

**MOTHERHOOD: GENDER IDENTITIES AND GENDERED SELVES**

MOTHERHOOD: GENDER IDENTITIES  
AND GENDERED SELVES

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the experience of motherhood among a sample of full-time employed mothers of pre-school children in the Metro Toronto region. The perceived costs, rewards and meaning of being a mother of young children are explored. The focus of analysis is on identity. The data show how, along with the increased workload, motherhood also provided opportunities for women to claim personal growth and development and to constitute themselves as 'morally' enhanced persons.

The processes whereby women were 'recruited' to motherhood varied by social class and were often subjectively experienced as tentative or problematic. The data show how motherhood did not simply express gender identity as is often argued, but it allowed women to achieve a gendered identity. That is, the social organization of parenting was a profoundly socializing experience that produced, and not merely reflected, a gendered experience of self. Becoming a mother was both a **gendered** and **engendered** process whereby women came to a new sense of self. Thus, in contrast to the diversity in the ways women came to have children, women came to share experiences which transformed their identities in very similar ways. Women produced babies, but having babies produced 'womanly' persons.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis looks at women's experience of motherhood. It looks at how women came to have children, and how they felt themselves changed through being mothers. The study explores what women saw as the rewards and costs of having children and analyses the impact of motherhood on women's identities.

Social structural and demographic changes have transformed men's and women's experience of adulthood (Smelser, 1980; Swidler, 1980). Such changes affect not just the choices individuals make, but the development of self and the ways in which people make sense of their lives (Berger and Kellner, 1977; Turner, 1976; Bellah et al., 1985). Adulthood no longer represents a period of stability of self but has become problematic in a changing world (Smelser, 1980; Swidler, 1980).

These social changes raise new issues about the meaning of adult identity for women. Women in the 1980s are marrying later, having fewer children and are having them later in life than their mothers or grandmothers did.<sup>1</sup> Most mothers, even those with young children, now work outside the home. Delayed childbearing, a permanent attachment to the labour force, and increased life expectancies mean that women are spending less of their lives involved in either childbearing or childrearing than ever before (Eichler, 1983: 38). The decision to have or

not to have children is perceived by many to be a matter of individual choice (Gerson, 1985; Currie, 1988). Thus, women today have greater occasion to develop and vest themselves in non-familial identities than women in the past. However, many of the cultural changes that have accompanied economic and demographic changes make the question of how to live as an adult problematic in new ways for women (Gerson, 1985).

Parental roles are no longer taken to define the meaning of a woman's adult life or of a couple's relationship (Swidler, 1980). The rise of individualism has meant that, among the middle-class, it is no longer culturally acceptable for adults to sacrifice themselves for their spouses or their children; instead the individual is offered cultural images of self-realization, and 'finding one's self' as guides to identity and the meaning of life (Swidler, 1980; Bellah *et al.*, 1985). At the same time, according to Berger (1977:72-80) the individualism and secularization of the modern world has created a world in which it is increasingly difficult for people to feel at home and where public institutions now confront the individual as immensely powerful and alien.

Ironically, the same pressures that appear to threaten traditional family bonds and women's commitment to children may also function to make family relationships and bonds with children more personally important than before. Relationships with significant others have become central to the modern individual's search for meaning - a form of modern religion

(Berger and Kellner, 1977; Bellah *et al.*, 1985; Schoenfeld, 1988). According to Turner (1976), we seem to be witnessing a significant transformation in the basis of self-conception in modern society: a shift in the locus of the experience of "real self" from institutional role to impulse; from role to feelings and sentiment.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, the research questions about motherhood explored in this thesis are also questions about the social psychology of self in modern society.

This thesis is about the meaning of motherhood in the lives of a sample of Toronto women who have pre-school children and who work full-time outside the home. The major theoretical issues investigated are those pertaining to the social production of identity. The empirical focus is on how these women's sense of themselves was transformed through the process of becoming mothers. On a more abstract level the thesis is about the process of personal change in adult life and the socially produced nature of gender identities. The thesis looks at how children produce mothers, rather than at how mothers produce children. It analyses how motherhood is both a gendered and an engendering experience. That is, the thesis goes beyond conceptualizing motherhood simply as an expression of female identity, to expose the ways in which the experience of motherhood produces a gendered sense of self in women.

### **Re-thinking the Research Problem**

Theses usually begin with a statement of the problem:

why one studied what one did. However, in this instance, such a statement is not so simple. It is first necessary to explain how the research process transformed the conceptualization of the problem. Originally I set out to study the relationship between the meaning of work and of motherhood in women's lives. Shortly after I started interviewing, however, I realized that the interviewees' responses were conforming to a pattern. The interview schedule was structured so that background information was gathered first, followed by information about women's experiences of work and of motherhood. However, it quickly became clear that the whole mood of the interview shifted when motherhood experiences were discussed. Women were more engaged in discussing motherhood than work; answers were much longer, more detailed and personally disclosing. I realized that while respondents and I talked about both work and motherhood, of the two, motherhood was the more salient issue in the interview. At a theoretical level, I understood that to analyze social experience I needed to start with respondents' understandings and meanings (Blumer, 1969). The thesis' focus on women's identity transformations through motherhood grew out of accepting respondents' definitions of what was important in their lives as a starting point for analysis.

As I gathered and analyzed the data for this study my understanding of the problem under investigation began to shift. I had begun by asking how social structural changes in

women's work and in the social organization of motherhood were affecting women's experience of motherhood. Initially, in formulating the research problem I had conceptualized the experience of motherhood, and by implication women's maternal behaviour and ideas, as dependent variables in social structural processes. My research hypotheses had been derived from both feminist and general sociological theory on motherhood and work in women's lives. However, as I collected, coded and analyzed the data I discovered the limitations of a strictly logico-deductive approach for my research problem. Women's actions and ideas did not fit neatly into such categories as traditional, transitional, non-traditional or feminist which I had theoretically derived and whose usefulness I had felt I was testing in some qualitative way.

I also fairly quickly realised that I had operationalized the effects of social change in women's lives in a way that led me to an overly narrow focus on conflicts between work and motherhood. While such conflicts do exist, role conflict is not exhaustive of what is sociologically interesting about motherhood in women's lives. Although the research project had from the beginning been conceptualized and designed within an interpretive sociological framework that emphasizes the centrality of subjective meaning, my own commitment to sociological explanations that go beyond the social-psychological to social organization had led me to attend seriously to only the social structural side of the

dialectical process between human agency and social conditioning that Giddens (1984) refers to with his concept of "double hermeneutics". What this concept means for interpretive sociologists is that social actors already experience their own actions as meaningful, and it is the analyst's task to understand both these meanings and the larger social context simultaneously (Giddens, 1984; Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Stone and Farberman, 1981; Currie, 1988).

By attempting to resolve these types of issues in my own empirical work I came to appreciate how much qualitative research involves a dialectical process of going back and forward between theory, data, concepts, and measures and that my 'problems' were a normal part of this research process (Glazer and Strauss, 1967; Currie, 1988). Findings that at first seemed puzzling and contradictory became sociologically intelligible when I appreciated the dialectical relationship between data and theory. I found I had to confront the methodological implications of what has long been an interactionist maxim, but has by now become a feminist research tenet: that women's (respondents') experience provides the empirical starting point from which the subjective can be linked to social organization.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, through my own experience of the research process, I realised that women's experience of motherhood needed to become the focus of empirical attention in my study and not be merely treated as a dependent variable. I will

illustrate this point. I had intended to look at whether motherhood was still an important source of identity for women. I found it was. Had I stopped there I would have perhaps reaffirmed recent sociological findings about the persistence of a motherhood mandate. However, I would not have been led to look so closely at the different accounts of transformations in women's self-conceptions or to explore women's feelings for their children which later came to be a focus of the thesis. Originally I dismissed these data as of minor interest. How can one write a thesis that 'discovers' women's identity is vested in their relationships with their children? Or that they feel deeply connected with their children? Women are 'expected' to experience motherhood in that way. If they didn't, that would be news. Yet the data repeatedly pointed to the tremendous significance of motherhood in women's lives. I felt almost haunted by these data on women's feelings and self-conceptions and was forced to rethink how I should approach the study of motherhood.

### How to Study Motherhood

There has been relatively little research on women's experience of motherhood. 'Mothers' have been more often studied than 'motherhood'. Boulton (1983), in reviewing the literature on motherhood, concluded that biological conceptions of maternity have dominated the study of motherhood. In the past women's maternal behaviour was seen as largely instinctual

and adaptively tailored to the needs of the uniquely dependent human infant.<sup>4</sup> Psychoanalytically oriented theories, she explains, expanded instinctual explanations to include the notion of psychosexual development where maternity was taken as the normal expression of mature female identity, and women's dissatisfaction with motherhood constituted maladjustment and personal developmental failure.

The sociological conceptualization of motherhood as a role which varies according to how reproduction and childcare are socially institutionalised represented an advance over biologically based theories, but empirically the neglect of women's subjective experience continued.<sup>5</sup> As a model for explaining women's behaviour, mainstream sociology stressed the role of early childhood socialization. Gender socialization, through the internalization of norms and values, instilled in girls both the capacities and motivations to mother.<sup>6</sup> Research tended to focus on role behaviour, role strain, role conflict, etc. Although structural functionalism professed a notion of voluntarism in human behaviour, the social system was the ultimate determinant of values and action.

The re-emergence of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s led to a new interest in social conflict and structural coercion theories of women's experience and behaviour. Motherhood, as institutionalized in the role of housewife, became perceived as oppressive to women by many feminists (Oakley, 1974; Firestone, 1971; Allen, 1983; Luxton, 1980). Some feminists attempted to

distinguish between the work of motherhood which, as institutionalized in the housewife role, was seen as stifling, overwhelming and oppressive, and the relationship of motherhood which was seen as potentially rich and rewarding to women (Oakley, 1974; Rich, 1976; Bernard, 1975). However, the conceptualization of motherhood as (unpaid) reproductive labour came to dominate feminist theory and research, and motherhood as relationship remained largely unexplored. The domestic labour debate within Marxist feminism attempted to give theoretical articulation to the oppression of women within the nuclear family which other feminists had described. Although theoretically interesting, this debate continued the now established tradition of focusing on women's oppression and the coerciveness of social structural arrangements.

The limitations of beginning with theoretical assumptions about the oppressiveness of motherhood and women's domestic work was one of the first problems I faced in my research. If I adopted a theoretical stance that focused on the oppressiveness of motherhood to women then I was led to interpret much of what women described to me as ideological, and to see women as passive accomplices in their own subjugation. On the other hand, if I adopted the theoretical assumptions of the socialization model and interpreted women's commitment to motherhood as gender role conformity, I trivialized and neglected what women were telling me about their lives and choices and I felt I would misrepresent the

empirical reality I was studying. Neither theoretical approach seemed adequate on its own to explain the variations in women's behaviour and experience which my data showed.

### Alternative Explanations of Women's Behaviour

Recently, some feminist researchers have employed an explanatory model of women's decision making around work, motherhood and domesticity that emphasizes the structured opportunities, rewards and constraints and also the competing goals and values within which women, as social actors, construct their lives and make commitments (Gerson, 1985; O'Donnell, 1985; Luker, 1975; 1984).<sup>7</sup> This cost-benefit type of perspective is useful in analyzing women's behaviour because it allows for women to be conceptualised as social actors constructing meaningful lines of conduct. The perspective also recognises structural determinants of women's actions in the ways in which opportunities and resources relating to marriage, work and domesticity are socially organised. Thus, it helps explain the observed diversity in women's behaviour around motherhood that is otherwise puzzling. For example, women frequently make difficult choices about motherhood within a context of value ambiguity and structural contradictions (Currie, 1988). Women's adult options are socially organized to produce ambivalence: typical male value-orientations and life-choices are seen as of greater social worth than typically female ones (Gilligan, 1982). Women have to choose between

structurally incompatible goals in ways men do not (Hochschild, 1989; Gerson, 1985; Currie, 1988).

The cost-benefit model has been applied to trends in women's fertility behaviour. It does seem clear that, historically, a negative correlation existed between Canadian women's labour force participation and their fertility, which is now at an all time low (Eichler, 1983:36). Until recently, Eichler stresses, "[t]he drop in fertility has not meant that fewer women have children, but that each woman on average has fewer children than before" (1983:36). Some research has suggested that voluntary childlessness among ever-married women is beginning to increase. According to Veevers (1980:157), in the immediate future between 10 and 15 percent of all couples can be expected to voluntarily remain permanently childless. The expansion of alternative opportunities to motherhood and domesticity was a frequently cited reason for women's apparently increasing lack of enthusiasm for motherhood and their propensity to delay childbearing (Gerson, 1985; Veevers, 1980). However, both the recent increase in first births to older women and the data from the middle-class women in this study suggest that some of the expected increase in childlessness may in practice translate into deferred motherhood.<sup>20</sup> Whether or not the predicted rise in voluntary childlessness materializes, it remains clear that most people still expect and want to have children (Machung, 1989; Gormly, Gormly and Weiss, 1987).

A strictly utilitarian analysis of women's behaviour around motherhood has its limitations. My research indicates that women in this sample were not simply pushed into motherhood by the absence of alternative rewarding options, or pulled away simply because they found work more satisfying, though rewards and costs were important. The 'recruitment' to the motherhood process in this sample was far more complex. As I will show, women's sense of identity was deeply implicated in their transition to maternity, and the process was experienced in 'moral' rather than simply utilitarian terms.<sup>9</sup> Motherhood has far more meaning in women's lives than simply a satisfaction maximizing option.

The fact that the majority of women have children does not make the process of becoming a mother or the experience itself non-problematic. Although my research was not designed to explain women's decisions to become mothers, the data I gathered show that women follow very different and often apparently quite tentative paths to motherhood. From women's perspective, it is far from predetermined that they will have children. But they do. Sooner or later, planned and unplanned, the vast majority of women become mothers. The sociological question for me became how is it that, in pursuing what they experience as private and personal choices and decisions, women come to follow apparently similar patterned responses. As Turner comments, the question is an old one:

[Are we] like the Plains Indians who sought purely personal visions to establish the basis of each individual's

authority but faithfully replicated their culture in the form and content of their visions. (Benedict, 1943 in Turner, 1981:219)

Indeed, this issue became the theoretical challenge of my thesis: to analyze women's experience of motherhood in a way that captured the subjectively creative and often tentative process by which women acquired maternal identities, but at the same time to recognise the persistence of shared patterns of meaning which emerged from women's experiences and actions. This, then, is a thesis about both the subjectively creative production of identity and the reproduction, albeit with variations, of cultural meanings associated with adult female identity.

### THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to better understand the social processes through which women become mothers I heuristically divided the experience into two analytically distinct phases. The first phase, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, pertains to the social processes through which women became pregnant and sustained their pregnancies through to motherhood.

The second phase, discussed in Chapters 5 through 8, refers to the processes whereby women developed self-conceptions of themselves as mothers. These two phases are not necessarily empirically separate or temporally sequential. A woman may develop a self-conception as a mother long before she becomes a mother, or she may not acquire such a self-conception

even after she has given birth. The paths to both biological conception and social psychological self-conceptions varied among women in this study.

Both phases may be seen as part of the women's moral careers (Goffman, 1963). The changes women experienced in their self-conceptions can be seen as moral in two separate but related ways. The conventional use of the concept moral has an ethical or evaluative referent, and as I will show, many women felt themselves changed in that sense of the word. However, Goffman has used the concept 'moral' to refer to the experience of the self or self-conceptions. Persons who share similar changes in self-conceptions share 'moral careers' which in turn may become both cause and effect of commitment to a similar sequences of personal adjustments (Goffman, 1963: 32).

Socialization, and gender socialization in particular, is frequently invoked to explain the enactment of adult roles and the embracement of gender-role identities. Socialization has been conceptualized as the link between culture and conduct (Stokes and Hewitt, 1976). Socialization, simplistically conceived as the internalization of the norms and values of a culture so as to provide a blue-print for living, has been convincingly critiqued as inadequate to explain the improvisational, creative, problematic and negotiated nature of social interaction in general (Turner, 1962; Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959), and the complexity of choices facing women in modern society in particular (Gerson, 1985; Bernard, 1975). To

argue that gender roles exist in society tells us little about the process whereby women are motivated to embrace or come to take on these roles. Neither roles nor culture should be conceptualized as conditioned responses (Fine and Kleinman, 1979). What needs to be emphasized about women in this study, for example, is not that they all became mothers, but that they followed quite different routes to motherhood and that many of them had, at some stage of their adult lives, clearly expected or intended to remain permanently childless.

Symbolic Interactionism provides the major sociological perspective informing both the methodology and theoretical analysis of this study. This perspective places meanings, identity and experience of everyday life at the centre of its explanation of the social world (Blumer, 1969). It conceptualizes individuals as creative social actors whose conduct is oriented towards situations and objects on the basis of meanings these have for them. Meanings, however, are conceived of as neither private nor psychological, but arise through and are embedded in social relationships and processes. Identity is seen as a central dimension of meaning involved in social interaction. As meanings and identity are understood in processual terms, and as being sustained in and through social relationships, the perspective is particularly suited to the study of changes in meaning and identity as social relationships change, as they do when a woman becomes a mother.

### Re-thinking the Concept of Culture

However, while the symbolic interactionist perspective used in this study is well suited to analyze the negotiation of roles and identities, it needs, according to Stokes and Hewitt (1976), to re-claim the concept of culture to explain enduring meanings and patterns of behaviour. Indeed, what emerges from this study is that women, pursuing what they experienced as their private and personal choices and decisions, reproduced many of the gendered patterns of their culture. The tendency for symbolic interactionism to treat culture as being internalized in little more than a cognitive sense (knowing the rules) conveys an image of virtually limitless creation of culture (Stokes and Hewitt; 1976: 840). As we know, however, social objects frequently confront us with pre-existing meanings - as a taken-for-granted social reality. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) point out, our relationship with our social world is a dialectical one of mutual determination where existing meanings confront us as a legacy to which we must respond. For Stokes and Hewitt, both the problem of culture and the persistence of meanings, as well as the creative nature of social action, can be conceived in terms of the metaphor of alignment. Social action can be understood as a process through which persons orient their conduct towards each other and a common set of social objects (Blumer, 1969). But culture also provides a resource to make sense of situations: people align conduct with culture by defining actions in culturally

known terms. Vocabularies of motives, accounts and disclaimers are among such cultural resources (Mills, [1940] 1981; Scott and Lyman, 1981). Thus culture itself can be conceived as a set of objects: ideas, knowledge, beliefs, roles, institutions, norms, as well as ways of feeling may all be designated and acted towards as objects (Stokes and Hewitt; 1976:843).

Culture in complex societies, they conclude, must no longer be viewed as internalized and carried in the personalities of individuals, although some lines of conduct are shaped by normative structures internalized at an early age. Rather, culture needs to be re-conceptualized as a "field of objects that are environmental to action"; that is, a set of cognitive constraints - objects - to which people must relate as they form their lines of action. As such, culture constitutes one of several conditions within which conduct is formed (1976:847). Such a conceptualization of culture allows for both the continuation of normative culture and enduring meanings and also the empirical flexibility of human behaviour and creativity of interaction. This conceptualization of culture as providing the resources through which people interpret both others' conduct and their own prospective or past actions and thus make sense of their lives will become central to understanding the role the cultural motif of love plays in symbolically structuring women's experiences of motherhood discussed in Chapter 5.

### Conceptualizing the Self

For interactionists, the concept of self, and identity in particular, is fundamental to the description and explanation of social interaction (Blumer, 1969; McCall and Simmons, 1978; Hewitt, 1976). These concepts thus provide key analytical tools in understanding women's experience of motherhood. Self and identity are social processes, rather than psychological phenomena. This conceptualization follows from Mead's (1934; 1962) theory of the self as a reflective process. The essence of the Meadian notion of the self is the ability to engage in self-interaction or indication: the self is both subject and object, knower and known (Mead, 1962:137). Among the most important objects of self-indication is the self itself: a person can be the object of her own reflectivity, an object to herself. Self, as object to itself, or self-concept, has been defined by Rosenberg as "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (1979:7). Identities, therefore, or selves as social objects, are a central component of self-concept. Although self must be understood as a process, we can also understand how persons can be the object of their own and others' acts, that such objects (identities) can be situated both in immediate and biographical contexts, and that, as social objects, identities evoke not merely cognitive responses, but affective and evaluative ones (Hewitt, 1976: 75). Thus the concept of identity expresses the notion of self

as social object (Stone, 1981). Identity is not identical with self, but it locates the self in social terms, it refers to the social meaning of the self. Identities are variable and are transacted in interaction by "announcements" and "placements" (Stone, 1981). Announcements are the identities we claim for ourselves; placements are the identities in which we are cast by others. Identity is socially validated through the coincidence of placements and announcements.

As identities are sustained through interaction, appropriate identities must be established in order to enter into different social relationships. The social relationship of mothering a child, for example, is largely restricted in our society to those who establish their claim to this identity by giving birth or by satisfying the requirements of an adoption agency. There is often, therefore, a close relationship between identity and social role. For Burke and Franzoi (1988:274), for example, roles provide the shared meanings through which persons are able to establish identity. Thus female identity, Burke *et al.* (1988:274) explain, is based on the meanings we have internalized from our association with the role of female. And it is towards these meanings, rather than the role, that persons orient their conduct.

### Multiple Identities

The interactionist conceptualization of identity as located in interaction implies the notion of multiple

identities, not all of them active or invoked in any one situation. McCall and Simmons (1978:73-74) develop the notion of multiple role identities by explaining that identities are not randomly collected, but, at any one time in an individual's biography, are organised within the self in a 'prominence hierarchy', or the 'ideal self'. The prominence of any particular identity in the hierarchy, they explain, is shaped most importantly by commitment to or personal investment in that identity, the degree of self and social support for the identity and the rewards associated with it (1978:76). Thus the 'exchange' of social support for valued identities becomes a central feature of social interaction, as we strive to legitimate our self-conceptions. Rosenberg (1979:53) employs a similar concept of psychological centrality to explain why certain components of a person's self-conceptions are more important for self-esteem than others.

Whereas the prominence or the psychological centrality of an identity refers to the personal importance of an identity to an individual, the concept of salience refers to the probability of its behavioural enactment. As McCall and Simmons (1978:84) explain, we must be careful to distinguish the very fluid hierarchy of identities in terms of salience (the situated self) from the relatively enduring hierarchy in terms of prominence (the ideal self) in which a person's more enduring sense of self may be located. Thus situated selves or salient identities need to be understood as the properties of

situations rather than exclusively of individuals (Maines, 1981:474). One may observe, for example, that maternal identities appear less salient among women who are employed full-time, for work situations frequently preclude the invocation of maternal or family identities among employees. But this does not necessarily mean such identities are less central to these women's more enduring sense of self or identity prominence hierarchy.

The notion of multiple identities must not be taken to imply essentially shallow and fleeting selves who lack stability and integration. Although we recognize that identity is often situational, the concept of the ideal self or prominence hierarchy allows us to understand much of the stability and continuity in the experience of self. Commitment to identities provides a coherence to biography: it allows one to make sense out of life. Motherhood, as we will see, provided many women with symbolic resources which not only contributed to the integration of personal biography, but also allowed them to link individual biography with a collective biography of past and future generations. As Stryker (1968: 563) points out, individuals committed to different identities will seek opportunities for their profitable enactment. People seek out those who can 'significantly' validate valued identities. Partners and children can be important validators of women's identities. We must not assume, however, that they provide validation for the same identities.

## Self-Conceptions as a Frame of Reference: Identity and Motivation

We can see, therefore, that self-conceptions and identity provide the conceptual basis for a theory of motivation that conventional role theory lacks (Foote, 1981) and a theoretical basis for the integration of the processual nature of self. The concept of identity provides a key theoretical link between conduct and both culture and social structure in the interactionist framework. McCall and Simmons (1978:230), for example, argue that to understand what persons are likely to do we must look at their self-conceptions, in particular their role-identities, for it is through these that the demands of the social structure are filtered. Similarly, Burke et al. (1988:274) and Rosenberg (1979:53) argue that identities provide fairly stable sources of motivation, leading people to behave in ways which are consistent with their identities. Indeed, Rosenberg (1979:59) concludes that the motive to protect and enhance one particular dimension of self-conception, one's self-esteem, is among the most powerful motive in the human repertoire.

Thus, in analyzing the experience of women in this study it is important to understand how women's self-conceptions provide, as Rosenberg (1979:59) puts it, a fundamental frame of reference, the foundations on which actions are predicated.

Identification With: The Appropriation of Others into the  
'Sacred' Realm of the Self

Traditionally, interactionism has used "identification of" as an important concept in explaining behaviour. The term "identification of" refers to the establishment of the meaning of social objects. Before we know how to act towards something, we must "identify" it: that is, we must establish its meaning or implications for our plan of action (Blumer, 1969:2). Individuals, as we know, act towards situations on the basis of their definitions of those situations. However, the basic meaning to be identified in any situation is ourselves: who am I in this situation? What is my identity? Stone and Farberman (1981:318) point to the guiding role of identity in forming conduct: "If I am so and so, then, I will want such and such, and accordingly I will do this rather than that". In looking at how identity provides a motivational basis for motherhood, therefore, it should be emphasized that a woman makes choices about motherhood on the basis of her conception of who she is, rather than in terms of conformity to social roles.

Not all identities are appropriated as being central to a person's 'real' self. Sociology professors may practice role-distance from their academic identities, soldiers accused of brutality may claim they were following orders, and deviants may claim troubled backgrounds, not 'defective character', led them to their crimes. Persons can thus be understood to

appropriate certain roles as their own on the basis of who they feel they really are. This process of appropriation, or taking as one's own, is central to the concept of "identification with" or commitment to an identity (Foote, 1981:336). The concepts of "identification of" and "identification with", therefore, are analytically separate but related.

The appropriation of identities makes social order possible without physical coercion. Not all social identities are appropriated in the sense that an individual vests some valued sense of herself in the associated social relationships. But some identities, like motherhood among women in this study, are so appropriated. Although external observers may define women's commitment to the conventional role of mother as ideologically based, and ultimately oppressive of women (Wearing, 1984), it is important to remember that the appropriation of identities also makes possible what we regard as our most human experiences:

In fact, we will carry this so far as to say that only full commitment to identities shared with others makes possible the grand human phenomena of love and grief.... (The concept of appropriating identities) enables us to rephrase such imponderable speculations as 'What are the psychological functions of love?' into definitely researchable forms, such as 'How does this person acquire his identity?' or 'How does he get committed to particular identities which tie him constitutionally as a self to other persons?' (Foote; 1981:340)

Maternal love, I suggest, can be conceptualized as commitment to an identity and sense of self which a woman vests in her relationship with her child. That is, the identity established and validated in the social relationships

associated with motherhood are appropriated by the self as constitutional of self. This idea is developed in Chapter 5.

The concept of proprietation is central to understanding maternal commitment. The notion of proprietation, according to Turner (1981:205) has been a neglected dimension of our understandings of self and self-conceptions. The concept of proprietation, however, allows us to capture that "realm of the self [which] is characterized by possessiveness, privacy and sacredness (Turner, 1981:205). This conceptualization of the self provides an affective and moral rather than overly cognitive basis of self and self-concepts. In love, one can argue, the other is appropriated as constitutive of self and the 'loved one' acquires the character of 'the sacred' through association with self. As we will see in the data chapters, a recurring theme in women's accounts of motherhood was that the self-transformation associated with becoming a mother was personally experienced as moral transformation. The notion of 'moral' experience, as Goffman (1963) insightfully shows, has to do, not merely with issues of ethics: it pertains more profoundly to the experience of self.

### Gender Identities and Gendered Selves

Gender, within an interactionist perspective, is conceptualized not as a role or an individual property, but as something evoked, created and sustained in day-to-day interaction (Goffman, 1987). Women and men participate in the

construction of the meanings of gender and distinguish themselves from each other as women or as men (Thompson and Walker, 1989:865). Gender involves more than simply learning masculine or feminine behaviour. It involves "the entire person in the process of becoming human (Deegan, 1987:4). The development of gender-identity can be understood as a central aspect of the development of self (Cahill, 1987:89-94). It is, according to Goffman (1987: 51), the prototype of all social classification. Like other forms of social identification it defines the nature of social objects, and how self and others should be acted towards.

Gender identity, like other identities, locates an individual in social terms. It indicates to others (and one's self) how an individual is to be acted towards, establishes claims for entry into certain relationships, and provides a relatively unquestioned 'vocabulary of explanations' by which both past and future behaviour can be referred to in socially plausible terms. We can, according to Goffman (1987:55), employ the concept of gender identity where persons build up a sense of who and what they are by referring to their "sex class", and where they judge themselves according to the ideals of masculinity or femininity. Social environments are routinely designed to evoke or allow the display of gender identities, and audiences are purposefully sought out to validate our gender-claims (Goffman, 1987:71). Situations, Goffman insists, do not so much allow for the expression of

gender differences as for the production of such differences that legitimate our identity claims.

The real significance of gender identification, however, is not just that it underlies most other forms of social identification, but that it becomes deeply constitutive of self-concept and informs our deepest feelings about our own and others' essential natures (Goffman, 1987). Thus, at a deeper level, gender comes to inform not just our social identities, but what we experience as our essential natures or 'real selves'. The importance of this distinction between gender identity and gendered self became clear to me only as I was analyzing the data. It was not simply respondents' identities as women that were affirmed in their relationships with their children. Rather motherhood validated their sense of 'real selves' as persons. What persons come to vest their feelings of 'real self' in, of course, is deeply gendered.

The conceptualization of gender, therefore, must go beyond the notion of role identity. Role identities are learned and enacted in specific contexts, but men and women "do gender" all the time, in all contexts (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Thus gender is both interactional and implicated in our deepest senses of our selves. Self is a gendered process.

### **Gendered Selves : Symbols and Strategies**

The notion of self as a gendered process must not be taken to imply that there are innate differences between male

and female self-conceptions or psycho-social developmental trajectories. Rather, it can be understood as an example of "culture in action" (Swidler, 1986). Culture, according to Swidler, influences action, not by providing the ultimate values towards which action is oriented, but by shaping the repertoire or "tool kit" of habits, skills and styles from which people construct "strategies of action" (Swidler, 1986:273). Like all resources, cultural 'resources' can be understood to be differentially available to society's members by class, gender, and race. Maccoby (1990), for example, has recently argued that communication skills and interaction strategies are differentially distributed to men and women. While men and women may show little difference in individual based measures of personality traits and ability, she notes, in interaction they display distinctive "cultures" of relationship and communication styles.

Like the interactionist conceptualization of culture, therefore, Swidler's understanding of culture as a set of resources includes not only a tool kit of habits, skills and material artifacts, but also the symbolic vehicles of meaning such as language, beliefs, gossip, rituals of daily life, love and other mythologies, popular art forms and so on (Swidler, 1986). Motherhood, I argue, provides such a cultural resource. It provides a central motif of female culture which functions to symbolically structure female adult biography. People, it can be understood, build lines of action from their cultural

'repertoire', calling on their diverse cultural resources selectively, and often in surprising ways.<sup>10</sup> Rather than seeing action as determined by values, we need to understand the empirical process whereby action and values are organized to take advantage of cultural competences (Swidler, 1986:275).

The notion of culture in action can be usefully extended to include people's familiar or preferred ways of thinking about self, and the relationship between self and others. Breyspraak (1984:15-18) reminds us that the very idea and experience of a self varies by culture and historical period. Ways of experiencing the self also appear to vary by gender. Sampson (1988) shows how the socially constructed self is reflected in modes of self-reflectivity and in our ideas about individualism. We can compare cultures, he argues, by the indigenous psychologies of individualism that achieve dominance: in America "self-contained individualism" has achieved dominance. This psychology is characterized by sharp boundaries between self and other, belief in internal personal control, and an exclusionary concept of the person (1988:16). However, even in America, Sampson points out, many people, especially women, operate within a mode better described as "enssembled individualism" which is characterized by more fluid self-other boundaries, field control, and an inclusive conception of self as defined in and through social relationships (1988:16-18).

Evidence for the effects of gender on the development

of self also comes from Gilligan (1982; 1986). Gilligan argues that, in American society, there are different ways of thinking about moral issues. One way is associated with, but not necessarily restricted to women; the other way is typically associated with men. Men's moral thinking, she argues, tends to be characterized by abstract principles of justice and rights, women's by an ethic of care and responsibility (Gilligan, 1982; 1986). The different styles of thinking, Gilligan emphasizes, are identified by theme, not by gender.

Developing the notion that ways of thinking about self and others are gendered, Lyons (1983) argues that individuals show a preference for using one of two distinct ways of describing the self in relation to others. Women, she notes, tend to define themselves in terms of connectedness with others; men more frequently use characterizations of a separate/objective self. Men and women seem able to employ either mode of self-definition, but showed a preference for one mode rather than the other. Interestingly, Lyons discovered that, regardless of gender, individuals who described themselves primarily in terms of connectedness with others used an ethic of care and responsibility in making moral decisions. Those who describe themselves in separate/objective terms more often use an ethic of justice and rights in their moral thinking (Lyons, 1983:141).

In thinking about women's experience of motherhood, therefore, we need to recognize not only that gender is a

socially constructed phenomenon, but also that self and self-conceptions are likely to reflect the gendered structures and processes of the worlds in which they arise.

### OUTLINE

This thesis looks at women's experience of motherhood. This chapter has located the research within current sociological research on motherhood and it explores theoretical issues related to the study of identity. Where necessary, substantive chapters also begin with a discussion of theoretical issues relevant to the analysis of the data presented in those chapters. Chapter 2 describes the research methodology. Chapters 3 and 4 employ biographical data to look at how women in this study came to be mothers. In analyzing women's accounts we see that change in adult life is not merely superficial. As adults, women make choices about motherhood in the context of perceived options and relationships with others who help define what is meaningful and desirable in life.

Women describe their experience in primarily subjective terms, but it is important to recognize how social class shapes women's lives as mothers (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976; Bernard, 1975; Wearing, 1984). In a class society women's 'opportunities and constraints' are unequally socially organized and my data show this profoundly affected the sorts of choices women face. Thus the data presented in chapters 3

and 4 are organized by social class. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 looks at how middle- and working-class women respectively came to have children.

Chapters 5 and 6 look at how women's self-conceptions are transformed by the experience of motherhood, albeit in class specific ways. These chapters explore the meaning of children in the lives of women in this study and the ways in which children come to be constitutive of identity in women's lives. I show how women experience themselves as not merely changed by becoming mothers, but as being morally transformed. In a social psychological sense, children create mothers.

Chapter 7 focuses on women's everyday, practical lives as mothers. It explores the joys and costs of motherhood and looks at how women combine paid work and motherhood in their lives. Chapter 8 analyzes parenting as both a gendered and an engendering experience for women. That is, I show how the social organization of parenting is a profoundly socializing experience and produces, rather than merely reflects, a gendered experience of self. Women do not simply become parents when they have children - they become mothers. The identity women claimed as mothers was quite different to that they ascribed to fathers.

The conclusion, Chapter 9, summarizes the findings and analyzes their implications for our understanding of motherhood, gender and identity.

## ENDNOTES

1. In 1986, for example, the average age at first marriage for women was 26, up by 3 years since the early 1970s (Adams and Nagnur, 1989:25). Also during this period Canadian women's fertility reached an all-time low. Between 1960 and 1980, women's fertility dropped from 3.9 children per woman to 1.7 (Eichler, 1983:37). The crude birth rate fell from 27 per 1000 in 1960 (Eichler; 1983: 36) to 14.4 in 1987 (Canadian Social Trends, "Social Indicators", Autumn 1989).

2. The term "real self" is used here as a folk construct, not a sociological concept. Turner (1976) argues that people appear to be turning to the personal or impulsive spheres of life to find what they claim as their "real selves".

3. Some recent feminist methodologists have argued that understanding women's subjective experience is the goal of feminist research and they eschew social structural explanations as falsely objective (Stanley and Wise, 1983). Traditionally, it is the sociologist's task to go beyond descriptions of subjective experience to analyze how social organization shapes personal experience. However, what constitutes the starting point for such sociological analysis has long been the subject of methodological debate between those who employ logico-deductive versus inductive research techniques. See Glazer and Strauss (1967). For a discussion of feminist methodology on this point see Currie (1988).

4. For an excellent review and critique of the sociological and psychological literature on motherhood see Boulton (1983).

5. For a critique of how women's experience has been excluded from the social construction of knowledge, including sociological knowledge, see Smith (1975). See also Jessie Bernard's now classic article on her four revolutions in *Sociology* (Bernard, 1973).

6. For a critique of the over-simplification of the psychoanalytic understanding of socialization and the 'oversocialized' concept of the individual in Parsonian sociology see D.Wrong (1961).

7. For a controversial application of economic decision making theory see Gary Becker (1981). Becker applied a utility maximization model of economic decision making to women's fertility behaviour. Decisions about children, he argues, are motivated by economics. Women have fewer babies if the

opportunity costs of their time - the income they forgo if they stay home - go up. Fertility has declined, he argues, because the rise in women's earning potential has made babies relatively more costly.

8. The proportion of childless ever-married women aged 25-29 increased from 14% in 1961 to 30% in 1981. Among those aged 30-34, the proportion of childless ever-married women increased from 9% in 1971 to 14% in 1981 (Burke, 1986:7). However, it is not yet clear how much of the changes in fertility patterns reflect a move to increased voluntary childlessness or merely deferred childbearing (Burke, 1986).

9. For a discussion of the use of 'moral' as pertaining to the sphere of both identity and ethics see Chapters 5 and 6.

10. Kaufman (1985), for example, has shown how women who returned to orthodox Judaism used traditional Jewish values and practices to enhance their own power and control. Thus, even elements of a traditional patriarchal culture can be employed by women to achieve non-traditional, personally empowering ends.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY

As a methodology the symbolic interactionist perspective used in this study requires that we make the "meanings things have for [those we study] central in their own right" (Blumer, 1969:3). Thus the research was designed to gather in-depth, qualitatively rich data that captured the social world as experienced by the women interviewed. Through a "grounded" (Glazer and Strauss, 1967) approach, the theoretical categories and issues that became the central focus of my thesis were those generated by the data. As discussed in the Introduction, the focus of analysis grew out of the issues and meanings which were salient for the women in the study, and were different from what I had expected. The analysis of women's experience, of course, goes beyond description of their points of view, to provide a sociological explanation of personal experience in terms of the social organization and social processes that shape it.

The data for this study were gathered in 1988/89 through in-depth interviews with 59 mothers living and working in the Metro Toronto area. All were Canadian educated, employed full-time and had at least one pre-school child who lived primarily with them. The sample was purposefully restricted in this way for theoretical and methodological

reasons. The study limited itself to the investigation of identity and the meaning of motherhood under specific social circumstances. The findings do not apply to all women at all stages of motherhood. As social circumstances change, so do identities and meanings. The sample included only full-time employed mothers of pre-school children for several reasons. First, this population represented the most obvious challenge to the traditional image of motherhood where women stayed home to nurture children (Wearing, 1984). Mothers of pre-schoolers have experienced a particularly rapid increase in their labour force participation rates in the last decade (Parliament, 1989). Also, the experience of motherhood may change with different stages of the family life cycle; mothering pre-schoolers represents a clearly identifiable and particularly demanding stage of motherhood (Bernard, 1975: 73-75; Wearing, 1984:13). In general, restricting a sample provides a more homogeneous group to study. Although it isn't possible to control for ethnicity in a Canadian sample of this size, by including in the sample only women who had been educated in Canada (from grade 1), I hoped to reduce potential variations in the experience of motherhood that were specific to immigrant women. All of the women in the sample were white.<sup>1</sup>

An interview schedule which contained both structured and semi-structured questions as well as a number of standardized tests (scales) was used. Open-ended and in depth questions allowed the collection of rich, descriptive and

detailed data through categories grounded in respondents' own meanings and experiences. Closed questions in the schedule provided tools for the collection of more standardized information on the objective realities of women's lives. Some of the questions were adapted from research schedules used in other studies of mothers in order to facilitate comparison.<sup>2</sup> Pilot interviews were also carried out in order to test and refine the schedule. Responses were recorded in writing at the time of interview, and a microcassette recorder was also used where respondents indicated they were comfortable with it, which they were in all cases. Interviews were usually conducted in the respondent's home and without other adults present in order to facilitate the uninhibited expression of ideas.<sup>3</sup> The average interview lasted approximately 2.5 hours, and ranged from 1.75 to over 3 hours in length.

### **The Sample Design**

The sampling design was purposive or theoretical sampling. Purposive sampling is distinguished from types of random sampling in that it does not use probability estimates to approximate towards population representation. Purposive sampling looks for representativeness by 'purposefully' choosing a sample that typifies the population, the theoretical category or phenomenon to be studied. Thus it does not allow one to make statements about the general population from this sample, but it enables one to learn a great deal about the

particular phenomenon or theoretical issues under study. The sample was chosen in order to investigate typical phenomena to do with theoretical issues of identity, not to represent the population.

Purposive sampling was combined with quota sampling in order to fill the sample. Quota sampling methods require that first the population be classified in terms of the theoretical phenomena, characteristics, or properties etc. deemed to be relevant to the issues to be studied. Classification may be on a theoretical or empirical basis. The literature on motherhood and employed mothers indicated that social class would be an important variable (Komarovsky, 1962; Bernard, 1975; Rubin, 1976, Luxton, 1981; Wearing, 1984). Komarovsky (1962), and Oakley (1974) for example, argue working-class women do not share middle-class women's discontent with domestic roles, and Kohn (1977) and Bernstein (1971) found class differences in attitudes to children and childrearing patterns and ideology of motherhood (Wearing, 1984). Social class also emerged from the data as an important analytical category. There were class differences in both subjective and objective data gathered about women's experiences of motherhood. Social class provided not just a theoretical basis for classifying respondents, but also an empirically relevant way of organizing the substantive chapters of the thesis and analyzing data. The sample included an almost equal 'quota' of working-class (48 percent) and middle-class (52 percent) mothers (see page 43)

All mothers worked full-time. Full-time work was operationalized according to the Statistics Canada convention, that is, being employed 30 hours a week or more. I also included the criterion of normally working, or expecting to work full-year, in order to exclude women who are employed for only part of the year, and could be seen as part-time workers.<sup>4</sup>

The research was designed to explore women's experience of motherhood, thus the sample included mothers with (75 percent) and without (25 percent) permanent partners. Having a partner was operationalized to included mothers who were living with partners whom they perceived as permanent. Alone mothers included previously married, but divorced, separated or widowed mothers as well as never married mothers, all of whom who were not presently living in a permanent relationship with a partner.

Alone parenting is a far more common experience of parenting than cross sectional analysis of family structures might suggest. Although at any one time about 10 percent of families with children are female-headed, in 1984 for example, 27.7 percent of mothers aged 40-49 years had been alone parents for part of their maternal careers (Moore; 1989: 432). Being an alone mother has concrete implications. For example, the average income of women-headed alone parent families is less than half that of two-parent families, and 60 percent of female-headed alone-parent households in 1985 had incomes below the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Offs (Moore, 1987:34-35).

Being an alone mother can be seen as a temporary state many mothers move in and out of. Alone motherhood typically lasts about 5 years (Moore, 1989:349), but depending on how and when a woman becomes an alone mother, the consequences may be more long term. Although most women who become alone mothers do so through separation, and are usually in their early thirties (average age of 31.6), an increasing percentage of those who become alone mothers do so through ex-nuptial births (Moore, 1989). Such women are typically younger, less educated and have less work experience than other mothers. As with early childbearers in general, the costs of becoming a mother at a young age are both high and enduring, especially in terms of education and employment (Grindstaff, Balakrishnan and Maxim, 1989; Grindstaff, 1988; Moore, 1987; 1989). Although the age at which a woman becomes a mother, whether she is single or married, may function to shape the objective circumstances of her life, we must remember that age at first birth also appears to be a consequence of her 'objective' life circumstances; women from working-class backgrounds, in particular those with less education, have first children at younger ages than middle-class women (Wearing, 1984; Rubin, 1976; Grindstaff, 1988). The sample of mothers in this study sharply reflected this class pattern. Working-class women were on average 22.1 years old when they became mothers. Middle-class women, on the other hand, were on average 30.5 years when they first became mothers.

Both the sample size and the purposive sampling design mean that the research findings are not representative of all mothers' experiences. The sample selection, for example, limited regional and ethnic diversity by including only women living and working in the Metropolitan Toronto area. On the other hand, the qualitatively rich data allow the development of a deeper understanding of women's experience of motherhood and the processes of identity transformation. They also allow one to explore the ways in which subjective processes may reflect changes in objective circumstances. Paid work is increasingly coming to dominate the objective structures of Canadian women's lives (Duffy, Mandell and Pupo, 1989). Like women in this study, the majority of Canadian mothers, even those with young children, now work outside the home. In 1988, 57 percent of mothers of children under age 6 who had employed husbands were themselves employed, as were 42 percent of alone mothers of pre-schoolers (Parliament, 1989:4). The shift in family patterns has been so great that, between 1967 and 1986, the proportion of two parent families with children which were 'traditional' in the sense of the husband being the sole breadwinner, fell from 61 percent to 27 percent (Moore, 1989:24). These changes also mean that women's earnings are becoming increasingly important to their families' economic welfare. By 1986 wives' earnings amounted to 29 percent of family income in dual-earner families, but this proportion increased where women were better educated; women with

university degrees earned 35 percent of their dual-earner family incomes (Moore, 1989:25). Thus women in this study are part of the growing proportion of women who are, according to Eichler (1983:245-260), creating a new pattern of motherhood.

### The Women in This Study

All of the women in the study were mothers who had at least one pre-school child living with them. In all cases these pre-school children were theirs by birth. Most of the mothers interviewed (77 percent) had just one child, 20 percent had two children, and 3 percent had three children. In all but five of these cases, these second and third children were also preschoolers.

Most of those interviewed expected to have another child. Fourteen percent were pregnant at the time I interviewed them, and a further 46 percent planned to have one or more additional children.

The sample was designed to allow the analysis and deeper understanding of issues pertaining to identity and the meanings of motherhood. Some unplanned-for characteristics of women in the sample provided a particularly interesting opportunity to do this. The majority of middle-class women (77 percent) described themselves as feminists, and another 13 percent said they both 'were and were not' feminists. Only 21 percent of working-class women described themselves as feminists, 25 percent said they were not; many did not

understand the meaning of the term. The 'ideological' composition of the sample, therefore, provided a very interesting 'context' in which to study issues of gender, identity and motherhood.

When I interviewed them, the median age of the middle-class women was 35 years and the working-class women's median age was 27. About half the sample claimed some religious affiliation, while the rest did not. All the women in the sample grew up and had been educated in Canada. Most grew up in large cities and many, especially working-class mothers, had grown up in the Metro Toronto region.

### Social Class

As indicated earlier, the existing literature suggested that class would be an important determinant of women's experience of being a mother. But the concept of class is a difficult one whose meaning varies according to different views of the nature of social structure and the object of research (Giddens, 1973). The concept is particularly problematic when applied to women's lives and their experience of motherhood (Boulton, 1983:42). We know that the economic system creates differential life experiences for those who are differentially located in its structure, but traditional theories of class and stratification had very little to say about gender. In response to this neglect, feminists have begun to point out that gender itself is an element of stratification (Acker,

1988, Eichler, 1977). Men and women experience the world differently, they argue, and gender may create shared experiences among women that cross cut male-derived class positions. Social class distinctions developed with reference to the situation of men may not always reflect meaningful distinctions among women (Acker, 1988; Boulton, 1983: 43). The tradition of studying class differences in women's experience using male-derived conceptual schemes and measures has come under increasing criticism (Rapp, 1978; Murgatroyd, 1982; Boulton, 1983; Wearing, 1984; Bernard, 1975; Acker, 1988). Indeed, Oakley (1980b: 102) stresses that the tradition of categorizing women by 'husband rather than by self can be seen as participation in the cultural typification of women that relegates them to a second-hand status'. Such a practice rests on the assumption that the family is the unit of stratification and that inferences can be made about all family members on the basis of the husband's class position. It denies the relevance and importance of employed women's direct relationship to the social structure in favour of a derived relationship. It makes the class position of women who support households difficult to conceptualize. And it neglects the impact of gender itself as a dimension of stratification in our society. As Acker (1980: 33) puts it, 'stratification theory has been a theory of white males'. We can no longer assume a male work world (Murgatroyd, 1982: 574). With greater and greater numbers of women in the labour force the determination of all family members' socio-

economic status by reference to a male 'breadwinner' must be questioned (Blishen, Carrol and Moore, 1987). Whatever the justification for categorizing unemployed married women according to their husbands' class positions in the past, the practice would be problematic in this study where all the women interviewed are employed full-time. Women were classified according to their own class position rather than using male derived indicators of class. The decision to operationalize social class in terms of women's direct rather than derived relationship with the social structure provided an empirically relevant, pragmatic, and consistent classification criterion in this sample where all of the women in the study had full-time jobs and 25 percent of them were not currently living with partners. In order to look at contrasts and similarities in women's experience of motherhood a consistent measure of class that allowed comparison between married and unmarried women had to be employed. Using husbands' class position for some women, but not for others, would have made comparison difficult as well as having trivialized the significance of women's employment.

This study looks at how women come to make decisions about motherhood. As Gerson's (1985: 40) points out, class position powerfully influences women's choices regarding work and motherhood by determining their options and constraints and shaping how they will evaluate their choices. A full analysis of women's experience requires that we look at how both middle-

class and working-class women build their lives from the different raw materials they are offered (Gerson, 1985: 40). This research uses class as a way of talking about the different life-situations in which women find themselves. The concept of class is used because it captures the notion of different worlds of experience in ways the concept of socio-economic status does not. Indeed, this is the tradition in which class has been used in family sociology - to convey the different worlds in which women live (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976; Kohn, 1977; Boulton, 1983; Wearing, 1984) - and its use will facilitate comparison with existing research findings.

In this study I use Giddens' (1973) approach to class. Giddens attempts to conceptually integrate the Weberian and the Marxian traditions of class analysis using the concept of market capacity. He sees the market in capitalist society as intrinsically a structure of power in which the possession of certain attributes advantages some groupings of individuals relative to others (1973:101). Market capacity, for Giddens (1973: 103), refers to all the relevant resources and attributes an individual may bring to the bargaining counter of the market place. There are three sorts of market capacity which Giddens sees to be important in this respect: ownership of the means of production; possession of educational or technical qualifications; and possession of manual-labour power. These distinctions yield, albeit in complex manners, the basic three-class system in capitalist society - upper,

middle and working class (Giddens, 1973: 107). Educational qualification or recognised 'skills' is, according to Giddens (1973:103), a major factor influencing market capacity. The returns gained through market capacity go beyond merely income, and may include security of employment, prospects of career advancement, pension rights, benefit packages, safe work conditions, etc. Through their different bargaining power in the market place, therefore, some women have access to greater resources than others. While the notion of market capacity does not include all the differences between women in this study, or suggest that the women in one class category form a homogeneous group, it is a useful way of indicating their different relationships to the economic system.

Mothers' education was chosen as the primary criterion for operationalizing the concept of class and classifying respondents. While educational level is not identical to class position, it is a good indicator of the sorts of class differences in choices and life circumstances looked at in this study. Gerson explains the relevance of using education as an indicator of class to study women's decisions about work and motherhood:

Educational attainment is, of course, not an exact proxy for class level, but it is closely linked to class background, life chances, and ultimate class position. Even more important, as the most powerful determinant of occupational access, educational levels affect the work and thus indirectly the family decisions women make. (Gerson: 1985:41)

Women's education rather than income was chosen as an indicator

of class because education also best fits both the theoretical conceptualization of class as market capacity and the research concern with identity. Education can be understood as a means of accessing resources in modern society - in particular, as a means of accessing occupational identities and structurally generated opportunities. At least for men, occupational identities have come to replace kin (or tribal group) in providing the central public identities claimed by modern persons. One of the issues looked at in this research is the extent to which family based identity (motherhood) has remained salient among women. Income may have provided an adequate indicator of class differences between women if the only resources and differences under consideration were material. But this is not the case. The other limitations of using income an indicator of class for women in this study come from the fact that the association between income, class, and education does not operate the same way for women as for men (Murgatroyd, 1982; Boyd, 1986). Using income would have created the problem of whether to employ household income or individual income, and would have made the comparison of women in single- and dual-income households problematic.

Women's education was taken as the primary indicator when assigning women to one class or other. However, the decision to assign a woman to the working- or middle-class sample was cross checked with her occupation to validate the decision (see Appendix 1). Women with a university degree or

three year community college diploma, for example, were classified as middle class. Typically these women held professional occupations. Women with grade 12 or less education were assigned to the working-class sample; these women typically held an unskilled or semi-skilled manual or clerical or service job or were doing or had done an apprenticeship. Most cases fell readily into one of the two class categories; however, a few cases were difficult to classify. One woman whom I decided to classify as middle-class had a Grade 13 education, and no post secondary education. However, she held a managerial occupation, had an annual income of between \$30,000 -34,900 and lived in a household with an income of over \$90,000. Another woman had completed a four year apprenticeship and was earning more than other women in the working-class sample. However, as an apprenticeship is a typically connected with a working-class occupation I decided to classify her as working-class. This woman's husband held a semi-skilled manual job, so their household income did not differ greatly from that of other working-class women.

### **The Women in the Study: Their Jobs, Earnings and Education**

Middle-class women in the study worked primarily in professional, semi-professional and administrative occupations. Working-class women, on the other hand, worked in predominantly clerical and service occupations, but a small minority (18 percent) worked in skilled or semi-skilled trades or manual

jobs (Appendix 1).

Eighty-one percent of the middle-class mothers had university level education at the level of a B.A. or higher. Twenty-six percent had completed an M.A. or graduate level education and another 13 percent were currently working on an M.A. or Ph.D. Only one middle-class woman did not have post secondary education.

Working-class women had less formal education. Sixty-one percent of the working-class sample had finished Grade 12. The rest had not. Few had received any formal training or education beyond secondary school. Those that did included 11 percent who had some formal secretarial education. Eleven percent were either in or had completed an apprenticeship, and another 6 percent had received some short term vocational skills training which prepared them for their present occupations.

A quick look at the women's biographies shows there were class differences. Middle-class women had entered the full-time labour force at a median age of 21 years. Most (70 percent) also gained some formal post secondary or graduate level education after they first entered the labour force.

Working-class women, on the other hand, started their working lives much younger at a median age of 17.5 years. For them, any further education or training typically involved night school to try to finish their grade 12, for example, or for typing or wordprocessing classes. Twenty-eight percent had

either gone to or were attending night school for such reasons.

All the women interviewed worked full-time and full year. Their median annual income from work was \$25,000 - \$29,999. Middle-class women had a median annual earnings of \$35,000 - \$39,999. Working-class women earned a median income of \$20,000 - \$24,999 (Table 2.1))

The median income from work for alone working-class women was the same as that for working-class women with partners, but middle-class alone mothers earned less than middle-class mothers with partners. Their median income was \$30,000 - \$34,999, compared to \$35,000 - \$39,999 for those with partners.

Most women in the sample lived in dual income households. All but one of the 75 percent of mothers with partners said that their partners also worked full-time. This explains how the median income of these households at first seemed relatively high when compared, for example, with the 1986 Canadian average income of dual-earner families of \$50,000 (Moore, 1989:25). However, this average included families where women worked part-time. The relatively high incomes among families in this study must be interpreted within the context of two full-time family earners and the high cost of living, especially of housing, in Toronto in 1988.

The median annual household income for middle-class women was \$75,000 - \$79,999, but for alone middle-class women it was only \$30,000 - \$34,999. The median household income for

working-class women was approximately \$35,000 - \$39,999, but within this group, the median income for those with partners was \$45,000 - \$49,000, but only \$20,000 - \$24,999 for alone working-class mothers.

**TABLE 2.1**  
**RESPONDENTS' INCOME**

Median earned and household incomes of respondents

	middle-class	working-class
median earned income for all women	\$35,000-39,999	\$20,000-24,999
Median earned income for alone mothers	\$30,000-34,999	\$20,000-24,999
Median household income (all women)	\$70,000-74,999	\$35,000-39,999
Median household income for mothers with partners	\$75,000-79,999	\$45,000-49,999
Median household income for alone mothers	\$30,000-34,999	\$20,000-24,999

### Women as Family-Income Providers

Because these women worked full-time their earnings constituted a significant proportion of household incomes, and they should not be seen as supplementary income earners. Forty-four percent of middle-class women earned as much as if not more than their partners; and another 22 percent earned only 10 to 15 percent less than their partners. Thus most middle-class women's earnings were not significantly different from their partners'. Indeed, only 11 percent of middle-class women earned 60 percent or less of their partners' income.

There was greater variation in the relative earnings of men and women in working-class couples. Only 12 percent of

working-class women earned more than their partners, whereas 22 percent of middle-class women did so. Thirty-one percent of women earned about the same as their partners. In total, 43 percent of working-class women earned as much if not more than their partners. At the same time, however, 37 percent of working-class women earned only 60 percent or less of their partners' earnings, and 19 percent earned half or less than half of what their partners earned.

Alone mothers' earnings constituted most or all of their household incomes. A third of mothers were receiving some child-support, but in most cases the amounts were relatively little. Only one mother received more than \$300 a month child-support. However, many had government subsidized daycare.

### Finding the Sample

Originally I had planned to recruit women to the study by randomly selecting from the client lists of several daycare centres in both working- and middle- class areas. However, I realized that this could introduce a systematic bias in the sample because approximately 80 percent of children in care are in unlicensed or informal settings (Duffy, 1989:56). Instead, women were recruited for inclusion in the sample by an adapted form of snowball sampling and personal referrals. Although these sampling methods have an established tradition in the sociological study of women (Boulton, 1983; Wearing, 1984;

Duffy, Mandell and Pupo, 1989), I was anxious to avoid the problems of bias associated with them, in particular the problems of self-selection and over-representation of the characteristics of a particular network. In order to minimize possible network bias I used multiple starting points for contacting women, and I strictly limited the number of women contacted through any one original source. My starting points for accumulating a pool of potential respondents were diversified, including daycares and home-daycare providers, places of employment, community college programs and associated networks, sole-support mothers' groups, coordinators of women's training programs, literacy programs, pre-schoolers' playgroups, and personal acquaintances and their friends. Once identified, potential respondents were sent an explanatory letter, followed by a phone call to determine whether they fit the three eligibility criteria, and if so, whether they were willing to participate. This strategy limited the possibility of self-selection and also provided me with records of referrals, contacts and refusals. Only one mother who received a letter and subsequent phone call refused to be interviewed. Another 3 indicated that they did not wish to be contacted about the study prior to having received the explanatory letter or phone call.

