Maternal Narratives as Feminist Inquiry

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Education
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education

University of Prince Edward Island

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April, 2006

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Not numbered in thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the construction of my identity as a mother and an analysis of the issues mothers face in our society.

Analyzing the construction of my identity, I consider socially constructed forces as well as embodied experiences and how the two in combination have influenced who I am, how I mother, and how I perceive and interact with the world.

Using personal narratives as my 'data' for this research together with theoretical analysis, I examine feminism and the normative ideology of the 'good' mother as powerful influencing forces in the construction of my identity as mother. My 'data' has led to the revelation of personal 'truths' which have allowed me to critically analyze and challenge these powerful forces. I examine how the challenging of powerful normative ideologies can be empowering and an impetus for social action.

The relationship between motherhood and feminism is contentious. Exploring the intersection of motherhood and feminism in my own life has exposed the tensions that exist between the two, but also the need for feminism in motherhood and for motherhood in feminism. Recognizing this has led me to a political space. The way our society positions mothers means that women who become mothers are subjugated despite years of feminist work attempting to gain equality for all women.

My aim in writing this thesis is twofold: the first is to show through personal narratives my developing consciousness of issues that mothers face in our society. The second aim of this thesis is to expose the need for social change so that mothers in our society can achieve equality.

Feminism and motherhood need to make space for one another so that social change may be possible.

PREFACE: TALKING TO MYSELF

MY 17 YEAR OLD SELF CHATS WITH MY 38 YEAR OLD SELF

Breaking the time/space continuum, my 17 year old self meets with my 38 year old self at my present-day house in Charlottetown. I call my 17 year old self Nicky and my 38 year old self Nicole.

Nicky: Wow, this is cool.

Nicole: Yeah, I'll say! Hey, nice asymmetrical hairdo!

Nicky: Thanks. So, this is how it turns out so far, huh? Let's see, you're – I mean I'm, we're....whatever – married, nice choice by the way, three kids – very cute, MINI VAN – ohmigod!!!, station wagon – ha!, nice house. Looks like you're just missing the white picket fence.

Nicole: Yeah, I didn't think you'd approve of the mini van, but, do you know what? It's really practical. Yeah, yeah, laugh all you want. It's only a thing – things don't define us if we don't let them. I'm pretty sure we've achieved much of what we were hoping for. I remember those chats we had with the girls where we'd try to imagine what we'd be doing, what our husbands and kids looked like and what our house would be like. Oh, and by the way, we've had four kids, not three.

Nicky: What do you mean?

Nicole: We had a stillbirth. After Alex. A baby boy named Matthew.

Nicky: Oh, that's awful ... Why did it happen? How did it happen?

Nicole: Yes, it was awful. There's still no explanation. I was 35 weeks pregnant and he just died while he was still in utero.

Nicky: That must have been so terrible…so…you had to give birth to a baby that you knew was dead? Oh my god. You know, if you don't mind me saying, is it a little weird that you named the baby and everything…and you obviously still think of him as one of your children…I know it's a major loss, but wouldn't it just be healthier to kind of just forget about it?

Nicole: It's OK to ask that. I don't think our society has a particularly healthy relationship with death and the tendency really does seem to be to encourage people to get on with things and forget to a certain extent. I think a stillbirth is particularly uncomfortable for people too, because the baby is somehow not 'real' to anyone else. Anyway, you're right, I do think of him as one of my children and the brief time that I was able to hold him has probably changed me forever.

Nicky: You were able to hold him?

Nicole: That probably seems strange to you. I remember I was really hesitant to ask the doctor if it would be OK to hold the baby…this was before I had even delivered him. I can distinctly remember how uncomfortable I was asking, but I knew that I had to and I really didn't know how my request would be received. I was so relieved that the doctor and nurses really encouraged both Dave and I to hold him and name him once he was delivered.

Nicky: That kind of freaks me out.

Nicole: You know, we're so afraid of death in our society and I can totally understand why it would freak you out. But, honestly, it was the most natural thing in the world to hold Matthew. He was my baby. He was perfect in every way, he just wasn't breathing. As you can probably tell, it was profoundly affecting.

Nicky: Yes, I bet it was. Sounds to me like a life altering moment if ever there was one.

Nicole: For sure. The experience of having a baby die and holding him in my arms really, truly has affected who I am, the decisions I've made, and how I see the world now. Experiencing that kind of loss made me realize how fragile life is and how quickly it can disappear. I hate that it sounds cliché, but having had Matthew has given me a whole new appreciation for life and living for the moment.

Nicky: I can see that. Hmmm....wow. Pretty heavy stuff....So, what do you do?

Nicole: Oh, ha! I hate that question! Sorry, but I really do. I'm just kind of laughing because I was at a wedding last weekend where we were doing the typical small talk thing and I think that was the first question just about everyone asked. Come to think of it, as a society we really seem to need to identify people early on in our interactions by what they *do*, don't we? Make quick judgments and label them, make assumptions based on what they do...

Nicky: Well yeah, I guess, whatever. So, are you going to tell me what you do? I'm dying to know, maybe I can get out of taking calculus next semester! Ha! That'd be great! I just mean, like, what did we end up *being*? You *do* work, right??

Nicole: Well, of course. But, how do you define work?

Nicky: You know what I mean. Do you have a job?

Nicole: Well, believe it or not, my job right now is to be home with the kids.

Nicky: You're kidding.

Nicole: Nope.

Nicky: So, what happened?

Nicole: What do you mean, what happened?

Nicky: Well…jeeze, I can tell we're a little sensitive about this…don't you remember how all of us girls said that we planned to have careers *and* a family? So, I'm just wondering what happened. Why aren't you working?

Nicole: God. I AM working, just not in the paid workforce, which by the way, is apparently the only valued work in our culture! You know, I do remember having those conversations. In fact, I'm embarrassed to say, I clearly remember sitting around the table with Sarah confidently listing all the things we expected in our futures and how we totally dismissed what both our mothers were doing. I'm embarrassed because neither one of us gave an ounce of thought about why Mom and Flo might actually be at home and not out in the paid workforce. We didn't consider what their choices may or may not have been, and the fact that maybe they just *wanted* to be home to raise their children. You know, who knows. We had no idea about what led them to make the choices they did. Instead, we cockily proclaimed that we would do things differently. I've got a bit of understanding now about how complex this whole issue of motherhood is for women and that when we talk about choices, they're not always all they're cracked up to be.

Nicky: OK. Take it easy. It looks to me like you've got things pretty cushy around here. So, obviously you've made the choice to stay at home and it sounds like maybe the loss of Matthew might be a factor in that choice. So, what's your problem, why are you so bothered?

Nicole: Yeah, sorry. I'm a little defensive when it comes to people asking me what I am doing.

Nicky: Obviously.

Nicole: I think having you here has made me feel like I've failed us in some way. I mean, I remember very clearly stating that I'd be working *and* be a mother and here I am not doing that. I don't think we had figured out at your age exactly what that job would be, but it was something. I think we envisioned that we'd share the work of raising kids and domestic work 50/50 with our partners, right?

Nicky: Yep.

Nicole: Well, it's all a little more complicated than that, and I guess that's what my *problem* is. We did actually have a *real* job as a teacher for four years before becoming a mother.

Nicky: Oh, cool. Maybe I can drop calculus then! Teaching is a perfect career to balance family life with, isn't it?

Nicole: Well, yeah, I guess in a lot of ways. It is really demanding, but yes, you're right. Summers off, all of that…I've done a couple of part-time teaching jobs since Alex was born.

Nicky: Do you miss it?

Nicole: Oh yeah, there's a big part of me that misses it. I miss the actual teaching work, but I also miss being 'out there' in the world, interacting with colleagues and working in a professional setting. I miss that part of my self that I can call teacher.

Nicky: So why aren't you teaching and being a mom right now? I guess I'm just wondering how you've made the choices you have when I feel so strongly that we should be doing both? I'm just really surprised.

Nicole: Fair enough. I suppose I owe an explanation to myself! For one thing, I was completely blown away by the experience of being pregnant, giving birth, and

caring for a tiny, beautiful little baby. You might find it hard to believe, but I didn't *want* to go back to work. At least, not right away.

Nicky: Sounds to me like you got lazy. Nice that you were in a financial position to be able to choose to stay at home, but were you prepared for the consequences of that choice?

Nicole: I can see how you would think that I just got lazy — maybe chose the easy way out. But, my 'plan' changed after having Alex. Outside work wasn't nearly as important to me even though I knew that I was sacrificing my career by taking time out. I was pretty focused on doing all that I could do to care for this new little human being and I guess I just sort of hoped that I would be able to get back into the workforce when I was ready to.

Nicky: Hmm, 'hoping' doesn't sound like very good planning, sounds to me like a pretty big risk to take. OK, so you fell in love with your baby, but what about *you* — I mean, *us*? We probably worked hard to get that degree and establish a career. So, you're just going to throw all of that out the window?! You do see that you're becoming a kept woman, don't you? Those kids are cute and all, but come on. Let's just hope that great guy you married doesn't decide to take a hike! Don't we know better than this?

Nicole: You're totally right, I've gotten myself into quite a vulnerable position and I can see how it is a downright dangerous position for many women, particularly if they are with an unsupportive partner. But, isn't it terrible that motherhood is equated with vulnerability and danger?! Something's wrong with that picture don't you think? Thankfully Dave really is an amazingly great guy. He has always been very clear that it has been my decision about whether to work or not, and he truly does

value and appreciate the work that I do at home. I believe that he sees me as an equal partner in this project that we call 'family' right now. But, yes, the 'what if' still does scare me. It scares me, then it makes me angry that I am in a position to be scared! It makes me angry that society positions mothers this way.

Nicky: Well, don't get positioned that way. You've got choices. I can't understand why you've let go of the idea of having it all, particularly after what you've just said about feeling vulnerable. From my perspective right now, it sure seems like the best way to organize your life...you know, balance, the best of both worlds, no need to be dependent?

Nicole: Ah, yes, balance! We've been obsessed with balance for quite some time now! When you asked earlier what my problem is – well, this is a big part of it. I'm still trying to figure out how am I supposed to have it all like we figured we were entitled to when we were your age. Nothing in motherhood is black and white. The way I see it, it's a complicated blend of emotion, desire, physicality and rational thought, further complicated by cultural messages and social structures.

Nicky: Wait a minute. One thing at a time. Let's get back to that idea of having it all...or not.

Nicole: OK, looking back I realize just how strong that message was for us – you're equal to the boys, get out there, get your education, have a career, have a family, have it all! But now, here I am wondering is it *really* possible to have it all at the same time? Do I even *want* to have it all at the same time? This has been a source of real frustration for me. I know I am supposed to want to have it all – that's the message you're getting right now and it's a message that has certainly stuck with me. And it's a valuable message, but I've realized that it is pretty difficult to achieve

and I don't think it's just me personally finding it difficult, I think it's bigger than that. I've realized that the social supports just aren't in place to make 'having it all' a realistic possibility for many people. One of the big problems is that the strength of the message makes women feel like losers when they can't attain the impossible.

Nicky: Do you feel like a loser?

Nicole: Well, no. Yes, sometimes. I'll tell you one thing, I've felt undervalued many a time and that gives a pretty good blow to the ego. Getting back to the have it all message, I'm trying to figure out if I really don't want to have it all at the same time, or if I just *think* that because I know it is so difficult due to structural forces and imbalances…

Nicky: It can't be that complicated can it? Obviously I can't really understand what having a baby is like or how that might change you and your priorities, but women before us went to all that work to make sure that we'd be able to go to university and choose to be anything we wanted to be. We've got access to birth control and abortion now so that we can have some control in our reproductive lives. We've achieved equality and now isn't it your responsibility to 'get out there'? Hey, don't you remember listening to Free to be…You and Me when we were kids? I still don't understand why it is so difficult for you to be doing both?

Nicole: I know, I know. I do feel that in a sense I have let feminism down by making the choices I have, I'm living the Feminine Mystique that Betty Friedan wrote about, but do you know what, I feel a bit let down by feminism too.

Nicky: Why? What do you mean?

Nicole: Well, I kind of feel like I am living in a half-changed world. Feminism has only taken us so far, and it seems to have stalled. There are some real structural

problems that make it difficult for women once they become mothers, and feminism hasn't done enough to address these issues. In fairness, it isn't just feminism, it's bigger than that, it's our whole socio-economic structure in the globalized, capitalist society in which we live that requires 'ideal' workers and therefore prevents the sharing of domestic and caregiving work required of a family.

Nicky: Hmmm. We've become conspiracy theorists, have we? It's not us, it's them!

Nicole: No, really. There is a perception of equality, and you know, maybe it is the reality of equality, *until* you have a baby. Then, boom, you're responsible for a baby and choices are no longer black and white. You want to share this work of caring for your baby and the domestic work with your partner, but suddenly it seems to make more sense for one of you to cut back or to opt-out altogether....yes, because of the bigger 'them', the socio-cultural, political and economic structures in which we all live our lives. And guess what? Statistics show that it is usually going to be the woman doing this cutting back or opting out, which is probably a complicated mix of women's desire to be with their children but also the cultural expectation that it is women's role to be the primary caregiver. I'm only now becoming aware of the strength of the cultural messages that surround gender and motherhood and what a 'good' mother is in our society.

Nicky: What ever happened to the idea that you would share everything with your partner? I mean, that's certainly what I *expect* should happen. Did we change our mind or what? Sarah and I were just talking about this last night.

Nicole: There is probably some social reproduction theory or psychoanalytic theory that would explain that I have simply chosen to do what my mother did because that is

what was modeled for me and what I learned to be 'normal'. But there's more to it I think. There are political, economic and socio-cultural forces at play which affect all of the decisions all of us make. Perhaps I made the choices I've made because of a backlash to what you are seeing right now in the 80s - the high powered, have it all, completely stressed out mother. Maybe the religious, right wing fanatics with their so-called family values have insidiously infiltrated our lives. Or, maybe it's simple economics. I'm no economist so I obviously represent the layperson's observations here. Dave with an MBA and me with a teaching degree – obviously, it was going to be Dave who would always be making more money. Yes, I know what you're thinking. Money isn't everything. Yes, we could have donned our Birkenstocks and headed to the mountains to make pottery and live off the land, which as you know has always been very appealing, but we didn't. Fine, we conformed. It may have been possible for Dave to have taken a break here or there, but the reality of the job market is that it just isn't that flexible and he would have had to pay a price for doing so. We're living in a competitive, globalized, capitalist society in 2006 and people coming in and out of the workforce as they please is just not all that realistic. So, I'm the one that opted out, for now anyway, and I'm hoping there will be an on-ramp for me when I'm ready to go back into the paid workforce.

Nicky: Hmmm, there's that word 'hoping' again. I can't believe that all I asked was 'what do you do?' and here we are talking about socio-cultural structures and messages, letting feminism down, it letting you down…Have you got too much time on your hands?

Nicole: Hardly. It just seems women can't win no matter what they choose – and that makes me angry. If I choose to stay at home, I've let down feminism and my self, taken a career hit, a social demotion and lost my financial independence. And if I choose to work, then I'm not spending enough quality time with my children and not living up to the 'good' mother ideology, I take my chances with where my kids are going – seeing as we still have no universal, accessible day care system; and have you heard of the second shift? Well, even though feminism has won us the right to get degrees and be a part of the workforce, women are *still* performing the majority of the childrearing and domestic work.

Nicky: Wow, OK. I'll buy it, it does sound complicated. You're depressing me. I thought feminism had all of this worked out.

Nicole: Well, no. I think there's still quite a lot of work left to do in that department. In fact, I've become really passionate about this whole issue and I think we're at the beginning of another new wave of feminism that will actually include mothers in the discourse in an attempt to figure out how women can achieve equality and still have babies. And, I don't mean to depress you. Despite its complications, motherhood is still an amazing thing. You won't believe how much you love these little people.

Nicky: Hmmm…achieve equality and still have babies…everything you've told me so far makes this sound like an impossibility. What's your definition of equality? What's your perfect scenario?

Nicole: Well, what if we imagined mothering as important to women *and* society in addition to recognizing the importance for women's participation in the paid workforce and public realm? What would change? I think women would be

financially recognized and compensated for the domestic and caring work that they

perform, there would be easier 'on ramps' so that women and men would not be

penalized in their careers by taking time out to care for their children, there would

be a restructuring and revaluing of capitalist economic systems which demand

'ideal' workers and therefore negate the realistic possibility of attaining work/life

balance.

Nicky: Sounds pretty idealistic to me. So, what are you going to do about it?

Nicole: Well, at the moment I'm writing a thesis about the intersection of motherhood and

feminism in my life. That's my small political activism for right now. We'll see

where it takes me from here. Believe it or not, I still think I can change the world!

Nicky: Awesome. I'm glad we haven't lost that idealistic side of ourselves.

INTRODUCTION

We know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood (Rich, 1976, p.11).

I am a happily married mother of three beautiful young children. I have had the financial privilege of choosing to 'stay-at-home' and have done so, for the most-part, for eight years now. How odd then, to engage in a two year academic project seeking to understand and explore issues surrounding motherhood. The reasons for engaging in this research become apparent through the contents of this thesis and it is my hope that the reader will come to understand that, in fact, my engagement with this topic is not so odd after all. Despite forty years of modern feminist work, mothers continue to face subjugating forces. Every mother should be as lucky as I have been to have had the opportunity to critically and theoretically analyze mothering and motherhood.

This thesis is an exploration of the intersecting forces of motherhood and feminism in my life. The examination of my own life has facilitated an understanding of issues facing mothers in our society. I come to this writing from a particular location – white, middle-class, heterosexual, married, educated. I recognize I can speak only from this location, which I recognize as a location of privilege.

This thesis concerns the construction of identities in our society. In particular it examines the intersection of motherhood and feminism in my life and analyzes their influence on the construction of my identity. Both feminism and motherhood discourses construct powerful cultural messages. The dominant feminist message I absorbed while growing up was that I was equal and I could, and should, 'have it all'. On becoming a mother I absorbed the normative ideology of the 'good' mother with its accompanying ideology of

intensive mothering. These two cultural messages are in conflict with one another and have resulted in confusion and frustration in my own life and for many others who share my demographic.

Drawing on autoethnography and reflexive narrative methodologies and critical feminist theory, I explore my experience of mothering and my membership in what Adrienne Rich (1976) calls the institution of motherhood. The 'data' for my research is produced through the writing of personal maternal narratives. I reflect on how mothering and motherhood have changed how I see myself, what I do, how I think, and how I now interact with the world.

The exploration of my own experience has led to my developing consciousness of issues that mothers face in our society. This developing consciousness has resulted from a newly acquired critical awareness of normative forces and ideologies acting on my life and changes in my life brought on by both the experience of mothering and my membership in the institution of motherhood. The analysis of my own personal experiences has led me to a political space recognizing the need for social change in addressing the issues that mothers face in our society.

