YOU MUST BE SUPERWOMAN! HOW GRADUATE

STUDENT MOTHERS NEGOTIATE

CONFLICTING ROLES

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my three amazing children, Shane 'Landon' Ellis, Braeden Connor Ellis, and Reagan Aaralyn Ellis, who have been so amazing, adaptable, supportive, and encouraging throughout this journey. We've all sacrificed a lot but you three have been real troopers about understanding when Mommy couldn't be there because of class. Thanks for being the best "three little monkeys" ever!

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ABSTRACT

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The lived experiences of graduate student mothers and their unique challenges in
comparison to working or faculty mothers are explored through their own words utilizing
the theoretical perspective of Dorothy E. Smith. Their jobs as graduate students are rarely
viewed as 'real' work outside of academia, they face financial woes due to low pay and
high student loan debt. Graduate school and motherhood have cultural expectations of a
full-time commitment and these incompatible idealizations leave graduate student
mothers feeling incapable of meeting the cultural expectations of being a 'good' mother
and 'good' graduate student. Through in-depth, semi-structured, intensive interviews with
twelve graduate student mothers, I explored how graduate student mothers negotiate
conflicting roles, how their lives are shaped by cultural expectations of a 'good mother,'
departmental, graduate school, and university policies, how they attempt to find balance,
and what roles support systems play in their successes or struggles.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The lived experiences of graduate student mothers in academia related to the role-negotiation and role-conflict associated with juggling multiple roles as students, researchers, instructors, mentors, mothers, and partners and friends are unique. Much has been written about women's experiences in academia as faculty and mothers (Bassett 2005; Bhattacharjee 2004; Colbeck & Drego 2005; Kawash 2011; Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004); however, only a small body of research has focused expressly on the experiences of graduate student mothers. While there is certain to be much overlap between the struggles of students and faculty in terms of work-life balance, there are conditions unique to graduate student mothers such as financial instability, career uncertainty, relationships with their advisors, etc. (Springer, Parker, and Levitan-Reid 2009).

Women are still responsible for much of the housework and child care and face expectations from the dominant culture to be 'good mothers' in line with cultural expectations of 'intensive mothering' (Hays 1996; Choi, Baker, and Tree 2005). In order to meet the needs of the academy, however, graduate students are expected to treat their graduate program as a full-time job, especially if they have some sort of funding as a

graduate assistant or teaching assistant. The full-time demands of both motherhood and graduate school are incompatible idealizations pushed upon graduate student mothers. Graduate student mothers have reported dissatisfaction in both roles and report working in conditions that can be subsumed under the notion of a "second shift" as articulated by Arlie Hochschild and Annie Machung in *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (1989). The contradictions that are faced by graduate student mothers who are committed to their pursuit of a graduate degree and equally as committed to raising healthy happy children are not just personal problems. These problems don't exist in a personal bubble, they exist within the larger cultural context and are part of a larger cultural contradiction that values the selfish commitment of businessmen to their careers and the unselfish act of mothering as a total commitment to the child (Hays 1996). In the terms of C. Wright Mills (1959), the personal problems that individuals experience are actually closely connected to the "public issues of social structure" (P. 8).

This study examines the lived experiences of graduate student mothers and gives expression to their unique needs. It is my hope that institutions may take on a welcoming attitude toward graduate student mothers rather than one of accommodation that serves to problematize the commitment of graduate student mothers to being both an academics and mothers. By learning more about the perceptions, perspectives, and standpoints of graduate student mothers about their status in society as student mothers as well as their perceptions of their academic settings and institutions, I gain a better understanding of how the roles of mother and of graduate student overlap and intertwine for those women

who are vigorously pursuing success at both roles. Through in-depth interviews with twelve graduate student mothers, I explore support networks, institutional supports and factors, and personal beliefs and habits that either constrain or facilitate success in both roles. I will conclude by offering suggestions on how to improve the university environment to better support graduate student mothers and graduate students as a whole in order to lower attrition rates that lead to "brain drain" within the American higher education system.

Female graduate students experience more stress and distress than their male counterparts (Hodgson and Simoni 1995). It is likely that a woman's time in graduate school will coincide with her childbearing years, given that the median age of women completing their doctorates is 33.6 years (Springer et al. 2009). A study by the American Sociological Association found that several critical resources were less available to graduate student parents, especially mothers, than they were to other students (Springer et al. 2009). These crucial resources include but are not limited to: mentoring, help with publishing, fellowships, and effective training in the classroom for teaching (Springer et al. 2009). Both male and female graduate students with children are less likely to be in a tenure track position four years after earning their PhD (Springer et al. 2009). However, women are especially disadvantaged, according to a longitudinal study of the 1996-1997 cohort of sociology PhD graduates (Springer et al. 2009). Many graduate student mothers "choose" to go part-time, take a break from school, or to leave their graduate program altogether in order to stay home with their children. However, to view this only as a

3

choice ignores and smoothes over the multifaceted social and institutional constraints that serve to *force* graduate student mothers out of academia (Springer et al. 2009). There is a need to explore the lived experience of mothers in graduate school to better understand this unique population and their needs in order to help them better succeed. Springer et al. (2009) note that the "flexibility" and "accommodation" stance that many departments and institutions take regarding motherhood and family life as a special issue or "favor" that must be sought out leaves graduate student mothers vulnerable without a formal policy in place. While flexibility is essential, it is simply not sufficient as a stand-alone policy and leaves the distribution across departments and individuals left up to individual discretion leading to unequal distribution of resources that are framed as "favors" (Springer et al. 2009:444).