In order to protect their anonymity, the names of the women who took part in the study have been changed. The names cited are fictional.

## Measures

This study does not analyze all the data gathered through the interviews; therefore, only the standardized tests or measures of self-esteem and distress analyzed for the thesis will be described below. These measures look at aspects of women's experience as mothers in a standardised way, as an observer. The interpretive and objective approaches to understanding women's experience are used in this study to complement rather than compete with each other. They constitute different ways of exploring the social reality of women's experience. The standardized tests are useful because they allow comparisons between the findings of this research and other studies in a more controlled way than that provided for by the comparison of qualitative data. The standardised tests can also be looked at to provide a form of internal verification of the analysis of the qualitative data.

The measure of self-esteem used in this study is Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965). I decided to use a standardized test to measure self-esteem because it is an evaluative aspect of self-concept which appears to have successfully lent itself to measurement, and because the motive to protect or enhance self-esteem is seen to have important explanatory power in relation to understanding the self (Rosenberg, 1979; Breytspraak, 1984). Self-esteem can also be used as a measure of subjective quality of life (George and Bearon, 1980).

As discussed earlier the concept of self is theoretically and methodologically complex. Rosenberg (1979) approaches the study of the self by distinguishing self-concept as a major dimension of self which, he argues, lends itself to empirical study and measurement. Self-concept can be defined as "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979:7). So defined, the focus is on self as object, not subject: self-concept is not identical with self. Whereas the term self-concept is most frequently used to refer to the cognitive dimensions of self-perceptions, the concept of self-esteem refers to both affective and cognitive dimensions of the self (Rosenberg, 1979; Breytspraak, 1984; George and Bearon, 1980). It refers not just to how people think about themselves, but also to how they evaluate and feel about those images. Self-esteem refers to individuals' feelings of self-worth and beliefs that they are persons of value. The Rosenberg scale used in this study measures global or overall self-esteem. A dimensional self-esteem scale would measure one's evaluation of one's self in relation to specific self-characteristics: one's evaluation of one's self as a student or tennis player, for example.

Because the concept of self-esteem is an evaluative one it can be assessed qualitatively (i.e., as "high" or "low", as "positive" or "negative")" (George and Bearon, 1980). High self-esteem is seen as innately satisfying, and low self-esteem

is not (Breytspraak, 1984). High self-esteem is also seen as being associated with well-being, including positive mental health and feelings of interpersonal success and mastery (Rosenberg, 1965; George and Bearon, 1980). Although psychologists sometimes view self-esteem as a stable and enduring trait of the individual, sociologists more frequently see it as a variable the development and maintenance of which is dependent on situational and interpersonal factors (George and Bearon, 1980). In this study the measure of women's self-esteem is conceptualized as a dependent variable.

George and Bearon (1980:78) describe the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale as perhaps the "classic measure of global self-esteem; it is a unidimensional, extensively used scale that has been used on diverse samples of children and adults of both genders and of different ages. It is a 10 item Guttman scale where respondents are asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with questions relating to liking/and or approving of the self. The scoring method used in this study is that used in Rosenberg's original study (1965), where the 10 items are "contrived" to yield a 7 point scale which ranges from the highest self-esteem score of zero to the lowest self-esteem score of six. In terms of reliability of this scale Rosenberg reported a Guttman scale reproducibility coefficient of 92 percent and a scalability coefficient of 72 percent. Validity data are presented in Rosenberg (1965). In particular, Rosenberg points to a clear

relationship between scores on his self-esteem scale and other measurements of both depression and anxiety.

### **The Measurement of Emotional Distress**

Because the situation of employed mothers is frequently characterized as one of 'role-overload', the Centre for Epidemiological Studies - Depression Scale (CES-D) was used as an indicator of women's consequent distress. Although the CES-D scale was originally designed to measure current levels of depressive symptomatology in non-institutionalized adult populations, the scale's focus is not limited exclusively to depressive symptoms, so it is, perhaps, better regarded as a measure of more general emotional distress (Hsu and Marshall, 1987). The scale consists of 20 items and respondents were asked to indicate how frequently in the previous week they had experienced each symptom. The total sum of scores can range from 0 to 60. Scores of 0-15 are considered to indicate no depression; 16-20 indicates mild depression; 21-30 indicates moderate depression and scores of 31 and over indicate severe depression (Hsu and Marshall, 1987). Women typically score higher than men on this scale. Other studies of non-clinical female populations indicate that the general population of women that could be expected to have any emotional distress (scores of mild and over) was between 19.5 and 23.5 percent compared to a range of 12.9 to 16.5 for men (Hsu and Marshall; 1987: 1562). The CES-D scores of mothers in this study can be

interpreted in the context of these wider findings and provide another indicator of how women were coping with what is becoming popularly known as "the double day".

### Summary

The research methodology directed the study to an investigation of the social processes that shaped women's experience of motherhood rather than to causes. The focus of the analysis grew out of the issues and meanings that were salient for the women in the study. However, the research was designed to go beyond the description of women's personal experience to an analysis of the social organizational context in which it was located.

**ENDNOTES**

1. See Endnote 1, Chapter 3. The tradition of family research using categories of respondents differentiated by colour and class is well established in sociology. Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976; Boulton, 1983, Wearing, 1984, for example, provide studies of white working-class women's experience of motherhood or family life which allow useful comparisons.

2. In particular, from Gerson (1985), Boulton (1983), and Pistrang (1981).

3. On two occasions a partner was present for part of the interview, and I changed the ordering of questions so as to avoid questions that might have raised sensitive issues or been difficult to answer in that context. Occasionally also, a partner or other family member passed through the area where I was conducting the interview and I avoided sensitive questions at those times.

4. See White (1983) and Pupo (1989) for discussions of the problems of operationalizing full and part-time work. Mothers of pre-schoolers are somewhat more likely than other women to work part-time. Whereas about a quarter of employed married women work part-time, approximately a third of these women have preschool children (Pupo, 1989:11).

### CHAPTER THREE

#### PATHS TO MOTHERHOOD: MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN

This chapter looks at middle-class women's transition to biological motherhood. It focuses on women's pasts: how they came to be mothers. As explained in the methodology, the data are organized by social class for several reasons. First, the literature on motherhood and work indicated that class is an important variable shaping women's experience. As outlined, working- and middle-class women differed not only in terms of their incomes, occupations and educational levels, but also in terms of the age at which they became mothers and whether they identified themselves as feminists or not. We will see that they also differed in the paths to motherhood they followed.

Although the sample selection attempted to limit diversity within the samples by controlling for employment status and ethnicity, neither middle-class nor working-class women in this sample were homogeneous groups. Studies of white<sup>1</sup> American working-class family life, for example, have also found notable differences in marriage and family patterns within this population (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1975).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, studies of middle-class women show diversity within that population in terms of gender-role attitudes, childcare and domestic labour issues (Hochschild, 1989; Luker, 1984; Bernard, 1975).<sup>3</sup> Although class is usually treated as an

independent variable in sociological research, we will see both how class and gender interact to shape the structures of women's lives, and how gender also cross-cuts class to produce shared experiences of motherhood.

As explained in the introduction, I found it useful to distinguish between how women came to have children and how they developed self-conceptions as mothers. This and the next chapter look at how women were 'recruited' to motherhood. Women's self-conceptions as mothers are analyzed in later chapters. Concepts such as "motherhood mandate" and gender socialization do not capture the complexity of the processes through which women come to have children. Women followed very different routes to motherhood. Although, like most women in our society, all of the women in this study became mothers, the outcome does not capture the meaning of the process. The data show how many women did not step easily, or deliberately into the role of mother. On the contrary, their paths to motherhood were often tentative, unanticipated, and problematic. Many women, for example, had once thought they would choose to be permanently childless. Others wondered if they would find the "right relationship" in which to have children, or if they would be able to conceive. If the analysis focused on outcome rather than process, it would miss much of women's experience. This chapter shows how time conceptions, relationships with male partners and middle-class women's perceptions of adulthood were implicated in women's maternity. I will show how women's

identities as mothers are better understood as products of interaction rather than of gender role-conformity.

### Time Conceptions and Biological Conceptions

It is popularly held that motherhood has become a matter of individual choice. However, most middle-class women found it difficult to talk about becoming a mother in terms of choices and reasons.<sup>4</sup> By looking at how rather than why women come to have children, a far clearer pattern emerges.

Unlike 'reasons', time, embodied in biological and biographical time conceptions, provided a frame of reference in which women's accounts of their pregnancies made sense. Time frames, however, were class-specific. Class-specific time frames help explain how working- and middle-class women become mothers at different ages. Middle-class mothers' average age at birth of their first child was 30.5 years; their median age was 32 years. Working-class women were much younger; on average they were 22.1 years. Their median age was 22 years.<sup>5</sup>

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**TABLE 3.1**  
**AGE AT BIRTH OF FIRST CHILDREN**  
 Average and median ages at birth of first children by social class and present marital/partner status

	M.CLASS	W.CLASS
Average age at first birth	30.5 yrs.	22.1 yrs.
Median age at first birth	32 yrs.	22 yrs.
Average age at first birth among <u>presently</u> alone mothers	31.25 yrs.	21.1 yrs.

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N: 59 interviews

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The age at which women become mothers seems to be both a cause and a consequence of class. It both reflected and reproduced inequality in terms of work and education,<sup>6</sup> as class and gender interact to structure women's lives as mothers in ways not experienced by men as fathers.

Time-conceptions can also be understood to be gendered. Whereas women's relationships with men played a central role in their pregnancies, that role is far from unproblematic. We will see how, although middle-class women tended to present their motherhood as a joint project with their partners, in practice women often strategically negotiated their transitions to maternity. Some sociologists argue that modern men are revolting against the emotional and financial burdens of supporting and raising a family: they are 'fleeing commitment' (Ehrenreich, 1983).<sup>7</sup> However, Hareven's (1977) historical framework provides an alternative explanation. Hareven argues that men's and women's "family clocks" are no longer synchronised. Family time, she explains, has become dominated by industrial time: occupational roles for men and women have come into conflict with family in ways not experienced in the past. Rather than concluding that the reluctant fathers described in this chapter were fleeing commitment, we can understand that men and women may operate within quite different temporal frames of reference.

Similarly, Maines and Hardesty's (1987) research on young adults' career and family plans supports the notion of

gendered temporality and its effect on women's decision making around motherhood. Men's anticipations of their futures, they found, reveal an image of temporally linear life where men's multiple roles in education, work and family are seen as sequentially organised and non-problematically related. Once young men decided "what" they wanted in life, Maines and Hardesty observed, they had an almost taken for granted set of assumptions as to "how" they would realize it (1987:117).

Women's anticipated futures, on the other hand, were characterised by 'temporal discontinuities', contingencies, and a recognition that they had only partial control over their futures. Women envisioned the relationship between work and family in their lives as problematic, and their thinking about the future was characterised by "how" questions. The consequences of these gendered temporal anticipations were far reaching in that women, but not men, made career decisions and plans based on the recognised problematic relationship between work and family. For men, Maines and Hardesty concluded, linearity is a form of cultural engagement:

The support systems, career symbols, and vocabularies of motives that are present in our culture contribute to linear futures for men. The "whats" and "hows" of their futures are provided for them. Linearity for women, however, is a form of cultural disengagement, because in order to be fully linear, they typically must sacrifice all or part of family participation. (1987: 115)

In analyzing middle-class women's transition to maternity, therefore, we must recognize that women face the problem of synchronising their own and prospective partners'

biographies. They must accomplish this within a context where men's lives are socially organised in ways which deny the reality of competing commitments between work and family which have become structurally endemic to the temporal organization of women's lives. Men's commitment to the labour force is popularly perceived as an uncomplicated, progressive, and continuous attachment. Such unproblematic attachments, however, are predicated upon having support systems (such as wives) that allow men to concentrate on their work (Machung; 1989:53). At the same time, because women are believed to have a greater commitment to having children, it is seen as legitimate that women handle the problems associated with 'their choices'. Thus childcare and balancing work and family come to be seen as women's issues, not men's. Becoming a parent, therefore, is quite different for men and women.

The analysis begins with women's pregnancy accounts.

#### **Motives for Motherhood among Middle-Class Women**

As with in-depth interview material in general, women's accounts are after-the-fact interpretations of their experiences. For some period of their adult lives almost half of the middle-class mothers (48 percent) had thought that they would choose to remain childless (Table 4.2). Most of the others (45 percent) described themselves as having "always wanted" children, or having never thought about not wanting children. By the time they became pregnant with their first

child the majority of middle-class women (71 percent) described their pregnancies as having been "planned" (Table 4.2).

"Unplanned" pregnancies, on the other hand, included pregnancies that were either unanticipated or unsought, but not necessarily unwanted; pregnancies that resulted from contraceptive risk-taking behaviour; pregnancies that were initially unwanted, but became wanted; unwanted pregnancies that remained unwanted, all of which led to motherhood.

However, the notion of "planned" and "unplanned" motherhood is a problematic one, and has limited explanatory value. Several women who described their pregnancies as "planned", for example, were also surprised when they became pregnant. As Luker (1975), shows, women may "plan" to accept a risk of pregnancy. This, however, is not identical to planning motherhood. Beth explained:

We decided to cease [using] birth control. We probably started discussing it, made the decision, and I got pregnant [all] within six months.... In the abstract it was great, [but] when I actually got pregnant... it was a month of sheer panic... partly because I always thought that people spent a long time trying to get pregnant. It was really fast. It took me by surprise. I had a month of real panic. (Beth: Management Board Officer)

Women's assessment of the consequences, cost and benefits involved in risking pregnancy vary before and after conception; the outcomes in terms of pregnancies, abortions and births are situationally contingent (Luker, 1975). Maternal careers that ended in abortions were not represented in this study.

Women's 'pregnancy accounts' are perhaps as good indicators of present meanings as they are of past events;

recollected accounts will be interpreted as guides to meanings rather than 'objective' facts. No doubt some unplanned pregnancies which later produced wanted children were, in retrospect, recalled as planned. And, as reported in other research, pregnancies are often neither "planned" nor "unplanned". Women who are ambivalent about pregnancy often describe themselves as just 'falling pregnant' (Luker, 1975; O'Donnell, 1985). For Currie (1988) 'falling pregnant' through contraceptive risk-taking is a way of handling ambivalence.

Middle-class women found it difficult to give reasons for having wanted children. The problem was not simply one of memory, but of applying the common sense notion of reasons to having children. Where childbearing is culturally normative, women are not asked to say why they want children; only to explain why they do not. Thus, Jean, an archivist, could give no 'reasons' for having wanted a child except "just really wanting to have children, you know... It wasn't really [discussed] very in depth at all." Similarly, Fran, a lawyer, had been trained in rational decision making; but a request for reasons didn't fit her experience.

I don't know. Now that's the funny thing about it. I'm not sure what it was. I don't know what it was. Why was it that I wanted to have children? I don't even know.  
(Fran: Lawyer)

Unlike working-class mothers for whom "no reason", or "I don't know!" would satisfy, most middle-class women eventually offered some personally meaningful explanation for having had children. Although having children may be

'culturally normative' it is also 'culturally held', especially among the middle-class, that children are a matter of individual choice, not an obligation. What is not 'culturally available', I argue, are reasons for not having children. And this affected women's fertility decisions.

Eighty-two percent of middle-class women who planned their pregnancies invoked some concept of time in their accounts (Table.4.4). On the surface, a reference to time explains when, not why, it was seen as desirable to have children. However, as I will show shortly, it helps explain both. Other reasons for wanting children included the desire for a relationship with one's own child, in particular that of love or nurturing (32 percent); and maternal instinct or natural drives (23 percent). About a third of the women mentioned difficult-to-code but loosely related themes about children enriching life, being part of a pattern, or making sense of things. Not uncommonly, pregnancy accounts were idiosyncratic and difficult to code, supporting other research findings that, among middle-class women, maternity decision making is often difficult and ambivalent (Gerson, 1985, O'Donnell, 1985; Currie, 1988).

### **Motives and Motive Talk: The Problem of Reasons**

Past research on motivation for parenthood indicates that the most common reasons people give for wanting children include the importance of children as a means of achieving

adult identity; as a way of establishing a family or primary ties; and as a means of self perpetuation. Fun and stimulation have lost their appeal as a motive for having children (Gormly, Gormly and Weiss, 1987).

Articulated reasons, however, should not be confused with causes. Scott and Lyman (1981) remind us that, whether claimed or imputed, reasons function as accounts that make problematic behaviour intelligible or legitimate. Reasons are generally only called for when behaviour is seen as needing explanation. A great deal of human behaviour is taken-for-granted, and therefore only called into question when expectations are violated. On one hand, some of human behaviour appears open to choice. On the other, where people routinely face institutionalised choices, societies or subcultures usually supply their members with 'vocabularies of motives' which legitimate choices people make (Mills, [1940] 1981). Indeed, in this sense, accounts and motive talk can become 'causal' by becoming implicated in individuals' decision making. Motive-talk should not be confused with causes. However, the absence of articulated motives does not mean behaviour is either irrational or purposeless.

The difficulty women in this sample had in articulating 'reasons' for their pregnancies can be explained by three factors. First, 'reasons' as accounts are unnecessary where behaviour is taken-for-granted. Questioning the taken-for-granted is nonsense: it makes no sense.

Why does anyone ever want to have children?", [retorted Nina]. It wasn't a decision, it wasn't a question. We didn't try to decide to have a child or not to have a child.... It was taken as given. (Nina: Director, Non-profit Organization)

In contrast, Anna had clearly articulated reasons for becoming a mother. Unlike other women, she was called on to explain her decision to have a child. Anna's maternity was deviant. She was not 'in a relationship', but she decided to get pregnant. Thus Anna's maternity, unlike Nina's, required accounting for:

[I talked about having a child] a lot. It was mostly all verbal. Over those years I was thinking about it, I talked it over with various male friends I was considering being the father - this was when I would do a very planned [pregnancy].... [I wanted a child because] I wanted there to be someone very important in my life with whom I could share [life] experience....I really wanted continuity.... I wanted continuity, roots and shared experiences. (Anna: Community College Teacher)

The difficulty with motherhood motives may have also been social organizational. Whereas sociologists may detect the continued existence of a 'motherhood mandate', there is also a common-sense belief that motherhood is a matter of individual choice. Our society places a high value on choice. Indeed, women may value motherhood more because it is perceived as chosen (Russo, 1979:12). The question "why" creates the need for an ideological response. The problem for middle-class women seems to be that there is little ideological consensus on reasons for motherhood from which to generate accounts (Luker, 1984; Harding, 1981). In particular, there is a lack of feminist motherhood accounts.

Finally, middle-class women's difficulty with reasons

for pregnancies arose because children were not products of reasons but of the process whereby couples came together to make sense of their lives and to "jointly" construct biographies (Berger and Kellner, 1977). Children were socially, not simply biologically conceived. As Wendy recalled:

We thought we would make a nice baby. It was a joint project. We were both at a stage of life where we wanted it. [I once thought I would choose to remain childless]. I hadn't wanted any [children]. I hadn't thought I would have the patience and dedication. And you have to have a relationship in which you are settled and very comfortable going into it. I hadn't had that. So, it's all of a package, I guess. (Wendy: Research Advisor).

Similarly, until she met a particular woman, Debbie believed that her chosen gay lifestyle precluded her having a child.

[I had lived with a woman who had a child]. I really enjoyed having this child in my life for the 5 or 6 years that she was there. The other relationship I'd been in, the plan was the other woman was going to have a child. So I'd been planning on us having a child, but I hadn't really thought about myself having a child until I left her, or she left me, to be more precise.... [I started thinking about having a child myself when] I was putting myself back together after a relationship had broken up and I was starting a new one and starting life all over again. And that's when I found a method of getting inseminated I could live with. (Debbie: Accountant)

Debbie had assumed she would be childless:

I didn't really expect to have children. I 'came out' at a very early age.... Childlessness seemed to me one of the real impoverishments of the [gay] lifestyle that seemed to be available to me. So [now, having a child] feels like an amazing gift to me.

Becoming a mother, therefore, was often a tentative process. It may be better understood as the product of interaction rather than the result of causes.

Is it time?: Time Conceptions and Pregnancies among Middle-Class Women

When one shifts attention from reasons for having children to descriptions of what women thought and talked about, and what was happening in their lives when they became pregnant, a clearer pattern emerges. Time was a dominant theme in accounts of pregnancy decisions. Women invoked two different dimensions of time : biological/chronological time and biographical time. Some accounts referred to issues of age and the "biological clock". Others invoked biographical time conceptions in relation to maternal transformations.

Half (50 percent) of the middle-class women who planned their pregnancies said that age awareness or the "biological clock" helped lead them to decide to get pregnant (Table 4.4). Another 9 percent said their partners' age also meant "time was running out." Marie was 32 when her first child was born; her partner was 9 years older.

Well, I felt like time was running out - I felt I was getting older. Frank was getting older - [I thought] 'We'd better do this,' And I didn't ever feel I would be necessarily ready to have a child. But I came to terms with it. 'All right, I'll do it', even though not everything is perfect; because nothing will be perfect. I had been waiting for the perfect time. Well, on and off. I think for 4 to 5 years I didn't want to have a child. Then, you know, the biological clock started ticking. And I felt, 'I want to do this, and I want to do it sooner than later'; a little sooner because Frank is 40, you know. (Marie: Education consultant)

For some, the biological clock raised not only the issue of whether they would, but whether they could, have children. Twenty three percent of women said that they had

been unsure that they would be able to conceive:

I think probably on and off for 5 or 6 years it was 'Do we? Don't we?'.... We were feeling that we were handling all the finances well. We had accomplished most of the [house] renovations. I was feeling that I was beginning to have made some career advances.... The pulls were equally strong in both directions. There were many positive things for the double income, no kids [life].... Yet I figured [that] further down the road, when it would probably be too late, I would probably have so many regrets.... I had a miscarriage ... and [I feared] 'maybe there's something wrong with me ... maybe, physically, I won't be capable of it'. (Mary Lynn: Policy Analyst)

When Sue was about 33, she became aware of "the biological clock". From Sue's account, however, we see that time refers not simply to biological time, but to the time women need to socially arrange motherhood.

The biological clock was ticking away. I said we got married to have children - I think they were synonymous - the decision to get married was a decision to have children. And I definitely wanted children.... It was either [he agreed] or... I would have found another relationship. [Having a child] was something I wanted to do and I had reached the point where I realised I only had a small amount of time in which to do it. (Sue: Community Coordinator/Social Worker)

Contrary to common sense expectations, it was women who were ambivalent or who had not "always wanted" children, rather than women who had, who heard the biological clock most often. Almost half ( 47 percent) of the women who once thought they would choose to remain childless felt pressure from the biological clock. Given "always wanted to" be mothers' commitment to having children, one would have expected a greater awareness of time pressures. The unexpected pattern might be explained by the different ages at first births among the two categories. Older women could be expected to 'hear the

ticking more loudly'. However, the average age at first births among those who "always wanted" and those who did not were quite close, 31 years and 32.6 years respectively.<sup>29</sup> The pattern of biological time awareness is explained, however, by listening to how women made decisions about pregnancy.

### The Changing Content of Women's Options: How 'When' Becomes Whether

At first glance, the biological clock appeared to be an issue of when to have children, not whether to have children. However, for many women, when decisions became yes or no decisions. After being in a "solid" relationship where having children wasn't considered partly because of her partner's financial commitment to children of a previous marriage, Kim said she and her partner made a "fairly spontaneous decision" to have children:

My past had been, I've had a relatively happy life. Nothing traumatic has happened that would make me feel negative about having children. And probably the fact that I was getting older and we knew we wanted to have a child so it was a matter of deciding whether we would or not.... [There were no reasons]. It was a fairly spontaneous decision.... The age factor, I guess. Many women at this point feel the clock ticking. The clock certainly helped the decision along. (Kim: Librarian)

Similarly with Jill, who started thinking of having a child about 3 months before she got pregnant. Jill had thought she wouldn't have children, partly because she "never really wanted them that badly." Jill and her partner "knew [they] didn't want children before they were 30."

[When Jill was 30, she and her partner] just figured - well, we're 30 and we'll slowly try to get pregnant, and if we do we do, and if we don't we don't.... [I] wasn't really excited about the whole thing. I didn't have, you know, the great maternal urge. I didn't even really like babies. (Jill: Marketing Manager)

When she became 30, no longer having a reason to explain not having children, Jill became pregnant:

We were almost so laissez faire about it. We really didn't have a reason for wanting a child other than we thought if we were going to have one, we wanted to have one before we were mid thirties.... I think we knew we didn't want children before we were thirty. And then, when we hit thirty we said, 'Gee, if we are going to do it, we should do it now'. But it was never, sort of, you know, we want to have a little baby in the house.

Where women are unsure about becoming mothers and where reasons for or against having children cannot be easily articulated, time and age can acquire the character of normative precept and motive. Wendy, who previously wanted to remain permanently childless, explained:

[Later on] I wanted a child, that's all. And the main reasons I wanted a child? It was time to get on with it, that's all. The time was tick, tock, tick tock.... (Wendy: Research Advisor)

The biological clock invoked by middle-class women was flexibly biological. Women and their partners constructed and readjusted biological age as subjective 'make up your mind times' or cut-off-dates for considering pregnancies. "My new cut-off date is forty," explained Sandra who was undecided about having a second child. As the public perception of biological cut-off-ages for children changes, the time frame in which fertility decisions are made expands accordingly.

The biological clock did more than urge women in this

study to 'make up their minds'. It faced them with a new decision. For all of their adult years, middle-class women in this study, although childless, had retained a potential identity as mothers. However, neither women who had earlier thought they would remain childless, nor those who were ambivalent, had taken final steps in rejecting motherhood potential through sterilization. Whether it was perceived as a desirable option or not, women retained a potential claim on motherhood identity. Thus, for years women could be non-mothers but potential mothers at the same time. This balancing act made motherhood temporarily non-problematic for both those who "always wanted" children and those who did not.

The biological clock threatened this balance by destroying one side of the equation - the future potential identity of mother. Women were suddenly faced with a new potential identity: that of becoming a permanently childless woman. This new identity, unlike previous childless identities, was irrevocable. Earlier in their biographies women could adopt a non-motherhood identity with little cost. But 'time' threatened to make lifelong and potentially costly commitments out of temporary decisions. As Mary Lynn put it:

[We were thinking about having a child] probably off and on for five or six years. It was do we? Don't we? When do we?.... and I was feeling too that the biological clock was ticking and that we sort of had to get on with it if we were going to do it. (Mary Lynn: Policy Analyst)

Mary Lynn and her partner found it hard to decide to have a child until Mary Lynn realised she could not accept the

idea of being permanently childless. Her decision was more a rejection of permanent childlessness than an embracement of motherhood at that particular time:

At one point, when we were waffling so much [about having children] and forever changing our minds, I thought that perhaps during that time that the ultimate decision would be no.... But I felt sort of empty and at a loss [with that decision]. I wasn't happy with it for very long and that's why I kept going back to [the idea of having children]. (Mary Lynn: Policy Analyst)

Marie also felt that time was running out. At thirty two, she felt ambivalent and "not ready" to have a child; but she could not commit herself to childlessness:

You know, you have images of yourself... mine was never a childless one - not that it was necessarily one with a child, but it sure.... While I didn't imagine myself with kids around me, I never imagined myself without them.... I thought I may not have children at certain times - I don't think I ever, ever, thought I wouldn't have one. (Marie: Education Consultant)

Veevers (1980) shows how decisions to postpone pregnancy can, by default, lead to lifelong childless outcomes. On the other hand, being unable to sustain an identity of permanent non-motherhood appears to have led some women to become pregnant.

### Being "Ready": Motherhood and Biographical Time

Independently of referring to biological time, more than half of the middle-class women (64 percent) who planned their pregnancies invoked biographical time in explaining their decisions to have children (Table 4.4). Women located decisions about having children in a temporal flow of their lives that assumed a developmental or progressive character.

Women spoke in terms of "being ready for children" or it being the "right time". "We were ready", Jenny, an executive secretary emphasized. "We were both at a stage of life when we wanted it", explained Wendy who, at 36 years, had recently had her first child. Twenty nine percent of women located their pregnancies at a time of personal crisis or upheaval - half of these mentioned a death or impending death in the family.

Women talked about specific dimensions of readiness for children: financial readiness, employment readiness, personal and emotional readiness and being ready in terms of their relationships. Loretta put it like this:

We were mature enough. We had satisfied a lot of other needs. We were ready to make a commitment to children. We were very sure in our relationship.... Emotionally, both of us were ready....We both wanted to have a baby... the inevitable result of our relationship. We talked about it.... Our relationship had been established... there was obviously a commitment there. It seemed like the right thing to do. (Loretta: Teacher)

A woman recalling her earlier abortion, on the other hand, explained how, at the time, she "had not been ready".

The themes of readiness in women's discussion of motherhood had material and social psychological referents. The right time also referred to the practicalities of having children, such as money, work, housing, and support with domestic tasks. Some women mentioned home-renovations or owning a home as part of readiness. Others referred to being financially ready, or ready in terms of their own or their partners' work. Tess, who was thirty-three when her first child was born, had to achieve readiness in terms of her

career, finances, and her relationship before she could contemplate having children:

I always wanted to have a child but I didn't seriously contemplate it until a few years ago, when I felt financially ready. And also, John didn't want to have children for a long time. So, it was after we got married, I think we felt very comfortable with one another and thought maybe it would work. I had a permanent job. I had some work experience.... I'd established myself at work. (Tess: Snr. Policy Advisor)

As Currie (1988) argues, the notion of the "right time" for children corresponded to a 'configuration of material circumstances' such as employment, shared parenting, housing and finances which women feel they must personally manage before deciding about having children. As many of these factors are outside their control, women face the problem of developing personal strategies to handle structurally generated problems. These strategies, Currie (1988:249) notes, are often misinterpreted as ambivalence.

Men are one of the major strategies work-involved women use to reduce the practical costs of children to themselves, and make maternity more viable (Gerson, 1985:166; Hochschild, 1989:193). Loretta and Peter, for example, reached a joint decision to have children, but shared parenting was part of that decision, Loretta explained:

I think [the decision to have children] depends on your spouse and the type of commitment you are going to get from them[sic].... We had a very equal relationship and I wasn't going to get involved in having children unless that continued.... Peter does fifty percent of the childraising and I know he is fairly unusual.... He does fifty percent of the cooking and fifty percent of the cleaning.... It didn't work out easily; it's something we worked at continually. (Loretta: Teacher)

Work-oriented women may tend to marry men who profess similar egalitarian ideals. However, egalitarianism is often little more than a family myth disguising the persistence of a gendered division of labour (La Rossa and La Rossa, 1981; Backett, 1982; Ferree, 1984; Hochschild, 1989).

Like Loretta, Tess had tried to reduce the potential costs of motherhood to herself by making a joint commitment to shared parent-work a part of the decision to have children. Although her partner agreed to have a child, his commitment to fatherhood did not involve a commitment to sharing the work. Her greater desire to be a mother put Tess in a weakened bargaining position:

John was concerned about my career; how [having a child] would affect it. He wasn't in any hurry really to have a child. He wanted it to be the right time. We talked about how our relationship would be affected by it .... We talked a bit about how much responsibility he would take vis-a-vis [sharing the work]. There was no definite commitment in the sense that he was prepared to do half [the work]. (Tess: Senior Policy Advisor)

Some middle-class women found themselves in the right circumstances for deciding that they were ready to have children; others attempted to negotiate their circumstances; and others adapted their definition of readiness. Jean, for example, had been waiting for readiness:

You think about having a child and you think it's not the right time, so [you don't]... [but] then it just seemed there would never be a right time, so we may as well go ahead and do it. (Jean: Archivist)

Although women referred to other aspects of being ready for children, especially their work or careers, their

relationships with men dominated middle-class women's discussions of their transitions to biological maternity.

**The "Right Relationship": Men and the Social Construction of Motherhood**

A characteristic feature of biographical "readiness" for middle-class women was the presence of the "right relationship". When asked when they 'first started thinking about actually having a child', many women said it coincided with a particular relationship, "readiness" in a relationship, or replacing one relationship with a another which they came to define as a "right relationship". Although women frequently presented their "right relationships" as having led them to pregnancy, the data show how some women invoked their relationship to support their claims to maternity.

Women invoked their relationships with partners as a decisive factor. Without the "right relationship", becoming a mother appeared problematic. Thus Patricia, who had always wanted children, explained how she came to be thirty six before she had her first child. Patricia waited for a Dad, not a man.

When I was 35 I found the right Dad. I had [a child] as soon as I thought I had the right father and that was simultaneous to the marriage. I always wanted to have a child, but I couldn't have a child unless I felt I had a particular [partner] that I felt was the right person to have a child with. I've always had a very deep desire [to have a child]. (Patricia: Community College Teaching Master)

Thus we see how children are both social and biological products. Women with partners presented children as joint

projects with their spouses.

Social psychology has long pointed to relationships with significant others as having a crucial relevance for establishing and validating identity (McCall and Simmons, 1978, Rosenberg, 1979, Hewitt, 1976). Berger and Kellner, for example, maintain that modern marriage holds a "privileged status among the significant validating relationships for adults in our society" (1977:9). In a marriage, according to Berger and Kellner, a couple come together to redefine themselves, and to build a private cosmos where they can experience their lives as making sense (1977:9).

What emerged from this study, however, was not that couples consensually built biographies, but that women claimed or perceived the decision to have children as jointly made. Women presented readiness for children as mutually achieved. Loretta described how she and Peter came to reject childlessness:

When we got married, we were definitely not having children.... Peter was in grad. school and I was working. He finished [school]... and I went back to school. Then we were both working while we were doing the house. We both found we were in jobs that weren't terribly satisfying, yet they were financially rewarding and could consume our [lives]. And yet we decided that the quality of life wasn't quite there.... It took us some time to realise that children were the next move we were ready for. (Loretta: Elementary School Teacher)

However, like other social relationships, definition and redefinition of identities within marriage involved negotiation, strategic interaction and conflict as well as consensus. For many women, "right relationships" were not

found: they had to be achieved. For some, redefining themselves as mothers required that they strategically altercast their partners in paternal identities that they were reluctant to assume. Sandra explained:

I was in my early 30s.... We talked about it a lot, and he wasn't ready, and I was ready and sort of waiting.... It was understood between us that I wanted to and it was up to him to decide to be ready, and that maybe he should hurry up. (Sandra: Civil Servant)

In contrast, Janette and her partner had "established" that they were not going to have children:

Sam had his children, he wasn't keen to start a new family.... He didn't really want to have children again. We'd established we weren't going to have children. (Janette: Manager)

However, Janette continued to feel some distance from that 'joint' decision and claimed only a temporary commitment to a non-motherhood identity:

I always figured I'd find a way [to have a child]. I figured I'd hang on till I was thirty.... He definitely didn't want [to have children] with me or anybody else. And I thought "well,... when I hit thirty, I'll get serious... always in the back of my mind was that he might come round. (Janette: Manager)

The situation was resolved by Janette "accidentally" becoming pregnant: "... we went away for the weekend and I forgot my pills and...."

Twenty three percent of women in the middle-class sample described how they achieved readiness to have children by transforming their reluctant partners' identities and negotiating their relationships into the 'right ones'. Cindy chose a strategy of direct confrontation:

Well, I had been wanting to have a child, even before we were married. In fact, that was the thing our marriage hinged on. My husband wasn't particularly [keen], he wasn't at all interested. We, in fact, started to not remain together before we were married. We split up over this issue because I knew I wanted to have a child so badly. Anyway, it all worked out that he... We finally got back together again on the understanding we would have one child. I wanted to have a child from the moment we were married, which was 1980. But we waited for five years. (Cindy: Coordinator of Language Studies)

For women such as this, becoming a mother was far from a smooth, unproblematic conformity to adult female role expectations, but emerged as a tentative process characterised by strategic interaction and negotiation. Alice, for example, recalled that before her previous marriage broke up...

I was not very happy... My former husband...really wanted children [and I thought about having a child], and I thought I would not with that partner. I decided to leave and try again. (Alice: Graphic Designer)

When she accidentally became pregnant by her new partner with whom she had started living, Alice felt she faced a choice of becoming a single mother or having an abortion because he did not want children:

[When I learned that I was pregnant] I felt, 'oh shute', now this. I also felt a little touch of aura -I felt apprehensive, excited, [and thought] 'what's Michael going to say? Oh! Oh!' But I decided, I knew no matter what Michael said, I was going to have the baby.... [I wouldn't choose to be a single mother, but] if I was involved with the father, if I really cared for the father... I would carry through a pregnancy [even] if it were an accidental pregnancy... whether that meant becoming a single mother or whatever. (Alice: Graphic Artist)

Alice's and her partner's discussions led to a redefinition of the relationship as one that included the already conceived child, but continued to exclude future children.

### Negotiating the Path to Motherhood; Altercasting Men as Fathers

Middle-class women's paths to maternity often involved altercasting men into fatherhood roles which they were reluctant to assume. For women, men's responses to pregnancies are often seen as a test of their commitment to the relationship (Gerson, 1985; Luker, 1975). However, women whose pregnancies or desire for children cast reluctant men into parental identities risked transforming their relationships in unintended ways. Several women said, for example, that they were afraid that their pregnancies would harm or destroy the relationship. Della felt that her fears for her marriage when she accidentally became pregnant had been justified. She is now an alone mother:

[When I learned that I was pregnant] my initial response was fear. I wasn't sure if the relationship was strong enough, and it wasn't. [Back then, however,] after we decided that everything would be O.K... we were going to have this baby and everything would be fine [between us], I was ecstatic. (Della: Social Worker)

Cindy, on the other hand, remained with her partner after she too had successfully negotiated becoming a mother with a very reluctant partner. As we read earlier, she put the relationship itself on the bargaining table when they talked about having a child. Cindy was pregnant with her second child when I interviewed her. Cindy's negotiations, however, may have weakened her subsequent claims to her partner's involvement in childcare, as theirs was a particularly unequal division of labour among middle-class couples.

Thus women who appear to want children much more than

their partners may find themselves strategically disadvantaged in the subsequent division of childcare work. Machung (1989) points out that popular notions about men's and women's commitment to parenthood place women in general at such a strategic disadvantage. Machung (1989) found that young men and women sustain the misconception that women typically want children more than men do. Thus, women anticipate having to make career and other sacrifices for children; men do not. Describing this state of gendered pluralistic ignorance, Machung noted that "[m]issing from both [men and women] is the awareness that men often want families as much as women" (1989: 49). Men and women in Machung's study differed, not in their desire to have children, but in the projections each gender made about the other's desire for children:

Men see women as wanting children more, as having the instinctual capacity to care for them better, and therefore as having to make career sacrifices for them.... Women see men as not wanting children as much.... and therefore as exempt from career sacrifices. (Machung, 1989:50)

Thus, because children are perceived as wanted more by women than men, women can be 'legitimately' expected to bear more of the costs.

Kim was an exception to this pattern. Unlike Cindy who had bargained with her relationship, Kim felt that risking her relationship was too high a price to pay for motherhood:

[Having a child] was something I would have wanted... and yet the relationship was such, and I valued the relationship [so much] that I wasn't prepared to trash the relationship in order to have children (Kim: Librarian).

In spite of her partner's original reluctance, Kim's eventual pregnancy came to be defined not simply as being a joint decision, but as something they both wanted. Having a child was presented as the product of their relationship, not as Kim's project:

We both wanted to have a baby - the eventual result of our relationship. We talked about it and thought it was something we very much wanted. [There were no 'reasons',] it was a fairly spontaneous decision. (Kim: Librarian)

This recognition of having an equal investment in parenthood may help explain the equal division of childcare which appeared to exist in their household.

But whereas Kim's pregnancy finally emerged as a joint project with her partner, other women's did not. Joanne, now an alone mother, had lived with a previous partner and his daughter for eight years when she realised:

I thought, 'oh gee', you know, not only do I like this [caring for a child], but I seem to be fairly good at it. It would be something I would definitely like to do. [Then] I knew definitely that I really enjoyed kids and I'd like to [have a child].... [Then] it became clear to me that the commitment to the relationship wasn't equal anymore.... I had made a request [that we have a child] and got no response one way or the other....Tim didn't know what he wanted. I did. (Joanne: Elementary Teacher)

Things may have been different, Joanne reflected, " if I had known myself; and if I had known that I would like kids. See, I didn't know [that I would want children] till I was near twenty seven." Joanne's partner was unwilling to support her claim to a new identity of mother. In response, Joanne set out to effect her status passage to motherhood by controlling what

she saw as the determining circumstances of her life:

Partly [that is why I changed my job]. I got out of [acting] because I thought you can't have a family situation unless you have a regular job. I wasn't ever going to meet anybody [in theatre life]. I thought 'nothing is going to happen here under these circumstances'. In fact, that's basically what happened. I changed my life and I have met all my goals... by accident in a way.... I got it backwards, but it sort of happened.

Joanne perceived that she was ready for children. Although she lacked a permanent male partner Joanne acted to control other contingencies of her maternal transformation. When she was 'around twenty seven', she decided that "[i]f I did get pregnant accidentally, I would accept it and do whatever I needed to do in order to have a child." When, as a single woman, she unintentionally became pregnant, her interpretation of her relationship with the father as being, if not the "right relationship", at least a 'right enough' relationship, allowed her to sustain her identity transformation:

I chose not to terminate the pregnancy, which I suppose is a choice.... The fact that his father is the man that he is made a lot of difference because I knew him quite well and I also knew he would be very supportive. I also knew that he would enjoy the child as well, so... that had a lot to do with it. He did provide me with a lot of security - emotional security. It turned out he helped me financially as well.... I'm sure if it had been somebody I didn't know, I may have re-thought again [sic].... It happened at a particular point in my life too - when I was ready and I knew I could cope and I knew I was grown up enough. (Joanne: Elementary Teacher)

In contrast, women who have an early commitment to maternal identities can try to avoid the contingencies of negotiating parenthood by making a potential partner's desire to have children a precondition, not just to marriage, but to a

serious relationship. Laura put it like this:

I had made up my mind [to have children] a long time ago... I discussed it with him [my partner] before we even got married; before we even became serious. I wanted to be sure he wanted children, because it was very important to me. If he didn't, then let's not get serious. (Laura: Accountant)

However, such strategies are not always applicable. As we saw, many women wished to present the decision to have children as a joint product of a relationship with a partner, not as a precondition of that relationship. In other cases, women presented their decision to have children as a private one; but one that required them to renegotiate their partners' identities. Finally, women who could not find or construct what they defined as the "right relationship" found themselves doubly at risk. They faced the option of remaining not just partnerless, but childless. It is not surprising, therefore, that women invested so much 'relationship work' in their romantic attachments and in finding the "right relationship".<sup>9</sup> Women had a great deal at stake.

Men are often decisive in women's transitions to motherhood - and not simply in biological terms. Gerson (1985), for example, found that male support for, or pressure against having children, was frequently the decisive factor determining ambivalent women's decision for or against maternity. In this study, only two middle-class women described their partners' desire to have children as leading them to decide to have a child. Two others, both previously alone mothers, recalled that it had been their new partners'

desire for children, rather than their own, that led to their decisions to have second children. However, as Gerson (1985) points out, men also affect women's decisions about children in indirect ways. Because men's support for children is seen as indicative of their commitment to the relationship, women can attempt to test and externalize that relationship through maternity decisions.

In this study, men were implicated in women's maternity in yet another way. By allowing women to invoke the notion of the "right relationship", men, whether intentionally or not, led women to claim they were ready for children. Women generally claimed this was a 'joint' readiness. In contrast, the absence of the "right relationship" and thereby 'readiness', made claiming motherhood problematic.

### Integrating Childless and Maternal Identities

To an outsider it would appear that middle-class women in this study postponed motherhood; indeed many claimed they had once 'permanently' rejected it. Women's biographical accounts show how they ensured that the value of present maternal identities was not devalued by past rejection or postponement. Women disassociated themselves from past childlessness decisions in ways that integrated their pasts and presents and so presented themselves as responsible and stable rather than as fickle and erratic. For example, Laura came to interpret her earlier decision never to have children as 'a

cold one'; one not made by "me as a person". Motherhood, on the other hand "turned out to be the thing that I had wanted". Other explanations for postponed or rejected motherhood both reaffirmed the valued nature of motherhood and the legitimacy of the women's present claim to it.

Some women explained the rejection of motherhood by saying they would not have made good parents back then. Others, as we have seen, interpreted themselves as having undergone personal development towards 'readiness' that made children seem appropriate and desirable:

It took us a long time to realise that children were the next move we were ready for.... Before I got married and for the first I'd say five years of our marriage, we were definitely not going to have children. ... It took a long time to see myself as a feminist and a mother. So that I had to sort all that out for myself before I could make a commitment to motherhood, because I knew I couldn't be a traditional mother. (Loretta: Teacher)

Women could also come to terms with their earlier rejection of motherhood by realising that the motherhood they rejected was not the only type of motherhood:

I had thought a mother had to be certain things... one of them was that a mother had to be unhappy - my impression of a mother was that she was self-sacrificing and she was unhappy. And I discovered it does not have to be the case... I thought I would have to become self-sacrificing and unhappy ... I found I didn't have to change myself... I learned and I grew and the changes did happen, but I didn't have to force myself into any kind of mould. (Beth: Management Board Officer)

In the retrospective contexts of their own biographies, therefore, middle-class women saw deferred motherhood not as rejection, but as preparation.

**Perceptions of Adulthood: Being Ready for Motherhood as a Form of Achievement**

Value, in our society, is usually established not simply by utility or personal preference, but by scarcity. Social positions that have greater social value are generally those to which there is restricted access: they are scarce<sup>10</sup>. Unlike entry into valued social positions based on occupations, recruitment to motherhood is not formally regulated. Any woman who can conceive can become a mother. Although unmarried women are socially discouraged from claiming motherhood, access is not denied.

Easy access to motherhood, therefore, threatens its social value. One response to the potential debasement of the value of motherhood through unrestricted access is to establish the notion of there being valid and invalid claims. Middle-class women's biographical accounts of their transitions to maternity established just such a notion. Claims to maternal identity among middle-class women were presented as an achieved, social accomplishment rather than biological events. Rather than a period of nine-months gestation, 'becoming a mother' involved years of personal, emotional, social and financial achievement - to be "ready". Although women can biologically become mothers before they are "ready", it is clear that middle-class women considered this invalid. As we have seen, certain 'motivating circumstances' were put forward as legitimate bases for motherhood; others were not seen as

valid. Nina, for example, explained:

[It's not right to have]...kids to keep you company, or to fill your life; to fill some kind of a void, or to make your marriage work, or something like that. I mean I think those are just the wrong reasons. So, I think having kids for the wrong reasons is a poor parenting strategy. (Nina: Director of Non-Profit Organization)

Similarly, several mothers mentioned that being "too needy", or "not having her own needs met" made women into 'poor mothers'.

Thus, it appeared that among middle-class women a developmental conceptualization of adulthood as social maturity has become an alternative to female identity as a legitimate basis from which to claim motherhood. In their accounts, being a woman was not presented as the grounds on which motherhood was claimed. Maturity was.

In addition to recognising that biographical and 'family time' is structured by gender, we can see how, for women, time and the achievement of adulthood is structured by class. This point become clearer in the next chapter.

### Summary

This chapter looked at how, not why, women became mothers. The data show that it is too simplistic to conceptualize middle-class women's transition to maternity as conformity to gender role expectations. For the women involved, the process has the character of an achievement.

Middle-class women found it difficult to articulate reasons for wanting children. Their biographical accounts, however, show how time conceptions provided key frames of

reference in which having children made sense to women. By locating themselves in personally meaningful sequences of temporal events, most middle-class women came to see having children as either an appropriate or desirable occurrence in their lives.

Not surprisingly, given that most middle-class women were in their thirties when they first gave birth, references to the "biological clock" were common in pregnancy accounts. However, a closer look at the data showed that what first appeared to be a question of when to have children often became a question of whether to have children. "Time" did more than urge procrastinating or ambivalent women to make up their minds. Earlier in their biographies women could adopt non-motherhood identities with little permanent investment or cost. Women could be both non-mothers and potential mothers at the same time. However, women came to see time as facing them with a new and irrevocable identity - that of being a permanently childless woman. Middle-class women's accounts show how becoming pregnant was often as much a rejection of permanent childlessness as it was an embracement of motherhood.

Middle-class women conceptualized their lives in developmental terms: they made sense of their lives by ascribing to it an inherent and progressive logic. They were becoming "ready". It was the "right time" for children. Thus the potential to have children imposed a meaningful temporal order on women's lives. Permanent childlessness removed this

sense-making structure from women's lives.

Middle-class women's accounts of their pregnancies also had a 'self-evolutionary' aspect. The "right-time" was frequently presented in terms of maturational, social and economic achievements. Women typically presented themselves as 'psychologically ready', 'financially ready' and as having 'achieved readiness' in terms of their relationship and their occupational careers. For middle-class women, therefore, motherhood was a negotiated process. Even for those who had "always wanted" children, it had the character of a personal achievement.

## ENDNOTES

1. Differences in family patterns between white and black working-class men and women have received considerable attention (Ferree, 1984; Stack, 1974; Martin and Martin, 1980). Ferree (1984), for example, suggests that the destruction of black kinship and household patterns through slavery and high male unemployment rates have meant that black women often raise families with limited male support. Black women coped with their own low wages by sharing income, resources and child care. Having families composed of several generations of female kin helped financial survival, and produced female solidarity and patterns of exchanging (Ferree; 1985:15). Variations in white family patterns associated with different economic conditions have also been studied by social historians and, more recently, by feminist anthropologists. See for example, Sacks, 1984; Bridental, 1982; Tilly and Scott, 1978.

2. For example, Komarovsky (1962) found major variations in expectations of marriage and in familial behaviour between white working-class women and men who finished high school, and those who had fewer years of education. And Rubin (1976) distinguished between the 'settled-living' lifestyles of the steadily employed, and the 'hard-living' lifestyles of the erratically employed, white working-class families she interviewed.

3. For example, many researchers see employment, or work-involvement as a major divide among middle-class women (Bernard, 1975; Pistrang, 1981; Luker, 1984; Anderson, 1987).

4. To say women have difficulty speaking about reasons for having children does not mean they are acting irrationally. On the contrary, Luker (1975) shows how women's behaviour around risking pregnancy, for example, can be analyzed in terms of rational choices.

5. Middle-class women had an average of 1.2 children; working-class women had an average of 1.4.

6. See Grindstaff, 1988; Moore, 1987, 1989.

7. See also for example, L. Weitzman, 1985.

8. This comparison refers only to women who planned their first pregnancies.

9. For a discussion of how working on one's relationship has become a secular form of modern religion see Bellah et al., Habits of the Heart, 1985.

10. One could argue, of course, that children are becoming a scarce commodity. My concern in this chapter is primarily with the value of motherhood, rather than children.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PATHS TO MOTHERHOOD: WORKING-CLASS WOMEN

In the previous chapter we looked at middle-class women's pasts: how they came to be mothers. In this chapter we look at working-class women's paths to motherhood. Initially, the most striking contrast between the two groups was the average age at which women first gave birth. The differences in their experiences, however, ran deeper than age. In this chapter I show how time conceptions, positive conceptions of motherhood, the expressions of adult identities and the expectations of maternity generated by family and friends were intimately linked to how and when working-class women became mothers. As with middle-class women, becoming a mother had to do with issues of adulthood. However, the relationship between motherhood and adulthood varied by class.

The average age at which working-class women first became mothers was 22.1 (Table 3.1). Within the working-class sample, currently alone mothers<sup>1</sup> were slightly younger at the birth of their first child; their average age was 21.1.

#### Alone Mothers: the Interaction of Class and Gender

It is important not to categorize alone parenting as a deviant or abnormal form of parenting (Eichler, 1983). Rather it represents a temporary, but widely shared experience or

phase in women's maternal careers.<sup>2</sup> In recruiting women to the study I originally intended to have equal representation of middle- and working-class alone mothers in order to allow comparison. Alone mothers make up 25 percent of the sample. However, I found it much easier to locate alone working-class mothers of pre-school children than middle-class mothers. I was afraid that if the sample of working-class mothers contained a higher proportion of alone mothers than did the middle-class sample it would limit comparison. I had intended to 'purposively' select the sample to increase the proportion of alone middle-class mothers until I realized that the pattern of my sample reflected typical class differences in women's experience of motherhood. The experience of being an alone mother depends on how and when a woman becomes an alone parent (Moore, 1989). Women become alone mothers through separation, ex-nuptial births and widowhood. Separation is the most common antecedent to becoming an alone parent; for women this typically happens at an average age of 31.6 (Moore, 1989:347). Ex-nuptial births, on the other hand, tend to occur to younger women (average age of 20.6) and this is the second most common way to become an alone mother. Age at first birth, however, is itself associated with social class. Thus, the pattern of becoming a young alone mother that the women in this study described is typically working-class, not middle-class. It is part of a class experience of motherhood. Not only does becoming an alone mother tend to have different antecedents for

women of different social classes, but, given women's different educational and income earning resources, it also has different consequences. Middle-class women do not typically give birth in their teens or early twenties when they have little post secondary education and limited work experience, and do not typically become welfare mothers as did most of the alone working-class women in this study.

Thus, this thesis compares women's experience of motherhood by social class; not alone mothers' experience of motherhood. The latter research focus would have required a different research design and sample selection. Rather, the thesis explores how class and gender interacted in women's lives to shape their maternal career paths. Thus the comparisons that can be made by marital status between the two sample groups are limited.

### "I Always Wanted to be a Mother"

Working-class women were more likely than middle-class women to say they had "always wanted" children (Table 4.1). On

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**TABLE 4.1**

**"ALWAYS WANTED" TO HAVE CHILDREN.**

The percentage of women who "always wanted" children by class and marital/partner status

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	m.class	w.class
Always wanted/assumed would have children	45%	79%*
Once thought would choose to remain childless	48%	21%
Others	7%	0%

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N: 59

\* 14% of these gave birth by age 17

---

the other hand, they were less likely to describe their first children as planned: only 46 percent did so (Table 4.2).<sup>3</sup>

The difference, however, was associated with the interaction of marital status and social class (Table 4.2).<sup>4</sup> Currently alone mothers were less likely than those currently with partners to say their pregnancies had been planned, even if they had been living in a permanent relationship at the time of conception (Table 4.2). Only one alone working-class mother said her pregnancy was planned; 70 percent of working-class mothers with partners said their first child was planned.

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**TABLE 4.2**

**PLANNED AND UNPLANNED PREGNANCIES**

Planned pregnancies with first children by current marital/partner status and social class

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	PLANNED PREGNANCIES
Middle-class women (all)	71%
Working-class women (all)	46%
Middle-class women currently with partners	74%
Working-class women currently with partners	70%
Currently alone middle-class women	50%
Currently alone working-class women	9%

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N: 59

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**Motives for Motherhood among Working-Class Women**

Working-class mothers found it difficult to give 'reasons' for wanting children. Wanting children did not seem to need accounting for, or explanation. They often prefaced their replies with "I don't know"; or, "no reason really, I just wanted a child"; or, "why not?"

The most common reasons for wanting children among those who planned their pregnancies were: just wanting a baby or wanting to (46 percent); feeling ready (46 percent); the desire to establish a family (38 percent); feeling that their partners really wanted a child (31 percent); wanting to share something with, or wanting a closer relationship with a partner (31 percent).

Again, if we look at how, not why, women came to have children, the pattern is clearer. Motherhood was more taken-for-granted among working-class women: the issue of children was when, rather than whether. Fewer said that they had once wanted to never have children and those who did were more tentative about it, and held the idea of childlessness for less time than middle-class women. Wendy, a mother of two, recalled her brief commitment to non-motherhood:

Yes [ I once thought I would never have children]. In 1977 I thought I was not going to get married, and not going to have children. That was a fabulous year.... I had quit school under financial pressure from my step-father... [Later] I went back to high school and was the first girl to [take traditionally male shop subjects]... I broke all the barriers... and thought I could do anything... [It was a] crazy year. [That year] I was my real self. Next year I started work. [Wendy: Apprentice Woodworker]

In spite of describing herself as having been ambivalent about having children, and "not wanting kids" when she married at 21, Wendy also "knew" that she would have children:

[I started thinking about having children] when I was about 21. I was just married. Shortly before we got married we decided we were going to have two children. [He had wanted a large family.] It seemed like a good idea [but] I was kind of neutral about it. I didn't want

children, but I was a bit [ambivalent].... He always wanted children....He didn't want to wait too much longer because he is older than I am. It was more his age that we done it. We both knew we were going to have children.

Lisa also found it difficult to maintain an adult identity of non-mother.

Oh yeah [I didn't always want children]. When you see other [people's] kids and you see how bratty they are, and how much they drive you up the wall! I thought, 'no, I don't want any of this'.... At first I thought, 'no, I don't want any [children]', but then, like, it just goes away and you think, 'I'm just being silly. Eventually, I probably will have one or two'.... [Then it became that] I said I wanted children. Eventually you do want children. [Lisa: Data Entry Clerk]

In contrast to the reluctant fathers portrayed by middle-class women, 31 percent of working-class women who planned their pregnancies, as against 10 percent of middle-class women, indicated that, at that time, it was more their partners' desire to have children than their own that was decisive in their pregnancies. Karen, who married at 19, described how she came to get pregnant:

Well, I just got married and children to us are very important to have.... But to tell you the truth, I really didn't think about it.... It was mostly he wanted a child. Well, me too, but he was more [keen].  
[Drycleaner's Shipping Clerk]

### Time Conceptions and Pregnancies among Working-Class Women

As we have seen, time conceptions were central to middle-class women's accounts of their pregnancies. References to time were less important in working-class women's pregnancy accounts, and the data suggest that time conceptions were differentiated by class (Table 4.3).