Chapter one outlines the methodologies used in this thesis, which are reflexive narrative inquiry and autoethnography in combination with theoretical analysis. In this chapter I outline why I feel it is important to write and share personal maternal narratives – sometimes referred to as 'momoirs'. In the telling of my personal narratives I present my reality of mothering and motherhood which reveal confusion, frustration, joy and rage. This presents a challenge to the normative discourse surrounding motherhood. I examine the importance of narrative inquiry in the literature and I explain how the reflexive nature of narrative writing serves as a means to increase understanding of the issues surrounding mothering and

motherhood. The analysis of personal narrative has enabled me to make broader socio-cultural connections, which is one of the aims of autoethnography. This critical awareness has led me to a position where the personal has become political.

In chapter two I present my 'data' of the thesis which are my personal narratives. These narratives incorporate themes of embodiment, loss, emotion, change, development of my feminist consciousness, and intensive mothering. Each narrative, or piece of 'data', is taken up theoretically in other parts of the thesis. Each serves as an insight to my developing consciousness of the construction of my identity and my developing critical awareness of issues mothers face in our society with the development of my feminist self as a backdrop.

In this section I include an essay that illustrates the extremes of emotion that are a part of motherhood, and what I view to be a part of the embodied experience of mothering. I present this essay on rage as a challenge to the myth that 'good' mothers are always loving, giving, and selfless.

Chapter three is devoted to the theoretical examination of the shaping of identity and subjectivity. I create a theoretical framework in which I analyze the construction of my own identity. I outline humanist, poststructuralist and social constructivist positionings of the self and the split in feminist theory between essentialism and social constructivism. I explore the possibility of embodied subjectivity as a means to challenge individualism and thus allow for the incorporation of maternal forms of selfhood. Envisioning subjectivity as embodied allows one to take up difference without slipping into essentialism.

In chapter four I look closely at the distinction Adrienne Rich made in *Of Woman Born* (1976) between the institution of motherhood and the experience of mothering. Like Rich, I see the institution of motherhood as a patriarchal social construction and the experience of mothering as being based in embodied experiences and the potential site of empowerment. I

examine the socially constructed myth of the 'good' mother and the accompanying ideology of intensive mothering and the role these normative discourses play in perpetuating the subjugation of mothers in our society. In the discussion of the experience of mothering, I examine how maternal embodied experiences are life-altering and how this change potentially leads to a place of empowerment. I believe that the construction of my identity as 'mother' is influenced by a complex blend of biological, psychological and social forces.

In chapter five I move from the personal to the political. I outline structural issues, barriers and forces, I see as being most problematic for mothers today. Briefly these are:

1. the ideology of intensive mothering as backlash discourse

2. work/life balance issues

3. devaluation of motherwork

In chapter six I examine the intersection of feminism and motherhood. Many feminists see having a child as the fastest way of turning into a second class citizen – and yet it is something that many women still want and actively choose. I explore the thoughts of some prominent second wave feminists on the issue of motherhood. I then put forth an argument suggesting that feminism needs motherhood and motherhood needs feminism. Feminism will not move forward as a social movement if it does not include mothers in its discourse and mothers will continue to be subjugated without the help of feminism as a vehicle for social change. Finally, I ponder the question, does motherhood have to be impossible? I hope it doesn't.

In Chapter seven I outline what feminist mothers want, and how the issues I have outlined above may be addressed. I examine the possibility of a mothers' revolution and how such a revolution might work to be inclusive of all mothers, not simply a private issue for

white, middle-class mothers. I question whether we could possibly be in a post-feminist movement when there are so many unresolved issues facing women in our society.

In chapter eight I briefly explain how an autoethnographic thesis examining the intersection of motherhood and feminism has relevance to research in the field of education. The writing of this thesis has been a transformative learning experience for me. This learning has been of great value to me personally and will affect my teaching self. I outline what I see as potential curriculum recommendations that flow from the inquiry generated from this thesis.

I believe mothering is an important part of many women's identities and it is potentially an impetus for women's political participation. I argue that feminism cannot claim to give an adequate account of women's lives and to represent women's needs and interests if it ignores or scorns the issue of mothering. I encourage feminist theorists and scholars to continue working to theorize what we as a society are going to do about this messy business we call motherhood so that women who choose to become mothers don't have to deal with feelings of inadequacy, confusion, conflict, frustration and vulnerability and don't have to pay a steep financial and social price for becoming mothers.

CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY

Who needs another 'momoir'?

We live in a culture that has left the mother's experience, the mother's perspective, the mother's powers in the shadows (Lowinsky, 1992, p.4).

Maternal narratives have been referred to as 'momoirs' and in various places I have seen much criticism of mothers' attempts to tell their stories. The term 'momoir' aims to condescend and belittle what mothers' have to say. Society often attempts to silence women and has done so for many, many years. So, I have taken up the term 'momoir' and explained why it is important to get personal narratives out into the popular discourse as a means of creating new knowledge and thus creating new understandings and leverage for change. My personal narratives, my 'momoir' will serve as the data in my research.

In the examination and telling of my own 'momoir' I have realized that my own conflict within motherhood is not just personal, that there is a social context to this. It is also what has led me to the work of this thesis: to think and read about how identities are constructed and how social, political, economic and cultural forces influence our choices and the way we conduct our lives. Why is my particular demographic in this generation mothering the way we do? What is this conflict we are feeling? Where does it come from? What do we do about it? Being able to name conflicts and frustrations has meant being able to think about ways to challenge the sources of these conflicts and frustrations.

It would seem that everything that is possible to say about motherhood has already been said; this topic is widely written about, and yet it seems there is still a need for women to 'talk' motherhood. This is why we need another 'momoir'. Contemporary mothers are thinking, talking and writing about motherhood in ways that expose the complexity and

conflicts of mothering – both as a social experience and as a private one. In print and online, there are now countless examples of mothers telling their stories of motherhood.

The telling of slice-of-maternal-life stories seem to be the foundation for a particular kind of shared understanding of motherhood. One that gives mothers an opportunity to voice some of their frustrations and reflect in public on the ongoing dilemmas faced by women who choose to mother. These are very important stories to be told and shared. However, if the social and cultural factors are not examined, then there is a ghettoizing effect. Mothers will only talk to mothers, which is a start, but many others need to hear about the social changes that can end the discrimination that mothers face in our society. I want what I write to lead to cultural critique and social change. I want to expose the larger structural wrongs that can make a mother's life difficult and it is for this reason I have written personal narratives but I have also heavily relied on theoretical analysis of maternal and feminist scholarship.

Daphne deMarneffe articulates the importance of maternal narratives. In her book *Maternal Desire(2004)* she says:

> ... in an effort to complete the feminist project by including maternal narratives, the tried-and-true feminist adage 'the personal is political' comes to our aid, suggesting that we take our ordinary experience as a starting point for questioning the culture. To come to a useful understanding of our own needs and desires, and the cultural and historical forms that interpret, structure, and limit them, we must think through received ideas in light of our personal experience (deMarneffe, p. 26).

It is my intention that this thesis not simply describe, but rather, explore themes about the construction of subjectivities within structures and cultures, find possibilities for changes, create spaces for choices, and make room for resistance. By articulating some of the

complexities and difficulties at stake in the issue of mothering through my personal narratives, the central concepts of feminist theory, including gender, sex, embodiment, desire, consciousness, experience, representation, oppression, equality, freedom, and liberation can be taken up and used to explain these points of difficulty within motherhood. The narratives I include are representative of the progression of events and thinking that has led me to where I am now – a stay-at-home mother of three, Masters of Education thesis writer on the topic of feminism and motherhood. They explore the powerful physical, intellectual, and emotional experiences that I have gone through as a mother. By doing so I seek to examine what mothering means in the world today, and show that the work of feminism is not finished and is needed to support a mothers' movement that will work to achieve social change, not just for mothers but for all women.

At this point I will look to the literature on narrative inquiry to illustrate the importance of narrative as a research methodology. I examine the reflexive nature of narrative and how this reflexivity leads to the practice of self-study, which is also known as autoethnography. Using the literature, I define autoethnography and its importance and relevance to my research. I explain how the writing of personal narratives, which serve as the 'data' in my research have also acted as a springboard leading me to theoretical analyses of mothering and motherhood in our society. The reading and interpreting of the theory surrounding this topic have furthered the understanding of my social location and the influences and forces acting in my life. With this increased understanding of my own location, I am then better able to position myself into a space of social change which is ultimately my goal in my use of narrative as a research methodology.

The importance of narrative in the literature

"Narrative is one of the most ubiquitous and powerful forms of human communication and learning" (Bigge, 1999, p. 142). I agree. When I look back to my most powerful learning experiences, they are more often than not embedded in some sort of narrative. Books, movies, poems, music – all are examples of social texts or narratives that influence us and help to construct cultural and personal meaning. Narrative can serve to provide us with alternatives to normative ideologies or they can reinforce them. Narrative can challenge our thinking and it can help us to make sense of the world and our place in it.

The notion of learning and teaching through stories is very intriguing to me. I believe in the power of stories and I believe that story telling is an excellent way of representing and understanding experience. I believe that stories lived and told educate the self and others. I agree with Clandinin and Connelly when they say:

> All of us lead storied lives on storied landscapes. Life as we come to it and as it comes to others is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

Roland Barthes, one of the most important literary theorists concerned with narrative, discusses the centrality of narrative in the lives of people:

> "The narratives of the world are without number. In the first place the word 'narrative' covers an enormous variety of genres which are themselves divided up between different subjects, as if any material was suitable for the composition of the narrative: the narrative may incorporate articulate language, spoken or written; pictures, still or moving; gestures and the ordered arrangement of all the ingredients: it is present in myth, legend, fable, short story, epic, history, tragedy, painting....In

addition, under this almost infinite number of forms, the narrative is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; the history of narrative begins with the history of mankind; there does not exist, and has never existed, a people without narratives" (Barthes cited in Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 14).

From this quotation one can see that narrative can mean many different things. The way I am using narrative in this thesis is through fictional dialogue, and written accounts of past experiences and emotion surrounding mothering and motherhood. With these stories I aim to convey my own 'truth' surrounding issues of mothering, motherhood, and feminism in my life.

Some say that any act of remembering is a fictional re-creation. Madeleine Grumet, a well known educator and proponent of educational autobiography, asserts that text revealed through the autobiographical method never completely coincides with the experience it signifies. Interpretation is a "revelatory enterprise...limitations, half-truths, contradictions, distractions hover around every tale we tell" (Grumet cited in Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 44). I've done my best in trying to relay what I view as my own 'truths' in my narratives, but I agree that my telling of these stories is told through the veils of memory and influenced by what I've read, heard, seen and interpret – the multitudes of social texts or narratives that surround me.

Narrative as a way of increasing understanding of mothering and motherhood

There are five reasons I have selected narrative inquiry as an appropriate methodology for increasing understanding of motherhood and mothering in our society:

1. Narrative can be prescriptive and future-oriented

Barthes believes that narratives perform significant functions. At the individual level, people have a narrative of their own lives which enables them to construe what they are and

where they are headed (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 14). We are all affected by the multitude of cultural narratives that surround us. In this thesis I focus on feminist narratives and narratives surrounding motherhood as influential forces in my life. We can examine these narratives to understand how they may limit or empower us. We can then create counter-narratives through reflexivity and self-understanding. These counter-narratives may then be prescriptive in that they help to set goals for where one may be headed in the future. Later in this thesis, I suggest that by using personal narratives I am challenging harmful normative discourses surrounding motherhood. A result of this challenge is that alternatives may then be imagined, critical analysis is brought forward and social change is made possible.

2. Narrative allows the researcher to reflect and reckon with the past

Polkinghorne approaches narrative primarily as a cognitive scheme and states that "having narrative as one of our fundamental structures of comprehension shapes the character of our existence in a particular way" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 15). Narrative helps us to understand our past experiences and places those experiences in a particular context for us and creates meaning around those experiences. In the narratives I have written, I am reflecting back on experiences of mothering in order to gain greater understanding of my social location. As Polkinghorne states, "we create narrative descriptions for ourselves and for others about our past actions, and we develop storied accounts that give sense to the behavior of others (1988, p. 14).

3. Cultural narratives shape what is acceptable or legitimate in the norm

"At the cultural level, narratives serve to give cohesion to shared beliefs and to transmit values" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 14). There is a merging of cultural narratives that shape what is acceptable in public, legitimate in the norm, and also, what is abnormal. For example, for a mother to display or talk about rage in relation to her children would be seen as

unacceptable and abnormal, given the strength of the normative ideology surrounding what a 'good' mother is. This normative ideology is constructed by various cultural narratives such as film, television, popular fiction, children's fiction, magazines and parenting books. In revealing complexity, confusion and diversity through personal narrative, I challenge the cultural narratives that define the normative discourse surrounding motherhood.

4. Narrative allows for causal reading between events, beliefs, feelings

Narrative helps us draw moving pictures of our world so as to see the causal relationships between our feelings, actions and beliefs. This concept is taken up by Polkinghorne when he states that "narrative is the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite. It displays the significance that events have for one another; it is a form of meaning making" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 36). In relation to the topic of my thesis, it is through the writing of my own personal narratives and the analysis of cultural narratives surrounding both motherhood and feminism that I can understand their connectedness in my life and how thoughts, choices and practices are all influenced.

5. Narrative makes known the particularity of mothering

In her book *Mother Matters: Mothering as Discourse and Practice*, Andrea O'Reilly states that narratives perform an archaeology of maternity in so far as they seek to excavate the truth of motherhood hidden beneath the 'mask of motherhood' (2004a, p. 12). O'Reilly references Susan Maushart (1999) in her use of the metaphor, 'the mask of motherhood'. This mask is seen to disguise the chaos and complexity of our lived experiences and confers an idealized, and hence unattainable image of motherhood. Narrative serves as a tool for 'truth telling' and in revealing these 'truths' the normative discourse is interrupted and problematized.

There is empowerment in this process because once the normative discourse is disrupted, alternatives are acknowledged and space is made for change.

The reflexive nature of narrative

An important aspect of using narrative inquiry as a research methodology is that it demands that the author be reflexive. Cole and Knowles take this up when they explain:

> Reflexive inquiry takes into account the personal history-based elements of contextual understanding, emphasizing the foundational place of experience. It is rooted in a critical perspective and is characterized by interrogation of status quo norms and practices, especially with respect to issues of power and control (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 2).

I believe that narratives are always a reflexive form because they convey and evoke context – be it personal or historical. When Cole and Knowles say 'critical' I believe they mean that reflexivity itself is transformational leading to a better informed, or critical, perspective. This perspective then allows for critique of normative ideologies that often serve to regulate and sometimes subjugate. The writing of my personal narratives surrounding mothering and motherhood has been a transformational act. The process has required me to be reflexive which leads to the practice of self-study, also known as autoethnography.

The reflexive nature of narrative also requires and allows me to be aware of my role as a researcher and how I am positioned within my research. As Britzman indicates, it is imperative that I know where I am coming from: "to fashion narration with the imperatives of poststructuralism means that I admit how my own telling is partial and governed by the discourses of my time and place" (Britzman, 2003, p. 248). I agree. I need to be careful not to universalize my discussion. My understanding will always be limited by my perspective

which is a female, middle class, white, educated, heterosexual sphere. However, although I am speaking from a specific perspective, it is still possible to make socio-cultural connections. This writing differs from autobiography because these connections are made and critically analyzed.

What is autoethnography?

Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. Consequently, autoethnography locates the personal and emotional experiences of the researcher (self) as the subject in a context that relates those experiences to larger social issues. As Virginia Oleson states, "the personal, biographical, political and social are interwoven" (Oleson, p. 232).

Ellis and Bochner (2004) describe the process that is engaged when using an autoethnographic methodology:

> Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition (Ellis and Bochner, in Ellis, 2004, p. 38).

My goal in the writing and sharing of my narratives is to make sense of my experience and to attempt to understand myself and my location within a broader socio-cultural context. Reflecting on the discourse of motherhood in a larger sociological context allows me to examine and name the institutional forces at play in my life. I examine myself and the forces

that shape me. I describe myself as a member of a group or subculture and then illustrate how that membership has contributed to the person I am today.

With autoethnography the criteria to judge the quality goes beyond the traditional criteria of reliability, validity and generalizability, so researchers have come up with new ways of imagining validity in their work.

Laurel Richardson uses the metaphor of a crystal to deconstruct traditional validity when she states that "a crystal has an infinite number of shapes, dimensions and angles. It acts as a prism and changes shape, but still has structure. What we see depends on our angle of vision" (Richardson cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 12).

How will my 'data' be judged? I like Richardson's use of the metaphor of a crystal. Each reader is going to come to my 'data', my narratives, with a different perspective, a different angle of vision as Richardson says. That perspective will influence how they take up my narratives and will create different reactions and responses. If any response at all is evoked, whether a negative or positive response, I would suggest that my 'data' is valid because that response will then be a starting point for thinking around the issues of mothering and motherhood. I hope that the narratives I have written 'speaks' in some way to my audience. I hope it draws them in and makes them think. I hope personal connections can be made as well as connections to their own lives and to broader socio-cultural issues. I hope that as a result of reading and engaging with my narratives some new knowledge may be imparted.

Advancing the theoretical

I believe autoethnography is an excellent methodology to present research and convey new 'truths' and knowledge and understanding, in the case of this thesis, around the issues of mothering and motherhood. Using this methodology has required me to look both

inward and outward to understand my personal experiences and the socio-cultural context of these experiences. I turn again to the quote by Ellis and Bochner:

> Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition (Ellis and Bochner, in Ellis, 2004, p. 38).

I look to this quote once again to explain the theoretical emphasis that is present in this thesis. In my researching and writing, there has been a constant back and forth between the personal and the socio-cultural aspects of the experience of mothering and motherhood. Moving back and forth, I have made connections and have been able to locate and name forces that play out in my life. The reflexive nature of narrative inquiry has prompted me again and again to look outward to theory in an attempt to create a framework in which to understand the experience. The theoretical domain has been a comfortable place for me – it has empowered me in the sense that I can better understand and now have the tools to critically analyze the sources of some the conflict and frustration I have at times felt.

The ultimate goal that I see in this process is one of transformative change, both personally, but also on a societal level. This is the role I see research playing in our lives: the exploration of ideas, the generation of understanding and perhaps new ideas as a result of this understanding and the attempt to use those new ideas and knowledge to further the greater good of society.

