, which remain unconscious to the mother. By observing disturbed mother-infant relationships, Fraiberg concluded that when a mother’s affective memory is not adequately processed she becomes increasingly more vulnerable to acting out with her infant. In her early work, “Ghosts in the Nursery: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Problems of Impaired Infant-Mother Relationships” (1975), she associated a mother’s mothering with her mental representations.

Fraiberg claimed “the parental past is inflicted upon the child.” (p. 420) However, she did not believe that the past and present connect in a linear manner only; she thought that experiences can be contextual as well. She claimed, “history is not destiny, then, and whether parenthood becomes flooded with grief and injuries, or whether parenthood becomes a time of renewal cannot be predicted from the narrative of the parental past.” (p. 389) The mother’s actions can be interpreted as dynamic, and open to opportunities for growth. If the mother is incapable of sensing this dynamic, her history quickly encroaches upon her.

Lebovici, in “Fantasmatic Interactions and Intergenerational Transmission” (1988), examined the contributions of the mother’s maternal representations; the article explored a mother’s intrapsychic associations with her unborn child and described how the child can evolve from a “fantasmatic” infant to an “imaginary” infant. The “fantasmatic” infant is the child of the mother’s father and is reflective of the mother’s continued close identification with her mother. (p. 11) The “imaginary” baby represents a child who has evolved from the mother’s intimate thoughts and desires (p. 11), and can be interpreted as an extension of her ego.

Lebovici tried to illustrate varying levels of maternal consciousness and viewed them to encompass the mother’s past, the mother’s current experience of identity, and her lived experience with her infant. At birth, the mother must confront the baby she is holding, whom she feeds and cares for, with this double reference—unconscious and preconscious. (p. 11) The new mother’s mental representations can create a scenario where her new life is less about her and more about unconscious conflicts. This presents a challenge to understand these tensions on a more intimate level. If she accepts this challenge, then a new mother can live a more informed life that signifies a dramatic shift in maternal identity, in which engagement with her infant moves from “fantasmatic” to “imaginary.”

In a later article, “On Intergenerational Transmission: From Filiation to Affiliation” (1993), Lebovici emphasized that the nature of a mother’s infantile conflicts either remain stagnant or become available for growth. Lebovici implied that a mother’s mental representations can be conveyed in what he terms the “transgenerational mandate.” This concept embodies those expectations placed on the newborn that are

derived from parental conflicts with the child's grandparents. This process suggests an infant takes on the maternal and paternal representations so that "the child is charged to repeat with his parents the infantile conflicts which the parents experienced with baby's grandparents." (p. 265) However, Lebovici was mindful of influences experienced beyond one's immediate familial ties and makes note of how these cultural experiences add to the complexity of his/her mental representations. In other words, "the tree of life extends its roots into the family past, but also allows the transmission of cultural affiliation." (p. 260)

Lebovici, Fraiberg, Solomon, and George agree that the mother not only learns about her identity through an historical reflective process, but also by the experiences emanating from her present day realities.

This study was interested to learn how the new mother's present involvement with her child shapes what she thinks about herself, particularly as this experience integrates with other responsibilities that extend beyond the mother and child relationship.

Attachment theory spawned several studies of maternal representations. In 1978, Mary Ainsworth defined three basic organizations of attachment, which she observed in children and is reflected in the relationship between caregiver and child. She labeled these categories: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-ambivalent. Subsequently, Ainsworth created the Strange Situation Assessment. However, it was not until Mary Main et al. created the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (1985a) that researchers could study a mother's representations of her own attachment experiences. Frequently, the AAI and the Strange Situation Assessment are used together to study the mother-infant relationship.

Peter Fonagy, Miriam Steele, Howard Steele, and George Moran focus on particular facets of maternal representations; their study entitled, “The Capacity for Understanding Mental States: The Reflective Self in Parent and Child and Its Significance for Security of Attachment” (1991), attempts to create a way to score a mother’s reflective-self function. This Reflective-Self Function is the measure they created in an effort to rate a mother’s capacity for understanding her mental states. They obtained transcripts from interviews that utilized Main’s Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and correlated the results with Ainsworth’s Strange Situation Assessment. This data was rated for the mother’s level of self-reflectiveness. Reflective-self is defined as the internal observer of mental life, while the prereflective-self indicates an unmediated internal life. (p. 203)

Their interest in reflective capacity stemmed from the belief that in order for the infant to achieve an adequate sense of security, the mother needs to know herself well enough to attune emotionally to her infant.

Attunement requires an awareness of the infant as a psychological entity with mental experience. It presumes a capacity on the part of the caregiver to reflect on the infant’s mental experience and re-present it to the infant translated into the language of actions the infant can understand. The baby is, thus, provided with the illusion that the process of reflection of psychological processes was performed within its own mental boundaries. This is necessary background to the evolution of a firmly established reflective-self. (p. 207)

The lack of, or seriously compromised, self-reflective function, magnifies the mother’s fear of disintegration, thereby interfering with the infant’s establishment of security. (p. 205) This fear of disintegration may be experienced by the mother as a feeling that she is falling apart. The mother’s anxiety causes her to question the ramifications of such a fear. Reflectiveness helps to promote secure attachment as it

permits parents to seek understanding and compassion for themselves that is then extended to their child; parents realize that their child is a human being in need of understanding. The sense of safety is initially a shared mental process between the infant and caregiver, which stays with the child ultimately into adulthood as an aspect of mental functioning independent of the caregiver. (p. 215)

Fonagy, Steele, Steele, and Moran focus on the mother's reflective capacity relative to the attachment experienced between mother and child. The notion of self-reflection in the context of this study is viewed as a means by which a new mother may discuss her identity. A mother's reflections are not a tactical account of experiences. Instead, they allow the mother to convey affect and interpretations relative to her experiences of motherhood.

In another study, Fonagy, Steele, and Steele, "Maternal Representations of Attachment during Pregnancy Predict the Organization of Infant-Mother Attachment at One Year of Age" (1991), highlighted and expanded on the idea that the nature of the relationship between parent and child defines the ultimate strength of the attachment between them. The AAI and the Strange Situation Assessment were again implemented to examine the significance of a mother's childhood attachment experiences on her subsequent maternal representations, and its effect on the quality of the infant-mother relationship. The results indicated that one's specific history alone does not predict the quality of the infant-mother relationship; but rather, "the overall organization of mental structures underlying relationships and attachment-related issues." (p. 901) For example, it was found that securely attached infants have mothers who are capable of engaging in a

fluid conversation about the context of their history, rather than relaying a cryptic set of impressions, which would leave the impression of a more defended psychological state.

In “Maternal Representations during Pregnancy and Early Infant-Mother Interaction” (1991), M. Ammaniti argues that a mother’s self-reflective capacity will impact the quality of attachment and sense of security between the mother and child. Ammaniti utilizes the AAI and Strange Situation Assessment also to look at the effect of a mother’s maternal representations on the infant-mother relationship. Ammaniti claims that “generational transmission” is the process by which a mother’s maternal representations of self and infant work toward shaping the current mother-infant relationship. A securely attached infant reflects a mother who has processed her past infantile relationships and demonstrates an ability to balance her infant’s needs for both safety and independence.

What counts is coming to terms with one’s own parents and still valuing close relationships. These individuals maintain a balanced view of themselves in relationship to others, are capable of forgiving their own injury, are coherent in describing early experiences, and do not idealize their own parents. This representational orientation enables the mother to respond affectionately to her baby’s demands for safety and his or her need for independence. Thus, the baby will internalize a feeling of relational trust; in fact, the baby expects the mother to pay attention to his or her demands and communications and to be able to understand them. (p. 248)

Ammaniti, like others, contended that parents who are incapable of flexible thought and self-reflection have relationships tainted by inaccessible emotional experiences.

Questions surrounding maternal representations have become central to the investigation of the mother-infant relationship, and, in 1991, Stern found that mothers respond positively to this model, as they are acutely aware of the parallel process

between the observed external scene and the projections made based on their own internal scene. Mother's experience of being mothered and the internalization of the associated affective memories are continually correlated to the current infant-mother relationship.

Stern concurred with much of what has already been said regarding maternal representations, both their impact on mother-infant relationships, and the importance for the mother to reflect openly upon her history. In an effort to push research in another direction, he conducted a study utilizing the AAI in combination with an "activated representation" model. The preliminary results are cited in his article "Maternal Representations: A Clinical and Subjective Phenomenological View." (1991) In this study, Stern tried to utilize a phenomenological approach by placing the mother in a participant observer position. The mothers observed their children in preschool and reported on both the internal and external scenes. He found that mothers respond positively to this model, as they are acutely aware of the parallel process between the observed external scene and the projections made based on their own internal scene.

The assumption made by Stern "is that events of the internal scene will be relevant to our exploration of the mother's representations" (1991, p. 182); he found that "as parents conduct and observe overt behaviors with our own children—so embedded in our lives—they are almost constantly emotionally colored and thematically influenced by our representational world on an almost second-by-second basis." (p. 183) Mothers' representational worlds are categorized in the following clinical models:

1. The distortion model reflects the distortion between subjective reality and objective reality

2. The dominant theme model refers to how “the baby is represented in the mother’s eyes as taking part in and being woven into themes that have been ongoing, conflictual, and problematic throughout the mother’s life;”
3. The coherence model refers to “coherence, comprehensibility, continuity, and consistency of the narrative told.” (p. 179-181)

Again, the historical facts fade in importance, but the way in which this history is comprehended acts as a catalyst between one’s history and present-day experiences. How the new mother articulates this bridge between her past and present will reveal what she considers to be factors that contribute to her identity.

Intersection of Motherhood and Adulthood

For most new mothers, motherhood is concurrent with adulthood. In this study, I sought to learn how a new mother connects her adult experiences with motherhood. An exploration of adult development provided a structure for understanding the changes in a new mother’s identity. The authors reviewed in this section discussed adulthood in light of the individual person’s possibilities for continued growth.

Erik Erikson articulated central themes pertinent in adult life. Calvin A. Colarusso, Robert A. Nemiroff, Robert Galatzer-Levy, Bertram Cohler, and Rebecca Shahmoon Shanok all spoke about the ramifications of parenthood’s occurrence in an adult person’s life.

Children present adults with the possibility to open themselves to psychological growth, but it is up to the parents to actually engage in a developmental process. Erikson’s discussion of the eight ages of man, cited in *Childhood and Society* (1950),

recognized the central concern in adulthood to be “generativity versus stagnation.”

Parenthood institutes a time when adults support and guide another life, the life of their child. Generativity is about “establishing and guiding the next generation.” (p. 267) He cautioned that having children does not guarantee generativity’s presence. However, when generativity does not emerge, stagnation may pervade.

In a later work, Erikson (1980) reflected on this basic human need for expansiveness when he expounded upon Freud’s succinct answer to what a normal person should be able “to love and to work.” Erikson offered this interpretation:

For when Freud said ‘love,’ he meant the expansiveness of generosity as well as genital love; when he said “love and work,” he meant a general work productiveness which would not preoccupy the individual to the extent that his right or capacity to be a sexual and a loving being would be lost.” (1980, p. 102)

However, mothers have significantly broadened their roles. It is common for a mother to be a companion, careerist, volunteer, and student also. The timing and balance of these roles might be a more pertinent inquiry for today’s mother.

Colarusso and Nemiroff’s book, *Adult Development: A New Dimension in Psychodynamic Theory and Practice* (1981), considered how self-acceptance emerges from the experience of narcissistic injury as well as the recognition of corresponding limitations. They introduced the idea that limitations become evident when narcissistic injury is felt. The chapter entitled, “Narcissism in the Adult Development of the Self,” discussed narcissistic injury that stems “not only from disappointments experienced in childhood, but also from those that are newly experienced in adulthood.” (p. 85)

Colarusso and Nemiroff defined this experience as authenticity and evidence of “the capacity to assess and accept what is real in both the external and inner world, regardless of the narcissistic injury involved.” (p. 86)

One of these experiences includes parenthood. Parenting inevitably creates narcissistic vulnerability and it is typically experienced when limitations are confronted. Colarusso and Nemiroff heralded adulthood as a time when development continues to unfold, and cited parenthood as one of many catalysts that helps facilitate this process. A disappointment in parenthood might stem from the divide between the fantasized child and the real child. (p. 85) The authors considered this discrepancy to be one of many disappointments experienced in adulthood; they asserted that once it is recognized it “gradually becomes a source of pleasure and strength as the self accepts and develops the capacity to act interdependently within the restrictions imposed by the human condition.” (p. 86) For the new mother, adulthood coincides with a time when acceptance of personal limitations inspires greater empathy toward others’ limitations.

Robert Galatzer-Levy and Bertram Cohler (1993) argued for an adult’s continued need to be connected with significant persons; they referred to these people as “essential others.” They defined “essential others” as part of an individual’s life that provides needed support throughout one’s lifetime. “Essential others” can be both part of one’s internal and external life. For instance, children function as an essential other for their parents; in fact, the child’s “performance reflects parental adequacy.” (p. 281) The relationship displays a transactional nature, and can be either a mutually supporting experience or one that is constantly at odds and causes stress for all involved.

In her articles, “Parenthood: A Process Marking Identity and Intimacy Capacities,” (1990) and “Towards an Inclusive Adult Development Theory: Epigenesis Reconsidered” (1993), Shanok focused on a particular aspect of parenting and adult development. In the articles, she advocated steering away from a sequential outline for

development, particularly as it relates to adulthood. She viewed childhood as more amenable to stage-by-stage analysis, because biological changes are central during this time. Since physical issues usually recede in adulthood, she argued that identity and intimacy succeed them as the central organizing function. (1990, p. 2; 1993, p. 248)

Shanok emphasized that identity and intimacy are interdependent and contribute to the adult's personal richness, making adulthood dynamic rather than merely aligned to stages.

The parent continues to solidify identity and to enhance the capacity for intimacy within the parent-child context. Shanok (1990) described the capacity for identity and intimacy as a desirable dynamic that enhances the parenting experience. She made an analogy between a gear system "cogwheeling" and the parent-child relationship. If we imagine this relationship as a cogwheel, it helps us to understand that the potential for "growth in one area will have a positive impact on the other; trouble in one will lead to vulnerability in the other." (p. 3) For the adult, parenthood becomes a "marker process" that is defined as an enduring event, which is challenging, influential, and ultimately, responsible for intrapsychic shifting. (cf. Levinson) Without doubt, an adult's identity and capacity for intimacy are challenged during this demanding time.

Shanok stated that an adult's sense of self and autonomy takes shape in childhood and grows out of attachment, but I would add that it is through the enactment of the caregiving behavioral systems that the parent's sense of autonomy is further challenged to grow. Shanok reiterated: "parenthood affects identity; parenting influences intimacy." (p. 3) It is the woven fabric of identity and intimacy that characterizes adulthood, and for the new mother, in particular, it creates a pressure to acknowledge the strengths and

weaknesses within her character. The new mother's awareness of strengths and weaknesses might account for the changes in identity, and add depth to how she is understood.

Summation

In summation, this literature reviews numerous and diverse ideas about the effects of motherhood on maternal identity in the five sections outlined.

1. Maternal Identity explains motherhood is a catalyst for psychic reorganization, which implies that a new mother, specifically the first-time mother, must transform her previous identity in order to become an effective caretaker. A new mother will usually feel some need to reconsider her emotions, and her intimate relationships.
2. Identity and Influential Factors, suggests ideas about identity formation outside the maternal context. The authors emphasize how the transition from self-love to object love and the satisfactory gratification of self-object needs are manifestations of narcissistic development, which, for the purpose of this paper, are understood as components of identity.
3. Psychological Upheaval describes how many new mothers experience motherhood as a disruption that engenders a process of review; although unsettling, this mental work often, but not always, produces substantial emotional growth. In order to reshape her self-identity, a new mother must integrate previous life experiences with maternity, but as a result, she may also experience the benefits of heightened self-esteem and enhanced self-

awareness. Maternity may offer the mother numerous gratifying side effects, however this does not overshadow the internal and external turmoil that often consumes her, and in some instances, can become detrimental.

4. *Observations of the Mother*, cites how earlier research emphasis on the infant has been largely displaced by a greater interest in the mother's experience. However, identity changes experienced by first-time mothers have not been thoroughly researched.
5. *Intersection of Motherhood and Adulthood*, brings our attention to the fact that the subjects in this study must be twenty-one years or older. They are both adult women and mothers. By itself, adulthood impacts an individual's identity; however, once combined with motherhood, a new and unique identity inevitably results, representing a blend of previous and current experiences. How this integration occurs and how a new mother perceives the many changes to her self-identity are the foci of my study.

This literature survey, which converges on the subject of maternal identity, provides a theoretical structure for my hypotheses and supplies a framework to formulate the interview questions that will guide this study.

CHAPTER III

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

Understanding mothers from a variety of perspectives is helpful to the field of social work, particularly for those clinicians working with children and families. When a mother can be supported and her developmental process facilitated, she and many within her family can benefit. Motherhood can stimulate both internal and external issues only vaguely known before becoming a mother, and some of these issues may challenge a mother's capacities when she is faced with the responsibility for another human being. That responsibility precipitates a shift from a primary focus on oneself to her child. This shift in focus for the mother can deepen an awareness of her strengths and limitations and the compromises necessary to achieve self-acceptance.

Today's mother is aware of or has participated in, the many life-style choices available to women. For some mothers, this raises concerns about balance and priorities in one's life. Therefore, as they learn to care for themselves while caring for another (or many) this can be helpful for new mothers, particularly as their identity undergoes change.

It is hoped that this study will not only add value to current knowledge of motherhood, but that it also presents to clinical social work a possibility of learning how to help a new mother process the difficulties accompany change. As a clinician comes to understand how a mother's awareness of her identity came into being, that understanding

can then be used as a catalyst to facilitate her developmental process. Motherhood impacts a woman's identity, because it expands her experiences with herself and others that can create new ways to understand and know herself.

For many women, the transition into motherhood is emotionally intense and can cause a mother to question who she is. A mother may feel uncomfortable or even frightened by these unfamiliar experiences, and in some cases this dilemma might necessitate treatment intervention. Given the circumstances, when a clinician encounters a woman who is having trouble transitioning into motherhood, issues related to her past, current and future identity can be processed as a means to discover the nature of this impasse. A mother's awareness of these issues offers an opportunity for them to be worked through. This gives her enough relief to continue on with her life, and an increased ability to adequately care for her child.

Studying the new mother's experiences of change in identity is significant to social work because of the potential impact it has on her connection with others in her environment. Clinical social work is concerned with more than individuals and the environments in which they live and work. A mother exists within a system that not only includes herself and her child, but, in many instances, also includes a partner, other children, extended family and friends. As clinical social workers come to understand the nature of a mother's connections, it is important to know how her identity and self-knowledge affects these relationships.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM TO BE STUDIED AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES TO BE ACHIEVED

Theoreticians have offered evocative thoughts about maternal identity, but little research specifically studies the subject. This may be due in part to the difficulties inherent in studying identity in general. Since identity is a unique experience for each individual, defining it poses problems for researchers. However, in the case of this study, the problem is alleviated somewhat, because mothers have a common denominator: the child. I believe it is important to study this change in identity, as it will help to understand why motherhood presents uniquely difficult challenges.

This investigation was designed not only to help clarify a new mother's identity, but to analyze if and how she reaches some semblance of self-acceptance. I utilized grounded theory because this methodology is capable of retrieving information that is intimate and possibly unknown to the subject prior to participation in the study. By asking carefully constructed interview questions, I hoped to elicit a detailed account of what the new mother is aware and what she understands about the changes her identity undergoes. Typically, themes arise out of such interview data and lead to several hypotheses. Ultimately, a theory should emerge that informs us about maternal identity as experienced by a new mother.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study utilized a life course developmental perspective. The life course developmental theory frames how we understand the nature of the mother-infant relationship, and how this relationship affects the new mother's identity. Anna Freud (1965) is one of the first theoreticians to isolate and study the development in children. She described children as endowed with "developmental lines" where progression and regression are normal manifestations of development, essential for survival.

Where Anna Freud's work remains focused on childhood, Erik Erikson (1950) extended an understanding of development into adulthood. He formulated an epigenetic model that begins in infancy and proceeds throughout the lifespan. Development, he argued, progresses through a series of psychosocial phases. Each phase has predominant characteristics that reflect the previous stages and foreshadows what is to follow.

Both A. Freud's and Erikson's perspectives remain respected today. However, contemporary developmentalists no longer understand development solely from a stage model where some level of mastery is required before an individual proceeds to the next stage. Developmentalists believe this former way of thinking gives the impression that development is linear and ultimately formulaic; but in reality, this perception proves to be unsubstantiated by research.

Robert Emde (1988b), along with other developmentalists, articulated development as a less predictable process; they viewed new experiences as catalysts that invigorate the developmental process and move toward change. In "Development Terminable and Interminable" (1988a), he addressed Freud's frustration with the developmental process in analytic treatment when he felt frustrated in his attempts to

effect change in his patients. Emde, however, believed that Freud's thinking about development was constrained by his model of psychopathology and, consequently, Freud was unable to visualize possibilities for growth and change.

Emde described the infant as endowed with predictable innate characteristics. These characteristics evolve within an environmental context, and therefore, are impacted by it. He referred to this circumstance as a "specifically experienced environment." (p. 27) What transpires within the infant-caregiver relationship, he said, are "patterns [that] get set in an enduring way." (p. 28) Development begins in infancy and is cast by the infant-caregiver relationship. This relationship, which is internalized, has a strong influence on a child's development and is later replicated in similar relationships throughout life. (p. 28)

In addition, Emde elaborated on Winnicott's theory that there is no such thing as a baby, and contributes "there is only baby with mother." (p. 28) Parts of development, he noted, are placed at risk by being closed off to new experiences via repetitions that seek recognition of one's self in a familiar context, or repetitions based on an attempt at mastery of earlier pain.

Colarusso and Nemiroff argued that adults encounter developmental tasks and challenges throughout life, and basic change follows inherently. (p. 79) Rather than confine developmental possibilities to childhood, Colarusso and Nemiroff contended that the adult does not represent a finished product. Instead, these authors believed adulthood to be an ongoing dynamic process where "experiences are developmental issues in and of themselves, regardless of the past." (p. 64) They believed adulthood is influenced not only by one's childhood past, but also by one's adult past.

Among other theorists, Robert M. Galatzer-Levy and Bertram Cohler (1993) believed “essential others” continue to support and influence adult developmental process. This concept suggests that adults are enriched through their experiences with others, including the child who also serves as an essential other for the parent. Galatzer-Levy and Cohler described how, on one hand, the child’s presence prompts the parent to introspect, which can be upsetting. On the other hand, the child provides the parent an opportunity to reshape knowledge of one’s self.

Statement of Assumptions and Questions to Be Explored

The following assumptions guide and inform the study’s organizing principles. Many of these assumptions are inspired by the literature review. Later in the Methodology Chapter these assumptions become an impetus for how the interview questions are created.

1. The impending birth and the arrival of a child sets in motion a great deal of thought and emotion, and these factors tend to influence the perspective a woman has of herself. I call this the mother’s journey.
2. The mother and infant find themselves in a transactional process where each not only supports the other’s development, but impacts it as well.
3. Motherhood challenges a woman’s understanding of herself—in terms of what she knew before motherhood, and what she is becoming aware of since motherhood. For most women, this process of understanding becomes known through self-reflection.

4. The process of self-reflection aids in a woman's comprehension of herself as a mother, and is a method for ascertaining information about her identity.
5. The grounded theory method provides a framework for organizing and analyzing data that allows access to intimate details of a new mother's comprehension of her identity.
6. Grounded theory methodology is compatible with the researcher's psychoanalytic orientation and clinical training.
7. The details retrieved and developed through a conceptualizing process will illuminate what a new mother comes to know about her identity, and the characteristics of this journey.
8. It is hoped this information will lead to the ultimate discovery and development of a theory that reveals the new mother's perception about her change in identity and the impact an overall awareness of these changes has on her transition into motherhood and life.

Theoretical and Operational Definitions of Major Concepts

The following operational definitions are used to organize the study:

1. Self-reflection is the observing ego's ability to analyze oneself both internally and externally (e.g., "I was thinking about how my way of mothering is similar, but also different from how my mother mothered.") Schon's (1983) notion of "reflection-in-action" embodies a person's knowledge that stems from experiences accumulated over time (e.g.,

“When I was awarded a scholarship for college it helped me develop confidence in my abilities, similar to how I feel as I find myself more competent in taking care of my baby.) Fonagy (1991) would add that this knowledge manifests via a prereflective self—(e.g., “I don’t know why I just walked away from her. I am just tired of always giving to her.”)—that is unmediated, and/or through a reflective self—(e.g., “I know sometimes I get overwhelmed and it is not her fault.”)—that is an internal observer of mental life.

2. Self-understanding/observing ego is the information gleaned through a reflective process that is then placed in a larger context and becomes part of an increasingly complex identity (e.g., “I realize how much I want to do this right and don’t want to mess it up. I know a lot was asked of me as a child and because of this I find it difficult know how much to give to Emily.”)
3. Identity “is the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others.” (Erikson, 1963, p.261) One’s inner sense of self eventually becomes reflected in one’s external experience, (e.g., “I find myself becoming more like the kind of mother I envision.”)
4. Intimacy is the capacity to physically and emotionally support the growth of oneself and others. This includes interactional patterns,

mutuality, and warmth which are responded to within a relationship,
(e.g., “I feel so close so lovingly toward my baby when I nurse her.”)

5. New mother is a woman who has carried a child to full term and who has never given birth to a child before.
6. Maternal identity is the mother’s sense of her self before becoming a mother combined with her sense of her self after the birth of the baby,
(e.g., “My life is completely different. Before the baby my identity was about my career, my relationship with my husband and friendships. I did what I wanted whenever I wanted, but now I first think of the baby. Now, I first describe myself as a mother and everything else about me following.”)

CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY

Type of Study and Design

The purpose of this research study was to learn about the changes in identity experienced by a new mother; it was a personal inquiry and one in which the answer is learned only as the data is collected and interpreted. To that end, the study employed grounded theory.

Grounded theory utilizes a process in which the researcher initiates the study with a question void of interpretation or conclusion. It postulates that one does not begin a research study with a theory in mind and the theory is not used as a way to test hypotheses. Rather, grounded theory allows a researcher to explore around the central question; the data, which then must be analyzed and interpreted, directs the researcher toward a theory. This philosophy reflects Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original definition and construct of grounded theory. It necessitates a close relationship between the researcher and the data collection process. Because a woman's reflections about her identity, in fact, reveal intimate details of her internal perceptions, grounded theory is a method that has the ability to elicit this type of information.

There are also other valid reasons for using grounded theory. First, because I am a trained clinician, the procedure utilized to collect data, interviewing, requires skills and

techniques similar to those used by a psychotherapist. A researcher who is also a psychotherapist will listen in a particular way, and possibly emphasize different information.

In the roles of psychotherapist and researcher, I listened not only for the material presented at face value, but also for its subtext relative to common themes and feelings, as well as to my own reactions. In addition, grounded theory lends itself naturally to the collecting, organizing, shaping, interpreting, and reinterpreting of data. It is a dynamic process much in the same way as the human condition.

The subjective reflections of a new mother were put through a process in which they became objectified in the hope that once combined with the thoughts of multiple others, a theory would emerge of general meaning and significance.

Finally, grounded theory provided a bulwark against the researcher's biases. The researcher's biases encompass a variety of experiences and beliefs formulated throughout her life, but these inclinations were put under scrutiny, and were safeguarded both by the techniques and procedures defined by the grounded theory method and by the dissertation committee overseeing the study.