Graduate student parents report higher amounts of dissatisfaction within academia than non-parents and mothers have been found to be more dissatisfied than fathers who are also graduate students (Gardner 2008). Attrition rates for graduate student mothers are alarming, to say the least. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, graduate student mothers are at a higher risk of attrition than almost any other group in the American academy (Gardner 2008; Lynch 2008). By exploring the lived experiences of mothers operating within American graduate education, perhaps graduate programs can learn to address concerns of graduate student mothers more accurately and to encourage policy changes that might improve retention rates of mothers in graduate school. By addressing the needs of graduate student mothers and providing better support

for them, the academy may be able to cut down on some of the "brain drain" that occurs when graduate student mothers are forced to "choose" to leave academia. This rhetoric of "choice" is a way to "mask economic, social, and political disparities in power" and results in the alienation and exclusion of graduate student mothers (Williams 2007; 28). A woman is restrained by the social capital she has to work with including the support system she has in place to help her succeed such as family, her workplace, and the institutions in her life (Williams 2007). Because women are not in the ruling class, they were not responsible for setting the norms, standards, and rules that control their lives. As Smith notes, all of the ruling texts, structures, and institutionalized norms, values, and expectations are the creation of men, right down to what has been considered authoritative knowledge and objective scientific research in the field of sociology (1990a, 2005). When we look at the texts and even the images and media that have been used in what Smith (1987; 1990b; 2005) terms the ruling relations (1987; 2005) we can clearly see that the Judeo-Christian Bible, and, indeed, the religious texts of nearly every major world religion, were written by men. It is men that serve in the Catholic Church as popes, bishops, cardinals, priests, and even altar boys and it was men that were leaders in the Protestant Reformation, including John Calvin and Martin Luther and it is men who have traditionally been leaders in religious institutions. Men wrote the governing documents for the United States, including the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, men had voting rights while women were excluded from voting until 1920, and men have served on the Supreme Court and made laws that governed women and

5

their bodies, with the first woman justice on the Supreme Court, Sandra Day O'Connor only beginning to serve in 1981. Even today, in 2014, there are only 3 out of the 9 Supreme Court Justices that are women (a fact that is particularly salient in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling that corporations can claim religious objections to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in order to avoid following the federal law that women have access to twenty different forms of birth control free of charge).

This study contributes to the limited body of qualitative research on graduate student mother's lived experiences. Previous research that has focused on the lived experiences of graduate student mothers has been more limited in scope than this research. Daugherty (2012) chose to exclude women with older children and to focus only on mothers of children under six. Daugherty's (2012) piece only represents graduate student mothers with small children who are typically not in school and therefore require childcare much of the time. Her approach ignores the experiences of graduate student mothers of older, school-aged children, who are juggling school politics, extracurricular activities, playdates, sleepovers, and even dating.

Anaya (2011) explored Graduate Student Mothers of Color (GSMC's), in a theoretical piece with no actual GSMC's interviewed. Anaya's (2011) piece offers some great theoretical insight, although much of it echoes bell hooks (2000) who noted that black women are typically the most disadvantaged when race, class, and gender overlap. Williams (2007) also points out the arguments by Reid (1990) and Hamlet (1999) who lament the lack of data on black women in academia and the neglect and disrespect of the

stories of black women. Unfortunately, Anaya's (2011) study does not actually involve speaking with graduate student mothers of color to learn about their experiences, Anaya (2011) theorizes based on her own experiences, informed by her discipline, about the struggles she assumes all graduate student mothers of color experience.

The primary purpose of the current study is to investigate how graduate student mothers negotiate their conflicting roles within their dichotomous roles as graduate students and as mothers and how universities might better support graduate student mothers to reduce attrition rates. It is expected that common themes will emerge during the interview process with graduate student mothers.

Research questions include:

1. In what ways do dominant cultural beliefs concerning motherhood and 'intensive mothering' as well as their status as paid workers outside of the home affect the lived experiences of graduate student mothers?

2. What strategies do graduate student mothers employ to negotiate their dual roles as mothers and graduate students?

3. How could graduate schools, departments, and universities better support the needs of graduate student mothers?

4. How do graduate student mothers balance motherhood and graduate school?

5. How is the success of graduate student mothers dependent upon a support network and how does the lack of a support network impact their success?

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These research questions will address the underlying theoretical problem: What is

the status of women sociologists and women's studies students at American universities?

