Mothering and motherhood: A decade review

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Berkeley, CA: Center for Working Families, University of California, Berkeley, 1999

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Working Paper No. 3
April 1999

Forthcoming:
Journal of Marriage and the Family,
Special Issue: Decade Reviews
November 2000

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Abstract

Mothering and motherhood are the subjects of a rapidly expanding body of literature. Considered in this decade review are two predominant streams in this work. One is the theorizing of moethering and motherhood and the other is the empirical study of the mothering experience. Conceptual developments have been propelled particularly by feminist scholarship, including the increasing attention to racial ethnic diversity and practices. The conceptualizations of the ideology of intensive mothering and of maternal practice are among the significant contributions. Study of mothering has focused attention on a wide array of specific topics and relationships among variables, including, issues of maternal well-being, maternal satisfaction, and mothers' employment.

The study of mothers and mothering expanded dramatically over the course of the past decade. Today's multidisciplinary considerations of mothering speak to issues of mothers' activities and experiences, whereas earlier work often attended to the quality of mothering and its supposed effects on a child. Feminist scholarship, especially, opened up conceptualization and research on mothering and motherhood and on women's lives and family, more generally, and pushed for study of identities and experiences (Adams, 1995; Ross, 1995). These discussions continue a trend propelled by the women's movement and by writings, both personal and theoretical, by such now-familiar luminaries as Adrienne Rich (1977), Audre Lorde (1984), Carol Stack (1974), Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), Jessica Benjamin (1988), Alice Walker (1983), and Nancy Chodorow (1978; Chodorow & Contratto, 1982). Inclusion of racial ethnic and working-class and lower-income definitions, representations, and practices has richly energized and expanded the study of motherhood (Bassin, Honey, & Kaplan, 1994b; Collins, 1994; Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994). More recently, scholarship on mothering has been stimulated further by the developing body of conceptual and empirical work on care and caring (see Fisher & Tronto, 1990; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Tronto, 1989, 1996; Ungerson, 1990; Waerness, 1996).

This decade review examines writing and research on mothering and motherhood in North America, particularly in the United States. Consistent with the literature, I focus on mothering as women's activity. First I address developments in theorizing mothering and motherhood. This overview includes attention to the articulation and contestation of the dominant ideology of motherhood and related discourses. Secondly, I consider the phenomenology of mothering - the experiences and understandings of those who mother. In this latter category, I examine findings on mothers' well-being, including issues of distress, emotional

work, social support, and marital satisfaction. I then turn to mothers' employment and, briefly, to the economic distress experienced by high numbers of mothers and related social policy. I conclude with some thoughts regarding gaps in our knowledge and prospects for future study.

Theories of Mothering

Although the term "mother" can be ambiguous, used to refer to both a woman who gives birth and one who actually cares for and raises a child, typically but not always the same person (Card, 1996; Leonard, 1996), the subject of the scholarly work on mothering is the person who does the relational and logistical work of child rearing. Definitions of mothering hold in common a key theme: the social practices of nurturing and caring for others, usually dependent children. Thus, mothering involves dynamic activity and always-evolving relationships. Scholars Glenn, Brown, and Forcey, for example, define mothering as "a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people." The authors acknowledge the significance of mothering as "the main vehicle through which people first form their identities and learn their place in society" (Forcey, 1994, p. 357; see Chodorow, 1993).

Multifaceted, complex, and varied, mothering is also symbolically laden, representing what is often characterized as the ultimate in relational devotion, affection, and importance. Scholars Phoenix, Woollett, and Lloyd (1991, p. 6) make the point: "Incorporated within the term 'mothering' is the intensity and emotional closeness of the idealized mother-child relationship as well as notions of mothers being responsible for the fostering of good child development" (see Barnard & Martell, 1995). Mothers and children form relationships of care (Gordon, Benner, & Noddings, 1996), and "caring as experienced in the family has come to act as the metaphor and standard for all forms of caring" (Tarlow, 1996, p. 56; see Noddings, 1996).

Feminist revisiting and reformulation of psychoanalytic theory illumine the deep-seated character of the understandings, interpretations, and meanings of mothering (see Benjamin 1990, 1994; Chodorow 1989, 1990; Vegetti-Finzi, 1996). "Representations of motherhood reverberate with the complexities of our own maternal bonds. Motherhood is tied to infantile experience and relates to complex, ongoing, deeply personal feelings" (Bassin et al., 1994a, p. 2). Everyone was mothered, and many are mothers. These experiences can impede study and understanding, as psychoanalyst Schwartz (1994, p. 253) noted:

> If we could transcend our tremendous resistance to altering the traditional representations of motherhood based on our collective anger, envy, idealization, and objectification of our female mothers, then we might begin to ask some historically germane and potentially more interesting questions about being and experiencing motherhood.

Related to the processes and meanings of mothering is the social status of being a mother. Motherhood, enveloped with beliefs and values, is institutionalized not only in marriage and family arrangements and practices, but also in law and social policy and through representations in literature, film, and other cultural forms (Gillis, 1997; Hirsch, 1994; Kaplan, 1992; 1994).

Many of the most pressing political and social debates of recent years have had definitions of mothers and mothering at their center (Glenn, 1994, p. 3; Fraser and Gordon, 1994; Umansky, 1996). These debates entail contests of power and knowledge (Collins, 1994; Ferguson, 1989; Lamphere, Zavella, Gonzales, with Evans, 1993). The debates involve disputed definitions and normative expectations of women and womanhood and are often highly contentious.

Mothering is associated with women because, universally, it is women who do nearly all mothering work. “Caring is part of the world of women" (Tarlow, 1996, p. 56). Irrespective of

other social variables, mothering and gender in the West are deeply constitutive of each other (Glenn, 1994, p. 3; Chodorow, 1989, 1990), intricately and intimately entwined, as they have been historically. Mothering is a primary identity for adult women, and women's gender identity is reinforced by mothering (McMahon, 1995). That is, womanhood and motherhood are treated as synonymous identities and categories. Yet, not all women mother, and mothering, as nurturing and caring work, is not inevitably the exclusive domain of women (Forcey, 1994; Rothman, 1994; Ruddick, 1994; Schwartz, 1994).

About women, mothering is also about men and the constructs of gender, adulthood, parenting, and family, more broadly (Barnard & Martell, 1995; Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Stacey, 1996; Thompson, 1992; see Thompson & Walker, 1995). So, too, mothering is about children and the evolving conceptualizations of childhood. Debates about what children need, and whether or not their needs are being met, are very much entwined with both the scholarship and cultural disputes about mothering.

Conceptualizing Mothering

Theorizing mothering and motherhood is an outstanding feature of current work on mothering. Several themes predominate. On the one hand are endeavors to develop a model of mothering that offers breadth and universality and delineates common maternal activities and their significance. These efforts at conceptualization include identifying cultural ideologies encircling mothering. On the other hand, and often in response to the efforts to formulate a more or less universal paradigm, are explanatory frameworks aimed at specifying and accounting for particular practices and purposes of mothering. The push for more attention to diversity and

specificity comes especially from scholars attending to racial ethnic and, to a lesser extent, class variations.