Scope of Study, Setting, Population and Sampling, Sources and Nature of Data

The subjects of this study were new mothers who have never given birth to a child before. New mothers were recruited from various sources. Fliers were posted at obstetric and gynecological practices, pediatric offices and new mothers' groups in the Chicago metropolitan area. From this starting point, I hoped referrals would come by word of mouth, or by colleagues and friends.

The new mothers were interviewed over a span of time beginning in their third trimester and concluding in the sixth month postpartum. The goal was to achieve approximately 50 hours of taped interviews. These interviews were to include 15 to 25 women who are interviewed two to three times at different points over the course of time (i.e., third trimester, third month, sixth month). Not only were their statements recorded, but also their affects. In addition, any other nonverbal forms of communication were noted as well. The interview setting was selected by the subject in an effort to assure comfort and to accommodate schedules.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Data obtained from subjects was in the form of interviews that are both audio taped and transcribed. Information retrieved from these interviews became data that was then transformed into memos and diagrams. Memos are thought to be “analytical and conceptual,” reflecting “relationships among concepts” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 217-218), and diagrams are the visual reflection of a memo. Strauss and Corbin claimed that memos and diagrams are integral to the study’s outcome, as they help the researcher to convert raw data into rich and generalizable concepts.

The projected goal was 50 interview hours. The initial interview could take place at any point between the new mother’s third trimester and six months post birth. Whenever the first interview occurred, a second, and in some cases, a third (particularly for those women whose first interview was in the third trimester) followed approximately two to three months later. I did not begin an interview in the sixth month. My ideal was to arrange interviews for the third trimester, six weeks after birth, then three months and

six months postpartum. I focused my study strictly on this very early period of motherhood. By staggering interviews throughout this early period, I sought to capture a sense of change in identity. Each interview began with a few standard questions to open a dialogue between researcher and subject, which I hoped would take on a more free associative style reflecting the subject's stream of conscience. Please refer to the questions noted below. My questions were intended to uncover information about the mother's identity. The hope was to learn more about a woman's identity as she added the new dimension of motherhood to her previous sense of identity.

The following questions guided the interview process. These questions were inspired by the literature review, assumptions noted, and my own clinical training and experience. The questions were pursued in an interview format and analyzed within the grounded theory paradigm. As interviews progressed, new questions were generated and reflect thoughts stimulated by this study.

1. How have you thought about yourself before becoming pregnant? Any significant experiences leading to this?
2. How is/was your pregnancy, labor and delivery?
3. How was it to leave the hospital and return home for the first time?
4. Did you have thoughts or dreams about being a mother prior to pregnancy?
5. Since the arrival of the baby has become imminent, have any of these thoughts/dreams changed?
6. Now that the baby is here what do you think being a mother means?
7. How does your baby affect the thoughts and feelings you have about being a mother?

8. Does the reality of being a mother differ from your previously held ideas?
9. Can you describe what you felt were your internal and external strengths prior to conceiving your child?
10. Can you talk about these strengths in light of being a new mother?
11. How about your awareness of internal and external weaknesses prior to conceiving your child?
12. Can you discuss these weaknesses in light of being a new mother?
13. Have you had any significant dreams during this time period that you would like to share?
14. Do you have any thoughts about their meaning?
15. How does the knowledge of these strengths and weaknesses affect your emotions and thoughts about yourself, and yourself with your baby?
16. Do you think you have changed since becoming a mother, and if so, how, if not, why not?
17. In terms of what you always knew or vaguely knew about yourself; what has remained unchanged, what has become more magnified or diminished, and what has changed?
18. Since becoming a mother, what can you foresee for yourself in the future?
19. Does this differ with any thoughts you had prior to becoming a mother?
20. Why do some ideas seem possible and others seem out of the question? (This can reflect internal as well as external events)
21. Can you give a brief explanation of how you would describe your identity since becoming a new mother and how this impacts your life?

22. Have you had much help through your life?
23. Do you depend on others or do you like to be independent?
24. Has either circumstance changed?
25. Do you ever take time to think about what is happening and how that has affected you?
26. How does it feel to have a baby?
27. What is your baby like?
28. Has that changed your feelings about yourself and baby?

The data gathered was organized via three interrelated coding procedures: open, axial, and selective. Open coding is just that— open, to the greatest possibilities for the generation of categories, and likewise, samples. Open coding is then followed by and intermingled with axial coding.

Axial coding leads to sampling that is more relational and variational according to categories and subcategories achieved. Axial coding leads to selective coding.

Selective coding is a subsequent sampling style that is discriminate, seeking data that supports the theory being narrowed in on. Theoretical sampling can emerge during this time, and initiate a search for subjects who illuminate a new theme that has been up to this point unelucidated.

Strauss and Corbin (1990 and 1998) cautioned researchers to remain flexible throughout the data collection and sampling process. This precaution ensures that categories unforeseen and unplanned for remain possibilities to be pursued for the purpose of learning new and interesting aspects of the population under study. I recorded notes regarding affect and nonverbal communication in private after each interview. A

brief demographic sheet was handed to each subject; it was up to the discretion of each subject to decide which questions she wished to answer.

Plan for Data Analysis

I analyzed the interviews using the grounded theory method prescribed by Glasser, Strauss, and Corbin. (1967, 1998) In this study, I was interested in the mother's journey, and more particularly, what she learned about herself along the way. What was new to her? What was familiar? What was deepened?

These are intimate questions and have the greatest potential for being answered in a one-on-one interview setting. The grounded theory method lends itself best to this type of research as there are no theories imposed on this population, only a story to be told and understood by listening to private ponderings as well as intellectual and emotional reflections.

Data collection and data analysis naturally simultaneously evolve from interaction and immersion with the data. As categories emerged from the data, they were further fractured into properties and dimensions. These discoveries were built upon and then utilized in subsequent interviews, which generated more categories, properties, and dimensions. For grounded theory, collecting and coding data are integral as one enhances the other. The information gleaned from this process brought me closer to understanding the new mother and the perceived changes in her identity.

Analysis, as noted earlier, entails the implementation of open, axial and selective coding: three procedures, all of which are interdependent and yet are distinctly different.

Open coding involves the discovery of categories, and the further breakdown of these categories into properties and dimensions. From these categories, sub-categories emerge, which are then utilized to make relationships with already defined categories. The physical procedures involved in open coding include: line-by-line, sentence, paragraph or entire document analysis. The material noted above comes from transcripts generated by the interviews. The notes taken were recorded in the form of memos and/or diagrams.

While open coding is known to fracture data into its smallest components, axial coding takes all this information and puts it back together in a meaningful way. This integration creates connections between categories and subcategories. Axial coding involves the back and forth relating of categories and sub-categories, verifying them against raw data, continuing the search for properties and dimensions, exploring the variations in phenomena. As the process of relating categories and subcategories unfolded, I hypothesized about the newly revealed connections such as causal conditions, phenomena, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences.

Selective coding permitted me to recognize the story that gradually emerged from such detailed analysis. Selective coding is axial coding with the added responsibility of narrowing categories into one coherent story line, which will shape and define a grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990 and 1998) developed this analytic process to give researchers the opportunity to discover what was happening in the world, but not yet identified, and subsequently, not communicated to the larger masses. Grounded theory foregrounds issues likely to have been taken for granted or merely unrefined.

Statement on Protecting the Rights of Human Subjects

This research project has been reviewed and accepted by the Institutional Review Board of the Institute for Clinical Social Work.

Limitations of the Research Plan

There were several limitations to the research plan. Subjects were confined exclusively to women who have given birth to their first child and resided within a particular geographical location (racially mixed, lower to upper middle class and affluent). I interviewed these subjects between the third trimester and sixth month postpartum. The sample size was projected to be between 15 and 25 subjects. This was a small sample, and consequently noted as a limitation. In an effort to cope with this limitation, I processed and analyzed these interviews in-depth under close (bi-weekly) supervision from Dr. Dennis Shelby.

In this research study, I was in the role of researcher, but I am also a trained clinician, which has both advantages and disadvantages. In order to maintain a unified sample, I used my clinical skills to eliminate any subjects who may have mental illness.

My bias was colored by experiences that encompassed my own journey prior to giving birth to two children, and the inevitable consequences. I was aware that my personal experiences would influence how I heard reported material. However, I hoped the years of personal analysis, clinical training, and concurrent supervision during the interview process and analysis would help to minimize biases, which I realized had the potential for skewing the data.

Those who engage in a self-reflective process, and consequently have an interest in their identity as mothers may be the majority of those who volunteered for this project. The sample size was small and possibly generalizable only to those with similar characteristics of the volunteers.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS

The results chapter is comprised of: a description of the subjects, the reason for the subjects' participation, and the results of data analysis. In the description of the subjects, they are referred to as new mothers, as they are throughout the dissertation. This is not meant to presume that the mothers in this project are of one mind, nor that they are representative of a universal mother. The term "new mother" is used to capture the subject's current state, which is the state under investigation. The subjects who agreed to participate in the study did so voluntarily. However, they shared a general sentiment that sparked their interest in the project. An explanation of the data is given, and it is organized and analyzed according to its' categories and properties. This explanation is followed by a summary of the results. The chapter concludes with an outline of the findings, which will be elaborated upon further in the theoretical discussion chapter.

Description of Subjects

At the time of their babies' births, six of the new mothers were aged between 25-30 years; nine were between 31-35, one was 38, and one was 44. Four needed fertility

treatment to assist them in conceiving a baby. Six of the women were in the second half of their 3rd trimester when they began the study.

All the new mothers interviewed were married: eleven less than 5 years, five between 5-10 years, and one between 11 and 15 years.

Of the 17 new mothers interviewed, 13 intended to return to work and four planned to remain home full-time with their child. Among those who intended to return to work, some are returning after a typical maternity leave of 3 months, while others will return after a longer hiatus ranging from 8 months to 2 years. A few planned to continue their full-time work schedules, while others will reduce their work hours to part-time or less. Eight of the mothers were teachers and academics; six were in business; two in social work/psychology; one in a creative position. Seven had bachelor's degrees; seven had master's degrees; two had PhDs; and one was an ABD. Most with bachelor's degrees either had hours toward their master's degrees or plans to further their educations at a later date in the future.

Five of the 17 new mothers interviewed were either currently in psychotherapy or had previously been in psychotherapy at an earlier time in their lives.

Why these New Mothers Participated in this Research Project

With the exception of a few interviews conducted at the work place, the majority took place in the interviewee's homes. As I captured a glimpse of their private lives, it became clear to me that, prior to having children, all these women lived substantial lives. This was indicated by numerous observations of either bursting bookshelves or artifacts from around the globe or evidence that work and other projects were in progress. These

new mothers entered motherhood with a wealth of experiences and achievements which stemmed from vigorous attention toward personal interests, talents and aspirations. In the midst of everything that had been accumulated in the past, infant paraphernalia now lies: bottles, pacifiers, and diapers. In addition to books about education, zoology and biology, there were books about pregnancy, breastfeeding, and sleep training. These findings explore these new mothers' identities prior to motherhood and how that identity is further broadened when they become pregnant and when they give birth to their first child.

Each woman who volunteered to participate in this study said they were doing so because they felt that motherhood was a critical juncture in their life. Their emotional flux and their difficulty in solidifying a coherent understanding made them realize that internal examination was both inevitable and necessary. They saw this study as part of a process that could help support them and their babies as they transitioned into motherhood. Pregnancy and the baby's birth create an emotional intensity which stimulates a desire to know and understand themselves more deeply. Many echoed sentiments similar to those of this new mother: "I have to tap into areas that I've never had to tap into before." Those who find this difficult still have some sense that self-reflection has a purpose; they often join groups to help them probe more deeply. "I'm just one of those very analytical people, not as emotional, so even at those prenatal yoga classes that we go to and connect with the baby mentally; I have a very hard time doing that. I can't focus on that." For the most part, these new mothers recognized that their transition into motherhood would involve challenges, and subsequently they joined support groups for help.

They are resourceful women who are determined to work through the challenges encountered in motherhood. All found pregnancy and motherhood to be a significant juncture, one which marked a point in their lives when emotions were heightened and caused uncertainty. Many were weighted down by the emotions, mystified by where these emotions came from, the nature of them; at times, they were unable to clarify what these emotions meant. “I’m not a crier and one day I was driving to work and I got very teary-eyed because I remembered something that had happened like two years ago that bothered me.” Many women saw this study as a catalyst for loosening and analyzing their emotions and reflected, “I actually looked at [the study] as possibly an opportunity that the questions would elicit for me some understanding of what I’m going through.”

For these women, renewed interest in their internal world began during pregnancy and continued to build postpartum. Many of the new mothers noted that their pregnancies were the first time they ever felt compelled to pause and think about their lives, pondering what motivated them and why. “My pregnancy was the first time I, you know, really stopped and let myself be and to really get into stuff.”

In varying degrees, these new mothers desire insight, and they believe it is essential and relevant to mothering.

I started really thinking about what I’ll be like as a mother and how truly important it is for me to work through some of the things about myself that I know are difficult, and that I would never want to pass on to my children.

As I asked questions of these women, listened to answers, and observed their affect, I was moved by their discovery process. After interviews, I left grateful for their candor. However, much of what was expressed was their ideal vision for themselves as

mothers and for their new family. Their responses were filled with warmth and hope for the future.

The findings are not organized along physiological lines; rather, the findings uncover an array of psychological aspects inspired by motherhood between the third trimester and 6 months postpartum. Even though I interviewed these new mothers one to three times over a 7-month period, I never noted a significant difference in their comments or concerns. Instead, over the course of interviews, their comments and concerns only changed in that they were better articulated. In general, their commentary about this period in life is embedded in idealism: hopes and wishes for the future.

Results of Data Analysis

The categories are not presented in hierarchical order or an order dictated by the biological progression of the pregnancy and birth. Rather, they are concerns and discourses that preoccupied these new mothers during this early period of transition into motherhood. Each category presented is discussed by all the new mothers with varying levels of interest and emotion. I have placed the categories in a particular order only for the purpose of creating a story line about their identities. The categories are presented as follows: Baby, Influences, Career, Husband, Mother's Responsibility, and Emotional Upheaval.

- Baby describes how these new mothers are impacted by their newborns.
- Career surveys the new mother's life priorities, her readjustment of those priorities and in particular her assessment of personal ambitions.

- Influences is a retrospective review made by the new mothers; it reveals how the new mothers conceptualize their internal identifications. This analysis is pursued as a means to understand how a mother's internal identifications influence her identity as a mother.
- Husband is about the new mothers' current thoughts and dilemmas about their partners in parenthood.
- Mother's Responsibility exposes self-discoveries, their impact, and what the new mothers feel compelled to confront.
- Emotional Upheaval illuminates motherhood as a period of great emotional stimulation.

Baby

"It's going to be so fun to actually see him, after getting to know him so well in utero."

In this section, the baby is specifically discussed in terms of his or her direct effect on these new mothers. While pregnant, these women fantasized about their babies, but all the new mothers agree that there is no adequate preparation for what they experienced once the baby was born. Some expressed that pregnancy offered a private relationship, one shared only between herself and her baby, and they anticipated feeling some kind of loss once the baby was born.

At the end of pregnancy I felt like there was something that I was able to experience that no one else was able to. So, in a way, I kind of thought, "Oh stay in," because I feel so special now, like only I know what this is like.

A few describe coming to terms with their infant's birth. "I had this special gift, but I guess I had gotten to the point where I really thought, I'm ready to share him."

Impacted immediately by their baby's presence, these new mothers respond and adjust in

various ways. Their thoughts and reactions are described in the following properties: Baby Love, Expectations, Realities, Incorporating Baby, Baby as Ambassador, and Baby's Meaning.

- Baby Love is a discovery of a love that is incomparable to anything they have ever known.
- Expectations is a review of their babies' meaning relative to expectations formulated over time.
- Realities exposes the difficulties that come with a newborn, and the subsequent personal challenges that are encountered.
- Incorporating Baby presents a new lifestyle remarkably different from that of their previous life.
- Baby's Meaning is a discussion about the meaning their babies personally hold for them.
- Baby as Ambassador describes how the baby becomes both a catalyst to meeting new people and an entree into new experiences.

Baby Love

Throughout these interviews, one thing was undeniably clear: these women's desire to love their newborns. Although Baby Love is always present, these new mothers describe it as an emotion that evolves, rather than as a readily identifiable experience. "It wasn't there the first month, two months. I mean, it was there. I loved her, but I've really noticed an increase in the past couple of months." It is understandable that in the initial days and weeks that follow their newborn's birth, Baby Love appears more

shadowy than distinct. Initially, these new mothers are consumed with the explicit concern of acquiring the skills necessary for ensuring their baby's life. They are narrowly focused on this effort; it is only when some develop confidence in their skills that their love is more evident and expressed less anxiously. "I'm just highlighting this intense love; it's just growing and growing, and lately, I've been looking at her and just getting teary with happiness."

Some new mothers expressed that the intensity of love they feel is surprising. They are comforted by the emotion and reassured by its presence. "I never really thought I could ever love anything more than my dogs, but I found out, yeah I can." Many assure themselves that their instinctive decision to have a child was correct. "I always knew that I wanted to have kids and I always knew that I would be excited about being a mom, but I never knew how much I would love it, and I just love it."

All the love felt for their baby culminates into being the new best accomplishment for many, surpassing all others in their life.

I just feel like it's the best thing I've ever done, like getting your Ph.D. or having my job or, you know, doing all the things that I've done in the past are kind of like—well, they're second best, they're like way low down. It's quite far like the best thing I've ever done, for sure.

Baby Love realigns many new mothers emotional sense of self, particularly as their newborn's individuality becomes more apparent. Once the baby is born, a few expressed that this changed their perspective about their babies. "I thought more of her like a soul, but now I know that she has a soul, but I think of her more as a person now." As new mother and infant engage in a mutually satisfying relationship, most find their baby's responses to be instrumental in the two of them being drawn closer together.

The kid was out of me in 15 minutes and I looked over and I said—“I get it.” And there are days when he is eating and sometimes he just looks up at me and just stares. I know he is just looking at my face and just analyzing me, and I’ll just look back and say, “What are you thinking in there?”

Many are mesmerized by their babies. “All I can do is stare at her and I can’t do anything else.” And when the new mothers have a sense that their babies reciprocate the love they has bestowed, they are further encouraged. “That is the motivator, just seeing those responses, just knowing that they see you and they want your approval and they love you.” Their mutual expressions of love encourage their attachment and, in parallel, make the infant’s individuality pronounced.

Expectations

Expectations for the newborn percolate as many new mothers are able to think more broadly for the child. However, their thoughts do not loom large, as these expectations are neither specific nor grand expressions. Rather they are simple desires for health and happiness. “I’m not sitting here thinking, ‘Oh, gosh, I wonder where they’ll go to college.’ It’s more—I really am more concerned about their health and happiness. I really do feel that.”

Concern for the child is basic; it is as though some aggressively push aside any indication of expectations beyond fundamental health and happiness. “I don’t worry about smart or not smart, or athletic or not athletic. I just want him to be happy and a nice person.” For these new mothers, preoccupations about their babies’ physical appearance or innate ability seem superficial and disconnected. “I didn’t care what she looked like. We just wanted ten fingers and ten toes. We were concerned about miscarrying and, so to me, I think she is perfect just the way she is.” When there is an

acute awareness of life's fragile nature, any thought that deviates from this focus pales in comparison.

In their expectations for their newborn, these women sense an opportunity to compensate for what they experienced as inadequate in their life. This is not explicitly stated, but the affect conveys such a sentiment.

Wanting to give her security and security in being whatever she is going to be—all of those great things. To have at least some foundation, not that my parents are there to catch me, but they stand behind me, believing in me. I really hope giving her that background gives her that forward momentum to take confidence in her own decisions.

A few hope to raise their children to be unrestricted by male and female stereotypes. “If it's a boy I want him to be more sensitive and if it's a girl I want her to be more enabled.” In the end, there is a consensus among the majority that they want their child to be self-assured and confident.

Realities

As challenges become more prominent, expectations for their newborns are soon measured against the realities many new mothers face. These realities are frequently recognized when they find their newborns to behave in an unpredictable manner, leaving many struggling to find their way. A dynamic in their relationship emerges when their emotions become more complicated in the face of this reality. Many realize they and the newborn are interdependent. “You realize how much of you is tied up in their behavior, which is so silly because you influence it to a degree, but to another degree, you don't.” Some explain that they depend upon their child's responses as a measure for their feelings of success and failure. “It makes me feel more stupid, the further I go.” As their

fantasies of motherhood and its reality interface, a few begin to doubt the decision to have a child, and parenting style that was originally intended.

It wasn't fun. It wasn't—and I remember thinking, “I feel so bad; this isn't fun. Maybe I should go back to work. Maybe I'm not cut out for this. Maybe I'm really not a good mother. Maybe everyone was wrong about me.

These feelings are most powerful for many when they feel ineffective with their babies. “Right now she is in the process of having these screaming fits, and I'm really having a hard time with it. This is clearly not what I had envisioned.” As a new mother and her baby adjust to one another these feelings become tempered. “It just took some time to get used to what it was like to be home. I had to establish my own schedule and my own rhythm with being at home.” As many of these new mothers voice these not-so-pleasant realities of motherhood, they feel guilty, but they are compelled by an even greater need to express themselves.

A few new mothers become aware of the contrast between their currently lived experience with their newborns and the environment in which they were raised. As much as one new mother hesitates to disclose her envy of what she provides her child, she can also take pride in her accomplishments.

There are times I feel just the slightest bit like, “Wow, we're giving you everything. We're trying to give you everything,” and I don't really want to say that to her, but that's maybe what's going through my head.

She realizes that she and her daughter will have different backgrounds. However, this does not cause her to anticipate an acrimonious relationship in the future. Instead, she places herself in her child's position and wonders if her life would be different with the environment she now provides for her child. “There is a little piece of me that was like,

‘Would I have been different or something if maybe this had been my entrance into the world?’”

There is no doubt that newborns prompt a substantive emotional and physical reaction for these new mothers. The realities with a newborn evoke numerous emotions that range from joy to feeling ill-at-ease. Joy causes this new mother to savor every moment with her newborn and at the same time longing for time already past. “I noticed the other day he actually has long eyelashes. Before, they were little, so I love every single minute with him, and I don’t want him to grow up too quickly and I want to cherish it.”

Many reveal feeling uneasy with all that is required as a mother and they are periodically restless. While they acknowledge that their duty remains with their children, the majority fantasizes about time alone, separate from the infant.

I don’t wish him to get older, but I do look forward to when he’ll be sleeping longer. I feel selfish, but that will allow me to sleep longer and just feel awake and have an opportunity to get out of the house. I guess I feel a little housebound.

Caring for a newborn is an enormous adjustment, particularly with the amount of time devoted to attending to a child’s needs. Because most newborns stay close to home in their early weeks of life, these new mothers did as well, causing many to feel confined and isolated. They reported a sense of urgency about getting out of the house. What was formerly defined as a mundane activity may now be considered exciting. “I love the grocery store now. I love it. I can’t get enough.” Time alone, separate from the activities directly involving the baby, is a diversion and seen as attractive. “I’d rather do the dishes.” Some are concerned about their need for separation from their infants. “I kind of wish that I could completely enjoy it instead of feeling a little trapped at the same

time.” It seems difficult to fathom the coexistence of these contradictory feelings, feelings of both wanting to be close with the infant, but also wanting to be separate...

Others are less guilt-ridden and find separation to be mutually beneficial.

I’ve heard a mom say that the first time she put her baby from the bassinet into the baby’s crib, she cried because it was the first point of separation. I haven’t felt that. I’m like, “Well, this is good.”

A few state they are ready for or can imagine a time when both the need for closeness and the need for separation exist compatibly.

Incorporating Baby

These new mothers’ lifestyles undergo a dramatic change. Many discussed a physical difference--their bodies now have an alternate purpose. It is no longer subjugated by their agendas. Instead, for one pregnant woman, her body felt divided between her personal desires and the obligation to her baby.

You really feel like your body is meant for a different purpose altogether. It’s got nothing to do with you anymore. You feel like a vessel. My body’s purpose right now has got nothing to do with me whatsoever.

She viewed her body as a vehicle for giving birth, which echoes many new mothers’ feeling of being physically divided. There is a body for the baby and then one for the mother. As the third trimester progresses and as their due date nears, most are fatigued and uncomfortable. Tired of the baby inhabiting and controlling her body, all come to want to be free of the physical burden. “Can I have my body back, please, now?” A few are exasperated, “My whole body was under attack.” Quickly after their babies’ births they feel under-prepared for what follows, particularly on a physical level. Nursing is intense. For some of the new mothers, it did not come easily, and most did not account

for the amount of time involved with breastfeeding. “It’s just so all-encompassing right now that I can’t really get any distance from it.”

Their interdependence causes some to contemplate their physical relationships, the purpose of the contact, and their comfort level with the closeness. “We go through life without a lot of physical contact. I did, certainly, for many years, despite having been romantic.” Where some women embrace a physical relationship and seek more with their infants, others remark feeling saturated and want separation. “I’m really looking forward to having my own body back.” There is a continuum for how much physical contact these new mothers can tolerate and find pleasurable.

The baby directs these new mother’s lifestyles in a way they have never before experienced in their adult lives. “I’ve added a new part to my life that wasn’t there. I compartmentalize a lot of things and it forces me to be somebody I’ve never been before.” Most were accustomed to fulfilling their needs around education, career and friends. For some, however, their lives did not produce an expectable joy from such pursuits. “I think just having a baby brings so much more to your life and joy in the things that used to bring joy to you when you were younger.”

There is an overriding desire to ease certain parameters that directed many of their lives prior to children.

Before, it was so intense. You know, you would have to have a conversation on a particular topic with the intention of coming to some kind of cool conclusion. Now, with my son screaming in the background, it is much more relaxed.

For this mother, her baby eases personal pressures to excel in an arena once thought to be the premier source for stimulation. For a few, their babies now present them with an acceptable excuse to temper these tensions by granting the mother permission to refrain

from participating. “I see her as an excuse to get out of a lot of things.” No one can argue with a new mother’s priority, and some use this to their advantage. “I’m taking her as my excuse because I have to do things for her that are right for her, so I can say no to you.” Their cause is righteous, and ultimately newborns can give an opportunity for one to become self-directed.

The course is set for some new mothers who welcome the fact that the newborn’s agenda will take precedence. From this, a lifestyle emerges where the baby’s needs define the mother’s experience. “All of a sudden there is somebody in the world that I care about more than myself, and I would do anything for him.” As many become increasingly baby-centered they are aware that this means setting aside some of their own priorities. “I don’t even think about myself at all. I could care less.” They are cavalier and self-sacrificing in their pursuit to have a child-centered agenda reign supreme.

It is definitely not very important to me anymore whether all the dishes are done, or how often I get the vacuuming done or something, when the alternative is spending time with her and that’s so much more gratifying.

There is a sudden shift in focus, from self to other that is both a relief and comfort to many new mothers. “My criteria for what is fantastic have, I guess, lowered themselves, but I don’t feel like it’s really lowered. I just have other things that I find to be fantastic.” At times this immersion into the baby’s needs is eventually disrupted by the inevitable intrusion of personal needs, basic as they are. “Who would have thought that I could think to myself, my gosh, I have got to take a shower today.” “I’m all about getting the kids up, dressed, and fed. And then it occurs to me, what in the hell am I wearing?” Life, as it was before the baby’s birth, is not as easily discarded as some fantasized.

There is an effort to maintain some semblance of what had been fundamental necessities to their lives prior to children. The majority of new mothers are reluctant to give up everything for the sake of their babies. They believe there are aspects of their lives prior to children that can now coexist with their new shift in emphasis on the baby.

Because we were married for so long before we had her, we were so used to being a couple and doing all these things together, and having this life that I don't think we want to stop. We don't want to stop entertaining or stop traveling. I think we now just want to expand it to include her in all those activities.