My approach seeks to expand upon the research of Williams (2007) and Lynch

(2008) while using Dorothy E. Smith's (1990a) feminist standpoint theory, originally

conceptualized as 'women's perspective' (1974), the "relations of ruling," (1987, 1990a,

1990b, 2005) as well as utilizing Smith's conceptualization of institutional ethnography

(2005) while looking at the lived experiences of graduate student mothers in sociology

and women's studies as a guiding theoretical orientation. Both sociology and women's

studies should be familiar with Dorothy Smith and her radical feminist critique of

sociology and the validation and need of women's standpoints in sociology, a sociology

for women (1987) and her newest conceptualization of a sociology for people (2005)

which will be discussed more in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the research that has been done to date on the role of

motherhood and university life. I will specifically explore the previous work in

motherhood and academia for faculty members and for graduate students (both mothers

and fathers). Next, I will discuss the literature on intensive mothering-the dominant

parenting paradigm of the last decade or so. This includes expectations of what it means

to be a good mother. Finally, I will discuss Smith's essays "Women's Perspective as a

Radical Critique of Sociology" (1974), the updated "Women's Experience as a Radical

Critique of Sociology" (1990a), the ruling relations (1990b), institutional ethnographies

(2005), a sociology for people (2005), and her poignant assessment of mind/body divide in sociology departments (1990a, 1990b, 2005). How relevant is this article today? Is the experience of graduate student mothers a radical critique of sociology or of university life as a whole?

In Chapter 3, I present the methodology for this project and my methodological approach. I include an overview of the research design, procedures for data collection, information about the participants in the project, and a discussion of how I performed the analysis.

Chapter 4 presents both the results of the study and a discussion of the findings. I present a variety of themes emergent from the data to highlight the richness of qualitative data that, as Charmaz (2004)

> *…affords views of human experience that etiquette, social conventions, and inaccessibility hide or minimize in ordinary discourse. Hence, rich data reveals thoughts, feelings, and actions as well as context and structure. […] Rich data afford the researcher a thorough knowledge of the empirical world or problem that he or she studies.* (P. 502)

In order to honor the voices and lived experiences of the participants, I draw heavily on the interview transcripts in this chapter. Anderson, Armitage, Jack, and Wittner (2004) argue, "If we want to know how women feel about their lives, then we have to allow them to talk about their feelings as well as their activities" (P. 229) and by allowing "women to speak for themselves, they reveal hidden realities: new experiences and new perspectives emerge that challenge the 'truths' of official accounts and cast doubt upon established theories" (P. 224).

In Chapter 5, I summarize the project, noting limitations and suggestions for future research. I also answer the question, "So what?" What is the potential impact of this work? How might it improve the experience of graduate student mothers while also benefitting the universities who have invested so much in their success?

Graduate student mothers occupy a place of marginalization and discrimination (Gouthro 2002) within the academy where they are subjected to policies that have disproportionately negative impacts on their lives and their families. While graduate student mothers are certainly not the only women harmed by the cultural ideology of intensive motherhood (Hays 1996) and what I conceptualize as the greedy institution of motherhood, while they attempt to operate within the realm of academia, itself a greedy institution, student mothers will continue to have high attrition rates due to structural, institutional, socio-cultural, and even personal and familial barriers to success. Without the institutionalization of family-friendly policies that are not just offered but valued by both men and women, structural supports such as mentors, training, affordable childcare, and better financial support, graduate student mothers will continue to serve as "indentured servants" (Williams 2012) within the academy and as unpaid workers within the home, meaning that success in graduate school may very well be limited to those students with outside support in terms of childcare and financial resources. It is my hope that through my qualitative inquiry into the lives of graduate student mothers and promotion of their standpoints while taking a critical feminist viewpoint of the institution of academia, validating the subjective knowledge of my participants and questioning the

10

assumption of men as the neutralized, objective, scientific, rational knowledge builders, I can follow hooks (1994) imploration to root my scholarship in "transformative politics and practice" (P. 71) and be a voice for social change.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Springer et al. (2009) conducted an online survey of Graduate Program Directors for the top sixty-three U.S. sociology departments to find out what supports are available to graduate student parents both at the departmental and the university level. They discuss the conflicting roles that graduate student mothers face in the culture of academia when trying to pursue their graduate education. The authors note that the ideal academic is "trained to be monkish in their devotion and slavish in their pursuit of knowledge" (Springer et al. 2009, 438), yet this is a contradiction to 'good mothering.' A good mother should "expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children" with their behavior guided by a "logic of unselfish nurturing" (Hays 1996:*x*).

Academics face constant pressure to publish and the demands that graduate school places on student's time leaves little time for much else. The academy was designed for single white males and other groups struggle to meet the ideal that is only attainable by a small fraction of graduate students these days (Gardner 2008). Graduate students are frequently involved in teaching, assisting others with their courses, research for classes, taking courses, independent research, honor societies (the ideal academic

would be an officer in these societies), working with faculty or other peers on research, attending departmental training courses, networking at department social events, mentoring undergraduate students, and presenting at various research symposiums and conferences. Despite being the fastest growing group enrolling in doctoral programs, women have lower rates of candidacy and graduation (Grenier and Burke 2008).