In the social sciences and humanities, the social constructionist perspective has come to dominate the study of mothering from and theory development operates from within its frame, explicitly or implicitly. That is, mothering and motherhood are viewed as the outcomes of dynamic social interactions and relationships. Rather than being seen as "natural, universal, and unchanging" (Glenn, 1994, p. 4), the product of biological reproduction, mothering definitions and practices are understood to be historically situated and variable (see Apple & Goldin, 1997). What is vital to explore is not that women, as females, have the capacity to conceive, gestate, give birth, and lactate (see Bornstein, 1995; Braverman, 1989). The socially significant phenomenon is that some women engage in the ongoing, demanding activities of child rearing and nurture.

Motherhood Ideology. Intensive mothering is the dominant cultural ideology of mothering (Hays, 1996). This motherhood mandate (Braverman, 1989) declares that mothering is exclusive, wholly child centered, emotionally involving, and time-consuming (Hays, 1996). The mother portrayed in this ideology - the sentimental mother discourse (Kaplan, 1994) - is devoted to the care of others; she is self-sacrificing and "not a subject with her own needs and interests" (Bassin et al., 1994a, p. 2). She is the good mother (Berry, 1993; Ribbens, 1994; Thurer, 1993).

The ideology of intensive mothering has its grounding in the historical shift to an industrial capitalist economy and the separation of productive paid labor from the home. With this came the rise of the family wage, earned (normatively) by male heads-of-households, and

the designation of the home as the private sphere, presided over by mothers (Gordon, 1993; Ladd-Taylor, 1994; Lopata, 1993). A revised definition of intensive mothering took hold by mid-twentieth century, a result of combined social trends: the dramatic expansion of the post-war economy, growth of the suburbs, and the temporary decline in age at marriage and increase in family size. Even though women did not return en masse to the home on a full-time basis subsequent to World War II, the ideology that mothers were to be full-time (married) mothers and homemakers was persistent and powerful. Yet, those who were engaged in full-time motherhood were often isolated, even adrift:

> The 1950s family breadwinner ideal was a new invention even in comparison with the 1920s version. It involved a rejection of formerly valued ties with extended kin and with class, civic, or ethnic networks. In their place, 1950s family ideology wove together consumerism, male breadwinning, full-time motherhood, and a new gender-centered definition of morality into a tight knot of nuclear domesticity (Coontz & Parson, 1997, p. 445).

Motherhood ideology, then, according to feminist scholars, is entwined with that of the family, presuming the institution and image of the idealized White, middle-class heterosexual couple and their children (see Cheal, 1991). Both mothering and family ideologies are embedded in the interrelated ideologies of capitalism (Michaels, 1996, p. 54; see Rothman, 1994), liberalism (Abramovitz, 1996; Held, 1993), and patriarchy (Ferguson, 1989). Intensive mothering ideology both assumes and reinforces the traditional gender-based division of labor (Fineman, 1995; Hartsock, 1998).

Law and Social Policy. Motherhood ideology, with its premise of the conventional heterosexual nuclear family, is institutionalized within the law and a vast array of social policies. The intimate relationship at the center of law and policies is that of husband and wife, not mother and child. By centering the spousal relationship - the marriage - and nuclear family, male

authority and dominance are maintained. Yet, not only is the relationship between mother and child asymmetrical, that of caretaker and care recipient, with one being vulnerable and dependent, but it is the enduring relationship in a society with continued high rates of divorce (Fineman, 1995, p. 1). The legal processes and regulations structuring divorce have spotlighted the gaps in family law created by the continued prioritizing of the marital relationship (see Arendell, 1995; Sugarman, 1990).

Maternal Practice. Situated in and, in part, also responding to the ideology of intensive mothering is conceptual work aimed at delineating what it is that mothers do. Ruddick (1994), extending her influential earlier work (1980), argues that, while mothers differ, culturally and individually, they share, by definition and condition, a set of activities (see also Phoenix et al., 1991). They engage in maternal practice: the nurturing, protecting, and training of their children (see also Ladd-Taylor, 1994; Leonard, 1996). Certain kinds of responses, then, are evoked by children's (supposed) common core of basic needs (Bailey, 1994). Mothering fosters a practicalist form of reasoning - an intellectual style, way of thinking, and "thoughtful project." Women's particular mothering actions are shaped by the dynamic interaction of their beliefs about family, individuality, the nature of childhood, and the nature of their child (Ribbens, 1994). In this way, mothering is synonymous with caring:

> Caring involves thoughtfulness, deliberation, and good judgment. It requires self-knowledge, adequate resources, and knowledge of the situation in which one cares. It requires that immediate needs be balanced with long-term needs, that those who care think through their priorities and resolve conflicting demands for care (Tronto, 1996, p. 143).

"Mothers are identified not by what they feel but by what they try to do" (Ruddick, 1994, p. 34).

Maternal practice, therefore, is not to be reduced to skills: it includes emotional content - a relationship of care in which the child has physical, emotional, and moral claims on the mother. "This claim is not experienced as limiting, rather it provides meaning, purpose, and identity" (Leonard, 1996, p. 129). Mothers foster and shape, in dynamic interaction with the subjects of their care and, at least, as ideally portrayed and often experienced, a profound affectional relationship, a deeply meaningful connection (Oberman & Josselson, 1996).

Sociohistorical, cultural, and economic contexts shape in various ways the activities and understandings of mothers. Mothering takes place within "specific historical contexts framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender" (Collins, 1994, p. 56, 1991; see Baca Zinn, 1990, 1994). Not only do not all mothers nurture, protect, or socialize their children in similar ways or circumstances, but they do not necessarily provide such care at all. Mothers' responses to children vary. This "pragmatics of motherhood" (Scheper-Hughes, 1992) cautions against the "nearly universal" model of mothering put forth, at least implicitly, in Ruddick's conceptual framework (see Bailey, 1994). Having limited or no access to class and racial privilege, for example, shapes the options and resources available to racial ethnic (Baca Zinn, 1990, p. 468; 1994) mothers in a stratified society. Further, mothers operate out of particular kinscripts frameworks. Evolving out of cultural and socioeconomic contexts, "families have their own agendas, their own interpretation of cultural norms, and their own histories [Hagestad 1982; Reiss 1981; Reiss & Oliveri 1983; Tilly 1987]" (Stack & Burton, 1993, p. 158). Family arrangements and interactional dynamics also vary; some mothers, for example, do their mothering in circumstances of hard living (Kurz, 1995), contending with economic hardship, alcohol or other substance abuse, or threats or acts of physical and emotional violence.

Sociologist Collins (1991; 1994), among others (see Altschuler, 1997; Kaplan, 1997), rejects a universalist model of maternal practice. Instead, she notes that three issues - survival, power, and identity - "form the bedrock of women of color's motherwork."

> The importance of working for the physical survival of children and community, the dialectical nature of power and powerlessness in structuring mothering patterns, and the significance of self-definition in constructing individual and collective racial identity comprise three core themes characterizing the experiences of Native American, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American women (Collins, 1994, p. 61).

Motherwork, then, is on behalf of individual children and, as well, on behalf of the larger social group in which they are situated (see Stack & Burton, 1993).