CHAPTER 2: NARRATIVE

EMBODIMENT: PREGNANCY, CHILDBIRTH, BABIES AND LOSS

Eight years ago, in February 1998, I gave birth to a boy we named Alex. In September 1999 I had a stillbirth at 35 weeks — another boy whom we named Matthew. In November 2000 I gave birth to a girl we named Abby and in October 2004, I had another son, Jonathan. Prior to having Alex in 1998, I had a miscarriage at 12 weeks in 1997. Although the reproductive history I have just presented does not define the whole of me, each pregnancy, birth and loss has profoundly affected my identity. Each event has left me with a physical, embodied memory and each has contributed to the person I am today. The choices I've made and the way I live my life are all connected to these births and deaths. Sharing these stories connects embodied maternal experiences with my embodied subjectivity. Later in the thesis I show that if feminist theory can help us to view subjectivity as embodied, we may then be able to theorize mothering and motherhood in a way that will affect social change that works towards equality for all women.

In the following narratives I include themes of embodiment, change, development of my feminist self, and intensive mothering. I take up each of these themes theoretically later in the thesis.

I hope to convey the power of embodied maternal experiences and explore the way they contribute to changed identity and new knowledge. I have chosen to share the story of the stillbirth I experienced, which represents my most powerful and life-changing embodied maternal experience -- one that includes pregnancy, birth and death.

I view the intense emotional aspects of mothering as embodied and have included what might be viewed as two extreme opposite emotions — joy and rage. That both these

emotions are integral to my experience of mothering challenges the patriarchal myth of motherhood portraying mothers as always joyful, loving and self-sacrificing. For me, being a mother is intrinsically rewarding but also intensely demanding. Joy, rage, wholeness, frustration, ambivalence, jealousy, worry, the sensual physical pleasure of caring for small children, the bodily experience and connection, all of these are parts of my experience of motherhood.

Many of these experiences are not part of the accepted discourse surrounding motherhood in our society, but this is part of the problem. Without an honest portrayal of the experiences of motherhood we slip into the prescribed societal myths of motherhood with its essentialist tendencies and patriarchal overtones which maintain subjugation.

Matthew

"I'm afraid your baby is dead"....

I'm 35 weeks pregnant and feeling a little crampy the morning of September 30th. I think to myself that this could be a good thing. I'm already feeling very big and uncomfortable and would happily have the baby today. This has been an easy pregnancy with no problems or complications. I have an appointment with my obstetrician this afternoon, so I'll just sit tight until then. I go through the motions of the day feeling somewhat uncomfortable, but not bad. I'm feeling nervous about the prospect of labour and delivery, but also excited that things might be getting started. I know it's a bit early, but that's probably OK. I can't wait to meet this baby! I know that Dave is excited and Alex is really looking forward to having a new little baby brother or sister.

It's 4:00 and I arrive at the doctor's office. Alex is with me because I haven't found a sitter. We have just recently moved to Tennessee and it still feels like we are getting ourselves settled. After a short wait I get called into the examining room and the nurse takes my blood

pressure and then uses the doplar machine to look for the baby's heart beat. She seems to be taking longer than usual. She can't seem to find the heart beat. She asks how I've been feeling and I tell her that I've been feeling quite crampy since early this morning but I just assumed it was Braxton-Hicks contractions that I was feeling, those contractions that are sort of like the warm up for the real thing. She nods and tells me that the batteries must be dead in the machine and that she'll be right back. When she comes back in with the doctor and lets her use the doplar machine I still suspect nothing out of the ordinary. It's not until I see the doctor's face and realize that she is concerned that I experience my first wave of panic. She can't find a heartbeat either. She tells me that we need to go immediately over to the hospital for an ultrasound and that I should probably call Dave and ask him to come over. Although I'm feeling alarmed by this and very worried, I still haven't made the cognitive leap that my baby is dead, and the doctor isn't telling me anything. I make the assumption that there is just a complication. Maybe they'll have to admit me into the hospital, maybe they'll have to induce. That's OK I tell myself. That must be why she wants Dave to be here. I settle down and tell myself not to worry.

Thankfully, Dave gets to the doctor's office quickly and joins us just as the doctor begins the ultrasound. I'm glad he's here. It takes only a minute or so before she tells me that our baby has died. It takes me a moment to process, but then it hits me with full impact. My baby is dead. Dead! Babies don't die! I feel an indescribable loss and emptiness. I remember letting out a sound that I will forever associate with deep grief; I sometimes recognize the sound when I see and hear mothers on the news in some far off war torn country who have lost a child. It will forever be one my worst moments. I cling to Dave's hand but can say nothing.

The doctor gives us a few moments before she explains what will happen next. She explains that they will induce me that evening and that I will have to deliver the baby. I can't believe what I am hearing and beg for a c-section but I'm told that this isn't an option, that surgery is always a risk and that it is always best to be avoided whenever possible. I still question the wisdom of this decision, but apparently I had no say in the matter.

I am taken to a labour room in the hospital and prepared for labour. I'm hooked up to an IV with an oxytocin drip that will soon get the contractions started. The nurses obviously have been told of my situation and are empathetic and professional however, the nurse that is with me throughout the labour and delivery is young and I think relatively inexperienced. She has never been in this situation and is obviously finding it quite emotionally difficult, breaking down in tears several times.

Earlier when the doctor told me that I was to deliver the baby, she assured me that I would be kept comfortable throughout the labour and delivery. I was told that I would be able to have an epidural whenever I was ready; that, however, did not turn out to be the case. As it happened, there were three emergency c-sections that evening which kept the anesthetist busier than usual. By the time he was able to get to me, my contractions were coming on fast and strong. I was probably beyond the point of needing the epidural but wanted one anyway. The anesthetist had trouble administering the needle, perhaps because my contractions were so strong and I felt a tremendous pressure in my spine and a strong jolt of electric pain into my left buttock and down the outside of my thigh. Something had gone wrong which meant that the needle had to be taken out and re-administered. I felt like I was in some surreal dream being subjected to alternating physical and mental torture. This couldn't really be happening.

Finally, after four long hours of very difficult physical and emotional labour I delivered our dead baby. The room was strangely silent. The doctor announced that the baby was a boy and after cutting the umbilical cord, placed him in my arms. We named him Matthew. My love for him was immediate and overwhelming and I broke down sobbing unable to believe that he was really dead. He was 6 pounds, 10 ounces and perfect in every way; except he wasn't breathing. He looked like he was simply sleeping. His features were familiar and reminded me of Alex when he was a newborn. Dave and I took turns holding him over the next hour or so, and I secretly begged and pleaded him to come back to life, to somehow start breathing again.

The nurse gently told me it was time to get cleaned up and move to the maternity ward to recover. She explained that we would have another chance to hold Matthew later that night and that she was taking him to clean him and dress him. After answering what I remember to be a number of annoying and inappropriate administrative questions I was then taken up to the maternity ward to recover....with all the newborn babies and mothers. It struck me then that this was a rather cruel place to be taken to recover.

After settling into the new room, a different nurse came in to ask us if we'd like to hold Matthew again. I felt unsure if this was appropriate or the 'right' thing to do, but I desperately wanted to hold him again. The nurse brought him in and he was dressed and swaddled in a blanket. We probably spent another hour holding him, stroking his nose and forehead and cuddling him closely. I didn't want to let him go, but somehow we decided it was time. We said our impossible good-byes to the son we'd never get to know. I think that very moment, handing him over to the nurse, knowing that it would be the last time I would see him or touch him, has been the hardest moment of my life. It went against every screaming instinct in my body to stop holding him and pass him over to a stranger.

The next day I was given the option to go home, which I did. Staying in the hospital on the maternity ward was too difficult for me. Leaving the hospital with empty arms made them physically ache, along with the rest of me that was physically aching; my breasts filling with milk for a baby that would never be nursed. Instead of carrying a baby out of the hospital I was carrying an envelope of clothes that he wore, a book on coping with a stillbirth and my own heavy grief. I had lived through a nightmare.

How was I supposed to face the world and 'get back to normal'? I didn't even have a baby to show for what I've just been through.

Extremes of emotion: Joy and rage

Joy

This section of the narrative has been difficult for me to write, which is a point of curiosity for me because it is most certainly *not* due to a lack of joyful maternal experiences. I think I have been afraid that what I write may sound like a cliché, or a Hallmark greeting card, but I will give it a try.

Joy is something I experience in every day that I am with my children. Some days of course are more joyful than others. Any given day can be filled with various moments that span the emotional spectrum, but every day there is joy.

My children bring to my life an intimacy, love, and connection that is intensely rewarding and joyful. I am no longer a separate self as a mother, I am always in-relation to my children. This feeling of connectedness, although complex and sometimes stifling, is more prominently joyful than anything else.

I can think of many examples of my children bringing joy to my life: There is the intensity of what I call the 'mommy/baby bubble' in those weeks shortly after birth where all I want to do is breathe in my baby. This to me is such absolute, uninhibited love that is

unique to the relationship I have with my children. There are the smiles and laughter that come from my children that are so pure and unaffected and seem to come from the center of their being. These smiles and laughter are infectious and result, always, in feelings of joy for me.

This morning my daughter comes downstairs in one of her crazy five year old outfits – stripes, polka dots, clashing colours – declaring "I look GOOD mommy!" She tells me of a wild story she thinks she has read in a "mazgazine" and the humour of the moment fills me with joy. Then my one year old passes through, a Charlie Chaplin-like toddler teetering around playing a harmonica. I scoop him up and give him a huge hug to which he reciprocates. Then my eight year old comes up with one of his BIG questions, something about the meaning of life and death and the workings of the universe, a question giving me a sense of something bigger than the everyday, and to me this is a joyful moment.

Watching my children experience the world around them and seeing them develop and learn is always a source of amazement and joy. Watching my baby discovering his toes for the first time, taking those tentative first steps, learning how to write their name or read a book, it is all truly amazing.

Having children has allowed me to be a child all over again and enjoy the fascination and magic of the world from a child's perspective – a fresh snow fall, the sparkle of the Christmas light, a bird flying overhead, the excitement of a fire truck going by. It lets me slow down and appreciate the magic of the world we live in and experience the joy that is there.

Finally, there are the hugs, the holding of little hands and wonderful little bodies – the undeniable pleasure of touch which brings me great joy.

Rage

I've never been a fighter, stomper, or yeller. Displays of overt anger disturb me and more often than not seem melodramatic and self-indulgent. I have always dealt with anger privately, politely, always trying to keep the peace. Not a particularly healthy approach. I know it's healthy to express anger constructively, and I'd like to teach my kids that lesson when I see them completely lose their temper resulting in the hitting or throwing of objects or siblings.

I haven't been to therapy to learn anger management strategies, but since becoming a mother I sometimes wonder if I should. There are sometimes many moments in a given day when I feel that I am only barely managing my anger and may just lose control. More than at any other time in my life I have felt this struggle to stay in control. This is always exacerbated by how tired and how distracted I am. I know it is not the case, but sometimes it seems that all I do is yell at my kids, then apologize for yelling at them, then feel guilty for yelling and being such a lousy mother, then start to feel resentful about being made to feel like a bad mother. How crappy a mother am I really? I prepare three healthy meals a day, I don't humiliate or hurt my children, I read books, play pretend, make crafts, give lots of hugs and "I love you's. It is part of a cycle that includes rage and anger. It does not feel good and there are no Hallmark cards to cover the experience.

Little people, like big people, have their bad days and bad moments. They are constantly testing boundaries and learning social skills. It's how they learn to navigate themselves through life. They are needy and don't always listen or manage themselves the way they should. I know all this, and yet, some days I don't manage myself as I should. Sometimes I'm just angry at everything and everyone. I'm angry at the light bulb that just went out, the coffeemaker that just overflowed, the toy that just tripped me. I kick it with all my might

across the room, knowing that I shouldn't, almost breaking my foot. Not often, but sometimes. Again, the rage is always compounded by fatigue.

Sometimes it's me not managing as I should, and sometimes it's them. The darling, sweet, innocent loves of my life, just being absolute little *!@$heads. Most days I have the resources to know that if I'm feeling really angry I should count, breathe, step away, and usually I can. But, some days end in a culmination of fatigue and seemingly endless conflict resolution, so that when I try to have a brief conversation on the phone that is interrupted every thirty seconds by whining and tugging, I feel my patience is being severely tested. Or, when I try to make dinner, with one hand because the baby is fussy, only to have it thoroughly rejected as "yucky" and then to have Alex and Abby erupt into their 16th fight that afternoon resulting in tears and spilt milk, I again feel anger welling up. *"Goddamnit!!!!"*, I yell. I can feel myself starting to lose control. Then, thankfully, there is something pulling me back, reminding me that I am the 38 year old and they are the children. However, it is in moments like this where it is all I can do to push the anger away and to count, breathe, step away.

Motherhood pushes human beings to their limits. I have felt those limits and they have a depth and volatility that is frightening. It is also guilt inducing. We mother so privately and are constantly self-judging against what we perceive the way a 'good' mother would act in any given situation. A 'good' mother doesn't shout or lose her temper. . . does she?

CHANGE

When a woman becomes a mother she enters the period of change called "matrescence", the process by which she takes on the full responsibility of mothering in the face of numerous changes to her identity (Raphael cited in O'Reilly, 2004a, p. 147).

The day that I became a mother, I became something new and was forever changed. I was introduced to a love that I never knew existed, a love that I'm sure could never have been explained to me with language. An important part of my identity has been formed through my embodied maternal experiences and raising my children. Having children has provided me with a unique opportunity for reconsidering the premises of my life. It has been a transforming experience changing my perspective on the world, my values, my priorities. It has changed the way I spend my time. It has changed my income and the way I spend it. It has expanded my heart and made me see the world in a whole new way. It has changed everything.

Each pregnancy has changed me, or perhaps collectively they've changed me. Each has left me with a physical memory, changed perspective, new knowledge and a new way of interacting with the world. The embodied experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing is an important and undeniable part of the new person I've become. It is a part of my physical, emotional and psychological makeup. I cannot ignore what becoming a mother has done to me and for me, and I don't want to. It is with this maternal intensity and responsibility that I now navigate through the world and attempt to make choices surrounding issues of care, paid and unpaid work, private and public spheres, balances of power both in my relationships and in the world at large, self and others.

In my early days as a new mother I embraced my new identity as 'mother'. As time went on however, I realized that with my new role and my new identity, as amazingly wonderful as it was in so many ways, I was also experiencing a nagging, but unnamed internal conflict and sense of loss. There was the loss of my previous identity, loss of my professional self, loss of my financial independence and the loss of my freedom in many senses. I was undergoing a significant change in the structure of my life and in my identity. It was one

thing to experience a loss of self in a pre-feminist culture that at least assigned a positive

status to motherhood itself; it is very different to lose part of one's very sense of self to

motherhood in a world that often seems to have little time, patience, or appreciation for

motherhood or parenting. The transition to motherhood has abruptly repositioned me in a

space between self and family where it has been a perpetual struggle to find a balance

between nurturing others and fulfilling the self. I find myself wondering though, whether my

sense of loss and the fear of losing myself in the caring of my children is not heightened by

the rhetoric surrounding motherhood that conceptualizes mothering as antithetical to self.

I was working full-time as an elementary teacher up until the point that I had my oldest

child Alex and since having Alex eight years ago I have worked part-time for one academic

school year and one summer session. While working full-time as an elementary teacher at an

International school, my daily life was structured and filled with people; colleagues, students,

parents and friends. The roles in my life were clearly defined. I knew what was expected of

me and felt confident in each of my roles. With the birth of my first child, the structure of

my life changed dramatically. My daily activities were now centered on the care of a tiny,

totally dependent little person. A whole new world presented itself, one with far fewer

people and much less structure. A world located much more 'at home' than 'out there' in the

world. As I took on this role in the full sense of the experience, on all levels of my

experience, I was confronted with various adjustments in my changing sense of self.

Accompanying this was the realization of the devalued status of mothering and the

invisibility of the work I was doing. I was experiencing the full measure of the distinction

between public and private profoundly.

It first began when I was asked for the first time after having had Alex, "so, what do you

do?" I remember feeling a range of emotions, a combination of insecurity, confusion, anger,

disappointment, guilt, loss and defensiveness. Here I was, trying to care for my child, in a way wanting the importance of what I was doing to be publicly acknowledged, yet simultaneously feeling that in leaving my job, I had relinquished all claim to adult respect. I wanted to feel valued, even special amid the diapers and baby's spit-up and exhaustion. I cringed at the thought that devoting myself to this not particularly easy role might be viewed by some as some kind of refusal to pull my own weight.

"So, what do you do?"

There it is. A seemingly simple question that should have a simple answer, shouldn't it? One would think so, and yet for eight years now, it has become a question that I dread. I have come up with many different answers to this question, many different scripts:

1. *"Nothing."* No…that is so far from the truth, that I know I'm not being fair to myself or to other women who have chosen not to work outside the home while raising their children. In fact, there are many days when I think that I could not possibly be busier or more stretched both mentally and physically.

2. *"I'm a stay-at-home mom."* I imagine I can see their eyes glazing over and I suddenly feel like I need to be defensive of my choice. I think to myself, "what does that mean anyway? Stay-at-home mom? Some days I'm hardly home at all!".

3. OK, let's try again. *"I'm a teacher……Oh yes…..well, I haven't actually worked as a full-time teacher for quite some time now but…"* This doesn't seem quite right either. Why do I feel that I need to hold on to my professional identity in order to feel some sort of worth, to feel of some value to whomever it is I am speaking with?

"Help!"

DEVELOPMENT OF MY FEMINIST SELF

Feminism is something I have at times taken for granted, at times angrily rejected, and at other times casually ignored. I was born in 1967 which means that second wave feminism was gaining momentum and was in full swing in the seventies while I was a child, so it is a cultural force that has always been present as a backdrop to my life. It is upon becoming a mother that I have been prompted to analyze my relationship with feminism and the role it has played in my life. Initially this prompting came about due to feelings of anger and frustration in trying to reconcile being a mother with the feminist message telling me I could 'have it all' when I was clearly having difficulty seeing how this was possible.

My mother

I recently asked my mother if she thought of herself as a feminist. I loved her response. She said, "with two daughters, how can I not be?" I suppose I found myself wondering because at the time I was examining my own relationship with feminism, and feeling quite confused about it. Nobody around me seemed to be active in the women's movement. Was there still a women's movement? The word feminist seemed almost radical – the other "f-word" – and yet, myself, my sister, my mother, my friends, we all seem to be living lives where we assume equality.

Now that I think back, I realize that my mom has always been a feminist, although like me, I think she has at times shied away from the label itself. I remember copies of Ms. Magazine, the high rotation of the album Free to Be...You and Me on our record player, and folded back articles by one of her favourite Toronto Star columnists, Michelle Landsberg.

Although never actively or overtly political in a public sense, I would argue that she has always been privately political. I view her as an armchair intellectual, never having gone to

university, but always incredibly well read and well informed with strong opinions on political issues, women's issues included. Her politics informed and influenced my upbringing and who I am today.

Mom, and Dad for that matter, always encouraged my sister, brother and I to be what we wanted to be and to do what we wanted to do. There was always the assumption of equality in our household – even though we were living the model of the traditional nuclear family with my father being the breadwinner of the family and my mother being the primary caregiver.