As noted by Gouthro and Grace (2000), there are structural relations of power that are systemic within the dominant culture that determine the inequities and expectations of women's experiences. By better understanding these gendered divisions of labor, we can better understand how women students (especially mothers) may be at a disadvantage. Gouthro and Grace (2000) state that the university is blind to the concerns of women graduate students, and that by having equal policies for both male and female students, the university makes the assumption that males and females are equally affected by such policies. As Patricia Hill Collins argues when discussing the matrix of domination, systematic racism and sexism are hidden under a shelter of efficiency, rationality, and equality (2000). Collins states that sexism and racism are ignored when certain kinds of knowledge are excluded for not being objective enough or scientific enough and for those of us interested in social justice, change can be slow moving if our knowledge and research is deemed unscientific or too subjective (2000). Williams (2007) notes "little research examines the dual impact of racism and sexism on the black female scholar" (P. 16). As Collins (2000) and Gouthro and Grace (2000) note, women are subjected to an

13

education that is centered within patriarchal ideologies about women's roles in higher

education and in the family. By assuming that policies such as those centered around

attendance are equal or fair because they apply to all students, universities are ignoring

the reality that women are still in charge of the bulk of childcare and care giving work in

general, meaning that if a child is sick, a sitter cancels, or an elderly relative falls ill, it is

likely the mother/woman who must stay home to fulfill her care giving responsibilities.

When attendance policies penalize students for missing class, women but mothers

especially are disproportionately affected. Evening classes, based on the antiquated

model of the full-time nine-to-five male worker who attends graduate school in the

evening, also disproportionately affect graduate student mothers, many of whom, in order

to fulfill their internalized expectations of motherhood, feel as though they should be at

home in the evenings helping with homework, fixing dinner, and getting children bathed

and in bed. Hays (1996) notes that the role of primary caregiver can be largely attributed

to "women's lack of power" but also points out that the subordination of women has been

incredibly beneficial to not just men, but also "capitalism and the modern state" (P. 18).

Family planning and timing for academic mothers is a particularly salient subject

as having children can have a negative impact on a woman's career and tenure-track

(Williams 2007). An academic woman's tenure clock and biological clock are racing

against one another, leading many academic women to have to choose whether to delay

having children (and possibly risk not being able to have them later) or whether to

sacrifice their career and success in order to have children (Williams 2007). Hensel

14

(1990) argued that children are harmful to a woman's career and incompatible with an academic lifestyle that assumes that academics have time that is not interrupted. A study by Mason and Goulden (2004) concluded that women who had babies within five years of obtaining their PhD were thirty-percent less likely than women without babies to obtain a tenure track position.

Williams (2007) discusses an article by Joan Williams (2002) in which she notes that female professors and staff members felt as though their colleagues viewed them as less competent after they had children, despite having the perception that they were valued team members before they had children. Their fears would appear to be supported by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) who, using expectation states theory, found that motherhood as a status characteristic biased others against mothers as workers. Even highly qualified individuals who were considered competent and committed previously were seen as less committed and less competent once their status as mothers was known (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). The researchers believe that working mothers are perceived to be less committed to work than non-mothers (presumably because they are torn between work and family) and therefore put less effort into work (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

The cultural belief in intensive motherhood holds that a good mother will give her child(ren) all of her emotional time and energy without constraint (Hays 1996), therefore, a good mother is simply unable to give priority to workplace demands and must put forth less effort and be less devoted to a successful career (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007).

The more rigidly structured the job is in terms of time commitment and the more demanding and rigorous the job appears, the greater the negativity that arises from the motherhood status (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). The researchers assert that motherhood is a status characteristic "that is culturally perceived to be directly, but negatively relevant to workplace performance in that the normative obligations of mothers are thought to be inconsistent with the obligations of a committed, ideal worker" (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:697).

Jobs that require an intensive 24/7 time commitment violate the cultural expectations of motherhood, or the ideological intensive motherhood that Hays (1996) states is in a cultural contradiction with the belief that the ideal worker will be willing to sacrifice any other competing demands in order to meet the demands of work (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). The ideal worker belief is also thrust upon graduate students, working within the greedy institution of graduate school, who are expected to give a 24/7 commitment to the rigors of graduate school and are expected to "devote enormous hours each week to 'face time' at work, to work late nights, or on weekends, and to drop everything at a moment's notice for a new work demand" (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:690).

Mothers within the workplace must meet higher standards in order to prove capability and are likely to suffer from reduced opportunities for advancement, fewer chances to speak up and share ideas, lack of confidence from others in her ability when she does speak up, and will be seen as less deserving of pay raises, bonuses, or

promotions, and as less qualified for leadership or authority positions (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Correll et al. (2007) echoed these findings, using a laboratory experiment to evaluate equally qualified, gendered pairs of job applicant materials; the only differences on the application materials were parental status indicators for one male candidate and one female candidate. The researchers found that mothers were seen as less competent and less committed, were held to harsher performance and punctuality standards, and were held to higher standards on the management exam than non-mothers in order to be perceived as hirable (Correll et al. 2007). In addition, mothers were recommended for a lower starting salary, were seen as less eligible for promotion, less likely to be recommended for hire, and less likely to be suggested for a management position (Correll et al. 2007).