Deviancy Discourses. The standard of mothering presupposed in the dominant ideology – the mother absorbed in nurturing activities and situated in the biological nuclear family – contributes to a variety of deviancy discourses, targeted, albeit differentially, at mothers who, for whatever reasons, do not conform to the script of full-time motherhood. Single mothers, welfare mothers, minority mothers, and immigrant mothers, overlapping but not mutually exclusive categories, are commonly subjects of deviancy discourses of mothering (see Fineman, 1995; Kurz, 1995; Sidel, 1996). White married mothers who are employed, especially if they are middle class, are also subjects of these deviancy discourses by virtue of their employment (see Coontz, 1997; Presser, 1995; Stacey, 1996). The deviancy or concern discourses of motherhood vary, then, by race and class. They spotlight, on the one hand, mothers of color who are unmarried and not engaged in paid work but dependent on public assistance to support their children and, on the other, nonpoor White mothers who are employed. Indeed, unmarried or low-income racial ethnic and immigrant mothers are expected to prioritize employment, not mothering, as has been the case across the century (Abramovitz, 1966; Boris, 1994). This

discriminatory attitude reveals cracks in the hegemonic ideology of mothering and points to the convergence of structures and ideologies not only of family and race, but also of gender and class.

Demographic Trends

Adding fire to the discursive rhetoric on motherhood are several significant demographic trends. Birthrates continue to decline across all racial ethnic groups and, overall, childbearing is delayed compared with other decades (Ventura, Martin, Curtis, & Matthews, 1996). Both patterns reflect women's perceptions of greater life options and access to contraception (see Matthews & Ventura, 1997). Yet, in the United States, racial ethnic women's fertility rates remain higher than White women's, and there has been less convergence, thus far, than previously predicted (Casterline, Lee, & Foote, 1996). Immigration rates and patterns contribute to the diversity in fertility rates among groups of women.

Population Trends. Of particular importance, and fueling the ideological debates about mothers' and women's roles, more generally, is the increasing separation of marriage and maternity - single motherhood (Loomis & Landale, 1994; Manning, 1995; Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Two phenomena account for this trend: the continued high rate of divorce and the increasing numbers and proportion of births to unwed women.

Sixty percent of all first marriages end in divorce, most within the first ten years of marriage, when children are young. "Recent estimates are that about one-half of mothers with young children will become a single parent by age thirty-five" (Spain & Bianchi, 1996, p. 50). Consistent with their primary parenting activities during marriage, the majority, more than 85 percent, of mothers are the residential custodial parents subsequent to divorce. A large majority

of divorced fathers do little in the way of parenting (Arendell, 1995; Selzter, 1991; Teachman, 1991). Women, generally, are more satisfied with divorce than men (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990; Riessman, 1990), and women's remarriage rates are both declining and lower than men's (NCHS, 1998).

Births to unmarried women now comprise nearly one in three American births; the proportions were roughly one in five in 1980 and one in ten in 1970 (Ventura et al., 1996). That the age distribution of women entering motherhood outside of marriage has shifted, so that it is now more common among nonteens than teens (Foster, Jones, & Hoffman, 1998), speaks to some women's view that motherhood outside of marriage is an acceptable choice (Foster et al., 1998; Miller, 1992; Ventura et al., 1996). These patterns aggravate the commentators who view women's increasing autonomy as a threat to children, marriage, and family stability (see Blankenhorn, 1995; Blankenhorn, Bayme, & Elshtain, 1992; Whitehead, 1993). Older unwed mothers, however, hold a variety of attitudes regarding marriage, relationships with men, motherhood, and feminism (Siegel, 1995).

The vast majority of unwed mothers are heterosexual, although a significant number of lesbian women is mothering. Between 1.5 and 5 million lesbians are raising children. Estimates suggest that one-third of these women were formerly married and gave birth to their children during marriage (Allen, 1997). Others enter motherhood through adoption or the use of assisted reproductive technologies (see Allen & Demo, 1995). Lesbian mothers who are open about their sexuality risk being stigmatized and are at peril for losing child custody in some states. Many attempt to keep the two identities - sexuality and motherhood - separate (Lewin, 1993; Patterson, 1995; see Weston, 1991).

Further adding to the deviancy discourse concerning unwed mothers are significant racial ethnic differences. Roughly one-quarter of births to White, Latina, and Asian American women are to unmarried women. More than two-thirds of births to Black women are to unmarried women. Further, well-educated women are underrepresented among the ranks of never-married mothers (Ventura et al., 1996). Given present trends, births to unwed women are likely to increase relative to those of married women, as is the case in numerous European countries (Welles-Nystrom, 1997, p. 280).

Mothers' Employment. Women's employment trends are pivotal in the changing institution of motherhood and are at the center of much research and writing. The activities of mothering and working for pay are undertaken simultaneously by a large majority of mothers rather than, as in the past, sequentially. Mothers' employment, tripling over the past thirty years, increased steadily for all racial ethnic groups (Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Seventy-five percent of all mothers with dependent children under age 18, and 60 percent of mothers with children under age 6 are in the paid labor force. Well over half of all mothers of infants are employed (Bachu, 1997; Ventura et al., 1996). Further, "if child care costs were more reasonable, national surveys show that 10-20% more mothers would return to the labor force after giving birth [Mason & Duberstein, 1992]" (Scarr, 1998, p. 100). "In the portrait of contemporary women's lives, children are in the foreground, marriage is in the background, and employment occupies an ever-expanding middle landscape" (Spain & Bianchi, 1996, p. x).

Racial-ethnic, immigrant, and poor women have combined employment and child raising at relatively high rates across the decades (Dill, 1994a), responding to the larger economic and racial structures of American society (Glenn, 1992; Segura, 1994). For instance, Black women's

labor force participation was nearly 48 percent in 1970, White women's nearly 41 percent, Hispanic women's 39 percent. These proportions increased across all groups so that in 1998, roughly 60 percent of Black, 58 percent of White women, and 63 percent of Hispanic women (all aged 20 and over) were employed (U.S. Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999). Even with the convergence in employment rates, racial ethnic mothers work longer hours at lower paying jobs than White mothers, overall (Benin & Keith, 1995; Spain & Bianchi, 1996).

Assisted Reproductive Technologies. Also posing challenges to definitions and the dominant ideology of mothering and motherhood is the rapid advancement of reproductive technologies (Donchin, 1996; Ginsberg & Rapp, 1995; Rothman, 1994). These technologies extend in dramatic, often unexamined, ways the medicalization of maternity (see Michaels, 1996; Rapp, 1994) and stress the primacy of male genetic ties to offspring (Callahan, 1995; Ragone, 1994; Van Dyck, 1995). Definitions of mothers and mothering are coopted by scientific and medical experts and determined by legal contracts (Fineman, 1995; Hirsch, 1994; Schwartz, 1994), and birth giving and motherhood are commodified. Rather than affording reproductive freedoms, technologies may countermand them (see Baber & Allen, 1992; Rothman, 1994). Although much scholarship on the evolving effects of reproductive technologies has been deeply critical (Rae, 1994), some theorists argue that these advances offer a site of, and the potential for, further subversion of patriarchy, by encouraging women's solidarity, for example (Michaels, 1996; Ragone, 1994).