Free to Be...You and Me

I think back to when I was in grade 3 in 1975 and the *Free to Be...You and Me* album was playing at our house. Songs and poems calling for equality, recognition of difference, challenge to status quo and stereotyping....*every boy in this land, grows to be his own man. In this land, every girl grows to be her own woman....and you and me are free to be you and me.* I can still sing the tune 30 years later. The *Free to Be...You and Me* collection of songs and poems will be forever imprinted on my brain. It was a formative narrative text that has influenced the way I see the world.

Walking by a used bookstore four years ago while living in California, I saw the familiar purple book that went along with the album and knew I had to have it. It would be nostalgia for me, but I also bought it to share with my own children thinking of all the valuable lessons of feminism that I had absorbed and which have become part of who I am. It would be passed on to a new generation!

I find myself hoping that there will be some sort of equivalent for my children; something that catches their interest by way of literature and music to instill in them values and lessons about equality and cultural relativity that they will carry with them for the rest of

their lives. Perhaps someday they will be walking down a street and come across this book or album (or CD or MP3 file?) and decide that they need to hold on to it to pass on to their children.

Hopefully it will remind them of their happy childhood and their feminist mother who always encouraged them to seek equality and fairness in everything they did....just as finding this book did for me.

The 80s

It's 1984. The height of the "me" generation. There are conservative governments in Canada and the United States and there is an economic boom. Reaganomics has taken hold. There are signs of monetary excess everywhere - in popular fiction (Bonfire of the Vanities), movies (Wall Street), fashion (status symbols, power suits, the preppy look). Record numbers of women have entered the paid workforce as a result of the second wave feminist movement. Simultaneously there is a feminist backlash in the midst of this conservativism. Susan Faludi examines this in her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991).

With this backdrop I am a 17 year old girl, brimming with confidence and privilege. I'm sitting at Mom and Dad's kitchen table with my best friend Sarah talking about boyfriends, last night's party, the movie *Pretty in Pink*, how I was going to save up for my next Ralph Lauren t-shirt, next week's biology exam; the stuff of everyday teenage life in middle-class Ontario. Our conversation then turns to the future and how we see ourselves in it. We want careers and family. We don't want to become our mothers we tell each other. Our 17 year old selves don't approve of the choices our mothers have made. There's no way we're staying at home with kids while our husbands pursue their careers. We want more than that we tell each other. We want it all! We want high powered, important careers. We want to be

wearing those power suits with the big shoulder pads and 'doing' lunch. We want children. We want to be able to travel the world. We'll split everything 50/50 with our (wonderfully handsome!) husbands. Why shouldn't we? We're equal now, right? After all, we are the "free to be, you and me" kids from the 70s. We've been told that we could be anything, which we took to mean that we could do everything, and have it all at the same time. We expect that our opinions matter and that our experiences our valid. We have the same sense of entitlement as our brothers and assume that the same opportunities that are there for them, will be there for us too.

Generation X

I've been labeled "Generation X". This label was christened by writer Douglas Coupland in 1991 in his book of the same title. Generation X has been a demographic whose cultural stereotype until recently has been marked by a perceived lack of gravitas and commitment. We have been seen to be indivualists, politically conscious, but not politically active. We are not joiners. We have been raised with an innate sense of equality and we generally espouse feminist ideals while rejecting the label. There seems to be an assumption that the feminist goal of gender equality has been achieved, that the work has been done.

The irony of my generation's rejection of feminism is that it is feminism itself that has made a tremendous difference in perceptions and opportunities in our lives. It is feminism that has won us the right to access birth control and abortion, both of which have had huge implications in securing my reproductive freedom. Schooling and career opportunities that I have taken as "givens" were hard-won by second wave feminists, not to mention the right to vote which goes back to the suffragettes' work at the beginning of the 1900s.

When I take a step back to examine all that feminism has changed in my life, it is shocking that my generation, and I include myself in this, would dare to reject the movement and the label.

INTENSIVE MOTHERING

Some days I feel like I, and the mothers around me sharing my middle-class demographic, are losing our minds. I look at the material things we feel we need to have in order to be a good mother. We need the latest and best Rolls Royce of strollers, we need the Baby Bach CD to play classical music for our babies while they are still in utero, we need a library of parenting books written by 'experts', we need the black and white mobile designed to enhance our infant's IQ while simultaneously providing a soothing heartbeat sound. This is consumerism shamelessly directed at mothers, insidiously suggesting that we aren't good mothers if we don't buy, buy, buy. This is also part of the new ideology of what 'good' motherhood represents. Intensive mothering takes on many forms and I put forth the argument later in this thesis, that this ideology serves as an oppressive backlash discourse creating guilt, anxiety, frustration and competitiveness among mothers. The following is a very short narrative of one brief example of intensive mothering in my life.

My 20-month-old had been playing in the sandbox at the park and then stopped to ask me for a snack. Ever the prepared mother, I pulled out a strawberry yogurt in a tube. Immediately another mother, whom I did not know, piped up from a nearby bench: "How can you give that to your daughter? It's so full of sugar. What I do," she continued, "is use a syringe to extract 1/2 of the sweet yogurt from the tube, then I use a second syringe to inject plain yogurt back into the tube. That way my daughter has the same yogurt as the other kids, but I know that it's not too sweet."

I was too floored to say anything back. Let's consider for a minute— just for fun— what an appropriate response could be in this situation. More specifically, what could be an appropriate feminist response— one that fosters community among mothers?

Here are a few choices I came up with:

a) Thanks so much! Can I borrow your syringe?

b) Have you lost you mind?

c) Why not use your yogurt time to fight any number of unethical and nonsensical policies that harm mothers, children, and everyone else? or

d) the all-purpose response to strange statements: Huh? Say What?

CHAPTER 3: THE SHAPING OF IDENTITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

This chapter of my thesis provides a theoretical framework for the construction of my identity. I have chosen autoethnography as my methodology for this thesis and it is therefore important to theoretically understand the positioning of self. I need to explain what this has meant historically in traditional Western philosophical thought, and how poststructuralism as a theoretical perspective views the self.

Feminist scholars studying motherhood, such as Patrice DiQuinzio, Mielle Chandler, Andrea O'Reilly, Julia Kristeva, and Sara Ruddick among others, take issue with the liberal hegemony of individualism as central to achieving autonomy, arguing that this is in conflict with what is required of a maternal self. They view the maternal self as 'in-relation', not as isolated and alone. I examine and outline this argument in this chapter.

After giving a brief overview of these theoretical positions, I attempt to articulate how I view the construction of my identity and subjectivity and why this analysis is important in relation to the topic of mothering and motherhood.

Historical positioning of the self

Attempts by Renaissance scholars to study and explain the human subject, the self has often been referred to as "humanism" and described in terms of a philosophical and literary movement that treats as central the questions of human values and of what it means to be human (Peters, 2004, p. 37). Humanism places 'man' as central in the order of things.

Humanism generally came to represent the set of beliefs based upon the central idea that individual human beings are the fundamental source of value and have the ability to understand and control the natural world through the exercise of their own faculties.

Humanism "insisted on man's essential autonomy: man is responsible to himself, to his own rational interests, to his self-development and by an inescapable extension, to the welfare of his fellow man" (Gay cited in Peters, 2004, p.39). The key assumption of humanist thought is the notion that the self is a stable, coherent, and knowable entity.

Poststructuralist positioning of the self

If there is one 'truth' or fundamental principle that poststructuralist thought has contested, it is the notion of self-consciousness and the self-conscious subject who is said to be self-transparent, or identifies itself with itself through an act of self-knowledge (Peters, 2004, p. 74). This is in direct contrast to the key assumption of humanist thought. Poststructuralist thinkers see self as shifting, evolving and never 'fixed'. There is no true self.

Poststructuralist thought tends to emphasize the anti-essentialist nature of subjectivity and historicize questions of who we are and what we are studying when we study ourselves; it questions the humanism underlying traditional accounts of the unified, autonomous, and transparent self (Peters, 2004, p. 5). In poststructuralism there can be no quest to find one self, rather, one finds multiple selves.

Poststructuralists increasingly come to specify the subject in all its historical and cultural complexity as 'decentered' within the language system, as discursively constituted, and as positioned at the intersection of libidinal forces and sociocultural practices. The subject is seen as embodied and engendered and subject to the practices and strategies of normalization and individualization that characterize modern institutions (Peters, 2004, p. 19).

Theorists in the poststructuralist tradition emphasize that meaning is an active construction "radically dependent upon the pragmatics of context and thereby challenge the

universality of truth claims" (Peters, 2004, p. 19). Through the poststructuralist lens there is a new emphasis upon perspectivism in interpretation.

Social Constructivism

In the tradition of social constructivism, I believe that truth and knowledge are socially constructed in particular contexts and cultures. The values and beliefs I hold and the way I see myself are constructed by historic, socio-cultural, political, economic and gender forces. I view truth and knowledge as being dependent on specific contexts: class, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity and factors that shape the discourse and interactions in our world.

Constructivism, as defined by Schwandt, means that,

> human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. There is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction. We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197).

It follows then, that I would see identity formation as a social construction. I am in agreement with Bruner's description of self as cited in Schwandt. He states, "it can never be the case that there is a 'self' independent of one's cultural-historical existence" (Bruner cited in Schwandt, 2000, p. 137). John Dewey states that "people are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context" (Dewey cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

Analyses that fix in simplistic terms are thoroughly inadequate. In *Feminist Mothers* (1990), Tuula Gordon's theoretical focus is on developing an understanding of the context within which subjectivities are constructed and located. She states that

> structures, cultures and personal lives exist in intricate, complicated relationships, and while the framework within which people's lives are constructed poses sets of

constraints, any deterministic analysis is inadequate in understanding the possibilities and limitations within which they operate (Gordon, 1990, p. 7).

A split in feminist theory - Essentialism vs. Social Constructivism

Two feminist perspectives compete to explain the gender division in our society. One perspective, essentialism or difference feminism, holds that there are basic differences between men and women and suggests that these differences are biologically determined. This position disputes social constructivism which argues that these differences are purely products of social conditioning. I believe both are too categorical, acting as binaries that serve to divide.

The 1970s saw the beginnings of divisions within feminist theory that would further subdivide in the 1980s. The basic division in the 70s emerged in a theoretical division between essentialists and social constructivists. This essentialist position informed certain streams of feminist thought in the 1980s such as Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* (1982), among others. Difference feminism intends to theorize the complexity of embodied, gendered subjectivity and difference feminists believe that differences are deeply rooted and result in different approaches to the world, in some cases creating a distinctive 'culture' of women. Such differences, they think, benefit society and ought to be recognized and rewarded.

Critics of this trend towards 'difference' argue that any formulation of women as different from men could be used as a pretext to justify the further exclusion of women from the workplace and public life. They fear any valorization of women's 'difference' could easily be co-opted by conservative interests wanting to confine women to the domestic sphere. The appeal to difference in feminist theory risks reinforcing the binary of male and

female and may fail to consider the extent to which aspects of women's difference are a function of sexism and male dominance.

Difference feminism is very important and it is a particularly important theoretical framework to take up when discussing motherhood. It demands space for womens' perspectives, but it does essentialize as well. How can the fundamental contribution that women as women make to society be specified without tying women's identity to some essential notion of what it means to be a woman? Any fixed formulation of women's 'nature' has the potential to undermine women's efforts to achieve some measure of personal autonomy. Yet to ignore women's specific experience as women, and their contribution to society as mothers, inhibits our understanding of nurturing activity and the possible development of a socio-political system grounded in an ethics of care.

Embodied subjectivity

> *Female identity is rooted in embodied experiences of menstruation, childbearing, lactation, and menopause, which are filtered through the veils that different cultures throw over them. Clearly a woman's identity consists of much more than her reproductive system, and this is where the feminist critique is invaluable in confronting cultural misogyny. But, I believe that we go to the depths of our feminine selves in these primal, physical experiences common to women of all cultures. Devaluing these depths is a function of our own cultural bias (Lowinsky, 1992, p. xiii).*

Feminist theory challenges the individualist claim that subjectivity can and should be understood apart from material, historical, social, cultural, and ideological contexts. A theory of subjectivity must analyze and explain the complexities of human embodiment (DiQuinzio, 1999, pp. 7-9). DiQuinzio explains that part of what she concludes to be the impossibility of motherhood is because individualism theorizes subjectivity in terms of identity, relying on the dominant tradition of Western philosophy, the metaphysics of

substance, for its foundations. The metaphysics of substance disavows difference. She

explains that according to individualism, the essence of human subjectivity is a set of

capacities, primarily reason, consciousness, or rational autonomy, which enable rational,

independent self-determination and action. These capacities are distinct from embodiment;

consciousness is conceived as fundamentally disembodied.

DiQuinzio argues that feminist theory must insist that individualism is an inadequate

account of subjectivity (p. 244). She suggests that at the center of feminism's difference-

based challenge to individualism is the question of how best to theorize embodied

subjectivity and she proposes understanding embodied subjectivity in terms of the concept

of subject positioning (245). The advantages of viewing subjectivity this way is that it then

allows maternal embodied subjectivity to be seen "not as a deviant or failed subjectivity, but

as a paragdigmatically human subjectivity" (p. 245).

In her essay *Queering Maternity*, Mielle Chandler explores how maternal forms of selfhood

have been "degraded, mocked and reviled" (Chandler in O'Reilly, 2004a, p. 20). Chandler

positions and links the maternal to new transgressive models of creativity and subjectivity.

Like DiQuinzio, she challenges disembodied individualism and argues that we must view

subjectivity as embodied. In so doing, we as a society may then allow for difference, without

slipping into essentialism. In allowing for difference, and viewing subjectivity as embodied

and in-relation, motherwork may be revalued which would then potentially lead to social and

policy change. Chandler builds on the work of Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of

Mothering* (1978) arguing that each of us is maternally identified. Her aim is to revive and

revalue the maternal in each of us, to cultivate maternal relations in all spheres and with all

others.

Sara Ruddick in *Maternal Thinking* (1989) offers a theory of embodiment based on the concept of natality. Ruddick argues that mothering begins in the bodily experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, and central to the care of infants and small children is the care of their bodies (Ruddick cited in DiQuinzio, 1999, p. 125). Ruddick argues for the possibility of a mode of thought which she calls natal reflection and suggests that this mode of thought originates in the experiences of pregnancy and birthgiving. Acknowledgement of this mode of thought requires a theory of the body as a site of knowledge and Ruddick argues that all aspects of embodiment have effects on knowing. It is her conclusion that subjectivity is always what she calls, 'social/bodily' (Ruddick cited in DiQuinzio, 1999, p. 126).

Sara Ruddick's work on mothering directly confronts the issue of the material aspects of mothering, as well as the issue of maternal embodiment. She addresses the paradoxes of embodiment and gender by striving to theorize female embodiment in a way that recognizes its significance for mothering, but does not reduce femininity and/or mothering to the female body and she tries to represent mothering in terms that are consistent both with what women and mothers say about their experiences and with feminist social and political goals. She relies implicitly on a social constructivist theory of gender to support the detachment of female embodiment, femininity, and mothering that is central to her analysis of maternal practice (DiQuinzio, 1999, pp. 118-124).

Adrienne Rich also uses the image of "thinking through the body" in *Of Woman Born (1976)*. She suggests that an attempt to reconceptualize embodied subjectivity can be achieved through women's accounts of their experiences of mothering. Like Ruddick, Rich argues that there is "a possibility of converting our physicality into both knowledge and power" (Rich, 1976, p. 290). In *Of Woman Born (1976)*, Rich describes the contradictions and ambivalence inherent in mothering, but also envisions the embodied experiences and

physicality of mothering as a source of power for women. She places emphasis on mothering as a source of power and pleasure for women, and as the site which implicitly or explicitly contains assumptions about the inherent differences between women and men. Rich argues for the radical implications of female biology, which has been shackled by patriarchal thought and religious ideologies. Physicality for women, is not a destiny but a resource. This would be in direct opposition to Simone de Beauvoir who in *The Second Sex*, laments that biology is destiny. Beauvoir deals directly with the issue of female embodiment in *The Second Sex* (1974).

In *"Stabat Mater"* (1977) Julia Kristeva's account of mothering offers a theory of embodied subjectivity by arguing that embodied subjectivity is discursively constituted using a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework. In addition she offers the concept of a 'herethics', an ethical theory and practice based on its discourse of the maternal and the feminine. Kristeva argues for a theory of language as the symbolic processes through which subjectivity is constituted, such that there is no subjectivity prior to and apart from language. Stabat Mater begins by explicitly framing the question of mothering and femininity in terms of difference.

Construction of my identity

I believe that my identity is a complex construction consisting of biological, psychological and social components. I believe I was born with genetically-based traits and capacities which I view as being innate – the nature part of me, rather than the nurture part of me. I acknowledge difference, by this I mean I acknowledge difference among all human beings given our different genetic make-ups. Within this I include difference between males and females based on differing physiology. This 'innate me' however, is subject to the socio-cultural structures and forces in which I live. Nurture influences the way I interact with the world and the way I perceive my identity. The contexts and forces in our lives change with

changing circumstances and therefore my identity, how I view my self and my place in the world, is also evolving and subject to change.

I do not agree with the key assumption of humanist thought which is that the self is a stable, coherent, and knowable entity and it's rejection of embodied subjectivity. It is, however, difficult to accept that there may not be an essential me, or at least an essential *part* of me. Is everything I think and do a product of the normalizing socio-cultural forces that surround me? Those parts of my self that I think of as uniquely mine, include my interpretation and internalization of embodied experiences, my innermost desires and genetic traits. It is probable that even what I think of as 'uniquely my own' is a complex combination of libidinal and sociocultural, consistent with poststructural analysis of subjectivity.

In relation to motherhood, I feel that it is a combination of the embodied experiences of being pregnant, giving birth, and nursing a child, the socio-cultural structures within which I live and the socio-cultural messages and normalizing forces which work together to construct my changed identity and subjectivity as 'mother'. This places me in conversation with feminist theorists who tend to call for a recognition of difference while acknowledging the implications and dangers of essentialism. As I argued earlier, in recognizing difference, maternal forms of selfhood can then be acknowledged and linked to a new model of subjectivity – one that rejects disembodiment. This new model of subjectivity then allows for a different view of identity. If I, and others, can view my maternal self as in-relation, then this is the starting point for revaluing mothers in our society without falling into dangerous essentialist positions which serve to maintain prescribed gender roles and subjugation.

In the next chapter I more closely examine the forces that influence and construct my identity as 'mother'.

CHAPTER 4: MOTHERHOOD VS. THE EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERING

Motherhood, the cultural construct, rather than mother, a biological fact, is a difference that needs to be explored (Kleinberg, 1999, p. 387).

As I will explain in this chapter, there is the institution of motherhood with all of its socially constructed forces that influence how I view myself as mother, the choices I make, and how I carry out the practice of mothering, and then there is the embodied experience of mothering which is my own interpretation and practice of mothering which comes from an embodied, personal, internal force. The two are not separate entities, but rather exist together and influence one another.

The legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born

According to Adrienne Rich (1976), mothering refers to women's experiences of mothering which are female defined and centered, and potentially empowering to women. Motherhood refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male defined and controlled, and is oppressive to women.

> In the introduction to *Mother Outlaws* (2004b), written by Andrea O'Reilly, she states that it has long been recognized among scholars of motherhood that Adrienne Rich's distinction between mothering and motherhood in *Of Woman Born* (1976) was what enabled feminists to recognize that motherhood is not naturally, necessarily, or inevitably oppressive, a view held by many early second wave feminists. Mothering, freed from the institution of motherhood, could be experienced as a site of empowerment, a location of social change. (p.11)

This is the true legacy of Rich's work, that in identifying the potential empowerment of motherhood, it has enabled feminists to envision empowered mothering for women.

The distinction of experience and institution allows Rich to argue that the experience of mothering is not inherently oppressive of women, and to show that even when women's experiences of mothering are controlled by men to serve men's interests, women can also experience joy, love, satisfaction, and accomplishment as mothers. Rich's distinction between experience and institution thus allows her to argue that the institution of motherhood can and should be reorganized so that it is controlled by women, serves the interests of women and children, and advances the goals of feminism. She argues

> the institution of motherhood is not identical with bearing and caring for children. [But it] creates the prescriptions and the conditions in which choices are made or blocked. It has shaped the circumstances of our lives ... the social institutions and prescriptions for behavior created by men have not necessarily accounted for the real lives of women. Yet any institution which expresses itself so universally ends by profoundly affecting our experience, even the language we use to describe it (1976, p. 24).

Rich argues that the solution to the subordination of women through patriarchal control of reproduction is the destruction of the institution of motherhood. Rich argues that the view of mothering as natural or instinctual is an element of the institution of motherhood that serves the interests of men and contributes to maintaining patriarchy (Rich, 1976, p. 24).

Understanding this distinction between mothering and motherhood has helped me to understand, name and locate some of the conflicts and frustrations that I have experienced in mothering. In my narratives I have used the distinction between motherhood and mothering to show how the first has been oppressive at times for me and how the latter has

been a source of joy and amazement and a location of social change which I express through childrearing and which has brought me to this writing.

This writing has allowed me to step back from my own experiences and see how the socially constructed institution of motherhood has created the conditions in which I have carried out the practice of mothering. Realizing that there are structural barriers inherent in the organization of the patriarchal institution of motherhood has highlighted for me the fact that these are not only personal struggles, but rather socio-cultural and policy issues affecting many mothers. Also, understanding the connectedness of my mothering practices and my embodied experiences and viewing them separately from the institution of motherhood has allowed me to see mothering as a potential site of empowerment and socio-political action.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MOTHERHOOD

Motherhood is a term that is socially constructed and gendered, with a meaning that resonates beyond the biological into the psychological, economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions of family life and the place of the family in society. It has a gendered and culturally specific significance, changing over time, making it a barometer of women's social role and status.

Inequities due to structural power imbalances which ultimately lead to the subordination of women are inherent in the socially constructed institution of motherhood. Recognition of the power imbalances inherent in this institution have led me on a quest to understand the forces acting on my life as 'mother' within the institution of motherhood and a search for ways to resist the oppressive forces acting on my life.

O'Reilly states that

> through a complex process of intersecting forces – economics, politics, cultural
>
> institutions/discourses - the dominant patriarchal definition of motherhood is

codified as the official and only meaning of motherhood. The patriarchal definition,

through its inscription in laws, social policies, governmental institutions and so forth,

determines the material conditions of mothering. Patriarchy, both socially and

discursively, defines the meaning of motherhood and determines how women

mother. (2004b, p. 4)

The myth of the 'good' mother

The socially constructed myth of the 'good' mother, with the ideology of intensive

mothering being central to this myth, acts as a normalizing and controlling force in mothers'

lives. Being a mother places me as a member of the institution of motherhood and therefore

much of my identity as a mother is linked with how a 'good' mother is supposed to feel and

act. I self-judge and am judged by others so that I will fit into this discursive normative

ideology. (Foucault, 1972/1980)

Part of this myth of the 'good' mother is the ideology of intensive mothering which,

according to O'Reilly in *Mother Outlaws* (2004b, p. 6), "is a historically constructed cultural

model for appropriate child rearing." She calls this ideology patriarchal motherhood and she

suggests that as the dominant ideology it becomes the mode of motherhood by which all

mothers are regulated and judged (p. 5). The ideology of intensive mothering measures good

mothering in accordance with the amount of time, energy, attention and money a mother

expends in raising their children. This ideology serves to keep mothers in their place as they

strive for perfection.

The myth of the 'good' mother becomes normative so that anything else is seen to be

deviant or abnormal. In the case of motherhood, we hear through various social texts about

'good' mothers and 'bad' mothers. Examples of these social texts are television, movies,

popular fiction, children's fiction, magazines and parenting books. These social narratives

perpetuate the dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' and often set mothers up to judge not only themselves but each other leading to competitive mothering.

Sociologist Sharon Hays in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996) coined the term 'intensive mothering'. It has also been called hyper-mothering, and referred to as 'the mommy mystique' in *Perfect Madness* (2005) by Judith Warner. Susan Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels in *The Mommy Myth* (2004) discuss what they call the 'new momism' which is a set of ideals, norms, practices, "that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond reach" (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 5).

One of the dangers of the myth of the 'good' mother is that it has essentialist assumptions. In her 1998 article, *Mothering Mythology in the Late 20ᵗʰ Century*, Pamela Courtenay-Hall states that the myth of the 'natural' mother involves the representation of mothering as "natural to women, essential to their being, an engagement of love and instinct that is utterly distant from the world of paid work and formal education." She argues that "at its core, the myth of the natural mother involves the belief that women are *naturally* mothers -- they are born with a built-in set of capacities, dispositions and desires to nurture children" (Courtenay-Hall, 1998, p. 59). DiQuinzio explains,

> when some aspect of human existence is theorized as natural, it is also understood as that which cannot and/or should not be changed. Essential motherhood represents women's mothering as natural in this sense, determining it as inevitable, instinctive, and properly contained in its appropriate realm, the private sphere (DiQinzio, p. 10).

I believe it is important to acknowledge that there is the possibility of an innate draw – perhaps maternal desire – to the work of mothering, but I also believe that it is wrong and dangerous to take an essentialist approach, as the workings of the myth does. It assumes that

all women want to have children, or that all mothers want to do the work of mothering, or are naturally predisposed to mothering. This is the danger of the myth because it reinforces gender roles which keep women in the private sphere and away from the public sphere which is the location for political and financial power.

The ideology implicit in the myth of the 'good' mother that positions women as natural mothers, selflessly and endlessly giving to their children can dangerously serve as an implicit justification for the staggering lack of publicly-funded parenting support. This is something that Pamela Courtenay-Hall points out in her article and I fully agree. The lack of social support is justified and propped up by the myth of the 'good' mother which implies that mothering is a labour of love. This is indeed oppressive for women.

The way in which women are represented as a social gender defined by motherhood and domesticity is a critical aspect to the myth of the 'good' mother. Gender divides humanity very neatly into two different worlds and assigns men and women to the half where their supposedly innate qualities are most in demand. Men get gainful work and public authority, women get family work and limited private authority. Each hemisphere has its own set of drawbacks and rewards, however, this arrangement gives men, as the leaders of public institutions, disproportionate access to key sources of social, political and economic power. Not only does our gender story substantiate a patriarchal social order that continues to marginalize and subordinate women, it also ensures that women have limited access to the power they need to change that story.

Ideological formations

I found it quite discouraging to read Tuula Gordon when she states that

> despite decades of challenges, the myth of the natural mother continues to be
>
> reflected in social and economic institutions, including wage standards, evaluations

of economic productivity, education policy, taxation and insurance policies, divorce settlements and reproductive technology regulation (1990, p.7).

If Gordon wrote this sixteen years ago and refers to decades of challenges, this myth is obviously deeply entrenched. Her concerns led me to wonder how myths such as this have become so ingrained into the fabric of our society and the way we continue to function.

Courtenay-Hall believes the 'natural' mother is a myth in the richest sense of the term and quoting Mach she explains that the myth is more than false belief and more than ideology, it is "a symbolic text which presents a story which in turn transmits values, norms and patterns essential and fundamental for a given culture" (Mach cited in Courtenay-Hall, 1997, p. 60). Courtenay-Hall draws on Barthes to explain how a myth such as the myth of the 'natural' mother becomes part of the normative discourse:

> the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature. It transmits a set of norms whose origin has become lost in the myth's pre-history. The norms thus come to be see as 'natural' rather than constructed by historical circumstances (Barthes cited in Courtenay-Hall, 1997, p. 61).

Ideological formations and discursive practices produce a variety of subjects of power (Foucault 1980, 1987), and those more powerful individuals, groups, and institutions, especially those with access to or control over "ideological apparatuses" (Althusser 1971), articulate, more or less consciously, the elements of ideological formations in ways that more or less successfully advance their interests and preserve their power. Women are subjected to the overt as well as hegemonic power of patriarchy and phallocentrism and many lack awareness of the way power operates.

Ideological formations are frequently hegemonic. This means that at the level of individual consciousness they are understood as 'common sense'. In order to be hegemonic,

ideological formations must mask or obscure both the contradictions that can be implicit in these formations themselves and the contradictions that can exist between ideological formations and their corresponding material conditions and social relations, structures, institutions, and practices.

Marxist Antonio Gramsci has written extensively on the way in which the individual's consciousness is determined through the influence of ideologies. He advanced the concept of hegemony to capture the ways in which

> the dominant classes in any society impose their own conception of reality on all
> subordinate classes, and the possible ways in which the oppressed can create
> alternate cultural and political institutions to establish their own understanding of
> oppression in order to oppose and change it (Gramsci cited in Weiler, 1988, p. 13).

DiQuinzio (1999) argues that individualism and essential motherhood have tended to be hegemonic. She states that ideological formations are effective – they bring about and sustain the material conditions, social relations, structures, institutions, and practices that they claim simply to describe.

Power and knowledge intersect in all spheres enabling the hierarchies in our society. Politically speaking, poststructuralism aims to expose structures of domination by diagnosing "power/knowledge" relations and their manifestations in our classifications, examinations, practices, and institutions. It aims to produce an "incredulity towards metanarratives," to disassemble the structures and strategies of the official discourse. It aims to analyze power relations in communication and the pedagogies of modern forms of mass media (Peters, 2004, p. 5). The metanarrative in this case is the myth of the 'good' or 'natural' mother.

THE EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERING

As previously mentioned, according to Adrienne Rich, mothering refers to women's experiences of mothering which are female defined and centered, and potentially empowering to women. This is in opposition to the patriarchal, socially constructed institution of motherhood. Mothering happens within motherhood.

The way I mother is hugely influenced by the discourse of the day surrounding 'good' motherhood and the cultural structures – political, economic, gender roles – which depend on the institution of motherhood to maintain the status quo and provide support for the socio-cultural constructs of our society. By problematizing the institution of motherhood, power imbalances can be named, addressed and social relations, structures, institutions and practices will start to be disrupted.

As discussed in the methodology chapter I have used personal narrative as a tool for this problematizing. Personal narratives describing real-life experience and practice of mothering challenges the normative discourse surrounding motherhood. In this challenge, alternatives are explored and power imbalances are revealed. This leads to empowerment and potentially social change. Guilt and anxiety are reduced, public voices are found and power is shifted.

In *Mother Matters* (2004a) O'Reilly states: "In speaking authentically of the conundrum that is motherhood, the renditions of lived mothering empower mothers in so far as they serve to free them from the self-recrimination, anxiety and guilt engendered by the normative discourse of mothering" (p. 21).

How do can I separate my personal experiences of mothering from the socially constructed elements of my life as a mother operating within motherhood? It is difficult to do so because the normative ideology is so strong that it informs, if not defines, the manner in which women practice mothering.

The practice of mothering

From the embodied maternal experiences which create an embodied subjectivity comes the practice of mothering which is the source of potential empowerment and location of social change. The practice of mothering itself leads to new ways of thinking and the creation of new knowledge which then have the potential to lead to a location of social change and empowerment. It is the practice of mothering itself, childrearing, that is a potential site of social action.

In her book *Maternal Thinking*, Sara Ruddick's account of mothering as a practice argues that mothering includes complex modes of thoughts and action (1989, pp. 13-17) A practice is a distinctively human activity in which persons respond to what they see as their material, emotional, psychological, and intellectual needs or interests, and those of others, in a coherent, socially organized way. Maternal practice responds to children's demands for preservation, growth, and acceptability (Ruddick, 1989, pp. 17-23). This theorizes the material aspects of mothering, showing how maternal practice considers the specific, embodied needs of children and requires an engagement with bodies and the material world.

Like Adrienne Rich, Ruddick also emphasizes power connected to the reproductive capacities of women, coupled with powerlessness due to the control of reproduction. She focuses on 'maternal thought', which is interested in preservation, growth and acceptability of the child. Contradictions in maternal thought must be transformed by feminism, Ruddick argues; this transformed maternal thought must be brought out of the private into the public realm (Gordon, 1990, p. 43).

Ruddick's view of the relationship of practices and their social contexts addresses the question of how the social organization of mothering is related to other forms of social inequality. It denaturalizes women's private, unpaid mothering, which makes possible the

analysis of how this particular social organization of mothering is related to women's economic dependence on men and women's social and political inequity.

If I view my practice of mothering as an expression of my embodied self, this allows me to separate practice from institution. My embodied self incorporates the incredibly powerful physical and emotional experiences of mothering. My practice is therefore embedded in my embodied experiences. The embodied experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, childrearing and loss have affected my life in a transformative way. I've been struggling with whether or not these embodied experiences have resulted in what Daphne deMarneffe (2004) calls maternal desire. The reason I have been struggling with this concept is because it comes dangerously close to essentializing and yet, I am drawn to my children in what feels to be a most primal way. It is certainly a complicating factor in my life when it comes to sorting out issues of work-life balance. Do men feel this, or what about adoptive mothers? I don't know, but I suspect my embodied experiences are integral to this 'desire'. But, to suggest that maternal desire (if it exists) stems solely from reproductive embodiment is likely problematic. There is a whole feminist argument that says that maternal desire stems not from embodiment but rather from a specific maternal psychology. Mothering as experienced cannot come just from the personal. It is, and cannot avoid being, influenced by our social environment, including the dominant ideological constructions within motherhood.

I do believe however, that for feminism to move forward and to be inclusive of mothers, it needs to recognize the profound importance of maternal embodied experiences, which would be recognizing difference, and theorize it further. Many feminist scholars already do acknowledge this although mothering and motherhood remains under-theorized.

I read the combination of these theories to mean that if we can acknowledge the possibility of maternal desire which plays a part in how we view embodied subjectivity, we

can then imagine an empowered practice of mothering leading to a location of social change. If society can revalue and rethink this embodied subjectivity, then the social organization of motherhood might also be rethought. This may include a revaluing of motherwork and its place within our socio-cultural, economic and political structures.

The goal of deMarneffe's book *Maternal Desire* (2004) is to provide a framework for thinking about women's desire to care for their children in a way that is consistent with feminism. She wonders whether contemporary discourse surrounding motherhood is defined by its evasion of the whole question of the desire to mother. She states that

> there is a tacit agreement to steer clear of the messy passions toward babies that ensnared so many women, because the costs to one's sense of personal achievement, and sometimes even to one's sense of identity, were perceived to be so steep. So rarely does public discussion take account of the embodied, aching desire to be with their children that many mothers feel (p. xi).

I agree with deMarneffe when she suggests that feminism hasn't adequately theorized this embodied maternal desire that many women claim to experience, myself included. It is a desire, I think, that has its roots in the embodied experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and the physicality of caring for young children. I don't think that this desire acquiesces to prescribed gender roles or is the result of social conditioning, but I say that with some hesitation as I do recognize the strength of the normalizing messages surrounding gender and motherhood.

This maternal desire that I believe comes from my own personal embodied maternal experiences has been a complicating factor in my life. It has confused me and has changed the way I thought I would be living my life. It competes with other desires and other cultural messages I receive. Acknowledging and talking about maternal desire comes dangerously

close to essentialism and falling into defined, socially constructed gender roles that have been so damaging to women, but I feel that it has to be acknowledged and that although it is a complicating factor for feminists theorizing motherhood, it is not to be avoided.

One of the problems in acknowledging maternal desire is to acknowledge difference and when one acknowledges difference we get close to slipping into essentialism. If we slip into essentialism, then we risk women being 'put into their place' and slipping back into prescribed gender roles which in the past has been damaging and limiting for women. So, we can see why, as deMarneffe said, there has been an agreement to steer clear of the messy passions of mothering and motherhood. Patrice DiQuinzio in her book *The Impossibility of Motherhood* (1999) calls this the dilemma of difference. She argues that in feminist theory the dilemma of difference and its resulting paradoxes are most salient and most difficult to resolve at the site of mothering (1999, pp. 66-67). In asserting our right to partake in the man's world we have come to identify with the very patriarchal attitudes that devalue our mothers and grandmothers. Some of us try to live like men: valuing separateness and achievement. These attitudes split us from our bodies, our physical experiences and our past and leave us wandering without being able to claim our experience as valuable and foundational in terms of our identity as woman. Denying our vulnerability also abandons those who mother. Our task is to integrate our mothering and feminist selves.

The dilemma of difference

DiQuinzio argues that the dilemma of difference in feminist theory is a function of feminism's conflicted relationship to individualism. She states that individualism problematizes certain aspects of women's situations and experiences, especially women's situations and experiences concerning mothering, that feminism also wants to represent and analyze. For this reason, contemporary feminism has come to include a theoretical discourse

that emphasizes the significance of difference for theorizing women's subjectivity and representing women's situations and experiences, or difference feminism. But, when feminist theory appeals to accounts of subjectivity that, unlike individualism, recognize the significance of difference for subjectivity, it may weaken feminism's claim of women's equal subjectivity and thus jeopardize its claim of women's equal political entitlement and agency (1999, p. 6). Traditional feminism has had to rely on individualism to claim women's equal rights (or as she says, equal human subjectivity). But feminism also resists and challenges individualism and includes what DiQuinzio calls a difference-based challenge to individualism, or difference feminism, which reconceptualizes subjectivity in terms of difference. As a result of this interplay of identity and difference, feminism and feminist theory are characterized by 'the dilemma of difference'.

As I stated in chapter three when discussing the split in feminist theory, the appeal to difference in feminist theory risks reinforcing the binary of male and female and runs the risk of not considering the extent to which aspects of women's difference are a function of sexism and male dominance. DiQuinzio recognizes this and argues that

> difference feminist accounts of mothering must recognize and theorize the
> significance of maternal embodiment and the embodied aspects of mothering
> without reducing mothering entirely to a bodily process or bodily based instinct,
> which would reconsolidate essential motherhood's equation of the female body,
> femininity, and motherhood (1999, pp. 68 - 70).