Ironically, despite finding that motherhood is a negative status characteristic that others perceive as making mothers less competent and less committed to their jobs than non-mothers (Correll et al. 2007; Ridgeway and Correll 2004), Correll et al. (2007) found that fathers actually were seen as *more* committed to their careers than other non-parents or mothers, were allowed more leeway in being tardy to work, and were offered statistically higher salaries. Correll, et al. (2007) note that the cultural perceptions associated with being a good father are not at odds with the ideal worker type. Perhaps this is reflective of a society that sees men as breadwinners who are responsible for supporting their families financially and considers paid work outside the home to be a vital part of men's existence (Lynch 2008).

17

There is very little mention in the current literature about the lived experiences regarding relationship strain among graduate students. In fact, none of the studies I found even mention relationship strain to my knowledge. Galvin (2006) reviews the existing research on marital satisfaction among post-secondary students, noting that several studies have shown that a family or marital change is a common barrier, although certainly not the only barrier, to incompletion among non-traditional (defined by Galvin as any student that is married, divorced, separated, or a parent) students. Galvin (2006) was unable to find any research that explored divorce involving post-secondary, non-traditional students among undergraduate or graduate students. I, like Galvin, expected to find a wealth of research on divorce rates and marital or relationship strain among graduate students, based on my own conversations with friends and colleagues, however, Galvin's (2006) article noting the literature gap for this research is all I found. Given my own experiential knowledge of relationship strain and divorces among my friends and colleagues, even those in entirely different fields, I feel as though this is an area that really needs to be explored. The demands of graduate school are straining to relationships and many of my participants mentioned relationship strain in their interviews. Resentment among spouses for time spent on school can lead to feelings of alienation among graduate students and likely contributes to higher attrition rates for graduate student mothers. This is an area that is desperately in need of more research.

In a study to assess the progress of women doctoral students and gain a better perspective of the various factors that "constrain, facilitate, and differentiate" their

18

success and degree completion, Maher, Ford, and Thompson (2004), examined the differences between early-finishing women and late-finishing women. The researchers found that among early-finishing women, there were four factors that constrained their progress: doubts or uncertainty about their ability to finish the program; limited funding from the university; limitations in personal finances for funding purposes; and lack of mentorship (Maher et al. 2004). They found that among late-finishing women, individual constraining factors seemed to only affect a minority of late-finishing students, however, there seemed to be more of a cumulative effect, with multiple constraining factors serving to delay degree completion, although, the authors did not note specifically which multiple factors played a role (Maher et al. 2004). Maher et al. (2004) do note, that late-finishing women were much more likely than the early finishers to have their progress slowed from family issues: childcare responsibilities (36% versus 10%); marital problems or other family related obstacles (28% versus 7%).

Cao (2001) explored the experiences of nine male graduate students through multiple interviews with each participant. Cao (2001) compared the experiences of the male graduate students to earlier research done by Fordon (1996) on women graduate students. The researcher found that the academic, psychological, and financial stressors were similar for male and female graduate students, however, their strategies for coping with these strategies were different (Cao 2001). Men experienced more financial stress and had a stronger "breadwinner" ideology while women experienced social and ideological prejudices (Cao 2001). Two of Cao's (2001) nine participants experienced

19

divorce or a relationship ending after beginning graduate school and four participants felt pressured by the demands of graduate school and their family responsibilities.

Dominant cultural ideologies and expectations of self-sacrificing motherhood dictate that mothers be available to their children around the clock, and "to do so with perpetual smiles on their faces and in a stylish pair of shoes" (Springer et al. 2009, 439). Women are much more vulnerable to role strain due to the multiple roles they take on and the extent and type of family responsibility a woman has. These things, coupled with the number of children she has and the ages of those children, can also contribute to a woman's role strain and load she carries (Grenier and Burke 2008). Arlie Hochschild and Annie Machung wrote the iconic book *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (1989) about the struggle women face while trying to "have it all" and juggle both a successful career and meet societal expectations of what being a mother means. Ideological beliefs about motherhood and the expectations attached to that role, are so strong that even mothers who work outside the home are still responsible for the day to day care associated with children and for the physical and emotional well-being of their children (Hays 1996; Lynch 2008; Richardson 1994). These cultural assumptions about what it means to be a 'good' mother often result in women being physically and emotionally drained trying to juggle working outside the home while also attending to the vast majority of child and household care (Hochschild and Machung 1989; Lynch 2008).