Not unrelated to the management of women's lives through reproductive technologies is the increased legal regulation of pregnant women with respect to fetal well-being and development. This reproductive-mother discourse "marginalizes the mother in favor of the

fetus" (Kaplan, 1994, p. 269). To date, most of these legal, and related judicial, interventions and regulations have been directed at poor women of color (Rapp, 1996). Thus, both the scientific interventions into women's reproductive lives and the criminalization of pregnant women who transgress the normative standards of pregnancy reveal the intersections of race, class, and gender.

In sum, both in efforts to articulate the predominate ideology and to question it, scholars call into question a unitary model of mothering. They insist that women's various standpoints must be taken into account (Dill, 1994a, 1994b; Glenn, 1992). Mothering is not universally a relationship between a sole woman and her children, a private, singular, or even primary activity understood to be separate and distinct from economic provision (see Collins, 1991, 1994; Coontz, 1997). Nor is the view that mothers are the "source of children's current and later personal stability" universal (Ambert, 1994, p. 531). Nevertheless, intensive mothering ideology is the normative standard by which other mothering practices and arrangements are evaluated. To the extent that the ideology has shifted, it is to include the image of the modern superwoman - the employed mother who does it all, with aplomb, grace, and effectiveness.

Writings on the conceptual and ideolo gical currents of mothering in the United States offer a panoramic view of mothering. Another assembly of materials, however, provides a more multidimensional representation of mothering. Often this work is uneven with respect to integration of empirical data and conceptual context, and some is empirically specific and conceptually vague.

The Phenomenology of Mothering[i]

Disjunctures prevail between the ideologies of mothering and motherhood and the experiences of real women. The literature on mothering experience is replete with posited dichotomies: mothering is a font of personal fulfillment, growth, and joy, on the one hand, and one of distress, depression, and anxiety, on the other (Ross, 1995). Mothering is an experience of dialectical tensions:

> Mothering can confer both maternal power and an immense burden of responsibility; the life-giving aspects of mothering may be undermined by the rage and aggression it inevitably elicits; the isolation it may impose on a woman can coexist with her invitation into a maternal community; the desexualization it may imply may go along with a new element of maternal sexualization (Oberman & Josselson, 1996, p. 344).

Child raising brings increased work and economic stress, but also personal development; it brings feelings of being oppressed and subordinated, and also of liberation and transformation (Marshall, Barnett, & Sayer, 1998; Roxburgh, 1997). Mothering is neither a unitary experience for individual women nor experienced similarly by all women. It carries multiple, diverse, divergent, and often shifting meanings (Josselson, 1996; McMahon, 1995).

Maternal Well-Being

Mothering ranks ahead of marital status and occupation in identity salience hierarchies (Rogers & White, 1998; Thoits, 1992). Mothers report experiencing greater meaning in their lives than do childless women (Ross & Van Willigen, 1996, p. 583). Given racial ethnic communities' extended family ties and loyalties, mothering may hold even greater salience for women of color. For instance,

> The sense that a woman's mothering is part of her Chicana identity is bolstered by interaction across kin networks and the larger ethnic community that can result in Chicanas feeling more strongly motivated to mother than European-American middle-class women whose kinship ties are more dispersed (Segura & Pierce, 1993, p. 88; see Collins, 1991; Dill, 1994b; McAdoo, 1993; Polatnick, 1996).

The transition into parenthood is a complex and complicated experience (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Cowan, Cowan, & Kerig, 1993; McMahon, 1995; Walzer, 1997, 1998), although it seems to be more challenging for men than women (Crinc & Booth, 1991; Osofsky & Culp, 1989). The research emphases include the role changes that accompany parenthood, including the psychological preparation, the redefinition of relationships with parents and partner, the negotiation of child care and work responsibilities, and questions of one's own identity (Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale, 1995). Couples typically move toward conventional gender roles upon the birth of a child, usually contrary to parents' expectations (Cowan, Cowan, Heming, & Miller, 1991; Walzer, 1997, 1998). In one study, class differences were discerned in women's responses to pregnancy, with middle-class and working-class women having different positions in relationship to maturity and readiness for motherhood. Middle-class women prepared in advance, considering themselves sufficiently mature to move into the status of motherhood, but working-class women achieved maturity and adulthood, as they saw it, through motherhood (McMahon, 1995).

Distress. Notwithstanding the transcendent meanings women locate in the activities and relations of mothering, a large literature suggests that mothering is negatively associated with psychological well-being. Distress -"symptoms of depression, anxiety, physiological malaise, and lack of happiness" (Goldsteen & Ross, 1989, p. 505) - is a common experience among child rearers. Mothers, overall, are more depressed, anxious, and less satisfied with their lives than

childless women (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1992; Ryff & Selzer, 1996). But the effects of child raising on women's well-being are contingent on social and economic factors. "When adjustments are made for economic hardship, difficulties arranging and paying for child care, and the division of child-care responsibilities at home, mothers actually have lower levels of depression than childless women [Bird, 1995; Ross & Huber, 1985]" (Ross & Van Willigen, 1996, p. 583). Mothers holding employment experience lower levels of distress than do full-time mothers (Marshall, Barnett, et al., 1998; Mirowsky & Ross, 1995; Roxburgh, 1997).

Feeling burdened prompts maternal distress. Having preschool-aged children or multiple children, living in crowded conditions, and being a full-time mother and homemaker contributes to mothers' perceptions of being overburdened (Goldsteen & Ross, 1989, p. 520; Ross & Van Willigen, 1996). Young mothers experience greater distress and have fewer psychological resources than do older mothers: adolescent mothers report feeling "more sad, tense, edgy, and out of control of their feelings than adult mothers [Miller & Moore, 1991]" (Barratt, Roach, Morgan, & Colbert, 1996, p. 210; Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale, 1995; McHenry, Kotch, & Browne, 1991). Each additional child increases younger mothers' feelings of being overburdened (Goldsteen & Ross, 1989). Feeling distressed by mothering has import beyond women's mental health. A strong relationship exists between a mother's overall well-being and the quality of her parenting. Distressed and depressed parents, for example, are more dissatisfied with and critical of their children's behaviors (Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993), and less attentive (Howes, Sakai, Shinn, Phillips, Galinsky, & Whitebook, 1995). These responses to one's children can play back upon mothers' well-being overall, further undermining it in a dialectical process.

Emotional Work. Mothering entails extensive, ongoing emotional labor; feelings are intrinsic to the modern mother and child relationship (Benjamin, 1990, 1994; Chodorow, 1989; Thurer, 1993). Feelings shift.

> There is no single emotion - love - that children inspire in mothers as feelings must be managed and directed. A mother's emotions can vary within the course of a day, and certainly over time, depending upon the behavior of her children, the space, time, and services available to her, and myriad other desires and frustrations (Ruddick, 1994, p. 34; see Josselson, 1996; McMahon, 1995).

Mothering is a site of warm and tender caretaking and nurture and also, inevitably, of interpersonal conflicts, as is the case with family life more generally (Presser, 1995; Thorne, 1993).

Mothers' negative feelings are little studied. Yet, some research indicates that married mothers experience significantly higher levels of anger than do fathers. Economic hardships and child care are the primary strains. Women report that their anger is targeted primarily at husbands, who do little to ease wives' burdens, and secondarily at children (Ross & Van Willigen, 1996, p. 582).