All concede they do not want their babies to take up every minute in their day. "We don't want our lives to stop because we have a baby." The reality that life includes more than just baby eventually presents itself. "Of course our lives revolve around this child now, but you can't not do the dishes."

However, establishing a lifestyle where something familiar is maintained with something unfamiliar, such as a baby, is accomplished by trial and error.

I think it's kind of been a learning process for me because I always assume that I can do everything, and do everything well. And up until I had her, it was only me, so I was able to do that, but now, obviously, having a child makes things unpredictable.

In this early period, most wrestle with their ideas of how to establish a lifestyle that reflects personal interests and needs but which is also compatible with their new priority of being a mother.

Baby's Meaning

As these new mothers work toward a balance between themselves and their babies, an attached meaning to the baby's life emerges. Their backgrounds vary greatly, with personal experiences ranging from divorce, early loss of a parent, familial discord,

adoption, etc. These early experiences become relevant and when a new mother reflects about her baby's purpose, they are communicated. "I'm having the family I never had, which is very emotional for me." A new mother, who herself was adopted, expresses enjoyment in her biological-relatedness to her baby. "I love that there is a person connected to me on a very physical level." Another new mother remarks about the intimacy felt with her newly established family, which was unfamiliar from her youth. "I can have some of the feelings of closeness that I didn't have in my own family."

A few new mothers have memories of neglect as children; they were anxious to work through their subsequent emotions by establishing a family of their own. "I feel really grateful because I—sometimes I'm just glad she's mine." All these new mothers reveal their private longings for what they hope to achieve emotionally through their children. This is their opportunity to correct or emphasize what was considered lacking in their experience as a child with their child.

In the middle of these new mothers' projected meaning of their newborns, there are the babies themselves. As these women find themselves as mothers, most of them come to learn that their babies are capable of assisting them along the way. "I think I was just being a mother to him and I was learning how to do everything. I wasn't as open to people telling me what to do."

As they work toward establishing themselves in the mothering role, some new mothers find their babies to be allies.

I just almost cried because I realized that I didn't really know what I was doing as a new mom, but he was such a good baby. I noticed he was waiting for me. I realized he's got a little bit of insight here, too.

Her baby is a collaborative partner, one that will help reinforce her confidence. “I do worry about her, as any parent would, but I feel like she just has this presence that reassures me that I don’t have to worry about her.” Their mutual interest in survival binds these new mothers and their babies closer. As their respective babies’ abilities and personalities become increasingly apparent, the person within is revealed. As their baby’s personhood becomes more exposed, many new mothers describe feeling more exposed as well. “Your child gets to see things about you.” .

In an effort to establish greater security in their relationship, some purposefully prevent other influences from imposing upon their relationship. A few remark that this was done in an effort to develop a sense of their own intuition.

I’m not reading a ton of books and I’m not trying to take other people’s advice. I feel pretty comfortable with the amount of time that I have with her to see what her needs are. So, I’m not feeling as if my questions aren’t being answered. I feel like she communicates with me.

Rather than being mistrusting and overwhelmed by their mutual reliance, many believe that their relationship will be a reliable guide.

Baby as Ambassador

There is another dynamic that arises from these new mothers’ relationships with their babies, which, instead of encouraging them to be more exclusive, causes them to reach beyond well-established social boundaries. This challenges many to broaden their ideas of who is an acceptable friend and, considering their present circumstances, they are willing to compromise. “I used to be very exclusive about who I associated with. And now I’m definitely a lot more relaxed on that. And more accepting, and hopefully people are more accepting of me, too.”

Isolation is both a feeling and an actuality many new mothers report experiencing. Most find that this isolation motivates them to reach out to other people. “I’m driven, I’m very motivated to go out and meet other moms. If I can have one interaction with a parent or another mom or support group then that sustains me for a day.”

Complete isolation with the newborn leaves many feeling deprived of proper sustenance for support, intellectual stimulation, friendship, etc. They have an intuition that building a network with other mothers is crucial to their survival. Once, various preconceived notions might have caused these new mothers to disregard a potential acquaintance, but now she considers it worthwhile to extend herself for the same potential acquaintance. “So making cookies and bringing them over to somebody else use to seem so vapid. I just couldn’t understand it and now I just totally get it. It’s a gesture of networking.”

Ultimately, most make a great effort to establish these connections and they find themselves personally benefited by such efforts.

I think once you have a child, it makes you—it enriches your life and it makes you a more complete person. You have all these new experiences now that you can connect to all these other women that you’ve never been able to connect with before.

An expanded network with other mothers with whom they can share common experiences is a positive addition to most of their lives. There is a warmth shared between mothers which emanates from a mutual interest in being available to one another. “That’s the beautiful thing, when someone reaches out to you and says, hey come on over for coffee, it’s such a nice feeling.” Their need for people in similar circumstances overrides any previous constraints that had once been imposed on friendships.

Much to their surprise, some women tend to have more in common with others than they had originally thought. “It turns out that some women, like me, are into radical ideas about motherhood.” All the new mothers concluded that they are interested in meeting new people and that they find it to be effortless, especially if baby is in tow. “He’s an ambassador, yes, and I try not to interfere with the interactions between somebody and my baby.” Her baby draws people into their exclusive circle, and she appreciates the gains derived both from the personal stimulation and the satisfaction derived from seeing others enamored with her baby.

Career

I think it means putting someone else, your child, before yourself and just kind of—I think for me, maybe you become less selfish because I’m thinking about what I want to do with my time and I’m thinking about how my time affects my child, and the choices I make, how those affect him.

Many new mothers are inspired by their baby’s birth to demand greater scrutiny of how their time is allocated. They express ideals about their time being more content-driven both when they are with their baby and when the two are apart. Time is defined according to a heightened awareness of time’s quality, which sets into motion a desire to re-evaluate personal aspirations. This is a subject that preoccupies all the new mothers, particularly in light of becoming their newborn’s primary caretaker. All are acutely aware of time, particularly how time is spent. “Okay, I have two hours. Now what can I do to use this time the best and enjoy it for my sake and for her sake?”

Career choices and friendships are reviewed with an attention to the quality of time and, consequently, changes are made. Changes are evaluated according to the kind of life they hope to establish for their baby and the type of mother they would like to be.

Some changes are subtle, while others are more dramatic. Many question their experiences and wonder about the continued place of similar experiences in their lives. “I feel like I don’t want to take any bullshit and I’m going to take myself more seriously and take my baby more seriously and not waste time on stuff that I don’t like.”

The baby presents an opportunity for many to say no or to establish boundaries with activities or people long felt to be a nuisance, an obligation, or counterproductive. For those experiences where their purpose is obliquely understood, and now resented for potentially taking time away from their baby, they are quickly given a lower status. Their baby’s birth enables many to decide how to best spend their time. For many, their baby is a legitimate foundation these decisions.

Personal interests and usual obligations are reprioritized once the baby arrives. “It’s easier to say what the priorities are because it’s her welfare that I would be looking out for.” The child is given primacy, and almost everything else in their lives is organized around this new hierarchy. Consequently, they are able to articulate their priorities. This new perspective facilitates a thought process, whereby there is much consideration given to how they hope to live their lives. Many are particularly concerned about those experiences that necessitate absences from their baby, whether it is a physical or an emotional absence. These women are reconsidering experiences and people in their lives based upon their purpose and worth.

The baby not only incites a fervor for eliminating or limiting certain situations, the baby also serves as a catalyst for many to think seriously about what they do with their time.

Bringing a baby into the mix makes things become more challenging, but in a way, that’s good for me because it forces me to be more structured; it forces me to

be more organized, which I needed to be anyway, but now I have to be because of my baby. I can't pretend or avoid anymore because she is real and she is here.

Many new mothers begin to think about their time and they want this time to be reflective of their connections with their newborns. They want time spent away from their baby or time spent with certain individuals to offer them acceptance for and support of their new role. "I feel like if it was a pie, all I've done is just made a sliver out of work and made my piece of pie for home a little bit bigger. "

For most of the new mothers, this heightened awareness of time and its relevance to her baby causes her to immediately call into question her career. Numerous questions percolate: whether or not to continue working, and then, how that decision will impact her and her baby. If she chooses to continue working, the questions then become: how will she balance a career with motherhood, and is the work personally satisfying. A few mothers must return to work, while the remaining majority has the freedom to think about how to incorporate their careers with their new role. As they rethink their careers, the following properties are considered: Personal Gains, Unwavering Commitment to Her Baby, and Dissatisfaction Inspires Alternatives.

- Personal Gains is the new mother's evaluation of her career based on its complimentary benefits to her personally.
- Unwavering Commitment to Her Baby is how the new mother's career pursuits are impacted by the priority she gives to her newborn.
- Dissatisfaction Inspires Alternatives reveals how the new mother comes to make a decision about her career.

Personal Gains

Those new mothers who must return to work and others who choose to continue working want to be sure that the hours they work is time spent being productive and fulfilled. Some mothers decide during this early period that their careers do not offer a personally meaningful experience, and they seek to find ways to remedy this situation. All the mothers are acutely aware of time and being confined to a certain number of hours each day. How each mother allots her time between family and external concerns is unique to the individual's responsibilities and needs. So, in the end, she is concerned about how she organizes her time and what she intends to get accomplished with it. These new mothers articulated an understanding of their importance in their child's life and want their life to respect and reflect this broadened role and responsibility.

Up until the birth of their children, all the new mothers who participated in this study were gainfully employed or in an advanced academic program. Because all the women are first-time mothers, they share the common experience of rethinking their career aspirations. As some new mothers contemplate whether to continue on, modify, or take a hiatus from their respective pursuits, they discuss "personal gains" that result from their careers. Many of the careers discussed involve a considerable personal investment, and so the career has become a vehicle for self-expression and esteem.

I feel I'm a better person because of my work. I have a lot of time invested in what I've built professionally. I think that will actually make me a better mother than if I kind of lost that grounding, being home all the time. So for me, I think I need my career in order to be a good mother.

This new mother cites her work as a needed ingredient necessary for motherhood.

Other new mothers add that their career offers an environment where their talents are easily identified and validated. "I just come into work, and sometimes it's like you're

on a stage. You don't let those things, those flaws show as much. I don't get uptight about things, but I definitely do in my personal life." The work place is an environment where they can thrive, an experience which is dissimilar from their personal lives. So to walk away from an experience that sustains esteem would threaten one source of how the mother is nurtured.

For a few new mothers, quitting work to stay at home with her newborn feels unfathomable, because it necessitates letting go of an experience which she has come to rely upon for sustenance. "I can't stay at home with my kid forever. I have all the respect in the world for stay-at-home moms, because I could not stay at home. I don't think I could, not right now."

A few new mothers who gave up their careers to stay at home find they fantasize about their work and, in part, resent having to quit. "I start to think about my job that I use to have and what would I be doing, and wondering how I ended up like this, stuck in a house."

Many of the new mothers experience their careers as a part of their lives that fulfills a need to have a life that feels purposeful and meaningful. A few had no other choice but to return, but they still wanted their work to provide personal satisfaction. "I try to focus on the positives, too, in terms of maybe that it might make me a better-rounded person." They consider their work an important component for their own self-knowledge and a means for self-expression. "I love what I do. It's not just a job to me."

Some have a deep sense of commitment coupled with a responsibility to those with whom they work. "There are a lot of kids that grow attached to me, and it's hard. It's not like shutting down your computer, and so it is harder to let go than I thought it

might be.” Even when all the new mothers consider their careers and the personal gains achieved, no matter what her circumstance is, she is deeply conflicted about how to incorporate her added responsibility brought on by motherhood.

Unwavering Commitment to Her Baby

New mothers who return to work now see that their needs have grown, and in order to maintain a homeostasis with regard to their self-esteem, it is crucial that their job does not compromise a now-“unwavering commitment to her baby.” “I could quit tomorrow or I could be fired tomorrow, but I’m going to still have my responsibilities I have at home.”

Prior to motherhood, some new mothers were eager to extend a workday, take a spontaneous business trip, or sign up for an extra project, but now she must find a compatible balance between her career interests and the more pressing desire to have time with her baby. This is a different perspective and approach, which for some is difficult. “I’ve never had to walk away from something for something else.”

The majority of new mothers are compelled to shift individualistic aspirations to include and be superseded by their new need to care for their baby. For some, this is a significant effort. “I think there were different times in my life that I always foresaw at some point, I will settle down, be normal and have a family. And then during my twenties my career was everything and I was definitely a workaholic.” All the new mothers are challenged to recalibrate personal expectations. “I know I can’t do what I did before, but I know that whatever I do choose to do when I’m there, I have to do a good job; otherwise, I think it would be too stressful.” Again there is an emphasis on

substance and quality, and if their career has lacked these qualities, many are reluctant to proceed.

Dissatisfaction Inspires Alternatives

To scale back or reallocate energy at work frightens a few new mothers, mostly because it is an unfamiliar behavior. “I’ve always been able to devote myself solely to my work and now I have to share, and I’m scared of becoming a sub-par employee because I have these other things in my life now.” The dilemma becomes a question about how to sustain familiar ways of knowing herself amidst enormous life change. However, as the tug toward her baby builds, it provides support which helps her deal with these challenges. “I don’t want him to think I never saw my Mommy because she was at work.” Many new mothers remain dissatisfied with their current employment, particularly when it is unable to harmonize with motherhood.

As a result, many new mothers either challenge their current situations or find alternate avenues to express their talents. Many find ways to carve out an environment at work that responds to her need for stable hours, and job responsibilities compatible to mothering. For those new mothers who succeed in making their workplace conducive to motherhood, they worry this will give the appearance that all is under control both at work and at home. Because perfection is something they do not have time for in either place, they hope there is still room for imperfections to be worked through.

A few found their workplaces to be unreceptive, and their once-relied-on contributions marginalized. These new mothers hear such things from employers as, “Well, you’re not really thinking. It would be like, business is up here and your little

family is down here. I know you've got your family things now, so you're really not as serious as you use to be." Some stated that they had to prove their worth and make a case for how they fit into the workplace after they returned from maternity leave. This attitude from coworkers surprised them, and while some were able to find resolutions, others were not.

It is at this point that many new mothers decide to quit their work, as it no longer benefits them personally. In the interest of making the most of one's time, she makes decisions that reflect her responsibility to her newborn and a personal need to sustain her self-esteem. This combination manifests differently for those who do not return to their previous employer. Some find their answer in becoming a stay-at-home mother, and others become entrepreneurs. No matter what the circumstance: whether they continue on in their present career, leave it, reconfigure it, or create something new, these women realize that their personal needs are compromised because of the added responsibility to care for their newborns. Therefore, in order to achieve a satisfactory balance between home life and work outside the home, she has to clarify what will work and how it will work. There is a major reorganization of personal and professional priorities.

Influences

I didn't really know, I guess, what kind of mother I'd be. I had watched other parents that I thought did well with their children, and noticed probably what I liked about the things they did, and hoped that we could emulate some of those things, but I didn't really, I guess, have a picture in my head of how I would be as a mom.

These new mothers have woven together influential people and experiences, both past and present, in an effort to achieve personal coherence in their new roles. How to be a “good” mother consumes her thoughts and remains a daily challenge.

As already indicated, the women in this study have accomplished a great deal in their lives prior to beginning a family. The majority of the women point out that prior to marriage and parenthood they had successful independent lives, which helped them to amass multifaceted impressions that now inform their identities. Unlike some of their own mothers they did not move directly from their parent’s home to the home shared with their husbands. Instead, many of these new mothers took many steps in between their life with their parents and their life with their husband prior to parenthood.

As they try to establish some sense of security in their new role as mothers, all review what impressions and information they find themselves drawing on. Motherhood that causes them to realize that they have been collecting data all along about mothering, but it is not until they become mothers that they put all their findings together in an effort to seek guidance.

Although each new mother discussed various experiences, her relationship with her parents and more specifically with her mother remained most influential. The influences are grouped as: Notable Impressions, Parents, and Mother’s Mother.

- Notable impressions are experiences a new mother recounts as having a lasting impression on how she conceptualizes herself and the world around her.
- Parents are analyzed and modified as well as how they parented these new mothers.

- Mother's Mother is the new mother's reflections about her mother as an individual and their relationship.

Notable Impressions

Experiences accumulated over numerous years are now recalled in various ways, but all agree that they are in some fashion lending support as these new mothers seek to understand themselves as mothers.

I got a scholarship in my senior year of high school that today if you asked me is one of the things I'm most proud of. It was a scholarship given to the person who was kind and non-prejudiced. It really meant a lot to me that I got it for being who I am.

This event, as retold by a new mother, provides reassurance at a time when much in life becomes disrupted after a baby is introduced. She reveals this memory only after reporting, "Going from no kids to one child is such a change in your life that you really do need to talk about it."

As these new mothers collect their thoughts about the broader topic of identity and motherhood there are poignant moments recalled and identified that now assists them with mothering. Many seek reassurance from their past that their decision to become a mother was appropriate and reflective of a natural inclination. "I always thought about having kids and in the eighth grade, I can still remember we did a "Where do you see yourself down the road," kind of thing. Our classmates had some input. And when they got to me, they just said "Well, I just see her as a mom." There is an apparent desire among these new mothers to process some of the dynamics related to motherhood, and frustration when they are not able to freely reveal them. "I want to reach this level of

candor about what we feel guilty about, or weak about, or frustrated about, rather than, ‘I’m still only getting three hours of sleep.’”

What each mother draws upon during the last trimester of pregnancy and in these early moments after giving birth to her child speaks a great deal about who she is thus far and what kind of mother she wishes to be. There is an effort to combine motherhood with what she knows of herself prior to her child’s birth; for most, this tends to stir internal conflict. This conflict is particularly relevant when they are unsure their individual needs will be satisfied.

It seems that among women, sometimes intellectual curiosity gets interpreted as an edge or hardness, and I find that very frustrating. It’s as if, if I want to press the issue or I want to look at it a little deeper, I’m not just being a soft, nice person. That whole perception of soft equaling being a good mother, or self-sacrificing being a good mother, or compliant or acquiescing or just affable or agreeable. So many of those traits seem to equate with, “You’re probably a better mom for that,” or “You’re probably more suited for motherhood if you’re those things.” I don’t think that’s true.

Her affect sounds unsure, particularly when she considers the possibility of being misunderstood or misrepresented. There is a battle going on for many of these new mothers. While she is transitioning into motherhood, she is concerned about integrating her new role with her accumulated knowledge and observations.

For some new mothers, their internal process unfolds within a context of judging what they don’t want for themselves through their observations of others. “Some mothers become antisocial and they also become people that all they can talk about is their children. They cut themselves off from the rest of the world.” These new mothers are searching for answers and making decisions on how to parent based on their assessment of others.

All my siblings have children. So it's easy to watch other couples and be like, "Oh, I don't ever want to do that," or "I really like how they're doing that." And probably truthfully from our families it's more like, "Well, we don't want to do that," and we are able to recognize in our friends, "Oh, that's nice how they do that."

Some build confidence and reassurance through their evaluations of others in similar circumstances.

Parents

All the new mothers stated that their relationship with their parents was the most influential in their lives, and that the influence was both good and bad. Motherhood can stimulate nostalgic reverie for the way a woman was raised, it can solidify feelings about separating herself from her parents, and/or it can help her find a resolution through blending: it can help her to appreciate what was positive, and modify what she experienced in their relationship that was not helpful to her. For the new mothers, there seems to be enough distance between their respective childhoods and their adult lives so that they can now analyze their parents within a context. This, along with the challenges that come with incorporating a child into her life, creates a need for deeper understanding.

The range of insights is immense. When fondness deepens, a new mother's parents are credited for her present ability in mothering. "I never, ever had a doubt that my mother was in my corner or that my dad was in my corner. That was probably the ingredient that makes me feel equipped to do a good job." She also displays a capacity to empathically place her parents within a context. "I just think I have so much respect for

the fact that they're just such good, decent people, and I couldn't imagine growing up without parents in the way that they did."

While this new mother is hit with challenges associated with parenting, she is further awed by her own parent's perseverance from difficult childhoods and contrasts that with what they managed to do for her, in spite of early hardship. Some of the new mothers recognize the impact of their parent's histories and they reference that history's continued influence on their own personalities. "They grew up so poor, so I think that I always thought at a young age that I needed to be an independent person or I needed to be self-sufficient." Understanding their parent's circumstances helps these new mothers to further develop their self-knowledge.

These new mothers who extol their parent's virtues, there are others who articulate their reasons for departing from their parent's methods. "As a young child, I was brought into their adult relationship in a way that was not healthy." As these new mother's think about themselves as parents and the kind of childhood they hope to cultivate for their children, they reference their own childhoods.

I wanted to handle my marriage and my relationships differently than my mom and dad did. So although they stayed together, I knew I didn't want to live my mom's life, and it's easy to repeat behavior. Like ending up with a guy who had a drinking problem.

For many, unresolved issues which stemmed from their parent's life left a residue which they had to deal with in their adult life. "I would say that my parent's divorce left a huge impact and made me feel like I was responsible for things that I probably wasn't which for me bred a lot of issues with trust." For another, her mother's depreciated self-confidence caused her to waver with her own confidence, "I think my mom didn't have a

lot of self-confidence and I see how that affects me. If there is one thing that I could teach my child, it would be that they're really loved."

Many new mothers take their parents to task and question their fundamental capacity to parent. "They didn't have a good notion, I think, of what it was to be a parent. It was a stereotypic notion, one of imposing their will upon their children." For a few new mothers, exerting an effort to analyze and understand her parents is no longer considered an option. In this instance, her newborn reconfirms what she has always known about her parents, which is immense disappointment. "The things that I need, I must get from other sources, because my parents are not going to change." Her newborn reinforces her profound disillusionment with her parents, as she resigns herself to the fact that she must look elsewhere for proper sustenance. Turning away from her parents is seen as a necessary measure to ensure adequate care for her new family.

I don't concern myself with trying to help him or help my mom make that whole situation better. It's kind of like, "Okay, I've got my family now and I love you, but you can either choose to abide by our rules or not be part of our family."

New mothers in this study were either embracing their parents more fully, or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, establishing a firm separation between themselves and their parents. However, the majority of new mothers find themselves somewhere between the two spectrums: incorporating what feels authentic and disregarding what no longer reflects their thoughts and emotions.

Pregnancy and becoming a mother generates a great deal of thought about ideals about behavior and how to live a satisfactory life. For those new mothers who sift through their relationships with their parents do so by appreciating the good and

articulating a plan to move beyond the bad. Her ultimate motivation is to create a better life for her child by improving on her parents' limitations.

Some new mothers have clear ideas of what they would like to do differently from their parents, while others gradually come to make distinctions between herself and her parents. Many struggled to find answers, and in this early period after the baby's birth much remains unresolved.

My mom was like, "You can't have your cake and eat it too." And I'm like, "Well, what's the cake and what's eating it too?" I hadn't thought about the analogy. And my mom said, "Staying at home is the cake. You have enough money where you can stay home. But if you want to have enough money to stay home, he has to work really hard." And I responded, "Okay. Well, I don't necessarily agree with that and that may be a little old-fashioned."

The new mother begins to differentiate herself from her parents' reasoning by disagreeing, but how to proceed may remain unclear. There is a bridge initially created by many with thoughts that indicate an approach, not a firm decision. "I will try to be a little more forthright about what I actually want for my child. Bringing these thoughts out into the conscious conversation rather than, you know, keeping it sort of underneath."

A few new mothers are slightly apologetic for their differences with her parents.

I wish my mother and father, for example, did more things together and had a little bit more of their own life, too. That everything didn't revolve around their kids. And I don't think I want to be like that, not in a cruel sort of non-compassionate way, that I want to have my own life. That's not how I mean it.

She relates that her motivation is to learn from her parents' mistakes, so her child's life will profit as a result. "It will make it easier for him to make a choice. I want him to be confident, more confident than I am." By acknowledging her parents' difficulties she is further challenged with this awareness. "I also had to learn how to go deep into things, because she never did. My mother never really dug in and committed enough." As many

analyze their parents' impact on them, they proceed with the hope that they can be different in ways that their parents were unable to be. Most desire to be more adequate than their parents had been.

Very often these new mothers come to support their parents where they previously had not. Once her baby arrives and she is full with intense love and hope, she can understand some of her parent's justification for certain decisions.

I don't want to rescue my daughter. She is going to need to have a few bumps in the road, but I can understand why you would want to rescue your children. If they're struggling here or there, you're going to want to try and help them out, even if they're 30 or 40 years old. So I think I understand a little bit more how my parents defend some of my brother's choices in life, even though I have typically been like, "What are you doing?"

Upon reflection many are capable of empathizing with some of their parents' decisions, even though they believe that, given the opportunity, they would handle similar circumstances differently.

I felt bypassed, because I was definitely not a favorite. And just when you are growing up, you have a hard time with it. I didn't understand it at the time, but my sister needed my mom more than me. Knowing my sister and her difficulties I would do the same thing now, as a mother.

Her personal pain from childhood is somewhat eased by the comfort in knowing that, if in similar circumstances, she too would make the same decision as her mother.

A few new mothers had experienced the early loss of a parent, and for all of them it happened to be their closer parent. One new mother reflected on the difficulty she had continuing on with life after her father died when she was an adolescent. "It was me Dad, and basketball. That was how it worked. And when he died it took me a while to figure out that I could still play."

These new mothers all report having a heightened awareness about their challenges stemming from this early loss; they discuss how their deceased parent is kept alive. They have a profound sense of their deceased parent's presence, and they have maintained an ongoing dialogue. "I know in my head she can see I am happy and very much at peace with my pregnancy." This proves to fortify her sense of security and belief in her capacities.

During labor, one new mother reported, "I knew he was there when I had my son and that helped me. I just knew that it would be okay, that he wasn't going to let something tragic happen." As she embarks on a new course in life, she not only seeks reassurance; she also seeks validation. Generating life fills her with a sense of accomplishment, and she believes that it is acknowledged by her deceased parent.

You just look up to the sky and say, "Hey, here he is," or whatever, so I talk to her, pray to her, all that stuff that I always have done, but just maybe with a new sense of pride. Just saying, "Hey we've done this great thing and it's all because of you."

All the new mothers in this study revealed a desire to have parents with whom they can feel nurtured and supported by. As indicated above, these new mothers lost the parent with whom they had the closer relationship. For all of them, there is a concerted effort to teach their remaining parent how to be involved and how to assist them in their new role. They all reported positive results.

For one new mother, the dialogue began with pressing her father for memories about her mother's pregnancy and the early years of parenting. "If I ever think about something, or I need to talk about something, I talk to Dad and say, "Well, what was her pregnancy like? What was the labor like?" Initiating this dialogue is not easy as they all reported having difficult relationships with the remaining parent. "Just having my father

die and feeling that my mom was kind of unavailable, I had a pretty lonely childhood.”

“After Mom passed away, we struggled a bit with our relationship, and so we didn’t get along very well.” However, their pregnancies and birth of their respective children created a new opportunity to reconnect, which they all took advantage of. “It sort of strengthened our relationship and that was nice.”

There is a period of transition before a level of comfort is established. Basic issues concerned the parent seeing them in physically intimate situation. “My mother has never seen me naked, I think, since I was five years old.” Other issues that needed to be traversed involved teaching the parent how to be helpful. “My father came to a baby shower and he looked at me and he said,

I didn’t bring you anything. I didn’t get you any gifts or any card or anything. And I responded, “Well, you’re here. That’s all I can ask. That’s fine.” He said, “That’s what your mom did. Your mom took care of all that stuff.

As some new mothers and their parents work through the initial feelings of awkwardness and unfamiliarity a synergy is established.

When he left, I promised him no tears, and he walked out the door and I heard him get on the elevator. I just kind of sank to the floor in front of the door and I cried. It’s so hard to see him go.