**TABLE 4.3****REFERENCES TO TIME IN PREGNANCY ACCOUNTS**

Frequency of reference to time in accounts of first pregnancies

	m. class	w. class
mentioned biological or biographical time (positively or negatively)	71%*	39%**
mentioned biological time	39%	16%***
mentioned biographical time	45%*	25%

N: 59

\* 14% of these mentioned time negatively, e.g. not being ready.

\*\* 18% of these mentioned time negatively, e.g. being too young.

\*\*\*40% of these said they were too young

Class differences, however, seemed less among those with planned pregnancies (Table 4.4).

**TABLE 4.4****REFERENCES TO TIME IN PREGNANCY ACCOUNTS OF THOSE WHO PLANNED THEIR PREGNANCIES WITH THEIR FIRST CHILD**Women who planned their first child and who mentioned time as a factor in their pregnancies.

	m. class	w. class
mentioned biological or biographical time	82%	61%
mentioned biological time	50%	23%
mentioned biographical time	64%	46%

N: 35 planned pregnancies

If we look more closely at how women spoke about time, however, we see that working- and middle-class women's conceptions of life stages and biographical time were different.

Fewer working- than middle-class women talked about biological time. Among those that did, middle-class women talked about not wanting to find themselves too old to have children, working-class women were more likely to describe themselves as wanting to be young with their children.

Working-class women associated having children and being young. Ramona decided to become pregnant at 21:

Well, you know, you always dream about having children and what not. I think [we decided] about a year after we were married.... [We wanted] to start our family when we were young, so we could, you know, kinda all grow up together, kinda thing.... [We had waited] because we wanted to give ourselves at least a year to get to know each other living together. (Ramona: Bookkeeping Clerk)

Pam, who had the first of her two children at 24 recalled:

I don't know [what our reasons for wanting children were]. My husband and I just didn't want to be too old when we had our children. [We wanted it to be] so we were young with our children.... I didn't want to be too old - I'm pushing 30 now. (Pam: Clerical)

Kathy, an alone mother, had not intended to conceive at 18; she was single when she became pregnant. Later, when interviewed, she said she was glad she got pregnant when she was young:

I hadn't yet [begun to think about actually having a child]. I always said I'd wait till I was 26; and by then I probably wouldn't want one. So, I'm glad I was sort of unaware. I was thrilled to death when I found out.... I was [also] scared to death. I didn't know anything about babies.... As soon as I found out I was pregnant, I ran out and got a whole bunch of books. (Kathy: Clerk)

For middle-class women, deferring pregnancy meant waiting until one was in one's thirties; for working-class women, deferring motherhood until they were 30 seemed unthinkable. Marg's husband had wanted to postpone children, but she made it clear that waiting until she was 30 was not on:

You've always wanted to have kids and it's like, 'I don't want to be thirty when I'm having my first baby', you know.... Well, he [my husband] is a year younger than me and he thought 'I don't want to have kids till I'm thirty'. And I thought 'there's no way I'm going to wait till you are 30, because I will be thirty one. (Marg: Accounting Clerk)

It seems plausible that the fewer references to biological time or age among working-class women was because their youthfulness removed them from the impending prospect of being physically incapable of having children. On the other hand, there appeared to be an absence of a concept of being too young for children: a chronological age equivalent to the biographical concept of not being ready. 46 percent of working-class mothers in this sample became pregnant in their teens or had given birth by age 20 (Table 4.5).

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**TABLE 4.5**  
**AGE CATEGORIES AT CONCEPTION OF FIRST CHILD**  
 Age\* at conception of first child by social class

	m. class	w. class
Women who conceived by age 19	0%	46%
Women who conceived by age 24	16%	75%
Women who conceived by age 29	39%	100%
Women who conceived by age 34	84%	100%
Women who conceived by age 39	100%	100%

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N: 59

\* Age at conception was estimated as a year younger than women first gave birth at.

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Two working-class women felt they had been too young when they had children. Tina, who gave birth when she was 16, said it was younger than she would have chosen; she had expected she would have been twenty before she became a mother. On the other hand, another young woman explained: " I had been putting-off [having a child] since I was sixteen....[By nineteen], I didn't want to wait anymore."

**"Being Ready": Definitions of the Situation as Class Constructs**

Working-class women were less likely than middle-class women to invoke the concept of being "ready" or the "right time" to explain their first child (Table 4.3). But, among the minority who described their pregnancy as planned, almost half (46 percent) mentioned such time conceptions as associated with becoming pregnant.

However, "being ready" and the "right time" were different for working- and middle-class women. Middle-class women presented 'readiness' in self-evolutionary or personal development terms. Readiness included specific material and psychological components, and was seen as a personal achievement. Among working-class women "being ready" referred, on one hand, to readiness to take on responsibilities. On the other hand, it referred to fewer expectations about material conditions and control over life. After all, one does not reasonably wait for what one does not expect.

The social definition of 'readiness' was shaped by class-expectations. Working-class women seldom talked about having established themselves at work, about home ownership or about home renovations (although home ownership was desirable) as preconditions to parenthood. Marg's definition of reality focused on what she did control, not on what she did not. She presented her desire to have a baby as taking precedence over the material aspects of life:

I was ready. I was at that age, I was responsible enough to... bring up a baby. Our relationship was good and

solid. I've always wanted one; I just couldn't wait to have one.... We had a bit of money in the bank, but no house.... [My husband] wanted to have a house, [but] houses are so expensive.... He didn't really want to bring up a baby in an apartment...[but] I didn't ever thought we'd move into a house. (Marg: Accounting Clerk)

It was not that working-class women were indifferent to issues of money, home ownership or steady jobs. However, working-class women do not have the same expectations about the material circumstances of their lives as middle-class women do, though they may share their dreams of home ownership (Rubin, 1976). As Jackie put it when she became pregnant, "I didn't know how we were going to handle it." Lack of money was something to be "handled", a 'given' to be accommodated to; having money or an established career was not a prerequisite for having children.

Waiting for what middle-class women would define as 'readiness' appeared neither realistic nor applicable to working-class women. A working-class mother of two living in an apartment expressed the sequencing of family time in her life: "[I hoped] to have a family, to be a family and maybe, eventually, [to have] a house." Similarly, Ramona, who was 22 when she became a mother, perceived no purpose in deferring childbearing. For her, like many working-class women, waiting for financial stability would mean never having a child:

[In deciding when to have children] you can't say you wanted to get financially stable, because that never happens and you'd never have children if you waited for that. It just seemed as good a time as any [to have children]. (Ramona: Bookkeeping Clerk)

For working-class women, the absence of middle-class

life-planning or postponement of childbearing should not be taken to indicate an 'inability to defer gratification', or a sub-culturally based emphasis on immediacy rather than future orientation. As Rubin's (1976) study of white working-class families shows, the 'blame-the-victim' bias in 'culture of poverty' type explanations of working-class behaviour fails to appreciate that some people have neither the material resources to plan effectively, nor realistic options for which to plan:

For in order to plan for the future, people must believe it possible to control their fate - a belief that can only be held if it is nourished in experience. That seldom happens in working-class life.... It should be clear by now that the lack of planning to which I refer is not due, as some social scientists insist, to some debilitating inability of the working class to delay gratification.... Rather, in the context of their lives and daily struggles, looking either backwards or forwards makes little sense; planning for the future seems incongruous. (Rubin; 1976: 38-39)

Not all working-class women have children when they are young. Twenty-five percent of the sample were 25 or older when their first child was born (Tables 3.1 and 4.5). Sally, for example, was 26 when she became a mother. An exception among working-class women, she talked about 'readiness' for children in terms of career and financial security. Sally had thought she would not have children. By the time she became pregnant she had options and resources many working-class women did not:

I was guaranteed my same position, and my same job, and that made a big impact as well because I didn't want to give up my career after having worked for over ten years just because I had a child. So that made a big difference. I was able to have a child and come back to my same job. (Sally: Bell Service Assistant)

Sally's 'strategic' thinking reflected not merely her years at

work, but the work-involvement produced by experiencing advancement at work. As Gerson (1985) emphasizes, a woman's family and work commitments are shaped, not simply by whether she works or not, but by the relative rewards and options available to her at work and at home.<sup>5</sup>

In this section we have seen how biological and biographical time conceptions around childbearing were differentiated by social class. One must be careful not to interpret the temporal sequencing and meaning of life-events in working-class women's lives by reference to middle-class patterns. Rather, we must interpret working-class women's actions in the context of their lives, as they see them. At the same time, however, women's subjective perceptions have objective consequences. For example, for working-class women, having children in their teens comes to determine the objective contexts of their future options and resources.<sup>6</sup>

**"I Don't Want To Be An Aunt No More!": Family, Friends And Fellows In Working-Class Women's Transition To Motherhood.**

Working-class women presented themselves as having "always wanted" children (Table 4.1). In many ways their accounts indicated that they were waiting for the circumstances in which they could legitimately (and 'illegitimately'), claim entry into the desired status of motherhood. We saw in the previous chapter how middle-class women frequently worked to control the circumstances in which they could claim motherhood.

Working-class women, I suggest, were more likely to claim entry to motherhood, and deal with the legitimacy and circumstances of their claim later - often by proffering the strength of maternal motivation to compensate for illegitimate entry.

Irrespective of the legitimacy or 'illegitimacy' of their claims to motherhood, for working-class women there appeared to have been a pattern to the timing of motherhood in their lives. Repeatedly what seemed like a "right time" for motherhood coincided with the traditional concomitants of pregnancy. That is, working-class women were more likely than middle-class women to talk about friends or family having children and their own recent or impending marriages as being associated with becoming pregnant. Seventy five percent made reference to such events in accounts of their pregnancies. Few middle-class women did. Whereas middle-class women accounted for pregnancies in personal and self evolutionary terms, (sustained individually or by the couple,) working-class women's conceptions appeared more family and socially based.

Karen, a mother of three who had her first child when she was 19, explained:

We were trying for one.... I did want one - the majority of my friends had one or two. And also just because I just got married too, eh? (Karen: Drycleaner's Shipper)

Concerned to emphasize her own desire for a child, rather than suggesting she was conforming to convention, Ramona observed: "It wasn't [just] like it was the thing to do." But then she added:

You know, all our other friends had kids and you could see how happy they were with their children, and you felt like you were missing out on something. Or you'd go to the hospital to visit your friend who just had a 'newborn': [Respondent started to speak in a baby-like voice] 'A cute little baby.'<sup>26</sup> (Ramona: Bookkeeping Clerk)

Marg's account shows how marriage and babies were closely associated for working-class women. However, Marg's commitment to motherhood was prior to her commitment to marriage: it was taken-for-granted. She was waiting to have "the baby". In her mind, the baby already existed:

Well, I guess we'd been together for a couple of years. We seemed more like, you know, the married type and I just thought, like, it was a good time to have a baby. Get married first, but then have the baby. (Marg: Accounting Clerk)

Age-consciousness, and the fact that others close to her had achieved motherhood - even those younger, and thus presumably less deserving of motherhood - added an urgency to Marg's motherhood motivation.

You know, you're 25 ...and it's like, 'I don't want to be 30 when I'm having my first baby', you know... especially when you have brothers and sisters [who have children]... and my sister is younger than me and she had a baby and my best friend had a baby....[I said to myself] 'I don't want to be an aunt no more.'

It is interesting to note that Marg used her younger sister's maternity to support her own claim. The fact that her sister had become an unwed mother, and remained an alone mother, did not make her sister's motherhood status a less valid object of comparison for Marg. Whereas marriage legitimated working-class women's claims to motherhood, its absence did not make motherhood illegitimate. Thus, when Mary, single and 17, got

pregnant, seeing friends with children helped her define her situation as non-problematic:

Actually seeing [my unmarried friend] with [her daughter] Kate, I was more excited about having a baby. If she wasn't there, if she didn't have Kate, I don't think I would have been so excited to have [my son] Michael.... I have another friend who had her son when she was seventeen. She lived with me [for a while after] her father kicked her out of the house....we talked about... things.... It's important to have support when you're having a baby. (Mary: Hotel Housekeeper)

Jackie, on the other hand, did see her pregnancy as problematic - her friends were not yet having children. Twenty years old and married, she was one of the few working-class women who felt that motherhood came too soon. To Jackie's reference group, her behaviour would appear deviant:

[When I learned I was pregnant] I was scared and I was apprehensive. I didn't know what to do. I was actually embarrassed to tell people, because I had been married [only] a couple of months. And [I thought] people would sort of look at me and go, 'You're only twenty, you've only been married a couple of months and you are having a baby already!'... [None] of any of my friends have... children. I'm the first to get married and the first to have a child. (Jackie: Secretary)

Sally was also unusual among working-class women: she had considered voluntary childlessness. Like other working-class women, however, her transition to motherhood was socially grounded. Like middle-class women she felt her attitude to children changed as an adult. Unlike them, she attributed this change to factors external to herself rather than internal: her friends were getting pregnant and having children:

Just my outlook changed [when I was twenty five]. I had never wanted kids before. I just didn't want kids.... I think it was just from getting older and a lot of my friends were getting pregnant and having children and

seeing the interaction there, and I think it changed my outlook.... And then I changed [so] that I wanted kids. And once I decided [I wanted kids], I got pregnant right away and I started having them. (Sally: Bell Service Assistant)

Sally had had little social support for a childless identity.

She felt pressure to have children:

I thought I was different to a lot of people that I talked to.... [Tom's family were pressurizing me] to have kids, at the beginning of the marriage, [but] not so much after we had been married so long. I felt like, because I didn't want kids, a lot of people didn't seem to understand that.... [My husband] and I had only talked about that I didn't want kids right away. And I had told him that I didn't want kids [but] I don't think he really accepted it, or believed it.... He probably just thought that I was just saying that, and that I would change my mind. (Sally: Bell Service Assistant)

As she felt her husband expected, Sally did "change her mind."

In contrast to middle-class women, the connection between men and motherhood was far more immediate for working-class women. Men rapidly led to pregnancy in ways which men in middle-class women's lives did not. Whereas the absence of the "right relationship" was a barrier to middle-class fertility, its presence did not automatically lead to pregnancy. 'Joint readiness' had to be achieved first. Among working-class women, on the other hand, marriage, or its equivalent, facilitated women's achievement of motherhood, but the absence of a male relationship neither blocked, nor seriously delegitimated women's maternal claims.

We see this, first of all in the evidence that working-class women were far more likely to conceive soon after establishing [what they perceived to be] a permanent

relationship with a man. Additionally, working-class women presented the men in their lives as more anxious to become fathers than middle-class women depicted middle-class men as having been. And finally, as the next section shows, the absence of a permanent male relationship did not appear to have been a barrier to conception among working-class women.

### **"I Liked The Idea Of Being A Mother": Conceiving Motherhood Among Working-Class Women**

For the majority of working-class women in the sample (79 percent) motherhood was an identity and a role they had "always wanted" to claim for themselves. The issues surrounding having children appeared to be ones of when they would or could claim entry to the desired status of motherhood. Whereas biological time conceptions and not wanting to make a permanent commitment to childlessness eventually encouraged middle-class fertility, working-class women's conceptions of a positive identity of self-as-mother appeared as central to their reproductive behaviour.

Working-class women in this sample "liked the idea of being a mother", and such positive self-conceptions facilitated biological conceptions. "I've just always wanted to have a child", typically responded a married woman as explanation for her planned pregnancy. "I just couldn't wait to have one," she added. Similarly Mara had also "always wanted a child." At age 19, while living with her partner and planning their

wedding, she 'accidentally' became pregnant:

I've always, always, wanted a child. I mean, I said to my mother, "Mom, I'm going to have a baby - just not right now, since I'm just sixteen". I've always wanted a child.... (Mara: Clerical)

Mara's account of her pregnancy shows how positive conceptions of having children were implicated in 'accidental' pregnancies.

Thinking about wanting a child seemed to lead to having one:

I was thinking about [wanting a child] when I got pregnant. We were arranging the wedding when I found out I was pregnant, but we were already talking about having a baby.... I went to the doctor's one day, for something else. And [afterwards], as a joke, I said to Carl [my fiance] - I didn't say anything. I just had a grin on my face.... and he says, "you're pregnant". And I said "no, what would you do if I was?" [He said], "I'd marry you tomorrow. I want one so badly, and you want one too." And a week later I found out I was pregnant. [But] we had already decided to get married. (Mara: Clerical)

To say that women responded positively to the idea of being a mother does not imply that they had clear or detailed conceptions of motherhood. As a mother of two whose first pregnancy 'just happened' explained:

I always, I mean, you always wanted [children] ... I mean, you just see a little, tiny baby; it's so cute and cuddly. You're not thinking about the future. (Helen: Waitress/Cashier)

Similarly, Mary explained that when she became pregnant the idea of becoming a mother was both positive but also 'unreal' for her. She was 19 and single at the time:

It didn't really sink in until I was eight months pregnant.... I didn't realize it until I heard the heartbeat of [my son].... Because, it's like, it's there, but you don't really know it's there - like it's really hard to believe ... that there's a baby inside you. I just didn't realize it. It's like when I go on vacation. I don't realize I'm there until I'm actually there. (Mary: Hotel Housekeeper)

Gradually, the identity she had claimed began to claim her:

And then when I was about eight months pregnant, I started to show.... I actually had no plans [for after the baby was born, but] I went out and bought a crib... when I was eight months pregnant.

For many young women, having a child expressed in their eyes their maturity and responsibility - both of which were highly valued. Sue, a mother of three, recalled:

I had just gotten married. I was working for the bank then, and I was out of school for about a year and starting to grow up. I was always mature, anyhow. I always sort of took the responsibility.... I was getting a little bit more independent.... Instead of living at home I was now boss of my own home, type of thing. I remember feeling more independent and responsible than I had been.... (Sue: Secretary)

Sue felt that now she had a right to claim motherhood:

I always liked kids and I wanted, as you say 'a baby of your own'.... I was always brought up to believe that you didn't have sex before you got married, and you didn't have children before you got married. I always wanted kids and I thought 'I'm married now - I can have a baby'.

For Sue, and other working-class women, having a child was a way of claiming adult identities.

### **Claiming Adult Identities: Motherhood as Expressive Behaviour**

The accounts of those who became pregnant as teenagers indicated that younger women were particularly attracted to positive images of motherhood. Rita, an unskilled manual factory worker, now married to a new partner, was 18 when she planned her pregnancy and conceived by an earlier boyfriend. She too had "liked the idea of being a mother." She planned to live with her boyfriend. Like Sue's association of motherhood

and maturity, implicit in Rita's account is an image of motherhood as a challenge - a female rite of passage that tested her qualities and measured her personal worth: "Would I be able to handle it?" she wondered:

Well, me and the father planned [the baby], but we didn't plan him [the father] leaving. We had planned to live together and have a baby... I was wondering how I would be as a mother - whether I'd be able to handle it, whether I'd be patient enough... "Can I actually be a mother"? ... I just thought it sounded nice. I liked the whole idea of being a mother. (Rita: Unskilled Factory Worker)

June also described how her positive conceptions of becoming a mother dominated her interpretation of her situation when at 19, and single, she unintentionally became pregnant. Though her pregnancy was unplanned, she recalled that, at that time, she was thinking about "wanting a family". Her recollections also show how positive conceptions of motherhood were associated with biological conception:

[I was] just wanting a baby. I've always wanted a baby. [When I found out I was pregnant] I was really happy. I was having a baby. I was bringing something into the world that I wanted to. I always wanted a child and I got it. (June: Daycare Assistant)

Young, unwed, working-class mothers presented particularly strong motherhood motivations. Perhaps this was because their maternal careers were 'deviant'; perhaps not. What was clear in many of their pregnancy accounts, however, were the ways in which adult identity, female self-conceptions and women's desire for connection and love were interconnected in their responses to the idea of motherhood. Val's 'planned' pregnancy as a single 19 year old shows how she connected being

"grown up", 'figuring out who she was' and being "ready to take care of somebody". Getting love was one of the rewards:

I was the motherly type. I always mothered my friends. [I started thinking about actually having a child] at 16; that's when I began to figure out who I was and what I was capable of doing. [I decided to get pregnant at 19]. I wanted something that was mine. I wanted somebody to love and to love me back. I wanted a reason for being alive. I didn't want to wait anymore.... I'd been putting it off since I was 16... [By 19] I had a steady job... I had grown up a lot. I felt I was ready for something - I felt I was ready to take care of somebody and start a family for myself. (Val: Apprentice Mechanic)

Having a baby was a means of establishing a new adult way of being in the world for Val. Her account also shows how young working-class unwed mothers do not necessarily share society's conception of them as victims or objects of pity. Rather, Val, like many others, saw herself making adult decisions and realising her values. Motherhood among these young working-class women is better understood as expressive, rather than instrumental action. Motherhood is expressive of an identity, a claim to being a loving, caring, grown-up woman.<sup>7</sup> Whereas middle-class women indicated that they felt they had to achieve maturity before having a child, working class women's accounts suggest that many of them saw themselves as achieving maturity through having a child.

Working-class women were waiting to be mothers, waiting for the circumstances in which they could legitimately (or 'illegitimately') claim entry to that desired status. This explains how unplanned pregnancies among both single and married women were met with mixed emotions of being "scared"

and "thrilled" as they so often were. Scared because circumstances were not right (financial problems, housing problems, being unmarried) and thrilled because access to a desired status had been gained. Kathy, for example, was single and had thought she would be in her mid-twenties before she had a child, but she was 'thrilled to death' when after just turning 19, she discovered she was accidentally pregnant:

I was thrilled to death when I found out.... I hadn't planned it but when I found out... I was scared to death for lack of knowledge. [I was] excited; it was a challenge. I wasn't afraid so much of doing something wrong; but just of the unknown.... The first time I had to dress him I had to remember he wasn't a doll from my childhood... he used to scare me. I didn't know anything about children [but] I had wanted a child. I wanted a boy. (Kathy: Accounting Clerk)

### How 'Traditional' Identities Produce 'Deviant' Careers

I have argued that positive conceptions of motherhood were implicated in biological conceptions of children. These ideas about motherhood, although shared by the majority of working-class women in the sample,<sup>10</sup> were most strongly expressed by those who were young when they conceived and who, at some stage in their maternal careers, became single mothers. It could be argued that such mothers represented a 'deviant' category and should be studied separately. However, in their motherhood motives, single mothers were not deviant, but had exaggeratedly typical traditional motherhood images. It is perhaps more accurate to see single mothers' 'deviance' as a consequence rather than a cause of their behaviour. Becoming a

parent does not constitute deviant behaviour. Most adults become parents. But the consequences of becoming a parent if one is unwed sets some parents apart from others, and men apart from women.

Deviance is not simply a matter of 'breaking the rules'. Eichler (1983), for example, points out that men can break the rules of parenting with little consequence. Giving birth to a child outside of marriage, she argues, has... "a truly life-altering impact on the woman concerned, but only a minimal impact on the father with respect to altering his life chances." (Eichler, 1983:209) Similarly, an American study of 140 men who were collectively responsible for 176 extramarital pregnancies showed that, although these men recognised their behaviour to be 'rule-breaking', they neither perceived themselves as deviant nor had they been institutionally defined as deviant<sup>11</sup> - as typically happens when alone mothers go on welfare. Thus, the consequences of their behaviour and the subsequent labelling of identity as deviant or normal are differentially experienced by male and female unmarried parents. Furthermore, the consequences of deviant behaviour are often falsely seen as flowing from the 'deviant' act, when, in fact, the consequences are 'caused' elsewhere. For example, many of the negative features of single parenthood for women and children are produced, not by being single parents, but by the combination of poverty and lack of social support systems for women who parent in this way.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, these women's apparent deviance is partly a product of changing demographics. These women were not unusual for having given birth in their teens; until recently, this was the norm for working-class women. What was unusual about these women's situation is that they became teenage mothers at a time when fertility rates were falling, the average age at which women first give birth is rising and there is a growing separation between marriage and childrearing.<sup>13</sup>

Fertility has fallen dramatically in Canada in the past 20 years; however, the decline has been in marital fertility. Although women are less likely to give birth in their teens than they were 20 years ago, those that do are more likely to be unmarried, and more likely than in the past to keep their children rather than give them up for adoption. Thus, over the last 30 years, out-of-wedlock births have more than quadrupled, growing from about 14,000 in 1951 to 59,600 in 1985.<sup>14</sup> The increase was not just in absolute numbers. During this period out-of-wedlock births as a percentage of all births increased from less than 4% in 1951 to more than 16% in 1985.<sup>15</sup>

For young working-class women the lower socially acceptable age barrier to claiming motherhood had far reaching consequences. Of the 46 percent of working-class mothers in this study who conceived in their teens, whether they were living with permanent partners at the time or not, 82 percent of them were to become alone parents at some point in their maternal careers, and 62 percent of them spent part of their

lives as mothers on welfare.

**The 'Ideal Self' and Identity Salience: How Unplanned Conceptions Become Wanted Pregnancies**

I have shown how positive conceptions of motherhood, which were widely shared among working-class mothers, were implicated in how working-class women became mothers - whether they described their pregnancies as 'planned' or not; whether they were wed nor not.

From their responses to pregnancies, planned and unplanned, it seems that motherhood was involved in working- and middle-class women's 'ideal self' or identity prominence hierarchy (McCall and Simmons, 1978) in different ways. Middle-class women, as we have seen, chose motherhood when they were "ready" and the circumstances were "right". Working-class women, on the other hand, placed far fewer restrictions on the appropriate time for motherhood; they appeared ready to accept it when it came. Even unplanned conceptions among single, teenage women could be interpreted as welcomed pregnancies.<sup>14</sup> How are we to understand this?

The answer appears partly to lie in the conceptions of womanhood and motherhood that women hold. Luker's (1984) study of motherhood and the politics of abortion shows how women's responses to unplanned pregnancies are shaped by their self-conceptions and present-day commitments. Some women, she observes, see motherhood and reproduction as the most salient

dimension of a woman's personal and social identity. Others do not. The former group are more likely to be opposed to abortion than the latter. Those who see women's reproductive capacity as the core of female identity feel that their valued conceptions of motherhood and womanhood are violated when women's mothering role is made subordinate to other roles or ambitions. For such women, Luker argues, a woman is primarily defined by the fact that she can become a mother. For women who hold such self-conceptions, a pregnancy may be 'unanticipated', but can only be ambivalently defined as 'unwanted'. As Luker explains:

[For those who see] women's reproductive roles ...as having social primacy... the act of conception therefore creates a pregnant woman rather than a woman who is pregnant; it creates a woman whose life, in cases where roles or values clash, is defined by the fact that she is - or may become - pregnant. (Luker, 1984:200)

For such women, defining a pregnancy, or the resulting child, as 'unwanted' would mean rejecting the essence of female identity. Thus commitment to the primacy of motherhood in a woman's life can transform an 'unanticipated' pregnancy into a wanted child.

To understand the ways in which motherhood was differentially implicated in working- and middle-class women's self-conceptions it is necessary to distinguish between the notions of identity prominence and salience. Whereas prominence refers to the personal importance or psychological centrality of an identity to an individual, the concept of salience refers to the probability of its behavioral enactment.

Thus, even if motherhood was as central to the 'ideal selves' of middle-class women as it was to working-class women, and the data suggests that before they became mothers it was not, the saliency of motherhood in women's identities was different. Motherhood was more salient in working-class than in middle-class women's identities. That is, there were far more circumstances in which the identity of mother was likely to be claimed. Middle-class women limited their claims of motherhood to quite restrictive social contexts of readiness. Working-class women did not.

There was another way in which motherhood acquired a greater identity saliency among working- than middle-class women. For those young women who rejected motherhood, there appeared to have been fewer avenues for its avoidance. Not all working-class women have positive responses to pregnancies. Presumably, many of those who do not, terminate their pregnancies. For others, like Tina and Renee in this study, becoming pregnant presented them with an undesirable, but unavoidable self-transformation.

Renee was 17 and living with her common-law husband when she got pregnant. She felt her life was "ruined":

[I] never wanted to have a child. Both [were] accidents; [The] first one and this one. It's called public awareness, or whatever. Nobody told me nothing.... I was living with Frank, common-law, at his mother's house. His parents, they are from a Catholic background too. When I got pregnant, the first thing that came in my head was abortion. I didn't know anything about it... [but] of course, if you become pregnant at that age, it's, you know, how do you get rid of it...I thought "oh my God, my life is ruined."....I had everything set [for the

abortion] through my family doctor. (Renee: Truck Driver)

However, Renee's escape from an involuntary maternity was blocked by her mother:

My Mum almost flipped the table over on me.... I said to her "Mum, I'm pregnant." She took that very calm and she said: "I figured that was coming sooner or later." But then I replied, "but don't worry, I'm going to have an abortion." And that's when my Mum said, 'no you're not. You've got yourself into this. You're keeping it and you're having it....' Everybody, you know, wanted me to keep it, so that, more or less made you feel better too.

Thus, for Renee, "everybody" wanting her "to keep it" and to continue with her maternal career encouraged her to reinterpret her own responses and to "more or less...feel better" about becoming a mother. Renee subsequently became strongly anti-abortion and defined herself as deeply committed to her children. Chapters Five and Six look at the processes underlying commitment to maternal identities.

Unlike Renee, who was living common law when she became pregnant, Tina was 15, single, and going to school when she also found her transition to maternity out of her control. She hid her new identity. However, in time this new identity of mother came to shape what other identities she could claim:

I always wanted a child. I thought it would be when I was [about] 20.... [When I learned I was pregnant] I was shocked. I kept thinking 'this can't happen to me'. It was my first time and ah - I never told anyone [that I was pregnant] till I was seven months. I kept wishing I could have a miscarriage - but never thought of abortion.... [I had planned] to finish school and become a nurse, like. It was so difficult going back to school with the baby. It got to me after a while so I quit.  
(Tina: Dietary Aid/ Food Service)

When Tina was asked if she were doing things over, would she

choose to have a child she replied:

Yes I would. I just can't imagine, like, I'd like to have been older. but I don't regret having him, you know. It's just I've always loved children and it's just everything about it; the first time they call you Mommy. I just love being a mother. (Tina: Dietary Aid)

### Traditional Conceptions And Unanticipated Outcomes

For most working-class women, becoming a mother was associated with the conventional biographical concomitants of parenthood - marriage or common law relationship, friends and family having babies etc. However, many women had less 'conventional' maternal careers as alone mothers. Typically, few women set out to be alone parents, but acquire the status through unanticipated life experiences.

**TABLE 4.6**

**PROFILE OF EVER ALONE WORKING-CLASS MOTHERS\***

Some characteristics of working-class women who were ever-alone parents.

---

% of all mothers age 40-49 in the Canadian population who in 1984 had ever become alone mothers <sup>17</sup>	25%
% of working-class sample who were ever-alone mothers	54%
% of working-class sample currently alone mothers	39%
<hr/>	
% of working-class women whose pregnancy was planned	46%
% of currently alone mothers whose pregnancy was planned	9%
% of currently alone mothers who began their maternal careers as alone mothers	54%
% of ever-alone working-class mothers who began their careers with partners.	47%

---

N = 15

\* alone means not living in a permanent relationship.

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Women either acquired the status of alone parent when they became mothers or after they had been joint parents for

some time. The age at which women become mothers affects the likelihood of their becoming alone mothers (Table 4.8).

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**TABLE 4.7**

**AGE AT FIRST BIRTH AND BECOMING AN ALONE MOTHER**

Age at which working-class women first gave birth by whether they became alone mothers.

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% gave birth by age 20 who became ever-alone mothers	85%
% gave birth age 21-24 who became ever-alone mothers	33%
% gave birth over 25 who became ever-alone mothers	22%

---

N: 15

---

Ever-alone mothers did not appear to differ from other working-class women except that they were younger when they became mothers, and were more likely to say their first pregnancies were unplanned. Unplanned pregnancies, however, were not necessarily seen as problematic; women felt that they were pursuing normal maternal careers. Unplanned pregnancies do not mean the unwanted children. Kimberley, who at 16 and living common-law became pregnant, distinguished between her 'then' accidental pregnancy and her 'now' wanted child:

It was an accident, really - now it's not an accident. I don't regret having him anyways.... At that time it wasn't upsetting at all. At that time it really didn't change anything except I knew we had to move. (Kimberley: Sheet Metal Worker)

At that time, Kimberley did not know she was embarking on a career towards being an alone mother and welfare recipient.

[Later it changed things.] It changed the way the baby's father didn't spend a lot of time with him or I after. Plus I was having problems deciding whether or not to go to work, and plus I didn't have anyone to babysit. At the time [I found out I was pregnant] I was pleased. I didn't think anything about my life ahead at that time.

A once married, now alone, mother of two explains how the terms "planned" and "unplanned" refer to complex realities. Traditional conceptions can have non-traditional outcomes:

[My first pregnancy was] sort of [planned], but not - I don't know what to say, sort of... there was no birth control, so obviously both people knew. So like, if it happened....

Maybe I thought [having a child]... was the way to make absolutely sure I'll have him, [my husband at the time] which was maybe one of the dumbest things I ever thought in my life. You know, like really, it wasn't a trap, but it was kind of something that was his and, you knew, that no matter [what happened] - you'd have it, sort of.... Like, I never in five million years dreamed he would do what he did either [by leaving].... He did what he had to do, I guess. (Helen: Waitress/Cashier)

Twenty-nine percent of the working-class sample, and 54 percent of those currently alone, began their maternal careers as unwed or alone mothers. Typically, they did not plan to become unwed mothers: several had expected a future living with the baby's father. Almost half (46 percent) of the currently alone mothers had once lived as joint parents, and about a quarter (23 percent) of mothers currently with partners had once been alone mothers. A majority of the working-class women (54 percent) were currently, or had been, alone parents. Thus, the terms deviant, unconventional, or illegitimate appear singularly arbitrary when applied to working-class mothers.<sup>12</sup> Women moved in and out of statuses of being alone or joint parents, but the status of mother was enduring.

### Alternative Maternal Careers among Young, Working-Class Women

Rubin (1976) argues that 'accidental pregnancies' among

young working-class women are often not truly accidental. The emotional pain of growing up in families scarred by poverty, she argues, creates particularly urgent needs to escape parental control, to assert adult identity and find safety and nurturance. This, she concludes, leads young working-class men and women to be participants in an 'unconscious' drama of getting 'accidentally' pregnant and getting married (1976:64). "Unplanned pregnancies", she notes, do not violate expectations in a world experienced as beyond control.

Middle-class young women, on the other hand, can find valued adult identities and self esteem in the roles and relationships of advanced education or professional training (Rubin, 1976:41).

What distinguished young working-class women in this study from those Rubin interviewed was not the high rate of pre-nuptial pregnancies, but the fact that pregnancy did not lead to marriage.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps because it is more acceptable, perhaps because women have greater opportunities for employment, more women are not getting married when they find themselves pregnant, and they are not giving their children up for adoption.<sup>20</sup> Alone motherhood is becoming part of 'normal' maternal careers, especially among young working-class women.

Like Rubin's study, Freeman's study of abortion also links unplanned pregnancies to women's orientation to the world, albeit in a different way. Most women in her sample of women seeking abortions, she argues, were faced with unwanted

pregnancies because they had not seen themselves as instrumental in planning their own lives:

[P]regnancy happened to them.... Their experiences had trained them to be receptive, to value themselves in terms of other's responses more than through their own contribution. They had no history of feeling what they did made any difference, that their own actions and decisions had any value to themselves and others. (Freeman in Russo; 1979: 13)

Unlike the clients of Freeman's abortion clinics, however, women in this study did come to define the consequences of their actions (their pregnancies) as being of value to them. Yet, like the women in Freeman's and Rubin's study, they did not experience the world as under their control. Like several unwed mothers, Rita 'planned' to live with her child's father:

We planned to move in together, and then we decided to have a child as well, and I got pregnant very, very, fast.... There wasn't any main reasons [for me wanting a child]. At the time her father was saying he wanted a child. I sort of liked the idea - I didn't think much [about] it before then. It was like "O.K." It just happened I was pregnant two weeks later.... We didn't plan on him leaving [me]. (Rita: Unskilled Factory Worker)

Whatever their 'unconscious' motivation, what was characteristic of many of the young working-class women who became unwed mothers was the strength of their commitment to a traditional motherhood identity. Single women in this study appeared to offset the illegitimacy of the context of their becoming mothers with the strength of their motivation for motherhood. They expressed strong traditional maternal motivations and typically female motives for behaviour. For example, they talked about wanting a baby; about their desire to give and receive love; and about their desire for permanent

commitment. As Mary told herself when she accidentally became pregnant at 19, "You will always know you're loved."

The strong traditional motherhood motives presented by young alone working-class mothers provide not simply accounts of how they became mothers. They also provide these women with a mechanism whereby past actions could be interpreted in the light of commitments to new identities. The salience of motherhood in these women's identities functioned to neutralize the potentially degrading context in which they originally claimed motherhood.<sup>21</sup>

### Summary

In this chapter we have looked at transitions to biological motherhood among working-class women and contrasted them with middle-class women's transitions. We saw how time conceptions varied by class. Middle-class women invoked a 'self-evolutionary' notion of biographical time and explained their pregnancies by reference to "being ready", "the right time", and having the "right partner". In contrast, working-class women's biographical time conceptions were more family and socially based. Motherhood was more taken-for-granted among working-class women and coincided with the traditional concomitants of pregnancy: friends and family having children and the commitment of marriage or (perceived) permanent relationships.

Motherhood seemed to have greater salience in working-

than middle-class women's identities. A very positive image of self-as-mother was central to many young working-class women's reproductive behaviour. Indeed, it appeared that they were waiting for the time they could legitimately (or otherwise) claim the identity of mother for themselves. These positive images of motherhood facilitated younger pregnancies and the interpretation of unplanned pregnancies as being wanted.

I suggested that a lack of an alternative basis for valued identity and self-esteem, for example, through educational success or rewarding employment, made young working-class women more likely to see motherhood as an attractive option to be realized when they were young, rather than being deferred.

Becoming a mother also had to do with becoming an adult. But the relationship between adulthood and motherhood varied by class. On the one hand, when middle-class women talked about having their first child they put forward claims to maternal identities as achieved, social accomplishments. A certain level of maturity, they held, had to be achieved before they were "ready" to have a child. On the other hand, many working-class women saw themselves as achieving maturity through having a child. For young working-class women, becoming a mother was both expressive and instrumental action. Claiming motherhood was expressive of an identity, of an ideal-self as a loving, caring sort of person. But it was also a means of establishing that one was "grown-up"; that one was an

adult. The salience of the positive nature of motherhood in working-class women's identity hierarchy helps explain how those among them who claimed maternal identities 'illegitimately' did not share society's image of them as deviant. Instead, they neutralized the potentially degrading identity of being unwed with the strength of their commitment to motherhood.

Although many women can expect to be alone mothers for part of their maternal careers, the way in which alone motherhood is implicated in women's experience varies by class. In this study, becoming a young mother seemed linked to becoming an alone mother. And becoming an alone mother if one was working-class, but not middle-class, seemed linked to becoming a 'welfare mother'.

The following chapters shift from women's accounts of the past and how they came to give birth to their current self-conceptions as mothers.

## ENDNOTES

1. I use the term alone mother rather than single mother because the latter term is often used to mean 'never-married'. I avoid the term single parent because it implies that children living with alone mothers do not have other parents.

2. For example, 24.7 percent of all women age 40-49 in 1984 had been alone parents for part of their maternal careers (Moore, 1989:342).

3. 'Unplanned' does not necessarily mean an unwanted pregnancy or an unwanted child. Also, working- and middle-class women may have different notions of planning. Kohn (1977) suggests that working-class people are less likely to see the world as subject to their planning and control. And Russo (1979) argues that young or poor working-class women are particularly unlikely to see themselves as instrumental in planning their own pregnancies and controlling their fertility.

4. One could argue, however, that alone mothers experience powerlessness in ways that parallel the powerlessness traditionally associated with being working-class. The traditional effects of being working-class, on the other hand, are ameliorated for working-class women in two income families with stable employment. See Chapter 7.

5. See Gerson (1985) for a study of how experience of work and work advancement affects women's orientation to motherhood and domesticity. In this study, for example, Stephanie's experience can be contrasted with Sally's. Stephanie, 26, was also older than most working-class mothers when she had her first child, but the timing of her pregnancy was determined by her recent marriage. Years at work for Stephanie did not automatically translate into high work involvement; she had experienced little by way of promotions at work and had had no personal desire to return to the labour force after giving birth.

6. See Grindstaff (1988) and Moore(1987; 1989).

7. By "illegitimate" I mean claims to motherhood that may be questioned by mainstream social standards, such as having a child as an unwed teen. As we will see, women themselves did not necessarily see their claims as illegitimate.

8. However, given that women at other times noted that they perceived interaction between other parents and children as unappealing, and that parents are recognised as spending a good deal of time 'complaining about the disadvantages of

having children' the image of other parents spreading 'the good news about parenting' needs to be interpreted cautiously. Childless women may have perceived themselves to be missing out, but few women suggested that other women told them they were missing out. For data on the social world of parents see Chapter 7.

9. This idea is developed in Chapter 5.

10. On the whole working-class women's accounts portrayed them as having a far more positive conception and greater emotional attraction to motherhood. With reference to many issues raised in the study, working-class women were less articulate about their own feelings and responses. This may reflect difficulties with putting thoughts about feelings into words, or less practice in being self-reflective and self-analytical. If not always capable of saying why they wanted children, young working-class women emphasized the strength of their motherhood motivation.

11. Cited in Eichler (1983:208).

12. See Ontario Child Health Study: Children at Risk, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Government of Ontario, 1989 and Transitions: Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Government of Ontario, 1988. Also see Eichler (1983: 209).

13. See Moore (1987) and Burke (1986). For a full discussion of the growing separation between marital and parental roles in Canadian families, see Eichler (1983).

14. Moore (1987:32).

15. Moore (1987:32). See also Eichler (1983:205).

16. Presumably many pregnancies that were not so defined were terminated and thus excluded from this study.

17. Moore, 1989.

18. See Moore (1989). Eichler (1983) argues that monolithic and conservative biases in Social Policy and Sociology of the Family literature led to seeing families composed of married couples and their children as the normal and desirable family arrangement. But growing up in a single parent household is not statistically abnormal. It has been estimated that 45 per cent of the children born in the U.S. in the mid-70s will have lived in a one-parent household before they reach age 18 (Eichler, 1983:14).

19. There are alternative sociological explanations for unwed motherhood. Some see unwanted pregnancies as the result of contraceptive ignorance. Others, like Goode (1961), use Merton's concept of anomie to explain how, because of lack of legitimate means to achieve the culturally defined goal of marriage, women use getting pregnant as a way of becoming attached to a man. Related to this type of explanation are those, somewhat like Rubin's (above), that argue that where certain groups lack the resources to realise the dominant goals and values of society in which they also share, the range of acceptable values and behaviours becomes stretched or widened. So marriage and motherhood remain most valued, but unwed motherhood becomes a second best. Finally, the 'culture of poverty' approach argues that the working-class or poor in society are characterised by their own value system, or distinctive subculture, in which unwed motherhood is acceptable.

20. The number of out of wedlock births has risen by 400 percent between 1951-1985, from 4 percent to 16 percent of all births (Moore, 1987).

21. See also Horowitz's (1987) study of unwed Chicana mothers in which the professed and perceived salience of motherhood in young, unwed mothers' identities could be used to neutralize the potentially degrading identity of non-virgin or 'loose woman' in a traditional, male dominated environment.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MOTHERHOOD AS MORAL<sup>1</sup> TRANSFORMATION: MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN

In the previous two chapters we looked at the transition to pregnancy and motherhood among working- and middle-class women. In this and the following chapter we look at how women developed self-conceptions as mothers. This chapter focuses on middle-class women; the next chapter on working-class women.

Both working- and middle-class women experienced themselves as new persons by becoming mothers. We will see how the experience of change they described went beyond the new role-learning process typical of secondary socialization in adult life. Women's socialization into motherhood corresponded more closely to what Berger and Luckman (1966) have called "resocialization". Resocialization experiences, for example, religious conversions, require of their participants not merely a change of behaviour, but a change of heart. Like primary socialization, resocialization is highly emotionally laden, and typically achieved through interaction with significant others.

I will show how, for the majority of women in this study, motherhood was different from what they had expected. However, the 'surprises' of motherhood varied by social class (Table 5.1). We will see in this chapter how middle-class women in particular found themselves unprepared for both the

work associated with children and their own emotional responses to their children. Indeed, many middle-class women described themselves as overwhelmed or surprised by their feelings of connectedness and love.

Drawing on recent work in the sociology of emotions, I argue that women's feelings can be seen as guides to the nature of the social bonds between women and children, in particular to the ways in which being a mother is constitutive of self and gender identity. Indeed, building on Simmel's analysis of love, I suggest that central to understanding women's bond with their children lies the uniqueness of the nature of the relationship between self and other involved. I will also argue that becoming a mother did not simply express gender identity, but allowed women to achieve a feminine identity as a loving, caring, responsible person.

My analysis of the role of love and emotion in the development of women's maternal identities offers a socio-cultural interpretation of women's bonds with children rather than a psychosexual explanation based on concepts of feminine personality. The meaning of motherhood in women's self-conceptions is further explored by looking at women's responses to images of non-motherhood. Both middle- and working-class women indicated that the image of remaining childless signified not merely the absence of children in their lives, but feelings of personal loss or incompleteness.

Finally, I will suggest that love and motherhood effect

a 'moral' transformation in women's self-conceptions. I will show that maternal love carried many of the mythological themes and functions we usually associate with romantic love, and that "mother-love" provided a major symbolic resource by which the achievement of adult identity for women and the meaning of women's lives were structured.

The purpose of these two chapters is not to exhaust what could usefully be said about maternal love, but to show the role love and motherhood played in the structuring of respondents' identities. The aim of these chapters should also be distinguished from studies of women's initial responses to motherhood which have focused on the sense of crisis and shock that characterizes many women's experience in the early weeks and months after giving birth. (Oakley, 1980; 1981) Women's accounts of their early responses are discussed in Chapter 7.

It would be almost impossible for me to write these chapters about love and female identity without being influenced by the lively debate within feminism that emerged in response to the recent work of Carol Gilligan (1982). Gilligan's work represents an important challenge not just to liberal feminist thinking, but to social psychology in general.<sup>2</sup> As indicated by the response to her work, Gilligan's theory has an intuitive fit with how many women see themselves, especially in contrast to men.<sup>3</sup> Gilligan claims to have called attention to the very different ways men and women have of constituting the self and morality. Women's thinking, she argues, is governed by an

ethic of care and responsibility to others; men's is governed by principles of justice and rights. Women, Gilligan adds, tend to define themselves through relationships with others, but men typically achieve identity through separation. For many women, therefore, Gilligan's work explains women's apparently greater capacity for intimate personal relationships and concern for others.

Gilligan's emphasis on the importance of connectedness with, and responsibility for, others in women's ways of thinking and talking about the world were echoed and re-echoed in the accounts of mothers in this study. This persistently challenged me to be more critically reflective about the explanatory power of my own theoretical approach. This and the next chapter have, thus, acquired something of the character of a discourse with feminist social psychology as well as being the analysis of empirical social reality.

Although similar in many ways, the transformation in 'moral' identities among women in this study is differentiated by class in ways that reflect class differences in the meanings of maturity and responsibility in women's lives. For ease of presentation, this chapter will focus on middle-class women's self conceptions as mothers. In the following chapter we look at working-class mothers' self-conceptions. As indicated above, many of the findings involved were common to both groups; others were not. Class differences will be identified where relevant and will be discussed in the theoretical

discussion of self and identity in the second of these two chapters.

We will begin by looking at how middle-class women's experiences of motherhood compared with what they had expected.

**"This Motherhood thing Is A Totally Overwhelming Experience":  
Middle-Class Women's Expectations and Experience of Motherhood**

Although half of the middle-class mothers in this study had 'always wanted' to be mothers and many others had come to claim a strong commitment to motherhood by the time they gave birth, the vast majority of women were unprepared for the experience of being a mother. They reported themselves as overwhelmed, shocked, surprised and amazed at their experiences of being mothers.

When asked how their experiences of motherhood compared to their expectations, most middle-class women (90 percent) said it was different from what they had expected (Table 5.1).

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**TABLE 5.1**  
**CONTRAST BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERHOOD**  
Middle-class women's preparedness for motherhood

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Motherhood different to what was expected	90%
Surprised by how much they could care or their emotional responses to their children	65%
Surprised at the work involved	65%

---

N: 31

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Indeed, for the majority of middle-class women (68 percent) their accounts show that their experiences were very different

from their expectations. Only two middle-class mothers felt their expectations were realistic or accurate.<sup>4</sup>

Two major categories of unanticipated experience emerged from women's description of how motherhood was different from their expectations: women were amazed at their own emotional responses to their children (65 percent) and also at the work involved in being a mother (65 percent).

Middle-class women had greatly underestimated the amount of work and the demands involved in having children. A mother of two preschoolers describes her sense of shock at the reality of mothering:

I don't know what I thought it was going to be [like] I'm so deeply engrossed in the reality of diapers, and the baths, screams, shrieks... flying of food and hair pulling... just the constant stuff that goes on with them every minute when they are around and not sleeping.... I think the biggest thing was I had no idea of how much work was involved. I had absolutely no idea. It's an incredible amount of work.... I found the workload absolutely incredible. (Fran: Lawyer)

Kim, a librarian and mother of a year old and a two-and-a-half year old child, describes her responses to a wholly unexpected transformation of her life:

One can never envisage what it's like to work full time and have two children of this age.... You never really know how hectic life is until you actually find yourself on this treadmill.... The books, literature, everything you ever thought, never prepares you nor gives you any semblance of what it's like.... I don't want to sound overly negative, but it's not [what I expected]. (Kim: Librarian)

Perhaps more than anything, it was the lack of sleep that stood out in several mothers' minds: "I have a child who sleeps far less than I ever thought was humanly possible for a

child to [not] sleep", explained Mary Lynn, "That was the biggest shock of all".

For the majority of middle-class women, motherhood held other surprises; not only were women unprepared for the demands and work, but they were also unprepared for the emotional experience of being a mother. Women were surprised by their own feelings. Their responses to their children often came as a revelation to them. Marilyn, the mother of a year old boy, explained how she had never known she could feel the way she came to feel as a mother:

It's nothing like I expected at all. It is completely different. I hadn't realized how hard it was... how much hard work was involved in it... I also hadn't expected the way that my son would fill up my life... I didn't know that I could feel that way. (Literacy Coordinator)

Rachael, a mother of two preschoolers was unprepared for the work, but was more unprepared for the emotional experience:

I had probably heard about it, but it never sunk in, how physically and mentally demanding children are. On the other hand, I never, I would never have known the kind of joy they could bring and ... the love I was capable of having for my children. Every time they go through a new stage, I'm amazed. I find the whole thing a miracle. (Rachael: Teacher)

Several women were professionals or 'experts' on children and child development, but found that even their specialized training had not prepared them for their own children. Nina, a childhood education professional, described her surprise as one "who supposedly is an expert on children":

It's much more demanding, it's much more emotionally absorbing... I really was not prepared for the emotional impact on myself of having a child - it was profound. I mean just profound... The whole experience

was very overwhelming.... (Nina: Daycare Director)

Jean had shared parenting with a previous partner and his daughter for five years and was prepared for the work; but she was unprepared for the feelings:

The actual reality of having a child in my life wasn't that much of a surprise. I think the only thing that was a surprise was the intensity of the emotional side. Not that I didn't expect to care about him, but there is a different level of emotional involvement than I anticipated. (Jean: Archivist)

Women had expected to love their children - yet surprisingly, they experienced the intensity of their feelings as both unanticipated and unfamiliar (Table 5.1):

I didn't expect I'd love my child as much as I did - immediately. I remember watching other parents and thinking, "Oh, how do they put up with this and how do they put up with that?" But then, when I had my own it was like 'instant falling in love'. I was totally absorbed. (Rebecca: Counsellor)

It was perhaps Wendy, a policy analyst, who had her first child at 36 years, who most clearly captured the emotional gap between expectations and experience that the majority of middle-class women in this study described:

It's so far a very positive experience. I hadn't expected it would be quite so overwhelming. I've become all mushy about it. I'm all mushy about motherhood [which I didn't expect]... I expected it would tie me down, and it does - but I don't resent it. I expected I would and I don't.... This motherhood thing is a totally overwhelming experience. (Wendy: Policy Analyst)

We must not assume, however, that all mothers 'instantly fall in love' with their children. On the contrary, Oakley (1980; 1981) found that up to two-thirds of the British mothers she interviewed shortly after the birth of their

children expressed negative feelings and ambivalence in their relationship with their new babies.<sup>5</sup> 'Falling in love' and becoming a mother are perhaps better understood as processes of socialization rather than instant responses.

**"I Never Knew I Could Care So Much": Motherhood as Falling in Love**

Middle-class women in this study described themselves as having been surprised by their feelings and overwhelmed by their emotions; as totally absorbed by their children; as though they had fallen in love.

Until recently feelings and emotions have been largely neglected in sociology partly because of the "...tacit assumption that emotion, because it seems unbidden and uncontrollable, is not governed by social rules" (Hochschild; 1979:551), and partly because our society places a high value on rational behaviour. A consequence has been that much of our emotional experience and expressions have been ignored or trivialized.<sup>6</sup> Given that culturally, feelings are "women's office" (Goffman, 1987), a large part of women's world has been neglected. Maternal love, for example, has been typically ascribed a pre-social, biological or ideological function.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, much of what could be described as (culturally) female ways of thinking and knowing have been interpreted (and misinterpreted) as being essentially emotionally expressive and thus being of lesser interest or

value (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982). However, I could not lightly dismiss women's expressions of their connectedness with their children as being simply 'emotionally expressive' and thus of lesser sociological interest. Women's descriptions of their feelings were central to their accounts of motherhood. How was their talk about feelings to be interpreted?

A key contribution of the current interest in the sociology of emotions is to remind us that sociological explanation has been overly cognitive and behavioral and to demonstrate that feelings, as well as actions and ideas, are socially organised (Hochschild, 1979).<sup>2</sup>

To say that feelings are socially organised is not to suggest they are not real<sup>3</sup>. But it does mean that, to understand fully people's expressions of emotion, we must analyze them in their social context. The focus thus shifts from debating whether or not some emotions, be they maternal love, grief or aggression are universal, to a recognition that all human beings experience emotion-provoking situations. It is the variations in these situations and the responses to them that is sociologically interesting (Mills and Kleinman, 1988).

Like behaviour and ideas, feelings are also rule-governed - we come to feel in ways that are appropriate to the situation or identities we claim (Hochschild, 1983). Situations usually carry proper behavioral and emotional definitions of themselves - as occasions for grief, joy, or

love, for example.

There also appear to be different rules governing how emotions are interpreted and handled among different groups in society. Kohn (1977) and Bernstein (1974) show how class differences in childrearing practices reproduce class-differentiated emotion management practices. Goffman (1987) Gilligan (1982) and Hochschild (1979; 1983) point to the different expectations about feelings and their expression that govern the behaviour of men and women. Indeed, women's (cultural) specialization in emotionality and their (perceived) greater vulnerability to feelings is popularly taken as proof of their feminine nature (Hochschild; 1979: 567).

To argue that social rules govern emotions is not to say that the feelings of love and being overwhelmed by emotions expressed by middle-class women in this study were not genuinely experienced or were mere acts of conformity to social expectations. On the contrary, as Mills and Kleinman (1988) point out, descriptions of 'being swept away' and 'falling in love' are not merely rhetorics of legitimations; people do feel intensely; they are overwhelmed by emotion. However, they point out, when and how people experience themselves as overwhelmed by emotion is typically socially patterned.

People are more likely to feel overwhelmed by their emotions during periods of intense personal or social change. People are more likely to 'fall in love' when they feel vulnerable, for example.<sup>10</sup> The disruption and transformation

of their daily lives which middle-class mothers reported represent just such periods of intense personal change likely to occasion the experience of intense emotions.

Indeed, as anthropologists so clearly point out, societies organise both the social location and the times in our lives for intense and overwhelming feelings - funerals, weddings, religious rituals, all encourage strong emotional responses, and frequently require their expression. Social rituals and institutions function to define and limit what is legitimate human behaviour and what are legitimate human feelings and appropriate expressions of those feelings. People may experience themselves as overwhelmed by their feelings. But these feelings are socially patterned. Indeed, according to Mills and Kleinman (1988:1014), many forms of spontaneous action are best understood "as part of the life course, or as a structured rite of passage."

Motherhood, I will argue, can be understood as just such a structured time for intense emotion: an emotionally structured rite of passage in the transformation of female identity.

First, however, we must look more closely at the nature and meaning of love as an emotion.

### **Love: A Guide To Meaning And The Self**

Middle-class women in this study felt surprised and often overwhelmed by their emotional responses to their

children. How should we understand these responses?

Hochschild argues that the key to understanding emotions lies in their signal function -to signal or communicate information about the world to us. In particular:

... emotions function as a messenger from the self, an agent that gives us an instant report on the connection between what we are seeing and what we had expected to see, and tells us what we feel ready to do about it.  
(Hochschild; 1983:x)

Feelings, in short, are a clue or guide to the self-relevance of things; they indicate what meaning an event or person has for us. For example, anxiety, as Freud pointed out, signals internal or external psychological danger to the self.

Similarly, embarrassment signals that an individual's claim to identity has been discredited in the eyes of an other, and that the individual cares that the other should so view her discredited identity.<sup>11</sup> Sadness, love, and admiration all tell of a self vis-a-vis a situation. And as with all guides to meaning, they are subject to interpretation.

The names we give our emotions, according to Hochschild, refer to the way we apprehend a situation - the aspect of it we focus on - and what our prior expectations about it were:

In sadness, I am focusing on what I love, like or want and also on the fact that it is not available to me. I do not focus on what has caused the loss or absence... [but] I do focus on my relationship to the loved object....