Married mothers in dual-income households experience, on average, more positive affect while at work and more negative at home. In contrast, their husbands experience the reverse: showing more negative affect at work and more positive at home. These men do far less housework and cooking, engage much less with their children, and enjoy more relaxation and leisure when at home than do their wives (Larsen, 1998; Larsen & Richards, 1994). Employed single mothers are more similar to married fathers than to married mothers: experiencing more positive feelings while at home and more negative ones at work. They view their home situations as being more flexible than do married mothers, even though they have sole care

responsibilities for their children and homes (Larsen, 1998). Single mothers, contrary to general assumptions underpinning much of the literature, are not more distressed than married mothers when economic conditions are held constant. Further, single and married mothers spend roughly the same amount of time in total family and child care responsibilities (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994).

Ambivalent feelings about mothering - grounded in the paradoxical character of the experience - are intensified by the uncertainty of the likely outcome of the work of mothering. Even activities predominantly of warm affection, nurture, and attentive caretaking offer no guarantee of results (see Eyer, 1993). This is in contrast to earlier assertions that particular techniques and kinds of socioemotional relations would lead to particular outcomes.

Social Support. Mothers often carry parenting burdens with precious little assistance. Despite much attention in recent years to the so-called “new, nurturing father,” and some change on men's part, women still do most of the work of child rearing and homemaking (Coltrane, 1989, 1998; Coltrane & Adams, 1998; DeVault, 1991; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Pleck, 1996). In point of fact, "although people are moving toward the idea that fathers should be more involved with children, demographic and social changes have resulted in fathers being less involved with children than perhaps at any time in U.S. history" (Amato & Booth, 1997, p. 228). Divorced and unwed fathers, especially, do little in the way of parenting (Arendell, 1995; Teachman, 1991). Support to mothers from other family members, in general, is also lacking. Further, poor mothers are no more likely to receive family assistance than affluent ones, and single mothers overall receive no more assistance from family members than do married mothers (Benin & Keith, 1995).

Differences exist along racial ethnic lines in mothers' reliance on family and friends for childrearing assistance, although the variations are less pronounced than previously reported. A majority of African American mothers receive emotional support from kin but relatively little logistical support (Jayakody, Chatters, & Taylor, 1993). Benin and Keith (1995, p. 294) summarized their findings from analysis of NSFH data:

> Overall, our findings suggest that the family remains an important source of support for African American mothers, but there is reason for concern. Consistent with other studies [Hogan, Hao, & Parrish, 1990; Jayakody, et al., 1993], the results indicate that a significant proportion of African American women are not receiving assistance from family or friends or neighbors (see Kaplan, 1997; Polatnick, 1996).

Others find that the long-standing practice among African American women of sharing child rearing across households and generations - engaging actively in kinwork and othermothering - persists even as communities struggle under an array of social and economic burdens (see Collins, 1991; Dickerson, 1995; Stack, 1996; Stack & Burton, 1993).

Other variations also characterize support networks. African American mothers rely more on extended family for assistance with child care, and Anglo mothers rely more on neighbors and friends. Employed single mothers of both racial ethnic groups are more likely than married mothers to turn to family for help when a child is ill, but are no more likely to turn to friends and neighbors than their married counterparts (Benin & Keith, 1995; see Jayakody et al., 1993; Logan & Spitze, 1994). Hispanic mothers rely mostly on their resident partner and other adults or children who live in the household and less than either Black or White mothers on extended family or nonrelatives, even when taking residential proximity into account (Lamphere et al., 1993; Marshall, Marx, McCartney, & Garcia Coll, 1998).

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Black and Latina teenaged mothers are more likely than Whites to live in extended households (Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale, 1995; Trent and Harlan, 1994). Young Black mothers often turn to their grandmothers for parenting support, in the forms of both child care and parental guidance. Family closeness, the number of generations in the family, residence in the rural South, a scarcity of economic resources, and family proximity are all related to young mothers' reliance on their grandmothers (Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale, 1995, p. 134; Hunter, 1997).

Marital Satisfaction

The presence of children typically influences marital satisfaction negatively, more so for husbands than wives. In turn, perceived marital quality is positively associated with parenting satisfaction (Rogers & White, 1998; Starrels, 1994). "A warm, supportive spouse influences the quality of parental behavior by promoting emotional well-being and providing advice and assistance regarding the tasks and responsibilities of parenting" (Simons et al., 1993, p. 104). Mothers who are less satisfied with their marriages, for example, are less accepting of their daughters' assertiveness and more inclined to reciprocate sons' negative affect (Cowan et al., 1993; Kerig, Cowan, & Cowan, 1993, p. 931). Marital quality is less salient, however, for mothers' parenting satisfaction than fathers' (Cox, Owen, Lewis, & Henderson, 1989; Volling & Belsky, 1991).

Parenting biological offspring, rather than stepchildren, is correlated with higher parenting satisfaction, but the number and ages of children, social class, and employment patterns are not significant factors in maternal satisfaction (Rogers & White, 1998, p. 305). Women are more satisfied with parenting than men. Also, however, not surprisingly, given their

more intensive involvement in parenting work, mothers experience more parental strain over the course of child rearing than do fathers. But strain is not necessarily a negative phenomenon: it "may indicate greater emotional intimacy and, as such, is a positive sign of a close relationship" (Scott & Alwin, 1989, p. 500). Indeed, both mothers and children, in general, report that children feel more closely attached to their mothers than to their fathers (Lamb & Oppenheim, 1989; Larson & Richards, 1994). Mothers generally are more positive and supportive than fathers of their children (Kerig et al., 1993, p. 931; Starrels, 1994).

Parenting approaches are related to women's satisfaction with mothering. Mothers who utilize an authoritative style of parenting are more satisfied with parenting than those who use an authoritarian approach. "Indeed, parenting satisfaction appears to be related negatively to harshness of discipline [Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993] and positively to parents' health and well-being [Umberson & Williams, 1993]" (Rogers & White, 1998, p. 293; see Amato & Booth, 1997). Authoritative parents are highly invested in child rearing, sacrifice personal pleasures to be with their children, believe they are the most competent caregivers, and view their children more positively than do authoritarian parents (Baumrind, 1993, p. 1308; Greenberger & O'Neil, 1990; Greenberger, O'Neil, & Nagel, 1994; Horowitz, 1993). Well-educated parents are more likely to use authoritative parenting approaches; these approaches appear to "facilitate emotional closeness between children and parents more so than those of poorly educated parents" (Amato & Booth, 1997, p. 50; see Howes et al., 1995). Parents actively interpret cultural messages about childhood and their experiences with children, shaping their parental role in accordance with their evolving beliefs (Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992). "Mothering

is learned in the process of interaction with the individual mothered" (Barnard & Martell, 1995, p. 22).

Warmth, acceptance, and respect for their children influence the parental functioning of divorced mothers also. Families headed by divorced mothers function "most effectively and smoothly when mothers are flexible and creative, and willing to abandon the hierarchical relations between adults and children more common in two parent families." Mothers' willingness to receive feedback from their offspring, who they invite to actively participate in decision making, for instance, results in higher level family functioning. The exception is families beset with continued high levels of conflict (Arendell, 1998, p. 227; Stewart, Copeland, Chester, Malley, & Barenbaum, 1997).