This new mother and her parent successfully renewed their relationship and, consequently, deepened their emotional bond.

Mother’s Mother

During the interviews, what came to the fore was these new mothers’ relationships with their mothers. They were preoccupied with their mothers and looked to them for guidance, and, at times, made comparisons between themselves and their

mother. A new mother contemplates her mother from a dual perspective. While she needs her mother's assistance in adjusting to motherhood, she also faces having to deal with historic difficulties in their relationship. A few new mothers are in greater awe of their mothers after having their babies. Consequently, the maternal grandmother is honored as a positive role model.

My mother is my working model and I'm sure it will be interesting to you. I was adopted when I was a few days old and so my model of a mother is just a nurturer. It's really not a biological issue to me at all. It's just more someone who is a nurturer, a caregiver, a role model, and that's what I had in my mom, in both of my parents. And so that's what I would want to be for my children, and she's my role model.

A similar sentiment is echoed by others who also cite that not only are they maternal role models, but also role models outside of childrearing as well. "My mom was an amazing mom. She's just a total giver, just a wonderful example for a mom. Actually, at the age of 60 she decided to get her first career." Even after the active years of raising children, a few look to their mothers' current life circumstances as a way of foreshadowing their own.

However, before looking too far into the future most just simply want their mother's comfort and reassurance.

When my mom came into the delivery room, I just let her presence crash right into me and started crying. I was just like, "This is so hard." She just hugged me and said, "You can do it." At the time I just felt like I needed my mom and I didn't realize it until I saw her.

Many new mothers reported that their relationships with their mothers had atrophied over the years; it is not until their child's birth that the maternal grandmothers become pivotal once again. For some new mothers, establishing a connection with their

mothers was problematic, but motherhood is a new opportunity for both to concentrate on something that they now have in common.

My mom had forgotten that she had a similar labor to mine with her firstborn. This was a big relief for me to know because I felt like there was something wrong with me, like I was somehow failing, that I could not get this baby out.

This new chapter in these women's lives creates a subject matter, motherhood, for her and her mother to share. The immense love evoked by their new baby causes a few to wonder about their own mothers and what she might have felt at this same time.

I was talking to my mom today and I said, "Is this how you felt about me?" She said yes. It's incredible and now I understand. Wow, my mom really loves me a lot because I know what it feels like, because I never really knew how it felt. It makes me feel even more loved because I didn't realize the intensity of it and now I do.

The love she feels for her baby serves to reconfirm her mother's love for her. This experienced emotion and insight unite her and her mother. As some are awakened to their similarities they often become closer to each another than they had been in recent years. For some, it is a pleasant experience. "My mom and I have gotten so much closer since the baby was born. My admiration and love for her has just quadrupled." While they still have the memory of the difficult relationship between her mother and herself, some new mothers contend that despite this fact the relationship feels reinvigorated. "Mom and I are kind of back into, after, you know, years of sort of being apart, we're back in our old relationship, but renewed in a way, too."

The baby, for some, becomes a peace offering or gift that neutralizes upsetting emotions between them and their mothers. Their newborns become the link that helps to soften old tensions and at the same time gives both mothers and daughters a renewed sense of purpose in each other's life. "I've given back to her, and she feels useful, too."

Another stated, "I can really give something back to her or my baby can; it's been very healing and renewing to my mother." She is satisfied with having the ability to bring something to their relationship that they both can rally around, but many admit that they are emotionally challenged by their mother's presence. "I am very grateful to have her here, for picking up things, but at the same time I can become fairly peevish."

Having her mother around more simultaneously reminds a new mother of the aspects of their relationship that have been historically problematic. The need for her mother's help and guidance with her newborn is complicated by her long-felt frustrations and disappointment. "Clearly, you could think that maybe criticizing my hair is not something you have to do." She is heartened by the positive emotions she feels toward her mother since her baby's arrival, and at the same time challenged by disturbing emotions that she also feels compelled to revisit.

I mean my mom is around more, and that's great, because she's helpful, but I was thrown back into the role of dependency for a while. This event has just opened up that whole Pandora's box of mother-daughter stuff.

She analyzed their relationship, particularly as it related to what she perceived to be her mother's issues, which then affected their relationship.

I think it was partly her personal issues, where she did not want to intrude as her mother had intruded on her. So, this is my guess, I actually haven't asked her, but her mother was very clear, you know, about what she wanted from her daughter and I think she wanted to correct that with her relationship with me and so she actually went the opposite way and actually didn't address anything.

The attempt to make sense of her relationship with her mother is of great interest to a new mother during this early period. She wants to know both how the relationship and what she observes in her mother has impacted her.

Seeing my mother be very dependent and probably unhappily married the second time around and staying the second time around for financial security. She was just scared to be a mom without a man and that was very formative. And so I always grew up saying, "I don't want to feel that dependence and I don't want that weakness." And I thought it weakness.

This process expands the capacity for acceptance. "She's a very different person now than she was back then. The way I view my mom now is a lot different from how I saw her as a child." Some new mothers can evaluate their mothers as a mother within a sympathetic context. "Lets face it, in America; we tend to put a lot of value on financial ability. She did all this stuff for everybody and every organization you can think of, and there is not financial gain there. And so I think, especially when she got into her fifties (She had me when she was forty, so when I was ten, she was fifty.) that is when she started to say, "You know, I did all this stuff." I don't know if she ever felt appreciated." There is a compassion expressed for her mother, however, it is not without acknowledging its personal burden.

For many, the information gleaned from their introspection assists them to articulate how they plan to be different. Some of this differentiation continues to be fueled by anger.

My mother never knew anything about me, and to this day, this whole pregnancy and birth of my child remains outside of her awareness and understanding. I have one of the worst relationships with my mom. I don't want that for me and my child.

Most of the new mothers were less strident in their remarks. "The things that I want to improve upon are things that maybe I wanted my mom to do more of, but I can't necessarily articulate what those are." She alluded to knowing that she and her mother could not fully agree on everything, but in spite of this many proceeded in making their own decisions. "I don't think she's really happy that I'm going back to work. I think she

wants me to, you know, stay home at least for five or six years until my child is in school.”

A few of the new mothers, in certain situations, felt there was no other alternative except to confront their mother. “When you say these things, you really hurt my feelings and you make me not want to talk to you.” There is a new dynamic developing between these new mothers and their own mothers. All the new mothers engaged in an analysis of their mothers, their relationship, and its effect.

This new mother was not unlike others in this study in that she found it necessary to seek surrogates when her own parents were found to be inadequate. “My aunt taught me how to deal with my emotions because I just didn’t.” Despite the level of adequacy or inadequacy among their parents, it is a frequent practice that many of these new mothers create an opportunity for others to influence them.

Husband

I think more about the relationship with my husband and does he love me? I feel the need for his love so much more now than I did before. And that’s hard because before we were sort of these independent creatures, and I think in a way, he liked me that way.

The category “Husband” is the observations, realizations and feelings many new mothers express about their partners since embarking upon their common experience as new parents. A new mother considers her husband more intensely now that she feels their roles and responsibilities have become more serious. Life is no longer solely about each other’s careers, relationship, and activities. Now their lives also include fostering their newborn’s life and ensuring their welfare.

In this category, these mothers' reviews of their husbands encompass these properties: Shift, Differences, Giving Room, and Unit.

- Shift describes the new mother's shift in how she feels toward her husband, in particular, her increasing dependence on him.
- Differences that were neither known nor bothersome until having a baby are now in sharper focus and are contemplated.
- Giving Room is the new mother's need for patience that parallels an awareness that her husband needs space and time to find himself as a father and reflects what she hopes will be bestowed upon her as a mother.
- Unit is how some new mothers and their husbands come together during a challenging period in their lives.

Shift

All the new mothers are preoccupied by an obvious shift in their relationships with their husbands. They have all shared a significant amount of time with their husbands prior to becoming parents. Prior to children, the emphasis in their relationship focused on their mutual interests and their lives independent from one another. A baby brings them together in a concerted effort to sustain and foster life in another human being. Nothing they do together will be as important as raising their child.

In this early period post-delivery, new mothers notice that they have numerous thoughts and observations about their husbands. Many are agitated. "He couldn't do anything right for just a short period, maybe like two, three weeks, and I really didn't like him very much. I was like, "I have not idea, but I'm really mad at you right now." There

is a disruption in how they know one another and in how they interact. “The old kind of dating, going-out-for-dinner relationship is over for now.” This shift was anticipated. “I can’t imagine that it could remain status quo.” Yet, it is still bothersome and leaves some new mothers disturbed. “I don’t know, he seems disengaged a little bit, I don’t know if it’s just me noticing it more, because I’ve had time to notice him more.”

Many new mothers find themselves grasping for answers, and end up realizing that they too feel different.

I try to be really interested in his day and say, “How was your day?,” like he does for me, but God, I’m so tired. I just want to be alone, because the baby’s been all over me all day. I’m over-stimulated.

There is a transition period where neither they nor their husband is sure of how to interact with one another. “It was hard in the beginning because he felt like there wasn’t anything for him to do. He felt like he wasn’t being helpful, because I am breastfeeding.”

Many express that they and their husbands feel uneasy and awkward with each other and at the same time, they unabashedly state their needs. Most rely upon their husbands in a manner that they never did before. One issue that is palpable for all of them is their heightened feelings of dependency on their husbands. “It’s just the realization I don’t think that I could do what I do, as well as I would have hoped without him and without that partnership.”

Some are physically sore; in all cases, they are fatigued. They also report feeling emotionally vulnerable. Being physically and emotionally weakened, many new mothers reflect about their need for their husbands and most are pleased to find them reliable.

“There is something very secure about leaning on him.”

Some new mothers use their ability to seek solace and support from her husband to help strengthen them when they feel weak, and reject any suggestion that this means they are weak. “When you share the word dependency, you think weakness, and I think it’s made our relationship stronger.” A few new mothers are more uncomfortable and, therefore, unsure of what to think because it is a new aspect of the relationship being discovered. “I feel dependent on my husband and my parents. I feel more dependent in general on people around me for sustenance, whereas before I could sustain myself.”

Many new mothers reveal how their need for their husbands has intensified, and they fear they may lose them either through death or disinterest.

I have some panicky, late-night thought, like, “What if something happened to my husband?” Or, even feeling like I don’t want to slide down a slippery slope as a mother by letting my weight go, letting my appearance go because that means he would lose interest and want to leave or something.

It is difficult to assess why some of the new mothers fear death at the same time they have given life. Possibly, the delicate appearance of her newborn causes her to conclude that life is fragile. Her newborn’s small stature, along with her own sense of being a neonate as a mother, makes her uncertain as to how she will proceed. In addition to fearing abandonment through death, she is also concerned that she is no longer equipped to keep him attracted to her. A few new mothers are not certain if their claims have validity, and they do not inquire about their husband’s attraction to her for the purpose of easing their worst fear. “I’m financially dependent on him right now. So this would never happen, but in my mind, my fearful mind, I could be turned out on the street with no resources and so I don’t go anywhere near that.”

Other new mothers are saddened by the thought of possibly losing their husband, but keep in mind the overriding goal of raising their child. “You really need to have all

your ducks in a row to make sure that the lifestyle that you want to pass onto your child is in place.” These new mothers make sure that, in the event of tragedy, life can go on without having to make too many changes. Her newborn not only raises issues about losing her husband, but also stimulates a desire to care for her husband.

All the new mothers expressed a need to nurture her husband. From making sure her husband is properly fed, “I want to make sure he has dinner,” to checking in with him about his emotions, “I can tell when he has something on his mind, and so I try to talk to him.”

In the wake of tremendous change, a new mother’s concern for her husband’s wellbeing deepens her fondness for him.

There’s tenderness towards him that I don’t want to ignore. I just want to be such a good wife. I mean, I always did, but now I feel it even more. Like I’ve realized, “God, you’re such a great guy.”

The care expressed between her and her husband becomes reciprocal. Many new mothers are satisfied to expose their vulnerability to their husbands, and they are gratified when they are able to demonstrate concern for him. Despite a growing interest in nurturing her husband, a new mother can be agitated by what she learns about her husband within this new context of parenthood.

Differences

Most of the new mothers talked about being at odds with their husbands at one point or another. Much of what the women felt disgruntled about remains unclear. A woman just knows she is angry with him and that he is in some way responsible. “I feel like I’m very hard on my husband and I never was before and he just can’t do anything

right.” She begins to wonder about their compatibility, and if their differences can be worked through. “I’ve done what my mother did in that regard, and married a man that was quite different from me.”

Some are aware of their differences with their husbands, but these issues did not present difficulty, “and it really wasn’t an issue before we had the baby.”

I grew up so differently than he did, and I have often tried to explain to my husband that you have to understand that we come from two different backgrounds. It’s not that either one of us is right or either one of us is wrong; it’s just different, and now we have to come up with our own thing.

Some of this frustration with her husband is fueled by her belief that he is obstructing her efforts to find her way as a mother. This can have the adverse affect of making decisions to spite her husband, rather than doing something that is reasonable for her. A few sentiments echoed are captured in the statement, “It’s to prove to him that it can work, and not only can it work, but he doesn’t have to be all freaked out.”

Other new mothers noted that her approach to parenting and her husband’s approach conflict.

We have different attitudes about our son and where he should sleep, and that’s been extremely challenging. I feel pretty strongly that I would like to share the bed with my son and my husband feels very strongly that it is not necessary.

In a few cases, new mothers think that, because of their position, they are limited in their capability to resolve differences.

I don’t feel mutual with him right now, but it will come in time. Basically, I made certain decisions to get married and have a baby, and I have those things and they come at a certain price with my husband. So I don’t feel I can complain because I got what I wanted.

These arrangements create stalemates because, “there are a lot of conversations that don’t take place because we both have a different view of the future.” The majority of new

mothers do not find themselves in an uncompromising position, but instead they follow the logic of conceding when the issue is not significant enough. “I think that’s what helps to keep a relationship going is that you don’t make a big deal out of every single thing that might come up.”

In the end, most believe that, despite differences between her and her husband, they are capable of achieving a consensus. “There’s a lot of faith that we’ve worked out other things and that we will figure this out.” Many new mothers reported that in their marriage, “we are both sincere in wanting the other person to be happy.” In their new roles as parents, they share a mutual desire to work through differences; this is in part helped by the respect each gives the other to find their way.

Giving Room

There is much discussion among those who express a need for mental space about how to process what they are feeling relative to how they think about their husbands and their selves relative to their spouses. For some, renewing sexual relations weighs heavily on their minds, and in most instances, it is another burdensome request. “At least this week, I’m not even interested or next week.” The mother is tired, physically uncomfortable, feeling unattractive, over-stimulated from breastfeeding, and the chance of becoming pregnant is unfathomable. “If you get me pregnant, I will kill you, because I am not getting pregnant right now.”

Other new mothers are not opposed to the idea of having sex, other than being timid about being sexually intimate, because it has been a while since they and their husbands were last together. Because they were not feeling well, some stated they were,

“feeling very frightened about having sex.” Others were preoccupied about performance. “It’s probably like losing your virginity all over again. Do I even remember what to do?” Sexual relations is one of several areas mentioned where many express needing time and room to reincorporate this part of the relationship into the changed relationship with their husband.

Most are cognizant of their wishes for space to sort through thoughts and emotions. One new mother used her mother as a model for granting space after her father died in her youth. “She let me just do my thing and get it out how I needed to. The summer after my father’s death, I was very depressed. I remember I didn’t do much with friends.”

Most new mothers describe this early period as being fraught with uncertainty, and there is some recognition that until she and her husband are secure in their roles, a lot of patience for one another is needed in the meantime.

He looks, I think, a lot of time for me to be the strong one, and when he sees me breaking down he gets scared. Sometimes I just want him to just say, “Its okay,” and just work through the feelings together. Instead, he kind of lashes out—it’s just the way you learn, what people can do.

This uncertain time reveals her limitations as well as his, many of which cause these women to be frustrated and disappointed. But, for the most part, the new mother is hopeful that these emotions will not continue to feel so immense. “I feel hopeful that in time, I, we, will be able to return to something of our pre-baby relationship. So I see it as part of a process.”

New mothers are in agreement that patience will facilitate growth, and some report that in the meantime, they feel lonely. “Right now, I’m feeling alone, but know I

need to give him time and he'll figure it out." She is beginning to be aware that it is not only her husband who needs patience to grow, but that she does as well.

In many instances she has noticed that her presumptions about her husband's behavior are not always fair, particularly with regard to how he relates to their newborn. As some new mothers monitor the interactions between her baby and her husband, she is often critical and intrusive.

I see him with her and I think, "Okay, he should be playing with her more," or that he should be doing something else and feeling resentment, because I feel those things for myself and I'm projecting them onto him.

The insecurity and impatience some mothers have about themselves is too much to bear, and so they deposit their anxieties onto their husbands.

He'll just say, and I think this is right, "You cannot hold me to the same standards that you're holding yourself to. You can decide for yourself how you're going to be, but I have my way of parenting and I have to be free to be able to express that and do that.

These new mothers admit that these intrusions interfere with the natural unfolding of the relationship between their husband and their baby. A few go as far to solicit their husband's help in maintaining an appropriate boundary. "I've asked my husband to kind of call me on it, which he does, and I'm really mad that he does it, but later on I know it's good." She knows there is a great deal for her and her husband to learn, so when they can incorporate a "checks and balance" system in their relationship, life at home goes more smoothly.

I'm pleased with myself when I recognize, well, he may not do it exactly the way I did, but who cares. They love him; they adore him. They smile when he comes in the door and that's good.

For a new mother, knowing that her husband can learn from her, and that she can learn from him helps create the room they need to blossom as parents. This reciprocal

learning process has the added benefit of giving some new mothers security in knowing that it is safe to leave her husband alone with the baby. “I’ve left her with her father and if he doesn’t know what to do, he’ll figure it out. It’s time for them to have a relationship and get to know one another.” By giving each other sufficient room to develop, they come to rely on each other more; in doing so, they are drawn closer together.

Unit

As their husband becomes a focus, these new mothers see themselves more unified in their relationship with him; “he is my family connection.” And in many instances, her family-of-origin and friends recede while her husband’s role in their relationship evolves to more prominence.

I think because you’re so intimate with your husband, and they’re a part of this, that they can offer you something that your mom or your sister can’t. This is kind of odd because they do say, “Oh, the women who have had babies before should be able to offer you that,” but I haven’t found that. I’ve gotten some things from them about their experiences, but emotionally, it’s definitely my husband.

Many new mothers want to protect not only their husbands, but also their relationship and, subsequently, they do not want to invite interference. “I don’t want to drive a wedge between myself and him and I think complaining to my mother would do that.” She indicates that this dedication and reliance is not without effort.

Our first year of marriage was a nightmare. We’ve had more hard times than good times, but the hard times have brought us real close. Now, I can tell him anything and show him anything and it wouldn’t scare him away.

From the moment some of the new mothers decide to become pregnant a team spirit emerges between herself and her husband. “We needed to make sure we were both comfortable with it, and we both agreed to go ahead and give it a try.” New mothers and

their husbands unify around their common goal to become parents, “as much as anybody could be ready and got their ducks in a row, we had done that.” This early stage of parenthood tightens the bond between new mothers and their husbands.

Their decision to have children together is the first instance in which the two come together in a parenting effort. This decision then stimulated many new mothers and their husbands to establish some guidelines of how they want their lives to reflect their being unified as a couple.

We decided that we wanted to do it alone and have the first two weeks of parenting to be our own experience. We really wanted that bonding time for us. We wanted to make our own mistakes and figure them out alone, and that’s what we did.

Others talk about how they and their husbands hope to raise their children and more often than not find themselves in agreement.

He grew up in a family that he would like to emulate. I grew up in a family we don’t want to emulate. So, we’re bringing our priorities to bear on what we do with her and there’s a lot in common for different reasons.

There is an excitement heard when these new mothers report on a synergy felt between her and her husband, particularly as it affects their child.

We’re similar in that way and what we want for our kids. That they be free-spirited and be able to experience what they want and not what we want for them and let them learn in a way that’s best for them.

When they are unified in their efforts, new mothers report a deepened fondness for their husbands.

I feel we have a great relationship. I mean I actually told him a few weeks after our son was born, “As in love with our son as I am, I feel like I’m more in love with you now.” This surprised me. I mean, I expected to completely fall in love with [our son], but I didn’t expect to sort of fall more in love with my husband.

Their affection for one another is felt to be more accessible, according to the majority of new mothers. They are in many ways relaxed, and they state, “I like that we laugh about nothing in particular.” Such a woman has a firmer grasp of her relationship with her husband, but at the same time her grasp has loosened enough so that the relationship can be free to expand.

Mother’s Responsibility

Mother’s Responsibility is a watershed of thoughts and emotions brought on by motherhood. I say watershed because once the reality of being a mother is clear, there is a focus that becomes intensified when a mother discusses her duties. There is a mental list of responsibilities that she rapidly relays. She is suddenly bombarded by a heightened concern about her personal well-being, both physical and psychological, because she believes this has a direct impact on her child’s life.

In this category, the properties are as follows: Mother’s Process, Working toward Acceptance, Defending Child from Her Issues, and Still Me But with More.

- Mother’s Process is a self-critique.
- Working toward Acceptance is the new mother’s account of how she works toward self-acceptance as a mother.
- Defending Child from Her Issues is the new mother’s personal struggles and limitations, and her intention to shield her child from being adversely affected by them. These issues are more neurotic in nature, emotional fears and insecurities, rather than pernicious pathology.

- Still Me, But with More is the new mother's personal ambitions and goals combined with the fulfillment of motherhood.

Mother's Process

My description of having this baby is pregnancy seems so gradual. You have 9 months to get used to it. You don't just wake up one day with a belly. You can wrap your head around it over time and then in a matter of hours, you are done with that and you have this child, a human being. And that's just—I can't get my head around it—it's overwhelming. I can't really think about it because it's too mind-boggling, so it still amazes me. I asked my mom, "When does it sink in, that he's yours, he came out of you, he's a combination of you two, and he's never going to leave?" She said, "It doesn't." She still looks at me as her baby.

Feeling like a mother and confidently knowing the meaning of motherhood is neither quick nor linear. Most of the new mothers shared a mutual determination about becoming a mother, and they could see it in their future long before conception. "I always dreamed I'd be a mother." Many of them believed their prior exposure to children gave them experiences that qualified them for motherhood. "I always loved children; I always could bond with children. I babysat and worked at summer camps, and enjoyed it. So, you know, I knew that I would be a mother."

Their confidence that motherhood is complementary to their personalities is often validated by others who know them. "Everyone always said, 'You'll be a great mother.' I mean, those were things that people always said to me, so I had no doubt." Many of these new mothers embarked upon motherhood confidently and they proceeded to make plans accordingly. For these new mothers, it is not until their babies are born that hesitancy and self-doubt about motherhood seeps in. "I don't think you, 'bam,' all of a sudden feel like this mother, you know? I think that it's a process and I feel like I'm really just starting that process."

There are some who expressed initial enthusiasm and a self-assured attitude about motherhood, but who later found it necessary to recalibrate expectations. “I think you can really grow into motherhood, and I definitely don’t think it’s healthy that it just happens.” This mother slows herself down emotionally and makes room for a gradual entrance into motherhood.

Many are hesitant about their new role, and it is largely due to her newborn’s unpredictable nature and feeling inadequate in their ability to handle it.

What’s upsetting to me is when she has a bad day and I can’t fix it. It’s not that I think, “Oh, I’m not good at this,” all of a sudden. I’m just concerned. What’s wrong with the child? Why can’t I make it better?”

When there are moments of suspended security in their competence, some reconsider previous decisions about parenting. Some new mothers are taking a temporary hiatus from work so that they can stay at home with their babies for an extended period of time, in that group, some of them start to wonder if they are well-enough equipped to do so. “What was different was I thought, “Oh gosh, maybe I should go back right away.”

Through trial and error these new mothers grant themselves room to grow into their new roles; they express frustration when they haven’t given themselves enough time. “I think when I don’t follow my instinct, that’s when I’m most upset.”

Woven together with their self-doubt is a confidence that wants to be a part of the larger fabric of these new mothers’ experiences. Gradually many build their confidence as they witness their maternal capabilities coming to fruition. “When he is great, darling, and cute, and everyone says, ‘Wow, you’re up and out of the house and don’t they look darling?’ Boy, my self-esteem goes way up.” When her baby is complimented, she can

take pride in knowing she is partly responsible. Many new mothers report following an impulse that responds to her newborn's needs. "Something just kicks in and I hold him tight and settle him down or I rock him a little bit or something just takes over me to do it." This mother is neither fretful nor doubtful in her baby's moment of need, and she is subsequently strengthened by her experiences.

Working toward Acceptance

Steadily, confidence emerges through these women's interactions with their newborns, and this confidence encourages many to develop a sense of self-acceptance. As time progresses, most feel that they are better synchronized with their newborns, and they are reassured by their own efforts.

I just don't feel like I need people to tell me everything that I should and shouldn't do, so I just kind of said, "Oh, we'll work at it, and if it doesn't work out, we'll change our tactics and figure something else out." So probably that has a lot to do with just my own self-growth. That's why I feel more competent with my son than I do in a lot of other parts of my life.

Feeling more enabled in her relationship with her baby, she relaxes her preconceived notions on how she should be as a mother. She allows her unique manner of being with her baby to be evident. "I have a lot of limitations as far as what I can do, but it's so funny because I guess I just don't think about them so much." There is less time in a new mother's day to ruminate over what she did, and why she did it a particular way, and what she should have done differently. Consequently, many of the new mothers feel they must more readily cope with who they are by reaching a satisfactory level of self-acceptance.

As soon as I lower the bar to kind of a reasonable level, then I find myself being much more content, so I've been trying to lower my bar a little bit at work and lower my bar a little bit in my personal life.

Many of these new mothers discuss having greater tolerance for finding their way as a mother, and what seems to be an inherent part of this tolerance is a broader acceptance of oneself. "I'm better at forgiving myself." However, there are always those exceptional moments when self-doubt intrudes and throws many new mothers off their course.

I'm entitled to time and endeavors with friends without babies. But every time I say this I think, "Well, there's probably another person out there who thinks I'm a little bit heartless. And, yet, I don't have terrible pangs of guilt about the very thought.

Self-acceptance is understood as a combination of self-doubt mixed in with moments of self-confidence. Self-acceptance implies she is easing up on her perception of motherhood and revealing a less-guarded conception of herself as a mother. Time together with her newborn provides her with the necessary confidence needed to reveal this less-guarded conception of herself.

Do I look different? I wonder if these people know I had a baby. Can they tell? And not just from how I look physically, but I just feel different. I don't feel older or grown up; it's just I am a mom now, and it's a whole new realm.

She is proud of her new status and eager for it to be recognized. All the new mothers concur that motherhood has changed their lives for the better, but they realize that it does not equate into eternal bliss.

I'm a lot happier and a lot more content with everything, a lot more like I know what I'm doing than I did at the beginning. I wish somebody would have just said, "Just wait. It gets easier." But then, maybe it gets harder again. I don't know.

Life has changed for these new mothers and much of who she is now parallels the role she has taken on with her newborn. All are increasingly aware that their roles in life have

changed. A few report that motherhood restricts them within their family. “I was the life of the party; I just can’t be that way anymore.”

For a new mother, decisions she makes for herself are now filtered through her new responsibility as a mother. She is not as accessible to others within her family-of-origin, but believes she is committed to a greater endeavor. “I don’t feel so much like a junior kid anymore with the extended family because I have my own family, and I don’t feel as pulled around by my parent’s expectation now that I have my own family.”

Even though the majority of new mothers welcome this shift in emphasis from themselves as individuals to themselves as mothers, there is a sense of loss that lingers. “I felt he saw me as so much more of a mom that he couldn’t really say, “I want time with my daughter.” She misses her prior status as a daughter, and cannot help to wish that some things did not have to change. Even though she is accepting of her new position she is unsure of how to convey the value of motherhood.