We call it love when we focus on the desirable qualities of a person or thing and on our closeness to him, her or it. We call it admiration when we focus on the desirable qualities of the person in light of some attention to social distance. (Hochschild; 1983:225-6)

Women's emotional responses, therefore, signal the self-relevance of children in their lives. In calling their feeling love, women are focusing attention on their connectedness with the objects of their love - their children - and on the perceived valued nature of children.<sup>12</sup>

We must ask then, what was the self-relevance of children for women, and what was the nature of the connectedness or bond they felt toward them.

**"I Would Feel Empty Without Children - Like Something Important Was Missing"**

One way to learn about the nature of connectedness is to explore its absence. Women in this study were asked how they thought they would feel if they had never had children. Their responses reveal the centrality of attachment in the experiences of self among them. The idea of being without children was not experienced simply as an absence, but as a loss.

The majority of middle-class women in the sample (81 percent) said that they would feel empty, incomplete or that 'something important was missing' if they had never had a child. About a third of middle-class women also felt that they would be depressed or sad as non-mothers and a further 13% thought they would be lonely as non-mothers. Almost a fifth of middle-class women felt that they would suffer a sense of failure or decreased self-worth if they had remained childless.

**TABLE 5.2****RESPONSES TO THE IMAGE OF NEVER HAVING HAD A CHILD**

Middle-class women's responses when asked how they would feel if they had never had a child/remained childless.

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Would feel empty/incomplete/something missing	81%
Sad, depressed or lonely	47%
Less self-worth/sense of failure	22%

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N: 31

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The concept of 'something important being missing' must be distinguished from the notion of 'missing out'. The former concept refers to a sense of incompleteness; a loss. To say something is missing is to say that something that should be there is absent or lost; something is not whole, not full; things are not as they should be. The reference is to a moral rather than a utilitarian order. The concept of 'missing out', on the other hand, may refer simply to lost opportunity. As we shall see shortly, many women also felt that without children they would be 'missing out' on an important experience of personal growth or pleasure gained through having children.<sup>13</sup> The feelings of incompleteness, loss and emptiness evoked by images of themselves as childless, however, were expressive of the sense in which children were constitutive of self among women in this study. The absence of children meant the violation of the integrity of self, not simply missed opportunity.

Margaret expresses the way in which, for her, children were linked to feeling 'complete'.

I'd feel a void [if I had never had a child]. I'd be one of those people who look at kids and cry because I couldn't have one.... I never felt complete until I had a child - and I can't even explain what I mean by complete. (Margaret: Flight Attendant)

Tess' reflections are an example of how children were both constitutive and integrative of the self in many women's self-conceptions. Even their imagined absence was experienced as a loss:

[If I hadn't ever had a child, I would feel] a great loss - as if an important part of me were missing....I would see myself as unfulfilled... I see all of the things I have done in my life... have been leading up to the point where I would have a child... they were supposed to lead up to something... Having a child was such a fundamental thing... [an important part] of who I see myself being. (Tess: Snr. Policy Analyst)

For Tess, a child provided at once a coherence to her sense of her self and to her life. For Marie, the image of herself as a non-mother, as a woman who had never had a child, aroused feelings of loss and grief:

I am sure I would have to work through the loss of not having a child.... I would see it as a loss - as a grief issue... I never imagined myself without [a child]. (Marie: Education Consultant)

Lofland (1982) shows how loss and grief can be understood as the other side of social attachment and connectedness. In our experiences of grief, she argues, what is 'lost' are the threads of connectedness that bind the self to others. The experience of loss, therefore, can tell us a great deal about the nature of the social bonds that tie people; how self and other are linked. And social and cultural variations in how social bonds are organised help explain the

observed cultural variations in how grief, and by implication other emotional linkages, such as love, are experienced.

The threads of connectedness which Lofland analyses to explain the experience and variations in patterns of grief also reveal the nature of grief's counterpoints - attachment or love. We are attached to others as role partners, for example, and the loss of significant or irreplaceable partners or of potential partners will be expressed in feelings of grief. If the other is lost or never found, so is the opportunity for playing that role. One cannot be a wife without a husband, a mother without a child, etc.

However, the experience of loss women in this study described in response to the prospect of childlessness went beyond the notion of absence of role partner. It spoke to a disruption in the phenomenological experience of self. In explaining how grief reflects such an experience of loss of self, Lofland writes:

....in the loss of a single other, part or all of self is lost as well....

(This interpretation reflects) a long tradition in social psychology which understands the self and its components importantly as the ongoing creation of the significant others who surround the actor. From within that tradition, reports of self loss are not viewed merely as descriptions through analogy but as literal depictions. That aspect of self (or those multiple aspects) that was significantly and uniquely generated and/or sustained in interaction with the other is, quite literally, lost when the other is lost. (Lofland; 1982: 226)

Or, in the case of women in this study, the 'self' experiences not simply loss, but a sense of incompleteness when an other

which is central to an individual's self-conception has never been found. Thus psychological 'self-maintenance' is threatened not just by loss, but by the failure to find an other to allow the realization of valued self-conceptions.

Indeed for Simmel (1984) it is precisely the irreplaceability of the other to the self that lies at the heart of the phenomenon we call love. According to Simmel, the key to understanding love lies in the uniqueness of the relationship involved - a relationship in which neither the integrity of the "I" or the "Thou" is lost. Love, he argues, is not simply a response to the qualities or attributes of the other, for these can be found in perhaps even greater perfection among others. Mothers, as we know, do not only love babies who are cute or pretty.

For many middle-class women, children were constitutive, not just of the 'relational self', but of the 'transcendent self'. The notion of relational self refers to the self defined primarily through connectedness with others, rather than through separation and individuation (Sampson, 1988; Lyons, 1983).<sup>14</sup> The notion of transcendent self refers to the experience of self not simply in terms of situated or biographical identities, but as located in the individual's sense of relationship to the universe, sacred forces or some generalized other which function to make overall sense of experience. Almost 40 percent of women felt that, without children, the meaning of life would have become problematic for

them:

[Without children] I would feel I had a kind of hollow, empty life of just working and piling up money and material things... I think of the women I know who don't have kids, and I just think, at the end of their lives what will they have to show for their lives? - great wardrobe, nice cars.... (Janette: Manager)

The semi-religious function of children in relation to such transcendental issues as death and the purpose of life are captured by Jenny's reflections on remaining childless:

It's like knowing death, to never have a child - to experience your own death as you are living. It's not so much that I'm going on with her, it's just that everybody is going on. That life goes on. And that's important for some strange reason. I don't know why, but it is.... that's probably it, you know, knowledge of your own death. (Jenny: Executive Secretary)

Nina shows how, for her, children fuse the sacred and the secular. That is, children integrate the middle-class 'moral' concerns with personal growth and development with universal and transcendent questions:

This is going to sound terribly philosophical....In some respects I see life as being a quest for self actualization, and all of that. And I don't think anything does it like having a child. Now, I didn't actually know it [would do that] before having a child ... [but] it's really broadened my perspective on life and the universe and my place in all of it, and who I am and what I am doing here. (Nina: Daycare Director)

Middle-class women's responses to images of themselves as childless women provide important insights into the nature of women's connectedness with their children. Their feelings of connectedness with their children reflected the extent to which children were constitutive of self in women's lives. Images of childlessness evoked in women a sense of loss, and

for many women, it made the very meanings of their lives problematic.

### **Love: The Expression or The Achievement of Female Identity ?**

So far in this chapter, women's accounts of motherhood could be seen to support many of the popularly held notions about women's "inherent maternal natures". However, I will offer a more sociological explanation of women's connectedness to children in terms of the meanings children have in women's lives and in women's self-concepts. I have argued that children were experienced as constitutive of self among mothers in this study. We have seen that over four fifths of middle-class respondents said that they would feel empty, incomplete or that something important was missing if they had remained childless, and that a similar number indicated that they would see themselves differently if they hadn't had children. What then was this 'self' in which being a mother was so central a part? And how does it arise?

To answer these questions, I begin with the concept of gender identity which refers simply to the identities women claim, and others attribute to them, because of their biological sex. The relationship between motherhood and gender identity among women in this study, however, was far more complex than it first appeared.

The development of gender identity can be understood as a central aspect of the development of self (Cahill; 1987:89-

94). Sociology traditionally sees gender as "learned, diffuse, role-behaviour" acquired through sex-specific socialization experiences, rather than being a reflection of innate differences between male and female.

For Goffman (1987:51), the ascription to individuals of a sex-classification and gender identification is an exemplary instance, if not the prototype of all social classification. Gender identification, like other forms of social identification, defines the meanings or nature of social objects (and most importantly people), and defines how they (and ourselves) should be acted towards. Gender identification becomes "profoundly constitutive of self concept" and informs our deepest ideas and feelings about our own and others' essential natures. Goffman explains:

Every society seems to develop its own conception of what is "essential" to, and characteristic of the two sex classes.... Here are the ideals of masculinity and femininity, understandings about ultimate human nature which provide grounds (at least in Western Society) for identifying the whole of the person, and provides also a source of accounts that can be drawn on in a million ways to excuse, justify, explain, or disapprove the behaviour of an individual or the arrangement under which he lives, these accounts being given both by the individual who is accounted for and by such others as have found reason to account for him. (Goffman; 1987:53)

Thus gender identification informs how we think about ourselves, and provides a socially available gendered vocabulary of motives by which to make sense of our own and others' behaviour. Gender, therefore, is not simply a set of behaviours or a role. It is a perspective: a way of acting, thinking and feeling in the world.

Central to this perspective are the ways in which women claim love, and have love and emotionality attributed to them, to account for their behaviour. The identification of women with love and emotional sensitivity are relatively recent cultural products (Cancian, 1987; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975). The consequence, according to Cancian (1987), is that we have a feminized and overly expressive concept of love in our culture that both ignores typically male and practical ways of loving and provides a problematic model of self-development for women.

I want to argue, however, that in claiming the centrality of love and emotion in their experience of motherhood, middle-class women in this study were not merely expressing a female identity; they were achieving it. Rather than seeing maternal feelings as a reflection of women's female "personality", we need to understand how becoming a mother allowed women to claim or realise an essentially feminine identity. By exploring the nature of the identity women claimed as mothers, we can understand how children became constitutive of self and a source of value to the self by allowing women to achieve this identity.

### Maternal Identity as Character

Respondents in this study occupied the social role of mother. As incumbents of this status position, women, like occupants of any social role, negotiate their identities and establish claims to being 'certain sorts of people' who ought

to be acted towards in 'certain ways'. A person's identity is not established simply by the social position they occupy, but also by the 'character' they establish in that role. Character refers to claims made about the kind of person oneself or another is. Rosenberg (1979), for example, points out that, although individuals may present themselves to others in terms of a status or role-identity, they are more likely to think of themselves in terms of abstract personal qualities that testify to the type of persons they "really" are (Rosenberg; 1979:16). Thus roles may be filled by people who are very different kinds of persons, but the character persons claim in those roles affects the identities they establish. A woman's character is centrally implicated in both the social and personal identities she can claim as a mother.

Having children allowed middle-class women in this study to claim the character of mother by providing them with access to feelings and personal qualities which are characteristically feminine, but which hitherto in some sense had apparently been inaccessible or unavailable to them (Table 5.3). Middle-class women were surprised at their feelings. Motherhood 'evoked' emotions and qualities which women experienced as new or unfamiliar. "I wasn't expecting the intensity of feeling and how it affects the way in which you look [at things]", explained Cindy (Language Studies Coordinator). "I never knew I could care so much", recalled another mother. Marilyn (Literacy Coordinator) put it like

this: "I hadn't expected the way my son would fill up my life, I didn't know that I could feel that way". For Rachael (Teacher), "[Without children] I would never have known ... the love I was capable of having". "I really was not prepared for the emotional impact on myself... The whole experience was very overwhelming (Nina: Daycare Director). Although feelings of attachment and emotional expressiveness are conventionally seen as 'quintessentially feminine', it was becoming a mother that allowed women to experience those "feminine" feelings - the female character of being a loving and caring person:

[The best thing about having a child is the] emotional discovery. It's sort of like falling in love only it's different. Unless you've done it you don't have that central experience in your life. It's very intense.  
(Penny: Manager)

Motherhood, in this sense, did not express women's maternal nature, it allowed them to claim it:

Somehow, I didn't expect that much. Even the day before he was born, I really didn't expect [that much].... The shift is so [significant].... For the longest time you aren't [a mother] and when you are, you are in a different state altogether. I hadn't expected so much maternity on my part. (Wendy: Policy Analyst)

Character assessment, as we know, plays an important role in social identification. Emotion display can importantly influence character assessment (Heise, 1989). Emotion displays, for example, can influence the identities attributed to people, as in the case of remorse (or its absence) in the labeling of deviants. Similarly, emotions register an impression of one's identity, not just to an external audience, but equally importantly to oneself. In claiming and

attributing identities, as Heise notes, the issue of 'real' identity may hinge, not on behaviour, but on feelings:

The question [of identity] is not merely what kind of person would engage in such conduct, but rather who would engage in such conduct and feel the way this person feels. Reassessment of the person's [or our own] character must take account of the emotion displayed... (Heise; 1989:14)

For middle-class women, I suggest, giving birth is no longer the defining test of identity, but achieving (what is culturally seen as) an essentially female character of a caring, loving person. And motherhood, as we shall see shortly, was seen as the prime means in achieving just such a character transformation. But the identity middle-class women claimed through motherhood was not simply gender-identity, but a gendered identity or self. That is, through motherhood middle-class women achieved not just a female adult identity, but a feminized adult sense of self. Anna, an alone parent of a two year old explains how character, feelings and identity were interwoven in the new sense of herself, not just as mother and woman, but as human, which she achieved through motherhood:

[Without children] I think I would probably be emotionless - emotionless is a strong word. I don't mean hard. I mean superficial, not very deep. I'd see myself more as a sister or daughter. And those roles would be very important to me. And [as a] friend. Friends would be extremely [important]. [I see myself as a] friend still, but it's changed. I'd see myself as a career person [without children].

Note how Anna contrasted the relative 'superficiality' of her experience of role-identities with the 'deeper sense of self' she gained through motherhood - her sense of self as a human being. Even gender identities are related back to that more

fundamental self which, ironically her gender allowed her to access. Anna continued:

[Now] I want to get my career on track for financial security, but I think [without children] I would have viewed myself as an 'administrator/ teacher' instead of - now I view myself as a human. I have to say human because woman means one thing if I view myself as a woman and mother means another thing. I feel very human and within that those roles are woman and mother and that's the vulnerability that's come about. (Anna: Community College Teaching Master)

The experience of self-transformation, we will see shortly, was one of the dominant, if not the dominant experiences of motherhood for middle-class women.

In this section I have argued that motherhood did not merely allow women to express gender identity, but allowed them to achieve a gendered sense of 'real self'. The role of love and children in the achievement of a gendered self among women in this study becomes clearer when we look at how women say they were transformed through having children.

### **Motherhood And The Transformation Of Selves Among Middle-Class Women**

For the majority of middle-class women becoming a mother led to a sense of profound personal change. Ninety percent felt themselves changed by the experience of motherhood; 68 percent felt they were changed a lot, and 22 percent felt somewhat changed. Women experienced themselves as changed in external and internal ways; in the practical details of everyday life and in the ways they experienced themselves in

the world.

When asked to describe how they felt themselves to have been changed, three major grounded categories of change emerged: personal growth and development; transcendent change (changed relationship with the universe, the rest of humanity or some generalised other); and practical changes in lifestyle and time use. Although the last category of change is the most obvious and the one most commonly referred to in general conversation and popular culture, it was the first two categories which were the focus of women's self reflections.

Eighty-one percent of middle-class women experienced themselves as transformed through a process of growth and development which motherhood effected in their lives. Forty-two percent experienced a sense of transcendent change; that is, they felt that their relationship to the world, life or other humanity had been transformed. Twenty-six percent referred to practical transformations in their lives when describing how they had been changed by motherhood (Table 5.3).

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**TABLE 5.3**  
**BEING CHANGED THROUGH MOTHERHOOD: MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN**  
 Ways in which middle-class women felt motherhood changed them

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Changed through personal growth and development	81%
Experience of transcendent change	42%
Practical changes	26%

---

N: 31

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The most frequently mentioned forms of personal growth and development which middle-class women felt motherhood produced

in their lives were learning about one's self; awareness of one's values; transformation in one's personal qualities such as becoming more patient, less selfish, more mature and confident. Loretta described how motherhood changed her:

[Becoming a mother has]... made me more realistic; it's made me more giving; it's made me more tolerant; and it's made me busier. It's made me more tired. (Loretta: Teacher)

It would be easy to dismiss these accounts of personal change women experienced because they invoke qualities we typically attribute to mothers in society. We expect mothers to be giving, tolerant and tired. However, for the women in this study, their sense of having been changed was neither superficial nor taken-for-granted; they were frequently surprised by the depth of self-change they experienced. Fran, a lawyer and mother of two, explains:

I've grown up a lot [by having children]. I have gotten rid of a lot of problems - a lot of problems I didn't know about.... So, it's been very helpful for my personal growth. That was sort of the unexpected benefit with each child.... It can be quite surprising how you can change yourself, as a person - the growth you experience as a person. (Fran: Lawyer)

Interestingly, middle-class women talked about their experiences of motherhood in ways we usually associate with romantic love. Sociology and anthropology have long recognised that a culture's ideological and religious images provide the symbolic resources which structure and give meaning to individual lives. These symbolic resources are typically central to the resolution of predictable life crises such as birth, the achievement of adulthood or death.

Swidler (1980) argues that in Western cultures the mythology of romantic love has provided just such a symbolic resource in the achievement of adulthood. Like all myths,<sup>15</sup> the love myth's power comes from its ability to fuse contradictory elements: in the achievement of modern adulthood these elements are represented by the tension between social commitment and individual identity, between self and society.

In Western culture love has played a central symbolic role in integrating the issues of individual identity, moral choice, and social commitment. Courtly tradition made love a moral matter, ennobling and disciplining the self; bourgeois culture made love a central symbol of the individual quest for identity, integrity and fulfillment. (Swidler, 1980:125)

By the 19th century, according to Swidler, love had come to provide the cultural motif for women's lives. Through its association with marriage in bourgeois society, love came to represent, not simply the achievement of personal identity and one's "true self", but also the achievement of one's social identity and position. Falling in love and getting married represented a status passage; it "concentrated into one critical event all the questions about livelihood, mobility and achievement that were becoming so critical for the middle-class" (Swidler; 1980:123). Thus, the quest for identity and self-fulfillment was tied to the quest for social position: the association of emotion with femininity was institutionalized.

Delpy (1984) also stresses that, to understand the role of love in women's lives, we need to explore the material basis of women's concern with that emotion. She points to

women's economic dependence on men and marriage as structuring the 'subjectivities of male and female consciousness' and women's presumed specialization in love (Delphy; 1984; 116). Similarly, Smith-Rosenberg (1975) locates the culture of love and emotional expressiveness among nineteenth-century American women in the rigid gender segregation of that period.

In listening to women in this study speak of the bonds they felt with their children, and seeing how women came to define themselves through relationships with others, it would be easy indeed to conclude that women do indeed have a distinctly female personality characterised by an ethic of care, responsibility and intimacy (Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1978). Instead, however, by understanding the social context and historical context of women's cultural specialization in love and caring for others we can substitute psychosocial interpretations of women's emotional bonding for psychosexual or radical feminist ones.<sup>16</sup>

To further explore the relationship between female identity and maternal love in its cultural context we must look at how changing images of self, of love, and of identity were reflected in women's thinking about motherhood.

### Love and The Symbolic Structuring of Modern Adult Identity Among Middle-Class Women

Critics of contemporary American society argue that 'expressive individualism' and 'narcissism' are replacing the

notion of commitment in modern conceptions of love and social responsibility. (Bellah et al., 1985; Lasch, 1979; Ehrenreich, 1983). Many have blamed the women's movement for reinforcing this trend (Berger and Berger, 1983; Lasch, 1979)

Although love and marriage no longer socially determine the achievement of adult identity for middle-class women as they did in the past, one cannot conclude that the love myth has lost its symbolic role in the structuring of personal identity and the meaningfulness of women's lives. Indeed, among middle-class mothers in this study, maternal love performed many of the functions attributed to romantic love and structured a female identity in which commitment to children rather than a man was central.

Repeatedly, what Swidler (1980) identifies as the key themes of the romantic love myth emerged in women's accounts of the self transformations they experienced with motherhood. These themes express love's symbolic power: love transforms and reveals character; love allows us to find our true selves (and just reward); love is a moral test in which we discover our own true worth; love allows one to know and be known - and thereby know one's self; love can overcome individual isolation and call out the "true self"; love changes people and marks significant turning points in the development of self:<sup>17</sup>

In loving and being loved, people give themselves over, at least for brief periods, to intensely moving experiences through which they achieve new awareness of self and other. Love can make possible periods of crystallization or reformulation of the self and the self's relationship to the world. Beliefs about love

permeate people's hopes for themselves, their evaluations of experience, and their sense of achievement in the world. (Swidler, 1980:121)

Middle-class women felt themselves profoundly changed by motherhood (Table 5.3). Their stories reaffirmed the core elements of love mythology: motherhood occasioned both a transformation of self and a re-discovery of what already existed in the self, albeit deeply buried. For women, the self-transformation of motherhood was at once both integrating and liberating: the new and the old were born and reborn. For Patricia, like many women, change was experienced as self-realization, both in the sense of achieving self-knowledge and the liberation and development of the self's potential:

[Becoming a mother changed me a lot. It meant] maturing. I've had to look at myself honestly and openly. I've had to define my own values. I've had to re-examine my own values. It gives you a real good look in your own face. It led to confidence - confidence to go back to school. It liberated me. (Patricia: Counsellor)

For Penny, motherhood meant more self-recognition than self-transformation. Coming to know one's self can bring pain:

[Becoming a mother changed me a lot.] It made me worse and better -[no] it certainly hasn't made me worse. It has made me more realistic about my faults though. I mean, I've discovered all these nasty things [about me.] I mean, I'm impatient and I'm selfish and things like that. But, in discovering those things you become less so, you know, you become more grounded....(Penny: Manager)

Like Penny, Joanne saw motherhood as a form of moral testing:

Certainly, I learned a lot about myself. It focused my life.... I think that the abilities that I had became highlighted.... My weaknesses became obvious too. I think you are tested on every level when you become a mother. So you discover the good and the bad [about yourself.] (Joanne: Teacher)

The theme of motherhood as moral testing - exposing the good and bad, strengths and weaknesses - was a recurring one and provided a context for women's self-evaluation. Beth explained how motherhood changed her:

It has changed the structure of my life in terms of how I spend my time. It's taught me a great deal.... It has given me a lot of self knowledge. I am more aware of my flaw - aware of [my] limitations.... It's also given me an appreciation for some of my strengths. I've much more patience than I realised. (Beth: Executive)

Beth also shows how motherhood transformed her broader sense of being in the world:

I've become much more pessimistic about the world, much more concerned about that, much more anxious. I can't think more than a couple of years into the future - it's too scary... because I've a stake in the future.... Theoretically we all have... but it's a very dramatic immediate thing when you have children.

Most middle-class mothers in the study felt that motherhood had transformed their personal sense of themselves; many also felt that it had transformed their 'transcendental' selves, their relationship with the universe or humanity. Tannis, who had been an alone parent for several years but who is now remarried, explained how having a child affected both the way she felt about herself and her place in the world:

I think I have become more responsible and more stable. I think it has matured me a great deal. It has given me more focus for my life. In some ways I do feel more important as a mother. I mentioned [how having a child makes me feel I have] a stake in the future. I do feel I have some importance. (Tannis: Counsellor)

Middle-class women also talked about their feelings of having a different commitment to the world, a different 'stake' in the future and a different relationship with humanity that

came with motherhood (Table 5.3). Margaret explained how the connection with a child that motherhood brought transformed her experience of connectedness with the world:

How has it changed me? It's so hard to look from the outside in. I guess I'm more community concerned - in a global sense: not just self-oriented. I really look at children as the bead of life. And I have a more global perspective, and I feel closer to humanity. Having gone through childbirth and just raising a child is such a universal thing to do. It's really opened my mind... about a lot of issues. I've learned to love people more because we were all children once. (Margaret: Flight Attendant)

Thus, women's sense of connectedness to their own child can produce an identification with humanity. For other women, it was their sense of connectedness with a specific section of humanity that was transformed: their identification with other women:

I think I'm aware of my limitations, of how women are limited. I guess I have a lot more sort of sympathy for women as a whole, for understanding what it's like to be a woman in this society. (Tess: Snr. Policy Analyst).

We have seen, therefore, how women experienced themselves as deeply changed by the experiences of becoming mothers and that in their apparently private experiences of themselves, women reproduced the mythological themes of their culture.

### **The 'Good' Mother: Commitment Without Enqulfment**

For many middle-class women motherhood also brought 'moral' transformation. I use the term moral because the changes described relate to a (perceived) typically female

value-system or 'ethic of care and responsibility' (Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1983). Forty percent of middle-class women felt that they had undergone a form of moral development into less selfish and more responsible or caring persons. Marilyn, for example, contrasted herself as mother and non-mother by reflecting that "I think I would be a totally different person than I am now. I think I would be a more selfish person". Similarly, Tannis contrasted her present self with her previous non-maternal identity and with non-parents:

[Having a child] has been really good for me....I think I would feel a little empty and rootless [without a child]. I talk to friends who don't have children and they seem to have so much time, but they seem to fill it sometimes with things... that don't [matter], things I don't value particularly....I see myself as a more responsible person [than if I hadn't a child]. (Tannis: Counsellor)

As Swidler (1980) points out, love does not simply symbolise the struggle for adult identity in our cultural tradition, but it embodies a struggle for moral perfection.

[my child] provides the opportunity to be giving... my former life was much more taking. The opportunity to be giving rather than taking is a marvelous feeling".  
(Wendy: Research Advisor)

Repeatedly women saw themselves as having achieved the characteristically feminine moral attributes of 'giving and caring' through motherhood. As Carolyn put it, "In some ways I'd feel I never had to give anything up, [if I hadn't had children]"

This moral transformation of self isn't simply an act of will, for Laura:

I see myself as more responsible, more unselfish....

Children force you to be less selfish because they tend to be very selfish.... I mean, you have no choice. So, you have to be less selfish and you have to be more responsible. (Laura: Accountant)

Similarly, Sandra explained how she would have seen herself as being "much more self-centred without a child." Like Sandra and other women, Loretta also experienced a moral shift in the relationship between self and others through becoming a mother:

I think having a child... certainly [makes you] less self-centred.... Before I had kids... I was much more ...ego-centric... looking much more at the immediate, you know, just having a good time, and having a fairly good social life. (Loretta: Teacher)

Thus, many middle-class mothers came to see themselves as less self-centred persons through motherhood; however, middle-class women did not present motherhood as a form of self-sacrifice.

In looking at how middle-class women described 'good' and 'bad' (or poor) mothers, the emphasis is on process rather than product. That is, women spoke about the nature of mother-child relationship as the criterion of 'good' motherhood, rather than the outcome of that relationship or the behaviour of the child. Good mothers, they explained, love and care; they are sensitive, responsive, and empathetic to their children and their needs. Good mothers were expected to interact appropriately; to show love, nurturance and patience:

[A good mother is] someone who takes time to listen to the child and to understand from their point of view, doesn't get short and shout at them too much. (Jean: Archivist)

Penny explains:

What seems to be hard on kids and hard on Mums are a lot of expectations, a lot of, you know, 'the way a kid should behave' or 'the way a mother should behave. I think we are our own worst enemies. And the mothers who seem very good at it [mothering] are the ones who relax and enjoy their kids. (Penny: Manager)

Good mothers are expected to 'enjoy' their children. The current changes in the amount of time women are available to their children can affect how women see mothering:

I think it's good to enjoy all the time I do spend with Jennie. I have a very limited amount of time with her, but there isn't very much time when I'm not really glad to be with her, or interested with her. I think [the role of a good mother] is mainly stimulating the child. And if I'm happy and satisfied, I pass that on to Jennie. (Janette: Manager)

While emphasising the connectedness of mother and child, middle-class women also employed 'strategies of separation' which limited the total absorption of self and the mother role. Almost 40 percent of mothers felt that, to be a 'good' mother, a woman should have developed a strong sense of herself, have self-confidence or have realistic and manageable expectations about herself as a mother:

[A good mother involves] having a good sense of herself. ... being able to integrate the child in aspects of her life...being able to integrate the two so that the mother wasn't totally given over to one or the other.... I feel it's harmful for a mother to be totally engrossed in the child to the exclusion of everything else. On the other hand, a woman who tries to have her life remain totally unchanged by having children ... I think that has a bad effect on the children. (Marilyn: Literacy Coordinator)

Women pragmatically adjusted the ideals of the mother role:

[A good mother is ] a person who has some self-knowledge so that they can know their own limits... and don't [feel] that they have to be a supermom all the time. [They accept] that they are going to yell at their kids and get pissed off...they have to accept the negatives

and acknowledge that they are not going to be able to do everything.... (Sandra: Civil Servant)

Women struggled to have role commitment without role engulfment. The issue was not simply one of role conflict, but of role redefinition in a context of abstract and ill defined expectations. Mother love was no longer equated with self-sacrifice or self-denial, and defining 'good' mothering as a matter of the right feelings, women could continue to claim the uniqueness of the mother-child relationship:

[A good mother] is happy in the choices she's made. She is willing to put her child's needs ahead of hers quite often, maybe not all the time.... A good mother's love is not conditional. (Loretta: Teacher)

Middle-class women's definition of good childrearing also functioned to limit role engulfment. If mothers were not to be totally absorbed by their children, neither were children to be totally created by their mothers. The majority of middle-class mothers (55 percent) said that respecting a child's separateness or psychological autonomy was an important part of being a good mother. As Cindy put it "[A good mother] is able to accept her child, and [does] not try to mould that child into something that is alien to him or her." For most middle-class women, the ideal of mothering was that children should develop their own potential and not be the mere product of their parents. It was a mother's task to provide the "right environment":

[A good mother] is really just able to unconditionally love and accept their child for who they are, and where they are, and what they are all about; and not try to mould them into something to meet their expectations. I

think it's someone who can be there but in the right context. (Nina: Director)

Women in this sample interpreted the ideals of motherhood in ways that were consistent with their lives. Where there is little consensus on the rules of motherhood women may use feelings as guides. Ultimately, women emphasised, 'good' mothers are those who have and show the right feelings toward their children.

The strong emphasis on emotions and caring in middle-class women's definition of 'good' motherhood allows women to continue to claim the uniqueness of the motherhood experience. At the same time it allows them to affirm the desirability of having others share in traditional motherly activities of childcare and early childhood education. By using emotions as the definitive test of motherhood women's unique claim to their children is less threatened by behavioral changes in the maternal role.

### Summary

In this chapter I have argued that maternal-love performed many of the symbolic functions of the romantic love myth in structuring the transformation of female identity and in giving meaning to experience among middle-class women in this study. I have pointed to the special nature of the connectedness and relationship women experienced with their children and argued that children should be understood as constitutive of the phenomenological sense of 'real self'.

Indeed, it appeared that it was having children that allowed women to claim or realise this phenomenological sense of 'real' self in ways that reaffirmed the cultural feminine ideals. As we have seen, becoming a mother for middle-class women was not only a matter of giving birth to a child, but of giving birth to themselves. Becoming a mother functioned as an initiation rite into a unique process of personal growth and development and the achievement of a uniquely feminine identity.

We will now look at working-class women's experience of motherhood.

### ENDNOTES

1. The different meanings of the word 'moral' were discussed in the Introduction. I use the word 'moral' in its ethical/evaluative sense in these chapters, but of course, the theme of changing self-conceptions or Goffman's notion of moral transformation dominates both chapters.

2. See, for example, the discussion of Gilligan's work in Signs, Vol. 1, no. 2, 1986.

3. Ibid.

4. Oakley (1980; 1980b; 1981) also found a widespread sense of shock at the gap between reality and expectations about motherhood in her British sample of new mothers. For Oakley's explanation as to 'why society conspires to pull the wool over mother's eyes', see Oakley (1980b; 284-91).

5. We must not assume, however, that all mothers either instantly or ever 'fall in love' with their children. Oakley, (1981) for example, interviewed a sample of British mothers at 5 weeks and again at 25 weeks after the birth of their children and found that 70 per cent were shocked to discover that they did not feel the immediate maternal feelings they had expected to feel. Her study led her to conclude that "it is clear that the rush of maternal love is an exception, and not a general rule" (1980a:96). Indeed, she found that up to two thirds of mothers expressed negative feelings or ambivalence in their relationship with their new babies (1980a:99). She further argues that the label post natal depression and related theories and treatments can be seen as a major ideological strategy within the medical model of childbirth for rendering maternal ambivalence and dissatisfaction non-problematic (1980a:99).

6. For a quick overview of recent work that redresses the neglect of emotions by sociology see Smith-Lovin (1989). Psychology, which as a discipline has long claimed an interest in emotions, is also experiencing a renewed interest in the field. For a criticism of sociology's failure to deal adequately with particular emotions, for example, grief, see Lofland (1982), and for Sociology's overly emotional interpretation of love see Cancian (1987).

7. For a review of the interpretations of 'maternal love' see Boulton (1983). For an analysis of the political functions of the recent interest in maternal bonding theory see Arney (1980). For a controversial analysis of the bio-social origins of maternal love by a leading sociologist in Women's Studies see Rossi (1977). On the ideological functions of maternal love see Wearing (1984) and Oakley (1980; 1980b).

8. See Hochschild (1979; 1983). See also Social Psychology Quarterly Vol 52, no 1, (March 1989). This issue is devoted to the study of sentiment, affect and emotion.

9. There is a debate among historians of the family and ethnographers of childhood as to whether what we recognise as parental and maternal love are universal phenomena, or products of unique material and historical circumstances such as the rise of Bourgeois society and declining infant mortality (Stone, 1979; Badinter, 1981). For a historical analysis of changing conceptions of love in American society, see Cancian (1987). My concern is not whether maternal love is or is not universal, but to look at the meaning and function love and the rhetoric of love played in the lives of the women interviewed.

10. See Mills and Kleinman (1988). They cite the work of Dutton and Aron (1974), for example, which shows a connection between vulnerability and falling in love.

11. Hochschild (1983:215)

12. Images of children's nature and appropriate parental relationships vary by class and socio-historic period (Zelizer, 1985; Stone, 1977; Aries, 1962).

13. See Chapter 7.

14. See Chapter 7 pages 27-29.

15. There are different understandings of myth and mythology. Berger and Luckmann (1966:110), for example, see mythology as representing an archaic form of legitimation: a level of thinking where there is least need for theoretical, analytical or critical thought. Swidler's use of the concept, however, seems closer to Campbell's (1988) conceptualization. This view of mythology sees it as neither primitive nor naive. On the contrary, myth represents metaphorical thinking: myths are a means of expressing insight not merely legitimations. Myths point to what are differently called metaphysical and spiritual realms of human experience, and as such are present in all societies, albeit in different ways.

16. See Smith-Rosenberg, 1975. See also the review articles on Gilligan's In A Different Voice in Signs Vol.1, no.2 (1986).

17. For a broader discussion of this theme see Campbell (1988).

## CHAPTER SIX

### MOTHERHOOD AS MORAL REFORM: WORKING-CLASS WOMEN

The previous chapter focused on the transformations in their self-conceptions that middle-class women experienced through becoming mothers. We saw how motherhood was experienced as a form of resocialization in which women's sense of connectedness with their children became constitutive of their 'new selves'. This chapter looks primarily at working-class women's experience. Although working-class women were far less likely than middle-class women to say that motherhood was different from what they had expected, like middle-class women they described themselves as changed by motherhood. However, the experiences of self-transformation described by working-class women were dominated by themes of 'moral reform' rather than by themes of self-actualization which had characterised middle-class women's accounts. I use the term 'moral reform' for several reasons. The changes working-class women described were 'moral' in Goffman's (1963) use of the term to indicate that which pertains to the self or identity. The term moral reform is used also, not simply because working-class women frequently described themselves as having become better persons through motherhood, but because the changes in self they described fit what Gilligan (1982) describes as a typically female value system or ethic of 'care and

responsibility'. For working-class women, motherhood meant "settling down".

This chapter also looks at the nature of working-class women's relationships with their children. Like middle-class women, their responses to images of themselves as non-mothers pointed to the centrality of women's connectedness with their children in their current phenomenological experiences of self (see Chapter 5, 144-149).

Finally, the chapter looks at similarities and differences in how working- and middle-class women talked about their ideals of mothering. Class differences in how women talked about their definitions of 'good' and 'bad' mothers are interpreted not simply as ideological differences between social classes, but as also reflecting differences in the material contexts in which women mother.

This chapter begins by looking at how working-class women's experience of motherhood compared to what they had expected.

### **Working-Class Women's Expectations and Experience of Motherhood**

We have seen that the majority of middle-class women (90 percent) found motherhood to be different from what they had expected (Table 5.1). Working-class women, on the other hand, were much less likely to have been surprised by motherhood. Almost half of them (46 percent) said that being a mother was similar to what they had expected, but only 6

percent of middle-class women had felt that they had had realistic expectations.

**TABLE 6.1**  
**CONTRAST BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERHOOD**  
 Expectations versus experience of motherhood by social class

	m. class	w. class
Motherhood different to what was expected	90%	54%
Surprised by how much they could care or their emotional responses to their children	65%	14%
Surprised at the work involved	65%	32%
	N: 31	28

Eighteen percent of working-class women suggested that prior experience with children had prepared them for motherhood. However, this form of preparation was discounted as inadequate by those middle-class women who mentioned previous experience with children.<sup>1</sup>

Unexpectedly, alone working-class mothers were not more likely than mothers with partners to say that their expectations of motherhood were violated by the reality of their experience. Almost half (45 percent) felt that motherhood was what they had expected. Val, an alone mother, explained how she knew what being a mother would be like: being a mother meant being loved.

No. [Being a mother is as I expected]. The way I felt when I said I wanted someone to love as much as they love me, and getting that feeling, the amount of work it takes, the challenges, the cares. All of that, for some reason I knew that and it's everything I expected. There is nothing different and new that I never thought of before I had her. (Val: Apprentice Mechanic)

For just over half of the working-class mothers (54

percent) being a mother was different from what they expected. Of these, two-thirds found motherhood more demanding than they expected, especially in terms of work and time demands. Although women who said they had been unprepared for the work of mothering were a minority among the total working-class sample (32 percent) compared to 65 percent of middle-class mothers, their sense of not having realized how much would be required of them was nonetheless very real. Sally, a mother of two, puts it like this:

Yes, definitely [it's different from what I had expected]. I hadn't really been around babies. I didn't really understand about all the work and the time and the energy.... And you can't really tell people how much energy and time [it takes]. People go "yes, yes, I know." But unless you really have to do it yourself, and day after day, I don't think you can really... know how much it entails. It really, really takes a lot of energy.... (Sally: Bell Service Assistant)

Although Sally had a partner, she experienced the workload as if she were alone:

And in my case, you know, I'm the only one here - I'm the one who picks the kids up and drops them off...you know, I'm it. I didn't really realize how much [work it was].

Forty percent of those who were surprised by their experience also found motherhood more rewarding than expected, either emotionally or practically. Again, although only a minority of the total sample of working-class mothers (25 percent) talked about their experience of motherhood as having been better than they anticipated, it was the contrast with expectations that stood out in these women's minds, not the taken-for-granted.

It's better than I ever could have imagined. I didn't think anything could be as wonderful as this. It's the best thing that ever happened to me in my life. [And] I was afraid of babies too. I was afraid of handling them. (Barb: Clerical)

Most middle-class women said that they were quite unprepared for their own emotional responses to their children, but only a minority of working-class women (14 percent) talked about having been surprised by their feelings. We shouldn't conclude from this, however, that working-class women in some sense cared less than middle-class women. Working-class women may simply have had more realistic expectations about both the costs and rewards of children than middle-class women.

Similarly, working-class women may have talked less about being surprised by motherhood and their feelings for their children because, as we shall see shortly, their response to motherhood appeared to have been typically one of personal adaptation and acceptance rather than expecting to be in control of their worlds.

Finally, class differences in how women described being overwhelmed or surprised by their feelings for their children may reflect more general class differences in the way people talk about feelings (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976)), in emotional management practices and in emotional self-reflectivity (Hochschild, 1979; 1983).

Although just over half of the working-class women found motherhood different from what they had expected, few expressed the sense of shock or amazement that so characterised

middle-class women's accounts. To understand class differences in women's responses to motherhood it is necessary to look at the images of self and motherhood working-class women held and the practical circumstances in which they mothered.

**"I Have Responsibilities Now": Transformations of Self Among Working-Class Mothers**

Like their middle-class counterparts, working-class women experienced themselves as having been changed through motherhood. Eighty-two percent of working-class women said they felt they had changed by becoming mothers. Fifty-four percent said they had changed a lot, 28 percent said that they had changed somewhat.

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**Table 6.2**  
**EXPERIENCING THE SELF AS CHANGED THROUGH MOTHERHOOD**  
Women's feelings of having been changed by motherhood

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	m.class	w.class
Felt themselves changed through motherhood	90%	82%
Felt motherhood changed them a lot	68%	54%
Felt motherhood changed them somewhat	22%	28%
	N: 31	28

---

Whereas middle-class women described their transformations of self in terms of personal growth and development, transcendent change, and to a lesser extent in terms of practical changes in lifestyle, working-class mothers described quite a different experience of change.

Initially it appeared that both working-class and middle-class women did share an experience of personal growth

and development which they associated with becoming a mother. Like their middle-class counterparts working-class mothers made frequent references to "maturity" and "responsibility" to describe their experiences of self-transformation. However, on looking more closely at the data it became clear that middle-class and working-class conceptions of responsibility and maturity referred to different experiential realities. Middle-class women spoke of 'psychological self-discovery', 'self actualization', increasing self-confidence and "becoming less self-centred" with motherhood. For working-class mothers, the self-transformations experienced through motherhood were described not as self-actualization and personal development, but as the acceptance of limitations, lack of choice, self-denial and moral reform. The changes in themselves and their lives working-class women described communicated an image of concrete restrictions, acceptance, and self-abnegation: motherhood meant "settling down".

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**TABLE 6.3**  
**BEING CHANGED THROUGH MOTHERHOOD: WORKING-CLASS WOMEN**  
 Ways in which working-class women felt motherhood changed them

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"Settled down" and became "responsible"	79%
Self-actualization	11%
Experience of transcendent change and changed connectedness to the future	17%

---

N: 28

---

Working-class mothers felt that having children had forced them to "become responsible" and "settle down". Over

three-quarters (79 percent) of working-class women described the changes they experienced with motherhood this way. Only 11 percent mentioned the themes of self actualization and personal development widely referred to by middle-class women.

Both working- and middle-class mothers referred to achieving maturity or "growing-up" through the experience of motherhood. However, for working-class women "growing-up" meant confronting the restrictions of working-class life: a life with fewer choices and resources. As Jackie observed:

[Becoming a mother means I have] more responsibility - you have to take a harder outlook on life. You have to look at things more realistically, in terms of facts as opposed to dreams. (Jackie: Secretary)

Like both working- and middle-class women in the study, Renee felt that she became more responsible through having children. Without a child, Renee explained, her life would have been easier, but she would have been "worse": she would have been less mature and responsible:

[Without children] I think it would make a difference - it would be the responsibility part, because, you know, you have someone that's counting on you to come home and feed them. I think it would be worse, maybe it would be worse if I didn't have a child, like for responsibility wise, for [my] maturity, or whatever.... [Without a child] you wouldn't have to worry... and I probably wouldn't get as frustrated. (Renee: Truck Driver)

It should be emphasized that the reality of "responsibility" for Renee was not simply a psychological process of development. Eight months pregnant with her second child and working as a contract labourer driving a municipal garbage truck, Renee's routine involved getting up at 4.45 a.m.

Having a child made the realities of working-class life and a traditionally male occupation difficult for Renee:

Yeah, I get frustrated or irritated. Like, I'll yell at [my partner] Bob, or something. Like it seems it's always woman's work, right. I'm the one that gets up in the morning. I have to get up at 4.45 a.m. I have my shower and get ready. Then I cook on the stove, get her lunch all ready, get her up.... And then I come home and you've got to cook, clean, bathe her. Some days are worse than others...

As mothers, working-class women confronted the reality of class society in a new way; life had become harder and more restrictive. Working-class women repeatedly recalled their pre-maternal selves as carefree and they interpreted the restrictions and difficulties in their present lives as the outcome of their own private decisions and commitments to children, not to the class based inequalities of their society.<sup>2</sup> Hardships were described as "responsibilities". They were neither surprised nor outraged. They accepted it as the price of having children.

Karen was 24 and the mother of three preschool children when I interviewed her. She worked for minimum wage as an unskilled manual worker at a drycleaners. Her partner worked part-time and sometimes "babysat" the youngest child, but Karen said she did the other housework and childcare. For her, being a mother meant "settling down" and becoming "more responsible":

They [the children] changed me. I feel more dependent now. When I didn't have them I was carefree. But now I can't be like that... I have responsibilities. They settled me down. (Karen: Drycleaner's shipping clerk)

Karen tried to offset any suggestion that pointing to the costs

of children might imply she didn't love them. For her, the joys and hardships of life as a mother appeared inextricably intertwined. The joys may have made the hardships more acceptable, but they did not make them less real:

Now that I have mine, I love them for all the world. They change your life, they make your life joyful. Then sometimes they don't. I'm not going to lie and make it sound like everything is rosy. Sometimes they stop you from doing things with your life that you want to do, right? (Karen: Drycleaner's shipping clerk)

Working-class women in this study typically responded to their life circumstances through processes of personal adaptation and moral transformation. They described their experiences of motherhood in terms of having changed themselves or having allowed others to change them. Wendy, for example, described her self-transformation as a process of learning that "[now] I have to put other people before me." Similarly, Rita's response to being a mother was to shift the balance between self and other in her primary relationships:

[Now that I'm a mother] I don't think of myself. Before, probably, I thought of myself more than I thought of everybody else. Now I stop and think of other people before I think of me. (Rita: Unskilled Factory Worker)

Many middle-class women, as I showed earlier, tended to describe the new type of relationship between self and other that came with motherhood as a process of becoming "less self-centred", but as neither self-sacrificing nor self-denying. Middle-class women came to redefine themselves through connectedness with their children, but in a way that limited the engulfment of self in that relationship.

Working-class mothers were more likely to describe the relationship of motherhood as "putting others first". Marg described how motherhood brought a shift in perspective and location of self relative to others:

[Since I've become a mother] little things don't matter as much, like materialistic things don't matter as much. I guess I am just concentrating on my family and making them happy. (Marg: Accounting Clerk)

Thus, becoming a mother changed both the nature of Marg's commitment to others and her perspective.

Many sociologists have pointed out that the working-class members' strong commitment to family reflects in part an economic survival mechanism for dealing with the material deprivation and uncontrollable circumstances of their lives (Bridenthal, 1982; Sacks, 1984; Stack, 1974). Similarly, working-class women's focus on family can also be understood as being a psychological coping mechanism (Pollert, 1981). By "just concentrating" on their families, working-class mothers' attention could shift from the reality of what Marg described as "materialistic things that don't matter as much" and over which she had little control to personal worlds shaped by their commitment to motherhood.

In listening to women speak, at first it seemed that working-class women held traditional conceptions of motherhood that emphasised self-sacrifice and self-denial. Gradually, however, I came to understand that working-class women were using the language of the traditional ideology of motherhood to symbolize the process of self-change they experienced and their

adaption to the practical ways in which their lives had become more difficult. As I will show in the next section, motherhood did not mean the sacrifice of self. Rather it meant the 'death' of an earlier sense of self and the emergence of a new self through a process of 'moral reform'. At the time I spoke with them, this new self which emerged through becoming a mother seemed to provide women with the sense of self to which they felt most deeply connected. In this context the notion of self-sacrifice for one's child is rhetorical in that the self has been transformed in ways in which self and other are integrated. Thus when women spoke of self-sacrifice, it was the sacrifice of 'other selves' rather than the self as mother to which they were referring.<sup>3</sup>

### **Motherhood as Moral Reform**

In the previous chapter I pointed out that middle-class women talked about motherhood in ways we usually associate with romantic love. I argued that maternal love provided women with the mythological themes by which their adult lives and senses of self became symbolically restructured. Similarly, motherhood provided the symbolic resources for the expression of a transformed sense of self among working-class women. However, among working-class women the process of self-transformation that accompanied motherhood was not described in terms of self-actualization and self-development as it was among middle-class women. Rather, for working-class women, motherhood implied a

process of 'moral reform'.

Working-class women's accounts of becoming mothers paralleled middle-class women's in that they also expressed many of the mythological themes identified in Swidler's (1980) analysis of love: love was a moral test; love transformed and revealed character; love changed people and marked a significant turning point in the development of the self.<sup>4</sup> However, the motif was different: it was one of limitation and restriction: of "settling down" to "responsibilities".

The theme of motherhood as a form of moral reform achieved by "settling down" and taking on "responsibilities" provided the characteristic motif of working-class women's descriptions of their self-conceptions as mothers. Indeed, Stack (1974), in her study of poor black families in an American Midwest city, found that young women who did not become adequately 'responsible', lost the legitimacy of their claim to motherhood. The child's grandmother, with the support of other kin, could become the child's social mother or "mama", even against the biological mother's wishes.

The notion of motherhood as moral reform was shared within the working-class sample (Table 6.3) but was strongest among alone working-class mothers. Eighty-two percent of alone working-class mothers described motherhood that way. For Mary, for example, becoming a mother meant that she gave up her old ways and it enabled her to take on a new sense of being connected to the world:

[Since I've become a mother] I've been able to take on more responsibility.... Before I used to go dancing, bars... I had nothing to worry about except myself... and you don't really have much responsibility except for yourself. (Mary: Hotel Housekeeper)

Mary appeared to feel a greater responsibility for her child's life and his impact on the world than she did for her own.

But when you have a baby you sit there and look. Well, now you have a life to look after. And also, you know, it's going to change the world because it's one more human being.... To do this is a lot of responsibility.

Among working-class women in this study the changed self-conceptions that accompanied "settling down" through motherhood often dictated new codes of behaviour. June, a daycare assistant, described how her new identity as 'a Mom' led her actively to change and control her behaviour. Occasionally, however, she found that she had to remind herself she had become a new person:

Sometimes I get frustrated and tired of it... I just want to go out and have fun, leave [my son] John at home with a sitter. But I'm a Mom. I have a child that I've got to support. [I used to be] funny and crazy.... yeah, I was like that before. I was funny. I was crazy. I was nuts, but now... I think I've matured more since I've been a mother. (June: Daycare Assistant)

Although having children entailed costs and difficulties, working-class women and alone mothers in particular felt that they were "better persons" for it. Kathy, for example, explained how having a child represented not simply moral reform but personal salvation:

I don't want to think about [my life without a child]. I'm glad I do have one. I think my life would be in a mess right now. I was too wild when I was single, and crazy, and I probably wasn't going to advance too much. ... I used to go out and party too much.... Now when my

apartment is in a mess I think I have to clean it mostly for Pete, whereas before... I wouldn't even see it or care.... Now I am a hundred percent different. Not in my views and values, but my attitudes in some ways and also my actions. I work for him now and I put more effort into it. I've gained, and so has he. (Kathy: Accounting clerk)

Thus changes in how alone mothers saw themselves appeared to lead to transformations in how they led their lives. Changed self-conceptions also altered the significance they attached to their behaviour. Women attributed these changes to their new moral characters as mothers.

Many alone mothers also had a distinct identity of themselves as alone mothers. This identity endowed several women with an enhanced maternal identity: an identity which provided the motivational basis for greater efforts in terms of work, providing for their children and "being responsible". In reality, the class and gender structures within which they lived often made the realization of alone working-class women's aspirations to 'better' their own and their children's lives almost impossible. Motherhood effected a transformation in self-conceptions, perspective, and motivation which objective structures of society were likely to frustrate.

Diane explained how her identity as an alone mother changed her self-conception, behaviour and perspective:

I look at things differently [now]. Being a single mother I try harder with things, to prove that I can do it without Brian's father around. It has made me grow up a lot and take on responsibilities more.... Before, I was so carefree. (Diane: Clerical)

Although the responsibilities of single motherhood placed

restrictions on working-class women, several women mentioned that they drew strength from their special maternal identity and the intensity of their relationship with their children:

Especially now that I'm separated, it doesn't matter how hard everything else gets, and all that. She's the only one that doesn't - you know what I mean. I would never give her up for anything.... I would give up anything - just as long as I had Tara, I wouldn't care about anything else. (Mara: Clerical/Coordinator)

At the same time, it is the intensity of that relationship with her daughter that leads Mara not to resent the price she must pay for love. It is interesting to observe how Mara implied that it was only through her child that she could come to feel good about herself:

Tara makes me feel good about me - before her I was not feeling good about me, you know what I mean. I can't think how to say it. [Without her] I'd be sort of independent. I'd be doing things a lot faster than I am now - as far as school and all that goes. I'd be working a lot harder at those goals. But, they are back seat to her now.

As Gerson (1985) and O'Donnell (1985) argue, motherhood entails hard choices between competing alternatives in women's lives. However, the options, costs and consequences in the cost-benefit model they propose were structured quite differently for women of different social classes in this study.

Forty-two percent of middle-class women, but only 11 percent of working-class women spoke about the 'transcendent' changes they felt that motherhood made in the meaning and purpose of their lives and their relationship to humanity or the universe. Another 6 percent of working-class women said

they would feel in some way disconnected from the future by not having children. However, children appeared to help working-class women make "sense of their lives" by making them into changed and better persons. Sally, for example, articulated the connection between the meaning of life and the nature of individual identity which was implicit in many mothers' descriptions of their experience of motherhood. Typical of class-based imageries of self-change offered by women, the concreteness of the nature of responsibility in this working-class account of personal growth is in sharp contrast to the themes of self-actualization which characterised many middle-class women's accounts. The practical responsibilities of motherhood represented a form of moral testing for Sally:

[Without kids ] I think I would feel like I wouldn't have as much responsibility - kinda like a weight lifted off your shoulders. I'd be able to buy things when I wanted, and do things when I wanted. I think I would be more self-centred. I don't know if I'd feel like a real part of it, of the community, or not. I'd probably feel more like a machine than really contributing... Like someone who is just here for a joy ride... not really making a contribution, just doing what they wanted... [Children] help you be a better person. (Sally: Service Assistant)

In this section we saw how working-class women felt themselves changed by becoming mothers. Their stories of personal change were characterised by images of moral reform. And this moral reform, I suggest, is the symbolic representation of these women's coming to terms with the very concrete restrictions of their life circumstances as working-class women.

### Counter Identities: Images of Self as Non-Mother

Working-class women had similar, though not identical, responses to images of themselves as non-mothers as middle-class women had (Table 5.2). Forty-three percent said they would feel empty or missing part of themselves; 43 percent felt they would be depressed, sad or lonely; and 29 percent said they would feel like a failure or would have had less self-worth as non-mothers. A total of 75 percent responded in one or more of those ways (Table 6.4).

**TABLE 6.4**  
**RESPONSES TO THE IMAGE OF NEVER HAVING HAD A CHILD**

Working-class women's responses when asked how they would feel if they never had a child/remained childless.

Empty/ incomplete/ something missing	43%
Depressed, sad or lonely	43%
Less self-worth/sense of failure	29%

N: 28

Fourteen percent also mentioned that they would feel they were not 'full women' if they had never had children.

As with middle-class women, the notion of something important being missing and the feeling of being in some sense 'incomplete' or 'not whole' must be distinguished from the notion of simply 'missing out' on something (Chapter 5, p.145).

An alone mother put it like this:

[If I had remained childless] I'd be heart-broken - empty. I don't think I'd feel whole, you know what I mean.... I don't think I would have any self-confidence or respect or.... (Tina: Dietary Aid/Food Server)

A married mother of two put it like this:

[If I had remained childless I would feel] like I was missing something in my life. An empty spot. I would probably feel like a big part of my life was missing  
(Pam: Clerical)

The feelings of incompleteness or emptiness evoked by the prospect of childlessness, as I showed earlier, relate to a disruption in the phenomenological experience of self. It can also refer to a valued self that would never have been found without motherhood:

[If I had remained childless I would feel] lonely, unfulfilled. I'm not really a career person so it's very important to be [a mother]. So I'd guess I'd be very unhappy, very unhappy.... I can honestly say, and I don't say I'm good at anything, but I'm a good mother. I'm a really good mother. And it's the only thing you'll hear me say that about. It's the only thing in my life I feel I'm really good at. Otherwise I'd be going through life thinking I was O.K. or rotten at all these things. Now at least I can say, 'yes, I'm really good at something'.  
(Barb: Clerical)

Twenty-nine percent of working-class women also mentioned that they felt that they would have been 'missing out' on some valuable or important experiences by not having had children:

[If I hadn't had a child] I would have one. I would feel unhappy. I would feel lonely.... I think one of my main reasons for having a child and wanting more children was because I'm looking at my future.... I don't want to be lonely in my old age. I want to have a family. I want to have kids around [me]. (Rose: Secretary)

Sue, for example, would have 'missed out' on the experience of having a family, but this would not have threatened the integrity of her sense of self:

[If I had remained childless] I would miss the family, the family development and closeness. But I think I would have adjusted. I would have led a totally different life. I would have been a totally different

person. I would have been a little bit more self-centred. I would have pampered myself a lot. I would have dressed differently. I would have been able to afford a whole different lifestyle than I can now.... Now, I have to be responsible. (Sue: Secretary)

Although women's connectedness and commitment to their children was repeatedly expressed by women in this study, their feelings about motherhood were far from simple. Almost a third of working-class mothers gave somewhat ambivalent responses to images of themselves as childless women. Eleven percent said they felt they could adapt to being childless; 18 percent said they would feel free or relieved without children, although most of these women also had said they would feel empty or lonely without children; 7 percent were clear that they would feel better in terms of greater self worth and greater self-confidence if they had remained childless.