Williams (2007) conducted a mixed methods study with graduate student mothers where she examines the stigmatized identity that graduate student mothers have as they

maneuver through their doctoral programs and the institutional policies in place that either help or hinder the success of graduate student mothers. She argues that institutional discourses that lead to practices of exclusion and feelings of incompetency function to create policies that place graduate student mothers in unsustainable and incompatible positions where they are forced to choose between their roles as mothers and students, between their family and the academy, and between their sense of self and success (Williams 2007). Williams (2007) examined the discourses operating in the graduate school survival guides, Internet resources, and orientation material targeted to graduate students. According to Williams, these guides perpetuate the ideology of the good graduate student who sacrifices everything else in HIS life in order to make graduate school his central focus (2007). She argues for change, noting, "graduate school is a space and a place where real changes can begin to enact different policies, build a different community, draw on functioning and effective support systems, and make inclusiveness and diversity a reality" (Williams 2007:7). Williams (2007) would like to see family life and children embedded within the institution as "symbols of encouragement" rather than as individual problems to be dealt with by graduate student mothers alone (P. 7). "Shouldn't universities work toward inclusion rather than a rhetoric of accommodation that evokes images of disability?" (Williams 2007:26).

Lynch (2008) explored how graduate student mothers' daily lives were affected by structural environments and the socio-cultural constructs and the ways the dual identities of 'mother' and 'graduate student' "combine to problematize women's

21

educational attainment, and by extension, the advancement of women in the American

academe" (P. 585). The structural environments that impacted graduate student mothers

the most were a lack of financial support and lack of affordable childcare (Lynch 2008).

Lynch's (2008) participants were frustrated by low funding amounts and limited time

periods for funding for teaching assistant or graduate assistant positions that did not meet

their needs for health care and childcare and seemed more suited to "single and/or

childless individuals rather than for women with children" (P. 589). Sixty-one percent of

Lynch's (2008) respondents reported having to work either full or part-time outside of the

university in order to meet basic health care, childcare, and educational expenses.

Seventy-three percent of respondents switched to part-time status for a semester or two

after giving birth and the majority complained that this "choice" had not only harmed

their status as serious students, but had also rendered them unable to receive any more

funding (Lynch 2008).

Childcare was paid for out-of-pocket for all participants and participants reported

that childcare was not a consideration when considering funding eligibility, nor is

childcare "considered a necessary budget item on research proposals, grant or fellowship

applications. Although 4 out of the 5 universities represented by Lynch's (2008)

participants offered childcare, it was considered unaffordable and not a single participant

utilized it. Additionally, the hours of operation (usually 9-5) were incompatible with

graduate student needs, many of which took classes in the evening (Lynch 2008). Lynch

(2008) notes that affordable childcare that takes into account the often sporadic

22

scheduling needs of graduate students would best support graduate student mothers and help to lower attrition rates.

Lynch (2008) also examined socio-cultural factors related to managing expectations of their student/mother identities as well as the support graduate student mothers received for their student/mother identities. Participants used strategies to avoid cultural conflict and to try to guarantee success in both roles, including 'maternal invisibility' to downplay their mothering role while in the academic world and 'academic invisibility' to downplay their student role when outside of the academy (Lynch 2008). Participants reported being afraid that their identity as a mother would stigmatize them and detract from perceptions that they are "serious students" and therefore, they avoid talking about their family life to everyone and do not bring their children or spouses to department gatherings, even family friendly ones (Lynch 2008:596). Several other participants also reported feeling that they needed to be hypervisible in the department in order to ensure they were seen as serious students just in case their secret status as mothers is ever discovered, rationalizing that if they have "put in their time" that their motherhood status can't be held against them (Lynch 2008:597). Lynch (2008) warns that "The academe…cannot respond effectively to the needs of student mothers' blended identities when those identities are kept hidden" (P. 597). Pillay (2009) also argues against the "balancing two lives approaching to motherhood" and academia and contends that "motherhood needs to be inscribed into intellectual work if the academic mother is to find a wholeness of self" (P. 501). The strategy of 'academic invisibility' was utilized by

23

mothers who wanted to appear to meet the cultural expectations of a good mother and therefore stayed home all day with their children or volunteered as room-mom and then stayed up all night to complete their school work (Lynch 2008). Networks of support were also important to helping participants feel successful in graduate school. Faculty support is an important factor for retention rates and it seems Lynch's (2008) participants had received a multitude of unhelpful and hurtful 'advice,' leading to 28 out of 30 of her respondents saying they would like to see more sensitivity from faculty about the difficulties of meeting the demands of the university and the demands of motherhood as well as more tenured female faculty members with children. Participants also reported feeling alienated and isolated from both faculty members and other students due to their status as mothers, with the exception of the few programs that had peer matching, mentoring, or student parent support groups (Lynch 2008).

An auto-ethnographic case study was undertaken by Murphy and Cloutier-Fisher (2002) and the researchers used a gendered structure-agency framework to understand how the social construction of gender either empowered or constrained women, primarily graduate student mothers such as themselves. The authors especially wanted to explore how educated women such as themselves wound up perpetuating gender stereotypes that reinforced traditional marital and child rearing gender norms even though they typically espoused a more egalitarian ideology (Murphy and Cloutier-Fisher 2002). They found that they actually had renegotiated their motherhood roles using a few different strategies such as an expansion of their husbands' roles, arranging schedules around mothering

activities, lowering expectations of household cleanliness, and redistribution of chores to other family members (Murphy and Cloutier-Fisher 2002). The researchers did report feeling exhausted and isolated as they sought strategies to balance their career and personal goals (Murphy and Cloutier-Fisher 2002).