Second wave feminist theory provides two basic strategies for avoiding essential motherhood while negotiating the dilemma of difference. The first is to avoid essential motherhood by avoiding the issue of mothering as much as possible, either by minimizing the significance of mothering in women's lives or by analyzing mothering in overly

simplistic, one-dimensional terms. This was typical of early second-wave feminism.

Mothering is represented in overly simplistic and largely negative terms. The second strategy

is to deal directly and explicitly with the issue of mothering by employing difference feminist

theory. This second strategy leads feminist theory into a wide-ranging search for alternative

conceptions of subjectivity (1999, p. 62).

Analysis of self as mother – now what?

After thinking and analyzing the construction of my self as 'mother', I can more readily

identify the socio-cultural forces and power imbalances that shape how I view myself and

how I carry out my practice of mothering within the institution of motherhood. It has been

enlightening to think about how significantly we are shaped by hegemonic forces. It has

been empowering as well because I can now envision places of resistance to these oppressive

forces in my own life. I do not believe, however, that all that I am and do is socially

constructed. A good part of it is, but there is a very significant force within me that I have

discussed and have tentatively named maternal desire. I conclude that the way I view myself

as mother is a complicated blend of internal and external forces, both socially constructed

and based in embodied subjective experiences.

Analyzing the construction of my identity as a mother has been an interesting journey,

and I think an important one, that has helped me to locate and name some of the conflicts

and frustrations that I have felt. Through this locating and naming, I have moved from a

personal analysis to a political analysis of the position of mothers in our society.

Understanding my own experiences has made me realize that mothers in our society face a

number of issues that are due to structural forces and power imbalances that result in the

devaluation of motherwork, both attitudinally and financially, the difficulty mothers face in

achieving work-life balance, and the overwhelming feeling for mothers that they are failures no matter what they choose.

These issues that mothers face are not simply personal conflicts and frustrations. They are larger structural issues that will continue to penalize and frustrate mothers until significant changes are made in the way we view caring work in our society, the way we organize our economies and our policies and politics surrounding issues of the family.

CHAPTER 5: THE PERSONAL GETS POLITICAL: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ISSUES MOTHERS FACE

In this chapter I outline in more detail than I have up to this point, the issues I have referred to in my narratives and in other sections of the thesis as structural barriers and forces, that I see as being most problematic for mothers today. I focus on what I see as three of the most important issues affecting mothers. I start by looking at the ideology of intensive mothering and how this ideology acts as a backlash discourse that regulates women. I then discuss work/life balance issues and consider why this elusive notion of balance is so difficult for many women to achieve. The final section examines the devaluation of motherhood in our society. I take an historical look at how motherwork came to be equated with 'doing nothing' and the subsequent monetary devaluation of the role. I have encountered each of these issues in my experience of motherhood and in being able to understand them theoretically I can see the role that they have played in creating friction and frustrations in my life. I also touch on each of these issues in the narrative section.

INTENSIVE MOTHERING AS BACKLASH DISCOURSE

The intensive mothering ideology of today seems to be remarkably similar to what Betty Friedan (1970) referred to as *The Feminine Mystique* in her book of the same title. According to Friedan, the feminine mystique required that women abandon all activities except housekeeping and mothering and live through their children. Friedan argued that this form of mothering was harmful for both mothers and children. The feminine mystique, as Betty Friedan described it, involved a patriarchal projection on women – it expressed the way men wanted women to feel. By giving a name and voice to the 'problem that has no name',

Friedan empowered women to see the cruelty of the projection that said that women should be selfless.

Andrea O'Reilly in *Mother Outlaws* (2004b) theorizes that intensive mothering is an ideological construction that functions as a backlash discourse to regulate women (p. 10). She and others such as Susan Douglas and Meridith Micheals in *The Mommy Myth* (2004) claim that this model of mothering gives rise to guilt, blame, exhaustion, isolation, stress, and competitiveness. O'Reilly suggests that "the current discourse of intensive mothering emerged in response to women's increased social and economic independence"(p.10). As she points out, it seems that "just as women were making inroads and feeling confident, a new discourse of motherhood emerged which made two things inevitable: (i) that women would forever feel inadequate as mothers, and (ii) work and motherhood would be forever seen as in conflict and incompatible" (p.10). O'Reilly believes that "the guilt and shame women experience in failing to live up to what is, in fact, an impossible ideal is neither accidental or inconsequential. Rather, it is deliberately manufactured and monitored" (p.10).

There are many contradictory cultural messages surrounding motherhood which often leave women feeling like they can't win no matter how they choose, or need, to mother. It seems I am constantly navigating the messages of what a mother should be and is expected to be in our society and this has been a source of conflict and frustration for me in my personal experience of motherhood. I emphasize that it is my personal experience because I recognize that my specific demographic position in our society allows me choices that many other mothers do not have. On the one hand motherhood is held up on a pedestal as the most important job in the world and stay at home mothers are often seen to be 'good and natural' mothers who perform this most important job in the world. On the other hand caregiving work in our society is both financially unrecognized and unvalued.. Working

mothers may be seen as 'having it all' but are the first to be criticized if they don't bring homemade cookies to the school bake sale or need to leave work early to take their child to the doctor. It leaves women wondering what the 'right' way to mother is.

Foucault is concerned with how the objectification, surveillance and normalization of the individual subject becomes the central concern for a range of human sciences and institutions. A constant process of normalization is going on all the time as we watch each other and enforce the rules of regimes of truth. What is acceptable or unacceptable becomes a normalizing discourse or judgment. Power operates so the judgments of some people have more impact than others (O'Donoghue, 2004).

We can see the myth of the 'good' mother and the ideology of intensive mothering as normalizing discourses. The cultural messages and ideological formations surrounding motherhood have come to define motherhood and the way women mother today. Foucault's concepts of governmentality, genealogy, normalization, and power/knowledge can be applied to understand how.

"Governmentality" is a continuation of Foucault's interest in the dynamic between social and political systems of control and practice of self-control or "self-government". In Foucault's terms, governmentality means both governance of self and others. This locates the self as a politically constituted subject and a relevant domain of research (Peters, 2004, p. 65). Governmentality implies the relationship of the self to itself (and to others), referring explicitly to the problem of ethical self-constitution and self-regulation. Thus it is defined as the hegemonic set of practices and strategies that shape the way individuals in their freedom use in controlling or governing themselves and others (Peters, 2004, p. 66).

Using narrative as a challenge to the 'good' mother

Including descriptions of mothering and motherhood and getting stories into the popular discourse surrounding motherhood will begin the deconstruction of the myth of what a 'good' mother is or isn't. In chapter two I explained why I chose autoethnography as the methodology for this thesis and this is one of the reasons why. By sharing stories that reflect my reality of motherhood, I am putting forth an alternative to the accepted ideology. By interrupting and deconstructing the patriarchal narrative of motherhood, in particular the ideology of intensive mothering, it is possible to destabilize the hold this discourse has on the meaning and practice of mothering, and clear a space for the articulation of counter narratives of mothering.

I'm hardly the first person to do this. Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*, was perhaps one of the first to honestly speak to the experience of mothering, although many early twentieth century feminists addressed it. DiQuinzio, in *The Impossibility of Motherhood*, notes that "Adrienne Rich represents the ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradictory aspects of mothering. She recognizes the extent to which women's experiences of mothering include suffering, sorrow, frustration, restriction, fear, doubt, sacrifice, anger, failure, and violence, as well as joy, love, satisfaction, and accomplishment" (DiQuinzio, 1999, p. 209).

Marni Jackson's *The Mother Zone (1992)*, Cathi Hanauer's *The Bitch in the House (2002)*, and Christina Baker Kline's *Child of Mine* (1997) have all provided me with examples of narratives about modern day motherhood. Although there now seems to be a proliferation of 'mommy lit' and 'momoirs', there is still an overriding patriarchal myth surrounding the 'good and natural' mother in our society that is harmful to women and it is therefore important that personal stories continue to be told in an effort to debunk that myth.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE

As I have said elsewhere in the thesis, I opted out of the paid workforce since becoming a mother. I have had two part-time teaching jobs in that eight years, one was a two month contract and the other was an eight month contract. Despite being privileged to have the financial option to choose not to work outside of the home, it has been something I have wrestled with as the dialogue between my two selves illustrates. I have made the decision to stay at home with my children with the knowledge that I am making a considerable sacrifice that will seriously affect my financial independence and my future employability. In my eight years out of the paid workforce I have worried about how I will reintegrate myself back into the paid-work world. I have, perhaps naively, found myself crossing my fingers and hoping that it will all work out and that when I am ready to go back to paid work, I will be accepted. In my discussions with other women, I know that I am not alone in trying to figure out how children and career might fit into one's life. In fact, it is a preoccupation with most mothers I know. Whether a mother is staying at home and trying to figure out how to get back to her career after a decade away from it, or a mother who needs or wants to work for financial reasons or for personal fulfillment, it still seems that most women, including myself, are trying to find the best way to combine family and an outside work life.

Mothers are grappling with this dichotomy between work and caring and trying to maintain some semblance of self among it all. I now know there is a whole field of study surrounding the issue of work/life balance, however, prior to discovering this, it was something that was nagging at me, something that was creating conflict within me.

My attempt to figure out how to 'have-it-all' has been complicated by two strong conflicting cultural messages. There is the feminist message I received when I was growing up encouraging me to get 'out there', have a career and be independent, and now there is the

ideology of intensive mothering which strongly suggests that the best way to be a 'good' mother is to be home with your children. Throw in the complication of the embodied maternal desire I feel toward my children and you get one confused Mama! Over time I found it was becoming a constant topic of conversation among other mothers I knew and I realized that I was certainly not alone in trying to figure it all out. I found myself asking: what is this all about? Why are we all talking obsessively about it? Why are we finding it difficult to achieve? What's wrong with me? Why am I wrestling with this? I am not a stupid woman.

After eight years of motherhood and almost two years of reading, thinking and writing about motherhood I can now see that my struggle with this is not due to laziness or ineptitude, but rather, larger structural forces that are creating barriers in my life. With the discovery of the work-life balance field I now know that there are significant issues of power that need to be talked about and analyzed. Even in my position of privilege and choice, there are structural forces creating conflict and inequity with very little in the way of societal support. The structural forces that I am talking about include the fact that we are still without universal, affordable and accessible daycare so that if a mother chooses, or needs to work then finding care for their children often comes with a struggle, significant cost and an element of chance. Our economic structures make it difficult for women to come in and out of the workforce, and more difficult for women who have opted to stay at home for longer than the one year that they are legally entitled to. The work that is done at home is unvalued and is viewed as 'doing nothing'. Part-time jobs are often hard to come by and if they are there they are often organized to be contract work without benefits or are structured in a way that minimizes chances for promotion. The demands made on workers in our society are often not compatible with combining work and family which often means in a family

headed by two parents that one parent will cut back in some way in order to be 'there' for the children. Usually that is the woman and in cutting back or 'opting out' she is sacrificing her professional status and financial stability sometimes without being aware of these consequences.

I think all mothers regardless of class, race, sexual orientation and education, share a common predicament: we all deal in one way or another with the splits and conflicts in our lives, and we all struggle with the fact that when it comes to having babies and managing the daily activities of mothering, we need to find a workable solution. The reality for many women is that they are torn and live with a sense of conflict.

Many women in my demographic are choosing to do what has been referred to as 'sequencing', which means coming in and out of the workforce at different points in their maternal lives. But, what are the costs of sequencing? According to Judith Stadtman Tucker, by making this choice to come in and out of the workforce we are giving up promotions, benefits and the work that is most challenging and satisfying for us. She suggests that the news is not exactly encouraging for women who gear down their commitment to paid employment when they have a child and then attempt to pick up where they left off (Tucker, 2005, p. 6). Sylvia Ann Hewlett, author of *Creating a Life* (2002) and founder of the Center for Work-Life Policy states that we are as a society seriously lacking on-ramps for women, particularly mothers.

Do mothers opt out of good jobs, or are they pushed out?

An article titled *The Opt-Out Revolution* in the New York Times magazine by Lisa Belkin caused quite a lot of controversy a few years back. Belkin suggested that professional women were opting out of the workforce in droves in favour of the more satisfying role of mother. Joan C. Williams in *Unbending Gender* (2000) argues that women are not necessarily opting

out, but instead are being pushed out by patterns of bias and stereotyping triggered by motherhood. She coined the term 'maternal wall' which refers to what often happens to women in their careers after they have had a baby. No longer able to fit into inflexible workplaces, women to have to cut back on, if not quit, their employment once they have children. The result is a loss of income – what Ann Crittenden in her book The Price of Motherhood calls the "mommy tax" (Crittenden, 2001, p.5).

When women do try to combine work and family, they face many structural barriers which make it very difficult. Williams outlines many of these barriers. She links the problems that mothers face to our system of organizing market work and family work, which leads to work/family conflict. She argues that despite forty years of feminist challenge, the central dynamics underlying our gender arrangements with respect to market work and family work have proven to be incredibly *un*bending. She argues that to end the marginalization of mothers we need to change the way we organize market and family work and we need to challenge what she calls the 'ideal worker' norm (Williams, 2000, p. x).

Williams explains what she means by the 'ideal worker' norm: success in today's workplace depends on an employer's need for labour on demand – meaning that the most valued workers are those who can work long hours any day of the week, at any time of the day or night, without interruption from personal responsibilities outside the job. For mothers – who, by contemporary cultural standards, are still expected to carry the primary burden of family care – conforming to the uncompromising grind of the 'ideal worker' is nearly impossible. According to Williams, mothers on the professional career track face three unattractive choices: they remain in a good job that keeps them away from home 10-12 hours a day, or they take a part-time job with depressed wages, few benefits and no advancement, or they quit.

Cutting back to a part-time work schedule may seem like an ideal solution for easing

work/life stress in families who are able to make ends meet with one or both wage-earners

working less than full-time. But the part-time option is not without a downside. Often part-

timers receive less pay and benefits compared to full-time employees in the same positions

just because they work part-time (Stadtman, 2005, p. 3).

In *The Mom Economy* (2003) Elizabeth Wilcox emphasizes that women with post-graduate

education and advanced professional skills have considerably more bargaining power when it

comes to negotiating family-friendly work arrangements with employers. However, she notes

that even the most qualified workers must be prepared to make substantial trade-offs in

terms of wages, professional prestige, and quality assignments in order to land a good part-

time or flexible time position.

Naomi Wolf in *Misconceptions* (2001) suggests that "the job market holds out an all-or-

nothing prospect to new mothers: you can give your body and heart and lose much of your

status, your money, your equality in your marriage; or you can keep your identity and your

income – only if you abandon your baby all day long and try desperately to switch off the

most powerful primal drive the human animal can feel" (Wolf, 2001, p. 225). Women should

not have to choose between two starkly exclusive worlds as "work" and "home with kids" as

they now must.

Choice- power imbalances

> *Women's lives have become a complex web of economic, psychological, and social contradictions with*
>
> *opportunities so intimately linked to constraints that a choice in one realm can have unexpected*
>
> *consequences in another. The modern world is a "half-changed" one in which old patterns and*
>
> *expectations have broken down, but new ideas seem fragmentary, unrealistic, and often contradictory*
>
> *(Hanauer, 2002, p. xv).*

We see from the section above that choice may not be all that it seems. If women are still the majority who opt-out of work either partially or fully, then we have significant power and financial imbalances between men and women. Because the work of mothering is carried out in the private realm, women participate far less in the public realm where positions of power in our society are located and where decisions are made.

It appears to our society that the barriers to achieving equality for women have been broken down and that women choose to lead their lives comes down to just that – choice. Although educated women are omnipresent in the once male precincts of medicine, law, and journalism glass ceilings, maternal walls, mommy tracks and insidious gender biases persist. All the access in the world does not solve the difficulties that arise when women become mothers. Although technically there is still choice available to many mothers, we are just kidding ourselves if we think that mothers' social and economic displacement is simply the by-product of individual choice. There are structural barriers and power discourses that need to be explored. Joan C. Williams does this in *Unbending Gender* where she suggests that the way we organize market and family work is the root of this problem and therefore what needs to be changed.

Those who benefit from the status quo often attribute inequities to the choices of the underdog. The standard rationale for the status quo is that women choose to have children, and in so doing, choose to accept the trade-offs that have always ensued. The big problem with the rhetoric of choice is that it leaves out power. Talk of choice not only overlooks power but also ignores the pain embedded in mothers' tough trade-offs – a tangle of complex mixed feelings. To most women, choice is all about bad options and difficult decisions: your child or your profession; taking on the domestic chores or marital strife. (Crittenden, 2001, pp. 234-237)

All sorts of ungenerous attitudes toward mothers are rationalized through the contemporary rhetoric of 'choice'. Since it is a woman's choice to have a child, the reasoning goes, it is her responsibility to bear all professional and economic costs associated with that 'choice'. In response to this rhetoric, and in order to safeguard whatever gains we have made, women may find themselves observing a code of silence regarding the positive emotional motivations we have for mothering, lest the pleasure we derive from it be marshaled as further evidence of the purely voluntary and personal nature of the enterprise. In a weird way, our cultural eagerness to treat maternal desire as a manifestation of purely personal 'choice' recapitulates, in a new key, the punitive attitude society has always taken toward women's desires (deMarneffe, 2004, p. 161).

THE DEVALUATION OF MOTHERHOOD

Poststructuralism enables us to develop genealogies of social phenomena in order to analyze power/knowledge configurations. Foucault coined the term power/knowledge and shows us that knowledge in the human sciences is not disinterested, neutral, objective, or value-free; rather it is inextricably entwined with relations of power (1972/1980). Power produces knowledge and power and knowledge directly imply one another (Peters, 2004, p. 44). It is important to understand how the work of mothering has become devalued in our society. Taking an historical look at motherhood reveals a genealogy of the power imbalances within modern day motherhood.

We live in a culture that neither appreciates nor rewards parenting, a culture where the difficulty and hard work of constantly being responsible for another life is enormously denied. It seems that mothering is so unsupported in our society raising a child becomes a complex juggling act.

There is an attitudinal devaluation as well as a financial devaluation of the work that mothers do in our society and with this devaluation comes relegation to the private sphere where there is very little power. Also, many mothers have limited knowledge of the feminist issues surrounding motherhood.