When women in this study were asked, "If you were doing things over again, would you still choose to have a child?", the majority (83 percent), as we might expect, said yes. The others were unsure or thought that they would not choose to have children again. Interestingly, working-class women were somewhat more likely than middle-class women to be ambivalent about choosing to have a child if they were doing things over. Ninety percent of middle-class women but only 75 percent of working-class women were unequivocal that they would still choose to have children if choosing over again. None of the middle-class mothers and 11 percent of the working-class mothers said they would not have children again. An alone

mother put it as follows:

No. I don't want to say no. But... if I was doing things over again, no. When I had [my son] that was an accident. I don't know how that came about. [Now] I'd want to work... just to get ahead, I guess. (Kimberley: Sheet Metal Worker]

Without children, she would feel better:

[Without a child] I'd probably feel a little, a lot more better because I know I'd have a job. I'd be saving my money and I wouldn't worry about groceries and how much [money] I'd have left over and everything like that. (Kimberley: Sheet Metal Worker)

An additional 14 percent of working-class mothers said that perhaps they wouldn't have children if they were doing things over again, or they would not have children under the same circumstances:

I'm not sorry I have Brian. But I wouldn't have done it.... I wouldn't have chosen to have a child... not under those circumstances.... I don't think even if I'd been married I'd have wanted to.... I just didn't want kids. I never wanted any.... If it hadn't been an accident, I don't think I'd have Brian - even now. (Diane: Clerical)

At first it appeared that the class differences in women's responses could be explained simply by marital or parental status. The greater ambivalence toward the idea of repeating motherhood among working-class women came largely from alone mothers. Forty-five percent of alone working-class mothers were ambivalent or hesitant about choosing motherhood over again. However, alone middle-class mothers showed no such ambivalence about motherhood; all of them said they would have children again, if they were doing things over. Feeling hesitant or ambivalent about 'doing it over again' seemed

associated, not simply with being an alone mother, but with the circumstances of being an alone working-class mother. However, although these mothers may have felt ambivalent about 'doing things over', we must not assume they were ambivalent about the commitment they felt towards to their children.

Mothers in general, and ambivalent mothers in particular, had difficulty articulating their reservations about their experiences as mothers because of difficulty in distinguishing between past events (which they might regret) and present outcomes (the children whom they love). By talking about regrets they felt about motherhood, women risked symbolically negating both their children and the depth of their connectedness to them.

Women who said that they would not choose to have children over again were a small minority of the working-class sample (11 percent) and just 5 percent of all women in the study. All of them had been alone mothers and, like most of the 'ambivalent' women, had been welfare recipients for part of that time. 'Ambivalent' mothers frequently mentioned such themes as wanting to be financially better off or having more education as preconditions to considering motherhood, if they were doing things over again. Women who would not have children over again, like those who were ambivalent, attempted to separate their reservation about having children over again from the strength of their present commitment to their children. It was one thing to say that one might not choose to

be a mother over again; it was quite another to suggest that one was a less than loving mother. Kimberley, for example, who said she would not choose motherhood again, emphasized her current attachment to her son:

[Getting pregnant] was an accident really. Now it's not an accident. I don't regret having him, anyways.... I don't regret having a child (Kimberley: Sheet Metal Worker)

Although Kimberley said she would feel better if she did not have a child, and would not have one again if she were 'doing things over', her identity as a mother was central to the account of her life she presented. According to Kimberley, it was having a child that motivated her to want a good job and "to get ahead". That is, having a child led her to aspire to exactly those things which the combination of being a mother and her class position made difficult to achieve - further education and job advancement. It was as though Kimberley felt she could not claim for herself the things which she had come to want; she could only claim them on behalf of her son:

[Having a child] changed me in that I know I want to do good for him by working and getting where I want.

I want him to know, like, we are going to get ahead.... [And I want to get ahead] for me too. I want him to know that I'm not going to be on welfare or things like that.... I just don't want him resenting anything, well, resenting me for anything later on in life.  
(Kimberley: Sheet Metal Worker)

Similarly Kathy explained how becoming a mother changed her goals and provided a new source of motivation.

I probably wasn't going to advance too much [the way I was before I had a child]. Now, I have a clearer mind on what I want to do - just keep on working and keep advancing.... I do things I really put aside before. I

say I'm doing them for him. (Kathy: Accounting Clerk)

Alone working-class mothers' feelings of ambivalence about having children over again, I suggest, came not from any lack of present commitment to their children, but from the fact that the price they had to pay for becoming a mother was so high. In general, however, women in this study were reluctant to apply a utilitarian cost-benefit analysis to their experience of having children. For a minority the price was only vaguely sensed in retrospect and seldom articulated. For the majority, the price was never calculated at all:

[If I didn't have a child] I guess I would ... probably put all my energy into work.... so I wouldn't have to worry about money when I get older.... But having a baby, I guess I think more of loving more... is better than the materialistic sense. That's one thing I've noticed since having the baby. I'm less materialistic than I was before. (Marg: Accounting Clerk)

Because women's attachment to their children was experienced as 'moral', both women's experience of themselves and the nature of their connectedness with their children appeared to be violated by the imposition of a utilitarian framework. The absence of such a framework, however, leaves much of the objective cost of children to women hidden from themselves and from public view. And when women in this study spoke about being a mother it was the subjective experience rather than objective costs which animated their accounts. The limitations of a utilitarian framework for understanding women's experience of motherhood become clearer when we further explore the moral benefits of children to women through the

experiences of alone working-class mothers.

### The Moral Benefits of Children

We have seen that both working- and middle-class women had negative images of their lives as non-mothers. Although alone working-class mothers were more likely than other working-class mothers to be hesitant about saying they would have a child again if they could do things over, they were also more likely than mothers with partners to have very negative projections of their lives without children. Eighty-two percent of alone working-class mothers presented images of themselves in which they typically described themselves as 'feeling terrible'; being 'lonely'; being 'lost' and 'depressed'; 'going crazy' and feeling like a failure as a woman or having low self-worth if they had remained childless. Tina, who was 16 when she became a mother, reflected on the prospect of remaining childless:

I'd be heartbroken - empty. I don't think I'd feel whole, you know what I mean? I wouldn't feel like I could be a woman.... I don't think I would have any self-confidence or respect or.... I don't think I would enjoy life as much. (Tina: Hospital Dietary Aid/ Meal Server)

For some women the image of their own lives without children was shaped by beliefs they held about the unhappiness of childless women. Helen, an alone mother of two, felt that,

[If I never had children I'd feel] probably lost, you know, bad that I didn't have the experience.... Probably I'd feel less, you know, you hear about all these people who don't have kids and they feel so [bad], you know.... [I'd feel] less as a person, a mother, I mean, a woman, whatever. It may be stupid, but....(Helen: Waitress)

She also recognised that there were costs to being a mother:

[If I didn't have children] probably I could have done differently in work, you know what I mean? I could have probably went to school, and maybe be paid much higher than I am now, [and] not being used so much as I am... because with kids [you need money right now].

Many alone mothers held a devalued view of their lives before they became mothers, and the majority found it hard to sustain positive alternative conceptions of themselves or their existence without children:

[Without children] I would probably feel empty, probably terrible, probably gone crazy or something silly.... I know David has chained me down a lot... but I prefer to stay home, wake up early with him, get my full weekend in and feel good about it with him, than wake up and say 'I don't want to get up...I've got a headache from drinking too much or whatever'. (Cora: Wordprocessor)

Alone working-class mothers were aware that having children restricted their choices and many experienced frustration, but they did not express resentment toward their children for "tying them down"; to an extent they welcomed it because it made them feel better about themselves and their lives.

Val, for example, explained how, although she thought she would be more carefree without a child, her daughter provided her with a sense of self-worth and in some sense anchored her in the world. Without her daughter, she reflected, she didn't know who she would be or why she lived her life:

[If I hadn't a child, I would see myself differently]. I would definitely have no self-worth. She is my life right now. And if I didn't have her I probably wouldn't be doing anything that I am now. She is my reason for

living. That's exactly how I feel about it....

If I didn't have her, I don't know what I'd be doing now. I don't know what job I'd have, what friends I'd have. I think about that a lot and then I forget about it because I can't imagine [not having her]. I probably wouldn't be as responsible; I'd be more carefree and not thinking about anyone else. (Val: Apprentice Mechanic)

Val's daughter allowed her to value her self.

Motherhood provided access to self-worth for women like Val who, in feeling good about their children, could feel good about themselves; and in caring for their children they could care about themselves. A child provided at once a new way of thinking and feeling about oneself and a new self. In describing the best things about being a mother, notice how close Val comes to saying that her child is herself:

[The best things about having a child are] watching her grow up, watching her learn, being with her. She is mine. She is all me. She is my twin: something I am proud of. I can show her off. She makes me feel wanted and needed. Every time I think about her she makes me smile. I glow. I don't know how to put my feelings into words. (Val: Apprentice mechanic)

Thus children allowed alone working-class mothers in this study to escape from a life, and by implication a self, they felt was of little value. It allowed them to achieve a sense of self which they respected, and to claim legitimate access to the conventional rewards of our society, such as occupational advancement, not on behalf of themselves, but in the name of their children. Middle-class women, in contrast, from the vantage point of conventional occupational success, claimed children on behalf of themselves.

In the next section we look at how working-class women

talked about their ideals of motherhood.

### **Maternal Identities: 'Good' and 'Bad' Mothers**

Middle-class mothers, as we have seen, talked about their images of 'good' and 'bad' mothers in ways that focused on process rather than product. Their descriptions of 'good' mothers emphasised the connectedness of the mother-child relationship while at the same time acknowledging the separate identity of each. 'Good' mothers were those who loved, cared, empathised with, and were sensitive and responsive to their children and their children's needs.

Working-class women's descriptions of 'good' and 'bad' mothers also emphasised the nature of the relationship between mother and child but were more behavioural than middle-class women's and referred to different concrete experiences. Four themes dominated working-class women's discussion of 'good' and 'bad' mothers: spending time with children, good communication, correct interaction with children and the provision of adequate material care.

'Good' mothers spend time with their children, and 'poor' mothers do not, according to a majority of working-class mothers (57 percent). They did not, however, specify how much time. Interestingly, only a minority of middle-class mothers (18 percent) mentioned spending time with children as a defining characteristic of 'good' mothers.

'Good' mothers, working-class women (50 percent) also

explained, communicate with, understand or are sensitive and responsive to their children. Lisa stressed:

[Being a good mother] I think involves being able to communicate with her. O.K. me and my Mom were never close actually until I got married.... See, my Mom is European and she never talked about the pill, about boys, about sex, any of that. I probably will be the same way, but I want to be able to talk with her about these things, anyways. (Lisa: Data Entry)

**TABLE 6.5**  
**THEMES IN DESCRIPTIONS OF GOOD MOTHERING**

Themes mothers identified as characteristic of good mothering \_

	m. class	w. class
Understands empathy/responsive/communicates	68%	50%
Spend time with their children	18%	57%
Mentioned patience/not getting irritated	32%	46%
Respecting the child's separateness	55%	14%
Raised issues of discipline	13%	21%
Doesn't abuse	7%	32%
	N: 31	28

'Good' mothers also have patience and avoid getting irritated or frustrated with their children, according to many working-class mothers. About a third of both working- and middle-class mothers mentioned patience as characteristic of a 'good' mother, but how they talked about patience was different. Working-class women were more likely to introduce the topics of irritability, bad temper and physical and emotional abuse of children as characteristics of 'bad' mothers and as behaviour to be avoided:

A good mother is someone who would respond to their child. Love is probably the primary factor.... [And] patience. You have to be very, very patient.... [A good mother] would try not to be too stressed out, or fly off the handle. She'd try to count to ten. She'd try not to use physical discipline if it's unnecessary.... She would

try to build up the child's self-esteem, and she would teach the child good moral values and a sense of responsibility. (Sally: Bell Service Assistant)

Almost half of the working-class mothers talked about the importance of patience or of not getting irritated or bad tempered with children when describing appropriate mothering:

Every mother is different.... basically... as long as they're not beating the child, child abuse. .... A mother that does things with their children, I guess. Just, like I say, every mother is different. (Karen: Drycleaner's Shipping Clerk)

Almost a third of working-class mothers spoke of child-abuse in talking about good and 'bad' mothering, but only 7 percent of middle-class women did. Finally, working-class (50 percent), but not middle-class women, mentioned providing adequate physical and material care and keeping children clean, healthy and well dressed as part of being a good mother.

About a third of working- and middle-class women said that a woman's selfishness or her unwillingness to adjust her own life for her child's would make her a 'bad' mother, but only a small minority of either class said that a woman would have to put her child's needs or interests first to be a 'good' mother. In general, both middle- and working-class women in this study tended to define good mothering in ways that did not make the child's and mother's interests mutually antagonistic. They did this in different ways and with different degrees of success. Nancy, an alone working-class mother of two said:

[A good mother] makes the effort to understand the kid. You can't always be there for them... [but] if you really listen to them, then you can sort of beat time.... Having a strong sense of identity [makes you a good mother]....

Underlying everything I am trying to accomplish, the kids are there. In some part I'm doing it for them. In a sense, everything I do is for them. It's not quite putting their needs before yours, but acting with them in mind. (Nancy: Secretary)

The majority of middle-class women, as we have seen, emphasised the need to limit the mutual absorption of mother and child and stressed what they saw as the essential and desirable integrity of the separate individual, be it mother or child. However, only 14 percent of working-class mothers mentioned this as an aspect of 'good' or desirable maternal behaviour.

Both middle- and working-class women effectively reduced the potential for conflict of interest between mother and child by conceptualizing good mothering as good communications and empathetic interaction. Although Oakley (1974) points out that the vague and abstract maternal ideals tend to produce anxiety because it is hard to know when one has reached an acceptable standard of performance, loosely defined ideals may also allow everyday life to flow more smoothly by averting ideological challenges.

Similarly, working-class women's belief that mothers were responsible for ensuring that their children's physical and material needs were met helped offset concerns they might have had about not being at home with them.

### Good Mothering: Ideas in their Context

Initially the difference between working- and middle-

appeared irreconcilable. Helen could achieve neither ideal and even the time she did have for her children increased her concern when some of it had to be spent disciplining her children:

I'm just hoping they're going to be O.K. Like, there's nothing [I can do]. I can't change life - anything. So, I just try to do the best with what [I have] ...but you get the guilt - a lot.... [I have so little time] and when you spend some of that time [disciplining them]... you think 'Oh my God... how can I spend that time [like that], but you have to otherwise they are going to run, run you.... I really don't know what to say. (Helen: Waitress)

Indeed the whole issue of disciplining children is one which concerned working-class women far more than middle-class women as we will see in Chapter Seven.

Like Helen, Mara found the conflict between supporting her son and spending time with him irreconcilable. As a semi-skilled sheet metal worker Mara worked shifts and overtime. She worried about her lack of time with her son. Traditionally male, blue collar jobs like Mara's allowed men to be good parents by being good providers. However, the long, irregular hours and the physically tiring nature of the work makes it hard to be a 'good' mother, where mothering requires time and energy caring for children as well as being a good provider. Mara could have taken less physically demanding work; however, working-class women's traditional jobs would not allow an alone mother to provide the standards of material care which 'good' mothering dictated. She, like many alone working-class mothers, would have been financially 'better off' on welfare

class women's descriptions of 'good' and 'bad' mothers appeared interesting but its significance was unclear. Indeed, the questions about 'good' and 'bad' mothers were designed to capture ideological responses rather than objective differences between mothers' actual behaviour. Most women responded to the questions in terms of general ideals and with apparent reference to 'women in general' rather than their own behaviour. However, it gradually became clear that there was a pattern to the differences in what working- and middle-class women chose to mention when talking about the ideals of motherhood. And these differences related to the different material circumstances in which they mothered.

For many working-class mothers, and alone mothers especially, the maternal ideals of spending time with, providing good material care for, and having good communications and good interaction with children (not being stressed or irritated) tended to be ideals that were mutually exclusive or difficult to realize. For example, Helen, an alone mother of two children, worked long shifts in her job as a waitress which greatly restricted her time with her children:

I don't know [what makes a mother a good mother]. Maybe that's what my problem is too, like I feel guilty a lot - an hour in the morning and an hour at night and not being able to [afford things for the kids].... Michael can't stay after school [to play hockey, because I can't afford the fee] or he can't go to Boy Scouts on Tuesday because Mommy is at work, and he has no way of getting there.... (Helen: Waitress)

For Helen, the conflict between the goals of having time with her children and having enough money to support them

appeared irreconcilable. Helen could achieve neither ideal and even the time she did have for her children increased her concern when some of it had to be spent disciplining her children:

I'm just hoping they're going to be O.K. Like, there's nothing [I can do]. I can't change life - anything. So, I just try to do the best with what [I have] ...but you get the guilt - a lot... [I have so little time] and when you spend some of that time [disciplining them]... you think 'Oh my God... how can I spend that time [like that], but you have to otherwise they are going to run, run you.... I really don't know what to say. (Helen: Waitress)

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than in a traditional female occupation. Mara could achieve some of the ideals of being a good mother, but she could not achieve all of them:

It's important to spend time with your child when you finish your job. A lot of time I just come home and I go to sleep. I'm so tired, I can't see him that long, eh? It all works out in the long run, you're getting paid good money, but you [can't spend much time with your child]. (Mara: Semi-skilled factory worker)

It must be emphasised that only a minority of working-class women indicated that they felt guilt or concern about the adequacy of their own mothering in response to questions about their idea of 'good' and 'bad' mothers. But the frequency with which they, rather than middle-class women, raised the issues of time, material care, and irritation with children suggests that these were issues that concerned them.

Working-class women, however, may have talked about spending time with children as a characteristic of good mothering, not because they felt that they failed in that respect, but because they felt they were achieving their ideals. Staying home evenings and weekends seemed to have been perceived as time given to, or as activities forgone on behalf of their children. For Karen a 'poor' mother goes out:

Yes, some mothers are poor mothers. Some mothers, to them, the first thing is to put on my coat and go out and have a good time, even knowing that there's a child in the room. (Karen: Drycleaner's Shipping Clerk)

For Stephanie:

I think there's people who shouldn't even have kids! They constantly go out, leaving their kids unattended, thinking of themselves first. (Stephanie: Clerical)

Thus time given to children by not going out in the evenings was visible to mothers, and 'proof' of their commitment.

There is another explanation for why the issues of time, material care and irritation with children or child-abuse dominated working-class rather than middle-class women's ideals of mothering. It is not that the 'problems' they mentioned were unique to the working-class. Rather, I suggest, it is because parental behaviour is far more visible among the working-class. Working-class women lived less private lives as mothers than did middle-class women. They were more likely to live in apartments and share childcare with relatives, neighbours or friends. Other mothers and their children were more visible and audible to them. It is often easier to see others' behaviour than one's own. Even though they may not have been accurate, working-class mothers had more behavioural impressions about other mothers' performance and referred far more frequently to concrete examples of the good or bad mothering they described. Pam, for example, has strong views on other parents in her building:

[Being a 'bad' mother means] ignoring your children.... I've seen so many parents where the children are dirty; they are poorly fed; they are not hugged and kissed enough. And half the kids who live around...or in this building probably fall into this category. And those children are horrible, horrible, children. Filthy, dirty, disgusting mouths,..but it's the parents' fault, they don't care what they say in front of their children. (Pam: Clerical)

Thus the greater visibility of other women's parenting behaviour as well as the concrete differences in the

circumstances in which they mothered may explain much of the class differences in the ideologies of motherhood which working- and middle-class women held. Both groups, however, tended to hold pragmatic interpretations of their ideal of motherhood that limited the potential for conflict of interest between their children's interests and their own behaviour.

### Summary

In this chapter we saw that working-class women were less likely to have been surprised by motherhood than middle-class women, either by the work involved or by their emotional responses to their children. Like middle-class women, motherhood provided working-class women with the symbolic resources for the transformation and re-structuring of their deeply felt senses of self. The characteristic motif of this process of self-transformation was that of 'moral reform' which working-class women articulated through the language of "responsibilities" and "settling-down". Class differences in how women talked about their experiences of self-transformation, I argued, were shaped by the material contexts in which they mothered. Typically, working-class women interpreted the restrictions and difficulties in their lives as a consequence of their private commitment to their children. Under the guise of being the price of motherhood, class and gender structured inequalities were less likely to be perceived or resented.

### ENDNOTES

1. The propensity for middle-class parents to feel that nothing can really prepare one to cope with being a parent and childrearing was also found by Backett (1982). She found that only the experience of rearing one's own children was seen as the source of relevant knowledge.

2. The tendency of working-class men and women to blame themselves or their lack of education for the economic disadvantages they experience in class society has been widely reported (Rubin, 1976; Komarovsky, 1962). Interestingly, if working-class women did link their 'private troubles' to wider social processes, it was gender inequalities, not class structures, that they invoked to help them analyze their situation (Chapter 8).

3. At other stages of the life cycle one could well expect these other selves to gain more importance as the relationship between self and child changed. For the working-class mothers of young children that I interviewed, however, the experience of motherhood as a "settling down" and a form of moral reform showed how motherhood represented the symbolic departure from earlier self-conceptions and the emergence of new ones rather than self-sacrifice.

4. For a fuller discussion of these themes see Chapter Five and Swidler (1980).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WOMEN'S EVERYDAY LIVES AS MOTHERS

In discussing how the experience of becoming a mother shaped women's identity, I have emphasised that becoming a mother must not be understood simply as the expression of a gender identity acquired in childhood, but that the experiences of being a mother contributed to the development of a gendered sense of self as an adult: that is, to the ways of acting, thinking, and feeling we conventionally associate with being female. Howard Becker (1981) has coined the term situational adjustment to describe much of the process of adult socialization through which people come to take on the characteristics required by the situations in which they participate. The concept thus offers a way of understanding the patterned ways in which women in this study described their experiences of motherhood, not by appealing to deep rooted feminine personality traits and needs, but by pointing to the shared socializing experiences of similar circumstances in which women find themselves once they give birth to a child.

This chapter focuses on some of these shared circumstances: the costs and rewards of motherhood; the responsibility; the work involved; the combination of family and paid work. The next chapter develops the theme that gendered responses to parenthood are in large part a form of

situational adjustment to the social organization of childrearing and family life.

As I wrote the earlier chapters, I wondered if I was over-emphasising the social-psychological dimensions of women's experience and neglecting the objective realities of their lives. I reassured myself with thinking that I would deal with the 'objective' reality of motherhood in later chapters. This chapter and the next do just that. However, women's experience resisted such neat ordering as I had intended to impose.

In the previous two chapters I showed how the subjective experience of motherhood as a mythological journey of self-transformation was widely shared among mothers in this study, albeit characterized by class specific motifs of self-change. The consistency in women's accounts of their 'inner journey', however, was in contrast to the 'outer', more worldly experience of the practical realities of motherhood which women described; here the dominant pattern was that of contingency.

In order to learn about the day-to-day experience of being a mother I asked women questions about the practical realities of having children. For example, I asked women about the costs and benefits of having children; the work involved; the division of domestic labour; their daycare and social support networks. I also asked participants to complete the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which I use as an indicator of subjective quality of life, and the Centre for Epidemiological Studies- Depression Scale (CES-D) in order to provide a

standardized indication of the levels of distress mothers were experiencing.

I realized, however, that while it was analytically useful to separate the objective and the subjective, or the 'inner' and 'outer' in women's experience of motherhood, this distinction was not mirrored in women's accounts. Women repeatedly turned to their feelings for answers to my "practical" questions, not because they had no other answer, but because their feelings so frequently provided the meaningful context for interpreting the practical realities of motherhood.

This chapter begins with women describing the costs and benefits of having children. Not unexpectedly, the issue of costs led many women to talk about the work of motherhood and led me to ask about the division of domestic work in the household, which is discussed in the next chapter. It soon became clear that conventional concepts of 'work' don't easily fit women's experience of domestic work. More significant, perhaps, was the realization that the way in which women described their connectedness with children and their everyday experiences of being mothers again reveal the limitations of a social psychology that either posits self and other as radically separate, or that assumes that identities are the 'possessions' of individuals.

These points are not new. Symbolic Interactionism has long emphasised that individual and society, self and other

must be understood as mutually generating and sustaining processes rather than as separate entities. More recently, however, feminists have started to call for a social psychological perspective that can respect and adequately explain women's apparently greater experiences of connectedness with others. For example, Gilligan (1982) and Lyons (1983) point out there are serious weaknesses in how traditional psychological theory constructs 'the female', and the nature of self-other relationships. Models of human development have tended to emphasise the role of individual separation and the establishment of psychological autonomy in the achievement of adult identity, and have thus seen women's concern with attachments and relationships as forms of 'dependency' and immaturity, albeit quintessentially feminine (Caplan, 1985; Gilligan, 1982; Rubin, 1984). Feminists are asserting the validity of women's observed tendency to define themselves in interpersonal relationships (Miller, 1976) and frequently conclude that the real 'problem' lies in historically constructed male models of thought that glorify individualism and disconnected autonomy, and devalue connectedness (Ruddick, 1984b; Squier and Ruddick, 1984; Gilligan, 1982), and in particular 'patriarchal thought' that denigrates motherhood (O'Brien, 1981).

As part of the intellectual process of re-evaluating and understanding "women's ways", feminists frequently find themselves returning to the psycho-analytic perspective to

explain the persistent nature of gender differences in so much of social life and in particular the alternative ways of constructing self-conceptions and self-other relationships that appear to characterise men's and women's experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Chodorow (1978), for example, argues that the gendered experiences of self-other relationships are grounded in children's early development where one of the first psychic tasks of little boys is to realize that they are different from their mothers and, unlike little girls, can never grow up to be like them. The socializing effect of this distinction from the mother is held to create distinctly gendered experiences of identity; boys are defined through separation and autonomy from others, and girls through connection and personal relationships.<sup>2</sup> The 'problems' of identity and personal development for males are thus understood to be experienced as problems of handling relationships in the context of their core sense of separation and individuality, while for females the problem is seen as that of establishing a separate identity while maintaining relationships (Chodorow, 1978; Rubin, 1984; Gilligan; 1982). Indeed, according to Chodorow, it is this early identification by girls with a mother who nurtures that produces in females a desire and a capacity to mother, and produces males whose nurturing capacities and needs have been repressed.

But there is a danger in all of this. While it is truly important to value "women's ways", it is important not to

conclude that such ways are inherently feminine, whether biologically or psycho-sexually grounded. If we fail to recognise the socially constructed nature of gender differences we are in danger of accepting what Alcoff (1988) calls a 'feminist essentialism'. Feminist essentialism, according to Alcoff, not only sees women as essentially different from men but as also being morally superior. As Kerber *et al.* (1986) point out, because women have historically been associated with more nurturant and less aggressive social roles than men, there is a tendency to see women as being 'better' than men.

Thus, while the data from this study show that women found connectedness with their children both deeply rewarding and central to their transformed senses of self, it would be a mistake to think that only women are capable of nurturing relationships, or that women are consistently more caring than men. Recent studies of men who take on traditionally female parenting roles, for example, show that these men also develop the nurturing capacities usually associated with women (Pruett, 1987). Also, as Greeno and Maccoby (1986), for example, point out, although women consistently rate themselves, and are rated by others, as more empathic and caring than men, this behaviour may not hold cross-situationally. Women may be more empathic in relation to friends and intimates, but the evidence suggests this may not hold in relation to strangers (Ruddick, 1984b; Greeno and Maccoby, 1986). Citing the dangers of mistakenly assuming that nurturing capacities are restricted to women, and

biological mothers in particular, Rothman (1989) has recently argued that we need to see care and nurturance as components of particular relationships rather than as a characteristic of one gender. By conceptualizing motherhood as a nurturing relationship rather than as a status, our society can extend to men and other non-biological parents the socially beneficial effects motherhood has in socializing individuals into nurturant, caring modes of relating to others:

There are powerful reasons why men should mother, and it is not to save the children from their mothers. Men should mother, should provide intimate, daily, ongoing nurturing care to children, in the interests... of men themselves, and of achieving economic justice and a better world. (Rothman; 1989: 225)

Men can develop traditionally female characteristics through performing traditionally feminine roles, Rothman continues:

I think in mothering we hone our empathic abilities.... I think that the experience of mothering teaches people how to be more emotionally and intellectually nurturant, how to take care of each other. It is not the only way we learn that lesson, but it is hard to mother and not learn it. (1989:226)

It is surprising that feminism turns so infrequently to symbolic interactionism for a theoretical explanation of the gendered nature of self and self-other relationships. This perspective seems well suited for a feminist social psychology because it conceptualises all identities as social products and thus can explore how women might come to vest more of their identities in interpersonal relationships without either interpreting this as dependency or concluding that men and women follow different developmental trajectories. The

perspective can recognise that the characteristics of nurturance, caring and responsibility associated with women are socially grounded and arise by virtue of social experience. That is, that the nature of self conceptions and self-other relationships are situationally contingent. Men and women experience themselves and self-other relationships in gendered ways because social situations tend to be deeply gendered both in the structures that organize them and the expectations we bring to them (Goffman, 1987). We cannot assume that women are innately more caring, nurturant and peaceful and vest their identities more in interpersonal relationships, and that men are more aggressive and personally autonomous, without recognising that men and women are socially allocated to social positions that require or encourage just these characteristics. I develop these ideas in the final chapter where I show how women's practical experience as mothers, in particular the division of domestic work, produced in women a gendered experience of parenthood and a gendered interpretation of their own and their partners' identities. But first I turn to how women described their everyday lives as mothers.

**"The Rewards ... Are Harder to Articulate": Middle-class women and The Best Things About Having a Child**

For middle-class mothers the best things about having children were the pleasures or rewards they got from watching them learn and grow (65 percent), and the special connectedness

or relationship they felt with them (65 percent). About half of middle-class women (52 percent) also talked about the fun or enjoyment they had being with their children (Table 7.1).

According to La Rossa and La Rossa (1981) the experience of being a parent comes to take on a paradoxical character, not because of the nature of the specific costs and rewards involved, but because the costs and rewards, the highs and lows are so extreme.

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**TABLE 7.1**

**THE REWARDS OF MOTHERHOOD**

Percentage of mothers who mentioned specific responses

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	M.CLASS.	W.CLASS
1. Watching children learn and grow	65%	64%
2. Feelings of special connectedness or special relationship with children	65%	54%
3. Fun or enjoyment being with children	52%	43%
4. Rediscovering/re-experiencing the world through children's eyes	35%	11%
5. Strengthening of other social bonds	23%	12%

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Note: Based on 59 interviews; unprompted responses to an open ended question on the best things about having children.

\* Respondents mentioned more than one reward.

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Part of the 'paradoxical character' of motherhood for women must surely be reflected in the very different accounts, popular and scholarly, of the effect of motherhood on women's identities. Mothers' connectedness with their children is depicted as both destructive and positive for women. Boulton (1983), for example, emphasized both the 'monopolization' and loss of personal identity effects and the sense of meaning and purpose in life which children brought to the middle-class

full-time mothers she studied. Oakley (1980) has described the periods of post-natal depression which so many women she interviewed experienced as a form of mourning for their old identities. And Suleiman (1988) describes the experience of being torn between two seemingly irreconcilable allegiances: that of commitment to their children and commitment to their own creative selves that women writers experience. Similarly, women in this study experienced their connectedness with children as both rewarding and costly. However, their accounts are not so much of the loss of personal identity, of maternal ambivalence or a struggle between self and child, but of the different ways in which women come to experience themselves through motherhood, and the way in which their different identities sometimes come into conflict.

Penny's response captured the two most frequently talked about rewards of motherhood. Although Penny used the analogy of "falling in love" to describe her connectedness with her son, it is important to stress that not all women equated their connectedness with children with feelings of love:

[For me, the best things about having a child are] the emotional discovery - it's sort of like falling in love, only it's different. Unless you've done it, you don't have that central experience in your life. It's very intense. Aside from that it's [also] lots of fun.... I've had a lot of pleasure from things he's said and things he's done, and [from] watching him grow. (Penny: Manager)

For many women emotions were the coin of exchange in interaction with their children. Feelings were 'given' and 'received'. But as Loretta pointed out, feelings are hard to

measure or put into words; the costs are more visible:

[Before I had a child] I couldn't realize the attachment or the rewards that come from having your own child.... The changes in [your] lifestyle... are very visible, [but] the rewards are not that clear. They are there, but harder to articulate. They are harder to see. They are more felt than visualised. (Loretta: Teacher)

For those who used the language of love to talk about the rewards they got from motherhood, those rewards were lived in daily experience and emerged as feelings of connectedness. Children were described as offering a special kind of love:

[The best things about having a child are ] just the daily rewards; watching them grow and learn. You share so much with them.... Just having someone who loves you, unconditionally, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, [that's the best]. (Margaret: Flight Attendant)

The rewards of having young children were often immediate, physically and emotionally tangible, and inherent to the relationship:

It's so hard to articulate; the hugs, you know, you share.... And children, also, are really wonderful because they love their mothers unconditionally.... And that's the amazing thing. Just like you unconditionally love that child, even though I was never, you know, like, baby-crazy, you know. (Kate: Graphic designer)

Although middle-class women frequently used the language of love to express their daily connectedness with their children, it seemed that feelings of connectedness were related to, but not identical to love. Many women felt that there was a special connectedness between self and other in the mother-child relationship, not to be found in other relationships; and this was one of the best things about being a mother.

For Joanne, this special connectedness transformed the phenomenological experience of an 'isolated self in the world' into a feeling of permanent belonging in the world. Her new attachment to the world was independent of the specific other that brought about that attachment, but was inherent in the nature of the relationship itself; that of mother and child:

[The best things about having a child are that] it's like having a permanent friend, in a way. It's like a security against loneliness that I really was surprised to discover. For some people it would be a dependency. But for me it means I have a place in the world.... It focuses my life very well, which I think I needed; well I think everyone needs. Well, it has focused me in a way that nothing else has. (Joanne: Teacher)

She felt her connectedness was not contingent on her son's personality.

You know, I happen to really like him a lot. I suppose I could have had a child I didn't really like a whole lot.... It does make a difference, the fact that he is so much fun and so pleasant and so easy. But, even if he were troublesome I think I would really enjoy just having that responsibility and having that focus. (Joanne: Teacher)

When I talk about women's connectedness with their children I am not talking about the endocrinologically based mother-infant attraction posited by 'bonding theory'.<sup>25</sup> The concept of connectedness as used here was grounded in women's subjective expressions concerning the ways in which they experienced themselves and their relationships with their children. Thus, grounded in the empirical reality of women's phenomenological and social experience of self, the concept carries no assumptions as to the biological basis of mother-child connectedness; neither does it assume that feelings of

connectedness emerge spontaneously, immediately or even at all, following the birth of a child.<sup>4</sup> Rebecca, an alone mother, explained how the mother-child attachment which she found so rewarding was both a feeling of social belonging and a form of phenomenological self-extension in time and space:

The best things about having a child are the love you get and give. It's corny stuff like having a family, caring about each other, doing things together. [It's] that sense of continuity. Immortality, is that the word? Like I know he is going to be here and he'll have kids. I like that. I like seeing him with my parents. I like seeing him with my father, they get along really well. A lot of times I look at him as an extension of myself, in a lot of ways. (Rebecca: Counsellor)

Mary Douglas (1971) has shown how biological processes or events in the natural world often provide a society with the symbolic resources through which to express cultural meanings.

Similarly, Frazer's The Golden Bough (1890; 1987) gives many examples of how the ritualized mimicry of gestation and birth were used in pre-industrial rites to establish a unique social bond between mothers and their adopted children, even when the adoptees were mature adults. O'Brien (1981), however, extends the relationship between natural processes and social-psychological connectedness far beyond the symbolic. Men's alienation from the reproductive process, she argues, and from the ways in which women experience continuity in time and connectedness with others and nature through motherhood, has led to the construction of patriarchal social and political institutions in an attempt by men to overcome this fundamental alienation.

Most women in this study, however, used the language of emotions and social relationship rather than biology to express their connectedness with their children, but the parallels between the biological mother-child relationship and the social psychological connectedness of self and other which women described were quite striking. The way in which perceptions of biology can symbolically express and heighten social relationships occurred to me during a very moving interview with an alone mother who herself had been adopted as a child and who had therefore experienced a disjuncture between biological relationship and the social psychological attachment that this relationship can signify. Della wept as she explained why having a child was so important to her:

Looking at my history, one of the things that's important to me ... I just always thought it was very important to continue my line, you know. Without having a child myself, I wouldn't be able to do that. There is no heritage of the Della line, you know what I mean. So that's always been very important to me. I have a brother somewhere, a natural brother, but I don't know him. And although I never knew them very well, my [natural] parents were always important to me. And the sense of family was always very important to me and without having a child of my own, even if it was an adopted child, it wouldn't be a child of my own, having experienced birth of them and that whole.... It wouldn't be the same. (Della: Childcare/Social Worker)

Whereas having children may have provided many women with a sense of enduring connectedness, other rewards of children were seen as temporary:

I love the way he makes me look at the world all over again - with fresh eyes.... And I love the hugs and the kisses that are so unquestioned at this stage. I know it's going to change soon enough, but I really love that. (Mary Lynn: Policy analyst)

About a third of middle-class women talked about how, through their children, they briefly re-entered a child's universe of sensual experience and recaptured a childlike joy for life:

[One of the best things about having children is that] I think it makes me live and enjoy the moment.... I think children make you stop and you rediscover the world again, not just through their eyes, but through your [own] eyes as a child. And also they have such enthusiasm for living that it brings back the joy and the optimism. (Rachael: Teacher)

Children can revitalize adult life:

I think the laughter [is one of the best things about having a child]. I think I have laughed more in the last year in a half than I've laughed in my life, or in my adult life.... And it slowed me down. It really slowed me down and made me observant. I think you stop and smell the flowers. You notice details that you probably missed for years and would have gone on the rest of your life not observing. (Anna: Counsellor)

A third (33 percent) of middle-class women with partners also talked about the strengthening of existing social bonds as one of the best things about having children. For some (15 percent) it was the increased bond with their partners.<sup>5</sup> For others, it included feelings of being a family:

[The best things are] I like what it's done to us, I mean to our family unit. I mean I would never have called us a family before. There is really something quite pleasurable about it all. (Marie: Consultant)

### **"It's the Way She Makes Me Feel": Working-Class Women and the Best Things About Having a Child**

Working-class women also felt that the best things about having children were teaching them or watching them learn and grow (64 percent), and the connectedness they felt with

them (54 percent). Responses are summarized in Table 7.1.

However, there were some subtle differences in how working- and middle-class women talked about the rewards of children. About a third of working-class women with partners, for example, emphasised that helping their children learn and grow gave them a feeling of having an impact or influence on life which they found very rewarding. For about a third of these, it meant the chance to give their children a better life than they had themselves:

[The best things about children?] I don't know where to start.... I don't know how to answer. I guess by loving and teaching them... you have a little bit of control... of maybe making them better than what you are. It makes me feel good to be able to produce a baby. I really feel really proud of myself, you know. I am just really so happy. She makes me happy. (Marg: Accounting Clerk)

And for Lisa, teaching her daughter meant not repeating the mistakes of her own life:

[The best things are ] when she's taking a nap (laugh). Somebody where you can teach them the things you know. I don't want her making the same mistakes I made.... And yesterday we were laughing. Some of the things she does, it's just hilarious.... It's just fun watching them. (Lisa: Data Entry Clerk)

Also, working-class women's descriptions of the social support they got from connectedness with children were often more immediate than the sort of 'existential' grounding 'in the world' which middle-class women talked about:

[The best things are that] Jessica means everything to me. She sticks up for you, you know. Kids, they stick up for you no matter what you do or what you say. Well, you get to watch them grow up. You teach them what you know, what you've learned. It's nice to see them grow up. (Renee: Truck Driver)

On the whole, working-class women were somewhat less likely than middle-class women to mention the pleasure or fun of daily interaction with children (43 percent against 52 percent), and only 11 percent mentioned that sense of rediscovering the world through children's eyes that middle-class women (35 percent) talked about.

More than other women, alone mothers, and especially alone working-class mothers, singled out love and connectedness as the central rewards of having children. They pointed, for example, to the fusing of self and other in motherhood, and the indestructible nature of their bond with their children:

[The best things are] watching them, you know what I mean?; knowing that they are part of you; watching them learn, watching them grow - everything. I mean, knowing that they are yours. Nothing can change it. You're their mom, you know what I mean. A mom, a mom, you know. (Helen: Waitress)

For Mara also, the best things about having a child were the unique feelings she had for her daughter. It was the central and irreplaceable relationship of her life, she explained, not simply because she no longer loved her ex-husband, but because women love children differently and more than they could ever love a man, she said:

[The best things,] I think they are more selfish than anything. It's the way she makes me feel.... She makes me feel so happy and so needed and ... I love watching everything she does. I love listening to her, watching every achievement... I just feel so proud. (Clerical)

Mara felt that she had discovered the true meaning of love and had social support for her view that a husband could never be a substitute for a child. Although she lacked the former, his

absence was relatively unimportant compared to what she had:

And this friend of mine.... Her and I always talk about it. Doesn't matter how much you love your husband or anybody, your child you love more. She said she loved Ken [her husband] with all her heart, but when she had Anne, her first [child] she realized she didn't love him as much as she could actually love somebody. Like she would always love Anne more. She wouldn't care, it wouldn't bother her...if Ken walked out the door. It would hurt her and everything, but as long as she had her kids, that's it. And it's the same with me. Didn't matter if everybody walked out of my life, as long as I had her. (Mara: Clerical)

The giving and receiving of love has traditionally been seen as a distinctly feminine characteristic. I suggested earlier that children seemed to provide young working-class women with access to sources of self-esteem and positive feelings about themselves from which they may have been excluded by the class and gendered structures of our society. Although I have argued that alone working-class women's commitment to motherhood was re-enforced by the self-esteem they came to experience through motherhood, I am not arguing that maternal commitment in general arose because women felt defective or lacked self-esteem before they had children. Rather, becoming a mother transformed women in ways they valued and allowed them to realise, at least in their private worlds, the traditional female values of love, care and connectedness with others. So becoming a mother was not experienced as rewarding simply because one filled a positive role, but because one became a positively valued self within a female value system. Children allowed women to claim the sort of selves they really valued, and 'saved' them from becoming other

selves. Motherhood is about how women feel about themselves, expressed in terms of feelings for children:

[The best things about having a child are the] laughter, love, affection and warmth. And it slowed me down.... I think you stop and smell the flowers.... I've had to readjust my value system - what's important to me.... Having a child is so wonderful. I was becoming a very tight, rigid, single person with fixed opinions. And he has forced me to be flexible, or return to that. He has made me so much softer than I was becoming. And more open... and vulnerable, but I would prefer that to becoming the tough person I had been becoming. There is so much love in my life right now. I had him for love, and I just have so much affection in my life. So much warmth and affection. (Anna: Teaching Master)

In the case of alone working-class mothers, achieving a 'valued self' within a female value system that 'puts children first' was perhaps the major source of self-value available:

If that question asked 'what is the most important things in you life', working would never be, not even close. I would give up anything - just as long as I had [her]. I wouldn't care about anything else.... It's the way she makes me feel. She makes me feel so happy and so needed... I love watching everything she does... every achievement. It doesn't matter if she goes from counting from 10 to 11. I just feel so proud. (Lisa: Clerical)

Thus in talking about their children, women are making claims as to their own identities. It is also important to note, however, that even if women realize traditional female ideals in the private sphere of intimate relations,<sup>6</sup> women do not necessarily effect any transformation or feminization of the world around them. To the contrary, women frequently find themselves in the position of mediating and absorbing contradictions in the structural conflict between the different value systems within which they operated, for example, the conflict between caring for others and the social organization

of paid work in our society. Indeed, women's maternity led some middle-class women to withdraw from pursuing 'female values' in other areas of their lives, whether in female friendships, volunteer work or feminist activities from which women had withdrawn in order to care for their children:

[Becoming a mother changed me] in terms of my activities, yeah. I used to do a lot of work for feminist causes and I don't do that anymore.... [If I didn't have a child] it would be totally different workwise, political activities. I would be very involved in different issues. (Marie: Consultant)

As Beth put it:

[Having children] has changed the structure of my life in terms of how I spend my time.... having children has gotten in the way of friendships. (Beth: Executive)

### **The Worst Things About Having Children: Middle-Class Women**

In talking about the disadvantages of having children, women's focus began to shift from their inner experience to the outer, practical realities of motherhood (Table 7.2). The worst things about having children, according to middle-class women, had to do with the work and practical demands of childcare (52 percent) and problems of time (52 percent). Twenty-nine percent of middle-class women talked explicitly about sleep deprivation echoing the women in Hochschild's (1989) study who 'talked about sleep the way hungry people talk about food'. Some women talked about constantly feeling rushed; and, for about a quarter of middle-class women, the sense of "not having any time for myself" was among the worst things about having children:

The worst things? One of the big ones, I guess, is the time commitment. I feel like we've absolutely no time to do anything either together, which is probably a little bit arguing [against my point] because we tend not to go out too much together without the children. Because we both work... we feel that we want to be with the children when we have a free moment. And the other thing is just time for yourself. Even little trivial things... [like] you have a shower in the morning and you race out of that. Once in a while [you would like time] to file your nails - you just don't have any time for your self. (Jill: Manager)

About a third of middle-class women (35 percent) spoke of the changed pattern of their lives as unwelcome; freedom and spontaneity had been replaced by a constant need for planning, scheduling and organising. And about a third of those with partners (30 percent) felt that their marital relationships had suffered - often, they said, because they hadn't enough "time for each other".

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**TABLE 7.2**

**THE DISADVANTAGES OF MOTHERHOOD**

Percentage of mothers who mentioned specific responses by social class

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	M.CLASS	W.CLASS
1. No "worst things"/ difficulty articulating any disadvantages of motherhood	3%	25%
2. The work or practical demands involved	52%	29%
3. Problems of time/time-pressures	52%	18%
4. Feelings of responsibility/concerns about one's parenting behaviour	45%	46%
5. Changed pattern of life/ constant need for planning and scheduling	35%	43%

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N: 59 unprompted responses to open-ended question

\* Respondent's mentioned more than one response

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Research findings support women's accounts. Mothers in full-time employment do indeed have greater demands on their

time than other sections of the population. Michelson (1985) reported that in the Toronto families he studied, women who were employed full-time worked (paid and unpaid) about an hour more than their partners on each workday; and Hochschild (1989) estimated that women work 15 hours more than men each week; they also get less sleep.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, La Rossa and La Rossa (1981) argue that conflict over time as a scarce resource is central to the transition to parenthood a couple undergo after the birth of their first child. Conflict over time acquires this central role, they argue, because of our cultural expectations that children be provided with "constant coverage" form of care, but this responsibility is not socially shared. Thus, parents find themselves in a zero-sum game-like situation with each other. The heavy personal costs to both men and women in two-income families of the extra workload or "second shift" of the caring for children which is born primarily by women is vividly documented by Hochschild (1989). Many of the costs, Hochschild notes, are not recognised, even by those involved.

If feelings of connectedness were among the best things about having children, their flip side, feelings of responsibility, were often among the worst. "It can be very frightening", explained Mary, "to be so important to someone... such a big part of their world." Forty five percent of middle-class women talked about the potential for loss, anxiety or pain that came with feeling so close and responsible for

another:Ⓜ

[The worst things are] sleep deprivation, the time commitment...the responsibility that I feel for her; the love. I mean this phenomenal love. What happens if something ever happens to her. I mean - I'm catastrophizing - [but] the risk, the fear... (Marie: Consultant)

The specific forms that women's feelings of intense responsibility for their children take in our society, according to Backett (1982), flow from the assumptions held about the nature of children's needs. Cultural beliefs about children's emotional fragility, for example, imply that their psychological security is contingent on the constant availability of their mothers. Parental images of children's needs, Backett concludes, reproduce traditional gendered parenting behaviour. The anxiety of maternal responsibility can be exacerbated where mothers feel that their behaviour is determining for their children, but at the same time believe, as many middle-class women in this study did, that they should not "try to mould" them. Beth, for example, came to feel that her own responses were the only thing she really controlled as a parent:

[For me the worst thing is] worrying - anxiety, I guess, about the responsibility. I think people of my generation and education tend to over-rate - I think we focus too much on our kids and the techniques and how we are going to raise them, you know,... I focus on them and worry about doing the right thing. I don't worry about them, I mean, they can sort of do what they want... and who knows what they are going to grow up like; But I worry about what I'm doing and what I'm saying a lot. (Beth: Executive)

### The Worst Things About Having Children: Working-Class Women

Working-class women seemed to perceive fewer costs to having children than middle-class women did. What they identified as the disadvantages of having children were also different.

Twenty-five percent of working class mothers said that, for them, there were no 'worst things' about having children. Even when I probed, talking instead about disadvantages or costs, many working-class women indicated that they could not speak negatively about the experience of motherhood. However, what they described as things that didn't 'even bother' them was often suggestive:

[For me] I don't think there are any [worst things] about having a child. I can't even think of anything. I haven't had any bad experiences yet. I don't even care if I don't sleep at night, I'll get up. (Marg: Accounting Clerk)

So, although working-class women also had their sleep disrupted and caring for young children was also demanding, they did not readily label such events as negative or personally costly. The demands of children were more taken for granted; but they were not necessarily easier or less frustrating:

[For me,] I don't think there are any disadvantages, [there are] just rough days.... It's hard working and then coming home, especially after you've had a hard day, and having to deal with this little person tugging on your leg, saying, "I want it". Some days are fine, some days are [not].... You always feel bad after, you know, if you yell at them and you shouldn't have. Like, "Why did I do that?" That's the hardest. (Ramona: Bookkeeping Clerk)

Only 29 percent of working-class women identified the demands or work involved as one of the main disadvantages of having children; and for half of these it was lack of sleep not the extra work that was seen as the problem.

Women's evaluation of the demands of having children must be distinguished from their responses of satisfaction or frustration with this work (Boulton 1983). One response is immediate, the other reflective. How women reflectively evaluate the work of childcare depends on the social context and women's expectations. Stack (1974), for example, showed that, among the poor black families she studied, the high public and private value of children, combined with children's perceived role of bringing joy to life, meant that the work of mothering wasn't seen simply as a responsibility, but as a cherished and much sought-after right and source of value.

Unlike middle-class women, only a minority of working-class women (18 percent) talked about problems of 'time' as a major disadvantage of having children. More puzzling, however, was that all of the alone middle-class mothers, but only 9 percent of the alone working-class mothers mentioned problems of time as a major cost of children. The difference might, perhaps, be explained by the fact that alone working-class mothers got more "help" with their children from their families (See Chapter 8). Or it may have been that, as several alone working-class mothers mentioned, they now felt more control over their time and their lives than they had when they lived

with partners:

[The advantages of being an alone mother are] not picking up after the husband; not worrying about whether his shirts are pressed; what are we going to eat for supper tonight; being able - I guess I've got a lot of freedom.  
(Cora: Wordprocessor)

Similarly for Helen, a mother of two:

[The advantages of being an alone parent are] you do what you want to do.... You don't have to answer to [anyone]... If you don't feel like doing the laundry or cleaning the bathroom, [you don't].... It's not quite as pressurised because if you come home and you're tired and you don't feel like cleaning up this or that tonight, O.K., fine, you don't... now, it's [just] me and my kids.  
(Helen: Waitress)

Many working-class women (43 percent) also talked about restrictions and lack of "freedom" as being among the worst things about having children. However, "freedom", I want to emphasise, did not refer to personal freedom. For working-class women lack of "freedom" meant not being able to take a job that paid well, but involved overtime, for example. They talked about the difficulty of juggling work and family schedules, and of the constant need to plan as being a problem of "freedom". Only 18 percent mentioned restrictions on 'going out' or on their social life as major disadvantages of having children.

Although few said that financial costs were among the greatest disadvantages of having children, money was obviously a concern. Fifty five percent of alone working-class mothers and 41 percent of those with partners said that, if they were doing things over again, they would wait to have children until they were better off financially.

**"I Hate it when I Yell at Her"**

Among the worst things of having children, about a third of working-class women (36 percent) and almost half (46 percent) of the alone working-class mothers told me, were concerns about their own behaviour as parents, in particular the problems of discipline and responding to undesirable behaviour in their children. The problem was not just one of guiding a child's behaviour, but it was one of feeling all right about one's own. Sue, for example, explained how she felt bad when she "yelled at her kids":

[The worst things are that] I get scared sometimes [that] something is going to happen to one of them... and wondering if you are giving them the right direction. I get very hyper and I might yell at them, and they might go to bed and I think, "oh God, why did I yell at them?".... You wonder what kind of impact you are having on your kids as they are growing up. (Sue: Legal Secretary)

That working-class women talked about "yelling" at their children while middle-class women did not is noteworthy. It may be that working-class women suffer greater stress, perhaps, and lose their tempers more often? Alternatively, working-class women's concern with discipline may be seen as paralleling middle-class women's concerns about responsibility. Both were worried about their performance as parents. Both saw their children as being affected by their parenting, but looked to different evidence as to how they were doing as parents. As Kohn (1977) and Bernstein (1971) point out, parents socialize children in class specific ways. Middle-class parents' childrearing strategies, they argue, reflect a greater concern

with their children's motivations and thus parents use more psychological methods of socialization. Working-class parents, on the other hand, are more concerned with behaviour and use more direct means to ensure obedience.<sup>10</sup> Thus working-class women feel that to be good parents to their children, and keep them 'out of trouble', they must discipline them (Rubin 1976). For women in this study this sometimes meant yelling. But this was also a way of responding to their children which made them feel bad.<sup>11</sup> Middle-class women, on the other hand, spoke less about behaviour perhaps because for them the 'real' consequences of parenting were seen in more psychological terms. And so they worried:

[One of the worst things about having children is] you have to [always] be conscious of them. [It's] that ongoing responsibility - you can never forget their vulnerability. (Kim: Librarian)

Anxiety about responding to children seemed greatest among women who, like Helen, were alone mothers and lacked social support for their parenting:

For me [the worst things,] it's like knowing how to handle situations that come up.... And now, just lately, my daughter took something that didn't belong to her.... I didn't have anyone to discuss it with, you know... the discipline. Also, the way the situation is, you know. With me, they want to get away with everything. With their father they don't....I feel bad if I'm constantly "no, no, no; "you can't, you can't, you can't". So maybe you give a little bit more than you should give. (Helen: Waitress/Cashier)

And so, for almost half the alone working-class mothers in this study it was not the work and the time constraints that were the worst things about having children, but the problem of

discipline and their own behaviour as parents.

### **The Neglected Variable: The Child**

Although it is seldom emphasised in the sociological literature on motherhood, I quickly learned that women did not experience their own children as passive objects of their maternal care. They saw them as having strong individual personalities and moods which shaped women's everyday lives as mothers. Some babies I learned were "easy", which usually meant they slept well, and more importantly, they slept continuously through the night. Some babies fit relatively harmoniously with their mothers' lives; others decidedly did not. Jill's baby did:

[So far] there haven't been any [worst things]. Well, the obligations - he is tiring; and [there's] much less freedom. That's about it. It hasn't been that bad. Prior to going back to work I went away for a week [with my baby]. He's really not that constraining. So far he is quite portable. (Jill: Researcher Advisor)

Katherine also recognised her baby as a 'good baby'.

[The worst thing about having a child was] actually, the first week [at home after the birth]. That's about it... because she's a really good baby, from what I hear [about other babies]. She slept through the night when she was two months old. She's a really happy baby, she's always smiling.

At the same time, however, she suspected that other women's difficulties were caused by their own behaviour:

It's funny, like, you know, sometimes people say, oh you know, "the kid won't stop crying". They lose their patience real quick. And I can't even relate to that. Like, I think, "how can you?" Nothing she does bothers me. I don't get upset. (Katherine: Service Clerk)

La Rossa and La Rossa (1981) show how women are more likely than men to perceive their infants as interpersonally competent and to interact and communicate with them accordingly. Fathers, they report, are more likely to act toward their infants as things, and do not feel they need full attention when they are with them. This difference, they conclude, leads not only to different parenting behaviour, but leads men and women to value parenting differently.

Irrespective of their perceptions of their children's individual personalities, working-class women were less likely than middle-class women to see children as disruptive of their lives, or to see such disruptions as problematic. Middle-class women were more likely to talk about the ways in which children resisted the order they attempted to impose on their lives, but at the same time emphasized the importance of the child's psychological separateness or integrity from the mother.

Children's individual personalities also came to affect women's daily experience of motherhood in an indirect way. Children's behaviour, for example, could be seen as reflections of their mothers' behaviour. Tess explained that for her the worst things about having a child were not just the feelings of having lost control of her time, but also the way others judged her by her son's very demanding behaviour. This was worse than the exhausting work:

[The worst thing about having a child] I think it's the lack of control over your own time...even the very simple things in life [can become problematic]. I think that the lack of control, and the lack of understanding by

other people of what you are going through.... [Most people] would think to themselves..."oh, but of course, the child is just spoiled. Put on their shoes. They are going to wear two shoes, and that's the way it's going to be.... After all... we should be able to control them." But I think it's because, fundamentally, we are not destined to be able to control them [children].

Tess felt her identity was being evaluated by others on the basis of events which she, Tess, did not control:

But I find it very frustrating because people think whoever he is and whatever he does, it's because of something I'm doing, and in essence, I can't control what he does most of the time. I can only keep him from harm, or try to get some food down and try to make sure he gets some sleep. So, if he is screaming, it's not because of something I'm doing. Like I'm a victim, and you're looking at me like it's my fault. I can't control who he is.... [Non-parents] will assume there is something I could do about it, and assume that... I'm not doing anything about it because I'm basically oppressed and I want to do it this way; like I don't realize how oppressed I am, and if I wanted to, I could do it differently. (Tess: Snr.Policy Advisor).

Tess felt herself caught between alternative principles of organization: the rational world of adults around her, especially at work; and the non-rational world of her son.

Women, Ferree (1987) points out, typically find themselves trapped in such contradictions. The organization of capitalist production which is oriented to the production of market value, she argues, is in conflict with the organization of family work, which is oriented towards meeting the needs of those we care about. These contradictions, she stresses, produce the ambivalence that women have about combining work and family. Thus, women's responses to the work of looking after children are tied to factors that extend far beyond the home.