Gardner (2008) looked at how socialization might affect attrition rates for graduate students that are non-normative students, including graduate student parents. Given that success in graduate school is all about "fitting the mold" (126), graduate student mothers do not fit cultural expectations of the graduate student mold. Students who do not meet the criteria of a normative graduate student mold (anyone other than young white males) will not have a normative socialization experience according to Gardner and this will influence attrition rates (2008). Gardner (2008) found five different types of graduate students that that did not 'meet the mold' of being a traditional graduate student, including, women, students of color, older students, students with children, and part-time students.

The intersectionality of multiple social and cultural realities of graduate student mothers of color is explored by Williams (2007) and Anaya (2011); Anaya notes that the main internal struggle that a graduate student mother has is as she navigates from one of her multiple roles to another (graduate student to mother to graduate assistant) and is dealing with the guilt of feeling as though she performs none of these roles well enough as social indicators set in that she is a 'bad' mother, a 'bad' student, and a 'bad' graduate assistant (2011). Anaya finds these issues to be slightly different for graduate student

25

mothers of color who may subscribe to a different ideology of motherhood than white graduate student mothers given that mothers of color have typically been in the labor force and already juggled working outside the home and motherhood (2011). Anaya's approach is primarily theoretical. Williams (2007) discusses intersectionality and the lack of discussion about race and class or the complications they cause for "women in academe" (P. 15). My study did not purposely seek out mothers of color but it did not exclude them either, as some previous studies have done.

Daugherty (2012) did a qualitative study on graduate student mothers to examine multiple role strain experienced by academic mothers. Daugherty used a grounded theory approach coupled with a feminist theoretical framework to examine the challenges faced by women with children under six years of age while attending graduate school. Daugherty found that her fifteen participants perceived many overlapping barriers to obtaining their higher education such as lowered economic status having a negative influence on the level of difficulty they experienced, women who were in relationships had an additional layer of stress, the age of the child added to the challenges a mother faced with those having children under age 2 struggling more, and either externalized or internalized blame based on cultural influence (2012). It is worth noting that Daugherty (2012) described her results as "to be complex and diverse based on the varied experiences of the mother who participated in this study" (P. 75). Daugherty limited her pool to mothers of children under six but I feel that this neglects the voices of many other mothers. Mothers of older children may have different concerns than mothers of children

26

not yet in school, but juggling the schedules and demands of school age children can be quite challenging. I wanted to make sure that the voices of these mothers are heard as well.

All of the above-mentioned studies found that the two primary concerns of graduate student mothers were related to childcare (crucial for a graduate student mother to be able to perform her duties as a student) and to financial problems related to their return to school and lack of adequate funding.

Sharon Hays argues in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996) that the current socially accepted guidelines for mothering takes the form of what Hays terms 'intensive mothering.' Hays elaborates that our cultural model of motherhood dictates that mothers spend an immense amount of time, energy and money in raising their children (1996) and yet, these ideologies that we force upon mothers actually contradict other societal norms in place. As Hays (1996) notes, we now live in a society where over half of all mother with young children are employed outside the home and our society is increasingly individualistic and focused on egoistic pursuit of self-improvement and achievement. This stands in stark contrast to the ideology of motherhood valuing complete and total devotion and selfless nurturing of children (Hays 1996). These inconsistencies in philosophies are what Hays (1996) calls the cultural contradictions of contemporary motherhood. I would also add that this is quite different from past generations of mothers, many more of whom did not work outside the home, and yet, embraced a much less hands-on approach to motherhood. The number of women with

young children who work outside the home has more than quadrupled since 1950 (Hays 1996).

Hays (1996) argues that women who work outside the home are pulled in contradictory directions by their perceptions of cultural expectations of motherhood and the cultural expectations of what it means to be a paid worker outside the home. These conflicting roles are not always compatible, such as when a child gets sick and a mother has stay home with a child, thereby not meeting the expectations of what a paid-laborer is expected to do (namely, put their career first). However, missing work due to a sick child does meet the expectations of what a 'good mother' does. Western society has only been trying to cope with the issues of contradictory suitable behaviors at home in the outside world for around two hundred years (Hays 1996). Prior to the 1950's, society was constructed with very separate spheres for home and work, with men typically taking over the sphere for the outside world, and women being in charge of the home sphere (Hays 1996). Society has urged women to stay home with their children, thereby reducing disagreements and tension about acceptable behavior mothering, however, the vast number of women who now work outside the home has certainly begun to crumble the foundation of the perfect mother set forth by society (Hays 1996). Hays (1996) notes that the benefits to men and capitalism of keeping women home have been beneficial:

> *The ideology of intensive mothering is not simply about children, or mothers, or even family. It is instead an ideology that speaks to a more prevalent set of social and moral concerns. [...] The cultural model of intensive mothering, after all, suggests that all the troubles of the world can be solved by the individual efforts of superhuman women. Clearly, this places a tremendous and undue burden on women, and one that becomes increasingly difficult to maintain as an ethos of*

28

rationalized market society invades the home and as more and more mothers enter that competitive and impersonal world when they go out to work for pay. [...] At the same time, however, this ideology helps to reproduce the existing gender hierarchy and to contribute, with little social or financial compensation for the mothers who sustain its tenets, to the maintenance of capitalism and the centralized state. (P. 177-178)

Hays' argument (above) is similar to an argument also made by Smith (1990b), although, Smith notes that women are "active as subjects and agents" and "give power to the relations that overpower them" because "capitalism is dependent upon and must be receptive to the active participation of women" in the marketplace (P. 161).