It’s such an ambiguous role. I think it comes down to a sense of just personal values. Because our society values money it’s just easier to talk about a job. There are certain things that can be summarized easily, for example, where you go, what you do and how much you make. A job provides something easier for other people to understand, and to value what you do.

Many new mothers find themselves in the position of defining their self-worth based on what they determine about their new role. They all describe having a focused interest in unifying herself with a sense of family—baby, husband, family-of-origin.

I’m in complete mom mode, or family mode. I just feel my identity is much more focused around family versus prior to having children. It was really much more about me, which is normal, but now it’s the whole family.

Old tensions ease for many new mothers, particularly as their larger interest in becoming a family takes precedence. “I feel more love and nurturing feelings towards

my family than my thinking about what they said or what they did. I can't wait to see them and want them to be around." This vigor in solidifying her interest around motherhood and family parallels her growing comfort and attachment with her newborn. "My priorities have changed. My number one priority is my daughter. I want to be a really good mother and a good wife and basically, create a stronger family."

These new mothers are excited about having an instrumental role within their new families and most of them consider themselves privileged. "I just think it will be cool—watching him grow. I just want to get to know this child first." As these new mothers come to stress stronger identifications with motherhood and family, they scrutinize what they personally would like to do to help facilitate their ultimate goals.

All the new mothers engage in an intense analysis of themselves. This evolves from a heightened sense of importance about being a mother. A new mother sees a direct correlation between herself and the well-being of her newborn. Therefore, in order to provide the best possible environment for her child, she looks at what she personally hopes to do to help facilitate this effort. Many of these ideals are borne out of what she understands about her internal dynamic.

It's my opportunity to try and awaken all of his senses and let him explore. I want him to do some of the things that I did not get to do. But I want to be very cognizant that I don't want him to accomplish things that I couldn't accomplish, because I don't want him to do it for me.

Defending Child from Her Issues

Many express caution about their aspirations for their children because they know that they are fueled by personal emotions, many which remains inadequately resolved. Yet, such a mother remains steadfast believing that her ultimate motivation is inspired by her desire make a better life for her child than she had. “I want to be a good mother. I want to do the right things.” She hopes what she learns through her emotional difficulties will only serve to benefit her child.

I really want him to be able to feel things. I want him to be able to be happy and I want him to be sad; I want him to be scared; I want him to be frustrated; I want him to be thrilled. To feel and know that it is okay to feel different things, and not be told that you shouldn't feel that way—the horrible should word.

What becomes apparent for most of these new mothers is their common desire to protect the child, and they do so by filling in gaps or making up for deficits experienced in their own childhoods.

The ideal of a unit was very appealing, although I don't want it to sound like my daughter shares the burden of giving that to me. I just want the closeness of having both parents in the home and sharing the responsibilities for raising her.

Not only do many believe their child needs to be protected from their history, but also from the manifestations in their personality. They explain that their broad review of their lives makes them concerned about certain aspects of their personalities. “I'm scared that the expectations that I have set for myself, that I will set for my son, and if he doesn't meet them I wonder how I'll be with that.”

Most new mothers express intentions to harness self-imposed expectations, so that their children will be kept from potential harm. “I guess I have perfectionist tendencies not related to the kids. The kids don't have to be perfect, but about myself, I want it all to

be right.” Their self-expectations and hopes for their children suggest that there is much to understand about their own internal dynamics and how that may impact the child. “I think you have to be aware of that and I think that it requires energy and focus and the ability to continue to grow and not be complacent.”

Her baby renews an interest in self-improvement. All consider themselves to be role models and they express serious intentions to live up to their new responsibilities, which derive from a sense of duty to their children. Areas in their personalities that need improvement are revealed, along with suggestions on how to make the necessary changes.

I feel like I want to be the adult for her now. Before there were things where I could act immature and I could act like a little kid and I still do, I’m sure, but I feel this desire to be mature for her and to be strong for her and model things for her.

Many aspire to place underdeveloped impulses and anxieties aside, and they hope that by suppressing their immediate needs, their newborn’s needs will be more apparent. “You may want to melt into a puddle and stomp your feet and not be diplomatic about working things through.”

However, all concur that motherhood has called them to behave in a mature manner. “I recognize when my moods are changing, but I’ve often been able, because I’ve tried to recognize them, keep them in check a little.” Another reports, “I would like to move away from being judgmental, so that hopefully she won’t be so judgmental.”

They set higher expectations for themselves. “Just acting like a parent, acting in the role of someone who is a parent, who is mature, who is healthy emotionally. I can give this to my child, instead of being the one who is needy.” For many, this is a significant emotional shift that requires gathering strength as the new mother attempts to

become her own ideal version of a mother. “I feel like I can handle it, I can do it. And I’ve been having this sense of wanting to make sure that I can be a good example for her by following my own heart.”

A new mother’s expectations multiply as ideas about being a role model for her child solidify. And despite the clarity expressed in her expectations, the pressure to be an improved version of herself is evident.

I just feel like when someone is watching you and will be watching you for the rest of your life, I think it does make you much more aware of the fact that you really need to be a role model. I want to pass along to her a good work ethic, and a good civic duty, and a good spirituality, and sense of self. I want her to have really good positive experiences in life and grow up to be a happy person. And so I think as a mother now, I’m much more aware of the fact that as she gets older, she will be looking to me as a role model.

There is awareness among some new mothers that they are not alone in their mothering endeavor. In fact, there is always an audience and a critic—the child. A mother’s performance is reviewed by her child on a regular basis, and because of this intimate scrutiny, she hopes she performs well. “If she could understand what I was saying, would I be proud of the things that I’m saying and would I be proud of the way I perceive things?” A few new mothers express that they need to be dually aware of what is going on with themselves and their children. “Being aware of what your kids are doing and being a part of their life. I really want to be active.”

All concede that to know themselves in the mothering role entails being in an engaged relationship with their newborns. Attending to an overall responsibility for raising their children is important to all, as they explain that caring for their children is an instrumental avenue for getting to know them.

When I do something that makes him happy and when I have the ability to make him happy I can see that now. I can tell what his emotions are, and I can see that I'm responsible, as I'm responsible for knowing.

Some recognize their power to affect their child's emotions, and believe it is their responsibility to know these emotions as well. "I'm completely responsible for this child. And that's such a huge responsibility, that mentally I'm responsible; emotionally I'm responsible for them, financially, etc. I'm responsible for them."

The relationship between herself and her infant requires active engagement, "What you want in life, you have to go and get. It doesn't come to you; you have to reach out and get that." She acknowledges the work ahead, but does so by qualifying the manner of her involvement. Some of her actions are direct and straightforward. "No more news; no more scary movies; no more loud noises. Everything needs to be calm."

Many new mothers discuss intentions to purify their children's environments. However, most recognize that controlled environments do not equate with desired results and a certain amount of freedom is necessary for growth to occur. "I wanted to be what I could be and now I want to let my child have the freedom to be what he can be."

Some describe their efforts in the likeness of setting a stage with all the necessary props, and then receding from the center. One mother sees her role as "a guide to show him the world, and to expose him to things as I guide him through his journey. I want to set the landscape and hope he does great."

When many of the new mothers articulate their positions, they require less of a central role in bringing goals for their children to fruition. "I think it will be interesting to watch them grow and try to shape how you want it to be and see what they choose."

Their child's self-determination brings into focus that she and her infant are, in fact, separate beings. Consequently, this makes some view their individual lives as having significance and it causes them to bring a refreshed attention to their own life. "I feel responsible for making my own life worthwhile for her."

The majority of new mothers do not espouse a martyrdom approach to mothering. Instead, they are very adamant about carving out time for their interests and attending to caring for themselves.

You also have to be able to have you own life, too. I think that it just makes you a healthier person. So, I want to be a good mom and be active and be really involved and do all these things for my kids, but I think I also need to do things that stimulate me educationally and emotionally. I need to do something for myself, because I think that will make me a better person.

These new mothers equate caring adequately for themselves with what is beneficial for their children.

That's why I need to go to the gym because it's a stress reliever for me, more so than the benefit of working out. I just feel like I need the relief. This enables me to do a lot of things now required of me like breastfeeding, clean, do laundry, cook and work. At a certain point, I have to make time for myself.

Another new mother reports, "I'm much more aware of my health because I want to be able to raise her." Many state that in order to mother effectively, their physical health is crucial. "I really want to be in good shape for the lifting and just the energy it takes."

These new mothers want to achieve a successful balance between their needs and those of their child's so they can become models for how to maintain fulfilling interests, while at the same time being able to provide the best care possible for their children. "It's a good model for her to see that her mom figured out how to balance motherhood with the things she loves to do." They hope their efforts will be looked upon favorably.

I would like my child to think that I'm a good mom and that I showed them that. Basically, I'd like to have a good relationship with them and hope that one day they would think highly of me for the way that I brought them up.

Still Me, But with More

All along the way, these new mothers work hard to try to make decisions about their parenting that incorporate some semblance of their individual interests into their mothering roles. These new mothers have a conviction about being “still me, but with more.” None of the new mothers interviewed expressed a single-minded interest to solely attend to their mother identities. Instead, they communicate various levels of a desire to incorporate self-interests. But none seem, at this point, sure of how to proceed. At times, some new mothers sound fearful that their identities will be completely consumed by motherhood. “I don't know that I want anything to fade at this point.” Another expressed concern that without some level of diversity in their identities there could be an adverse affect on their child. “One of the guiding principles for me was that I wanted to make myself into a whole enough person so that I would not need to live through my child.”

There is awareness that priorities may need to be shifted around, but before decisions are made a sense of possible loss looms.

I don't want to be a woman that just focuses on her children and then loses contact with the outside world, or friends, or interests. I want to keep growing as a person instead of shutting myself off from society as sometimes I think mothers can do.

As already stated these new mothers come into motherhood with many accomplishments relative to their education and careers. In many cases, complete abandonment of their interests prior to motherhood seems too big of a request.

I went back and got this master's degree and worked really hard and was granted tenure. And so the point is kind of not wanting to just throw it all away. It means something to me and I worked hard to get it. Also, I want the kids one day to know what I do. I have a little bit of fear that if I did not work I would become too myopic. I just might get too focused on runny noses. I don't mean to sound judgmental, but this is coming from someone who can already worry about little things. I think it's very helpful for me to have more of a balance.

Some of the positions expressed by these new mothers reflect observations and perceptions of other mothers. One new mother indicated, "It always seemed hard."

Another new mother is direct about her intention to avoid her mother's mistakes.

I always felt my mother was subconsciously a little upset that she stayed home and gave up her career for all of us and that we didn't appreciate her. So that's why I'm going to take the next year off, but then I'm definitely going back the year after.

A few approach the very notion of reprioritizing their lives with some resentment.

I don't feel like I should put my life on hold now to develop him and then in ten years, come back and try to start my life again. And I know that there would be an identity for ten years of being a mother. I just know that with my mentality and just who I am; I need both in my life.

As the new mother contemplates the "still me" part of the equation she has to face an unveiled image of herself. She has to think through how she will blend her interests before motherhood with her primary interest of being the best mother possible.

I love them and they are such a pride for me and I want them to be one of my primary identifiers, but I don't want them to be my only identifiers. There is more to me than my husband and my children; however, they are the most important.

Most of the new mothers found their interests outside motherhood to sustain their self-esteem, and they believed feeling good about themselves helped them to provide better care for their newborns. When a few new mothers found it difficult to nurture their

self-esteem outside of motherhood, they reported being frustrated in their search for appropriate outlets. They attempted to keep alive familiar ways of knowing themselves.

There is a part of me that wants to hang onto whoever I thought I was before I had the baby. Like my persistence to be in mixed company and say, “What did you think of the debates,” or “Did you see the article in the New York Times?” For some reason, I am feeling this impulse to put those things out there so that I don’t just disappear in everybody else’s definition of motherhood.

A few new mothers simply need to hear their familiar voices so they can be reassured that everything about them is not consumed by motherhood. They resist preconceived notions about motherhood that restrict them from creating a unique version of it, one that is best suited to their own selves. Many are ill-equipped to articulate a firm self-definition; rather it is fluid.

I thought I would come to this “Planet Mom” destination, and that would be the state I occupied, but now I feel divided. I can be without her and feel like the person I was before I had her. But then, of course, when I’m with her there’s a whole new set of concerns. Then there are those in-between moments where if I’m truly in an anonymous setting, like Borders, without my husband or daughter, I almost want to say to people in the café, “I’m a new mom and I’m breast feeding, and that explains why I’m bitchier.”

There is a consensus among these new mothers that their newborns are being added to a life that existed before and that is ongoing. “I still feel that it’s important that I’m a good friend, sister, and daughter. I haven’t left that by the wayside. I feel like I’ve just added more to it.” She posits that much can coexist in her life; however it is not without worry. “I am concerned about how I am going to handle it all.” The only stipulation requested by all the new mothers is that the varying components of her life complement and support her new role and responsibility to her child.

Emotional Upheaval

I feel different. I was on the way home from the hospital in the car and I remember looking out the window and everything looked different. Everything looked different and I can't describe how particularly, but the world looks different now.

“Emotional Upheaval” is a compilation of emotions stimulated by the anticipation of motherhood and the baby's arrival. These new mothers discuss how their prior lives offered little time or warranted little necessity for self-reflection. Pregnancy and motherhood evokes significant emotions that inspire most to search for self-understanding. A new mother finds herself increasingly contemplative. Many issues that she now finds herself interested in pursuing are not completely new to her, but they have been mental processes which were placed to the side until motherhood. Motherhood has created a renewed interest in these under-analyzed emotions.

“Emotional Upheaval” uncovers the new mother's emotions in a less-defended state combined with a desire that these emotions become accessible, that they become conscious. Her emotions range the spectrum and they are stimulated from various sources such as: the baby, other significant relationships, and herself. This early phase (third trimester through 6 months postpartum) strikes me as an incubation period for these new mothers, and therefore the impression is left that emotions are more blended than sequential.

The data reveals psychological aspects of motherhood that may or may not be correlated with physiology. As the interviews unfolded and were then re-read and coded, nothing discussed aligned itself perfectly to a particular point within this study's timeframe. The properties reviewed are: Dreams, Known Self, Emotional Swell, Discoveries, and Benefits.

- Dreams are actual dreams that many new mothers reported and analyzed in this early phase. The dreams shed light on some of the emotions they are attempting to process in the unconscious.
- Known Self is what has always been part of the new mother's awareness.
- Emotional Swell is the heavy emotion she experiences: raw and exposed.
- Discoveries are the unknown aspects of herself that she is now learning about.
- Benefits describes how these emotions have propelled her self-development.

Dreams

For many new mothers, dreams become more frequent during pregnancy and the early months of motherhood. Not only are they more abundant, but they linger in the minds of these new mothers when they are awake, which encourages the women to ponder their meaning. When asked about their dreams, none of the women dismissed their relevance to present-day circumstances, motherhood and subsequent emotional upheaval. Instead they are energized and intrigued by their unconscious. As I listened to their numerous retellings of recent dreams, I had a sense that these dreams involved themes related to their fears associated with motherhood. Most dream interpretations are made by the new mothers with a few elaborations added by me.

A couple of the dreams revealed the women's fears of failure and anxiety about being unprepared.

All the women that I knew that didn't have babies and me were taking a class. I didn't realize I had signed up for the class and it was the last day of class and I had to take the final exam. I hadn't studied. I was going to fail and I was really upset about it and very anxious.

Another talked about a similar dream. “I had to take the test and I didn’t study, I mean, I didn’t go to class all semester.” Both dreams grapple with feeling outside of what is comfortable and under-prepared to deal with what is before the new mother.

Consequently, she feels that failure is inevitable.

A few others discussed their dreams as dealing with an underlying fear of inadequacy. “I decided to take the baby out and hold it in the placenta and I was petting it and it broke the placenta. I looked down and it had little shrimp legs. Its legs were made out of shrimp.” She questions whether her own struggles with inferiority will give birth to potential defects in her newborn. Another reported a similar dream. “I was breastfeeding and the baby literally looked up at me and spit it out right in my face. Like, I don’t like that.” This dreamed caused her to wonder, “How in the world am I going to feed you if I can’t feed you that way?” She was left uneasy and unsure about her capacity to breastfeed and her ability to provide adequate nourishment.

Other dreams reveal sudden realizations that she is a mother and a protector.

I dreamt that there was a little boy running around the apartment and other people in the apartment who were not giving the impression that this child was theirs. I’m like, he must be mine—this blond hair blue eyed boy. And said, okay then he’s mine. And I just remember holding him and kissing him.

Another new mother had a similar dream where she was taken by surprise when discovering her new role as a mother.

Lord and Taylor sent me a letter that I either owed them money or that I was approved for a credit card. At the end of the letter it informed me—oh and by the way, you are having a girl and in case you did not know sorry for telling you.

The next dream is similar, but with more of an emphasis on her role as a protector.

I dreamt that there was a little baby that had fallen down on the ground. It was kind of like a doll because it was only the size of my hand. I picked him up and I

was going to take care of him. And he was very fragile and no one else was going to be taking care of him, so I just held him in the palm of my hand and protected him. We were outside and I knew when to get him inside.

The end of this dream hints at a growing confidence in her ability to mother.

Abandonment themes are evident in some dreams.

I dreamt that my brother passed away and left behind two young children. He died suddenly and everybody was really overwhelmed. And then people were trying to figure out what his wife was going to do with these two little kids, and they didn't really have very much life insurance.

The concern in the dream may not only about the mother being abandoned, but also anxiety about who will take care of her as she cares for her children.

Another dream is more explicit about a new mother's fear that she will be left alone to raise her child. "My husband was taken by Al Qaeda." She remembers awaking from this dream and being comforted in knowing her husband was at work. The thought of raising her child without her husband as a partner is frightening and intensifies her insecurity.

A few dreams uncover these mothers ambivalence about motherhood and a sense of being overwhelmed by the burden of responsibility. "All the things that belong to her were stolen from our house." This new mother had a momentary wish that she could be relieved from her child. In a different dream, the mother wished for her child to be self-reliant. "I dreamed that I let her go to the bathroom by herself. She came out of the bathroom and disappeared, like somebody took her." She discussed that in this dream she believes the stress and weight of responsibility for somebody else causes her to worry about doing anything wrong which could hurt her. Relief from this distress can be achieved if her child no longer existed or eased her from the responsibility by becoming prematurely proficient in caring for herself.

One dream encapsulates how the emotional intensity feels. “I’m sliding downhill, going down this hill and then there is a steep drop-off and I wonder how I am going to get down the steep drop-off.” This new mother interpreted her dream as signifying to her that she still has a way to go, but at least it is not scary. She states that the dream did not frighten her; it only foreshadowed a journey ahead of her. Her dream notifies her that an emotional process is underway and it has depth, it feels uneasy and it causes uncertainty. But in the end, this new mother has a sense that she will persevere, despite the nature of the journey.

Known Self

For a few new mothers, what they have always known about their emotional lives resurfaces with new vigor and interest. These statements indicate that an internal dialogue had already been present prior to motherhood, but that the act of mothering helps these women broaden their perspective and interpretation.

My parents taught me how to live by rules, be a perfectionist, never screw up, but I never felt anything. I had no feelings; I was not allowed to feel or have emotions. It was all pretty much repressed. Sometimes, I feel like I finished being a child when I was 12 years old.

The new mother is trying to draw correlations with what she knows about her self and its relevance to motherhood. “I tend to be more devoted to a person, to an entire personality, and I wonder how having my own child will magnify that level of commitment.”

A slight concern about the imposing emotional process remains an unanswered question.

I kind of know that I'm self-centered. I was the first child, so I got a lot of attention, and I'm sort of demanding of attention. I can be. I can manipulate things pretty well, and I think that works against me sometimes. I don't know if that will really affect my relationship with my son much.

Many new mothers state that describing their emotional process was historically never an interest they pursued. "My pregnancy was the first time I really stopped and let myself get into stuff." Motherhood stimulates this new mother to formulate an understanding about her emotional world; this is not altogether a surprise because all the new mothers report an unavoidable emotional intensity.

Emotional Swell

Emotions are immense, unpredictable and felt. "There are those moments of humbling awe and almost a love that you could take a bite out of, almost tangible. It's thick, and it's heavy and it's sweet and it's kind of incomprehensible, too." These new mothers are overcome with emotion, much of it so powerful that they have difficulty grasping its meaning. Despite this problem, the new mother is intrigued and wants to become familiar with this emotion rather than defend against it. "I started writing all these letters, kind of like a book of everything I'm feeling towards the baby. And so many things come out. I think about, 'Will the baby be happy?' and 'Will I be a good mom?'" They all agree that the rush of emotion is connected to becoming a mother and having to care for a baby. "I'm feeling more because now I have this whole other person that depends on me for everything."

For most, the emotional range is broad, but some new mothers do not find the types of emotions to be unfamiliar; instead they are surprised by their deepened feeling. "I'm adaptable and patient, and I'm incredibly loving, unconditionally loving, and I

didn't really know what that meant. And I have to admit I'm still mesmerized by the whole process of having a child." Their emotional experiences are stunning; "to realize that you're really responsible for another human being—it's huge."

Even though most equate their emotional states to motherhood, it remains a mystery why some emotions and not others are felt. "Nobody was making me feel guilty, and yet I felt so terribly guilty."

For others their emotions accentuate senses and an appreciation for things that might have been overlooked before giving birth.

My priorities have shifted. Little things like a beautiful weekend make me think we ought to get the babies out for a walk in the sunshine. Forget there are 181 things on my to-do-list, or there's a great new restaurant. I feel, let's just get out and take a walk.

Her emotional swell also signifies a shift from a typical self-focus to a child-focus. This is an interesting transition as many new mothers report feeling unsure about what they may discover.

I was a little afraid of how overwhelming the feelings might be, that I certainly anticipated a swell of love and joy and sweetness about that, but I also feared—almost a panic of how fiercely would I want to protect and do everything right by this little person.

The emotional volume combined with the lack of sureness about how the emotions will manifest leaves many new mothers anxious, as they view these emotions with uncertainty.

Discoveries

I've always struggled with my self-esteem and I don't know why, I can't relate it back to my childhood or anything like that, but I've always struggled with it. And the one thing that I, before I had my son, I wondered if I'd be a good mom and,

“Well, what is it going to be like and everything?” When I had my son, I thought to myself, “Oh, I can do this.” It was a huge boost to my self-esteem, and now a little bit of what I learned is that I am going to be a good mom.

The emotional deluge experienced with motherhood unearths emotions that are often surprising. A few assumed that by educating themselves with literature in combination with the nature of their work, which is specifically about parenting in particular, that they would be protected from the challenges associated with motherhood. They found themselves feeling unfortunate, because of their inability to ward off unpleasant affect.

I'm so in tune to it and so intellectually aware and well read. I think I've experienced it a little harder because I thought maybe I wouldn't have it because I knew so much; or maybe I wouldn't experience it in that way because I'd prepared myself.

Feeling unprepared deepens the feelings of insecurity. “I felt it just as much as if I had never read a book about it or talked with a client on it.” When these new mothers feel insecure in their role, the understanding they once had about their identity is shaken. At this juncture, all the new mothers embark upon a quest to learn more about themselves. However, the journey begins with doubts about once-known beliefs coupled with insecure notion of how to go about motherhood.

The majority comprehend that their present emotional deluge would expectedly be uncomfortable, but there are a few who would rather it be otherwise. “Struggle is what I struggle with.” It is within this initial emotional burst that the new mother feels most at odds with herself. “What am I? I used to be a major professional and supervise a whole staff.” Many doubt their motivations previous to motherhood and wonder about the relevance of them within their present circumstances. “I've had a pretty accomplished, successful life so far but a lot of that was just running, running away from

myself.” Some express disappointment primarily for never having felt the depth of emotion they now feel. “I think the things that I thought were important—were just really extremely selfish.”

A few new mothers have difficulty grasping the meaning of their aspirations before motherhood. “I just absolutely relied on those superficial successes to get attention and assistance.” Prior accomplishments are looked upon with disdain, particularly because of an inability to recognize how those accomplishments can assist them in their new role. “As a person, I never would sit with someone for 30 minutes.”

Many new mothers are frustrated when they realize much of their adult lives neglected developing a deeper emotional awareness. A few new mothers reveal that it was their internal conflict that often got in the way of nourishing a broader emotional life. “I would get lost in indecision because I would want to analyze every aspect of something.” Typically, they spent their early adult years pursuing academic and professional goals, and they rarely veered from their plan.

Pregnancy and motherhood is the first time the majority of new mothers stray off course, and there are some that proceed with regret from their pasts. “Trying to find the joy in what I’m doing, instead of just doing it for the sake of doing it.” Questioning the past, its purpose and meaning, causes this mother to desire something different for herself. She is intrigued by the emotions provoked, but equally challenged. “This is so monumentally—so much harder for me than I’m jobless. I’m so tired by the end of the day, and resent that he gets to go out in the car and listen to music on his way to work.” The mother is reluctant to share any regret, ambivalence, or dissatisfaction, because motherhood was an originally planned goal. “I get mad at myself for feeling that way

because this is what I wanted.” The emotions can leave her feeling confused and incapable of knowing what she would like to do with herself.

Ultimately, however, the emotions she taps are both interesting and somewhat reassuring. “I actually like this part of me now that I know I can have a conversation and just sit.” These interviews reveal an anticipated emotional experience.

I think I’m probably going to be surprised by the overwhelming emotion that will be with it, because when I said I was emotionally hardy before, I think I tend to just try to always be logical about emotions. I think that is going to be completely rewritten once there’s a baby.

Some new mothers believe their emotional state changes once they can say, “I’m ready to fully commit myself to another person.” Personal change is expected. “You know it’s hard to imagine, how you can possibly change. Yet I know it’s going to happen; I know I’ll change.” The expectant mother is curious and looks forward to how her sense of change will unfold. “I’m very interested to see how I change, once I’m a mom.” Motherhood is the catalyst for emotional movement, which most find refreshing, even when the emotions do not always reveal complementary attributes. The emotional discoveries realized vary both in content and effect. Restless in her new role, the new mother is guilt-ridden to admit that she is sometimes bored.

I have to work through my feelings of guilt that I’m not doing things well enough. If I don’t sit with her every moment, I’m feeling guilty. I should be this perfect person—this super woman. I feel bored sometimes and I think, “Oh, I’m with my child. I’m not supposed to be bored.

Feeling isolated with her newborn, she expresses that she “just needs to get out.” A new mother is confined to the home; the daily routines shaped around the care of the infant are sometimes tedious and boring. Some are concerned that the isolation may have further ramifications.

I have a friend who stays home with her child full-time and she feels isolated. Sometimes I talk to her and I can just tell she's about ready to go nuts, and I think, "Well, I don't want that to be me."

Feeling emotionally regressed at a time when, because of her new role and responsibilities, she feels pressure to be mature; the new mother is left perplexed. "It definitely brings Mommy back to being more childish." Prior to motherhood, the emotional outbursts which were once indulged now seem self-consumed and a barrier to meeting her newborn's needs. "I think it's wise to practice self-restraint and just think about things a little while before reacting. It's probably a good habit to learn."

Many new mothers describe feeling more dependent, and they associate it with having a baby. "Having a very young child really emphasized dependency." For other mothers who have always felt more dependent than independent, they are uneasy with their child-like feelings. "I'm very dependent, not financially, but emotionally. I think especially with my mom, which is a little bit unhealthy. Since I've had my baby, I've looked a little bit closer at that relationship and wonder, "Is it a little unhealthy?"