### Responses to Family Work

To understand women's everyday lives as mothers I asked them how they felt about the daily activities of looking after children. Their replies were difficult to summarise (Table 7.3). If, following Boulton (1983), one separates women's immediate responses to the tasks involved from the deeper sense of meaning or purpose women may find in looking after their children, then it appears most women do not find childcare tasks primarily enjoyable (Boulton, 1983).<sup>13</sup> Only 30 percent of women in this study said they mainly got a lot of pleasure or enjoyment from the routine tasks of looking after their children. Ten percent said, with some qualification, that they found childcare routines primarily frustrating, and 42 percent said that their responses mainly varied between frustration and enjoyment. Working-class women were somewhat more likely than middle-class women to say that they found looking after their children primarily enjoyable (38 percent as against 26 percent) but the most common response, which I will discuss shortly, was to describe immediate responses to childcare tasks as 'situationally contingent'.

First, however, it is important to stress how difficult it is to conceptualize the nature of family work such as looking after children. Early feminist studies of family work, for example, tended to adopt theoretical frameworks borrowed from the world of paid work to understand women's work in the home. While such approaches have been effective in revealing

the hitherto neglected amounts of real work involved in unpaid family labour, they leave the impression that the true meaning of family work is primarily that of an unpaid burden for women. This is a mistake. To treat family work as similar to paid work, and as a burden for which there is no economic recompense, misrepresents large parts of the reality of women's experience of what they do for their children, and the significance of these activities for them (Devault, 1987; Ferree, 1987; Boulton, 1983). Because it is associated with love and embedded in family relations, the meaning of family work for the women who perform it is both complex and contradictory (Thompson and Walker, 1989).

Women frequently do not find the actual tasks of family work enjoyable or fulfilling. At the same time, however, most, though certainly not all, women get rewards from family work because, through it, they are meeting the needs of those for whom they care (Devault, 1987; Boulton, 1983; Ferree, 1987). Family work is experienced as part of a caring relationship; as part of being a parent, and not simply as 'work' (Devault, 1987). So women's immediate responses to childcare tasks, be they irritation or enjoyment, must be conceptually separated from the broader significance that performing those tasks for their children carries. Women can both value and resent family work (Thompson and Walker, 1989).

The word 'contingent' seems to best describe the 'immediate' responses women had to the routine childcare tasks

they performed for their children. It all "depended", they explained. It depended on factors internal and external to that work. Studies of women who combine paid work and motherhood emphasise the role conflict, the chronic fatigue and lack of time that these women experience. But as Baruch, Biener and Barnett (1987) note, there is a frequent assumption that the stresses in women's lives come from their 'external' employment. Family work itself can be inherently stressful and the life of stay-at-home mothers very distressing (Oakley, 1974; Boulton, 1983) and, rather than leading to higher levels of maturation, full-time mothering can occasion depressed self-worth, if not personality deterioration (Rossi; 1980: 397). Family work is a mode of work with its own logic and organization (Ferree, 1987). It carries both its own internal sources of pleasure and frustration (Oakley, 1974; Boulton, 1983). Children can, for example, undermine women's attempts to keep a home tidy or turn mealtime into a battleground. Similarly, being constantly responsive to the needs of others may threaten women's sense of psychological integrity (Oakley, 1980; Mandel, 1989).

Thus, as feminists point out, many of women's frustrations with family work are produced by its social organization; others are inherent in caring for young children, although, of course, our perceptions of appropriate care for children are also culturally shaped. The difficulties of family work, however, are exacerbated when this work is

interpreted by the standards and values of a market place economy which degrades its logic and meaning.

Mothers in this study experienced some tasks as inherently more enjoyable or frustrating than others.<sup>13</sup> Bath times, or time spent with children after supper, for example, were enjoyed by many mothers, but meal times were often very frustrating. Similarly, women mentioned that children's behaviour shaped how they experienced family work. An irritated or overtired child, for example, could make manageable tasks frustrating:

Sometimes I get irritated when I come home from work.... Some days, I'm really irritated and some days I'm all right. I guess it depends on how my oldest [two children] get on when they come from daycare. If they start screaming right away, then my night is ruined. It's their mood, not mine [that counts]. (Karen: Drycleaner's Shipping Clerk)

External factors, in particular paid work, frequently interacted with internal factors to make family work more or less enjoyable. Paid work, for example, imposed industrial time constraints of which children were delightfully oblivious and, on occasions, downright subversive:

Everyday is different.... Some mornings he is cooperative, he wants to get up. Other days we clearly operate on different clocks.... Often there are trials and tribulations around getting organised, or he'll get dressed O.K., but then he won't put his coat on, or he won't put his shoes on, or... he wants to go into his room to find something to bring with him.... So you never know. It can take anywhere between 5 minutes to an hour to get him out of the house.... [How I feel] depends on where I am at that day - if I'm not pressured [it's not too bad]. (Nina: Director)

Thus for women, it was often the combination of

irreconcilable demands, not the particular task, nor the fact of having outside employment, that produced frustration and irritation.<sup>14</sup> For others, the feeling that a partner was unwilling to "help" heightened the frustrations of trying to do incompatible tasks at once:<sup>15</sup>

[I get a lot of pleasure from looking after my children.]  
The only one [task] I find really frustrating is trying to cook supper when you have two children running around. A lot of time [I'm on my own] ... even if my husband is home he won't be with the children anyways. (Sally: Telephone Operator)

So, women typically said that how they responded to family work "depended". It depended on the task, their children's moods, whether they felt rushed for time, and less frequently, whether they had support from their partner and the sort of day they had had at work.

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**TABLE 7.3**  
**RESPONSES TO THE DAILY WORK OF MOTHERHOOD**  
Women's responses to the daily tasks of caring for children

	m. class	w. class
Contingent on task, child, time available or her day at work etc.	42%	43%
Mainly enjoy it a lot	26%	36%
Mainly frustration	3%	18%
Neutral	13%	3%
Other	16%	0%
N:	31	28

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Without intending to understate the serious difficulties 'working-mothers' experienced, it appears that women's involvement in multiple roles may have had some quite positive effects for mothers. Women who work outside the home tend to experience greater self-esteem, more control over their

time, increased family power and marital satisfaction and, not unexpectedly, increased dissatisfaction with the traditional division of family work (Eichler; 1983:188). Having outside work may have helped make childcare tasks less, not more frustrating for mothers. It can even enhance women's personal fulfillment in mothering (Wearing; 1984:136). Over half of Boulton's (1983) sample of stay home or part-time employed mothers reported finding childcare to be a predominantly irritating task, but only 10 percent of employed mothers in this study did. For many women, childcare tasks, especially evening routines, provided much of the contact time they had with their children on weekdays, and women valued this contact. Fran, for example, explained how working outside the home reduced her irritation with her children:

Nowadays it's all right.... I [used to] get irritated by about eight at night... the little one has been getting up a lot at night... and that's when I get irritated.... Otherwise I don't get [irritated] anymore because [now that I'm working full-time,] that's the only time I spend with them. (Fran: Lawyer)

Thus, having paid work superimposed a legitimate structure on women's day which limited the seemingly boundaryless demands of motherhood, thereby reducing this costly dimension of the role.

### **Alternative Identities: Childless Women and Stay-at-Home Mothers**

Women were asked about their immediate responses to two alternative images of women's lives: the woman who had a full-time job or career but no children, and the stay-at-home

mother. These images provides women with imaginary 'counter-selves' which functioned as reference points women used to make sense of their own situation as 'working-mothers'. Their responses show us how women saw children not only shaping who they were, but also who they were not and the lives they had forgone by becoming 'working-mothers'.

Both working- and middle-class women held surprisingly clear impressions of the lives of women who had jobs or career, but no children. These women were generally seen as materially advantaged but psychologically disadvantaged. For middle-class women, for example, the lives of these women were perceived as more "glamorous" than their own (63 percent), as the 'good life', of leisure, eating out, and travel. And working-class women (68 percent) typically perceived such women as having "easier" lives; better jobs, more money, a better social life, able to buy and do what they wanted and just "free to pick up and go". Indeed, from women's perspective, maternal status appeared to determine women's material lives much more than social class.

Overall the materially advantaged situation of childless women was not seen as preferable by the majority of women. Sixty-five percent of middle-class women said they felt relatively lucky compared to such women but 70 percent of this 65 percent also felt somewhat envious. Similarly, 64 percent of working-class women said they felt relatively lucky, but 56 percent of this 64 percent also felt some envy. None of the

middle-class women and 18 percent of the working-class women described themselves as primarily envious. Women who had children were seen as gaining psychological and non-material advantages over those who did not (52 percent of middle-class and 56 percent of working-class women). Laura explained:

[When I see other women of my age who have full-time jobs or careers but no children] I guess it makes me remember when I had more time on my hands and not as much responsibility. But that doesn't make me feel I'd like to return there.... I really feel that where I am now is better than where I was, so I have to watch I'm not condescending.... I imagine they have more free time, more money to do travelling and stuff with, but I don't think they are happier. I see myself as being happier. I see them as still searching. (Laura: Accountant)

Women perceived their lives and identities as mothers to be determiningly distinct from those of childless women:

No [I have no response when I see women who have full-time jobs or career, but no children, but], I can usually pick them out though, so I guess there is a response.... Most mothers usually look like mothers.... You can tell that they [these other women] usually spend a lot of time on themselves... because they look like they've never had to lift a finger in their lives. They have probably chosen career over family, that's all. I've nothing against it. [Their lives are] probably lonely. (Cora: Wordprocessor)

It was clear, however, that although women found much of the imagery of the childless lifestyle attractive, it did not appear to be deeply subversive of women's role commitment as mothers. Several middle-class women pointed out that they had "had all that", but had given it up to have children, and working-class women felt that they had foregone the possibility of attaining material advantage by having children. The heavy investment of having relinquished the "glamorous" or "easy"

life functioned to reinforce rather than threaten commitment to motherhood. At the same time, the options women compared seemed essentially non-convertible, making direct comparison difficult:

Only occasionally do I feel envious -but not really, I don't feel envy and I don't want to trade lifestyles at all. I'm not in the least bit envious. But occasionally I think, well.... But I also sort of... wonder about them too. I wonder if they have chosen their lives? If they are happy? In some cases I know they are happy, but they are not always [happy]. I also feel I don't have as much in common with them.... Somehow, having a child means that I am in a different life-experience from [them]. (Joanne: Teacher)

However, because women saw motherhood as so determining of their lives, and the material rewards of non-motherhood as so concrete, women's commitment to motherhood also required on-going ideological work to reduce the potential for cognitive dissonance. Central to this process was the way in which women 'reminded' themselves of the sort of persons they really were, their claimed characters and identities. As Sally put it, she was not "that type of person":

Well, I just feel that they have a bigger financial bucket to dip into, and are able to do whatever they want to do and go on trips or buy material things. It doesn't bother me too much because I'm [not] that type of person, but some other people might be more envious.... I feel that what I have is more than having material things. So I'm not envious of that because to me it's not important. (Sally: Telephone Operator)

In spite of women's heavy investment in motherhood and the fact that it is an almost irrevocable status transformation, there is also a sense in which the potential for ambivalence is endemic to motherhood, although not

subversive of commitment. Because women experienced motherhood as so determining in shaping their lives and their identities, childless 'career-women' symbolized the potential selves women never were. Earlier chapters showed how women valued the selves that they had become through motherhood; however, for women, becoming a mother meant not-becoming the persons she could have been:

I'm aware that I'm different from them [women who have full time jobs or careers but who don't have children]. ...It's like looking at myself a few years ago.... If I think they will never have children, ah,... they will miss something, but they will have an opportunity to do things that I won't have. I don't know. It's a funny feeling.... Either they will take a road, either the same road I took or they will be pursuing the road I didn't take. (Ellen: Typesetter)

A traditional image of womanhood also helped to locate women's experience of motherhood - the domestic ideal. Again, on one level, this image held a powerful appeal for women, but on another it was a clearly negative image.

Sixty five percent of middle-class women said they felt relatively lucky compared to women who stayed home, though 39 percent also felt some envy, primarily with respect to the time these women were believed to spend with their children. None described herself as overall envious. Middle-class women tended to see the image, but not the reality of domesticity as attractive. Kim explained how, in spite of the fact that she would have liked more time with her child, she felt fortunate to be working:

It's a bit of a double edged sword.... I feel envious in the sense that there is some time they are spending with

their children...the quality of [that] time might be questioned, however. On the other hand, I feel fortunate that I have a life of my own - sometimes just getting out and having your own job and group of friends is very important for a woman's self-image. (Kim: Librarian)

Most middle-class women held quite negative images of those who stayed home full-time, and of their own lives, were they to stay home. Indeed, 52 percent felt sorry for stay-at-home-mothers or indicated that staying at home was psychologically harmful to women. Many others expressed concern as to whether it was these women's free choice, or said they had 'a problem' with women deciding to stay home. For a minority of middle-class women it was seen as almost heroic, but for the vast majority it was not seen as a desirable option for women like them. An alone middle-class mother explained how she felt relatively lucky:

Yeah. [When I see women who stay home full-time with their children] I want to help them. I would like to unburden them to some extent because I find, for the most part, women I see who stay home full time, usually they have more than one child, they look haggard... I want to take them out to lunch. I think I am lucky that I can balance the two. (Della: Social Worker/Childcare)

Working-class women were more likely than middle-class women to see the domestic ideal as attractive. Over a third of working-class women (36 percent) said that stay-at-home mothers were relatively lucky compared to them, or that they felt overall envious of them. But, like middle-class women, many (43 percent) working-class women held very negative images of the lives of stay-at-home mothers, or of their own lives were they to stay home. Women who stayed at home were seen as

being in danger - in danger of not getting financial or social recognition for their work, of letting their minds or bodies "go", of risking irritation, frustration and boredom. A married working-class mother of two pre-schoolers explained:

I think that [staying home] they have a harder job than I do because they don't have as many breaks and don't always have the prestige or appreciation. They are probably doing the most important job in the world and yet people look down on it. I feel sorry [for them] because they are not gaining anything financially, because they are investing themselves in their children... I feel sorry they don't get paid and people don't really look up to them... I feel lucky because I'm able to have two worlds. They only have one, but I have two worlds, plus the financial benefits. (Sally: Telephone Operator)

Within the working-class sample, however, there was a division on the ideal of domesticity between those with and without partners. Almost half of those with partners (47 percent) said that they envied at-home mothers, but only 18 percent of alone mothers did, and they were also less sure about seeing at-home mothers as relatively lucky. However, working for pay is increasingly becoming part of what a 'good' working-class mother does for her children (Wearing, 1984). In contrast, work is often seen as something middle-class women do for themselves, which weakens their bargaining power in negotiating the division of family work (Ferree, 1984, 1987).

### **Making Sense of Women's Lives: An Outsider's Perspective**

Two images emerge from women's description of their everyday lives as 'working-mothers'. The first was an image of the work, the endless need for organising and scheduling, and

the stretching of resources to make the demands of work and family fit in a world that appears to be organised as though these demands were taken care of by separate individuals. The other image was that of women whose lives were indeed objectively difficult, but who derived satisfaction and self-esteem from the fact that they were combining work and motherhood in their lives. Similarly, Mandel (1989: 40) reports that the full-time employed mothers she interviewed "exude independence, confidence and autonomy". Like women in this study, her sample of women were described as having "developed a perspective on their lives that allows them to assess their choices as worthwhile" (1989:41).

For the majority of women, combining work and motherhood involved very hard work and difficulties, but it also seemed to have provided them with a sense of personal competence that offset some of the distress one would expect to see in persons under the sort of objective pressures they experienced. Like women in the studies by Hochschild (1989) and Mandel (1989), women in this study talked repeatedly of the coping strategies and organizational patterns they had developed to make combining work and motherhood manageable. That women's experience of combining work and motherhood is socializing in a way that encourages high self-esteem and personal competence is supported by the results of the standardized tests of self-esteem and distress which were administered to respondents during the interviews.<sup>16</sup> However,

the results of these tests also indicate that alone mothers suffered high levels of distress (Table 7.8). Women's scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale as provided in Tables 7.4 and 7.5 below show that women's global self-esteem ratings were high, and higher than in Rosenberg's original study. Table 7.4 compares the distribution of self esteem scores from Rosenberg's study with the distribution of self-esteem scores from middle-class and working-class women in this study.

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**TABLE 7.4**  
**MOTHERS' SELF ESTEEM SCORES**

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Fig. a Distribution of self-esteem from Rosenberg's 1965 study

HIGH							LOW
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
17%	28%	25%	16%	8%	4%	1%	

Fig. b Middle-class mother's self-esteem scores

HIGH							LOW
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
52%	39%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
							N = 31

Fig. c Working-class mother's self-esteem scores

HIGH							LOW
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
54%	21%	7%	11%	7%	0%	0%	0%
							N = 28

---

Although we have seen in earlier chapters that women frequently presented themselves and their experiences of motherhood in class specific ways, Table 7.4 shows there was not a great difference between the self-esteem scores by social

class. This, as Rosenberg (1979; 288) points out, is consistent with results from other studies, but, as Rosenberg emphasizes, it does not mean that self-concepts do not differ by social class.

**TABLE 7.5**  
**MOTHERS' SELF-ESTEEM BY MARITAL STATUS**

Fig. a Mothers with partners' self-esteem scores

HIGH	1	2	3	4	5	6	LOW
0							
54%	32%	4%	7%	2%	0%		0%
							N = 44

Fig. b Alone mothers' self-esteem scores

HIGH	1	2	3	4	5	6	LOW
0							
47%	26%	20%	0%	7%	0%		0%
							N = 59

Similarly, there were only small differences in self-esteem scores by marital status (Table 7.5).

**TABLE 7.6**  
**WORKING-CLASS MOTHERS' SELF-ESTEEM BY MARITAL STATUS**

Fig. b Working-class women with partners self-esteem scores

HIGH	1	2	3	4	5	6	LOW
0							
65%	12%	0%	18%	6%	0%		0%
							N = 17

Fig. b Alone working-class mothers' self-esteem scores

HIGH	1	2	3	4	5	6	LOW
0							
36%	36%	18%	0%	9%	0%		0%
							N = 11

However, within the working class sample there was a greater difference in the self-esteem scores when compared by marital status (Table 7.6), which suggests that it was not simply having lesser social support from a partner that may have been related to lower self-esteem, but the combination of alone parenthood and the objective difficulties of being working-class. In the working-class sample scores varied by marital status. Similarly, there was only a small difference in self-esteem scores by marital status (Table 7.5). On the other hand, it is evident from the qualitative data that children provided important validation for alone mothers' senses of self-worth and no doubt helps explain why the self-esteem scores are relatively high. Because the sample size is small it is impossible to test for the statistical significance of these observed differences.

Boulton's (1983) review of the literature on depression among stay-at-home mothers of pre-schoolers pointed to class differences in depression rates. Reported rates of clinical depression among working-class mothers ranged as high as 42 percent and as low as 5 percent for middle-class women (Boulton, 1983:31). The CES-D scale used in this study may be better understood as a measure of emotional distress rather than clinical depression (Hsu and Marshall, 1987). And it shows that alone parenthood, rather than class, seems to have been associated with increased distress among women in this study. As Table 7.7 shows, working-and middle-class women

scored similarly on the CES-D scale.

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**TABLE 7.7**  
**MOTHERS' DISTRESS SCORES BY SOCIAL CLASS**

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	<u>CES-D Scores</u>	
	% of middle-class	% of working-class
None	74%	71%
Mild	10%	4%
Moderate	13%	11%
Severe	3%	14%
	N = 31	N = 28

---

The scores in Table 7.7 can be put in context by comparing them with scores from other community female populations using the same scale. Other studies of non-clinical female populations indicate that the general population of women that could be expected to have any emotional distress (scores of mild and over) was between 19.5 and 23.5 percent (Hsu and Marshall; 1987: 1562). So this population was not exceptional. However, the difference in the CES-D scores by marital status are quite noticeable (Table 7.8). Almost half the alone mothers in this sample (47 percent), but only 11 percent of the mothers with partners suffered moderate or severe levels of distress. Thus, although women who combine work and motherhood may indeed experience greater well-being than women who stay home to care for children (Kessler and McRae, 1982; Waldron, 1980), alone mothers in this study suffered far greater distress than those with partners.

**TABLE 7.8**  
**MOTHERS' DISTRESS SCORES BY MARITAL STATUS**

	<u>CES-D Scores</u>	
	Mothers with partners	Alone mothers
None	79%	53%
Mild	9%	0%
Moderate	7%	27%
Severe	4%	20%
	N = 44	N = 15

What should be borne in mind is that being part of a two income family offsets many of the financial uncertainties and difficulties historically associated with being working-class. However, alone mothers experience many of these uncertainties by virtue of being in a female-headed, one income household. Thus, for women, being an alone parent can lead to an experience of objective difficulties in the world in ways which were once typically working-class.

It is difficult to know how much of alone mothers' distress was a function of class (which for alone parents translates into low family income), alone parenthood, or the combination of both, because the numbers in this study are small. However, other studies, especially those of the effects of alone parenthood on children, suggest that negative effects are products of low income (Ontario Child Health Study, 1989) or the combination of poverty and lack of social support (Eicher, 1983:209), rather than alone parenthood per se.

### Summary

Although the costs of motherhood often tended to be more visible, women found watching their children learn and grow, their relationship with children and the feelings of connectedness with them deeply rewarding. Rather than seeing this connectedness as 'costing' a loss of self or denial of personal identity for the mother, we need to understand how the connectedness represented the extent to which women's sense of self, like all social identities, was generated and sustained through the social relationship of motherhood. Women's accounts also suggested the ways in which natural or biological relationships can be interpreted to symbolically express very special social relationships, and thus heighten feelings of social connectedness between self and others, in this case, mother and child.

There was less agreement among women on the costs of having children than on the rewards, although images held about 'career-women' suggest that women did perceive having children as synonymous with a decision to give up the glamorous" or "easy" life. Working-class women saw fewer costs to having children, and were less likely than middle-class women to see the work involved or time pressures as disadvantages of having children. They both talked equally often of their worries about how they parented, and found the greatly changed patterns of their lives to be a disadvantage of parenthood. Even if women love their children, they do not necessarily enjoy the

work of looking after them. Indeed, women's immediate responses to the work of childcare are best described as "situationally contingent".

Two images, that of stay-at-home mothers, and childless 'career-women', readily functioned as reference points by which women made sense of their everyday lives. While the majority of women saw their situation as 'working-mothers' as preferable to either of these options, these images conjured up powerful attractions for women, making some degree of maternal ambivalence endemic. Their responses show how women perceived children as determining who they were, but, also important, who they were not. Given the nature of women's personal investment in their children, however, such potential 'counter-selves' images were not deeply subversive of maternal commitment. Indeed, the high perceived cost of motherhood appeared to have reinforced commitment.

Finally, the image of women's everyday lives that emerges from this study is a dual one. On the one hand, there is an image of women's long hours of work, sleep loss, and the ongoing tasks of organizing, scheduling and managing. On the other, there is the image of women's joy in their children, their sense of personal competence and self-esteem which they experienced through combining work and children in their lives. However, both the qualitative data and the data on distress show that for some, in particular the alone working-class mothers, the costs of motherhood were high. And given that 25

percent of Canadian mothers can expect to be alone mothers at some point in their careers of caring for children (Moore, 1989), these costs will be widely experienced. Perhaps it is time to abandon the assumption that paid work is somehow 'optional' for women and that the difficulties women face are merely the 'costs' of their personal choices. Instead, the focus should be on why the cost of motherhood made so high?

The next chapter continues the theme that women's everyday lives as mothers can be analyzed as a form of adult socialization whereby women come to take on the qualities and characteristics required by the situations in which they find themselves. In particular, it explores how the daily division of domestic work in families produced, in women, a gendered experience of parenthood and a gendered interpretation of their own and their partners' identities.

## ENDNOTES

1. For an overview of some recent theoretical attempts to theorize the thorny nature of gender as a concept so as to avoid both the essentialism of cultural feminism and the over determinism of post structuralism see Alcoff, 1988. See also Gerson and Peiss, 1985.

2. Cahill's (1987) symbolic interactionist analysis of gender identity formation in early childhood argues the opposite. Same sexed parental identification, she argues, is the effect, not the cause of gender identity. Rather, she argues, sexually differentiated patterns of caregiver-infant interaction, in particular the use of sex-designated labels, are central to gender-identity formation. Children respond to themselves as significant others respond to them, and they learn to have their identity validated by behaving in ways that will elicit gender identity confirming responses from others and from themselves (Cahill, 1987).

3. I want to distinguish my use of 'connectedness' from the notion of bonding as used in 'bonding theory'. According to this approach, 'bonding' between mother and child is a natural and biologically based process which occurs at around the time of birth in a 'normal' mother, and forms the basis of her motivation to care for her child. Problems arise where the 'bonding' process has been impeded or prevented. This biologically based bond, it is suggested, may subsequently develop into a social bond between mother and child. Although the approach is associated with psychology rather than sociology, Alice Rossi (1977) published a challenging article to sociologists entitled "A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting" which argues that there are endocrinological and genetic factors in women which facilitate bonding. However, Boulton (1983) argues in her critique of bonding theory that women may feel motivated to look after young children in their care, but, one cannot assume, as bonding theory does, that if they love (have bonded) with their children, that they will find childcare enjoyable. 'Love', she notes, may be differently expressed, and may be intertwined with other emotions.

Arney (1980) argues that bonding theory is deeply methodologically flawed. Its widespread adoption, he argues, has been based on the political interests of those involved in the medical organization of childbirth and in childcare policy rather than on scientific evidence. Bonding theory, he argues, was adopted by medical interests to provide them with a scientific basis for responding to pressure from women's groups for changes in childbirth practices and the threat from 'the natural birth' movement. By appearing to reform medicalized

childbirth for 'scientific' rather than political reasons, medicine met some of women's demands but retained their authority as based in science. Arney argues: "By expanding the medical domain to include the social relations of parents and infants, medicine preserves institutionalized relationships between physicians and patients. Hospital practices are reformed to protect the interests they embody" (1980; 562). Indeed, he concludes that bonding theory is a modern day social-psychological-biological version of maternal instinct theory which supports the idea that mothers are the only proper attendants for young children. In the area of social policy, non-bonding between parent and infant has been proposed as the cause of major social ills and criminal activity. Thus women are ascribed the biological capacity for solving social problems, if only they would bond adequately with their children.

4. See endnote # 5, Chapter 5.

5. Most studies show that marital satisfaction between couples falls significantly after having children. See Cowan et. al, 1985.

6. In-depth interviews data allows one to learn about the identities women claim, but they provide less reliable data about day-to-day behaviour and the extent to which the ideals women expressed were realized in practice.

7. Interestingly, Pistrang (1981) found that mothers who stayed home full-time complained more often about lack of 'time for themselves' than did women who worked outside the home. The reason, Pistrang suggests, is that working mothers experience work as scheduled time away from the demands of their children (1981:111).

8. Ruddick (1984) explains how maternal responsibility may be a powerful and positive resource for women, but it can also be a burden and source of oppression. It depends, she points out, on whether maternal practices in a society reflect the interests of women and children, or whether they are shaped by social forces antagonistic to these interests. Similarly, Chodorow and Contratto (1982) point out, the excessive sense of maternal responsibility from which many women suffer is the flip side of the myth of maternal omnipotence: the belief that mothers, and only mothers, are all powerful and totally determining of the 'outcome' of their child. Our cultural perceptions of maternal responsibility, combined with low control and few objective resources for evaluating the outcome of one's actions can lead to maternal anxiety (Oakley, 1974; 1980).

9. There is some evidence to suggest that employed working-class women do indeed suffer from greater stress than their middle-class counterparts. A common feature of working-

class women's work is that it is often characterized by lack of control over the work environment, lack of opportunity for advancement and under-utilization of skill which are likely to be associated with greater stress (Mansfield; 1982: 7). Similarly, Waldon (1980: 444) points out that the benefits in well-being for women associated with having paid employment may disproportionately favour women of higher socio-economic status because of the difference in the sorts of jobs that they do.

10. Discipline practices are related to the occupational structure, explains Kohn (1977). And different socialization strategies prepare children for class related occupational positions that emphasise self-direction on the one hand, or obedience to authority on the other.

11. Rubin (1976) talks about the class-specific nature of parents' concern with disciplining children. Middle-class parents, she argues, have a sense of control in the world and believe that they can act to provide for their children's futures. For working-class parents, on the other hand, she argues, the future seems uncertain and less subject to control. For them, the concern is not which school their child will attend, but whether the child will finish school; it's not what occupation will the child choose when s/he grows up, but whether s/he will grow up without getting into trouble. Working-class parents feel that it is only by constant vigilance over their children's behaviour that they can gain some control and ensure their children's futures (Rubin; 1976: 85-86).

12. Boulton, for example, reported that over half of her sample of mothers of preschool children found childcare a profoundly irritating experience (1983: 58).

13. For a breakdown on what tasks women like most and least see Oakley (1974). Although the family work that men do does not seem to be as great a potential source of distress for them as family work is for women, this is partly explained by the fact that men and women do different family work under different conditions. When men and women perform the same family work under the same conditions, their responses are very similar (Baruch and Barnett, 1986a; Thompson and Walker, 1989).

14. Similar reports come from other studies of working mothers. Waldon's (1980) review of stress and employment among working mothers concluded that it is not simply the combining of paid work and family roles that leads to increased stress levels for women. Indeed, paid employment has been shown to have physical and mental health benefits for women (Waldon, 1980). However, certain combinations of family and work roles are associated with increased risk of stress and ill health for

women. For example, clerical workers with three or more children and married to a blue collar husband were found to suffer higher rates of CHD than other women (Waldon, 1980; Baruch, Biener and Barnett, 1987).

15. Baruch, Biener and Barnett (1987) point out that although many studies have shown employment to have positive mental health benefits for women, this may hold only in cases where women have partners who share family work.

16. For a discussion of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) used in this study see Chapter 2 and also Appendix 2.

**CHAPTER EIGHT**  
**MOTHERS AND OTHER PARENTS: PARENTING AS A GENDERED AND**  
**ENGENDERING EXPERIENCE**

This chapter looks at the consequences, not the causes, of the social organization of parenting in the home. The chapter looks at ways in which the everyday practice of being a mother, in particular the division of domestic work, helped produce a gendered experience of self as parent. Everyday domestic practice thus reinforced the socializing impact of having children on women's identities discussed in the earlier chapters. In particular, it reinforced the socializing experience of children as constitutive of women's selves, and the influence of feminized cultural ideals of women's love and responsibility for children. As emphasized in Chapter Nine, what seems remarkable about motherhood is that so many different socializing processes converge to reinforce women's commitment to maternal identity.<sup>1</sup>

Socialization, in particular the inculcation of societal values during childhood, is frequently invoked to explain the enactment of adult social roles and the embracement of gender-role identities. Empirically, however, the situation is usually more complex. Motherhood, as Rossi (1980) points out, is distinguishable from other primary adult roles in that

there is cultural pressure on all women to assume the role, but anticipatory socialization is totally inadequate. And, unlike many other adult roles, motherhood is considered irrevocable. Traditionally, concern has focused more on women's acceptance of motherhood than on role-performance. Consequently, the transition to parenthood often takes on the character of a crisis. Even for social roles where anticipatory socialization does exist, however, role playing is seldom non-problematic, but is largely improvisational. Social roles and expectations are ill-defined and open to interpretation, negotiation and change (Blumer, 1969). Thus childhood socialization has limited explanatory power in accounting for adult behaviour (Brim and Wheeler, 1966), particularly when it comes to understanding women's family and occupational roles during the contemporary period of social change (Gerson, 1985; Bernard, 1975). This lack of societal consensus on women's roles is reflected in the feminist and non-feminist composition of the sample.<sup>2</sup> Women came to parenting with very different expectations and ideals of family roles and negotiated the realization of these roles under very different circumstances.

Explaining adult role-enactment and gender identities by reference to childhood socialization implies that change in adult life is relatively superficial. But if we take women's transition to motherhood to be automatic, as non-problematic, then we trivialize the experiences of profound personal change in adult life which so many women in this study described. In

this chapter I want to look at women's experience of becoming a mother as a process of situational adjustment (H.Becker, 1981) - a process whereby individuals take on the characteristics required by the situations in which they participate, whether or not they are formally socialized. I want to show how the everyday experience of being a mother, in particular the social organization and division of domestic work, helped produce the character and identity of mother: that is, it produced a gendered experience of self as parent and a distinct identity as mother. The nature of social situations, Becker emphasizes (1981:310), not the individual's personality or beliefs, explains much of the personal change experienced in adulthood. Individuals align actions and ideas to situations. But situations themselves are structurally organized and peopled. Thus the concept of situational adjustment allows a social structural explanation of personal change. And given the irrevocable nature of the role of mother, the pressures towards adjustment that exist in most social situations are greatly strengthened. We can, as Rossi (1980) emphasizes, have ex-spouses and ex-jobs, but not ex-children.

The concept of situational adjustment cannot fully explain women's commitment to motherhood. Because the behaviours and perspectives acquired by situational adjustments may be only as enduring as the situation, the concept of commitment is needed to explain consistency in identities and behaviour as individuals move from one situation to another.

Commitment is built up through investment:

The committed person has acted in such a way as to involve other interests of his, originally extraneous to the action he is engaged in, directly to that action. He has staked something of value to him... on being consistent in his present behaviors. The consequence of inconsistency will be so expensive that inconsistency ... is no longer a feasible alternative. (H.Becker, 1981:314)

I showed earlier the profound extent to which their children had become constitutive of women's valued senses of selves. We can further understand how a woman's maternal identity becomes implicated in her other social relationships of spouse, daughter, friend, etc. in ways that support the consistency of her commitment to maternal identity. This chapter looks at such social support for maternal identities. Thus, what sometimes began as a 'side bet' (H. Becker, 1981:315), for example, becoming pregnant because a partner wanted children, can become a full-blown commitment to maternity. Indeed, we saw in earlier chapters the extent to which, even among those who had been ambivalent about motherhood, a deeply valued sense of self became invested in motherhood. The more of value at stake in a role or relationship, the greater the commitment.

If reported comparisons on men's and women's experience of parenting are accurate (Thompson and Walker, 1989; Hochschild, 1989), what becomes more difficult to explain is the apparently greater salience of parental identities for women than men cross-situationally, whether in familial or non-familial situations, even when mothers work full-time outside the home. Women in this study talked about this gendered

experience of parenting not just in terms of different domestic work loads, but in terms of gendered consciousness, gendered feelings of responsibility and men's perceived greater ability to compartmentalize and segregate parts of themselves.

Experientially, it is part of what makes a woman a mother rather than just a parent. Although the greater saliency of maternal identity may reflect the greater commitment to parenthood by women than men (La Rossa and La Rossa, 1981), using Becker's notion of commitment as investment, I want to argue that the issue is not simply one of how much is committed, but what is committed to, in parenthood. The cultural terms of the 'parent contract' are different for men and women. Implicit in women's investment in parenthood, but not in men's, is the belief that children's daily emotional and physical well-being is ultimately dependent on their mothers' caring behaviour (Backett, 1982; Wearing, 1984). Thus, beliefs about children's needs can come to altercast women. Although mothers are no longer expected to be physically present with young children at all times, the assumption that she continue to be 'accessible' to them and responsible for them persists, even when women work outside the home (Wearing, 1984). Like doctors 'on duty', women are thus on 'call' from their daycares and 'available' to meet their children's needs, even at work. The belief that women are 'ultimately responsible' for their young children endures (Bernard, 1975; Ruddick, 1984a; Wearing, 1984). And this perception of responsibility, I suggest, is

profoundly socializing for mothers. Men's full involvement in the daily childcare responsibilities, on the other hand, has become culturally perceived as laudable, but remains essentially voluntary (La Rossa, 1988). Children are not seen as being at risk of profound emotional or physical harm if their father is not fully involved in childcare. Indeed, men's parental commitment can increase their investment in the 'provider' roles rather than domestic roles (Bernard, 1981). Thus the costs or consequences of non-involvement in childcare and family work are quite different for men and women - even when both are personally 'committed' to parenthood, the stakes seem higher for women.

So central was the identity of mother to the valued sense of self described by women in this study that to risk seeing one's self as irresponsible about one's children would be experienced as far more than inadequate role performance. Indeed, as a social role, women see motherhood to be of low public value, but to be of high personal and moral worth (Wearing, 1984). Thus, for a woman to be remiss in feeling responsible for her child would implicate her whole moral character. Ultimately, being responsible for one's children is about being moral as a person, and motherhood is about female morality.

### **The Division of Family Work Among Middle-Class Couples**

The purpose of the analysis of the division of domestic

work in this chapter is not to show its complex origins, but to show how it contributed to women's gendered experience of themselves as parents. The term 'parent' is replacing the terms 'mother' and 'father' in popular and academic usage. 'Parent' is a gender neutral word. But women's experience of 'parenting' was not gender-neutral. Eighty-four percent of middle-class women and 82 percent of working-class women were quite clear that parenthood was a gendered experience. Men and women may both be parents, I was told, but they act, think, and feel differently as parents. What then were these differences?

Women grounded their claims to a distinctly female experience of parenthood in the gendered social organization of their households, in particular the division of domestic work, in feelings of responsibility, and in the different awareness or consciousness they had of their children (see Table 8.4). Research supports women's accounts. Family or domestic work remains primarily women's work (Michelson, 1985; Hochschild, 1989). Even when men do participate in family work, what men do, how and when they do it, and how they experience it is different from women's experience (Thompson and Walker 1989). The picture is far from simple. Contrary to what one might expect, the division of domestic labour in the home is not determined by a woman having outside employment, by what she earns relative to her husband, the time she has available or even egalitarian beliefs held by a couple.<sup>3</sup> Equally puzzling

are the research findings that many women are not openly dissatisfied with unequal gender arrangements (Barnett and Baruch, 1987b; Rosen, 1987).

Because my main research problem focused on the development of identity, I was more interested in understanding how women felt about the division of family work, rather than documenting precisely 'who did what' in the family. However, I did collect data on women's accounts of the division of family work. I began by distinguishing between childcare and other family work, such as housework like laundry and cooking, home repairs and maintenance, managing family finances, etc., which I refer to as 'other household work'. The findings were somewhat unexpected. Middle-class women in this study described a greater level of sharing family work than that reported in many other studies.<sup>4</sup>

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**TABLE 8.1**  
**DIVISION OF CHILDCARE WORK BETWEEN MOTHERS AND THEIR PARTNERS**  
 Respondents' description of the division of childcare work in the household by social class

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<u>Mothers' share of childcare</u>	middle-class	working-class
Mother did less than half	4%	0%
Mothers and partners shared equally	30%	0%
Mothers did 51-60%	26%	18%
Mothers did 61-70%	15%	35%
Mothers did 71-80%	22%	23%
Mothers did 81-90%	3%	18%
Mothers did 91-100%	0%	6%
	N = 27	N = 17

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A third of middle-class women with partners (34 percent), for example, said that their partners did half (or

more) of the childcare work and another 26 percent said that their partners did approximately 40 percent of childcare (see Table 8.1). Put another way, only 25 percent of middle-class women said their partners did less than 30 percent of childcare work.

Loretta was one of the third of middle-class women who felt her partner shared family work equally:

I'm very satisfied [with the division of family work]. It's something we've both really worked at. It's something I really value ... I feel it's unusual, and that even makes you value it more. If you ask me how I feel about women who work full-time and have a husband who doesn't contribute, I have very strong feelings toward that.... We spent a long time in the first few years of our marriage working this out. (Loretta: Teacher)

Kim also felt she and her partner also shared family work equally. She explained that although her partner appeared to do more household work than she did, she compensated by contributing more emotionally to the children. Like Loretta she emphasized the notion of 'jointness' in the organization of family life:

[I am very satisfied]. We believe strongly that both parents should participate as fully as possible in the children's lives. We both have full-time jobs; our situations are very similar in that way.... If you were to look at this (check-sheet) it would indicate that my partner does certainly much more than I do in terms of the household tasks.... [But] in terms of having two babies of this age there is a certain tendency for them to want their mother, which is unavoidable. And that can be very, very emotionally draining.... I think there is a tendency to try to compensate for that, for example, when we come home from work Karl will generally prepare the food. And I'm sort of with (the children). (Kim: Librarian)

'Jointness', however, can be more of a description of how women

think about family life than of empirical practice.

**"My Husband Is Very Involved": Do Egalitarian Beliefs Produce Participatory Partners or Wishful-Thinking Wives?**

Reports of fathers' involvement in childcare do not necessarily indicate a shift to egalitarian family arrangements. Backett (1982, 1987) and Hochschild (1989) show that claims to parental sharing are likely to be overstated among couples such as middle-class professionals who are committed to the ideals of gender equality. Distortion and denial, La Rossa and La Rossa (1981) point out, seem to be a key strategy in the 'smooth' alignment of the transition to parenthood among professed egalitarian couples. And, as Hochschild (1989) and several women in this study point out, fathers' "involvement" often means men take over some of the more enjoyable aspects of parenthood. Play, for example, is characteristic of men's time spent with children, whereas mothers' interaction time is dominated by care-taking.<sup>3</sup> This leaves women devoting proportionately more of their time at home to housework and proportionately less of it to time with children (Hochschild, 1989:9).<sup>4</sup> If this is true, then mothers are being displaced from what women in this study regarded as one of the major rewards of motherhood, spending time with their children. Fathers' "involvement" isn't necessarily positive for mothers.

In light of evidence from other studies it would be

easy to suspect that many middle-class women's accounts were 'egalitarian wishful-thinking'. But such a conclusion does not readily fit the consistency with which middle-class women described male involvement in family work. For example, middle-class mothers reported that their partners were as likely as they themselves were to take time off work when children were sick. Also, the third of middle-class women who said that their partners shared childcare also reported, on an itemized checklist, that their partners shared other household work, and another 7 percent said their partners compensated for doing less childcare by doing more housework. And of all the women in the study, this group was the most likely to describe themselves as satisfied with the division of both childcare and other household work. Although an objectively exact description of the division of family work would require a time-budget study or direct observation, it is clear that many middle-class mothers believed their partners were participating and were satisfied on that account.

On the other hand, there was no simple relationship between inequality in the division of family work and women's expressed dissatisfaction. Women who said their partner did less than half but more than a third of childcare also said their partners did less than half of the other household work.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly these women were less likely than women whose partners shared equally to say they were satisfied with the division of family work, but they did not necessarily describe

themselves as dissatisfied. Similarly, few of the 26 percent of middle-class women whose partners did less than 30 percent of childcare said they were satisfied, but at the same time, less than half (43 percent) described themselves as dissatisfied. It seemed easier for women whose partners shared family work to say that they were satisfied than it was for those with unequal family arrangements to say they were dissatisfied. As Thompson and Walker (1989:859) point out, the cost of expressing such dissatisfaction may increase family conflict, but produce little practical gains. Expressed dissatisfaction would also undermine the belief in the 'jointness' of family life. It can be easier and emotionally safer for a couple to engage in "glossing" (La Rossa and La Rossa, 1981) or "family myths" (Hochschild, 1989) to bridge the gap between reality and ideals.

The expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the division of family work are summarized in Tables 8.2 and 8.3.

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**TABLE 8.2**  
**MOTHERS' SATISFACTION WITH THE DIVISION OF CHILDCARE**  
 Respondents' satisfaction with the division of childcare between themselves and their partners by class.

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Level of satisfaction	middle-class	working-class
Satisfied or very satisfied	63%	35%
Neutral or somewhat satisfied	15%	29%
Expressed dissatisfaction	22%	35%
	N = 27	N = 17

---

Sixty-three percent of middle-class mothers were satisfied or

very satisfied with the division of childcare, 22 percent were dissatisfied, and 15 percent were neutral or somewhat satisfied. At the same time, 56 percent were satisfied with the division of other household work, and 30 percent dissatisfied (Table 8.3).

Overall, 41 percent of middle-class women said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the division of both childcare and other household work, and 37 percent said they were dissatisfied with one or both of these arrangements.

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**TABLE 8.3**  
**MOTHERS' SATISFACTION WITH THE DIVISION OF OTHER HOUSEHOLD WORK**  
 Respondents satisfaction with the division of 'other household work' between themselves and their partners by social class.

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Level of satisfaction	middle-class	working-class
Satisfied or very satisfied	56%	41%
Neutral or somewhat satisfied	11%	41%
expressed dissatisfaction	30%	18%
No answer	3%	0%
	N = 27	N = 17

---

One of the reasons why patterns of expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction did not simply parallel levels of inequality was because the real issue for women had less to do with the equality of the division of domestic labour than with the legitimacy of the arrangements. That is, women judged the division of family work in terms of whether it was perceived as reasonable, fair, or inevitable in the context of, for example, the history of the different relationships mothers and fathers had with their children, perceptions about

children's needs, fathers' willingness to be involved, or the skills and personalities of the couple. Although some women explicitly stated that they were satisfied with the division of family work because it was equal, and that they and their partners had worked hard to achieve this equality, the notion of legitimacy rather than equality permeated women's evaluations of the division of family work.<sup>13</sup> Thus claims to equality in family work were more than a rationalization masking inequality, but were guides to the general principles of legitimacy by which women judged the division of work in their homes. And although the majority of middle-class mothers in the study described themselves as feminists, some measure of inequality in the division of family work was not necessarily seen as illegitimate. It was the "symbolic meaning" of men's participation or non-participation that counted.<sup>14</sup>

Middle-class women gave sophisticated 'reasons' to explain why inequality was not necessarily 'illegitimate' or why it was not grounds for overt dissatisfaction. Some, for example, referred to the ways in which motherhood was socially organised, in particular the institutionalization of maternity (rather than parental) leave to care for infants. As Backett (1982) emphasizes, women's early specialization in post-partum childcare results in women gaining greater 'expertise' which then becomes the perceived legitimate basis of a couple's subsequent allocation of responsibility for childcare to women. Fran explained:

I think it all depends on your husband. I have heard, and I do know of a few men who actually do... [share the] work. But there aren't many of them.... I think it stems from the fact that the woman, if she is breast-feeding... you are usually off work for a certain number of months. And you get into the habit of doing everything there is to be done and you just continue it. And when you go back to work the daycare fees come out of your paycheque.... I think that's where it starts. I don't think it is particularly deliberate on anybody's part. I think it just happens. (Fran: Lawyer)

Thus the pattern of women's responsibility took on the character of cause and effect, appearing to respondents as inevitable: the acts of giving birth and breast-feeding are seen to 'explain' why women, but not men (or both parents), "stay home" initially and subsequently assume overall responsibility for a child's wellbeing:

Women take the major responsibility for the child.... Certainly for me there has been more responsibility.... Typically, I mean, women bear the children, you breastfeed the child, so you build up this initial responsibility at that time and that generally carries on. And because I had stayed home... men don't usually stay home. (Tannis: Counsellor)

Others pointed, not so much to the differential socializing effects of early parenthood, but to men's own early socialization to explain their lesser participation in family work:

[It's the] socialization of males and females. Women have different expectations of themselves and men have different expectations of women. The difference between me and my spouse ... [is that] I take responsibility. (Beth: Executive)

Middle-class women's day-to-day experience of being a mother frequently conflicted with how they, as feminists, understood their world intellectually. A minority of them found

themselves making references to biology to fill the gap between expectation and experience:

It has to do with how we are socialized... but I [also] think men's and women's nervous systems are different .... [They] react differently.... It's hard to break the traditions. You might know it intellectually, but...  
(Patricia: Counsellor)

A feminist consciousness or intellectual awareness of the 'dangers' of gender roles doesn't mean they are easily avoided:

And it's because men are socialized differently to women, so that there are different expectations of their roles. And as much as one loves to be equal, it's very difficult to not fall into those [ways]. And sometimes you just have to decide, 'This may be stereotypical, but....'  
(Sandra: Civil Servant)

Interestingly, some once plausible rhetorics to explain men's behaviour no longer 'worked' for middle-class women. A small minority (7 percent) gave men's work outside the home as the reason for the unequal division of childcare. However, in these cases, this 'reason' lacked legitimacy, as these women were not satisfied with the division of family work.

Whatever the offered 'reasons' for inequality in the division of domestic work, it was clear that there were culturally available and credible rhetorics which explained women's greater and men's lesser participation in family work, and which allowed family life to appear non-problematic. For many middle-class mothers the division of family work acquired a form of de facto legitimacy, not because it approximated their ideals, but because, in practical rather than ideological terms, it seemed beyond their own, and even their partners' control. And the symbolic significance of men's lesser

participation in family work was rendered relatively safe of its potentially threatening consequences in a feminist relationship. Inequality in family work became problematic when no legitimating explanations 'worked' and men were interpreted as simply being unwilling to share.

**"I Would Like More Help; but Men are a Pain": Working-Class Couples and the Division of Family Work.**

Working-class women with partners described a more unequal division of family work than middle-class women (see Table 8.1). None said her partner shared childcare equally, and only 18 percent credited their partners with doing 40 percent or more of childcare work.

Working-class women are sometimes portrayed as more 'traditional' than middle-class women and therefore more accepting of an unequal division of labour in the home. This was not the case among women in this study. Only 35 percent of working-class women with partners were satisfied with the division of childcare, and only 41 percent felt satisfied with the division of other household work.<sup>19</sup> Only 18 percent were satisfied with both.

Although most were not satisfied, only 47 percent of working-class women were openly dissatisfied with the division of family work, whether of childcare or other household work. Others often described themselves as 'neutral' (see Tables 8.2 and 8.3). Mara was clearly dissatisfied:

Oh yeah. [ It's different for men and women.] O.K. This is good. Now, he gets home. He sits. He eats. He gets up and goes to the living room. What do I do [when I come home]? I have to make the lunches for tomorrow. If the dishes [aren't done], if I didn't have time to do them in the morning, I do them then... and I've got to make the dinner...and she's nagging at me and she's destroying the place. And he thinks it's great.... I wish he would spend more time with her. (Lisa: Data Entry Operator)

Again, however, responses to the division of family work did not simply mirror inequality. Chris, a mother of two preschoolers, described herself as feeling neutral about the fact that she did far more domestic work than her partner:

I'm not very satisfied with [the division of domestic work. [I feel] neutral [about it]. Well, I can't expect more from him because he wouldn't do it. (Chris:Clerical)

Like middle-class women, working-class women interpreted the division of family work according to whether it was seen as legitimate. Interpreting the division of family work as legitimate did not necessarily mean women were satisfied with the arrangement, but it did inhibit dissent. It both deprived women of publicly or personally credible grounds from which to voice dissatisfaction, and also functioned to make reality more acceptable. Typical 'legitimizing' explanations included beliefs that other men did less work at home; a feeling of some control in the (unequal) division of labour through their being more competent or more desirous of the work of caring for children; and beliefs about men's inherent (non-maternal) natures.

Becoming neutral was one way women coped with a situation which they felt they had little power to change.

Karen, a mother of three preschoolers, explained how she no longer cared that her husband didn't share with family work:

Most [men from his ethnic background], the man is free all the time to do what they want. I can't put on my coat like how he does and go through the front door.... At first I didn't like it at all, but like, it's an everyday thing to me now. So I don't really think about it anymore. (Karen: Drycleaner's Shipper)

We can see from Table 8.1, however, that many working-class men in fact did participate in family labour.<sup>11</sup> The widespread belief among working-class women that men generally did little domestic work appeared to reinforce rather than challenge inequality in family work. The belief in men's non-participation lowered women's expectations, encouraged a sense of powerlessness and discouraged attempts to negotiate alternative arrangements. As Stephanie put it, she was grateful that her husband watched the baby while she cooked dinner or did the laundry. Comparing herself to women whose husbands "didn't lift a finger", she was satisfied:

[I'm just] thankful that he does help. There are some husbands who won't lift a finger. He [my husband] watches him [the baby] while I make the dinner or do the laundry. It doesn't bother me [that I do most of the domestic work]. (Stephanie: Clerical)

As argued in the previous chapter, we must neither assume either that family work is always burdensome, nor that it is culturally acceptable for women to acknowledge that caring for a loved one can be burdensome. Domestic work is often presented both to and by women as a 'labour of love' (Luxton, 1980). Barb explained how, because she 'loved' looking after her child she felt moderately satisfied with

doing two thirds of the work involved:

[I'm somewhat satisfied.] I love doing it, but there are times!... [My husband] does a lot. He does a lot more than a lot of men I know. (Barb: Clerical)

Like middle-class women, working-class women offered 'explanations' that justified the persistence of traditional domestic arrangements. Women's beliefs about male incompetence, for example, functioned to reaffirm inequality in domestic labour, making it appear "easier" for women to perform tasks themselves. Ramona, for example, said she was neutral about the fact that she did 80 percent of childcare tasks. Since her partner had turned all the baby's clothes pink in some misadventure with the laundry she said she felt she could not trust him with certain responsibilities. At the same time, Ramona's partner's overt willingness to "help" makes him symbolically appear involved in family work and made the division of labour relatively non-problematic:<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes you wish he would do just a little more, just to help you out.... I would say I am neutral [about it] because... if I ask him to do something, he would do it.... [On the other hand] if I do it, I know it's done, [and done properly]. (Ramona: Bookkeeping Clerk)

It is difficult to know if men's apparent incompetence was men's way of avoiding family labour, or women's way of maintaining control over valued 'territory' (Boulton, 1983). However, as La Rossa and La Rossa (1981) point out, mothers of infants have good cause not to trust male partners who, by distancing themselves from family work (and embracing instead the breadwinner role) fail to acquire the skills and knowledge

necessary to care for young children. Pam, for example, described herself as 'moderately satisfied' with the 70 percent share of childcare tasks she performed:

I like to make sure things are done the way I want, not because I wouldn't like him to do more; it's because if I want things done a certain way, it's easier to do it [myself].... I would like more help, but men are a pain.  
(Pam: Clerical)

On the one hand, as Kranichfeld (1987) argues, family work can be an important source of power and value for women that women may be reluctant to lose. On the other hand, as Ferree (1987) points out, many women are discouraged from struggling for greater domestic equality because many men do so little in the home that women feel it is not worth their while to jeopardize what domestic control they do have to get just a little "help". So the pattern of gendered family work gets reproduced.

Whatever its source, men and women can find themselves trapped in a pattern of gendered interaction they and their partners reproduce on a daily basis (Backett, 1982; La Rossa and La Rossa, 1981). Sue, for example, said she was only moderately dissatisfied with doing 90 percent of the childcare work in her home because she was "quicker" at it. However, she also felt that her partner sabotaged her attempts to increase his minimal participation:

I don't mind doing the basic responsibilities. I have a routine, so I just go ahead and do it. Sometimes, when I have [something on] ... I say "listen, Tuesday night, I'm going out" ... and he comes home late from work which always happens when I am going out. I get angry.... That's the time I become dissatisfied. (Sue: Secretary)

**"Like It's a Favour!"; Men's Participation in Domestic Work**

It was obvious from talking to working- and middle-class women that the division of family work was far from resolved. Its negotiation was complex, subtle, and on-going in most households, and from women's perspective, seldom equal (Hochschild, 1989). A woman risks the material well-being of her children if she jeopardizes the marriage by making what may be seen as excessive demands on her partner (Ferree, 1984). Apart from economic dependence, women remain dependent on men and their 'good will' for "down time" from childcare (La Rossa and La Rossa, 1981) in a cultural context where men's "help" is seen as a privilege men confer on women rather than a right women can demand.

Part of the difficulty in understanding the negotiation of family work lies in the fact that men and women come to family situations saying that they believe in one set of gender ideals while they are also deeply committed to other gender ideals and the identities that go with them (Hochschild, 1989). Thus, a couple who claim to believe in egalitarian family relations can find themselves negotiating the division of family labour from with two very different sets of assumptions. Ellen's partner Sam, for example, came from a very traditional background, but was committed to being an "involved father" and to equality. Ellen was aware that Sam was proud of his contribution to family work, and felt himself different from

other men in this respect. However, if Sam felt that he was doing Ellen a "favour" by his involvement, Ellen did not see it that way. She resented defining Sam's participation as a favour, for this carried the reciprocal expectation of gratitude in exchange. She defined his participation as a responsibility - as merely expected behaviour. Although both were overtly committed to equality, the couple's definitions of family reality clashed. With bitterness Ellen described two very different perceptions of being "equal".

O.K., he plays with her a lot. He plays with her more than a lot of fathers I have seen.... He takes her to school, he picks her up. He often dresses her in the morning but I pick out the clothes and make sure the clothes are ready. I often feel that he has a lot of the fun. Like he does a lot of the fun and I do a lot of the work.... [Around the home I do] all of the cleaning...all those little minor tasks - they don't seem to count or add up to anything. There is not much recognition for that.

"Equality" made Sam feel he was doing Ellen a favour, she said:

But if you [Sam] make a meal - that's wow! That's five stars! And also he'll make [most of] the meals. But I'll hear about it, like it's a favour more than a neutral division of labour, like 'I'm doing something that should be your job...' It's not 'well, that's good, we are sharing it together'. It's he is doing some of 'my work', right? That feeling is there, even though we both 'agree' that it is all equal. (Ellen: Typesetter)

Structural constraints also limited working-class women's negotiation of the division of family work. Shift-work or overtime absolved some men from responsibility for family work. For others, this justification had lost its legitimacy:

[I'm] very dissatisfied. It's always been myself that has to go out and find daycare.... He works shift work. If he is on four to twelve [p.m.] he only has one child to look after [in the morning]. When I come home I have

both of them.....

And it's always been I'm the one that takes time off [if children are sick]. He has established he is the main breadwinner - I'm the 'incidental extras' [to him].... He is very firm that I'm the one [to take time off]. Once, I'd gotten a verbal warning and he took time off....[But, he says] I'm the mother, it's my duty.  
(Wendy: Apprentice Woodworker)

Several working-class women explained how family responsibilities had forced them to take lower paying jobs that did not involve shift work. And at the same time, I was told that because men earned more money it was expected that women would stay home from work with sick children.<sup>13</sup> The pattern becomes circular. Most working-class women with partners (65 percent) said they stayed home with sick children.

What is interesting about the many different ways in which women in this study made sense of family reality was that traditional accounts of the world, of men's and women's domestic and paid work roles, had lost much of their plausibility. I will show in the next section how the 'new' legitimations of family reality seemed to hinge less on definitions of male and female social roles than on claims about identities and perceived gender differences in emotions and character.