In my narrative I make reference to the dreaded 'what do you do?' question which I hope conveys the initial struggle I had in justifying the choice I made to stay at home. I quickly came to realize that the choice I made to stay home held little cultural value to whomever I was talking to at the moment. Very early on in my experience of motherhood I realized the devalued status of mothering and the invisibility of the work I was doing domestically. I have not taken this devaluation lightly however, and this fact has brought me to this work. Society tells me I have choices and then turns around and make me feel like a failure for the choice that I have made. The problem is that no matter what a mother chooses, she is likely to feel as though she is failing on some front. The working mother is going to be made to feel like she is not spending enough time with her children and the stay-at-home mother is going to feel like she is 'doing nothing' and is letting down all feminists. This is not a matter of personal decision or lack of confidence, these are serious socio-cultural structural issues that are making mothers feel this way. The total devaluation of caring work in our society whether it is mothering, nursing or even teaching, is condescending and damaging to women, unacceptable and incredibly short-sighted.

Today both mothers and fathers face tremendous cultural and structural pressures to stream their lives into either paid work or caregiving, and durable stereotypes about masculine and feminine capacities tend to push men and women into the well-worn grooves of the traditional gender track. One needs to wonder why it is that in our culturally sophisticated, economically advanced, postmodern society, almost all of men's work is

regarded as "real" work, while most of women's work, whether it's paid or unpaid, is either undervalued or dismissed as a vocation?

In the rest of this section I will specifically consider the financial devaluation of mother-work and what the cost of becoming a mother means to a woman and then I will take an historical look at how this devaluation of motherhood came about.

The price of motherhood

The idea that time spent with one's child is time wasted is embedded in traditional economic thinking (Crittenden, 2001, p.3).

My economic value: $0.00

So, let's have a look at my day. Can you still tell me my economic value should be $0.00?

5:45 – nurse baby, then hand baby to husband and try to sleep for one more hour

6:45 – stumble down stairs and find coffee

7:15 – make breakfast

7:45 – clean-up breakfast dishes etc.

8:00 – pack lunch for Alex, make sure homework is done and packed

8:30 – get self, baby and Abby cleaned and dressed

9:00 – make beds, gather dirty clothes and put load of laundry in machine

9:30 – play with kids, make doctor/dentist appointment

10:00 – grocery shopping

11:00 – put away groceries, get Abby set up with paints, nurse baby, take clothes out of washing machine and into dryer

11:45 – make lunch, eat lunch, wipe up spilled milk

12:15 – empty dishwasher, fill dishwasher

1:00 – drop off Abby for art class, take baby to doctor for shots

2:00 – go to library with kids

2:30 – Alex gets home from school; fix snack

3:00 – do homework with Alex, simultaneously play with Abby and Jonathan

3:30- start dinner

4:00 – kids are happily playing with friends; unload dryer, put clothes away, vacuum upstairs

4:30 – nurse baby, set table, play referee to squabbling playmates, write a few e-mails

5:00 – finish making dinner, set table, play with baby

5:30 – eat dinner

6:00 – clean up after dinner, sweep floor

6:30 – play with kids in the backyard

7:00 – give baby bath while Dave plays with Alex and Abby

7:30 - nurse baby and put him to sleep

8:00 – read books to Alex and Abby and say good-night

8:20 – clean-up day's worth of toys etc.

8:30 – phew! Think I'll work on my thesis now...

The financial cost I am paying to be a mother means I earn nothing financially. I understand that we all make choices in life and that with choice, there is often sacrifice. But, I think the price that mothers in our society are being asked to pay is far too high. I will continue to be financially penalized throughout the rest of my life because of the time I have taken to stay at home and care for my children. I have set myself up to be a good candidate for poverty in old age if my supportive and loving husband decides to take a hike. When it comes time to collect Canadian Pension Plan the time spent working at home is completely unrecognized, despite the proven value that domestic and caring work provides in our

society. This makes me angry. I have just seen this happen to my mother and it infuriates me that the government sees her contribution as zero and that I will suffer in the same way.

The time mothers devote to unpaid care-giving significantly increases the odds they will experience financial insecurity and diminished well-being over the course of a lifetime. Mothering, while unpaid and undervalued in our culture, is work and must be regarded as such by society. The fact that I am putting myself at economic risk to parent is a political issue as real to me as how much I love my kids. A huge cultural shift is needed to value the unpaid work of care-giving and to consider family issues in making corporate and public policy decisions.

In *The Price of Motherhood* (2001), Ann Crittenden suggests that establishing a fair deal for mothers would go beyond "wages for housewives", an idea that surfaced in the 70s. She states that what is needed is across-the-board recognition -- in the workplace, in the family, in the law, and in social policy -- that someone has to do the work of raising children and sustaining families, and that the reward for such vital work should not be professional marginalization, loss of status, and an increased risk of poverty (Crittenden, 2001, p.10).

Crittenden goes on to suggest that "changing status of mothers, by gaining real recognition for their work, is the great unfinished business of the women's movement. Revaluing motherhood will not be easy (Crittenden, 2001, p. 7).

An historical look at motherhood

Interest in the history of motherhood has grown in recent years as more scholars have tried to understand the complex and often contradictory place of motherhood in modern society. The last fifty years have been marked by an ambivalence toward motherhood and all that it has come to represent. Some of the fiercest political battles have been fought over motherhood, including the issues of abortion and welfare policy.

In a culture that measures worth and achievement almost solely in terms of money, the intensive work of mothering counts for little. One of the most intriguing questions to me in economic history is how the work of mothering has become so devalued. How is it that mothers came to be excluded from the ranks of productive citizens? How did mothers who don't work outside the home come to be defined as 'dependents', who 'don't work' and have to be 'supported' by a spouse who is officially the only working member of the household (Crittenden, 2001, p. 45)?

Motherhood, the cultural construct, is a relatively recent concept connected to Victorian sentimentality and the efforts of both women and society to define women's roles as the Industrial Revolution and the demographic transition altered the location and meaning of work, the number of children per family, the role of children and women in the family economy, and the composition of families and households (Kleinberg, 1999, p. 388).

Crittenden explains that in the pre-capitalist era a 'good wife' was considered a major economic asset. Yet, the fruits of female labour belonged to men. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, married women had no right to property of their own. As the first feminists often pointed out, it was hard to distinguish this servile state from that of a slave. In the nineteenth century, as the cash economy spread, men gradually began to work for wages. 'Work' or 'labour' became synonymous with cash income and with 'men's work'. As women's family labour lost status as work, it was increasingly sentimentalized as a 'labour of love'. By 1870 the principal economic unit was no longer considered the household, but the individual, whose wages were his alone. Thus all over the Anglo-Saxon world by the beginning of the twentieth century, the notion that women at home were dependents had acquired the status of a scientific fact. The idea that money income was the only measure of

human productivity had triumphed. Husbands could now consider wives not as economic assets but as liabilities (Crittenden, 2001, p. 61).

In the nineteenth century, industrialization and urbanization irrevocably changed patterns of work and family. The work of production moved outside the home, and child rearing became mothers' dominant focus. The industrial revolution transformed the social conditions and dominant ideas that governed ordinary people's lives. Rapid economic growth, urbanization, a shift from subsistence to commercial farming, the replacement of home-based with factory production, not to mention developments in politics, education, and religion, all wrought profound changes in family life and the lives of women.

This shift in maternal activity, prompted by economics, soon shaped standard ideology as well: raising her children was a good mothers' sacred calling. Women became moral defenders of home and hearth and became the primary parent in the household. "The moral elevation of the home was accompanied by the economic devaluation of the work performed there" (Folbre, 1991, p. 465).

Out of these changes arose a new ideology of domesticity, which idealized women's domestic roles and made the rapidly evolving separate spheres of men and women appear natural and good (deMarneffe, 2005, pp. 33 – 35). The emerging ideology of separate spheres, men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere thus served a dual purpose: it discouraged women from demanding greater participation in public and economic life and gave mothers license to rear children as they saw fit (Crittenden, 2001 p. 49).

In her book *Feminist Mothers(1990)*, Tuula Gordon writes that understanding the distinction between the public and private spheres facilitates our understanding of the structural position of women. The public sphere is the world of politics, of paid work, status,

and power, the private sphere is the home, which is devalued. Gordon argues that the separation between the private and the public spheres is crucial in the control of women's sexuality by men (1990, p. 11). The constitution of the public and private spheres as separate, and the predominate location of men in the former and women in the latter, is structurally determined; it does however, also have cultural implications. The power relations between women and men are constituted structurally, but they also find expression culturally in different sets of expectations about women and men. The public/private distinction is utilized to understand women's exclusion from mainstream culture (p. 126).

It should be noted that these transitions occurred unevenly throughout society since working-class and slave women remained enmeshed in productive labour outside the domestic circle at a time when more affluent white women devoted themselves to raising their families.

CHAPTER 6: ADDRESSING THE ISSUES; THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN MOTHERHOOD AND FEMINISM

The critical task of feminism is to examine the social, economic and political structures of women's

inequality and systemic oppression while also reclaiming and identifying the positive aspects of

women's experiences (O'Reilly, 1998).

The Contentious Relationship between feminism and motherhood

Patrice DiQuinzio in *The Impossibility of Motherhood (1999)*, suggests that the resurgence of

the women's movement in the second half of the 20th century has intensified the contention

surrounding mothering. Feminists in the sixties and early seventies had a clear objective:

equality and greater personal autonomy for women. The major obstacle was mothering.

Feminism and motherhood have always had a contentious relationship. There are many

reasons why feminists might be suspicious of motherhood: political, social, cultural and

emotional. Many feminists see having a child as the fastest way of turning into a second class

citizen – and yet it is something that many women still want and actively choose.

Second wave feminist activists argued very persuasively that women's responsibility for

the care of children was responsible for the sexual division of labour and women's position

of subordination. The argument posited that if women were to be liberated and achieve

equality with men then the ties of motherhood which bound women so closely to the

domestic sphere had to be loosened, if not transcended altogether. 'Biology is not destiny'

was the battle cry against the greatest unconscious undertow of pregnancy and nurturing that

keeps women in thrall to the needs of others (Lowinsky, 1992, p. 28).

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, which was written in 1949 and thus before the

second wave feminist movement, was certainly suspicious of motherhood and lamented

women's "misfortune to have been biologically destined for the repetition of life" (de

Beauvoir, 1949, p. 72). She scathingly states that "maternity is usually a strange mixture of

narcissism, altruism, idle daydreaming, sincerity, bad faith, devotion and cynicism" (de

Beauvoir, 1949, p. 484). To de Beauvoir pregnancy and motherhood were conditions to be

avoided by any woman who sought to become authentic. As a scholar and intellectual, de

Beauvoir named the way mothering limited womens' participation in the social and cultural

sphere.

I think one of the most radical and scathing commentaries about motherhood came

from Shulamith Firestone in the *Dialectic of Sex*, (1970). Firestone raged about the cost to

women of being solely responsible for the reproduction of the species, and wondered

whether we might not be better served by finding artificial means to procreate (Lowinsky,

1992, p. 28). She rejected the claim that the liberation of women is compatible with

traditional marriage and family life and argued for the complete elimination of what she

called the biological family. She argued that the biological family is "an inherently unequal

power distribution" (Firestone, 1970, p. 8). Firestone's proposals for ending these

oppressions included women's paid labour, the replacement of pregnancy and childbirth

with technologies for reproduction apart from the female body, and the liberation of

children to bargain for membership and care with groups of adults.

I am thankful that the complete rejection of maternity and motherhood did not take

hold as a result of these writings. As I explained back in chapter three there was a split in

feminist theory in the late seventies and into the eighties. The ideal of autonomy which had

inspired early second wave feminism came under attack from a new wave of feminist

thought that came to be called 'difference' feminism. Questions were raised as to whether the pursuit of autonomy by women reinforced the traditional male values associated with possessive individualism at the expense of the values of nurturance and connectedness associated with mothering. An attempt was made by 'difference' feminism to define a specifically female worldview in an attempt to revalue women's specific contribution to society as women.

Difference feminism allowed for discourses on mothering other than the avoidance or depreciation of mothering that was so prominent in earlier second-wave feminist theory. Feminist ethics of care and feminist standpoint epistemologies are examples of difference feminism, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) being one of the prominent books of this movement. By appealing explicitly to women's difference, difference feminism hopes to represent women's situations and experiences more accurately and powerfully.

With the difference feminist movement the subject of motherhood became increasingly central to feminist inquiry. In the late 80s there was a proliferation of theoretical works. The appearance of what came to be called French feminism, the writings of Julia Kristeva among others, produced renewed interest among North American feminists in the representation of mothering, women's experiences of mothering, and psychoanalytic interpretations of mothering. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), Julia Kristeva's *Stabat Mater* (1977), Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976), and Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* (1980) are all examples of feminist reassessments of mothering connected with difference feminism.

Why mothers need feminism and feminism needs mothers

On the question of feminism and motherhood, Dora Russell recounts:

Feminist indeed, I began to wonder if the feminists had not been running away from the central issue of women's emancipation. Would women ever be truly free and equal with men until we had liberated mothers? Demanding equality and the vote, women in the Labour movement had argued that there should now be no distinction between men's and women's questions, a view which I had more or less accepted until I came up against the issue of maternity (Russell cited in Gordon, 1990, p. 37).

When I first read this quote it really resonated with me. Until I personally experienced maternity, I had taken equality for granted and now, like Russell, I also wonder if feminism has been avoiding one of the central issues of women's emancipation: motherhood.

I am a mother. I am a feminist. I can say with certainty that it is because I am a mother that I have actively, consciously taken up feminism and now call myself a feminist. At times I have questioned if it is possible to be both a mother and a feminist. I have wondered if there is space for motherhood in feminism. But, I've come to the conclusion that there has to be. There has to be room for someone like me, the seemingly stereotypical, white, middle class, mini van driving stay-at-home mom, who recognizes that the work of feminism is not complete, particularly where motherhood is concerned. I need feminism and feminism needs me.

Making the personal connection has led me to view motherhood as a political issue. Contrary to what I thought ten years ago, the work of feminism is not done. I now need the perspective of feminist theory to understand the broader social context of my personal experience of motherhood. Feminism is a resource which facilitates an exploration and contributes to my understanding of my subjectivity within the institution of motherhood. The nucleus of feminist analysis is contained in the statement that 'the personal is political' and it is my personal experience with motherhood that has led me to a political space.

Contrary to what many second wave feminist said, I believe that mothering is not the source of women's limitations, or I believe that it *should not be* the source of women's limitations. I want to believe that it does not have to be the source of women's limitations. I argue that mothering is an important source of women's identity and an impetus for women's political participation. This has been my experience. I feel very strongly that feminism needs to include motherhood in its discourse and I believe that feminism cannot claim to give an adequate account of women's lives or to represent women's needs and interests if it ignores the issue of mothering.

Tuula Gordon outlines what feminism means in terms of mothering:

> Feminism is about the politics of transformation, about seeking the implications of the personal being political. In terms of mothering this means questioning politics of reproduction, motherhood as an institution, analyzing the complex desires involved in mothering, considering the right of women not to be mothers, and how those who make a positive choice to have children can combine their parenting with other activities, including paid work. It means questioning what paid work means and what structures of work are. We are dealing with complex sets of questions which are not simplified by the powerful, contradictory, ambivalent feelings that mothering generates for women (Gordon, 1990, p. 47).

Without formally knowing or consciously deciding that I was becoming a feminist mother, over the last eight years that I have been a mother, the kinds of questioning, thinking and analyzing that Gordon speaks of seemed to naturally be a part of my experience. However, once I started actively engaging in the issues raised by maternal scholars I began to understand the role of feminism in my life.

I now see that feminism is important in providing protection against the myth of motherhood. Gordon explains that

> feminism provides protection against the myth of motherhood by providing a
> critique and analysis of the social construction of motherhood and provides an
> alternative and an understanding of oneself in the face of this ideology. Through an
> examination of the context – that is, the structures and cultures that formulate the
> framework in which we live, power imbalances are made evident and we can then see
> how this leads to a particular cultural, social, and structural construction of
> mothering and motherhood which is in turn presented as natural and instinctual (as
> knowledge or truth) (Gordon, 1990, p.7).

I came to the gradual realization that using feminist theory would help me to explain some of the socio-cultural forces that construct my identity and my life. Theory has provided a framework which has helped me to name and understand some of the personal conflicts and frustrations I have felt. This naming and understanding has made me realize that these conflicts and frustrations are a result of structural power imbalances and this is where the personal becomes political, knowing that the source of conflict is external rather than internal and therefore affecting other women's lives and the whole of society. By becoming a 'feminist mother' , I have been able to develop critical orientations towards societal structures and cultures and stereotypical expectations and myths of motherhood.

Motherhood and feminism, although wary of one another, must intersect and the two discourses must overlap and engage one another to improve the rights and circumstances of women. Motherhood needs feminism to provide a framework to continue working toward equality and feminism can no longer ignore, dismiss or scorn mothers, for surely it will die as a movement without the inclusion of mothers. There are too many women, who despite

knowing the cost that motherhood brings, still choose to become mothers. For now anyway, it is women in our society who are biologically able to have babies, so we need to find a way to deal with that without slipping into essentialism or trying to ignore that very fact.

Does motherhood have to be impossible?

> *Fifty years ago, women who wished to realize professional ambitions dealt with gender inequality by refusing or relinquishing motherhood. Twenty years ago, mothers evaded gender inequality by keeping up their professional pace and not letting motherhood interfere with their work. Women continue to recognize the impediments to earning power and professional accomplishments that caring for children presents, and some adapt by deferring or rejecting motherhood. But the problem remains that for many women, these approaches to attaining equality don't deal with the central issue, namely that caring for their children matters deeply to them (deMarneffe, 2004, p.5).*

The quote is an important one to me because it pinpoints what I have seen as the impossibility of motherhood in my own experience. Feminism needs to continue to theorize mothering and motherhood in order for women to be able to make real choices when it comes to motherhood. As a society we must provide the supports that are necessary so that in choosing motherhood, women will not be required to make such large social, financial and professional sacrifices.

Can we recognize that I am different from my partner Dave without jeopardizing my equality? I am the one with the physiology that dictates, for now anyway, that if we want to have children I am the one to get pregnant, give birth and nurse the babies. I recognize that this is a slippery slope to be going down with its essentialist tone, but feminism, I think, needs to make space for women who embrace their identities as mothers and yet still recognize the need for equality and social change. Feminists can't say that motherhood is impossible – that is giving up. Feminists must continue to theorize and analyze mothering

and motherhood and its position in our society and we must learn how to embrace and use the empowering aspects of women's unique embodied experiences that come from mothering to enable social change.

There are no simplistic answers to complex issues such as motherhood, but I wonder what would happen if we imagined mothering as important to women *and* society in addition to recognizing the importance of women's participation in the public realm? What would change? Feminism can help to provide a framework for rethinking subjectivity so that the importance of embodiment is recognized which leads us to revalue traits that have been associated with the maternal. With this revaluing is an empowerment which leads us to a location of social change. We then have the framework which allows us to challenge inequalities and power imbalances in our social structures. So, it is possible to imagine a world in which motherhood is not impossible. Motherhood does not have to be a first class ticket to second class citizenship. It will take a lot of work to get there and we need much more power politically.