Maternal Employment

Maternal employment adds layers of complexity to the general portrait of mothers' well-being and parental satisfaction. Overall, employment is conducive to mothers' mental health and parenting gratification. But employment is not an unmitigated blessing for mothers: many experience role overload and difficulties in managing the two activities, which remain structured and defined as distinctive spheres in U.S. society (Moen, 1992). Mothers, and fathers, experience a time bind (Daly, 1996; Hochschild, 1997; Robinson & Godbey, 1997; Schor, 1991) and pay a personal price trying to balance work and family demands. The currency extorted is in the forms of loss of sleep and leisure time and the experiences of feeling overloaded and stressed (Hochschild, 1989; Presser, 1995).

Employed mothers perform the same range of child care activities as do full-time mothers, with the exception that they watch less television with their children (Bianchi &

Robinson, 1997; Bryant & Zick, 1996), especially, according to one study, less educational television (DeMeis & Perkins, 1996). Additionally, "many mothers compensate for their absence from the home during work hours by increasing the amount of time they spend in intense interaction with children during nonwork hours [Mischel and Fuhr, 1988]" (Amato & Booth, 1997, p. 60). Further, employed mothers with higher levels of education spend more time with their children than women with lower levels (Amato & Booth, 1997; Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Bryant & Zick, 1996).

Although a large majority of mothers is employed, social attitudes remain critical of women's regular absence from their children. The roots of the debates about working mothers run deep and long in American culture (Gordon, 1993, 1994; Ladd-Taylor, 1994; Ross, 1995), in tandem with a rhetoric of mother-blame (Arendell & Garey, 1998; Presser, 1995; Thurer, 1993; Turkel, 1994). Thus, mothers who violate the ideology of intensive mothering by being engaged in paid work must contend with both the judgments of others and their own feelings of ambivalence and guilt about leaving their children (Hertz & Ferguson, 1996; Walzer, 1997). The dominant ideology conflicts with mothers' realities while also shaping them: "Idealized, stay-at-home motherhood eludes most American women with children. As an ideology, however, it tells them what 'should be,' rending them failures as women when they enter the labor market" (Segura, 1994, p. 222; see Garey, 1999).

The benefits of employment for mothers, more specifically, include higher levels of general well-being and lower levels of depression and anxiety. Experiencing the least distress are employed mothers who are able both to locate and afford high-quality child care; who are supported by their partners, irrespective of marital status; and who can avail themselves of

flexible workplace options and, thus, have a sense of control over their work lives (see Duxbury et al., 1994; Hughes & Galinsky, 1994; Mirowsky & Ross, 1995; Roxburgh, 1997). Also, in addition to high levels of job autonomy, having supervisor support and a generally supportive workplace culture result in lower levels of work and family conflict (Jacobs & Gerson, 1997; Marshall & Pardee, 1998; Peters, 1997).

The physical and psychological benefits associated with employment are countered for women in situations having insufficient support (Benin & Keith, 1995, p. 276; Sears & Galambos, 1993). More precisely, low-income employed mothers, with little control over their work conditions, experience greater stress, more work-family conflicts, and less satisfaction with their family lives than other employed mothers (Howes et al., 1995; Hughes & Galinsky, 1994). Women who are married, employed, and mothers of young children; who encounter difficulty in locating and affording child care; and who handle child rearing mostly alone are the most stressed of all mothers, even full-time mothers (Howes et al., 1995; Marshall, Barnett, et al., 1998; Neal, Chapman, Ingersol-Dayton, & Emlen, 1993). Their depression levels overall are twice those of mothers having sufficient resources (Goldsteen & Ross, 1989, p. 507-8).

Mothers experience greater work-family strains than do fathers (Duxbury et al., 1994; Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Marshall, Barnett et al., 1998; Marshall, Marx et al., 1998; Umberson & Gove, 1989). Given their primary responsibility for child care (England, 1996; Leslie, Anderson, & Branson, 1991), mothers have fewer options for easing their overall situations (Jacobs & Gerson, 1997; Shelton, 1992). For instance, unlike the situation for women, "it appears that men do not perceive a conflict between responsibility for child care arrangements and opportunity for workplace advancement" (Peterson & Gerson, 1992, p. 533). Mothers are

the parent most commonly interrupted at work both by children seeking contact or child care or school personnel reporting children's illnesses or injuries (see England, 1996; Rosenbloom, 1993). The identity of parent is carried into the workplace: "Even when at work, one is still a parent and time is spent thinking, worrying, planning for children (this was particularly true for female respondents)" (italics added) (Thorpe & Daly, 1999, p. 15; see Neal et al., 1993). Women with small children reduce the amount of time they spend in paid work (Jacobs & Gerson, 1997; Miller, 1996). Breast-feeding mothers, for example, make various accommodations to the workplace, including earlier cessation of nursing (Blum, 1999; Lindberg, 1996; Vogel, 1993). Although the adjustments made to meet family needs are advantageous during the years of early child raising, women's long-term economic well-being is adversely affected (Presser, 1995; Waldfogel, 1997).

Some scholars argue that African American employed mothers may experience, generally, greater psychological satisfaction and less stress in combining parenting and paid work than do Anglo women (see Burton, Armstrong, & Rushing, 1993). Although they must contend with role conflicts between mothering and working for pay (Polatnick, 1996), African American mothers' employment rates have been higher for a longer period of time and recognized within the community as essential to family survival. Providing economically for children is more commonly understood among some minority groups to be an intrinsic aspect of a woman's mothering role in a racially and class structured society (Collins, 1991, 1994; Glenn, 1992; Segura, 1994).

Most studies conclude that employed women are more adversely affected by parenting obligations than men, but some work suggests that gender differences among dual earner couples

are minimal. Positive job and marital experiences are associated with low levels of distress and negative job and marital experiences with high levels of distress for both parents (Barnett, Brennan, & Marshall, 1994; see Hughes & Galinsky, 1994).

Strategizing. Mothers actively and continuously strategize the handling of both family life and employment (Eichler, 1997; England, 1996; Finch & Mason, 1993; Pridham, Denney, Pascoe, Chiu, & Creasey, 1995). They cope with the stress of the two roles by emphasizing efficiency and organization, planning ahead, and cognitively restructuring their attitudes and assessments (Paden & Buehler, 1995). Mothers reframe their views about their performances without reducing their roles; that is, they seek to emphasize the positive and to downplay the negative aspects of being a working mother (DeMeis & Perkins, 1996; Emmons, Biermat, Lang, & Wortman, 1990; Garey, 1999; Hochschild, 1997). One strategy used for combining employment and mothering is working split shifts, when married, and evening or night shifts, when married or single, in order to be at home during their children's waking hours (Garey, 1995, 1999). Another strategy used by dual earner couples is that of shared parenting (Barnett et al., 1994; Hertz, 1997; Hertz & Ferguson, 1996; see Walzer 1997, 1998). Mothers alter their strategies for coordinating work and family in accord with their perceptions of children's developmental trajectories and well-being (Arendell, 1999)

Immigrant mothers sometimes resort to using a pattern of circular migration, sending their children to extended family members in the home country for a period of time and then retrieving them, bringing them back to the U.S. (Orellana, Thorne, Lam, & Chee, 1998). Such movement of their children poses questions as to the meaning of motherhood and creates

dilemmas in child raising, even as it resolves some logistical matters for these women (see Hondagneu-Sotel & Avila, 1997).