A once-solid confidence is now tenuous as the new mothers see it as contingent upon their mothering capabilities. "It is interesting to me how much I think your sense of confidence is tied into your children." In the early months of motherhood, it is hard to find a mother whose confidence is unwavering. When there is a wave of insecurity, it typically coincides with her feeling incompetent. Many struggle with feeling disorganized.

Some days I'm not even quite sure that I'm putting on underwear before I do things and if I'm not sure I'm putting on underwear, I'm definitely not sure if I'm taking care of getting my son food or to a doctor's appointment.

Motherhood's newness makes even the kitchen, a once familiar room, suddenly a mystery. "I've got no idea where anything is. I lose the keys ten times. I put the milk away in the cupboard today." Such a mother feels out of place and disappointed by her recent shortcomings. However, when she exposes herself to other mothers in similar circumstances, her self-deprecation gives way to patience. "I feel better when I talk to other moms who also feel that way. Then I say, 'Okay, I'm not a horrible person.'" As many new mothers are adjusting to motherhood they describe being reassured by their newly found patience.

Many describe having to recalibrate expectations, and state that instituting a new level of patience is helpful. These mothers are used to their achievements reaping notable rewards. The rewards gleaned in motherhood are subtle and incremental. "Right now, a smile is good for me and he's a really smiley baby, so even when he's fussy, I seem to have more patience now than I use to have. I used to be a pretty impatient person." The new mother also displays an evolved patience for her emotional experiences.

I just learned to live with it. To live with the feeling of being dependent and the idea that I won't always be this way. And then, just sort of being able to tolerate it, but when it is not there you get the idea that you've kind of outgrown it. But then you find out, no, it's still there.

Emotions come and go and then come back again, making it difficult for new mothers to assess how they feel about themselves.

I have a lot more challenges ahead of me and not with work. I know I can do a job. I feel insecure about friendship, family, and the other part of my life. I'm not sure where I get my validity as a mother.

There is a belief that mothering requires more of an emotional presence than cognitive, and for most this requires a shift in emphasis from one that was primarily

external to one that is internal. Deepened and newly discovered emotions are described as having an overall benefit to each new mother.

Heightened confidence is an emotional byproduct of motherhood that surprises most new mothers. “I didn’t even think that my self-esteem would be impacted by the birth of my child. It never even occurred to me that it would have anything to do with my self-esteem, but it’s completely taken a huge boost.”

Many of these new mothers describe possessing self-esteems that typically fluctuate.

At work I’m on a constant roller coaster with my self-esteem, because at work there’s a lot of competition so people are always competing with you. You get feedback all the time on if you handled the situation right or if you didn’t, or if you need to improve on something and do it better.

With her newborn the feedback is less caustic and confrontational.

My feedback from my son is he’s gaining weight; he’s happy; he’s sleeping well; he smiles at me. When he’s fussy, it’s either that he needs to burp or he needs to eat or I need to change his diaper. So, I think that my self-esteem has taken a huge boost from being home and away from a lot of that negative energy from work.

The agenda with her child is clear, whereas at work it becomes muddled by other’s perspective of her. A few new mothers describe tightening their boundaries around what she will allow to penetrate her confidence and what she will not permit. “The whole idea that anyone thinks anything about me, I really honestly just could care less.” She rejects affect that may interfere with her re-invigorated confidence. “Well, it’s not anything that I want to occupy my mind with and I definitely don’t want to give any of my time to it.” In this case, her mind is fully occupied by her newborn and the constant assessment of her mothering abilities.

Motherhood brings with it a multitude of worries; specifically about the newborn's health and well-being.

I was worried that I wouldn't care for him in the right way or I wasn't going to be able to handle it in the right way, and I've handled it just fine, and so each day, I get a little pick-me-up just looking at him, so it's been something that I didn't expect.

When worries subside momentarily, these new mothers all agree their confidence grows. "I think the one strength that I didn't possess before that I feel has just come flowing through is confidence." Additionally, these mothers are also able to find equilibrium between their self-esteem and caring for their newborns. Some new mothers who feel overwhelmed state that it is helpful when a routine and rhythm is established with their baby. "Mothering is a series of tasks that are fairly simple, but doing those tasks has helped me just feel so much more confident in other aspects of my life." Another commented, "You know I thought I would be afraid to be with my son alone, but when I get into a better rhythm with him it is not so bad to be alone all day."

As many explain how the mothering components of their day became manageable, those emotions that were unsettling simmer. "I don't view it as an awesome responsibility to be feared or this entity creating upheaval." And in those moments of emotional calm, she can begin to see herself as a mother. "When I sit down with him and I play with him, and I see him smiling and I see him thriving, my self-confidence of being his mom just keeps growing and I never expected that."

For many of these new mothers, to have their role confirmed by others also contributes to their developing confidence. "They're like, 'He definitely knows his mommy.' And sure enough, he just melted right in my arms and I think my husband understands the importance of that." As many of these new mothers begin to identify

themselves as mothers, it is believed that their emotional discoveries are partly responsible for augmenting their development.

Benefits

Many new mothers cite numerous attributes that emerge in consequence of the emotional upheaval brought on by motherhood. They note a sense of assertiveness, freedom, and empowerment causes them to think and behave in a different manner than they did before motherhood. For a few new mothers, from the very moment they decided to embark on making plans to become a mother, they set a goal and asserted their energy toward attaining it. "I basically became involved with my husband when I realized it was time that I wanted to have a child."

Determined to be the best mother she is capable of being she feels compelled to make some adjustments in her typical behavior pattern.

I'm trying to work on the people-pleaser part of me, not trying to always make everyone else happy, and learn to say "no," although it's hard. But it's getting easier because I'm realizing how precious time is and I can't really commit to everything.

Since the priority she gives to her newborn is uncompromised, the new mother feels compelled to be increasingly more candid and determined with her agenda. "I was so emotional those couple of days. I was just crying and so, I said to him, "I'm just going to tell you what I need." Fatigued, vulnerable, and unsure of herself, she is open with her needs and direct with those around her on how they can be helpful to her. "I was able to tell him, "I don't want to be left alone. I want you to be here."

As time proceeds and as her initial insecurity becomes less potent, some new mothers begin to assert their desires about personal needs and their careers.

I've been actually very pleased that it seems to come naturally to me that she's here and she is who she is, and I still have some priorities for myself and I don't want to feel terrible about taking them.

When a new mother weaves some of her personal priorities back into her life she does so with certain guidelines in place. "I'm less tolerant for bullshit about my own work that I'm doing, and I need to either do it well or not do it at all." Particularly for those new mothers who will continue pursuing academic and career aspirations, they want to do so without that work disrupting her new role. She believes that her aspirations to be fulfilled personally and as a mother are possible, and this need for fulfillment is an assertive tactic that will benefit her.

The new mother feels relieved by a new sense of freedom to expand herself in unfamiliar ways.

I think that some people at work who have only seen me as this successful, driven, workaholic person are now seeing more of what is inside of me, and I'm okay with that. It's a big piece of vulnerability being exposed.

Some find that motherhood accentuates traits underutilized in their lives, and it is only after their child's birth that they feel free to explore them. "Different challenges inspire me to tap into areas that I've never had to tap into before. Whether it's creativity or whether it's trying to push myself in area that I've just never gone before." Other new mothers express that motherhood freed them from themselves.

I guess it's kind of freeing in a way because I think that a lot of my not-so-positive attributes had a lot to do with me being a little bit self-involved. So it's kind of nice to get outside myself a little bit, so I can focus on other things.

For a few, altruistic freedoms are unleashed.

I just recognized that I have one chance in my life. What am I going to accomplish in society? What is going to be my mark? And to me being rich from

a successful business career isn't what I'm thinking. It's how did I help change society?"

This internal sense of freedom ignites various possibilities and a reinvigorated awareness of her potential. An overall feeling of empowerment is described by many new mothers. They possess an urge to take on challenges they once considered out of reach. Many discuss having this feeling during labor and delivery. "I felt this incredible strength all of a sudden. I don't know where that was coming from, but I just was determined to have this baby."

A few described their success with childbirth as shoring up strength in their capabilities. "So to be able to deliver him naturally and then to be able to feed him without any help from any technology, that felt pretty cool. It could be the 1800s or the 1700s and we would be okay."

Much to the amazement of many of new mothers, they fared better in their transition to motherhood than they originally expected. "I was just nervous I was going to be so tired and not be able to do it, but I wasn't. I was more organized and efficient about things."

Many describe an ironic strength, causing them to believe that with certain aspects of their lives, more can be taken on rather than less.

Before, I think I would have been more concerned. And now, ironically, I'm almost feeling my husband can do what he wants, to go ahead and take a career risk. We'll be fine as long as we're all together, happy and healthy.

She acknowledges the paradox between the realities she faces in her new role and an emerging feeling that seems counterintuitive, yet she persists. "These kids have made me realize truly, what is important in life."

Many are energized and excited to utilize it. “I do feel more action-oriented. Now, I want to follow through on stuff.” It is as though some of these new mothers feel that their new family gives them an even stronger foundation, which enables them to envision attaining goals once perceived as unfathomable. “I have my own home, and my own husband, and my own child, now. And in a way that’s very empowering, sort of like I’m plugged into this new role.” For this new mother, motherhood helped her attain a level of respect that enabled her to feel empowered. The majority reveal that these empowered feelings help them achieve greater self-acceptance. “I just want to be happy and try not to do everything by the book, but instead try to raise him on my own.”

Results Summary

The results illustrate an array of psychological aspects inspired by motherhood between their third trimester and 6 months postpartum. During this period these new mothers found themselves uniquely impacted by their infant’s birth, questioning their career’s purpose, reviewing their childhoods, experiencing the effects of parenting with their husbands, grappling with a new set of expectations as an individual woman and mother. While distracted by these numerous preoccupations they are in a particularly heightened emotional state. The reactions to motherhood, as experienced by these new mothers, are considered normal. However, because mothers are an understudied population, these results help to further illuminate a mother’s transition into motherhood with specific attention to her evolving identity. And applicable to new mothers who are similar to those under study—educated, goal oriented, chose and planned for motherhood.

The categories along with their associated properties are concerns and discourses that preoccupied these new mothers during this early period of transition into motherhood. The categories are Baby, Career, Influences, Husband, Mother's Responsibility, and Emotional Upheaval.

- **Baby:** The baby's effect on these new mothers is discussed in this category with particular emphasis on the distinction between the fantasized baby and the real baby.
- **Career:** Career is an assessment of these new mother's careers within a context where there is a significant reprioritization their life's goals. For many their careers reined preeminently lives and organized much of their sense of self. Their infants quickly usurped the prime position in these new mothers' lives, making everything in her life orient to this reprioritization. Because of this dramatic change, she is now compelled to consider her career from a different perspective.
- **Influences:** This category surveys the numerous experiences and relationships that have helped to shape these new mothers identities. Once they become pregnant and give birth to their child many reflect upon these vast experiences in the hope of acquiring guidance as they try to establish a maternal identity.
- **Husband:** For most new mothers, the category Husband is their reflections about their spouse within their common experience of parenthood. For some their relationships have had few challenges until becoming parents. Parenthood has caused most new mothers to expand their understanding, opinions, and feelings about their husbands. In consequence to this new perspective about their husbands, many realize issues about themselves never before known. .

- **Mother's Responsibility:** This is a discussion among these new mothers about their personal concern for their physical and psychological wellbeing. All the new mothers believe there is a direct correlation between their personal stability and their child's development.
- **Emotional Upheaval:** the category describes how these new mothers emotionally reacted to motherhood. These emotions are experienced by all to be intense and provocative, causing many to reflect and to seek a deeper understanding of their origin and meaning.

Baby

In this section the baby is specifically discussed in terms of his or her direct effect on these new mothers. Their thoughts and reactions are described in the following properties:

- **Baby Love** is an account of these new mothers evolving awareness of their love for their infant. Initially consumed by learning to care for their infant's basic needs, an awareness of love emerges as they feel more competent in their maternal role. Once an awareness of love is apparent to these new mothers it is described as intense and incomparable to anything they have ever known.
- **Expectations** is a declaration made by many of these new mothers that their immediate hopes and wishes for their children is that they grow into happy and healthy individuals. Their expectations also include a hope that their children can avoid difficulties they experienced in their own childhoods, and have opportunities available that were denied them.

- Realities reveal the inevitable challenges that come with caring for a newborn. These challenges evoke doubt and ambivalence for some new mothers, particularly about their decision to become mothers.
- Incorporating Baby highlights the dramatic change in lifestyle for these new mothers. They all were active participants in their lives prior to motherhood and found their bodies, degree of physical contact required, and personal interests, to name a few, shifting from an understanding that was once familiar to an experience now largely unknown within this new motherhood context.
- Baby's Meaning discusses some of the new mothers' revelations about their baby's life and the personal meaning it holds for them. They describe their baby's life as an opportunity to create an emotional experience that was missing from their childhoods. Amidst these projections exists the newborn that in some cases is viewed as an ally in a mother's efforts to find herself as a mother.
- Baby as Ambassador is how many new mothers describe their babies as being the conduit to new experiences and meeting new people.

Career

Many new mothers are inspired by their baby's birth to demand greater scrutiny for how their time is allocated. They express having ideals about their time being more content driven both when with their baby and when they are apart. Time is defined as a heightened awareness of time's quality, which sets into motion a desire to re-evaluate personal aspirations. Career choices and friendships are reviewed with an attention to time's quality and, consequently, changes are made. The baby presents an opportunity

for many to say no or to establish boundaries with activities or people long felt to be a nuisance, obligation, or counterproductive. Personal interests and usual obligations are reprioritized once the baby arrives. Additionally, the baby not only supports a fervor around eliminating or limiting certain situations from life, the baby also serves as a catalyst for many to think seriously about what they do with their time.

For most of the new mothers, this heightened awareness of time and its relevance to her baby immediately calls into question her career. As they rethink their careers the following properties are considered:

- **Personal Gains** is some new mothers' judgments about whether or not they find their work personally fulfilling and meaningful. In light of this new reprioritization they want to be sure that whatever takes them away from their newborn is worthwhile. Many recognize that their career have been relied upon as a significant source for esteem, and are concerned that it will be compromised if their careers are given up entirely. On the other hand, some new mothers habitually found their careers to hamper their self-esteem. Consequently, since becoming mothers they have acquired a renewed expectation that their career should help work toward building esteem rather than tamper with it.
- **Unwavering Commitment to Her Baby** is how these new mothers expect their careers to value their responsibility to their child. If their careers are unable to accommodate to their needs, they then reconsider their employment entirely.
- **Dissatisfaction Inspires Alternatives** is when a few new mothers have had to find alternate outlets for their talents, particularly when their previous jobs were

unwilling to accommodate their needs, or when their job was no longer personally satisfying.

Influences

These new mothers have woven together influential people and experiences, both past and present, in an effort to achieve personal coherence in her new role. How to be a “good” mother consumes her thoughts and remains a daily challenge. The majority of the women point out that prior to marriage and parenthood they had successful independent lives, which helped them to amass multifaceted impressions that now inform their identities. All review what they find themselves drawing upon as they try to establish some sense of security in their new role as mothers. Although each new mother discussed various experiences, it was her relationship with her parents and more specifically with her mother that remained most influential. The influences are grouped as:

- Notable impressions are personal experiences or observations, which have an enduring value to some new mothers. They draw upon these experiences when in search of support and guidance.
- Parents and how these new mothers internalized their relationships, particularly in their youth, remain significant sources of support, but are more frequently identified as influences to improve upon rather than emulate.
- Mother’s Mother is the most discussed and processed relationship throughout the interviews and reveals these new mothers quest to understand their mothers, their relationship, the influence this relationship has had on her entire

life, especially now with how she is grappling to understand herself as a mother. It is within this property that many new mothers differentiate themselves from their mothers, and at the same time feel in great need of her presence and guidance.

Husband

The category “Husband” is the observations, realizations and feelings many new mothers express about her partner, since embarking upon their common experience as new parents. She considers him more intensely now that she feels their roles and responsibilities have become more serious. In this category her review of her husband encompasses these properties:

- Shift describes for some new mothers how their focus is no longer exclusive to her and her husband, but now includes something more important—ensuring the health and happiness of their child. Many find their emotions toward their husbands range from a deeper love and appreciation for him, to a dependence that leaves a few feeling more insecure about the relationship.
- Differences between many new mothers’ personalities and their husbands are more pronounced now that they are parents. This causes conflict and feelings of disappointment for them.
- Giving Room explains how many new mothers empathize with their husbands struggle to adjust to parenthood, and hope that this empathy will be reciprocated.

- Unit is how many new mothers define their relationships with their husbands as being close and intimate, particularly around their common desire to be good parents for their child.

Mother's Responsibility

- Mother's Responsibility is how these new mothers begin to grasp an understanding about their new role as a primary caretaker for another human being. This realization evokes enormous mental work as they embark upon formulating their maternal ideal. In this category the properties are as follows:
 - Mother's Process reveals how all these new mothers had planned to become mothers. Some initially thought their personalities would be compatible to motherhood, because of a history of enjoying children. However, after having a child and finding motherhood more challenging than anticipated, their confidence is shaken.
 - Working Toward Acceptance explains how many new mothers proceed in achieving a harmony with their newborn, through trial and error, that can then be internalized as successful mothering and bolster her self-acceptance.
 - Defending Child from Her Issues is recognition by most new mothers that they are not perfect beings and have many limitations. Understanding this reality, and that many of their personal issues need to be continually worked through, they set out with the intention to protect their child from their personal limitations.

- Still Me, But with More is a testimony made by most new mothers that motherhood will not become the only way they will identify themselves. They desire to establish a compatible coexistence between what is reflective of their individuality and their maternal ideal.

Emotional Upheaval

Emotional Upheaval is a compilation of emotions stimulated by the anticipation of motherhood and the baby's arrival. Emotional Upheaval uncovers her emotions in a less defended state combined with a desire that these emotions become accessible—conscious. The data reveals psychological aspects of motherhood that may or may not be correlated with physiology. The properties reviewed are:

- Dreams details their dreams that have become more abundant for these new mothers, along with their desire to analyze them.
- Known Self is a resurfacing of known aspects about many of these new mothers, which have a renewed interest since becoming a mother. Particularly with how these known aspects of herself impact her mothering.
- Emotional Swell is an awareness among many new mothers that their emotions are unusually heightened and intense. Although at times they feel overwhelmed, and can intellectually know that they are in response to motherhood, some become concerned when these emotions remain a mystery.
- Discoveries describes how some new mothers were unprepared for the more upsetting and disturbing emotions, specifically those emotions which

highlighted the need for psychological work. This awareness causes many to feel vulnerable and uncertain about their identities.

- Benefits is experienced by many new mothers as being in consequence to motherhood. They describe feeling assertive, empowered and free in ways they did not know before motherhood. Many stated that these emboldened feelings were underutilized in their prior lives, and now find themselves personally benefited by them.

Findings

Grounded Theory methodology proclaims “we do not create data; we create theory out of data.” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 56) The material documented above reflects a small group of women who discuss and analyze their experiences as they transition into motherhood. From these results there are four theoretical findings that encapsulate the early period in which these women begin to know themselves as mothers. They are as follows: motherhood assists in achieving a broader sense of self-worth, an internal dialogue is reinvigorated, acknowledges self as a role model, and a maternal identity is conceptualized. The following chapter will proceed with an elaborated theoretical discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER XII

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study analyzed data from interviews with seventeen new mothers in the early phases of their transition into motherhood. Their personal accounts illuminated emotional experiences that revealed how they were incorporating their new maternal role into their previously established identity, and how the new maternal role modified this identity. The findings discussed below demonstrate how these new mothers initially cope with their anxiety, and how they articulate their experiences of emotional disorganization. These findings also suggest how the new mother achieves a personal understanding of herself and how she develops a personal meaning for herself in this role. Specifically, the findings show how these new mothers are psychologically managing these changes to their identity, and particular categories and properties gleaned from the data will give these findings greater depth.

Four findings are of particular interest. First, motherhood assists the new mother in achieving a broader sense of self-worth. Second, motherhood invigorates an internal dialogue. Third, the mother perceives herself as a role model for her newborn, which subsequently activates her thinking about her own ideals. Finally, her maternal identity becomes part of her already-existing identity, but it supersedes this preexisting identity as the predominant organizer of her identity—both internally and externally.

The findings are very much in accord with pre-existing research. They reveal that all these new mothers sense that something has changed significantly in their lives and

that they feel different. Benedek (1959) brought to our awareness that parenthood presents an opportunity for the parent to rework and redefine internal conflict, thereby enabling parents to facilitate change in their lives. The findings of this research indicate that the evolving relationship with the developing child, both in utero and after birth plays a central role in promoting that kind of psychic change. Following Benedek, Stern's (1995) concept of the "motherhood constellation" further elaborated upon the psychic change a mother experiences during this early period of transition. He defined four component themes—life-growth, primary relatedness, supporting matrix, and identity reorganization—as the major organizers of this period. The findings pursued in this chapter are in some way reminiscent of his component themes. However, in a very significant way, the findings reveal a dynamic that is under represented, and in some cases absent, from Stern's concept.

These findings emphasize different preoccupations than Stern highlighted, particularly in how the component themes manifest for these new mothers. According to the motherhood constellation, these mothers should have been exclusively preoccupied with the child's well being. Although this was very much the case, my findings indicate that in addition to being preoccupied with their child's well-being, they were equally concerned about their own survival as mothers and that they were impressed by their new sense of self-worth. As these mothers learned to respond to their child via their attunement to their child's emotional states, they were also preoccupied by the effect this had on their internal life and they became interested in deepening their self-understanding. While these mothers wanted to establish an appropriate support network to further their growing investment in their child's well-being, they were curious about

the nature of the choices they made concerning that network. More importantly, they became acutely aware of how significant people and experiences in their lives had influenced their ideals about being a mother. While they accepted their maternal role, they were in deep contemplation about how to incorporate this new role into an already-existing identity. They wanted to preserve aspects of their prior lives, but in a balanced manner. This was one major challenge these women face. The findings reflect those preoccupations, which caused these new mothers to rethink and question previous ways of knowing themselves

These preoccupations disrupt a relatively established psychic structure, which then becomes vulnerable to disorganization during this early period of transition into motherhood. This study captures the thoughts and feelings of mothers within this very early period of transition, disorganization, and reorganization during a time when their self-worth, their internal world, their ideals, and the preservation of their personal interests weighed heavily on the minds of these new mothers. Perhaps the commonality around these preoccupations was prevalent among all the new mothers interviewed because it reflects the similarity of their adult lives, which involved their common interest in and their pursuit of personal aspirations. Additionally, all wanted to become mothers, and so although they were challenged by motherhood, they accepted their new role.

The literature I cite in this discussion is largely drawn from psychoanalytic and developmental theory. "The developmental point of view looks for the actual child instead of the reconstructed child." (Tyson and Tyson, p.21 1990) This study arose from a concern similar to that of the developmental theorists, who shifted their point of view from reconstructing the experience of the child from an adult perspective, to studying the

“actual child.” Similarly, it seemed that mothers were not being examined directly; someone other than the mother, i.e. the infant researcher, was giving an account of her experience via observations of the infant. This study breaks new ground by asking new mothers directly about their experience, and by examining commonalities in what could be characterized as an internal dialogue, by exploring the world of the new mother as she comes to understand herself during her transition into motherhood. This study posits that the psychological aspects of motherhood can be understood from a woman’s current experience as a mother, her retrospective analysis of how she was mothered, and also from developmental experiences from early childhood through her transition to adulthood.

The majority of women recruited for this study came from various new mothers groups, and prenatal classes. They were a resourceful group of women, who were capable of finding appropriate help and support when needed. The mothers in this study were eager to talk and to reflect on their internal experience. All the new mothers noted that their reason for participating in the study was to seek greater understanding of their thoughts and feelings regarding motherhood. They all shared a common desire to process emotions, including many emotions that felt both familiar and unfamiliar.

During this early phase, the preoccupations of these new mothers appeared to nurture their growth as mothers. Although disorganizing and stressful, these initial preoccupations were purposeful as these new mothers tried to orient themselves to their maternal role. This process is reflected in Stern’s (1985) description of a newborn within the first two months as being in a state of emergence. “It is a sense of organization in the process of formation, and it is a sense of self that will remain active for the rest of life.

An overarching sense of self is not yet achieved in this period, but it is coming into being.” (p.38) While I conducted the interviews, I often thought of the new mothers as being in a period of incubation. They appeared to be nestled in their homes, engaged in parallel activities: preoccupied in thought, while being empathic attendants to their newborn’s needs. In this early period after their baby’s birth, there was much for a new mother to learn about herself and her baby, as well as an opportunity to learn something familiar about herself in a different context. I elaborated further by defining this period as incubated idealism. As I listened to these new mothers most pressing concern, it was that they would provide an ideal environment for their child to thrive, as well as to strive for being an ideal mother. Their period of incubated idealism was part of a larger process that contributed to a new mother “coming into being.”

The findings suggest that there is a process by which these new mothers reorient their self-understanding: they change their identity, so as to incorporate a new role, but one that will be with them for the rest of their lives. Stern named his last component theme, Identity Reorganization, but spent little time explaining its meaning. The new mothers in this study focused predominately on their changing identity, and articulated the four findings—the incorporation of her maternal identity with her already-existing identity, her broadened self-worth, her internal dialogue, and her ideals—as predominant aspects contributing to their changing identities. These experiences were both exciting and anxiety-producing, but they were purposeful to these new mothers.

How Maternal Identity Is Incorporated with a Pre-Existing Identity

Identity reorganization involves the incorporation of a woman's maternal role with her identity pre-motherhood. What previously contributed to a cohesive sense of self is pushed to the background by motherhood, the new central organizer of a new mother's identity. The women in this study all had lives that were organized around academic and professional pursuits. Now all the new mothers had to grapple with determining how to balance satisfactory experiences before motherhood with a new life which was primarily organized around mothering. The transformation of a mother's identity is the primary focus of this research.

Motherhood creates an opportunity for psychological reorganization and change. Many new mothers found themselves agitated and their self-identity unsettled, because they needed to realign who they had been within this new sense of responsibility for their child's life. Once-relied-upon experiences and emotions that contributed to their self-coherence were now in flux—debated, challenged, and reconsidered. Motherhood now prompted an immediate review of their life: who they were, who they are, and who they hoped to become.

In this study, the reorganization of a mother's identity becomes apparent in the category Career, where many new mothers processed their thoughts about their careers. For most, their career was an important part of their identity. Some found their careers provided a place where their personal talents and aspirations could be expressed. However, motherhood placed constraints on every new mother's time, and demanded an examination of how they distributed that time. Now, many new mothers found themselves in an unavoidable examination of their life's work and its relevance to their

current life. In the property Personal Gains, some new mothers described the workplace as an environment where their talents and capabilities were given rein to thrive.

Galatzer-Levy and Cohler (1993) contend, “As Americans became better educated, they increasingly expected work to be personally fulfilling.” (p.231) Work for many new mothers was deeply personal and a significant contributor to their self-state.

Whether the new mothers had satisfactory careers or not, all agreed that as they planned to integrate work back into their lives, certain criteria must be met. All stated that their work needed to be compatible with motherhood, which for some new mothers inspired a need to find a balance between their main priority, motherhood, and a familiar source of cohesion and self-esteem, career.

In the property Unwavering Commitment To Her Baby, these mothers discussed their challenge to find this balance. “The wish to care for young children causes enormous stress for professionally ambitious women” (Chester, p.83 1990), “particularly early in family and professional life when the rapid shift from professional to caregiver can cause enormous psychological strain.” (Richter, p.143, 1990) In Unwavering Commitment To Her Baby, many began to realize that the balance between family and professional life was likely to be achieved through compromise. “I know I can’t do what I did before, but I know that whatever I do choose to do when I’m there, I have to do a good job; otherwise, I think it would be too stressful” (p.23)

Even though most new mothers found they benefited from motherhood in ways that their careers did not provide, in the property Still Me But With More within the category Career, a few expressed worries about becoming so singly focused on their new role, because they believed their prior identities would be consumed by motherhood.