### **Middle-Class Women; Motherhood as "Ultimate Responsibility"**

Bernard (1975:45) explains how the sexual division of labour in society is not a consequence of sex differences, but is often the cause of these differences. In listening to women talk, I came to understand how the division of family work

didn't merely reflecting gender identities, but helped produce gendered parental identities: those claimed by mothers and those attributed to fathers.

For middle-class women in particular, the perceived differences between male and female experiences of parenting went far beyond the division of domestic labour to differences in women's perceptions about men's and women's feelings and their consciousness of their children (Table 8.4).

**TABLE 8.4**  
**HOW BEING A PARENT IS DIFFERENT FOR MEN AND WOMEN\***

	middle-class	working-class
% who said parenting was different for men and women	84%	82%
No difference/not in my case	10%	4%
Other	6%	14%
Women do more or most of the work	61%	82%
Women feel ultimate or more responsibility for children	58%	54%**
Women have a different consciousness or special awareness of children	60%	43%
	N = 31	N = 28

Note \* respondents mentioned more than one difference.

\*\* For working-class women in particular the notions of doing more work and feeling more responsibility were closely associated. Thus the figure of 54% who mentioned responsibility underestimates the extent to which feelings of responsibility distinguished men and women's experience of parenthood in the eyes of working-class mothers.

Feelings of responsibility are central to the socializing effects of becoming a mother (Wearing, 1984; Ruddick, 1984a; Backett, 1982; Bernard, 1975). Middle-class women in this study felt that they had a qualitatively

different relationship with their children than their partners had, because of these feelings. Over half (58 percent) said that mothers felt a sort of "ultimate responsibility" for their children; a type of responsibility that men did not feel,

I think ultimately the responsibility falls to most women - to 99 percent [of women]. Although men are helpers, when it comes down to it you are the one who's thinking [about the child]... who really feels for the child and really the only person in the world who is caring for him. (Tess: Senior Policy Advisor)

Beth, for example, whose partner did 40 percent of the childcare work, explained how she felt that being a mother was different:

I take responsibility. I assume the leadership role in the home. What I am not doing, I am monitoring, and making sure someone else is doing it.... For example, if I'm doing the laundry, or whatever, and he [my husband] is with the kids, I will notice when their [bed] time comes around. I will notice and go out and initiate the bed routine. If I leave it to him, he will do something which I think is very irresponsible. I take responsibility, I initiate, and I monitor. He does not feel that way [responsible]. I think he leaves that for me. (Beth: Executive)

For Rachael, whose partner did approximately 30 percent of childcare work, responsibility was also an issue of priorities:

I think we [women] feel more responsible.... I think that the [paid] job is not as important for some women - is not the only important [thing]. I think a man would rate it, quite honest, as number 1 priority. And that's the difference anyway in my relationship - and I think number 2 [for a man] would be the children. For me, and for women, or whatever, number 1 would be the children...our priorities are different on that. (Rachael: Teacher)

I showed earlier that middle-class women grounded gendered parenting not just in cultural beliefs about mothers' responsibility for children but in the practical social

organization of childcare following the birth of a child. These social arrangements differentiate men's and women's early experience of parenting and typically lay the grounds for the gender differentiating and traditionalising effects of the 'couple's transition to parenthood' (La Rossa and La Rossa, 1981), creating "his and hers" transitions (Cowan *et al.*, 1985). Becoming parents differentially socializes men and women. Peter and Loretta, as feminists, had consciously tried to avoid these differential socializing effects: they shared family work. Loretta discounted differences in parenting styles as difference is personality. Their differences were not in parenting, but of 'personality':<sup>14</sup>

[For men and women the experience of being a parent] varies enormously with the type of relationship you have. In our case [the difference] is more personality - I tend to be a worrier.... I don't see a lot of relationships where the father is as involved in the childrearing as the woman. In my case, I don't think there is a difference. Peter took holidays when I came home from the hospital. (Loretta: Teacher)

What was surprising was that, even when middle-class women said they shared family work equally with their partners, more than half still felt that parenthood was a gendered experience. Perhaps, for these women, in spite of their claims, family work was not 'shared equally'; perhaps the work was shared, but the 'ultimate responsibility' was not. What is clear, however, is that women claimed distinct identities as mothers rather than simply as parents.

For some of those who claimed a distinct maternal identity, biology provided one intuitively plausible basis in

which to ultimately ground that claim. Jenny and her partner, for example, shared family work equally, but not parental identities. Jenny's body and her child also conferred her special identity:

Yes. I think having had the child in the womb as part of one's body for nine months has a strong impact as being an extension of the self - a physical extension of the self. I think it's a gut level difference. I think the child has more experience of the mother in that same way as well. It is more familiar with the mother physically... and I think it lasts. (Jenny: Executive Secretary)

We do not have to posit biology as the cause of women's experience, however, to understand how women can come to build social realities on the symbolic meaning which they attached to biological relationships. We can understand that women interact with their born and unborn children according to the meaning they ascribe to their biological relationship. Indeed, the physical experiences of pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding confront women with 'events' in their lives which must be interpreted and made sense of:

Absolutely [parenthood is different for women]. I say this as someone whose husband, I feel, is very involved.... The breast-feeding, the fact that you carry the child in the first place and you have to go through the pregnancy, the labour and the delivery. No matter how active your partner is, no matter how cooperative your partner is, you're the one whose body is going through this invasion, which for me is how it feels.... Certainly you feel you are being taken over. It's just another thing you have to deal with, whether you react to it positively or negatively. It's still something you have to deal with... the sheer physical involvement.... (Nina: Director)

Making sense of their bodies, therefore, becomes part of the process by which women make sense of themselves.

Biology, however, was not among the most common grounds for supporting claims to distinct maternal identities among middle-class women. Perhaps as feminists they have learned that biology can also be used to deny women's claims to other valued adult identities. As well as explaining that women have feelings of "ultimate responsibility" which men didn't share, 60 percent of middle-class mothers with partners felt that women have a special "consciousness" of their children that men did not have. Kim, who emphasized that her partner shared childcare equally, explained the difference this way:

[I am] always conscious of the children, but [with men], I don't think there is as conscious a stream there as with women. (Kim: Librarian)

The difference is not simply one of workload, as Kate, whose partner did 40 percent of childcare, emphasised:

Yes [There is a difference]... My husband is an incredibly involved father. He's just fantastic. But I know I'm the one whose always keeping track [of things for our daughter]... I'm more conscious of her and her 'life', I suppose, than he is. Anyone I've ever seen, it's been that way. (Kate: Social Worker)

For Mary Lynn, her consciousness of her child was a source of tension between herself and her partner Frank. Although her partner shared childcare equally, Mary Lynn felt that she had an awareness of her child, Sam, which her partner did not have. Her perception of Sam's dependency on her shaped her consciousness:

Yeah, [being a parent is different for men and women, for example,] Frank has trouble with the fact that I say that, right now, Sam (my son) comes first in my life, because he is so dependent. His interests have to come first, and come even above Frank's. And Frank has a lot

of trouble with that and to me, it's without question or without a moment's hesitation. That's the way it has to be.... Although Frank is tremendous with him and we share quite equally... I think it's at that philosophical level where he and I have the biggest differences, more than anything. (Mary Lynn: Policy Analyst)

Thus, even when men shared childcare, middle-class women still claimed a distinct identity and relationship with their children. Men could potentially learn to behave like women, but they didn't feel or think like women, they concluded.

Indicative of 'men's different consciousness', several women pointed out, was men's ability to compartmentalize and segregate parts of themselves and their lives in ways women felt they did not, or could not do. Penny's husband, for example, had agreed to provide childcare during her interview with me. For him, this meant he could read the paper at the same time. For Penny it did not. Although they had 'jointly agreed' on his temporary responsibility, for Penny it seemed her partner was not fulfilling his commitment. Penny's partner seemed like the 'new fathers' who have internalized the idea that they should be more involved with their children: technically present but functionally absent fathers (Feldman and Feldman, 1975, cited in La Rossa 1988):

He's pretty good if I ask him to do something. But most men aren't tuned in. Their antennae aren't up. So he doesn't notice that Pete is restless because he is in the other room reading the Sunday paper.... It's a question of responsiveness and awareness. (Penny: Manager)

Thus, if it exists as women believed it did, men's greater ability to compartmentalize as well as women's greater

feelings of responsibility may help women to understand why they have problems leaving their children to go back to work, but their male partners apparently do not.<sup>15</sup>

Although to women they appeared to be associated with gender, the 'different forms of consciousness' are not simply psychological products, but are intimately linked to women's socially allocated responsibility for children. Forms of consciousness, Ruddick (1984a) explains, be they maternal consciousness or 'scientific' modes of thinking, are grounded in social relationships. Thus women's way of thinking about their children is grounded in the social relationship of mothering. Women's responsibility for children is central to this social relationship. Responsibility, it seemed, shaped consciousness. Women typically attributed consciousness to gender rather than to (the gendered social distribution of) responsibility.

Middle-class women who had atypical parenting relationships provided some interesting insights into the relationship between gender, consciousness and responsibility. Joanne, an alone mother, for example, thought that parenting could indeed be similar for men and women, depending on the circumstances. Single parenthood, she suggested, could affect men and women in similar ways. She pointed out that her son's father, himself a single parent, had just such a socializing experience: he was 'as responsible as a mother':

When Tim's father comes to visit, I know I can walk out that door and I do not have to say a single thing to him

about 'don't forget this, and don't forget that' and 'do this and do that.' I don't ever have to mention it.... My way of thinking is, 'If you can be a single parent, then you'll make a good parent'. (Joanne: Teacher)

Debbie and Suzette were a lesbian couple. Debbie was the biological mother of Matt whom the couple had planned to have and whom they co-parented. Debbie's experience led her to conclude that what people usually see as male female differences in parenting are actually differences in the nature of social and emotional relationships with children:

I have a peculiar situation and... yeah, I think it's different for mothers than it is for the other parent. Suzette is very involved with Matt and she really cares about him. But I really notice that [I'm more aware of him].... So it's not male and female.

Debbie experienced parenthood differently to Suzette:

I know that it's just been this past year that it's been possible for me to read a book while he was in the room. It's just like constant alert and that doesn't seem to be something that's shared by the other parent [Suzette]. The difference is not around the physical work of the child. But it's around that socio-emotional alertness, I guess. (Debbie: Accountant)

As we will see, the majority of working-class women (82 percent) agreed with middle-class women that parenting was a gendered experience.

### **"They Love Them Just As Much, But...." ;Working-Class Women and Maternal Identity**

Although working-class women emphasized that differences in domestic workloads made men's and women's experiences different, many joined middle-class women in also emphasizing gender differences in women's consciousness of and

feeling of responsibility for children (Table 8.4). For working-class mothers, work and responsibility were intimately connected:

Very much, yes. [The difference is] responsibility. After work I know I have to come home because I have somebody waiting for me, whereas a man can do, or so he thinks, he can do whatever he wants. Like, no worries what-so-ever. If I want to go anywhere, or, you know, stop for groceries, I know that Jessica is waiting for me ... at the babysitters. (Renee: Truck Driver)

Half of the working-class women (50 percent) said mothers' and fathers' experiences of being parents differed because men's lives, they believed, were not significantly changed by parenthood, or that they continued to have far more 'freedom':

[Being a parent is different for a woman than it is for a man.] The woman gets all the responsibility of the child. The man can still do basically what he wants to do. (Chris: Clerical)

Like middle-class women, working-class women explained how they had difficulty identifying with men's apparent ability to compartmentalise and segregate their experiences. They did not deny men could love children, but, like Barb, sometimes had problems understanding male love:

I suppose it varies with individuals, but, through my personal experience it seemed to be [that] to us [women] our children are everything. We will do everything we can to spend every spare minute we can with them. For men, they love them, but they will go and spend a whole day away golfing even though they have been the whole week at work. (Barb: Clerical)

For Barb, men are "just different":

They are just different. They don't become as consumed with the child. They love them just as much, but it's different. I think men tend to put themselves first.... the woman always puts the child first.

Implicit in many women's descriptions of gendered parenting is an image of men as having lesser moral competence as parents of young children. Men are seen as not having undergone the same sort of moral transformations that women experienced. A working-class mother reflected:

I find men are ... a little more selfish with their time. They think of [other things].... I like to shut everything out and concentrate on her, whereas the guys, they still go on with their regular [lives]. Their lives really haven't changed much. Maybe... [that's because] they don't give their full attention. (Marg: Accounting Clerk)

Similarly, men's different behaviour as parents implies not just a different consciousness, but a lesser moral commitment:

I don't think they [men] see the responsibilities. The women concentrate on it 24 hours a day, thinking about what [the children] need... for the present and the future. Men just take it as it comes. I don't know who does a better job... [but] the responsibility [is] always on the woman for safety too. They [men] are there for guidance and support, but no responsibility really. (Kathy: Accounting Clerk)

Unlike most working-class women who pointed to empirical divisions in men's and women's parenting, Val, an alone parent, emphasized potential similarities. A man, she reasoned, could be "just as good as a mother" if he had the commitment:

No [it's not different].... They have the same responsibilities. They have to do the same things. They have to provide for their child, just as I do. [But] some fathers don't want to get so close or attached to their kids as mothers do. If a father wants to, he can be just as good as a mother. (Val: Apprentice Mechanic)

The notion of men as not having undergone the same moral transformations into parenthood as women has important

implications for women's claims to maternal identity. Working-class women, for example, tended to interpret men's and women's differential parental workloads as expressions of differential male and female psychology. Men, as fathers, it appeared, not having undergone moral transformation, were seen as inherently less responsible or more selfish than mothers. Thus working-class women felt that they could not expect much more of them - that's just the way men were. Because men were not perceived as having undergone a moral transformation through fatherhood, whatever women's personal hopes, a major behavioral transformation was not really expected of them. Working-class women could just wish they would "help out more".<sup>16</sup>

For middle-class women the situation was a little different. Middle-class women saw their partners as being more involved in domestic work than working-class women did. They also believed men should and could share parenting responsibilities, if only they had been correctly socialized. Although many middle-class women claimed their partners were 'incredibly involved', they also claimed a special identity as mother rather than as parent. Middle-class women could not, however, ground this claim to a special maternal identity in domestic work as readily as working-class women did. Fathers, after all, were either seen as sharing parenting, or as being expected to do so. In what then was middle-class women's identity as mother, rather than parent based? For middle-class women, mothers were essentially distinct from fathers because

although, for some lucky women, men could potentially learn to behave like mothers, they would never think and feel like mothers. The connectedness with their children which women established through the moral transformation of self occasioned by maternity was something men were not seen to share. By becoming fathers, middle-class men were expected to undergo a behavioral, but not a moral transformation.

Having looked at how day-to-day practices around family work produced and reinforced in women a gendered experience of self as parent, we will now look at some other forms of social support for women's identity as mothers.

### **We Seek Each Other Out: Social Worlds of Middle-Class Parents**

In order to get a better understanding of the social context in which women gained validation for their maternal identities, I asked women with whom they talked about their children. Married middle-class women talked about their children primarily with their partners, and to a lesser extent, with family, and friends who also had children. Partners are the main validators of middle-class parental identities (Boulton, 1983; Backett, 1982).

We have seen how the division of family work produced in women a gendered experience of self as parent. La Rossa and La Rossa (1981) convincingly show how couples 'talk' themselves into traditional gender roles through daily conversations. The social organization of everyday conversations, however, also

produced a distinct, but problematic public identity as parent.

In some personally meaningful ways the social worlds of middle-class women were divided into parents and non-parents.

Laura explained the social divide:

I think parents [have], like their own club. It's a very large club.... [There are] people who have children and people who don't have children. You really don't understand until you have them. (Laura: Accountant)

Most middle-class women with partners (78 percent) said that apart from husbands and family they generally limited talk about children to other parents. They felt restricted to their 'own kind' for support and understanding:

[I talk with other] parents in general. Wherever - like you have to seek each other out.... They really are the only people you can talk to. People who don't have a child [can't understand]. (Tess: Senior Policy Advisor)

The social world of parents, however, was not restricted to bona fide parents. Also included, it seemed, were the pregnant, those aspiring to pregnancy or parenthood, and at times, the involuntarily childless who, of course, were parents 'by desire', if not by deed. Problems arose where social worlds did not shift with changing identities:

[The worst things about having a child, explained Janette, are that] I don't have any friends who also have children. All my friends are single or just married, and it has kinda set me apart from that group.

Janette saw her parental identity as problematic for friends, whether they were voluntarily or involuntarily childless:

I mean some of them [my friends,] are single and desperately wanting to have children and I feel like when I invite them over, they are all looking at her [my daughter] green with envy. And there's the other ones who are sort of yuppie - and [it's] 'God, this child is

just going to spoil our dinner party'. (Janette: Manager)

Becoming a parent did not simply mean that a woman acquired a new identity; but others also acquired new identities. Women repeatedly mentioned the demise of old friendships. 'Old friends' with whom mothers were their 'old selves' now seemed more distant; some became childless ex-friends who were incapable of sustaining the new world of meanings that parenthood brought:

None of our friends have children, so that's been 'different'. [Yes, it has affected some friendships]. One pair of friends in particular... didn't seem to have any consideration for the fact that we had a [baby]... They didn't show much consideration at all. We were angry. (Carolyn: Secretary)

Displays of parental identities were limited to other parents:

[I talk about my children with my] spouse and friends who have children... People who don't have children are bored very quickly with stories of your children. (Sue: Community Coordinator)

Newly acquired parental identities, however, do not always take precedence over older identities, but can be incorporated into existing social worlds.<sup>17</sup> Debbie, the lesbian mother of a two year old son called Matt, explained how her friends, who were predominantly childless, had adopted Matt into their social world. Far from finding that she had less contact with childless friends as did most 'straight' parents, since Matt was born, Debbie and Matt found themselves the objects of increased visiting and social contact.

Not all of their social worlds were receptive to women's claims to maternal identities. By selectively

'revealing' their maternal identities, middle-class mothers tried to keep their parental identities and work identities strategically separate. Professional and middle-class women feel, according to Hochschild (1989), that to be taken seriously in the occupational world, they must conceal their identities as mothers; thus they disguise and misrepresent the various ways in which their maternal obligations intrude into their worlds of paid work lest their occupational identities be contaminated by their maternal ones. However, such strategies also perpetuate women's isolation from each other and the gender biased culture of the middle-class workplace.

#### **Social Support: The Social World of Working-Class Parents**

Unlike middle-class women, working-class women did not mention their partners first when they described with whom they talked about their children. Indeed, male partners seemed to play a secondary role to women's female networks as validators of maternal identity. For working-class women, like Sally, for example, parental conversations were frequently opportunities to provide male parents with the proper interpretation of family life, rather than occasions for its joint social construction:

I talk [mostly] with other mothers - kinda reaffirm that it is really all worth it, even if it is hectic or whatever... not so much with him [my husband]. But, I will tell him quite frequently that we are very lucky and we have good kids... and try to make him appreciate that way. (Sally: Bell Operator)

Unlike middle-class women who were concerned to keep

occupational and maternal identities separate, the working-class women's workplace provided women with a universe of discourse that validated women's maternal identities:

[I talk about children with] usually women at work. Tim [my husband] too, but women at work [more]. They've had children so they can relate with you. Whereas men can relate with men and well, we know how that story goes. (Jackie: Secretary)

Working-class women cited their families as part of their parental support networks more often than middle-class women, but alone mothers, both working- and middle-class, mentioned families most often. Interestingly, alone working-class mothers (36 percent), but not alone middle-class mothers, got social support from other single mothers.

In general working-class women got more "help" with children from their families than middle-class women did. Sixty-eight percent of working-class women and 29 percent of middle-class women said that they got regular help from their own or their partners' families.<sup>18</sup>

Working-class women cited their own female kin as the primary sources of familial help with children. Help from in-laws was mentioned by 41 percent of working-class women with partners and 19 percent of middle-class women with partners. So,, while working-class women got less domestic "help" from their male partners than middle-class women did, they gained access to the support of their partners' female kin in ways which middle-class women did not. In some cases, this support from a man's family persisted even after the couple had

separated, and in the case of Mary, it was provided without her and her boyfriend Ken ever having been a couple. Although Ken and Mary had never lived together, Ken's mother provided free daily childcare for Mary's child by Ken. Among working-class mothers alone mothers received more family "help" with children than those with partners.<sup>19</sup>

Middle-class women, on the other hand, were more likely than working-class women to buy help with domestic work. Twenty-six percent said that they employed a house-cleaning person and 16 percent employed a nanny who also provided some assistance with household work.

### Summary

In this chapter we have seen how parenting was a gendered and engendering experience. Mothers didn't feel that different experiences of parenting were merely a matter of different work loads, but had to do with differences in men's and women's thinking and feeling as parents. Women's feelings of responsibility for their children were central to the socializing effect of parenthood, allowing women to claim a distinct maternal identity and a distinct maternal consciousness. Even among middle-class mothers whose partners either shared, or were expected to share family work, women still claimed a distinct maternal identity. Men, it was believed, could, with the right socialization, perhaps learn to behave like mothers, but they didn't think and feel like

mothers. As explained earlier, the connectedness with their children which women established through the moral transformation of self occasioned by motherhood was something men were not seen to share. By becoming fathers, men might be expected to undergo a behavioral, but not a moral transformation. As I argue in the conclusions, motherhood is ultimately about female morality.

## ENDNOTES

1. There are far more social pressures ensuring that women become mothers than there are ensuring that women be skilled and competent parents (Rossi, 1980; Bernard, 1975).

2. The majority of middle-class mothers (77 per cent) identified themselves clearly as feminists, and another 13 per cent said "yes and no". Only 21 per cent of working-class women said they were feminists, 25 per cent were clear that they were not, and most of the others did not understand the term.

3. For overviews of research on the division of family or domestic work, see Thompson and Walker (1989) and Gerstel and Gross (1987).

4. Hochschild (1989) estimated that among the mostly middle-class couples she studied, 20 per cent of men shared family work equally, 70 per cent did less than a half but more than a third, and 10 per cent did less than a third.

5. See Lamb (1987) and other studies of fathering discussed in La Rossa, 1988. See also Thompson and Walker, 1989.

6. Oakley (1974) and Wearing (1984) have pointed out that even women who mother full-time, however, spend far less time directly interacting with their children than is commonly believed.

7. Research indicates that men's participation in family work tends to be restricted to certain areas, in particular childcare. Thus women devote proportionately more of their time to household tasks and less to childcare which both men and women find more rewarding (Thompson and Walker 1989; Hochschild, 1989).

8. The notion of legitimacy is similar to the ideal of 'fairness' in family arrangements discussed by Backett (1982) and La Rossa and La Rossa (1981). However, women in this study judged the division of family work less in terms of fairness, but more in terms of whether the arrangements were reasonable, understandable or inevitable under the circumstances. Thus the notion of legitimate refers neither to right or wrong in any abstract sense, but to a pragmatic assessment of reality.

9. See also Kessler and McCrae, 1982. Male non-participation in family work can be expected to have specific symbolic significance for women who hold feminist views.

10. For example, women who were more 'traditional' in that they would have preferred to stay home than be employed, did not have a more unequal division of childcare than others.

11. Some studies suggest that working-class men may do relatively more family work than middle-class men in two income families (Luxton 1983; Ferree 1984; 1987).

12. Backett (1987) found that even when men are not actively involved with their children, they can be passively involved by showing interest in the information about children their wives constantly provide, by appearing willing to "help", and by claiming that they are desirous of greater involvement - if only circumstances and time would permit.

13. The pattern was far from simple. Who stayed home also depended on a couple's employment benefit package and who was entitled to take paid sick time, for example. Middle-class women, in contrast, frequently talked about checking to see who had flexibility in a schedule in deciding who stayed home with sick children. Middle-class jobs usually offer better 'benefits' in terms of sick time, so men's and women's relative earnings would have been less important.

14. When parents do share childcare, differences in mothering and fathering behaviour seem to decline (Daniels and Weingarten, 1988, cited in Thompson and Walker, 1989:861).

15. 18 per cent of middle-class women raised this example when talking about the difference between men's and women's experience of parenthood. Men, it seems, are more likely than women to keep family and paid work as separate spheres of life (Gerson, 1985, Zussman, 1987).

16. Of course, men and women can have very different expectations about how much "help" women can expect. Men's "help" is also often interpreted as indicative of their commitment to their partners (Thompson and Walker, 1989; Boulton, 1983) and so has a symbolic and practical significance.

17. Several women mentioned, for example, they had again become closer to their families after having children.

18. Another 14 per cent of working-class women and 10 per cent of middle-class women said they got occasional help, by babysitting once a month, for example.

19. We must not assume that this is typically the case for all alone mothers. Alone mothers with family support might have been over-represented in this study because they were more likely than alone mothers without support to be able to hold full time jobs and stay off Welfare or Mothers' Allowance.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSION

The research for this thesis changed my thinking about motherhood. Although I had recognized that objectively the costs of motherhood for women are often very high, the research showed me how motherhood can provide women with symbolic opportunities for 'heroic' human experience. Consistent with other research findings, the data from this study show how motherhood is often associated with poverty, and how it almost invariably brings an increased burden of work.<sup>1</sup> I had been dissatisfied with analyzing motherhood exclusively in terms of its oppressiveness for women. However, I had also been both personally and intellectually uncomfortable with analyses which claimed that women's biological capacity to mother and nurture meant that women were innately different from and better than men. This thesis shows that the subjective experience of motherhood is not primarily that of oppression: motherhood did not mean the denial of self. Along with the increased work and economic disadvantage, motherhood provided opportunities for women to claim personal growth and development and to constitute themselves as morally enhanced persons. Although motherhood is conventionally taken as 'proof' of female maturity, its potential for fostering personal growth appears to be little recognized or valued in our society. This may be

because the personal growth associated with motherhood is of a certain kind. Motherhood produces 'womanly' persons; and womanly persons are less valued in our society.

What struck me about women's experience of motherhood was that it appeared to be an enriching human experience, rather than an exclusively female experience.<sup>2</sup> As with social life in general in a gendered society, however, this human experience was a gendered experience.

### Looking at the Process

This thesis shows how understanding the process whereby women become mothers is crucial to interpreting the meaning of the outcome: the fact that most women become mothers. The data show how women's identities as mothers are better understood as products of experience rather than of gender-role conformity. Although at first it might appear that, in becoming mothers, women in this study were conforming to gender role expectations, motherhood emerged from a whole series of separate processes and actions as women came to maternity by very different routes. The research findings demonstrate that the process of becoming a mother was far more complex than that conveyed by such explanatory concepts as "motherhood mandate" and "gender socialization". The processes whereby women were 'recruited' to motherhood were very different. For example, they showed clear class differences. Some women always wanted to have children, others had once wanted to remain childless.

Some were attracted to an idealized image of 'having a baby'; others had not been attracted by the role of mother, but found it difficult to avoid. For some, children emerged as products of the dynamics of their relationship with a partner, some strategically negotiated their desired transition to maternity, others rejected permanent childlessness rather than embraced motherhood. Still others described their paths to motherhood as the unintended and unanticipated consequences of their relationships with men or of contraceptive risk taking. Women did not necessarily step easily or smoothly into the role of mother; for many, the path was tentative, unanticipated, unfamiliar and problematic. Although eventually all routes led women to an outcome of giving birth, experientially the processes and meanings of women's actions were different for those involved.

### Motherhood and Adult Identity

We saw how becoming a mother was tied to issues of identity in adult life, but in class specific ways. On the one hand, when middle-class women talked about having their first children they frequently put forward their claims to maternal identities as achieved, social accomplishments. A certain level of maturity, they held, had to be achieved before they were "ready" to have children. Middle-class women felt it took years and the 'right-relationship' to achieve 'readiness'. On the other hand, many working-class women saw themselves as

achieving adulthood through having a child. Although their pregnancies were typically unplanned, becoming a mother for many of the young working-class women became both expressive and instrumental action. Claiming motherhood became expressive of an identity, of an ideal-self as a loving, caring, female sort of person. It also became a means of establishing that one was "grown-up"; that one was an adult. Having a child expressed young working-class women's maturity and responsibility, both of which were very highly valued.

We saw that for some middle-class women having children had assumed quasi-religious functions of providing solutions to the meaning of life and of how to live as an adult. The nomos building functions of marriage in modern society has been well recognized (Berger and Kellner, 1977). However, the data show how women's relationships with children provided perhaps even more powerful opportunities both to meaningfully locate individuals in the world and to stabilize identity. Children provide such a quasi-religious function of making sense of women's lives because of the capacity for natural relationships to symbolize social relationships and thus ground what women found personally meaningful in an apparently 'natural order'. Motherhood also helped women to make sense of the world and their place in it by providing them with a set of cultural resources that structured the transformation of their adult identities.

### Motherhood as Adult Re-socialization and Moral Transformation

Becoming a mother was more than a process of giving birth. Although the recruitment to motherhood process varied greatly and was marked by clear class differences, we find evidence for the pervasive impact of gender in the remarkably similar patterns of subjective experiences of motherhood which women described. For women in the study, becoming a mother involved a process of re-socialization in which they experienced themselves as profoundly changed. Middle-class women, in particular, described themselves as having been totally unprepared for, or overwhelmed by the experience of becoming a mother. Women's descriptions of becoming a mother and of maternal love carried many of the mythological themes and functions we usually associate with romantic love. Motherhood and 'mother-love' provided a major symbolic resource by which the achievement of adult identity and the meaning of women's lives were symbolically structured. The experiences of self-change described by middle-class women were dominated by themes of self-actualization and personal growth. Among working-class women the central motif of self-change was that of "settling-down". Among both groups women felt not simply that they had been changed through motherhood, but that they had been "morally" transformed.

The meaning of motherhood was also explored through the meaning of childlessness. For the majority of women in the study, the idea of having remained permanently childless

signified not merely the absence of children in their lives, but also strong feelings of loss and incompleteness: it signified a disruption in the phenomenological experience of self. Similarly, following Simmel's analysis of love, we saw how women's feelings could be seen as guides to the nature of the social bond between mothers and children. In particular women's emotions were seen as signals to the relevance of children to women's sense of 'real self' and to the ways in which children had become constitutive of self among mothers in the study.

#### **Motherhood as a Gendered and Engendering Process**

The greatest rewards of being a mother came from the special connectedness women felt with their children and from the pleasure of watching them learn and grow. However, the flip side of feeling connected, feeling responsible, was seen as one of the 'worst things' about being a mother. The data indicate that it is a mistake, however, to see connectedness with children as necessarily 'costing' a loss of self or threat to personal identity for women. Rather, among many women in this study, connectedness with children was the basis of their morally transformed selves. The data suggest, therefore, that we need to revise models of human development that emphasize the unique importance of the role of separation and individual autonomy in the development of adult identities. On the one hand, the data support recent developments in feminist

psychology. These developments suggest that the experience of self and the nature of self-other relationships are gendered and that women, more than men, tend to define themselves through connectedness and personal relationships.

On the other hand, the data do not warrant the conclusion that 'women's ways' are either innately different or morally superior to 'men's ways'. Rather, they suggest that we need to understand how such 'womanly ways' of experiencing self are socially, rather than psycho-sexually or biologically grounded. That is, men and women tend to experience themselves and self-other relationships in gendered ways because social situations are deeply gendered both in the structures that organize them and the expectations we bring to them. As argued in Chapter 7, we cannot assume women are innately more caring and nurturant than men, or vest their identities more in interpersonal relationships, without recognizing that men and women are allocated to social positions that require or encourage these characteristics. This research project shows how, by looking at the emergence of 'womanly' feelings and behaviour as a form of 'situational adjustment', we can see how the social organization of motherhood contributes to the social construction of gender differences. The concept of 'situational adjustment' refers to the process of adult socialization whereby people come to take on the characteristics required of the situation in which they participate. The research data showed how the everyday

practice of being a mother, in particular the division of domestic work in the home, helped produce the gendered character and identity of a woman as parent: it produced mothers. Thus we can understand how becoming a mother was both a **gendered** and an **engendering** process whereby women came to a new sense of self. In contrast to the diversity of the processes whereby women came to give birth, women came to share experiences which transformed their identities in similar ways. Women produced babies, but having babies produced 'womanly persons'.

#### **What is Committed in Motherhood?: Ultimate Responsibility for Children and Women's Moral Identities**

If the concept of situational adjustment helped explain the personal change women experienced in becoming mothers, the concept of 'investment of identity' helped explain the enduring nature of maternal commitment. Thus, what sometimes began as a 'side bet' (H. Becker, 1981), for example, becoming pregnant because a partner wanted children, could become a full-blown commitment to maternity. The data showed how many women who had been ambivalent about having children, later came to have a deeply valued sense of self vested in motherhood.

In analyzing the social organization of motherhood, the thesis focused on the consequences rather than the causes of inequality in the division of domestic labour. One such consequence was that it helped produce gendered parental

identities: those claimed by mothers and those which mothers attributed to men as fathers. Consistent with other research findings, the data showed that most women in full-time employment continue to do more family work than their partners. But mothers didn't feel that the different experience of parenting was merely a matter of different workloads: they felt that what made being a mother different from being a father had to do with differences in men's and women's thinking and feeling as parents. The data show that women's feelings of responsibility for their children were central to the socializing effect of parenthood, allowing women to claim a distinct maternal identity and a distinct maternal consciousness.

Using Becker's notion of commitment as investment, therefore, we can understand the greater salience of maternal identity in women's identity. But the issue was not simply one of how much was committed, but what was committed to in parenthood. The women interviewed indicated that the stakes for men and women in parenthood are quite different. The cultural meaning of parenthood for women is that they, as mothers, have ultimate responsibility for their children. What is deeply transforming and engendering about this ultimate responsibility is that it implies the frightening responsibility for the life of one's child; the child's physical and psychological welfare is perceived as finally dependent on the mother's behaviour. Repeatedly, the data show

how feelings of "ultimate responsibility" were profoundly socializing. For a mother, feeling responsible for her child is more than the expectation of a social role; it becomes constitutive of self, making denial of responsibility almost unthinkable. Thus, for a woman to be remiss in feeling responsible for her child would implicate her whole moral character. Being responsible for her child is about being moral as a person; and ultimately, motherhood is about female morality. This allows us to understand one of the central paradoxes of women's experience of motherhood: that, as a social role, motherhood has low public value, but, to women, it also has high personal value and moral worth. This paradoxical character of motherhood makes ambivalence almost endemic to being a mother.

To understand the meaning of women's responses to motherhood it is important to understand the ways in which motherhood is uniquely linked to female morality, and how it thereby carries the symbolic power to morally transform the self. On the one hand it could be argued that the essence of female morality is to be nurturing. Caring for others is perceived as quintessentially feminine, and women are socially allocated to roles and occupations that require 'nurturing' personal qualities. Women are nurturant and caring in many social roles. For example, they may be social workers, nurses, or the very best friends in the world, but none of these roles, nor the associated female qualities, in themselves carry the

power to morally enhance female identity. Nor are they as deeply engendering in establishing a woman's identity as is motherhood. As the data show, through having children women come to recognize themselves as women in special ways. But, as I emphasized in earlier chapters, the impact of children on women's sense of self goes beyond the experience of gender identity as a woman. Children become implicated in women's profound experience of themselves as persons, not just as women.

The essence of the transformation in women's identity came not from the social role of mother, which many women recognized as a devalued one. Rather, it came from the new character women acquired as mothers. Culturally, and as we saw through women's accounts, motherhood provided women with the symbolic resource for a moral transformation that could be independent of their actual performance as mothers. That is, women could be more or less skilled as mothers, but being a mother was qualitatively different from being a non-mother. And women in this study experienced it as qualitatively better. Perhaps it is the cultural association with selflessness or self-sacrifice that has imbued motherhood with its sacred character; perhaps it derives from the role of 'guardian of the innocent'. What is clear, however, is that socialization into motherhood is not simply the internalization of the appropriate expectations and the development of adequate skills. Many women never develop successful mothering skills, but they still

feel themselves to be truly mothers. Indeed, the literature shows that neither men nor women are adequately prepared for parenthood; for many it is experienced as a crisis. Women do not simply step into the role of mother. What is really internalized in becoming a mother is the sense of day-to-day practical responsibility for one's children. And it is this feeling of responsibility that motivates women to acquire the skill of mothering. Women may be more or less successful in this respect. However, fathers, according to many women in the study, do not share this feeling of ultimate responsibility and thus, being unmotivated to acquire the skills of mothering, either remained incompetent or unreliable. It is the feelings of responsibility, therefore, which endow motherhood with much of its sacred character. Thus, we can understand how motherhood can be morally uplifting to women even when it is not valued socially, and even when it is not skillfully performed.

### **The Salience of Personal Character rather than Social Role in Mothers' Selves**

The essence of the symbolic interactionist notion of self is that the person, being both subject and object, can be an object not only to others, but to herself. The term self-concept refers to the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to her/himself as an object (Rosenberg, 1979:7). Identity, therefore, refers to both a

component of self-concept and a way of casting the self as a social object. Identity is not a substitute word for the self, but is a constitutive part of the social process we refer to when we speak of the self. Identity is a way of establishing what and where the individual is in social terms. When one has identity, one is situated. Identities may be placed and announced according to a variety of categories of social relationships (Stone, 1981). Identities may be located through interpersonal relationships where names are central to identity, or through structural relations where title or social position provide the key to locating the self socially. Although structural relations provide important bases for identities in modern societies, as Stone (1981:189) points out, since one's name ordinarily outlast one's titles, interpersonal relations probably provide a more important social basis for the continuation of identity. Motherhood, therefore, was expected to provide an important basis for biographical rather than situated identity. The data from the research support that prediction.

The symbolic interactionist concepts of identity and 'self as object', however, are complex and require clarification in order to understand the salience of personal character rather than role in mothers' experience of self. To understand the nature of the self, Hewitt (1976; 72) argues, we need to appreciate the dual location of persons as objects of their own acts and the acts of others. We must, he continues,

distinguish between situated selves and biographical selves (see Appendix 3).

Most discussions of identity tend to focus on role-identity or social location as the key defining feature of self as object. However, to understand the processual and social nature of the self it is important that the analytical dimensions of qualities (character) and evaluation (esteem) not be overlooked. People do not regard themselves or others merely in terms of their respective social locations; they appraise themselves and one another in terms of qualities and characters they are deemed to have, and how these are evaluated (Hewitt; 1976: 79). Indeed, the qualities people are alleged to have by virtue of occupying a specific role may come to take on greater significance than situated role identity in establishing biographical self. For example, a woman who is loving to her children may come to view herself (or be viewed by others) as an essentially loving person, regardless of the specific roles she situationally takes on.

I argued in Chapter Five and Six that motherhood could be seen as a structured time for intense emotion in women's lives: an emotionally structured rite of passage in the transformation of female identity. We saw how motherhood did not simply express gender identity as is often argued, but it allowed women to achieve a feminine identity as a loving, caring, responsible person. I argued that character assessment, rather than role or status as a mother, played a

major role in establishing not just the identities, but the selves women claimed. And the selves women claimed through motherhood were not simply gender identities as women, but gendered identities and gendered selves: feminized, adult senses of self as a person, not simply as a woman. What was vested in women's commitment to motherhood was not simply a social identity of mother, but a character of a caring, patient, responsible adult person - a positively valued character which is quintessentially realized for women through motherhood. In short, through motherhood women judge their worth not just as women, but as persons. In a gendered society, of course, what makes women feel good about themselves is typically different from what makes men feel good about themselves.

### Reproducing Culture and Constituting the Self as a Moral Entity

Many women in the study did not set out to fill the role of mother,<sup>7</sup> but the majority of them did come to value the persons they became through filling that role. What women chose in becoming mothers (and many did not choose) was not the role of mother in the way we often think of that role. They did not choose to take on the romanticized cultural image of mother, be it saint, self-sacrifice or morally transformed persons. Rather women came through a wide variety of routes to take on the behaviour or outcome of having a child. What became clear from the data is that women, once they have

assumed the behavioural role of mother, found that the everyday living out of that role led to perceived character changes such that their claimed identity did in fact come to approximate the cultural romanticized image of a what a mother is 'supposed' to be. That is, once women stepped into the situation of being a mother the social relationships and cultural definition of the situation, and women's own responses, acted together to make women feel that they were morally transformed persons.

Although they did not set out to achieve this identity, women came to claim for themselves the romanticized identity of mother. However, it should be emphasized that it was character assessment rather than social position that mobilized this female role identity. It is ironical, therefore, that women come to reproduce the romanticized image of mother which in turn functions to produce much of the ambivalence and pressure women feel about motherhood.

As I analyzed the data for this thesis I became struck by the ways in which women's stories of their transitions to motherhood were analogous to many of our culture's mythological themes of heroic quests.<sup>4</sup> Typically, the traditional hero's mythological journey involved a quest for adventure, honour, or truth. The hero's journey can be seen as a metaphor for a search for identity. The heroine's journey, on the other hand, is quite different. Whereas the hero's journey typically involves a worldly and often solitary quest, the heroine's journey, as described by women in this study, was an inner

journey of self-change and moral development. Unlike the hero's defiance of social ties as he responds to the 'call to adventure' and 'rides off to distant lands', women's 'noble journey' is represented as one of self-discovery and deepened social commitment. Like much of human experience, women's experience as mothers was open to the human capacity to mythologize the mundane, and to confer on everyday life the qualities of the sacred. Thus, women's accounts both reflected and reproduced many of the mythological themes of human existence and romantic images of motherhood.

**ENDNOTES**

1. See for example the recently published report by the National Council of Welfare (1990) that documents the links between motherhood and poverty in Canada.

2. Throughout the thesis I have shown the extent to which the experience of motherhood is also structured by class. However, what surprised me in the data was the strength of the effect of gender in shaping experience in a class society.

3. Working-class women were somewhat more likely than middle-class women to have held romanticized images of the role of mother and to have found the role and the role-identity attractive. The data from this study show, however, that becoming a mother is better understood as the product of a series of processes rather than as the embracement of a social role. For an excellent analysis of women's decisions around contraception, pregnancy and abortion see Luker (1975).

4. See Swidler (1980) and Campbell (1949; 1988). There has been recently a surge in popular interest in mythology occasioned in large part by the work of Joseph Campbell (1949; 1988). The use of the terms 'heroic journey' and 'mythology' in this chapter follow Campbell's usage. Although the heroic adventures to which I refer are those drawn from Western European cultures, Campbell argues that these myths represent universal archetypes common to all cultures.

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**APPENDIX 1**  
**RESPONDENTS' EDUCATION AND OCCUPATION**

**MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN**

**Occupation**

**Education**

Senior Policy Advisor	M.A
Accountant	B.A. (Commerce)
Literacy Coordinator	B.A.
Social Worker	M.A.
Teaching Master (Comm. College)	B.A., part M.A.
Management Board Officer	M.A.
Teacher (elementary)	B.A.,+ Post Grad.
Coordinator of language studies	B.A.
Lawyer	B.A. LLB.
High School Teacher	B.A.
Director:Non-Profit Organization	M.A.
Librarian	M.A.
Childcare Worker	Diploma - 3 year
Immigration Officer/Civil Servant	B.A.
Executive Secretary (Administrative)	Journalism Diploma + part of B.A.
Consultant - Health Education	B.A. doing M.A.
Policy Analyst	B.A.
Flight Attendant/Air Hostess	B.A. doing M.A.
Managing Editor	B.A.
Secretary	B.A.
Marketing Manager	Grade 13
Counsellor	Diploma
Graphic Designer	B.A.+ Graphic Arts
Teaching Master (Comm. College)	B.A.
Accountant	Professional Reg.
Research Advisor	B.A. doing M.A.
Social Worker (Childcare)	3 year Diploma
Counsellor	Ryerson Diploma
Teacher (elementary)	B.A.
Archivist	M.A.

WORKING-CLASS WOMEN

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Education</u>
Apprentice Woodworker	Grade 12
Bell Operator	Grade 11
Accounting Clerk	Grade 12
Secretary	Grade 12 + secretarial program
Clerical	Grade 12
Service Clerk	Grade 12
Clerical	Grade 13
Shipper - drycleaners	Grade 11
Factory Worker - unskilled	Grade 10
Clerical	Grade 12
Truck Driver	Grade 10
Bookkeeping Clerk	Grade 12
Typesetter	Grade 12 + apprenticeship
Payroll Clerk	Grade 10
Daycare Assistant	Grade 12
Data Entry Clerk	Grade 12 + 1 year Clerical training
Secretary (Real Estate Office)	Grade 12
Clerical Assistant	Grade 10
Hotel Housekeeping	Grade 11
Accounting Clerk	Grade 9
Clerical/ Secretarial Assistant	Grade 13
Sheet Metal Worker	Grade 9
Hospital Dietary aid	Grade 9
Wordprocessor	Grade 13
Apprentice Mechanic	Grade 12
Secretary	Grade 13
Clerical	Grade 11
Cashier/Bartender	Grade 12

**APPENDIX 2**  
**METHODOLOGY NOTE**

**Measures**

This study does not analyze all the data gathered through the interviews, therefore, only the standardized tests used in this report will be described below. The two measures discussed below assess in a standardised way two aspects of women's experience as mothers which the qualitative data present using women's own words. In this sense, these alternative approaches to understanding women's experience are complementary. The standardized tests are particularly useful because they allow comparisons between the findings of this research and other studies in a more controlled way than that provided for by the comparison of qualitative data. The standardised tests also provide a form of verification of the analysis of the qualitative data.

**Self-Esteem**

The measure of self-esteem used in this study is Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965) (see below). I decided to use a standardized test to measure self-esteem both because it is an evaluative aspect of self-concept which appears to have successfully lent itself to measurement, and because the motive to protect or enhance self-esteem is seen to have important

explanatory power in relation to understanding the self (Rosenberg, 1979; Breytspraak, 1984). Self-esteem can also be used as a measure of subjective quality of life, and psychologists in particular emphasize the relationship between self-esteem and mental health (George and Bearon, 1980).

As discussed earlier the concept of self is theoretically and methodologically complex. Rosenberg (1979) has approached the problems of the empirical study of the self by distinguishing a major dimension of self, that of self-concept, which, he argues, does lend itself to empirical study and measurement. Rosenberg (1979: 7) defines self-concept as "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object." So defined, the focus is on self as object, not subject: self-concept is not identical with self. It should be noted, however, that Rosenberg's definition of self-concept includes both an affective and cognitive dimensions. It includes not just how people think about themselves, but also how they evaluate and feel about those images. The term self-esteem is used by Rosenberg to refer to this evaluative component of self-concept. It refers to a basic feeling of self-worth and belief that one is a person of value. Thus the Rosenberg scale measures global or overall self-esteem. A dimensional self-esteem scale would measure one's evaluation of one's self in relation to specific self-characteristics; one's evaluation of one's self as a student or tennis player, for example.

Breytspraak (1984) and George and Bearon (1980) point out, the terms self-concept is most frequently used to refer only to the cognitive dimension of self-perception, and the term self-esteem to refer to the affective judgement emerging from individuals' comparisons of what they are like and what they aspire to be like. Thus, self-concept becomes basically a descriptive phenomenon: "Self-esteem, on the other hand, is evaluative and can be assessed qualitatively (i.e., as "high" or "low" as "positive" or "negative")" (George and Bearon, 1980). High self-esteem is seen as innately satisfying, and low self-esteem is not (Breytspraak, 1984). High self-esteem is also seen as being associated with well-being, including positive mental health and feelings of interpersonal success and mastery (Rosenberg, 1965; George and Bearon, 1980). Although psychologists sometimes view self-esteem as a stable and enduring trait of the individual, sociologists more frequently see it as a variable in which the development and maintenance of self-esteem is dependent on situational and interpersonal factors (George and Bearon, 1980). In this study the measure of women's self-esteem is being used as a dependent variable that tells us about women's experience as mothers.

George and Bearon describe the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale as perhaps the "classic measure of global self-esteem; it is a unidimensional, extensively used scale that has been used on diverse samples of children and adults of both genders and of different ages (1980; 78). It is a 10 item Guttman scale

where respondents are asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with questions relating to liking/and or approving of the self. The scoring method used in this study is that used in Rosenberg's original study (1965), where the 10 items are "contrived" to yield a 7 point scale which ranges from the highest self-esteem score of zero to the lowest self-esteem score of six. In terms of reliability of this scale Rosenberg reported a Guttman scale reproducibility coefficient of 92 per cent and a scalability coefficient of 72 per cent. Validity data are presented in Rosenberg (1965). In particular, Rosenberg points to a clear relationship between scores on his self-esteem scale and other measurements of both depression and anxiety.

### **The Measurement of Emotional Distress**

Because the situation of employed mothers is frequently characterized as one of 'role-overload', the Centre for Epidemiological Studies- Depression Scale (CES-D) was used as an indicator of women's consequent distress. Although the CES-D scale was originally designed to measure current levels of depressive symptomatology in non-institutionalized adult populations, the scale's focus not limited exclusively to depressive symptoms, so it is, perhaps, better regarded as a measure of more general distress (Hsu and Marshall, 1987). The scale consists of 20 items and respondents were asked to indicate how frequently in the previous week they had experienced each

symptom. The total sum of scores can range from 0 to 60. Scores of 0-15 are considered to indicate no depression; 16-20 indicates mild depression; 21-30 indicates moderate depression and scores of 31 and over indicates severe depression (Hsu and Marshall, 1987). Women typically score higher than men on this scale. Other studies of non-clinical female populations indicate that the general population of women that could be expected to have any emotional distress (scores of mild and over) was between 19.5 and 23.5 per cent (Hsu and Marshall; 1987: 1562).

=====

**(ROSENBERG'S SELF ESTEEM SCALE)**

FEELINGS ABOUT YOURSELF

For the following questions, circle the number which corresponds to how much you agree or disagree.

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly

	<u>AS</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>DS</u>
--	-----------	----------	----------	-----------

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others ..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. ....                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. All in all I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. ....                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d. I am able to do things as well as most other people. ....                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| e. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.....                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| f. I take a positive attitude towards myself....                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

g. On the whole I am satisfied with myself.....1	2	3	4
h. I wish I could have more respect for myself..1	2	3	4
i. I certainly feel useless at times .....1	2	3	4
j. At times I think I am no good at all.....1	2	3	4

### CES-D DISTRESS SCALE

Below

is a list of the ways you might have felt or behaved. Please indicate **how often** you have felt this way during the past week

Code key: by days.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | <b>Most</b> or <b>all</b> of the time (on 5-7 days)                |
| 2 | Occasionally or a <b>moderate</b> amount of the time (on 3-5 days) |
| 3 | <b>Some</b> or <b>little</b> of the time: (on 1-2 days)            |
| 4 | <b>Rarely</b> or <b>none</b> of the time (less than one day)       |

**During the past week:**

a. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.	1	2	3	4
b. I did not feel like eating, my appetite was poor.	1	2	3	4
c. I felt I could not shake the blues even with help from my family or friends.	1	2	3	4
d. I felt I was as good as other people	1	2	3	4
e. I had trouble concentrating	1	2	3	4
f. I felt depressed.	1	2	3	4
g. I felt everything I did was an effort.	1	2	3	4
h. I felt hopeful about the future.	1	2	3	4
i. I thought my life had been a failure.	1	2	3	4
j. I felt fearful.	1	2	3	4
k. My sleep was restless.	1	2	3	4

l. I was happy.	1	2	3	4
m. I talked less than usual.	1	2	3	4
n. I felt lonely.	1	2	3	4
o. People were unfriendly.	1	2	3	4
p. I enjoyed life.	1	2	3	4
q. I had crying spells.	1	2	3	4
r. I felt sad.	1	2	3	4
s. I felt that people disliked me.	1	2	3	4
t. I could not "get going".	1	2	3	4
u. I felt anxiety or panic attacks	1	2	3	4
v. I felt pessimistic about the future.	1	2	3	4

**APPENDIX 3  
CONCEPTUALIZING THE SELF**

<b>The person as object to self</b>		
	<u>situated self</u>	<u>biographical self</u>
<b>LOCATION</b>	sense of position in a particular situation	cumulative sense of place relative to others
	<b>situated identity</b>	<b>identity</b>
<b>QUALITIES</b>	Image of self in a situation	Cumulative image of self
	<b>situated self-image</b>	<b>self-image</b>
<b>EVALUATION</b>	Evaluation of self in a particular situation	Cumulative evaluation of self
	<b>situated self-esteem</b>	<b>self-esteem</b>
<b>The person as object to others</b>		
	<u>situated self</u>	<u>biographical self</u>
<b>LOCATION</b>	Others' view of a person's position in a particular situation	Others' cumulative sense of a person's place
	<b>situated social identity</b>	<b>social identity</b>
<b>QUALITIES</b>	Others' image of the person in a particular situation	Others' cumulative image of the person
	<b>situated image</b>	<b>image</b>
<b>EVALUATION</b>	Others' evaluation of the person in a particular situation	Others' cumulative evaluation of the person
	<b>situated esteem</b>	<b>esteem</b>

Taken from Hewitt; 1976: 81

**APPENDIX 4**

**RECRUITMENT LITERATURE AND INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**CAN YOU HELP**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Martha Feely. I am conducting a study of working mothers of pre-school children. This research is for my doctoral thesis in Sociology at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. I wish to contact mothers of pre-schoolers who may be interested in participating in this study.

**THE PURPOSE** of this study is to learn more about women's experiences of combining full-time work and motherhood. My study looks at how women feel about work and motherhood in their lives, the satisfaction they get and the difficulties they experience. It is a study about working mothers' everyday lives from their own viewpoints.

**BENEFITS OF THE STUDY.** As the investigator in this study I believe that not enough is known or understood about women's lives and women's viewpoints. It is expected that this research will provide a better understanding of the lives of mothers of pre-school children who also work full-time outside the home, the choices they face, their joys and difficulties. This information may be useful to other women facing similar choices and circumstances. The research findings may also be useful in identifying potential areas for change in Social Policy.

**If you take part** in the study I shall arrange an interview with you at your convenience and in the place of your choice. All information you give me will be strictly **confidential** and used only for research purposes. The information participants provide will be presented in terms of general patterns and trends and no individual can be identified from research reports.

**I will** send you a summary of the findings when the research is complete. At any time I would enjoy answering questions about the study. My telephone number is at the bottom of this letter.

**In order to take part** in this study, mothers must share certain characteristics. These criteria are required for strict sampling reasons and in order to allow comparisons with other studies. Mothers in the study must work full-time outside the home, have at least one pre-school child who lives with them and be Canadian educated.

I will contact you by phone in the near future to discuss the study and your interest in participating.

Sincerely,  
Martha Feely, M.A.  
Toronto tel. 658 0236



McMASTER UNIVERSITY

Department of Sociology

1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4M4  
Telephone: 525-9140 Ext. 4481

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November 23, 1987

Dear Research Study Participant:

This letter is to introduce Martha Feely. Martha is conducting research on the ways in which working mothers with small children deal with the conflicting demands of family and work. She is interested in talking to you about your attitudes and responses to these experiences. In addition, she will ask you some questions about your family and work history so that she may get a better idea of your background.

I hope that you will be willing to participate in Martha's research, and that you will spend an hour or two discussing your attitudes and thoughts with her. Your cooperation will help her complete the requirements for her Doctorate in Sociology (Ph.D.) at McMaster University. Without the help of people like you, she will not be able to complete this aspect of her degree requirements.

As Martha's supervisor, I will make every effort to ensure that this research will abide by the strictest ethical procedures. The information that you provide Martha will remain confidential and will be seen only by her and me. Moreover, I will ensure that the doctoral thesis that she writes will contain no information that would make it possible to identify any particular person that she interviews. If you have any questions that you would like to ask me about this research, please feel free to telephone me (collect) at (416) 525-9140, Extension 3603. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely yours,

Ralph Matthews, Ph.D.,  
Professor

A CENTURY OF DISCOVERY



UN SIECLE DE DECOUVERTES

**WORK AND MOTHERHOOD STUDY**

1988

**TELEPHONE PROCEDURE**

My name is Martha Feely. I am conducting a study of mothers of pre-school children who also work outside the home full time. This research is for my doctoral thesis in Sociolog at McMaster University, Hamilton. I will be interviewing 80 mothers in the Toronto area. I mailed you a letter telling you about this study. Do you remember receiving it?

The study looks at how women feel about combining work and motherhood, the satisfaction they get and the difficulties they experience. It is a study that sets out to talk with women and to collect data on women's viewpoints and experience in their own words.

Participation in the study will involve an interview of about two hours. The interview time will be arranged to suit you, in your home, or if you wish, in another convenient place. You are free to refuse to answer any questions you wish and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I want to emphasise that all the information will be kept in strict confidence and used only for research purposes. The information participants provide will be used to give a picture of general patterns and trends. No individual will be identifiable from research reports. When the study is complete I will send participants a summary of the findings. You may also phone me at anytime to answer questions you may have about the study. My Toronto telephone no. is 658 - 0236.

Are you interested in participating? Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

(If respondent is interested in participating, go to the telephone screening section. If not interested, thank her for her time and tell her she may call if she wants to ask further questions about the study.)

**WORK AND MOTHERHOOD STUDY**

1988

**CONSENT STATEMENT**

I agree to participate in a study on work and motherhood in women's lives.

**THE PURPOSE** of the study is to learn more about women's experience of combining full-time work and motherhood. The study is designed to discover how mothers of pre-school children feel about work and motherhood in their lives and what the choices they make in this respect mean to the women involved.

**THE INVESTIGATOR** in this study is Martha Feely, M.A. who is conducting this research for her doctoral thesis in Sociology at McMaster University Hamilton. She will answer any questions I have concerning this study. I understand that she may be contacted by mail at McMaster University or by phone in Toronto at 658-0236. The Faculty Supervisor to this study is Dr. R. Matthews who may be contacted at the Department of Sociology, McMaster University.

I have been assured that all information I provide will be treated with the utmost **confidence** and that no individual can be identified in research reports.

I understand that I am may refrain from answering any question asked in the interview and withdraw from the study at anytime.

I have been told about the function of the Ethics Committee at McMaster University to which I may report any complaint regarding a procedure which I feel violates my welfare. The Chairman of the Ethics Committee is Dr. E.J.E. Szathmary, CNH - 527 McMaster University, tel. (416) 525 9140.