Most mothers must rely on their own resources and innovations in managing paid work and child raising. Their solutions are typically personal and individualistic, in large measure due to the dearth of formal programs and supports to which to turn for assistance (Hoffnung, 1992; Martin, 1990, 1991, 1997; Mitchell, 1997). Even the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act excludes a majority of working mothers. Only full-time employees working for organizations employing more than fifty people and who can afford to take unpaid leave may avail themselves of the leave policy. The FMLA offers a step forward, however, because it conceives "of the worker as both an individual and as a family member and . . . allows room for recognizing the special needs of new mothers" (Martin, 1997, p. 303, 319; see Kittay, 1995). Yet, even in organizations in which women qualify, relatively few avail themselves of the leave offered under FMLA, mostly due to concerns about their future employment standing and assessment of opportunity costs (Fried, 1998). Mothers are systematically disadvantaged in the employment sector by the lack or limited scope of programs aimed at accommodating their child raising (Waldfogel, 1997).

Women's social locations - the intersections of regional and local political economy with class, ethnicity, culture, and sexual preference - "condition the strategies and meanings that working mothers fashion through their agency" (Lamphere et al., 1993, p. 4; see Baca Zinn, 1990). For instance, mothers employed in manufacturing in one study crossed racial ethnic and marital status differences to engage in collective workplace action aimed at improving their

situations. The strategies utilized varied by the predominant form of managerial style in the particular site, not by worker characteristics (Lamphere et al., 1993).

Race, class, and gender intersect in further ways in mothers' employment. White middle- and upper-class mothers' employment is often made possible by the labor of women of color who provide necessary child care and domestic services. This racialized labor leaves unchallenged both the gender-stratified order, in which women have primary responsibility for children and home, and the systems of race and class stratification (Collins, 1994; Glenn, 1992, 1994). Thus, "time and energy available for mothering are diverted from those who, by kinship or communal ties, are their more rightful recipients;" this diverted mothering also directs attention away "from the true nature of this kind of mothering arrangement, especially its hidden power differential" (Wong, 1994, p. 69). The recent abolishment of the Aid for Dependent Children program and implementation of work requirements for women - irrespective of their skills levels, family needs, or parenting preferences - is likely to channel more low-income and racial ethnic women into domestic service.

The general relationships and interactions between mothers and their paid child caretakers are a focus of recent study. Mothers and their paid child care workers actively negotiate and redefine mothering, devising ways not only to provide care for children, but also to create and maintain certain meanings pertaining to motherhood. The strategies constructed vary, influenced by beliefs about mothering as well as about children, for example (Hertz, 1997; Macdonald, 1998; Nelson, 1990, 1994; Uttal, 1996; Wrigley, 1995). These studies, thus far, have granted more attention to the effects of different class statuses than to racial differences between mothers and child care workers, with only few exceptions (see Uttal, 1998).

Economic Distress

A significant, and understudied, dimension of contemporary mothering in the U.S. is access to economic resources and its influences on mothers' experiences, objectives, and strategies. Clearly, the lack of an adequate income adversely impacts parents, adding multiple stressors and obstacles to child rearing (Hofferth, 1995). Poverty is linked to poor child outcomes (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Flores, Douglas, & Ellwood, 1998; Zill, Moore, Smith, Steif, & Coiro, 1995). Several factors contribute to mothers', and their children's, poverty: the increase in mother-only families, the underpayment of child support (Arendell, 1995; Kellan, 1995; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992), the insufficiency of the minimum wage, changes in the welfare state, the persistence of gender stratification and occupational segregation in the workplace (Albelda, Folbre, & CPE, 1996; Children's Defense Fund, 1998; McLanahan & Kelly, 1998). Social and economic trends and the persistent high rates of poverty for mothers and children constitute the racialization and feminization of poverty (Dickerson, 1995; Edin & Lein, 1997; Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardiff, 1995; Kaplan, 1997; McLanahan & Kelly, 1998; Sidel, 1996).

Fully one-quarter of all women live below the poverty line, compared to under one-fifth of all men. Differences by racial ethnic grouping are profound, with nearly one-half (47 percent) of minority women being below the poverty line, compared to under one-third (29 percent) of White women (McLanahan & Kelly, 1998). Mothers' martial status is crucial to their economic well-being. Those raising children alone are at great risk of economic hardship, and the income gap among mothers is increasing rapidly. Female-headed households with children present in 1997 had a poverty rate of 31.6 percent, in contrast to a poverty rate among married couple

families of 5.2 percent. White mother-headed families have a poverty rate of 27.7 percent, Black, 39.8 percent, and Hispanic, 47.6 percent. Poverty rates among married couple families vary by racial ethnic groups as well: White families have a poverty rate of 4.8 percent, Black families 8 percent, and Hispanic families, 17.4 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). The poverty rate for all families with children is 19.2 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). Children are 40 percent of the poor, though they are only 26 percent of the total population; children's poverty is tied to mothers', just as mothers' is tied to their children's (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998).

Very young mothers often encounter extraordinary, persistent economic hardships, although they constitute a diverse population, live in varied arrangements, and have assorted outcomes (Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale, 1995; Sandfort & Hill, 1996; Trent & Harlan, 1994). Many young mothers move in and out of low-level, low-paying jobs, and are vulnerable to events over which they often have little control (Harris, 1997; Rank, 1994). Even older unmarried mothers are at risk: "In general, the economic situation of older, single mothers is closer to that of teen mothers than that of married childbearers of the same age." The exception is older, White unwed mothers who, generally, are more economically secure than both other women of their age cohort and younger mothers (Foster et al., 1998, p. 163).

A joint report issued by the Children's Defense Fund and the National Coalition for the Homeless shows that many families have lost ground with the move "from welfare to work," the abolishment of the Aid for Dependent Children program, and implementation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. Many lack food, medical care, and stable housing.

Nearly all mothers who have found employment receive wages that leave them far below the poverty line, and children's extreme poverty is on the rise. Further, as families expend their time-restricted benefits over the course of the next several years, the number of mothers and children falling into desperate economic conditions is expected to rise significantly (Children Defense Fund, 1998; Flores et al., 1998; Sherman, Ameyu, Duffeld, Ebb, & Weinstein, 1998). Extreme poverty lands a high number of poor families into homelessness. The fastest growing group of homeless is families with children (see Martin, 1997; Sidel, 1996), "most of whom are headed by women who have several children, most of whom are under seven years old" (Lee, Haught, Redlener, Fant, Fox, & Somers, 1992, p. 119).

Social welfare states throughout the Western industrial world provide support for mothers and children, ranging from maternal and child health care programs, for instance, to income supports. The United States remains a welfare state laggard and has extraordinarily high rates of maternal and child poverty in comparison to the other advanced industrial societies, even those with much higher rates of female-headed families than those in the U.S. (see Martin, 1997; McLanahan & Kelly, 1998). "Women, [in the U.S.], particularly single women, are punished by the social welfare system for having children, and it is the parent's responsibility, even obligation, to manage the family as best it can" (Welles-Nystrom, 1997, p. 295-296; see Leira, 1992; Martin, 1990; 1991; 1997).