This was a sentiment emphasized by those new mothers who were raised by women who did not seek to nurture interests outside of their maternal duties.

Many of the mothers in this study stated they had sensed their own mother's dissatisfaction with life and they felt this manifested in anger directed toward them. However, most new mothers found benefits to motherhood that could not be found in their careers. This sentiment is found in the category Emotional Upheaval, in the property Benefits where one new mother stated, "I think some people at work who have only seen me as this successful, driven, workaholic persona are now seeing more of what is inside of me, and I'm okay with that. It's a big piece of vulnerability being exposed." (p.78)

Indeed, for a few, career and motherhood were viewed as compatible; they felt the combination could mutually support self-cohesion and self-esteem. As noted in the category Career and its property Personal Gains, one new mother stated, "I feel I'm a better person because of my work. I have a lot of time invested in what I've built professionally. I think that will actually make me a better mother than if I kind of lost that grounding, being home all the time. So for me, I think I need my career in order to be a good mother." (p.21) This new mother believed that the personal gains achieved in the workplace served to support her positively in her mothering role.

The category Husband describes how many new mothers find they react, observe, and feel toward their spouses since becoming parents, and in the property Shift, some discussed how their relationship changed to include the baby. While some women expressed a new insecurity about their marriage, for most, marital security was built upon their mutual need for one another during this heightened period of stress. Many found

this inclusion of their baby stirred intense emotions between her and her husband, which resulted in a dependency. Some found this sense of dependency to be a relief; others found it threatening. Most described themselves prior to motherhood as independent, self-reliant women. It came as a surprise when they felt significantly dependent on their husbands for physical and emotional assistance.

Most mothers believed that exposing this need to their husbands made them personally stronger and that it had strengthened their marriage as well. Winnicott (1965) viewed this type of behavior as evidence of a mother's health: "mothers who have it in them to provide good-enough care can be enabled to do better by being cared for themselves." (p.49)

A smaller number of new mothers felt insecure in their relationship with their husbands, particularly as their relationship as lovers became overshadowed by their shared roles as parents. These women found their marriages to be uncomfortable; they felt they lacked adequate support. As a result, they have begun to wonder about the marriage's fundamental stability. However, because of financial dependence or an interest in maintaining a family unit, they refrained from being fully candid, and they kept their unhappiness private.

All agree that motherhood evokes intense emotion, and that they are preoccupied by these emotions and their possible meaning. These emotions connect with the category Baby and its property Realities. The challenges that come with a newborn cause some new mothers to wish for a return to being able to emphasize personal needs, and even to indulge in childish impulses.

As an example of the former, one mother noted, “I don’t wish him to get older, but I do look forward to when he’ll be sleeping longer. I feel selfish, but that will allow me to sleep longer and just feel awake and have another opportunity to get out of the house.” (p.10) For the latter case, one new mother reported that amidst her emotional turmoil, she felt divided between a pull toward maturity and her desire to be childish. As Karen noted, “to be fully open to the baby’s emotional needs is to become reacquainted with oneself as a baby.” (p.374)

The category Mother’s Responsibility and its property Defending Child from Her Issues articulates how some new mothers describe these more infantile impulses. “You may want to melt into a puddle and stomp your feet and not be diplomatic about working things through.” (p.57)

Benefits, another property of Emotional Upheaval, is an account of how some new mothers believed they have personally benefited from this emotional surge. Feeling a heightened sense of self-esteem encouraged some to become more assertive. “I’m trying to work on the people-pleaser part of me, not trying to always make everyone else happy, and learn to say ‘no.’ (p. 77) Their improved self-esteem had helped to cultivate a feeling of personal freedom and empowerment. Some felt that motherhood had emboldened them to seek a life that was more closely reflective of their internal desires. As one woman stated, “I just recognize that I have one chance in my life. What am I going to accomplish in society.” (p.79)

Some articulated similar sentiments about living for themselves instead of others. One woman stated that establishing a family gave her a more secure base and provoked her to want to take risks in areas where she had previously felt too intimidated. Her

infant's presence inspired a belief in her abilities and strengths not fully realized before motherhood. This kind of realization and solidification of identity occurs when one's internal world and external world are able to coexist in a compatible manner. (Erikson, 1980)

In many ways, these mothers had recognized that their identities had been in flux since becoming mothers, and that their emotions needed to be sorted through and understood. Brazelton and Cramer articulated that this "reshuffling" of emotions and fantasies and the ultimate adjustment to motherhood is contingent upon maternal and paternal representations, the mother's oedipal experience, and her separation from her parents. (1990, p.5) This new experience with her newborn offers the hope that aspects of the mother's identity will be receptive to challenges and open to change.

How Self-Worth Is Broadened

As the new mother successfully gives birth and as she is able to provide for her infant's basic needs, her sense of purpose is now defined by her ability to sustain the life of another human being. Her self-worth is affected by the important and crucial role she now plays, and by the fact that it is she upon whom her child now depends. Stern's life-growth component theme reflects the mother's concern about her ability to adequately nourish her child, with the expressed purpose of reassuring herself that she is capable of sustaining her newborn's life. (Stern 1995, p.175) This concern boils down to a simple question: 'Can I keep my baby alive?' In this study, evidence of a broadened sense of self-worth is found in the category Emotional Upheaval. This category describes the intense nature of these new mother's emotions.

Some emotions, which are noted in an associated property, Discoveries, reveal how a few new mothers were pleased by the renewed sense of worth they felt since becoming mothers. Successfully giving birth helped one mother's self-esteem surge. "It never even occurred to me that it would have anything to do with my self-esteem, but it's completely taken a huge boost." (p. 75)

They realized that, in the workplace, their self-esteem was prone to fluctuate. In contrast, they discovered that an enhanced sense of self-worth resulted from the simple feedback received from their infant, such as: weight gain, improved sleep patterns, and smiling. "My feedback from my son is he's gaining weight; he's happy; he's sleeping well; he smiles at me. When he's fussy, it's either that he needs to burp or he needs to eat or I need to change his diaper. So, I think that my self-esteem has taken a huge boost from being home and away from a lot of that negative energy from work." The mothers' purpose in their new relationship with their infant was confirmed when they believed they had been effective, and had accomplished their maternal duties.

In the category Baby, new mothers shared their feelings about their newborn's impact on them. This is where some of the concerns outlined in the life-growth theme emerge, expressed as worries about their ability to secure their baby's life. Particularly in the property Baby Love, many new mothers described an unfolding of their love for their babies. However, instead of an instant realization of love for their baby, some felt too concerned about the immediate necessity to feed and provide for their infant's basic needs.

In Baby Love, rather than reveling in their love for their baby, some new mothers stated their primary concern centered on securing their baby's life; their focus narrowed

to securing their baby's survival. Once they believed their baby was sufficiently fed and cared for, a more tangible love could be articulated

As mentioned above, the success many of these new mothers felt in their abilities to adequately meet their baby's need eventually gave them a surge of love, which was described in Baby Love. Their baby's responses and apparent thriving filled them with positive feelings about mothering. As Benedek (1959) theorized a good-thriving-infant would create a reciprocal psychological structure in the mother—good-mother-self. Some reported that they wanted their baby's approval and love, and they felt encouraged when these sentiments were realized.

Many of the new mothers found that as they and their babies continued to reach states of compatibility, they felt a sense of accomplishment. For a few new mothers, this feeling began with childbirth itself: they indicated that getting through labor and delivering a healthy baby made them feel strong and capable. In her 1980 study, Leifer concluded that even though there is much turmoil as a mother transitions into parenthood, she also experiences heightened self-esteem and she feels mature.

The property Baby Love shows how many new mothers and their babies work toward the achievement of harmony in challenging circumstances—specifically, when they believed they had successfully responded to their child's feedback. One new mother described that her baby transformed from an amorphous being to a person with whom something tangible could be exchanged.

As some of these new mothers witnessed their baby's positive response to their caring gestures, this feedback loop was noted as the motivator within their relationship. This supports Bowlby's (1958) initial belief that the mother-infant mutual interest in

attachment is motivated by the need for survival, which re-placed what was at that time the preeminent oral gratification theory with the more powerful construct of attachment.

How an Internal Dialogue Is Invigorated

New mothers in this study were concerned about reading their child's varying emotional states and responding adequately to them. As they find themselves experiencing their baby's emotions, they became similarly emotional. Stern's primary-relatedness component theme is concerned about the mother's social-emotional engagement with her baby. The mother wants to establish a secure understanding that she can love her baby, and that her love will be received and reciprocated by her baby. However, Stern did not observe that mothers are also interested in their own emotional states. These emotions then become an impetus to stimulate an internal dialogue. All were curious about the origin and nature of their emotions and believed that this knowledge would help them to be better mothers.

In this study, the theme initially emerges in the mother's emotional discoveries, which are described in the category Emotional Upheaval, in the property Discoveries. Here it is revealed how many new mothers cited motherhood as one of a few times they sat down and reflected upon their lives. These new mothers viewed their pregnancy and motherhood as a pivotal period in their lives, a time when their internal world dominated their existence. Previously, much of their time had been focused on the attainment of academic and professional goals. Some overvalued their external accomplishments, which then contributed to a diminished investment in their internal life. One stated, "I've had a pretty accomplished, successful life so far but a lot of that was just running, running

away from myself.” (p.71) Most had experienced new emotions and they responded by wanting to know these emotions more intimately. For some, motherhood disrupted identities that had been dependent upon tangible affirmation for self-understanding. In Discoveries, they reconfirmed that their emotions were useful and could be reliable guides.

As the primary-relatedness theme suggests, many new mothers discovered in Emotional Upheaval that their success as a mother was more dependent upon their emotional awareness than on their cognitive achievements. They recognized a significant link between their baby’s well-being and their own emotional being. When a mother is uneasy or doubtful about her ability to immerse herself in an affectionate relationship with her baby, she feels that her potential failure in this task would adversely effect her infant’s psychic development. (Stern, 1995, p.176) Stern stated that primary relatedness is analogous to Winnicott’s “primary maternal preoccupation,” but Stern differentiated the motherhood constellation as a psychic organization that could be sustained indefinitely.

Therefore, many new mothers were reassured by the emergence of their own emotional life when confronted with the task of being the emotional nurturer for their baby. It was not that these women found their emotions to be incomprehensible; it was that they believed their lives prior to children had been predominately guided by expectations, which constricted their emotional thoughtfulness. As one expectant mother stated, “I think I’m probably going to be surprised by the overwhelming emotion that will be with it, because when I said I was emotionally hardy before, I think I tend to just try to

always be logical about emotion. I think that is going to be completely rewritten once there's a baby." (p.71)

In the category, Emotional Upheaval, they experienced a presence and surge of emotion about motherhood that was unlike any other time in their lives. Some of the mothers were heartened by the emotional intensity, while a smaller number were made uneasy by it; they found it disruptive to a familiar self-experience.

In Emotional Upheaval, the property Emotional Swell describes how these new mothers were overcome with emotion. The emotions could be intense and indecipherable, and they often occurred as the mother was mesmerized by the infant. One stated, "It's thick, and it's heavy, and it's sweet, and it's kind of incomprehensible, too." (p.69)

Some were comfortable with allowing the emotions to linger within, while others were uneasy with the intensity. One new mother described feeling both joyful about and fiercely protective of her newborn. Her need to find a way to mediate these two emotional poles left her feeling uncertain as to how she would find a resolution. This description mirrors Benedek's theory that early revived conflicts or unresolved issues combine with the emotions stirred in parenthood to cause disruption, but they also provide a complementary sense of hope that these emotions are an opportunity for growth and change. (Benedek, 1959)

In the category Baby, many of the new mothers discussed the difficulty involved in availing themselves of this emotional opportunity, a difficulty which became complicated by their sense of their own limitations, and their adjustment after the baby's

birth. Baby surveys the spectrum of reactions and thoughts about her newborn's effect upon a mother's life.

The property, Realities, reveals that many new mothers were acutely aware of their own limitations in the wake of their baby's birth. Brazelton and Cramer (1990) discuss the mother's adjustment from her fantasies about her baby to the realities of her newborn's presence. These fantasies stem from the mother's wishes for a child; they are influenced by her experience in being mothered, and by her identification with the mothering role, her ideals, and her attempt to recreate old ties in the new relationship with her child. (1990, p. 9-11) However, the reality of living with a baby makes this very difficult to accomplish.

In Baby, the property Realities encompasses the difficulties some new mothers encountered as they tried to build a connection with their babies. Many found that this involved confronting their struggle in adjustment to motherhood, because their fantasies were now being challenged by an ever-encroaching reality. The real experience with the baby caused one mother to be concerned about her envy for the environment she was providing for her child, which she believed to be better than the one in which she had been raised. Although she was determined to create a different and better environment for her child, she was surprised that her accomplishment stirred longings from her own past.

Her reaction can be explained as a "transgenerational mandate." (Lebovici, 1993) Her behaviors are guided by historic difficulties stemming from her relationship with her parents, which she now hopes to correct through her child. Lebovici would describe this

new mother as extending a generational conflict into her current relationship with her child, a conflict which was preexistent with the maternal grandparents.

The category Baby includes a property, Baby's Meaning, where many new mothers discussed a personal meaning that their child held for them. In these findings, many mothers explained how their infant's life had an associated unconscious meaning. Some of what her infant meant to her stemmed from her experiences with her own mother and father. Her continual attempts to understand the nature of these infantile relationships had helped her establish some thoughts about her infant, which reached beyond a central focus on her mother and father.

Lebovici (1988) explains this dynamic as an interplay between the "fantasmatic infant" and the "imaginary infant." The "fantasmatic infant" is a continuation of the mother's infantile conflict with her mother and father. The "imaginary infant" resembles the mother's authenticity—her thoughts and desires. Lebovici thinks there is a tension between the two representations, and it is thought that as the mother's intrapsychic associations move from "fantasmatic" to "imaginary," there is a corresponding shift in her identity.

This interplay emerges in the findings. For some, their baby was an opportunity to create the family they had always longed for, and to experience a level of intimacy that was more reflective of their personal needs. A few others also remarked that their infants were there as guides, and their baby ultimately helped them in their mothering endeavor. "I just almost cried because I realized that I didn't really know what I was doing as a new mom, but he was such a good baby. I noticed he was waiting for me. I realized he's got a little bit of insight here, too." (p. 15)

Emde (1988b) contends that affective signals serve as a psychic organizer in two ways, “They provide internal feedback (guiding what is experienced as new, interesting, and pleurably mastered), and they provide social feedback (guiding what is attended to and rewarded). (p.287) Subsequently, the mother experiences her infant’s affective expressions as guiding her in her caretaking behavior (Emde, 1988b, II, p.31).

This new mother’s sense of insecurity was comforted by her ability to trust her infant’s signals. As some new mothers contemplated their personal struggles and as they attached this understanding to their baby’s meaning, they hoped their self-compassion would assist them in being more confident in integrating desires and values that reflected their authenticity.

In contrast to what Stern describes in the theme of primary-relatedness, however, many new mothers hoped that, as they sought greater self-understanding, they would personally benefit from a process of self-improvement. In many cases, the mothers’ reinvigorated interest in self-improvement was augmented by their expressed need to seek a deeper self-understanding. Fonagy et al. (1991) found that a reflective capacity significantly improved the chances for a secure attachment between mother and child. The quest for self-improvement is found in the category Emotional Upheaval, in the properties Dreams and Known Self; it is also expressed in the property Defending Child From Her Issues, within the category Mother’s Responsibility.

Most concurred that their babies were emotional agitators, in that the babies awakened emotions about the maternal care that had been provided for them. If these emotions remained unexamined by the parents, they ran the risk of harming their child; research based on attachment theory purports that a mother’s maternal representations

will affect and influence the current mother-infant relationship. (Ammaniti, 1991) The encapsulated affect behaves as a “ghost” that looms in and out of the parent-child relationship, thereby thwarting the developmental process.

When a smaller group of new mothers reviewed their relationship with their mothers, they were reminded of times when they felt neglected and misunderstood. For some new mothers, this was a painful process in which difficult decisions regarding their relationship with their mothers were made. In the category Influences and the property Mother’s Mother, a woman concluded that her mother would be incapable of being available to her and her baby much in the same way she had demonstrated throughout her childhood.

My mother never knew anything about me, and to this day, this whole pregnancy and birth of my child remains outside of her awareness and understanding. I have one of the worst relationships with my mom. I don’t want that for me and my child. (p.37)

Her early ineffectual relationship with her mother had fueled a determination within this new mother to be academically and professionally successful, a goal that had sustained her until she gave birth to her newborn. Now the challenge was to be emotionally available to her baby in a way her mother had not been for her. She wanted her child to experience feelings, which she felt had been denied her.

Fonagy et al. (1991) would commend mothers like the one just described above for engaging in self-reflection. His research concluded that an infant’s security was dependent upon a mother’s ability to become so engaged. Her self-reflection has the benefit of promoting understanding and compassion for herself, which can then be transferred onto her infant.

For those parents who are restricted in their ability to utilize affect stemming from their childhood experiences, Fraiberg's (1975) research concluded that inadequately processed or forgotten affect runs the risk of harming a child. One mother reflected her awareness of such a potential when she discussed problematic issues between herself and her mother.

I think it was partly her issues, where she did not want to intrude as her mother had intruded on her. So, this is my guess, I actually haven't asked her, but her mother was very clear, you know, about what she wanted from her daughter and I think she wanted to correct that with her relationship with me and so she actually went the opposite way and actually didn't address anything. (p.37)

Embracing an internal review of oneself was interpreted by a few as an impetus to mature, to be an adult. One new mother stated, "I feel like I want to be the adult for her now. Before there were things where I could act immature and I could act like a little kid and I still do, I'm sure, but I feel this desire to be mature for her and to be strong for her and model things for her." (p.56-57) This need for self-understanding may suggest a reflective capacity, which Fonagy et al found enables a mother to better care for her self and her child. For most of these new mothers, their reflections helped to organize their maternal identity.

The dreams of these new mothers were especially vivid, and in the property Dreams, they expressed curiosity about the meaning of such dreams, which further tapped into a curiosity about their unconscious life. All the new mothers were well aware of the unconscious, and reported many dreams, the meaning of which they were interested in interpreting. Upon examining their dreams, it became apparent that a fear of failure, a doubt about their adequacy, a fear of abandonment, and ambivalence about motherhood were deeper concerns than they had originally thought.

For many new mothers, their dreams became a medium through which their emotions could be processed. One woman reported a dream: “I’m sliding downhill, going down this hill, and then there is a steep drop-off, and I wonder how I am going to get down the steep drop-off.” (p.67) She explained this as her anticipated journey in motherhood. She realized this journey will evoke fear and uncertainty, but she can work through whatever she encounters. This explanation does not fully address the steep drop-off she encounters, but one might interpret that as a sign that she has doubts and reservations about proceeding in her journey.

Emotional Upheaval and its property, Known Self, is where some new mothers indicated that they have always been aware of an internal process. Many cited various emotional challenges that required significant mental work; these include loss, disappointment, success, etc. By and large they attempted to manage their emotions, rather than experience them, because such emotions were felt to be too painful and disruptive. Now, however, there was an interest in giving recognition to these emotions; in a few cases, some mothers wanted to modify them for motherhood.

One new mother articulated that she knew she had finished being a child by the time she was twelve. She found her childhood environment to be oppressive because of a pervasive pressure to be perfect. The only way she felt she could survive the narrow focus in her childhood was to minimize her feelings. After the birth of her baby, however, these once under-recognized emotions had a dual purpose: they helped her feel the reciprocal nature of the love that existed between herself and her baby, and they also alerted her to emotions that needed to be processed. One mother specifically discussed

her tendency to be self-centered; she hoped that her child would help broaden her perspective to a child-centered one.

In the category Mother's Responsibility, the property Defending Child from Her Issues deals with how some new mothers find their strengths and limitations revealed to their newborn. The mothers' reactions were varied. One new mother explained that since her infant would be observing her throughout her life, she was compelled to become more introspective.

“I just feel like when someone is watching you and will be watching you for the rest of your life, I think it does make you much more aware of the fact that you really need to be a role model.” (p. 57)

Some sounded relieved to be less guarded with their infant than with professional peers and other adults, and in fact they believe that they both are mutually served. As these mothers continue to work through personal struggles, they feel their child is a little less harmed than if personal struggles were rarely recognized. “If she could understand what I was saying, would I be proud of the things that I'm saying and would I be proud of the way I perceive things.” (p. 58)

In their efforts to grow as mothers, these women are persuaded to further challenge themselves to work through personal struggles, and they believe this effort will deepen the intimacy between themselves and their baby, because when a mother behaves as her baby's protector, she is motivated by her love for her child. As she loves her baby, she is inclined to experience her baby's response as loving.

How the New Mother Conceptualizes Herself as an Ideal Role Model

The supporting matrix theme describes the mother's support system, which is intended to protect the mother's health and to stave off outside pressures, such as career, obligations, disruptive family members, etc. In addition, the supporting matrix lends psychological and educative assistance to the mother. (1995, p.77-180)

When these new mothers began to establish their supporting matrix, they wanted to surround themselves with people who they knew would support them in their maternal role. Many of their choices tended to be people who had influenced these mothers in various ways throughout their lives, and who had served as role models that helped inform their identity. A new mother now sees herself as a role model for her child, and, consequently, she has a reinvigorated desire to live a life that is more reflective of her ego ideal.

However, Stern did not consider the effect a new mother's supporting matrix might have on how her sense of responsibility impacts her conception of being a role model to her child. While many people in these new mother's lives had left a significant impression upon them, these experiences did not always neatly translate into positive ideals with which she wanted to identify and integrate. Rather, some new mothers used disturbing experiences as motivation to align themselves with experiences and people more reflective of their personal ideals.

In this study, the supporting matrix was discussed in the category, Influences, which describes the mixture of people who made up their support system, including other mothers and women, their parents, and their husbands. In an associated property, Parents, some new mothers had given a great deal of thought about how they hoped to

parent. Many had reached conclusions about parenting that were significantly different from and/or a modification of how they themselves had been parented. One woman's initial choice in a partner immediately made her life different from that of her parents.

I wanted to handle my marriage and my relationships differently than my mom and dad did. So although they stayed together, I knew I didn't want to live my mom's life, and it's easy to repeat behavior. Like ending up with a guy who had a drinking problem.

The majority of new mothers cultivated a support system in various ways, and all were quick to point out that they could not carry out their maternal duties without the help of others. Much of the impetus for establishing a supporting matrix comes from the mother's need to identify with other maternal examples. Some of these examples are respected and viewed as being in line with their values, while other models are in need of modification and/or replacement. For example, in *Influences*, in the property *Mother's Mother*, one woman explained how she needed her mother to be part of her support system, and that she had had to find ways to integrate what she could appreciate from her mother, while old grievances were placed to the side.

When my mom came into the delivery room, I just let her presence crash right into me and started crying. I was just like, "This is so hard." She just hugged me and said, "You can do it." At the time, I just felt like I needed my mom and I didn't realize it until I saw her." (p.35)

In his 1994 book, Robert Karen synthesized a general sentiment shared by attachment theorists. He stated, "The importance of being able to rely on someone—and of having someone to rely on—is illustrated by the behavior of women who cope successfully with the immense demands of pregnancy and early motherhood." (p.382)

All the new mothers expressed various hopes for themselves in light of their being a primary role model for their child, because this new role is often accompanied by the

hope of being an ideal maternal figure for the newborn. As these mothers worked toward establishing their own versions of an ideal maternal figure, they assessed how their ideals were shaped over their life. Many of these ideals had been formed as a consequence of their relationship with parents, through experiences generated from their own efforts, and by significant people to whom they had opened themselves to be influenced. These ideals were now utilized for the expressed purpose of being a good mother. Their ideals were defined as desires to be informed, patient, forgiving of self and others, and balanced, to name a few.

Many saw motherhood as their great opportunity to more fully integrate ideals which had been changing and maturing throughout their life. In the category Mother's Responsibility, in the property Acceptance, a mother stated,

It's my opportunity to try and awaken all of his senses and let him explore. I want him to do some of the things I did not get to do. But I want to be very cognizant that I don't want him to accomplish things that I couldn't accomplish, because I don't want him to do it for me." (p.55)

This mother believed that she could impart the wisdom she had cultivated from her ideals on behalf of making her child's life open to opportunities that had been denied to her.

In the category Baby, the property Baby as Ambassador describes how their babies compelled these new mothers to expand their support network. The majority of new mothers had encounters with people who had not typically been part of their routine prior to motherhood, and so they relied on their common bond around motherhood to facilitate conversation and connections with other mothers. Several new mothers actively pursued meeting other mothers in the hope of sharing their thoughts and feelings about their common experience.

A few new mothers found themselves interacting with other women who they had once thought were too detached from their own personal experience and world view. However, the emotional disruption and isolation experienced by many new mothers, along with the positive pull to establish a network, motivated them to reconsider people they had previously rejected. Their incentive to temper these preconceived notions was fueled in part by their need to find comfort and assistance from others in similar circumstances. Some realized that, in their previous lives, some of these women likely would not have accepted them. But they hoped that, as they had opened themselves to new possibilities, so would these other women.

One's ability to accept the limitations in oneself and others is, according to Colarusso and Nemiroff, a sign that personal authenticity is being achieved. Once this acceptance has been achieved a relationship can be established which allows people to be candid and self-revealing. (Colarusso and Nemiroff, 1981) By being less judgmental about the limitations of oneself and others, more opportunities are created to meet people with whom a relationship can develop and mature. As one woman stated in this property,

I think once you have a child, it makes you—it enriches your life and it makes you a more complete person. You have all these new experiences now that you can connect to all these women that you've never been able to connect with before." (p.17)

She saw her baby as a catalyst to relationships she had once perceived as unacceptable or inaccessible.

In the category, Influences, new mothers discussed significant experiences with people in their past and current life who influenced how they perceived themselves as mothers. Stern articulated three discourses that preoccupy a mother: "the mother's discourse with her own mother, especially with herself-as-mother-to-her-as-a-child; her

discourse with herself, especially with herself as mother; and her discourse with her baby.” (1995, p. 172) These concerns are considered preeminent and they require “the greatest amount of mental work and mental reworking.” (1995, p. 172)

The first of these concerns is described in the property *Mother’s Mother*, which is a lengthy discussion in which all the new mothers participated and one which evoked a myriad of reactions. All the new mothers maintained there was both a fantasy and reality about her mother’s help.

One mother was surprised by her mother’s interest and level of involvement, considering that her childhood was shaped by their distance rather than their closeness. She had established an adult life which contained little interaction between herself and her mother. They had nothing in common; therefore there had been no need to be involved in each other’s life. But motherhood was something they now had in common, and this new commonality gave this new mother a renewed interest in her own mother’s participation in her life. Their reunion stirred mixed emotions; where the new mother had been once unsympathetic, she was now sympathetic; however, some remaining limitations continued to disturb her.

Contrary to this woman’s experience, another new mother found herself in equally unexpected circumstances. She and her mother had had an admittedly enmeshed relationship during her childhood. When she became a mother, she was surprised to find her mother unusually absent. This reversal in behavior caused her to analyze their relationship from a completely different set of emotions and experiences. She found herself readjusting her expectations and seeking alternate figures from whom she could achieve adequate support, an endeavor she had never anticipated. Both of these new

mothers demonstrated an ability to express disappointment and to react flexibly within their respective circumstances.

The mothers in this study felt a need to limit or manage their own mothers' support. A small number of new mothers refused their mother's help. They did so because of historic disappointment in their relationship, and because of that, they determined that their mothers were incapable of providing appropriate support.