I agree to take part in an interview with Martha Feely as part of the study describes above and to allow this interview to be audiotaped. The interview will be approximately two hours during which I will be asked to fill some questionnaires. I have the right to review the audiotape and written materials after the interview. I also understand that all identifying information will be removed from interview material and that information will be used only for research purposes. I will be sent a summary of the research findings when the study is complete.

I give my consent to take part in this study.

---

Signature

(date)

---

WORK AND MOTHERHOOD IN WOMEN'S LIVES  
TELEPHONING PRE-SCREENING SCHEDULE

INVESTIGATOR: MARTHA FEELY

1988

INTERVIEW PRE-SCREENING CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE CONTACTED: \_\_\_\_\_

CALL #: \_\_\_\_\_

OUTCOME/ELIGIBILITY: \_\_\_\_\_

SOURCE OF CONTACT: \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEW CODE NO: \_\_\_\_\_

### WORK AND MOTHERHOOD STUDY

#### TELEPHONE SCREENING

Before we set up an interview date, I should explain to you that the design of this study requires that the mothers in the sample fit certain sampling criteria. That is, the mothers interviewed must be alike in specific ways. They must all have full-time employment outside the home, be Canadian educated and have at least one pre-school child (i.e. age 5 years or younger) who normally resides with them.

I would like to take a few minutes to talk with you to make sure you fit this sampling description.

1 First, you have a pre-school child who usually resides with you, is that right?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

2 Do you work full-time outside the home?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

3 Are you Canadian educated (from grade 1 onwards)?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

**IF RESPONDENT ANSWERS 'NO' TO ANY OF THE ABOVE QUESTIONS, EXPLAIN THAT SHE IS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR INCLUSION IN THE STUDY AND THANK HER FOR HER TIME AND INTEREST IN THE STUDY.**

IF RESPONDENT ANSWERS YES TO ALL THREE QUESTIONS, TELL HER THAT SHE IS IDEAL FOR INCLUSION IN THE STUDY AND ASK PERMISSION TO ASK HER A FEW BACKGROUND QUESTIONS BEFORE SETTING UP THE INTERVIEW DATE.

4 (a) How many children do you have, including your pre-schooler?

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) May I have their names and ages?

<u>NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>RESIDES WITH R.</u> Y/N
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

(c) Who amongst these normally resides with you?

5 (a) How many hours a week do you usually work outside the home?

\_\_\_\_\_ hours

(b) What hours do you usually work, regular business hours, shifts, or what?

1 Regular business hours (e.g. 9 to 5, or similar)

2 Other hours (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_

9 Refusal/No answer

(c) In how many weeks of the year are you usually employed full time?

1 Fewer than 25 weeks a year

2 25 to 30 weeks a year

3 31 to 35 weeks

4 36 to 40 weeks

5 41 to 45 weeks

6 46 weeks and over

7 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

- 6 (a) What is your present occupation or job title?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (b) **IF OCCUPATION IS UNCLEAR, ASK, IN ORDER TO PROBE:** In what business or industry is this? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (c) **IF OCCUPATION IS STILL UNCLEAR, ASK, IN ORDER TO PROBE:** What product is produced or service given? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 7 (a) Is your present occupation your usual or main occupation?  
1 Yes -----> **SKIP TO Q.8**  
2 No  
3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 9 Refusal/No answer
- (b) **IF USUAL OCCUPATION IS DIFFERENT FROM PRESENT OCCUPATION, ASK:** What is your usual or main occupation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (c) How did you come to be working in this area rather than in your usual occupation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 8 (a) Do you have more than one paid job at present?  
1 Yes  
2 No -----> **SKIP TO Q.9**  
9 Refusal/No answer
- (b) **IF YES,ASK:** What job, other than the one you previously mentioned, do you have? (**ASK FOR JOB TITLE**).  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(c) How many hours a week do you work at that job?

\_\_\_\_\_

9 (a) What is your present marital status?

- 1 Single (never married)  
 2 Widowed (ASK: for how long? \_\_\_\_\_)  
 3 Separated (ASK: for how long? \_\_\_\_\_)  
 4 Divorced (ASK: for how long? \_\_\_\_\_)

**1,2,3,4, ARE CATEGORISED AS ALONE MOTHERS**

- 5 Married and living with spouse  
 6 Living in a common law/permanent relationship

**5,6, ARE CATEGORISED AS MOTHERS WITH PARTNERS**

7 Combination of above categories (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9 Refusal/No answer

**CATEGORISE 7,8, AS ALONE MOTHERS, OR MOTHERS WITH PARTNERS AS APPROPRIATE.**

(b) **ALONE MOTHERS ONLY (1,2,3,4,)**, ASK, IN ORDER TO CHECK:  
 Are you living with someone at the present?

- 1 Yes  
 2 No  
 9 Refusal/No answer

**IF YES, CODE AS 'WITH PARTNER' BELOW.**

**CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE SAMPLE CATEGORISATION:**

ALONE MOTHER

MOTHER WITH PARTNER

10 **IF MARRIED OR LIVING WITH PARTNER ASK:**

(a) What is your husband's/ partner's usual or main occupation or job title? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) **IF OCCUPATION IS UNCLEAR, ASK, IN ORDER TO PROBE:** In what business or industry is that? \_\_\_\_\_

---

(c) **IF OCCUPATION IS STILL UNCLEAR, ASK, IN ORDER TO PROBE:**  
 What product is produced, or service given? \_\_\_\_\_

---

THANK RESPONDENT FOR HER TIME AND ASSISTANCE. ARRANGE A SUITABLE TIME AND PLACE FOR THE INTERVIEW, OR ARRANGE A CALL BACK DATE. IF INTERVIEW IS SCHEDULED, TELL THE RESPONDENT THAT YOU WILL CALL THE DAY PRIOR TO THE ARRANGED DATE TO CHECK THAT THE APPOINTMENT STILL STANDS. ASK FOR TIME AND NUMBER TO CALL.

ASK RESPONDENT IF SHE HAS ANY QUESTIONS. AGAIN, GIVE HER A PHONE NUMBER AT WHICH TO CONTACT YOU.

---

**IDENTIFYING INFORMATION TO BE REMOVED ONCE CODE IS ON MASTER SHEET**

---

INTERVIEW SCHEDULED FOR: DATE \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

PLACE: \_\_\_\_\_

PRE INTERVIEW CALL: DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TEL. NO. \_\_\_\_\_

TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

CALL BACK DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_ TEL. \_\_\_\_\_

CALL BACK DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_ TEL. \_\_\_\_\_

CALL BACK DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_ TEL. \_\_\_\_\_

RESPONDENT'S INTERVIEW CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

RESPONDENT'S NAME AND ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NO.:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEW CODE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER CODE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

WORK AND MOTHERHOOD IN WOMEN'S LIVES  
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INVESTIGATOR: MARTHA FEELY

1988

DATE OF INTERVIEW: \_\_\_\_\_

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

I would like to begin this interview by asking you for some general information about yourself and your household.

11. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
12. (a) Approximately what was the population size of the area in which you spent most of your life while you were growing up? **(CIRCLE MULTIPLE RESPONSES IF NECESSARY)**
- 1 Rural area (e.g. farm)
  - 2 Village/small settlement (population under 2,500)
  - 3 Small town (population 2,500 to 9,999)
  - 4 Town (population 10,000 - 49,999 )
  - 5 Urban (population 50,000 - 99,999 )
  - 6 City (population 100,000- 499,999)
  - 7 City (population 500,000 and over)
  - 8 Don't know/Can't remember
  - 9 Refusal/No answer
- (b) Where did you live when you were aged sixteen years?
- 1 Same as above
  - 2 Other area **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
  - 9 Refusal/No answer
13. What is your ethnic background? **(CIRCLE MULTIPLE RESPONSES IF NECESSARY)**
- 01 British (includes Scottish and Welsh)
  - 02 Canadian
  - 03 Dutch
  - 04 French
  - 05 French Canadian
  - 06 German
  - 07 Irish
  - 08 Italian
  - 09 Portuguese
  - 10 Other Western European **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
  - 11 Other Eastern European **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
  - 12 Asian **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
  - 13 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
  - 88 Don't know/Can't remember
  - 99 Refusal/No answer
14. (a) Do you consider yourself as having any religious affiliation or religious preference?

- 1 Yes  
 2 Other response (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
 3 No -----> **SKIP TO Q.15**  
 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF YES:** What is your religious affiliation or preference?

- 01 Anglican  
 02 Baptist  
 03 Jehovah's Witness  
 04 Jewish  
 05 Lutheran  
 06 Muslim  
 07 Pentecostal  
 08 Presbyterian  
 09 Roman Catholic  
 10 Salvation Army  
 11 United Church  
 12 Other Christian (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
 13 Other non Christian (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
 88 Can't remember/Don't know  
 99 Refusal/No answer

(c) How often do you attend a regular religious service, (i.e. not a marriage or baptism etc..)?

- 1 At least once a week  
 2 At least once a month  
 3 Several times a year  
 4 About once or twice a year  
 5 Less than once a year  
 6 Never  
 7 Not applicable  
 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
 9 No answer

15. I would like to ask you a little about the composition of your household. **(RECORD DETAILS ON SPECIAL CHART)**

(a) Counting yourself, how many adults usually live in your household? \_\_\_\_\_

**IF TWO OR MORE, ASK:**

(b) What are the names of the adults who usually live here?  
**FOR EACH ADULT LISTED ASK (b), (d) AND, IF NECESSARY ASK (e)**

- (c) How is (name) \_\_\_\_\_ related to you?  
 (d) What is his/her present employment status? Is s/he working, looking for work (hour?); not in the labour force, or what?  
 (e) **IF NOT OBVIOUS, ASK:** Is (name) \_\_\_\_\_ male or female?

16. Do you have any other family members or relatives living in this building?

- 1 Yes (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
 2 No  
 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
 9 Refusal/No answer

17. Now I would like to ask you about the children who usually live with you. (RECORD DETAILS ON SPECIAL CHART) You have told me that (names) \_\_\_\_\_ live(s) here, is that right?

(a) Are there any other children living here?

- 1 Yes (ASK FOR NAMES)  
 2 No  
 3 Refusal/No answer

FOR EACH CHILD'S NAME LISTED, ASK, AS NECESSARY (b), (c) (d) (e)

- (b) What age is (name) \_\_\_\_\_?  
 (c) IF NOT OBVIOUS, ASK: Is \_\_\_\_\_ male or female?  
 (d) How is \_\_\_\_\_ related to you? CHECK PRECISE RELATIONSHIP AS INDICATED ON CHART. PROBE AS APPLICABLE: Is \_\_\_\_\_ your child by birth or adoption or a step child? Is \_\_\_\_\_ your child by your present/previous relationship? etc.

-----> MOTHERS WITH HUSBANDS/PARTNERS, SKIP TO Q.21.

-----> ALONE MOTHERS WITH ONE CHILD, SKIP TO Q.20

18. ASK ALONE MOTHERS WITH MORE THAN ONE CHILD:

(A) Do all your children who live with you have the same father?

- 1 Yes -----> SKIP TO Q.20  
 2 No ---->IF HAS ONLY 2 CHILDREN, SKIP TO Q.19  
 3 Not applicable  
 4 Other  
 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) IF NO, AND HAS MORE THAN TWO CHILDREN PROBE: Which children have different fathers? \_\_\_\_\_

19. ASK ALONE MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN BY DIFFERENT FATHERS:

(a) Is (child/ren's name/s ) \_\_\_\_\_ father alive?

- 1 Yes  
 2 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
 3 No :  
 8 Don't know/Can't remember: -----> SKIP TO NEXT CHILD  
 9 Refusal/No answer :

(b) IF YES, ASK: Where does he live now? \_\_\_\_\_

(c) How often do you see him or communicate with him?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(d) How often do(es) the child/ren see him? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(e) Other than seeing the child/ren, how often does he communicate with the child/ren? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(f) Does he have legal visiting privileges or other legal rights to the child/ren?

- 1 Yes  
 2 No  
 3 Other  
 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
 9 Refusal/No answer

(g) IF YES, ASK: What are these? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**REPEAT SEQUENCE FOR OTHER CHILD/REN:**

(h) Is (child/ren's name/s) \_\_\_\_\_ father alive?

- 1 Yes  
 2 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
 3 No :  
 8 Don't know/Can't remember: -----> SKIP TO NEXT CHILD  
 9 Refusal/No answer : OR Q.21

(i) IF YES, ASK: Where does he live now? \_\_\_\_\_

(j) How often do you see him or communicate with him?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(k) How often do/es the child/ren see him? \_\_\_\_\_

---

(l) Other than seeing the child/ren, how often does he communicate with the child/ren? \_\_\_\_\_

---

(m) Does he have legal visiting privileges or other legal rights to the child/ren?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(n) **IF YES, ASK:** What are these? \_\_\_\_\_

---

**REPEAT SEQUENCE FOR OTHER CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT FATHERS-APPENDIX**

20. **ASK ALONE MOTHERS OF ONE CHILD OR CHILDREN BY THE SAME FATHER:**

(a) Is your child/ren's father alive?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember -----> **SKIP TO Q.21**
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** Where does he live now? \_\_\_\_\_

(c) How often do you see him or communicate with him?

---

(d) How often do(es) the child(ren) see him? \_\_\_\_\_

---

(e) Other than seeing the child/ren, how often does he communicate with the child/ren? \_\_\_\_\_

---

(f) Does he have legal visiting privileges or other legal rights to the child/ren?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(e) IF YES, ASK: What are these? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**21. ASK ALL MOTHERS:**

(a) Do you have any other children who live elsewhere?

- 1 Yes  
 2 No -----> **SKIP TO Q.22**  
 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) IF YES: How many? \_\_\_\_\_

(c) What is (are) his/her (their) name(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR EACH CHILD WHO NORMALLY LIVES ELSE WHERE ASK, AND RECORD ON SPECIAL CHART:**

- (d) How is \_\_\_\_\_ related to you?  
 (e) What age is \_\_\_\_\_? --> IF OVER 17 YEARS, **SKIP TO Q.22**  
 (f) IF NOT OBVIOUS, ASK: Is \_\_\_\_\_ male or female?  
 (g) With whom is \_\_\_\_\_ living?  
 (h) Who has legal custody of \_\_\_\_\_?  
 (i) How did \_\_\_\_\_ come to be living with \_\_\_\_\_?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(j) How often do you have contact with (name) \_\_\_\_\_

-----> **ALONE MOTHERS, SKIP TO Q.23**

**22. ASK ONLY MOTHERS WITH PARTNERS :**

(a) How long have you been married/living with your partner?

No of years: married \_\_\_\_\_ (living together before that? \_\_\_\_\_)

(b) Had you been married or living on a permanent basis with someone before your present relationship?

- 1 Yes (how often? \_\_\_\_\_)  
 2 No  
 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
 9 Refusal/No answer

**23. ASK ALL:**

(a) What was the highest level of schooling that you finished?

- | <u>R</u> |                 | <u>H / P</u> |
|----------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1        | Grade 6 or less | 1            |
| 2        | Grade 7 or 8    | 2            |

3	Grade 9 or 10	3
4	Grade 11 to 13	4
8	Don't know/Can't remember	8
9	Refusal/No answer	9

(b) What about other education or technical training?  
(CIRCLE ALL APPLICABLE CATEGORIES)

<u>R</u>		<u>H / P</u>
1	Some post-secondary (e.g. technical or business course)	1
2	Past secondary certificate or diploma (e.g. nursing or teaching)	2
3	B.A. (SPECIFY) _____	3
4	Post-graduate degree (SPECIFY) _____	4
5	Apprenticeship (SPECIFY) _____	5
6	Non post secondary certificate or diploma (SPECIFY) _____	6
7	Other (SPECIFY) _____	7
8	Don't know/Can't remember	8
9	Refusal/No answer	9

-----> IF ALONE MOTHER, SKIP TO Q.24

(c) IF LIVING WITH HUSBAND / PARTNER, ASK: what was the highest level of schooling that your husband/partner finished?

(d) What about other education or technical training he had? (CIRCLE ALL APPLICABLE CATEGORIES)

24. Before we leave this introductory section of the interview I would like to ask you a few questions about your childhood.

(a) Were you living with both of your parents while you were growing-up? (COUNT UNTIL AGE 16 AS GROWING UP)

1	Yes -----> <u>SKIP TO Q.25</u>
2	No
3	Some of the time (SPECIFY) _____
8	Don't know/Can't remember
9	Refusal/No answer

**IF NO, ASK:**

(b) With whom did you live most of the time until you were age sixteen? (CIRCLE MULTIPLE RESPONSES IF NECESSARY)

1	Mother
2	Step - mother

- 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 Father IF DID NOT GROW UP WITH MOTHER OR STEP
- 5 Step - father -----> MOTHER, SKIP TO Q.26
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

25. IF RESPONDENT GREW UP WITH MOTHER OR STEP-MOTHER, ASK:

- (a) Did your mother/step mother work outside the home when you were growing up? (i.e. until respondent was age sixteen)

- 1 Yes, mainly full-time
- 2 Yes, mainly part-time
- 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember -----> SKIP TO Q.26
- 9 Refusal/No answer SECTION B

- (b) IF YES, ASK: What was (were) her main occupation(s)?

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_

- (c) Did she seem to enjoy or like working?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

SECTION B: WORK AND WORK HISTORY

I would like to spend a little time talking with you about your work. First, I want to ask you some questions about the different jobs that you have held since you left school or college and first entered the labour force.

26. (a) How many jobs have you had since you first entered the labour force. Please do not include Summer jobs or part-time jobs you held while going to school or college?

\_\_\_\_\_

27. (a) What was the first job you had? Job title? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) **IF NECESSARY, ASK:** What did you do at that job? What were your responsibilities and duties? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(c) What age were you when you began this job? \_\_\_\_\_

(d) What were the other jobs you held? ( **IF POSSIBLE, LIST JOB TITLES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER**)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(e) In total, how many years have you spent in the labour force?

28. I would like you to think back to your first 3 to 5 years in the labour force and the job(s) that you held.

(a) On average, how did you feel about the jobs that you had? Did you like them, dislike them, or what? **RECORD COMMENT**

- 1 Overall, liked jobs a lot
- 2 Overall, liked jobs somewhat.
- 3 Overall, neither liked nor disliked the jobs
- 4 Overall, disliked the jobs somewhat
- 5 Overall, disliked the jobs a lot
- 6 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) At the time, did you feel that you had many choices in relation to the jobs and type of work that you took? **RECORD ANY COMMENT BELOW**

- 1 Yes, a lot
- 2 Yes, some
- 3 No, not much
- 4 No, very little
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(c) On the whole during those first 3 to 5 years in the labour

force, did you experience much job advancement (e.g. by moving to more rewarding positions) or did you find yourself working at pretty much the same level? **RECORD COMMENT**

- 1 Experienced significant job advancement
- 2 Experienced some job advancement
- 3 Experienced very little job advancement
- 4 Experienced no job advancement
- 5 Experienced disimprovement in job situation
- 6 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

**COMMENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

(d) **IF NECESSARY, ASK:** Can you explain why you say that? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

29. (a) Did you re-train or go back to school at some time between when you first entered the labour force and now?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Other ((**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 No : ----> **SKIP TO Q.30**
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember:
- 9 Refusal/No answer :

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** What training or further education did you take? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

30. I have some questions now about your recent work experiences.

(a) What was the last job you held **before** your present one?

(job title) \_\_\_\_\_

(b) What did you do at that job? (**IF NECESSARY:** what were your duties and responsibilities) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(c) What age were you when you began working at that job? \_\_\_\_\_

(d) Was the position full time or part time?

- 1 Full time
- 2 Part time
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(e) On the whole, how did you feel about that job? Did you like it, dislike it, or what? **RECORD COMMENT**

- 1 Liked it a lot
- 2 Liked it somewhat
- 3 Neither liked nor disliked it
- 4 Disliked it somewhat
- 5 Disliked it a lot
- 6 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(f) Why did you take that type of work? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(g) How long did you stay at that job? **ASK FOR DATES** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(h) Why did you leave that job? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(i) On the whole, would you say that your present (next) job was better or not as good as that one? **RECORD COMMENT**

- 1 Much better
- 2 Somewhat better
- 3 Much the same
- 4 Not as good
- 5 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(j) **IF NECESSARY, ASK:** Why do you say that? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



2 No -----> **SKIP TO (m)**

- (k) **IF YES, ASK:** About how many people are you responsible for?  
 (l) Do you have any say about their pay or promotion?

1 Yes  
 2 No  
 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
 9 Refusal/No answer

- (m) Does your boss have a supervisor over him/her?

1 Yes  
 2 No  
 3 Other (**SPECIFY**)  
 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
 9 Refusal/No answer

33. (a) How flexible is your present work in terms of work-time schedules?

1 Very flexible  
 2 Somewhat flexible  
 3 Not very flexible  
 4 Inflexible  
 8 Don't Know/Can't remember  
 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

- (b) How satisfied are you right now with your present work schedule? (**RECORD ANY COMMENT BELOW**)

1 Very satisfied  
 2 Somewhat/fairly satisfied  
 3 Neutral  
 4 Somewhat dissatisfied  
 5 Very dissatisfied  
 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- (c) **PROBE, IF NECESSARY,** How happy/unhappy are you with the hours you work?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

34. What are the main reasons you are working right now? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



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---

35. (a) What are the main reasons you took your present job?  
**CIRCLE MULTIPLE RESPONSES, IF NECESSARY, AND RECORD COMMENT**

- 1 Liked the type of work
- 2 The pay
- 3 Convenient location
- 4 Suited family schedule
- 5 Career advancement reasons
- 6 Only job available at the time
- 7 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer -----> **SKIP TO Q.36**

(c) Why was (MENTION REASON) \_\_\_\_\_ important to you? **ASK (c)**  
**FOR EACH REASON MENTIONED.**

i. (reason: \_\_\_\_\_)

---



---

ii. (reason: \_\_\_\_\_)

---



---

iii. (reason: \_\_\_\_\_)

---



---

iv. \_\_\_\_\_

36. (a) Do you think that having a child (children) has affected  
your decisions about work right now?

- 1 Yes, affected them a lot
- 2 Yes, affected them somewhat

- 3 No effect :
- 8 Don't know/can't remember : -----> SKIP TO Q.37
- 9 Refusal/No answer :

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** In what ways? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(c) Why do you say that? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

37. (a) What are the things about your job that you like most?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(b) What are the things about your job that you dislike most?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

38. **HAND CARD 1 TO RESPONDENT:** Please read the following set of questions on how you feel about your present job, and circle your answer.

=====

(a) All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job? (Circle one number)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
very			neutral			very
dissatisfied						satisfied

(b) How likely is it that you will make a genuine effort to find a new job with an other employer within the next year?



40. (a) Right now, for you, what are the best things about working?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(b) Right now, for you what are the worst things about working?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

41. (a) If you could arrange things as you wanted, and finances were not a problem, would you still work full time, would you stay home, or what?

- 1 Work full time (ASK: what hours? \_\_\_\_\_)
- 2 Work part time (ASK: what hours? \_\_\_\_\_)
- 3 Work from home (ASK: what hours? \_\_\_\_\_)
- 4 Stay home as full time mother
- 5 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember -----> **SKIP TO Q.42**
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) Why would you do that? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(c) **IF WOULD CHOOSE PART-TIME WORK, PROBE:** How would your work be affected if you were to work part-time only?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

42. (a) If you were not working, but instead were staying home to look after your child/children, how do you think you would feel? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) **IF NECESSARY, PROBE:** How come you say that?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) **PROBE:** Would it change how you see yourself?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) Are there any other important ways in which your life would change, if you were to stay home?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
43. (a) If you decided to stay home with your child/children for a couple of years, how would that affect your work in the future? **RECORD COMMENT BELOW**
- 1 Work very negatively affected
  - 2 Work somewhat negatively affected
  - 3 No effect
  - 4 Work somewhat positively affected
  - 5 Work very positively affected
  - 6 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_
  - 8 Don't know/Can't remember
  - 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) **IF NECESSARY, ASK:** Could you explain why you say that?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

44. The next set of questions ask about how involved you are in your work. For example, some people say that their work is one of the main interests in their lives, and others say that their work is much less important than other activities. Please tell me how much you personally agree or disagree with each of the statements I am going to read. Here is a copy to look at. **HAND CARD 2**

=====

Code key: Circle only one number per question

- |                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| - 3 Disagree strongly   | +3 Agree strongly   |
| - 2 Disagree moderately | +2 Agree moderately |
| - 1 Disagree mildly     | +1 Agree mildly     |

(a) The major satisfaction in my life comes from my work.	-3	-2	-1	+1	+2	+3
(b) To me, my work is only a small part of who I am.	-3	-2	-1	+1	+2	+3
(c) my work is the primary focus of my energy.	-3	-2	-1	+1	+2	+3
(d) I often feel like staying home from work.	-3	-2	-1	+1	+2	+3
(e) I live and breathe my job.	-3	-2	-1	+1	+2	+3
(f) Other parts of my life are more important to me than my work.	-3	-2	-1	+1	+2	+3

=====

45. (a) Are you a member of a trade union, professional association or other organisation at work?

1 Trade Union

- 2 Professional Association
- 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember -----> **SKIP TO Q.46**
- 9 Refusal/No Answer

(b) **IF A MEMBER, ASK:** How important is the (name \_\_\_\_\_ to you?

\_\_\_\_\_

Before leaving the section on work, I would like to ask you a set of questions about how you experience work. **HAND CARD 3.**

**WORK SATISFACTION**

=====  
 46. People differ in how they feel about their daily activities at work. For example, some people say that their work makes them feel useful, while others don't feel this at all. Think of your own work and tell me how often you experience each of the following things. Circle just one number for each question.

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>		
	never	seldom	sometimes	often	very often		
			Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
a. Gives me a sense of challenge .....	1		2	3	4	5	
b. Gives me a feel of self fulfillment .....	1		2	3	4	5	
c. Makes me feel like I am contributing to society .....	1		2	3	4	5	
d. Gives me an opportunity to learn new things .....	1		2	3	4	5	
e. Makes me feel important .....	1		2	3	4	5	
f. Gives me a feeling of authority....	1		2	3	4	5	
g. I get respect from others for							

my work .....	1	2	3	4	5
h. Gives me an opportunity to use my talents .....	1	2	3	4	5
i. Gives me a feeling of prestige or status .....	1	2	3	4	5
j. Gives me the opportunity for contact with people .....	1	2	3	4	5
k. I get feedback that I am doing a good job .....	1	2	3	4	5
l. Makes me feel good about myself....	1	2	3	4	5
m. Allows me to be creative .....	1	2	3	4	5
n. Gives me an opportunity for independent thought or action .....	1	2	3	4	5
o. Makes me feel useful .....	1	2	3	4	5
p. Makes me feel competent .....	1	2	3	4	5
q. Gives me a feeling of independence..	1	2	3	4	5
r. Gives me a sense of accomplishment..	1	2	3	4	5
s. Allows me to make important decisions .....	1	2	3	4	5
t. Gives me an opportunity for self expression .....	1	2	3	4	5
u. Gives me a feeling of self worth...	1	2	3	4	5
v. I get appreciation from others for my work .....	1	2	3	4	5
w. I get an opportunity for personal growth and development .....	1	2	3	4	5
x. I get satisfaction from knowing I am doing a job well .....	1	2	3	4	5
y. I get an opportunity to make friends .....	1	2	3	4	5

=====

## SECTION C : MOTHERHOOD

In this section of the interview the questions focus on your experience of being a mother.

47. What age were you when your first child was born? \_\_\_\_\_

48. **IN DEPTH OPEN-ENDED PROBE QUESTIONS: ASK AS APPROPRIATE**

(a) When did you begin to think about actually having a child?

\_\_\_\_\_

**IF NECESSARY, PROBE:** How about when you were an adult?

\_\_\_\_\_

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal

-----> **SKIP TO Q.49**

(c) When was that? (what was happening in your life then?)\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(d) **IF NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE, ASK:** Was that before or after you got married? \_\_\_\_\_

(e) How did you feel about having children then?\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

49. Many women say that being a mother is different to what they had expected. What about you? How does your experience of being a mother compare to what you thought it would be like?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

50. At the time that you became pregnant with your first child, were you working, a homemaker, going to school or what?

1 Working full time (**ASK:** at what?\_\_\_\_\_)

- 2 Working part time )ASK: At what? \_\_\_\_\_)
- 3 Unemployed and looking for work
- 4 Full time homemaker
- 5 School full time
- 6 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

51. (a) Did you consider what effect having a child would have on employment options

- 1 Yes, gave it a lot of consideration
- 2 Yes, gave it some consideration
- 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 Gave it little consideration
- 5 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember -----> SKIP TO Q.52
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** What main factors did you consider?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(c) **IF NECESSARY ASK:** How important was(were) this(these) to you

- (i) \_\_\_\_\_
- (ii) \_\_\_\_\_
- (iii) \_\_\_\_\_

52. Were you married or living with someone in a permanent relationship at that time?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

53. (a) Was you pregnancy with your first child planned?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 No -----> **SKIP TO Q.54**
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** At that time, what were the main reasons you wanted to have a child? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(c) **IF NECESSARY, ASK:** Why then? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(d) Did you discuss this decision with anyone who was close to you or whose opinion you particularly valued?

- 1 Yes, with spouse
- 2 Yes, with other than spouse (SPECIFY)
- 3 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember -----> **SKIP TO Q.55**
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(e) **IF YES, ASK:** With whom? \_\_\_\_\_

**IF APPROPRIATE AND NECESSARY, PROBE:** What about your husband/partner? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(f) What did you talk about? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

-----> **SKIP TO Q.55**

54. **IF PREGNANCY NOT PLANNED, ASK:**

(a) How did you feel when you learned that you were pregnant?

---



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---

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
9 Refusal/No answer

(b) Could you tell me why you felt that? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



---

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
9 Refusal/No answer

**ASK ALL MOTHERS:**55. (a) Following the birth of your first child did you stay home to look after the baby, go to work or what? **(CIRCLE MULTIPLE RESPONSES IF NECESSARY)**

- 01 Returned to full time work within/after 17 weeks maternity leave  
02 Full time work between 17 weeks and 1 year after birth  
03 Full time work within 1 to 3 years of birth  
04 Full time work within 3 to 5 years of birth  
05 Part time work within/after 17 weeks maternity leave  
06 Took part time work only within first year.  
07 Took part time work only within first 1 to 3 years  
08 Took part time work only within first 5 years  
09 Combination of part time and full time work **(SPECIFY)**

- 
- 10 Did not work outside the home during first 5 years.  
11 Only company maternity leave and sick/holiday time  
12 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_

- 
- 88 Don't know/Can't remember  
99 Refusal/No answer

(b) Was this what you had planned before the baby was born?

- 1 Yes

- 2 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(c) **IF NO, ASK:** How did that change from what you had planned to do come about? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(d) In all, how much time out of work did you take to look after this child.

- \_\_\_\_\_ years when I worked only part-time
- \_\_\_\_\_ years when I did not work at all.
- \_\_\_\_\_ months maternity leave and holidays/sick only.

-----> **IF HAS ONLY ONE CHILD SKIP TO Q.67**

56. What age were you when your second child was born? \_\_\_\_\_

57. At the time you became pregnant with your second child were you working, a full time homemaker, going to school or what?

- 1 Working full time (ASK: at what? \_\_\_\_\_)
- 2 Working part time (ASK: at what? \_\_\_\_\_)
- 3 Unemployed and looking for work
- 4 Going to school, full time
- 5 Homemaker, full time
- 6 Other (**Specify**) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

58. Were you married or living in a permanent relationship at that time?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

59. (a) Was your pregnancy with your second child planned?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 No -----> **SKIP TO Q.60**
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** At that time, what were the main reasons you

wanted a second child? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(c) IF NECESSARY, ASK: Why then? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

-----> SKIP TO Q.61

60. IF PREGNANCY WITH SECOND CHILD WAS NOT PLANNED, ASK:

(a) How did you feel when you learned that you were pregnant?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

-----> SKIP TO Q.61

(b) Can you explain to me why you felt that? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

61. ASK ALL MOTHERS WITH 2 OR MORE CHILDREN:

(a) At the time did you consider what effects having a second child would have on your work?

1 Yes, a lot

2 Yes, some

3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_

4 No, very little

5 Not at all

-----> SKIP TO Q.62

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

(b) What were the main factors you considered? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

(c) How important was/were this/these to you? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

(d) **IF NECESSARY:** Were there different factors to be considered when a second child was involved?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(e) **IF YES, PROBE:** What were these?

---



---



---

62. (a) At the time, did you consider how having a second child would affect relationships within your family?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF YES, PROBE:** What things did you consider? \_\_\_\_\_

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---

63. (a) After the birth of your second child did you stay home, go to work or what. (**CIRCLE MULTIPLE RESPONSES, IF NECESSARY**)

- 01 Returned to full time work within/after 17 weeks maternity leave
- 02 Full time work between 17 weeks and 1 year after birth
- 03 Full time work within 1 to 3 years of birth
- 04 Full time work within 3 to 5 years of birth
- 05 Part time work within/after 17 weeks maternity leave
- 06 Took part time work only within first year.
- 07 Took part time work only within first 1 to 3 years

- 08 Took part time work only within first 5 years
- 09 Combination of part time and full time work **(SPECIFY)**

- 
- 10 Did not work outside the home during first 5 years.
  - 11 Took only company maternity leave and sick/holiday time
  - 12 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_

- 
- 88 Don't know/Can't remember
  - 99 Refusal/No answer

- (b) Was this what you had planned before the baby was born?
  - 1 Yes
  - 2 No
  - 8 Don't know/Can't remember
  - 9 Refusal/ No answer

- (c) **IF NO, ASK:** How did this change from what you had planned come about? \_\_\_\_\_
- 

- (d) In all, how much time out of the labour force did you take to look after this child.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ years when I worked only part-time
  - \_\_\_\_\_ years when I did not work at all.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ months company maternity leave and sick/holiday time.

-----> IF RESPONDENT HAS THREE OR MORE CHILDREN REPEAT SEQUENCE OF QUESTIONS FOR EACH CHILD USING ADDITIONAL REPLY SHEETS

- 64. (a) Is there much of a difference between having just one child and having two (or more) children?
  - 1 Yes
  - 2 No
  - 8 Don't know/Can't remember -----> **SKIP TO Q.65**
  - 9 Refusal/No answer

- (b) **IF YES, ASK:** In what ways? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



---

- 65. (a) Has having additional children affected family relations?
  - 1 Yes

- 2 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** Can you tell me in what ways? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

66. (a) Has having additional children affected decisions about work?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** In what ways? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**ASK ALL MOTHERS**

67. (a) Do you want to have another child?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 No :
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember: -----> **SKIP TO Q.67 (d)**
- 9 Refusal/No answer :

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** How many more children would you like to have?

\_\_\_\_\_

(c) What are your main reasons for wanting another/more children? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

-----> **SKIP TO Q.68**

- (d) **IF DOES NOT WANT ANOTHER CHILD, ASK:** What are your main reasons for not wanting another child?

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68. (a) If you had to do it over again, would you still choose to have a child/children? **(RECORD COMMENT BELOW)**

- 1 Yes  
 2 No  
 3 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_  
 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

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- (b) Why is that? \_\_\_\_\_

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- (c) **IF WOULD 'DO IT OVER AGAIN', ASK:** Is there anything important you would do differently in terms of having a child /children? **(IF NECESSARY:For example, would you like fewer/more children?; sooner /later etc.? RECORD COMMENT**

- 1 Have child/ren sooner  
 2 Have child/ren later  
 3 Have more children  
 4 Have fewer children  
 5 Space children closer together  
 6 Space children further apart  
 7 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_  
 8 Nothing important  
 88 Don't know/Can't remember  
 99 Refusal/No answer

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69. (a) For you, what are the best things about having a child / children? \_\_\_\_\_

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**IF NECESSARY PROBE:** What are the greatest rewards of having a child/children? \_\_\_\_\_

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- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer -----> **SKIP TO Q.70**

(b) How important is/are (rewards mentioned) to you?

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(c) Do you talk about the rewards of having a child/children with anyone?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No -----> **SKIP TO Q.70-**
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(d) **IF YES, ASK OPEN ENDED IN-DEPTH PROBE QUESTIONS, AS APPROPRIATE AND RECORD QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES.** With whom? What do you talk about? How does that make you feel?

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70. (a) For you what are the worst things about having a child / children? \_\_\_\_\_

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**IF NECESSARY, PROBE:** What are the greatest disadvantages of having a child/children? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Don't know/Can't remember  
2 Refusal/No answer

(b) Do you talk about the 'disadvantages' of having a child/-children with anyone?

- 1 Yes  
2 No  
8 Don't know/Can't remember  
9 Refusal/No answer

(c) **IF YES, ASK OPEN ENDED IN-DEPTH PROBE QUESTIONS AS APPROPRIATE, AND RECORD QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES.** With whom? What do you talk about? How does that make you feel? What do you do?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

71. (a) How much time did you spend yesterday (most recent work-day) with with your child/ren? - while s/he/they were awake!

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
9 Refusal/No answer  
COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Was yesterday (last workday) a typical day for you in this respect? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Yes  
2 No

(c) **IF NO, PROBE FOR A TYPICAL WORKDAY IN THIS RESPECT**

Time spent with child/ren on typical workday \_\_\_\_\_

72. (a) Do you think that being a parent is different for a woman than it is for a man? **RECORD COMMENT BELOW**

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- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

73. Women differ in how they experience the daily activities of looking after a child. For example, some women find the work enjoyable, others find it frustrating. I want you to think of your daily tasks of childcare, such as getting the child/ren up in the morning, meal-times, bath-times and so on. Most days do you mainly get pleasure or enjoyment from these tasks, or do you find these tasks mainly make you frustrated or irritated?

- 1 Mainly enjoy a lot
- 2 Mainly enjoy somewhat
- 3 Mainly neutral
- 4 Mainly mild frustration
- 5 Mainly strong frustration
- 6 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

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74. **OPEN ENDED IN-DEPTH PROBE QUESTIONS: RECORD ANY ADDED PROBES**

(a) How do you think you would feel if you never had a child / children?

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- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) Do you think it would change how you see yourself? **RECORD COMMENT BELOW**

- 1 Yes
- 2 No -----> **SKIP TO Q.74 (d)**
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(c) **IF YES, ASK:** How come you think that? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(d) **IF NO, ASK:** How come you think that? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

75. (a) Do you think that there are any important ways your life would be different if you did not have a child/children?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** In what ways? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

76. (a) Did you ever think that you would not have a child/ren?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(b) How come you thought that? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

-----> IF ANSWERED NO ON (a) SKIP TO Q.77

(c) IF ANSWERED YES ON 76 (a), ASK: How did you feel about that?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

77. If a close friend were to come to you and ask for your advice about combining work and motherhood, what would you tell her?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

PROBE: What would you tell her it is like? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

78. (a) What makes a mother a 'good mother'? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**PROBE, IF NECESSARY:** What do you mean? What does she do or not do?

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(c) What makes a mother a 'poor mother'? \_\_\_\_\_

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**PROBE, IF NECESSARY:** What do you mean? What does she do or not do?

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WE HAVE ALMOST FINISHED THE SECTION ON YOUR EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERHOOD NOW. WHILE I CHECK BACK TO SEE THAT WE HAVE COVERED EVERYTHING, I'D LIKE YOU TO READ THIS CARD AND CIRCLE THE NUMBERS WHICH ARE CLOSEST TO YOUR ANSWER. **HAND MOTHERHOOD SATISFACTION SCALE: CARD 4**

79.

=====

Women differ in how they feel about the daily activities of taking care of a child/children. For example, some women feel that taking care of a child / children makes them feel useful, while others don't feel this at all. Think of the daily activities of taking care of your child/ren and tell me how often you experience each of the following things.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
never	seldom	sometimes	often	very often

N e v e r	S e l d o m	S o m e t i m e s	O f t e n	V e r y o f t e n
-----------------------	----------------------------	---	-----------------------	---

a. Gives me a sense of challenge ..... 1                      2                      3                      4                      5

b. Gives me a feel of self fulfillment .....	1	2	3	4	5
c. Makes me feel like I am contributing to society .....	1	2	3	4	5
d. Gives me an opportunity to learn new things .....	1	2	3	4	5
e. Makes me feel important .....	1	2	3	4	5
f. Gives me a feeling of authority....	1	2	3	4	5
g. I get respect from others for my work .....	1	2	3	4	5
h. Gives me an opportunity to use my talents .....	1	2	3	4	5
i. Gives me a feeling of prestige or status .....	1	2	3	4	5
j. Gives me the opportunity for contact with people .....	1	2	3	4	5
k. I get feedback that I am doing a good job .....	1	2	3	4	5
l. Makes me feel good about myself....	1	2	3	4	5
m. Allows me to be creative .....	1	2	3	4	5
n. Gives me an opportunity for independent thought or action .....	1	2	3	4	5
o. Makes me feel useful .....	1	2	3	4	5
p. Makes me feel competent .....	1	2	3	4	5
q. Gives me a feeling of independence..	1	2	3	4	5
r. Gives me a sense of accomplishment..	1	2	3	4	5
s. Allows me to make important decisions .....	1	2	3	4	5
t. Gives me an opportunity for self expression .....	1	2	3	4	5
u. Gives me a feeling of self worth...	1	2	3	4	5

v. I get appreciation from others for my work .....	1	2	3	4	5
w. I get an opportunity for personal growth and development .....	1	2	3	4	5
x. I get satisfaction from knowing I am doing a job well .....	1	2	3	4	5
y. I get an opportunity to make friends .....	1	2	3	4	5

=====

In order to complete this section of the interview I have a couple of final questions on some of your feelings and opinions?

80. (a) When you see other women of about your age who have full time jobs or careers but who don't have children, does that bring out any response or feeling in you?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 3 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) What do you imagine their lives are like?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(c) Does it make you feel lucky or envious or anything else?

\_\_\_\_\_

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- 3 No - doesnt make me feel any such feelings
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

81. (a) What about when you see women who are staying home full time with their children, does that bring out any response or feelings in you?

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- 3 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) What do you imagine their lives are like? \_\_\_\_\_

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- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(c) Does it make you feel lucky or envious or some other feeling

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- 3 No - doesn't make me feel any such feelings
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal

82. (a) Do you consider yourself a feminist? **RECORD COMMENT BELOW**

- 1 Yes
- 2 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 No
- 4 No, anti-feminist
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(b) IF YES, ASK: Why do you say that? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(c) IF NO, ASK :Why do you say that \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

83. (a) Do you think that becoming a mother has changed you much?

- 1 Yes - a lot
- 2 Yes - somewhat
- 3 A little
- 4 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(b) IF YES, ASK: In what ways? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

---

(c) Do you think that your ideas about such public issues such as the Environment, Nuclear War or community issues have been affected by your becoming a mother?

- 1 Yes - changed a lot
- 2 Yes - changed somewhat
- 3 Yes - changed a little
- 4 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

IF YES, ASK: How? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### SECTION D: VIEWS ON MARRIAGE

Now I would like to ask you a few questions on your views of marriage

-----> IF RESPONDENT HAD NEVER MARRIED/PERM RELAT. SKIP TO Q.86

84. IF EVER MARRIED/PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP, ASK:

(a) What age were you when you first married/started to live in a permanent relationship? (IF NECESSARY, SPECIFY BOTH) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) IF APPROPRIATE: And your age at present marriage? (permanent relationship) (IF NECESSARY, SPECIFY BOTH) \_\_\_\_\_

(c) What were the main reasons for your deciding to marry? (TAKE FIRST MARRIAGE FIRST)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(d) IF APPROPRIATE: What were the main reasons for deciding to live with your partner?

85. (a) If you had not married, (or been living in a permanent relationship), do you think you would still have decided to have a child/ren? **(RECORD COMMENT)**

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Other
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Can you tell me why you say that? \_\_\_\_\_

**ASK ALL:**

86. In a marriage, who do you think should be responsible for providing financially for the family? **RECORD COMMENT**

- 1 Mainly the wife
- 2 The wife more than the husband
- 3 Husband and wife equally
- 4 Husband more than the wife
- 5 Mainly the husband
- 6 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

87 (a) Over your adult life, has what you (would) expect from marriage changed much? **RECORD COMMENT**

- 1 Yes
- 2 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 No
- 8 Don't known/Can't remember :-----> **SKIP TO Q.92**
- 9 Refusal/No answer :

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** In what ways? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(c) How did that come about? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

-----> **IF PRESENTLY MARRIED/LIVING WITH PARTNER, SKIP TO 91**

-----> **IF NEVER MARRIED, SKIP TO Q.89**

-----> **IF WAS MARRIED, BUT NOW ALONE, ASK: Q.88**

88. What do you feel are the main reasons you have not re-married?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
 9 Refusal/No answer

-----> **SKIP TO Q.90**

89. **IF NEVER MARRIED, ASK:**

(a) What do you feel are the main reasons you never married?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) Did you ever live with anyone in a permanent relationship?

- 1 Yes  
 2 No  
 3 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_  
 9 Refusal/No answer

**IF YES, ASK:** What happened to that relationship? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

90. **ASK ALL ALONE MOTHERS:**

I would like to ask you for your views on being an alone or single parent.

(a) What, if any, are the advantages of being a single parent?

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- 3 No advantages
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) What, if any, are the disadvantages of being a single parent?

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- 3 No disadvantages
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

#### SECTION E: FAMILY FINANCES

I have a few questions now on family finances before we move onto the final section of the interview which is on childcare arrangements etc.

91. (a) First I would like to ask you about your own income, and other household income. Please look at the **CARD** I am handing you and circle the number beside the income category that best fits your income. Include income from all sources. Income figures given here refer to yearly income before taxes. **HAND CARD 5**

	<u>OWN INCOME</u>	<u>SPOUSE'S/PARTNER'S INCOME</u>	<u>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</u>
None	01	01	01
Less than \$10,000	02	02	02
\$10,000 - \$14,999	03	03	03
\$15,000 - \$19,999	04	04	04

\$20,000 - \$24,999	05	05	05
\$25,000 - \$29,999	06	06	06
\$30,000 - \$34,999	07	07	07
\$35,000 - \$39,999	08	08	08
\$40,000 - \$44,999	09	09	09
\$45,000 - \$49,000	10	10	10
\$50,000 - \$54,999	11	11	11
\$55,000 - \$59,999	12	12	12
\$60,000 - \$64,999	13	13	13
\$65,000 - \$69,999	14	14	14
\$70,000 - \$74,999	15	15	15
\$75,000 - \$79,999	16	16	16
\$80,000 and over	17	17	17
Don't know/Can't remember	88	88	88
Refusal/No answer	99	99	99

(b) **IF LIVING WITH HUSBAND/PARTNER, ASK:** On the same card would you please circle your husband's/partner's income.

(c) **ASK ALL:** On the same card please circle total household income.

92. (a) Do you have income from any sources other from your work?

1 Yes

2 No

8 Don't know/Can't remember |-----> **SKIP TO Q.93**

9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** From what sources?

(i) \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(ii) \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(iii) \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

(c) About how much a year? **(RECORD ABOVE)**

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

(d) Did you include this in the income you circled on the card?

1 Yes

2 No -----> **ADJUST INCOME CATEGORIES AS APPROPRIATE**

-----> **IF LIVING WITH HUSBAND/PARTNER, SKIP TO Q.96**

93. **ASK ALONE MOTHERS ONLY:**

(a) Are you receiving child support payments? **(RECORD COMMENT)**

1 Yes

2 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_

3 No

4 Not applicable

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** From whom? \_\_\_\_\_

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

(c) About how much a year do you receive? \_\_\_\_\_

(d) Did you include this in the income you circled on the card?

1 Yes

2 No -----> **ADJUST INCOME CATEGORY AS APPROPRIATE**

94. (a) How do you feel about being the one who provides the main income in your family?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) Does this influence decisions you make about work?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Can you explain why you say that? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

95. What would happen if for some reason you were no longer bringing home a wage or salary? (PROBE, IF NECESSARY: What do you mean?)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

-----> ALONE MOTHERS, SKIP TO Q.100

96. IF LIVING WITH HUSBAND/PARTNER, HAND CARD 6 AND RECORD COMMENT

(a) How essential to your household budget is the money you earn

=====  
 How essential to your household budget is the money you earn?

- 1 Indispensible - could not manage at all without it
- 2 Very essential to household budget
- 3 Fairly essential to household budget
- 4 Not very essential to household budget
- 5 Not at all essential to our household budget
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

=====  
 COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(b) How come you say that? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

97. (a) On what are your earnings usually spent? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) How did you come to this arrangement? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

98. (a) Do you think you could financially support your family, if it were necessary? **(RECORD COMMENT)**

- 1 Yes
- 2 Yes, but in somewhat reduced circumstances
- 3 Yes, but in very reduced circumstances
- 4 Other
- 5 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) **OPEN ENDED PROBE:** How does that make you feel?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

99. What would happen if for some reason you were no longer bringing home a wage or salary? **(PROBE, IF NECESSARY: What do you mean?)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**ASK ALL MOTHERS:**

100. That ends the section on family finances. We are moving onto a very short final section now. Before we do this I would like you to take a minute to complete this QUESTION CARD . **HAND CARD 7 :**  
**FEELINGS ABOUT YOURSELF**

=====

FEELINGS ABOUT YOURSELF

For the following questions, circle the number which corresponds to how much you agree or disagree.

	1	2	3	4
	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly
	AS	A	D	DS
a. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others .....	1	2	3	4
b. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. ....	1	2	3	4
c. All in all I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. ....	1	2	3	4
d. I am able to do things as well as most other people. ....	1	2	3	4
e. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.....	1	2	3	4
f. I take a positive attitude towards myself....	1	2	3	4
g. On the whole I am satisfied with myself.....	1	2	3	4
h. I wish I could have more respect for myself..	1	2	3	4
i. I certainly feel useless at times .....	1	2	3	4
j. At times I think I am no good at all.....	1	2	3	4

=====

SECTION F: DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD WORK, CHILDCARE  
ARRANGEMENTS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Now I'd like us to move onto talking about household and childcare arrangements.



- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(b) How come you feel that? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(c) How satisfied do you feel with the division of household tasks in your family? **RECORD COMMENT**

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
<b>very</b>			<b>neutral</b>			<b>very</b>
<b>satisfied</b>						<b>dissatisfied</b>

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(d) How come you feel that? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

104. (a) If there is an emergency with the child/ren, for example, illness, who usually takes time off work?

- 1 Mainly Respondent
- 2 Mainly husband/partner
- 3 Both equally
- 4 Other **(SPECIFY)** \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Neither
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF APPLICABLE, ASK:** How do you feel about that? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(c) **IF APPLICABLE:** How do you decide who takes time off work?

- 
- 
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember  
9 Refusal/No answer

105. **ASK ALL MOTHERS:**

Who looks after the child/children when you are at work? **CIRCLE MULTIPLE RESPONSES, IF NECESSARY. GET DETAILS FOR EACH CHILD.**

CHILD'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Licensed daycare centre  
2 Husband  
3 Other household member (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_  
4 Nanny - live in  
5 Childcare comes to respondent's home  
6 Child/ren go to childcarer's home  
7 Non-household relative (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_  
8 Kindergarten (hours \_\_\_\_\_)  
9 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_  
99 Refusal/No answer

**(PROBE: WHO TAKES CHILD TO DAYCARE/SITTER?)**

CHILD'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Licensed daycare centre  
2 Husband  
3 Other household member (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_  
4 Nanny - live in  
5 Childcare comes to respondent's home  
6 Child/ren go to childcarer's home  
7 Non-household relative (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_  
8 Kindergarten (hours \_\_\_\_\_)  
9 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_  
99 Refusal/No answer

**(PROBE: WHO TAKES CHILD TO DAYCARE/SITTER?)**

CHILD'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Licensed daycare centre  
2 Husband  
3 Other household member (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_  
4 Nanny - live in  
5 Childcare comes to respondent's home  
6 Child/ren go to childcarer's home  
7 Non-household relative (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_  
8 Kindergarten (hours \_\_\_\_\_)

- 9 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 99 Refusal/No answer

(b) On average, how much a month does childcare for your child/children cost you? **RECORD COMMENT**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

106. (a) How satisfied do you feel with your present childcare arrangements?

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
<b>very</b>			<b>neutral</b>			<b>very</b>
<b>satisfied</b>						<b>dissatisfied</b>

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(d) How come you feel that? \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

107. (a) Are there many times when your regular childcare arrangements are not available?

- 1 Yes, often (how often a month? \_\_\_\_\_)
- 2 Occassionally. (how often a month? \_\_\_\_\_)
- 3 Seldom
- 4 No :-----> **SKIP TO Q.108**
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) what do you usually do when this happens? \_\_\_\_\_

**IF RESPONDENT USES LICENSED DAY CARE, SKIP TO Q.109**

108. **IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT USE DAY CARE OR PRE SCHOOL, ASK**

(a) Would you send your child/ren to a day care centre if one were convenient and available?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) IF NO, ASK: Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

109. (a) Do any of your relatives help you with looking after the child/ children on a regular basis?

- 1 Yes (ASK: Who? \_\_\_\_\_ How often? \_\_\_\_\_)  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Who? \_\_\_\_\_ How often? \_\_\_\_\_ )  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- 2 No
- 3 Other
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(b) Do you employ a house cleaning person, or someone to help with housework on a regular basis?

- 1 Yes (ASK: How often? \_\_\_\_\_)
- 2 No
- 9 Refusal/No answer

(c) (CODE: 12 onwards only) Do any of your friends or neighbours help you with looking after the children on a regular basis.

- 1 Yes (ASK: Who? \_\_\_\_\_ How often? \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Who? \_\_\_\_\_ How often? \_\_\_\_\_ )
- 2 No
- 9 Refusal/ no answer

SECTION G: SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR DUAL ROLE OF WORK AND MOTHERHOOD

110. How easy or difficult was it for you to decide to work full-time while your child/ren is/are young? **RECORD COMMENT; HAND CARD 9**

=====  
 How easy or difficult was it for you to decide to work full time while

your child/ren is (are) young?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
very easy	easy	moderately easy	neutral	moderately difficult	difficult	very diffic.

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

111. (a) At the time, did you discuss the decision with anyone?

1 Yes

2 No :

8 Don't know/Can't remember:----> **SKIP TO Q.112**

9 Refusal/No answer :

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** With whom?

1 Husband/Partner

2 Respondent's mother

3 Respondent's sibling (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_

4 Other family member (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_

5 In laws : \_\_\_\_\_

6 Friends

7 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_

8 Don't know/Can't remember

9 Refusal/No answer

(c) Was there someone among these whose opinion you particularly valued.

1 Yes (**ASK:** Whose? \_\_\_\_\_)

2 No :

8 Don't know/Can't remember:-----> **SKIP TO Q.112**

9 Refusal/No answer :

(d) **IF YES, ASK OPEN ENDED PROBE QUESTIONS FOR EACH :** What did \_\_\_\_\_ say? How did you respond to that? etc. What did you do/decide?

\_\_\_\_\_

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112. (a) How do you feel now about the decision to combine employment and childrearing?

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8 Don't know/Can't remember  
9 Refusal/No answer

(b) **IF NECESSARY, ASK:** Do you think your child/ren is/are affected by your not being home all the time?

1 Yes - positively  
2 Yes - negatively  
3 No  
4 Other \_\_\_\_\_

8 Don't know/Can't remember : -----> **SKIP TO Q.113**  
9 Refusal/No answer :

(c) In what way(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

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8 Don't know/Can't remember  
9 Refusal/No Answer

-----> **ALONE MOTHERS SKIP TO Q.II4**

113. **IF LIVING WITH HUSBAND/PARTNER, ASK:**

(a) Right now, how do you think your husband/partner feels about your combining childrearing and employment?

1 Strongly in favour  
2 Somewhat in favour  
3 Neutral/Doesn't care  
4 Somewhat against it  
5 Strongly against it

- 6 Other (**SPECIFY**) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

114. **ASK ALL MOTHERS:**

(a) Do you ever feel pressure from anyone to stop working?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't know/Can't remember
- 9 Refusal/No answer

COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) **IF YES, ASK:** From whom? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(c) What kind of pressure? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(d) **IF NECESSARY, ASK:** What do/does \_\_\_\_\_ say? What does \_\_\_\_\_ do?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

We have finally come to the end of the interview. While I check over what we have covered, I would like you to complete the following question sheet on how you feel these days, - then we are finished. **HAND CARD 10**

=====

Q.115

Below is a list of the ways you might have felt or behaved. Please indicate **how often** you have felt this way during the past week

Code key: by days.

- 1 **Most** or **all** of the time (on 5-7 days)  
 2 Occassionally or a **moderate** amount of the time (on 3-5 days)  
 3 **Some** or **little** of the time: (on 1-2 days)  
 4 **Rarely** or **none** of the time (less than one day)

**During the past week:**

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. I did not feel like eating, my appetite was poor.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. I felt I could not shake the blues even with help from my family or friends. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d. I felt I was as good as other people   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| e. I had trouble concentrating  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| f. I felt depressed.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| g. I felt everything I did was an effort.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| h. I felt hopeful about the future.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| i. I thought my life had been a failure.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| j. I felt fearful.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| k. My sleep was restless.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| l. I was happy.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| m. I talked less than usual.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| n. I felt lonely.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| o. People were unfriendly.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| p. I enjoyed life.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| q. I had crying spells.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

r. I felt sad.	1	2	3	4
s I felt that people disliked me.	1	2	3	4
t. I could not "get going".	1	2	3	4
u. I felt anxiety or panic attacks	1	2	3	4
v. I felt pessimistic about the future.	1	2	3	4

=====  
THANK RESPONDENT FOR HER PARTICIPATION IN THE INTERVIEW. REMIND HER THAT SHE WILL BE RECEIVING A SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS WHEN THE RESEARCH IS COMPLETE AND THAT SHE SHOULD FEEL FREE TO CONTACT THE INVESTIGATOR TO INQUIRE ABOUT THE RESEARCH AND RELATED MATTERS SHOULD SHE WISH.