Social Policy

Mothers' poverty is not a new phenomenon (Abramovitz, 1996; Skocpol, 1992). Throughout American history, mothers, particularly unmarried mothers, have been at a disproportionate risk of economic hardship (Boris, 1994; Gordon, 1993; 1994; Ladd-Taylor,

1994). Poor women have been long the object of policy regulation, viewed as undeserving in contrast to others who are deemed to be deserving. Social policies have been used

> to enforce the idealized version of women's roles; to maintain a double standard of womanhood; to reward and punish women based on their race, class and marital status; to reconcile the competing demands for women's low-paid market and unpaid domestic work; and to accommodate other labor market needs (Abramovitz, 1996, p. xii-xiii; see Boris, 1994; Brush, 1996; Gordon, 1994; Koven & Michel, 1993; Skocpol, 1992).

In addition to those economically depressed, other "undeserving" mothers have been subject to explicit policy regulations. These include women of color, immigrant women, and unmarried women, more generally (Boris, 1994; Brush, 1996; Chang, 1994; Gordon, 1993, 1994). Across the decades, attempts have been made by state and social welfare agencies to impose White middle-class normative standards on poor, minority, and immigrant families (Abramovitz, 1996; Garcia Coll, Meyer, & Brillon, 1995; Williams, Himmel, Sjoberg, & Torrez, 1995). Social policy, thus, has reinforced the dominant ideologies of the good mother, promoting, in the process, a particular view of appropriate women's roles. Overall, married and widowed mothers have fared significantly better under social policy, especially White women (Martin, 1990, 1997).

Policy advocates face central political questions in their pursuits. How, for example, do we press for greater social valuing of mothering, and other caring activities and relationships, and provide social supports for those doing this necessary activity without reducing women's lives to motherhood? How do we acknowledge the socially necessary work of mothers and "support women's personhood and claims to integrity, autonomy, dignity, security, and political voice" (Brush, 1996, p. 430; Ladd-Taylor, 1994) without resorting to a rhetoric of maternalism? How do we recognize and press to ease the burdens without becoming blinded to the pleasures of

mothering? These dilemmas point to the interrelatedness of cultural ideologies and social policy objectives and assumptions and highlight question of difference - differences among women, those who mother and those who do not, and between women and men.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Mothering and motherhood are the subjects of rapidly expanding bodies of literature. Study of mothering spans efforts to develop general conceptual models to careful examinations of selected social and psychological variables. For all of the contributions to our understanding of mothering and mothers' lives, however, we are left with major gaps.

We need more attention to the lives of particular mothers. By focusing our investigations on mothers' identities, experiences, and activities, and understandings of each, we can secure far more realistic and less normative portrayals of mothers' lives. At the same time, demanding further study are the influences on mothering of various political, economic, and other social and historical developments. We need work that connects mothers' personal beliefs and choices with their social situations. We will benefit from greater conceptual clarity, empirical depth, and better integration of theory and data. We especially need theory building grounded in mothers' experiences, discerned through a variety of methods. Through such work, we will attain not only a fuller, richer, and deeper understanding of mothering, but also, more generally, of caring and ethics of care (see Tronto, 1995).

Social constructionism lends itself well as a starting framework for considering mothering and motherhood. The paradigm affords a means for looking at, and taking seriously, interaction, interpretative processes (including those of the researchers and writers), and social context. Feminist conceptual models, from within which much of the recent scholarship on

mothering has been driven and which are usually consistent and often overlapping with constructionism, allow us to acknowledge the gendered character, as of yet, of most caregiving, including, importantly, mothering. Attention to the interrelated systems of gender, racial ethnic, and class stratification is made available using constructionist or feminist conceptual perspectives (or feminist constructionist frameworks).

Areas calling for our attention in the study of mothering can be described as falling into four broad, overlapping domains: identities and meanings of mothering; relationships, with both children and others; experiences of mothering; and the social locations and structural contexts from within which women mother. At the heart of each of these thematic domains must be attention to and respect for the enormous multiplicity of mothering circumstances. Class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and immigrant experience must be at the forefront of our considerations. Not only is American society increasingly diverse, but the experiences and perceptions of minority women - as legitimate and valuable in their own right and not as measures by which White, heterosexual, middle-class mothering is reified - have been given too little attention. At the same time, this respect for diversity and pluralism, in their many forms, needs not divert us from also considering what mothers hold in common. Here I borrow from feminist theorist Susan Bordo (1990, p. 140), "Certainly, we often err on the side of exclusion and thus submerge large areas of human history and experience. But attending too vigilantly to difference can just as problematically construct an Other who is an exotic alien, a breed apart." Women do, after all, actively participate in a shared larger social context: there is experiential continuity and structural common ground among women (see Marks, 1996, p. 568).

I raise several questions in each of the four areas I have delineated as one way to think about continued study of mothering. These broad categories offer literally dozens of more narrowly defined subjects for study.

Meanings and Identities

How do women feel about being mothers; what meanings do they ascribe to mothering? How do identities, and subjectivities, differ between full-time mothers, those who combine employment and child raising, and others? How are women's sexual lives, desires, and experiences affected by mothering activities and the status of motherhood? How do mothers attend to, balance, and negotiate their immediate needs with longer-term ones –relational, economic, health, and emotional? What is the mothering project, as mothers see it? Feminist Ann Snitow's (1992, p. 49) question posed almost a decade ago remains salient: "To what extent is motherhood a powerful identity? . . . To what extent is it a patriarchal construction that inevitably places mothers outside of the realm of the social, the changing, the active?"

Relationships. What is the character of the relationships between particular mothers and their children? How and why do mothering relationships diverge across mother-child units and also across time for individuals? What are the relationships between mothers' perceptions of their own needs and desires and children's well-being and needs? Where and how do intimate adult relationships fit into the relationships between mothers and children? How is maternal power perceived and exercised, and to what purpose? How are gender and family politics bargained, more generally?

Experiences

What, exactly, do mothers do? What is the character of mothers' daily lives? How do mothers negotiate the activities of child rearing? How are women affected by mothering, and how does this change as children grow and develop, as women mature and change? What is the full sweep of mothers' emotions and attitudes? How is ambivalence experienced and handled? How do women's experiences of mothering vary by sexual orientation or preference? Where does biology fit into mothering and mothers' experiences?

Social Locations and Structural Context

How do women actively resist the dominant ideologies of mothering and family? Where does mothering fit into the shifting landscape of gender politics? How is mothering affected by the increasing tide of global capitalism, and by more-local production and service economies, many of which are receding? How does region influence mothers in their activities? For instance, what does it mean to raise children in rural areas, urban areas, as immigrants? How do women mediate between their children and others, between the family unit and other institutions? How do women collaborate with others in mothering activities? How do they make room for men who wish to mother? What is the political economy of motherhood and mothering?

In conclusion, the decade's advances in the study of mothering offer us an assortment of markers shaping the landscape for continued research and writing. The next ten years surely will witness the commissioning of such efforts.

Note

1. I refer readers to the specific studies for delineation of research method, sample size, and discussions of issues of reliability, validity, and generalizability. For purposes of both readability and review length, I do not present these specifics in this text.

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