Bowlby (1969) explained mothers need to mourn the loss of the inadequately attached parent. He further suggested that a failure to do so would result in stagnation. In this study, the majority of mothers knew what they could obtain from their mothers, and so they found ways to capitalize on their mother's strengths while managing their mother's impediments. These mothers support Main's conclusion that,

being able to put feelings, especially unwanted feelings, into words makes them available for review and transformation....To have this ability means, in effect, that your internal working model is still a "working" model—open, flexible, able to assimilate new information." (Karen, 1988, p.370)

For many new mothers their mother's active reappearance in their lives had positive and negative aspects. Many had to learn how to manage their expectations about their mothers, because it was more important to them that they received some kind of help, rather than no help at all. As far as negative aspects were concerned, for some, old issues were present as noted in Influences and the property Mother's Mother.

One particular new mother confronted her mother over her mother's interference in her ultimate concern about getting adequate help. "When you say these things, you really hurt my feelings and you make me not want to talk to you." (p. 38) This new mother hoped that by confronting her mother's aspersions they would be contained, at least momentarily.

On the positive side, some mothers were pleased when they found themselves able to work through disappointment and capable of broadening their previous conceptions about their mothers. Ammaniti (1991) found that when maternal representations are viewed with balance, the new mother will tend to be more flexible and non-idealizing of their maternal figure. Ammaniti echoed the value espoused by many who study mental health, which is that this perspective helps the mother to adequately provide for her infant's current needs. Such flexibility also assisted these new mothers in accepting their mother's help. Consequently, a few reported learning new things about their mothers which pleased them.

An even smaller number of new mothers in *Mother's Mother* had little to complain about their mothers; in fact, they found motherhood to generate greater esteem for their mother. As one new mother stated, "my mom was an amazing mom. She's just a total giver, just a wonderful example for a mom." (p.34)

In these instances, these mothers' mothers were trusted to be active participants in their lives, and they were considered reliable sources for support, whatever form it might take. However, Ammaniti (1991) might caution these new mothers that they are "too idealizing," and at risk for having a restricted reflective ability, which can adversely affect their adequacy as a mother. For those mothers who are restricted from exploring their mothers from a mixed perspective, one consequence is the underdevelopment of their own ideas about motherhood.

In a different category, *Husband, the property Differences* highlights a particular way in which some new mothers came to find their husband a source of support. Stern has observed that the contemporary husband's role has become more extensive in the

mother's supporting matrix. In some instances, he refers to this as the husband being "maternalized" in an effort to provide a broader spectrum of support for what was traditionally a female role. (1995, p.178) This observation is proven true in Differences: the mothers described their husband's support as physical, emotional and psychological.

However, in the same property, some new mothers recognized that there were bothersome and, in a few cases, troublesome differences between themselves and their husbands in their approach to parenting. Tension and conflict, never before experienced in some relationships, challenged many new mothers to work through their differences. Their more infantile wish to fuel a grudge gave way to a mature perspective when some considered what was in the best interest of their child. They needed their husband's support, so it was in their best interest to strive for a deeper understanding of their husband's intentions.

Parenthood inevitably makes parents vulnerable to upsetting emotions, some of which are discussed in another property in Husband—Giving Room. Giving Room reveals the means by which some new mothers began to develop acceptance for their husband's differences.

The disappointment some new mothers felt about their husbands as fathers caused a few new mothers to reconsider their own limitations in light of their growing recognition of their husbands' failings. For example, one mother, conflicted by her own difficulty in establishing an appropriate level of interaction with her newborn, found herself monitoring her husband's "floor time" with their newborn. She concluded it was inadequate and she communicated this to him. Naturally, he was not pleased; he found her assessment off base. In contrast, a few new mothers recognized that their emotions

were heightened and erratic, and they kept this in mind as they attempted to understand their husband's reactions to parenthood as well.

Many realized their transition into parenthood was equally distressing for their husbands. A few new mothers stated that the most valuable support they got from their husbands was a mutual understanding that parenthood was difficult and that each spouse needed time and space to establish their respective selves more securely. Many expressed that, when each parent experienced the other as accepting, rather than critical, their reliance on each other increased.

In the category, Mother's Responsibility, all the new mothers discussed their wish to provide a loving and supportive environment for their child.

The property Defending the Child From Her Issues identifies some mothers' personal struggles and behaviors that had the potential to interfere with their child's psychological development. In this property, they assessed their personal dynamics and personality traits and they proposed how they would ideally like to behave and interact with their child. Many reported that their baby's birth had prompted an overwhelming desire to create an environment in which their child can thrive. Many hoped to translate personal review and a raised awareness into changed behavior. Karen describes this paradox between the establishment of a better life for one's children, and the inevitable impediment caused by lingering internal conflict and limitations.

“...as self-aware parents know, the effort to shield our children from the damaged parts of ourselves (the fears, the unmourned injuries, the unbearable longings) is arduous. And it is constantly undermined by our entrenched dissociations and indispensable armor, which have kept us as we are for so long” (p. 377-378)

For most of these new mothers, their hopes and wishes for their baby were an incentive for them to seriously review their lives; these hopes and wishes then became a central organizer of their identity.

All the new mothers placed great emphasis on understanding their own narcissistic development, and did so by exploring personal issues long felt to be formative. In *Mother's Responsibility*, the property *Expectations of Self* alludes to a potential strain between their family of origin and their newly created family, and how they intend negotiate between the two. One woman stated, "I don't feel so much like a junior kid anymore with the extended family, because I have my own family, and I don't feel as pulled around by my parent's expectations now that I have my own family."

(p.53) There was a realization among all the new mothers that their first responsibility was to their child, not their family of origin, and that this reprioritization was emblematic of their love.

For most, this expression of love caused them to examine how they felt they had been loved. As was noted in their reason in participating in this study, these mothers had a strong belief that, if they achieved a greater understanding of themselves, their efforts might have the complimentary benefit of enriching their child's life. In the case of some new mothers, their renewed focus on resolving personal issues was seen as a necessary means to reducing aspects of her self that she considered unhealthy for motherhood. According to Freud (1914), the mother's expression of love is a reflection of her own experience and internalization of self and object love. Freud (1914) contended that in order for object love to occur one has to set aside a certain amount of self-love.

Stern did not foresee that support was not the only requirement for a mother's supporting matrix: my study indicates that these new mothers not only surrounded themselves with people who could support them, but they also chose to be supported by people with whom they identified. More importantly, the new mother's supporting matrix is filled with people whom she considers to be role models. For these women, their common interest in being an exemplary role model for their children initiated a personal review of significant role models in their own lives. They felt a tremendous responsibility to now be a role model for their children, and in an effort to help their children achieve this goal they look back on those who have inspired them.

While reviewing their narcissistic development, these new mothers revived memories of those people who they felt had influenced them in the informing of their own ideals. These significant people, these role models, were gathered from their childhoods as well as from their adult lives. They reflected characteristics and values that these new mothers would ideally like to emulate. However, these role models were not only derived from those who had had a positive influence, but also those from whom they hoped to differentiate themselves. It was more usual for these new mothers' role models to be a composite of both. As in the case with many of their mothers, these new mothers decided that they appreciated some of their mother's attributes, wanted to modify others, and in various instances completely rejected them.

As many of these new mothers made efforts to work through their personal issues, these efforts also helped them to process their ideals, particularly their maternal ideal. The maternal ideal is a vision for how the mother would like to ideally feel and behave as a mother. Her maternal ideal is a composite of ideal role models stemming from both her

childhood and adult life. These ideal role models reflect values that she hopes to integrate and espouse. In explaining a mother's desire to be an ideal role model for her children, Kohut viewed a mother's vision of herself as a figure with whom her child will identify and idealize as a "means by which the child can achieve an enhanced sense of well-being." (Summers, 1994, p.250) Elson's (1984) "double helix" theory proposed that the parent's narcissistic development and their child's forming ego ideal are mutually supportive and enhancing. Both the child's and parent's development are mutually benefited.

An ideal model gives the mother a fruitful balance between her child's needs, which entails securing an environment that facilitates and supports her child's development, and her self-needs. However, as many new mothers explained their intention to strive for their maternal ideal, they were challenged by their internal identifications and conflicts. In the category Career, many examined their identification with their work. The workplace, for some, was an arena where their self-esteem is strengthened. A few new mothers worried that motherhood might adversely affect this once herald and reliable source for self-esteem.

The associated property Dissatisfaction Inspires Alternatives demonstrates how one woman feared that her self-esteem might be diminished because of the compromises that needed to be made between her work and motherhood. "I've always been able to devote myself solely to my work and now I have to share, and I'm scared of becoming a sub-par employee because I have these other things in my life now." (p.23) This particular woman struggled with the idea that she might have to re-prioritize an aspect of her life that allowed her to successfully demonstrate a certain set of competencies.

Motherhood challenged her to rethink how she will again acquire a sense of her ideal self in an arena other than her career.

Sandler (1963) stated that the ideal self-representation is the self I would like to be. This self-representation is influenced by various sources, both conscious and unconscious: aspects of ideal representations, i.e., loved, feared or admired persons; the good, desirable, ideal child as conveyed by her parents; states of self previously experienced in reality or fantasy; current realistic assessment of oneself, and of one's potentials and limitations. He argued that oftentimes one's ideals are in conflict, and therefore they are challenging to achieve. (P. Tyson and R Tyson, 1990, p. 202-203)

The mother referred to above was satisfied that a certain ideal self-representation could be achieved in her career, but was uncertain if she could achieve a similar experience in motherhood, or if she could still be ideal at work while also being a mom. This uncertainty is one of many unknowns discussed by these new mothers in the property Discoveries within the category Emotional Upheaval. A worry prevailed with some of the women about how they would acquire emotional security.

I have a lot more challenges ahead of me, and not with work. I know I can do a job. I feel insecure about friendship, family, and the other part of my life. I'm not sure where I get my validity as a mother. (p. 75)

Summary

Several observations emerge from this data. These new mothers share common experiences in their early period of transition into motherhood. They felt they had a broadened sense of self-worth; they were engaged in an internal dialogue; they wanted to be positive role models by fulfilling their ideals; and they were cognizant of their efforts

to expand their identity by incorporating their new maternal experiences. These findings are related to Stern's motherhood constellation and its component themes, but they expand upon them in significant ways.

While preoccupied about their ability to sustain their newborn's life (life-growth component theme), these new mothers were challenged by the responsibility for another human being, and consequently they had become aware of their personal worth. While concerned about their ability to emotionally attune and nurture their newborn (primary relatedness component theme), an internal dialogue around their own emotional awareness was stimulated. As they put forth efforts to establish an adequate support system (supporting matrix component theme), they were compelled to think about their role models, how they had come to formulate personal ideals in relationship to these role models, and how they now desired to be an ideal role model for their children.

Lastly, there was an overall concern among these new mothers about their life being reprioritized around motherhood (identity reorganization component theme). In this early period of transition, they shared many thoughts about their goal to find a balance between personal interests and their primary interest in being a mother.

According to the evidence put forth by this study, these new mothers would represent normative mothers as originally described by Winnicott and reflected upon by Summers (1994), "The environment need not be perfect, but it must be 'good enough' for the maturational process to unfold." (p.138)

As I observed these new mothers during this early phase, I often thought of them as being in an incubated state of idealism. This early period in motherhood marked a time in their lives when they hoped they would actualize ideal self-representations. For

most of the new mothers this ideal self was defined by their desire to create an environment for their child, whereby he/she would be unencumbered by their personal experiences and struggles.

As life progresses, it is likely that these women's ideals will be modified by the day-to-day challenges which confront mother and child. Although this incubated period of idealism most likely varies among populations, for these new mothers it was pervasive. These new mothers had a wider range of experiences than most of their mothers had had. They freely chose to become mothers, and entered motherhood with the intention of incorporating elements of their life that previously defined their identities. Hence they may feel less trapped by a prescribed way of doing things, but nonetheless they too experience challenges associated with the transition into motherhood.

As Leifer (1980) concluded from her research a mother's personal circumstances were irrelevant when it came to her transition into motherhood. She found that despite the variances in their backgrounds the transition into motherhood was challenging for all.

CHAPTER VIII

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

Introduction

This study highlights numerous issues for clinicians to be mindful of when they work with a new mother in clinical practice, particularly a new mother who resembles those in this study.

Specifically, it illustrates how motherhood sets in motion a major reorganization of priorities that is challenging for all new mothers. Such new mothers may be similar to those in this study in that they have chosen to become parents, and they must grapple with integrating their new maternal identity with their previously established identity. The women in the study are a group of highly motivated goal-oriented women who, since becoming mothers, have had to shift the central focus in their lives from themselves to someone else—their baby. Although they are eager to embrace this shift in focus, it evokes intense emotion and it significantly reorganizes their self-experience, and consequently their identities.

As I observed and as the data indicates, the new mothers in this study experienced a phenomenon that I define as incubated idealism. As noted in the theoretical discussion, this idea is similar to Stern's (1985) emergent self, and when applied to the new mother, it helps to explain a new mother whose identity is currently in flux, and motherhood as an "experience of organization-coming-into-being." (p.47)

For the purposes of this study, I define idealism as a new mother's positive reaction to her newborn, and this positive feeling inspires her to contemplate how to become a maternal ideal and how to cultivate an ideal environment for her child. The new mothers shared a desire to strive for a maternal ideal, and while their desires were general and loosely defined, they were accompanied by a sense of determination. These positive feelings reflect the new mother's response to her newborn's vulnerability and her desire to protect her newborn. The new mother responds by mirroring her newborn's need for admiration, and since the infant is too weak to satisfy its own needs, the mother's positive feelings bolster the child's sense of self.

This incubated idealism occurred during the very early period under study, 3rd trimester through six months postpartum. Benedek (1959) originally described parenthood as a developmental phase, and later changed her conception of parenthood as a developmental process. (Parens, 1975) I see incubated idealism as a part of this process, a part that occurs very early in a mother's transition into motherhood.

I also found that, during this period, these positive feelings coexist with the new mother's anxiety about mothering and being a mother. The findings in this study identify some of the anxiety shared by these new mothers; the findings also elucidate the range of possible preoccupations during this early period. Even though they can be upsetting, overwhelming, and simultaneously beneficial, this anxiety is viewed as a normative response to motherhood. Stern contended that the "motherhood constellation" was normal, and that, to varying degrees, it was likely to be part of most mothers' adjustments to motherhood. Similarly, Winnicott (1956) argued that the state of "primary maternal

preoccupation” was a crucial component of a mother’s process, and the absence of such focus indicated pathology rather than normalcy.

Powerful feelings and at times anxieties evoked for these new mothers reflect a normative reaction to motherhood. The new mothers in this study experiencing motherhood constellation shared numerous anxieties that they hoped to work through. A clinician working with a mother in a state of motherhood constellation and incubated idealism can listen for the following concerns as expressed by these mothers:

1. The intense emotions evoked their effect, and the mother’s process for understanding these emotions.
2. The pressure she feels to be a role model, life support and emotional nurturer for her child.
3. The challenges involved in bridging her preexisting identity and her newly acquired maternal identity.

Stern would argue that amidst these concerns the new mother is also engaged in a parallel process that requires the greatest amount of mental work: “the mother’s discourse with her own mother, especially with her own mother-as-mother-to-her-as-a-child; her discourse with herself, especially with herself-as-mother; and her discourse with her baby.” (1995, p.172) In this study, many new mothers constantly reflected on their mothers, their relationships with them, and the relevance of how these relationships influenced them as mothers. All of this pondering was concurrent with their lived experience with their newborns. The concerns relative to incubated idealism, motherhood constellation and the discourses noted above did preoccupy and cause anxiety for these new mothers.

Although there were no new mothers in the study whose psychological state appeared pathological, there were some who struggled more than others. Those who struggle, and who are distressed by their struggle, are among those most likely to seek treatment. As one new mother revealed, it is the struggle itself with which she struggles. The study's participant demographics indicate several of the women had been involved in various types of therapeutic treatment. The data analysis attempts to capture the many levels of struggle within this group of new mothers. In addition, their reflective capacities also varied. Some were capable of describing the nature and origin of their emotions, while others could acknowledge their emotions, but were less able to articulate an understanding.

Stern (1995) posits a therapeutic model for mothers experiencing the motherhood constellation and he advocates utilizing an alternate therapeutic alliance. When the psychic organization is the motherhood constellation, and not Oedipal or pre-Oedipal, a different transference/countertransference evolves. Instead, Stern argues for the "good grandmother transference." (p.186)

This transference involves "the elaboration of a desire to be valued, supported, aided, taught, and appreciated by a maternal figure." (p.186) Stern envisions the good grandmother transference as a positive addition to the mother's supporting matrix. He explains that under these circumstances a therapist is, "freer to 'act out' in the sense of making home visits, giving advice, touching the patient, and so on, and [the therapist is] more focused on assets, capacities, and strengths than on pathology and conflicts."

(p.187)

While I agree with the value of good grandmother transference, I am unsure as to whether a therapist should fulfill this role, particularly if this therapist had an established therapeutic alliance with the patient before she became a mother. In either situation, whether the patient becomes pregnant during the course of treatment, or if a woman seeks treatment after becoming a mother, the good grandmother transference could either be actively facilitated or allowed to emerge by the therapist. Both clinical situations have merit and are in need of further investigation.

The good grandmother transference was frequently invoked by the new mothers in this study, as the study and its interviews became a component of their supporting matrix. During the interviews, it was not uncommon for a pregnant woman to want me to touch her belly so that I could feel her baby's movements, to hold their babies so they could get a break, to give suggestions when solicited, and to share personal experiences when requested. The study helped to support their efforts to sustain their babies' lives, and it helped them learn about themselves as the emotional nurturers for their babies.

Implications for Future Research

Not only did the study's subjects agree to participate for the purpose of bolstering their supporting matrix, but they also had a desire to contribute to the perpetuation of research. The new mothers frequently wondered what their responses to the same interview would be like in five years. They clearly saw the initial transition into motherhood which the study examined as being one juncture, and their requests suggest that they anticipate another juncture in five years, the approximate time they expect their children to enter kindergarten. During the interviews, they acknowledged that a

psychological process has been precipitated by motherhood and is underway, and that this process continues on indefinitely into their future. The findings gleaned from this study and those that will be gleaned from future studies can only foster their quest to understand more about their maternal identities.

Three areas of future research include:

1. The ego-ideal and its development in the mother and in women in general.
2. Psychic structure formation and the mother: does motherhood create a new psychic structure?
3. Maternal representations which extend beyond one's own mother.
4. The study and its proposal of a period of incubated idealism.

The Ego-Ideal

There is some controversy in the literature about whether the ego-ideal evolves in consequence to the super-ego, and thus is a component of the super-ego rather than an independent structure, or if it is born out of a positive identification with loving parental objects, and has a line of development separate from the superego. The former view aligns itself with Freud, who was less clear about defining the ego-ideal, and who typically used the terms ego-ideal and superego interchangeably (J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, 1973, p. 144-145).

Freud formulated his thoughts about the superego and the ego-ideal within the context of the Oedipus complex “which combines the functions of prohibition and ideal” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, p.144-145), and which was conceived from a more

phallo-centric position. Similarly, Tyson and Tyson (1990) concur with the position that the ego-ideal is a component of the superego; they state:

The ego ideal refers to a collection of specific mental representations that carry model, exemplar, or wished-for standards or ways of being. We view this ego ideal not as a separate agency but as a group of representations within the superego.” (p. 198)

In his 1994 text, *Object Relations Theories and Psychopathology*, F. Summers also cites how E. Jacobson and M. Mahler agree that the ego-ideal helps to form the superego. He states that they conclude,

In the second year the child learns to distinguish the features of the love object, and the temporal sense develops. These two capacities allow the child to be like the object without the fantasy of being the object. At this point selective identification begins to replace fusion as a true ego identification, and the child is thus able to differentiate wishful and real self-images. The child’s wishful self-image and the identification with the idealized parent form the ego-ideal; this benign structure compensates for the lost fusion. Concurrently, the negative self-image built from frustrating experiences, realistic parental prohibitions, and the ideal self- and object- images combine to form the superego.” (p. 17-18)

In the latter position, theoreticians distinguish the ego-ideal from the superego as noted in Laplanche and Pontalis’ (1973) book, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. In that book, they cite H. Nunberg’s position: “Whereas the ego submits to the super-ego out of fear of punishment, it submits to the ego-ideal out of love.” (p.145)

Summers (1994) explained Kohut as defining the ego-ideal as a psychological structure that has a separate line of development. “The process by which this occurs is an almost imperceptible yielding of the idealized parental imago and its transformation into psychological structure, the ego ideal.” Kohut calls this process “transmuting internalization,” a term he applies to any internalization process that results in new psychological structure. In this case the idealized parental imago is transformed into ideals that the child hopes to realize. (p. 250)

Clearly, there is a reasonable basis for both positions, and I do not know which one is correct or preferable. Depending on the theoretical position, the mother's ego-ideal will be understood, as either a component of the superego or as a separate psychological structure.

The feminine ego-ideal, particularly its relationship to the mother and mothering, is not an extensively known or studied psychic structure. However, the findings in this study suggest that their ego-ideal has partly been formulated by people and experiences with whom they identify and which inform, in part, their ideal maternal figure. Stoller (1976) explains how these non-conflict-laden identifications help to inform a woman's ego-ideal, and in part her maternal identifications. He posits the notion of a core gender identity and considers that primary femininity for a woman evolves both from conflict-laden and from non-conflict-laden identifications. The non-conflict-laden identifications are with women who are outside the Oedipal complex and with whom she has positive connections.

In Roy Schafer's (1960) paper, "The Loving and Beloved Superego in Freud's Structural Theory," he explains the superego's more benign aspects. He confirms the existence of a benign superego within which one's ideals are formed. He states that it represents,

the loved and admired oedipal and preoedipal parents who provide love, protection, comfort, and guidance, who embody and transmit certain ideals and moral structures more or less representative of their society, and who even in their punishing activities, provide needed expressions of parental care, contact, and love. (p. 186)

And as stated by Schafer,

in the benign aspect of the superego it is object love which is turned around and transformed into that aspect of self-love or narcissism felt as pride and security in

relation to society and destiny as well as one's own conscience and ideals. (p. 187)

His interpretation and elaboration upon Freud's original thinking about the superego were as noted written with a paternalistic bias, however it would be interesting to relate these ideas about the benign superego to the maternal ego-ideal. From this perspective, a new mother's benign superego might activate those positive and loving identifications that cause her to contemplate her ideals in relationship to her newborn. Her newborn stimulates a desire to attain personal ideals.

Psychic Structure

It has been emphasized throughout this study that motherhood requires a significant shift in focus and that it reorganizes a mother's self-experience; this is a monumental juncture in a woman's life, one which might contribute to the creation of a new psychic structure. However, as I learned from the literature, the formulation of new psychic structures beyond adolescence is not supported. Developmental theorists contend that after adolescence new psychic structures cannot be formulated. Instead, any new structural changes found in adulthood are "related to adaptation; reorganization of existing psychic structures is involved, but not the formation of new structures." (p. Tyson and R. Tyson, 1990, p. 15)

Stern purposely states that the motherhood constellation is a psychic organization, not a new psychic structure that can be either temporary or one that can exist throughout a mother's life. Considering that he defines the motherhood constellation as being a new psychic organization, one which may last a lifetime, does its longevity then make the argument that a new psychic structure is being formulated? It would be interesting to

investigate further whether or not new psychic structures can be formulated after adolescence, particularly in the case of mothers.

Colarusso and Nemiroff (1981) intend to challenge the notion that adulthood is a stable phase of life; instead they argue that, “developmental processes in adulthood are influenced by both the adult past and the childhood past.” (p. vii) They further posit that mental structures are indeed not static from childhood experiences, but in fact continue on from current experiences in adulthood. They articulate several hypotheses about this adult development.

1. The nature of the developmental process is basically the same in the adult as in the child. Their mutual development is the result of interaction between biology and environment; “the adult is not a finished product insulated from the environment, but like the child, is in a state of dynamic tension which continually affects and changes him.” (p.63)
2. Development in adulthood is an ongoing, dynamic process. Here the authors emphasized that adult issues such as pregnancy, marriage, aging, and death and are all viewed as, “developmental issues in and of themselves, regardless of the past.” (p. 64)
3. Whereas childhood development is focused primarily on the formation of psychic structure, adult development is concerned with the continuing evolution of existing psychic structure. For instance, “adolescent infatuation builds structure and adult love refines it by stimulating a continuous evolution in identity and other processes. Adult love is the expression of existing structure and a modifier of it.” (p. 66)

4. Fundamental developmental issues of childhood continue as central aspects of adult life, but in altered form. Separation-individuation is described as a life-long process, “because of the inherent threat of loss in every stage of independence.” (p.67)
5. Developmental processes in adulthood are influenced by the adult past as well as the childhood past.
6. Development in adulthood, as in childhood, is deeply influenced by the body and physical change.
7. A central phase-specific theme of adult development is the normative crisis precipitated by the recognition and acceptance of the finiteness of time and the inevitability of personal death. “Confrontation with each adult-developmental task or crisis produce basic change in the life of each individual.” (p. 79)

Colarusso and Nemiroff make a vigorous argument for adulthood as having the potential for psychic change, but never actually state that new psychic structures are formulated.

Kohut (1977) did state that new psychic structures can be formulated within the therapeutic relationship via “transmuting internalization.” Colarusso, Nemiroff, and Kohut all lean toward supporting the possibility for the formation of psychic structures in adulthood. Considering their positions, this then might support the notion that motherhood presents an opportunity for the origination of new psychic structure.

Maternal Representations

Researchers of maternal representations concur that the level of security a mother achieves in her attachment with her child reflects the extent to which she sufficiently works through her early maternal attachments. Maternal security is associated with infant attachment security.

Ammaniti's (1991) research defined the "generational transmission" as the process through which a mother's maternal representations influence the current mother-infant relationship. She argues that if a mother demonstrates a capacity for reflective and flexible thought regarding her parent's influence, such a mother can attune adequately to her infant's needs, thereby establishing the foundation for her infant's secure attachment. When she refers to parents as persons effecting the mother's maternal representations, she suggests that it is not only a mother, but also a father, who can influence a mother's maternal representations.

To my knowledge, those who have researched a mother's maternal representation and its influence on mothering have not investigated those maternal representations that do not stem from the mother's mother, but from someone else. The weight on the mother's mother may reflect Bowlby's (1958) initial understanding of maternal representation as being discernible from the mother's early attachment experiences with her mother.

The study indicated that some women found that their attachments with their fathers were equally influential in how they experienced themselves as mothers. In some cases, the greater emphasis on a woman's father was a consequence of her mother's death, or because her mother was less emotionally available, and therefore less accessible

than her father. It would be interesting to learn about the nature and influence of these alternate maternal figures and their impact on a mother's maternal representations.

Several areas remain unknown. These include: the implications of a mother's ego-ideal evolving as a component of the superego or a separate psychic structure, whether or not motherhood constitutes a new psychic structure in addition to establishing a new psychic organization, and understanding maternal representations other than mother's mother. Research in these areas would help build upon an area of interest which has only recently been focused on directly—the mother's experience.

The Study and Incubated Idealism

This study was conducted within a specific segment of the population. These new mothers all shared common experiences around education, career, independence and the choice to become a mother. This study can be replicated among new mothers with dissimilar backgrounds to discern its findings cross culturally. Are the findings similar in other cultures, and if not how would these findings be different?

Additionally, further research that broadens the scope of subjects studied can help to further an understanding of incubated idealism, which arose from the findings in this study. Research to further investigate the notion of incubated idealism will help to answer some questions around its duration, and the extent of its generalizability across cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. Does incubated idealism exist, for how long, and is it part of every new mother's experience or only in certain populations?

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