CHAPTER 7: EQUALITY FOR MOTHERS

The process of becoming a mother has fundamentally transformed my worldview and it has sensitized me to the asymmetrical distribution of power in our society. Mothers are asked to pay an unfair social and financial price that I was previously unaware of and it is through feminism and radical social policy that these structural wrongs may be corrected. I now strongly identify with the label 'feminist mother' and it is obvious to me that the work of feminism is not done. What began as a personal exploration has evolved into an awakening to the need for political activism and social change not only for mothers, but for all women in our society. It alarms me that I was complacent for so long and that I didn't acknowledge the importance of feminism in every woman's life or fully recognize the vulnerable position that mothers occupy in our society. I believe this lack of awareness is hegemonically influenced in our society.

What do feminist mothers want? What do I want?

I have chosen to be a 'stay-at-home' mother, for the time being anyway. The reasons for my choice are influenced by a combination of the socially constructed structures in which I live, the socially constructed ideology surrounding 'good' motherhood, my mother's modeling of being a 'stay at home' mother, and my own maternal desire complicated by the loss of a child.

In my experience of motherhood I have felt undervalued at times by society at large, I have felt vulnerable because of my position as a dependant fearful about reintegration into the workforce when I am ready, or when it is required. I have felt confused by the conflicting messages of feminism and 'good' motherhood and I have felt angry that it is not easier to share domestic work and childrearing with my partner.

So what do I want? I want feminist scholars, including myself, to continue theorizing mothering and motherhood so that we have the language and framework to think and write about the positioning of mothers in our society. I want a complete revaluing of carework in our society so that economic structures are rethought and gender roles are flexible. I want the work that I have chosen to be valued, both attitudinally and financially. I want respect and recognition for the social and economic value of mothers' work. I want to be able to get back into the paid workforce when I am ready to do so without penalty. I want mothers to have better lives with less role strain and better options for integrating work and family. I want more flexibility in the workplace so that women and men are not penalized for taking time out for doing carework and so that the possibility for shared domestic and childrearing is available. Flexibility in the workplace needs to include part-time work that is appropriately compensated. I want equal pay for equal work. I want reasonable protection from economic hardships mothers may incur due to their maternal status. I want women to continue to be able to choose when to have a family through access to birth control and abortion. I want the moralizing about 'good' mothers and 'bad' mothers to stop.

I want a lot, but I believe that it can be possible. An organized social movement, a broad based grassroots and politically-based uprising, will be crucial to achieving this kind of sweeping change.

Mothers' Revolution – A grassroots movement

The writing of this thesis has led me to talk in depth with other women and read about women's subjective experiences of motherhood which has allowed me to glean comfort and advice, sympathy and wisdom and confirmation that I share many of the same conflicts and frustrations as many others. I know I'm not supposed to make generalizing or universalizing statements but here I go anyway: I've become convinced there are two universal aspects of

the experience of motherhood: (i) Becoming a mother changes you, although it doesn't change every mother in exactly the same way; and (ii) all women who mother are disadvantaged by the cultural and social circumstances under which they must mother, but all are not disadvantaged in exactly the same way, or to the same degree. Therefore, I believe that all mothers can and should be a part of a mothers' movement, a movement that will be a part of the feminist discourse and will work toward social change and equality for all women.

If the number of books and websites about motherhood are any indication, it seems that many contemporary mothers are beginning to think, talk and write about motherhood in ways that expose the complexity and conflicts of mothering – both as a social experience and a private one. Miriam Peskowitz, the author of *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars* (2005) has a website called Playground Revolution. I love the name because so many of the conversations I've had with other mothers about these complex issues surrounding power imbalances, cultural messages and work-life issues have happened in the playground. Conversations that have taken place through the fetching of snacks, the changing of diapers, the kissing of scraped knees, or sometimes dropped altogether and then picked up the next time we met. But women are talking which is the important thing and talking openly expands our consciousness and can lead to change. I see these conversations as the seeds of a grassroots movement. The conversations I've been having with other mothers are a form of consciousness raising and for me the writing of this thesis is a political act that is a part of the mothers' movement.

Motherhood as a private issue for the middle classes?

When discussing 'choices' in the lives of feminist mothers, it may be argued that we are concentrating

on those who are relatively privileged – feminism is often considered a luxury only middle-class

women can afford (Gordon, 1990, p. 7).

One of the problems in a mothers' revolution is finding a representative, collective voice.

As in the rest of society, there is huge diversity within motherhood. But as Andrea O'Reilly

explains, "the dominant discourse of mothering portrays the mother predominantly, if not

exclusively, as a white, middle-class, able-bodied, thirty-something, heterosexual married

woman who raises her biological children in a nuclear family, usually as a stay-at-home

mother" (O'Reilly, 2004, p. 20).

This means that mothers of minority races, mothers with disabilities, step-mothers,

lesbian mothers, mothers living in poverty, single parents and others are left out of the

discourse. Many do not have the time or monetary means to be able to critically analyze their

situations. Pamela Courtenay-Hall takes this up when she states:

The myth of the natural mother involves a dominant culture set of discourses that

revolve around issues of personal fulfillment for women…while for many women,

mothering issues are first of all issues of bodily, family or cultural survival. This is particularly

so for many women living in poverty; for many women of minority races and cultures living

with racism; for many women living with disability; for many women living with abusive

partners or lack of child support; etc. The personal fulfillment discourse needs to reckon

with these social realities (Courtenay-Hall, 1998, p. 63).

I have acknowledged my own class position and privilege in this thesis, however, I have

not necessarily acknowledged how the motherhood issues I focus on are themselves

primarily a middle class phenomena. Particularly issues of choice and work/life balance are

issues specific to the demographic that O'Reilly describes above and are in many ways constructed by the discourse surrounding intensive mothering.

Feminist attempts to accommodate the notion of women's difference in feminist perspectives have broadened the notion of difference to include the differences that exist between groups of women. This approach has been strongly influenced by poststructuralism. Feminst mothering should recognize the great variety of ways in which people can take responsibility and care for children. Different kinds of families, such as single parenting, step-parenting, and gay and lesbian parenting should be recognized. Feminist mothering also needs to support the option for women to choose not to become mothers. What is brought to the forefront is the problem of representation, of constructing a single category, 'woman' that supposedly represents all groups of women.

The challenge of current feminist theory and practice as informed by poststructuralist, postmodernist, and multiculturalist modes of thinking must recognize that there can be no single representative subject of feminism, while at the same time, we must continue to speak in a collective voice that articulates political demands on behalf of a group called 'women' (Siegel, 1997, p. 61).

We of course need to respect difference as the 'posties' suggest, but we also need to find common ground. Women must find a common voice in order to find the political strength to move forward toward social change. It will be a challenge to do so, but a phenomenon that I find interesting is one taking place in cyberspace. There has recently been a surge in the number of women who are blogging. I am amazed at the proliferation of 'mommy blogs'. These blogs offer a chance for women to speak, uncensored, in a public forum and allows for communication in a very broad way. Some, if not many, motherhood memoirs and blogs are complicit in the ideology of intensive mothering which certainly has its

dangers. However, having more and more mothers speak their 'truths' problematizes

normative discourses and potentially serves as a means to create a grassroots movement.

Are we in a post-feminist moment?

Many would argue that we are in a post-feminist moment. Many others would argue that

we are not, and I would agree with them. I believe we are in a third wave of feminism and

that the feminist movement needs to be redefined and above all else needs to become more

inclusive. The notion that feminism is a white, middle-class, elitist institution is rejected by

third wave feminists. Much of what is being rejected is informed by multiculturist,

postmodern, and/or poststructuralist philosophical perspectives.

While some women of my generation feel that feminism is unnecessary in their lives

because they view equality as being achieved, others are cynical about feminist activism

because they see the movement as having failed on many fronts. There are few women in

government, a glass ceiling in the workplace, and what many view as the rigid choice

between pursuing a profession and raising children; a feeling that contrary to what they feel

they were told, they can't 'have it all'.

- Of the new federal government, only 20% of elected members are women. Women

    are still seriously lacking public representation and voice after forty years of feminist

    work. Without this representation there will continue to be power imbalances

    between men and women.

- We are still without a national child care program. The Conservative government is

    dismantling the recently put together national child care program in favor of a

    reincarnated baby bonus which will do nothing to create quality child-care spaces.

- Abortion rights in the United States are currently under serious attack. In Prince Edward Island a woman is not able to obtain an abortion despite the promise of equal access to medical care as promised in the Canada Health Act. Out-of-province abortions remain difficult or expensive to access.

- Women are still not receiving equal pay for equal work earning only 71% of what men earn for the same work.

- Violent crime and abuse continues to disproportionately affect women and girls.

- In order to meet the needs of children and other family members, women often make decisions that reduce their actual and potential earnings, income, and security. 60% of part-time workers are women. Three out of five female single parents live in poverty. 56% of unattached women over the age of 65 live in poverty (PEI Advisory Council of Women, Unpaid Work Press Conference: January 2003).

Surely we can not be in a post-feminist moment.

CHAPTER 8: WHAT DOES THIS THESIS HAVE TO DO WITH EDUCATION?

My self as writer and mother

The writing of this thesis has been an interesting challenge for me. It has been an incredible lesson in 'stick-to-it-ness'. To write you need to leave mothering in a sense, but with three young children and one being nursed through the majority of this writing, this thesis has been written by my self as writer *and* mother at all times. I include this information, not to make excuses, but rather as a point of interest, and almost comedy when I look back to the some of the nights I would be trying to write on a sleep deprived brain while dashing upstairs intermittently to nurse, or soothe a child who has just woken from a bad dream or fever, then trying to bring myself back to my writing and pushing thoughts away of whether I've booked that dentist appointment for Alex or whether I've got enough class snacks packed for the sleigh ride with Abby tomorrow. The writing conditions have been very appropriate for a thesis on the topic of motherhood!

The writing process itself has been a valuable experience for me both as a student and as a teacher. As a student I have experienced the process of writing from the inception of an idea, to the brainstorming, and multiple drafts of writing. Although I have immersed myself in the writing process at other times in my academic career, it has never been to this extent. Having the privilege to receive feedback from three professors over the course of the writing of this thesis greatly enhanced my writing and the writing process itself. The exercise of simply doing the work involved in the researching and writing of this thesis is an experience that affects myself as a teacher. The benefits of this experience will be passed on to my future students when they embark on research and writing projects of their own.

Thesis as transformative experience

I see one of the goals of education as means to affecting transformative change through the exploration of new ideas and the creation of new knowledge. The researching and writing of this thesis has been a positive transformative experience for me. It has changed the way I view myself and my positioning in society. My evolving and changing self through the researching and writing of this thesis has led to new understandings and new critical awareness of myself and my world. This evolution and change has at times made the writing of this thesis quite difficult. For example, what I wrote three months ago is not the same voice I have now. My understanding of feminist theory and maternal theory has provided me with language to better conceptualize, name and theorize both personal experiences and broader socio-cultural events. The acquisition of this knowledge has been empowering.

Theoretically analyzing the construction of my own identity will help me to understand my self as a teacher which will in turn help me to understand my students and the forces that influence their lives. Writing about my own experiences and critically examining the construction of my own identity and subjectivity has been an important learning experience for me. To understand the larger cultural and societal forces that play out in my life has given me new knowledge for self understanding as well as knowledge to challenge these forces. Who am I? Why do I do the things I do? Why do I think the way I do? Every person should be provided with the tools to critically analyze their position in society so that the barrage of media and political messages we receive can be filtered consciously, with eyes wide open.

Do any curriculum recommendations flow out of this inquiry?

At this point I do not have specific curriculum recommendations, however, I have some general, and somewhat disjointed, thoughts and opinions that have come from my work.

I feel very strongly that providing students with the tools and knowledge to be critically aware of the world in which they live is one of the most valuable things we as teachers can do. How might this be achieved? I believe that students would benefit from an early introduction to philosophical ideas and critical theory. I don't think it is ever too early to teach 'thinking about thinking'. This knowledge and critical thinking can then be applied to specific contexts and curricula.

I would like to see the inclusion of women's history in some part of the social studies curriculum. Young women, and young men, need to know how and why the women's movement came about. Young women in particular need this knowledge to understand that they are still potentially marginalized and vulnerable in our society.

It would be interesting to see the inclusion of maternal scholarship in family studies curriculum at the high school level. This would give young people the opportunity to read, think, write and debate about issues surrounding motherhood, family policy and work/life balance before they became parents.

I have experienced the learning that can occur with writing personal narrative. I believe that this type of writing has the potential to benefit both student and teacher in a classroom environment. Journaling and personal reflexive writing allows the student to examine and reflect upon his or her personal learning and clarify and articulate thoughts and ideas.

Finally, the learning and generation of new knowledge that happens within the practice of motherhood is something that should be formally studied and documented. Margrit Eichler from the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education is involved in a project that takes this learning into consideration. This research has implications for better understanding of adult education as well as the potential for revaluing motherwork. With this revaluation would come the potential for easier reintegration back into the workforce after time taken

out for childrearing and potential policy implications such as entitlement to a public pension for caregivers who are not in the paid workforce.

CONCLUSION

Although this is an autoethnography, is not just a personal account of mothering. It has developed into a political statement about the place that mothers in our society occupy in 2006, at least the place that women in my specific demographic occupy. I know that I need to be careful about generalizations and universalizing but until women can work together and move past their personal embeddedness, change will not take place.

This thesis began as a general exploration of the topic of motherhood in our society. It was an unformed collection of ideas and feelings more than anything else. It gradually became a more specific personal exploration of the influences of motherhood and feminism in the construction of my identity when it was decided that autoethnography would be the methodology for the thesis. Choosing this methodology forced me to really think about and analyze the complicated blend of socio-cultural forces that come together to influence who we are, what we do, how we think and how we live out our lives. This thinking and analyzing along with the simultaneous reading on the topic of motherhood and feminist theory has brought me to where I am today. I am much more critically aware of the cultural messages and power imbalances surrounding motherhood that influence my life, the choices I make, the way I see myself and even the language I use to form the thoughts I have. I am much more aware of the position of women in our society, not just mothers. In the process of researching and writing this thesis I have had a feminist reawakening.

Interestingly, when it was first suggested that I do some reading in the area of feminist theory in an effort to understand the positioning of mothers in our society, I was resistant to the idea. I didn't want to write a feminist paper. Association with feminism seemed so negative and if anything I felt somewhat betrayed by feminism and felt that I had been sold a

bill of goods by the message that I could supposedly 'have it all'. I really felt that I had no need for feminism. I, like many other women of my generation, thought of feminism as the other "F – word". I resisted thinking about the ways that gender has influenced my life and constructed my identity. However, I have made the connection between the importance of feminism to this topic and to my life. And now, of course, I can't believe that I didn't see the connection earlier. By looking back and examining the influences of feminism in my own life, how it has affected the decisions I've made, influenced the construction of my identity and subjectivity, influenced the way I mother; it has helped me to be more critically aware of the messages I consume and incorporate into my life and question the inequities within the institution of motherhood. I now feel that it is feminism that will facilitate the confrontation of the social inequities that mothers face in our society. It is feminism that will fuel a mothers' movement that will work toward social change.

I've come to believe that motherhood is not naturally, necessarily, or inevitably oppressive, a view held by many early second wave feminists. As I said earlier, I believe that mothering, freed from the institution of motherhood, can be experienced as a site of empowerment, a location of social change (O'Reilly, 2004b, p. 11). This is where I position myself now. I am in that location of social change. The writing of this thesis is an expression of that location as is my personal practice of mothering. Teaching my children, and perhaps other peoples' children if I do go back to teaching, to be critically aware of the messages they receive and of the structures in which they live, they too will be in a position to challenge structural and power imbalances that they will surely face.

POSTSCRIPT

Dear Abby:

 I'm writing this letter to you and not to your brothers because it is you who one day may become a mother. Maybe you will not become a mother; I certainly hope that it is your choice. I don't just passively hope that it is your choice; I passionately hope that it is your choice. The control we as women have over our reproductive capacities is fragile and subject to forces of power that are often seemingly beyond our control. Our sexuality and reproductive rights are subject to the whims of the political and moral climate of the day. Thankfully, I have been living in a time that has been good for women in their ability to control their own reproductive destinies; I've had easy access to birth control, access to abortion. Knowing that these rights for women are so highly contested in our society, makes me feel nervous about whether it will be there for you if/when you need it. And you do need these rights, you do need this control. This will allow you to choose to become a mother when *you* feel it is time. There are many people out there who very strongly disagree with what I have just said, and would take great issue with the fact that I have suggested that it is up to you when to choose to become a mother. Many feel that it is not a personal choice, but rather one of fate or destiny. With those people, I vehemently disagree. Without the right to control our reproductive destinies, we *absolutely* become second class citizens.

 Whether you have children or not, you will have a relationship with motherhood regardless. It is the way our society positions women. I entered motherhood consciously, *when I was ready*, and becoming a mother has been one of the most important and valuable experiences of my life. I love you and your brothers more than you can ever imagine; or maybe you will be able to imagine it some day. I didn't know that such a love existed until I

became a mother. I don't think it is something that can be explained with words; it is one of those things in life that needs to be experienced to be truly understood. Despite being ready to become a mother and feeling an intense maternal love and desire, I have also experienced conflict and ambivalence within my experience of motherhood. I realize now that these conflicts are due to broader socio-cultural forces that position mothers in a dangerous and vulnerable place and I am exploring these conflicts and writing about them because I hope that equality for mothers can be achieved by the time you are making the choice to become a mother or not.

And this is why I am writing to you. If you do become a mother, and even if you don't, I want things to change. I have discovered that mothers face some serious inequities in our society. They always have so I'm not fooling myself into thinking that change will be easy to achieve.

These are some of the things I want for you Abby: I want you to be able to determine if and when you would like to have a child. I want you to have easy access to birth control and abortion, and yet, I don't want you to have to put off having children because you are afraid of being put on the 'mommy track' or hitting the 'maternal wall' in your career. I don't want it to be difficult for you and your partner to share the parenting and domestic work because of a hyper-competitive, globalized, capitalist culture that demands 'ideal workers' to fit like cogs in their machine. I don't want it to be difficult for you to find good, well-paying part-time work with benefits if you decide that's the balance you'd like to have. If you decide to 'stay home' full time with your children, I want a huge attitudinal and cultural shift that respects your choice and does not devalue the work you do at home. I want what is now unpaid domestic and care work to receive financial recognition. I want accessible, universal

day care so that if you and your partner either choose to, or have to, both work then you can feel good about the place where you leave your child, and you can afford it.

Becoming a mother has placed me in a vulnerable position Abby and this needs to change. This is why I have taken on this writing. I should not be asked to pay such a high social and financial price in our society that claims equal rights for women. This thesis is my small contribution to an attempt to change structural wrongs where mothers are concerned.

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