As mothers, we are barraged by media images of the perfect mother and what Smith (1990b) terms femininity as discourse. While Smith (1990b) focuses on femininity and its portrayal in textual discourse and the media, I would like to take her argument a step further and direct my attention to mothering as discourse. Smith (1990b) suggests that discourse and texts are both situated within and help to structure social relations regarding femininity where women are not simply passive, subordinate, and subjected to the reproduction and socialization of femininity, but are, instead, social actors. If we examine the discourse of motherhood, women are also active participants in the recreation of dominant discourses on motherhood, as we saw in Hays (1996) study, as well as in the Hochschild and Machung (1989) study. Many of my participants, all of whom are students who study systems and institutions of oppression, reinforced dominant ideologies about motherhood and graduate school when asked to give advice to incoming graduate student mothers who were either pregnant or had small babies.

29

Smith first posited her radical critique of sociology in 1974, calling for women's perspective in sociology, a discipline that Smith felt marginalized, alienated, and excluded women and their everyday experiences that were excluded and devalued within sociology and by the focus on detached, scientifically objective research that ignores the lived experiences of women and other marginalized populations. Smith has since updated her radical critique of sociology and has changed her call for the creation of a sociology for women to a call for a sociology for people and has adopted the term "women's standpoint" to replace " women's perspective" (2005). Standpoint theory, in Smithian terms, refers to establishing a subject position for using the method of inquiry known as institutional ethnography (2005). Institutional ethnography offers an alternative form of knowledge production that eschews the status quo knowledge production of objectifying a subject for research purposes that has been the typical basis of social science research and focuses instead on working from the everyday lives and "actualities" of people's lives to make them the experts of their own knowledge (Smith 2005:10). Institutional ethnography is concerned with how institutions such as the academy or even motherhood as an institution are organized and reinforced by other institutions (Sprague 2005). For example, an institutional ethnographer, such as myself, might look at the ways in which graduate student mothers organize their home lives based on the demands of their educational institution, their work demands, and the existence (or lack of) childcare, etc., in order to have a better understanding of the constraints faced and how those constraints are reflective of resources available to draw on (Sprague 2005). Smith (2005) notes that

she first began reflecting about the ways in which sociology had almost nothing to say about her life as a single mother and her conflicting and contradictory roles as a mother and performing housework and her duties as an instructor that required her to prepare for classes, teach, write papers, attend faculty meetings and other academic work. The methods, concepts, and theories of sociology were all a masculine creation, even when women participated, creating disconnect between the mind and body of how women actually experience the world and the concepts and theories in sociology that are supposed to explain social life (Smith 1990a). Men have authority over all aspects of society, even over those worlds that are traditionally women's areas such as children, the household, and the neighborhood, and between men's authority and the disconnect between established knowledge, women are alienated from their own experiences (Smith 1990a). The ethics of objectivity and research methods meant to ensure objectivity are in place to try to avoid bias, however, the assumption that males, and more specifically white males, are the standard for objective knowledge ignores that men have privilege within our "ruling relations" (Smith 1987). Smith writes of a "bifurcation of consciousness" or a separation of consciousness that women experience as they move back and forth between the public and private worlds that are controlled by men (1990a). I agree with Pillay (2009) that this bifurcation of our academic-selves and mother-selves must be blended and interwoven into our being and into our work as academics. If we continue to hide our status as mothers while at work and we continue to hide our status as academics while mothering, we will never, as Pillay (2009) argues, "find [our] wholeness

of being" because "fragmentation of self is indeed self-defeating" (P. 513). Smith's

(2005) institutional ethnography seeks the ways that the experiences of people have either

positively or negatively been affected by the institutional practices that have affected

their lives and how institutions might be able to work more effectively.

Women are advised and bombarded with messages from the media that it really is

possible to 'have it all,' now that feminism has opened those doors for us, a family and

the career of our dreams are within reach. We just have to want it badly enough. Women,

such as Sheryl Sandberg, tell us that to be successful, we must 'lean-in' to our careers; we

should learn to negotiate; stop holding ourselves back by internalizing negative

messages; focus not only on external barriers to our success, but also the internal barriers.

We are informed by the media that our children's success in school and life comes from

parents who are involved with their children and sit down to eat dinner with them every

night. We are taught that parents who help their children with their homework every

night are more successful. The media instructs us that we should know all our children's

friends and friend's parents, because children require constant monitoring. We have

social media sites such as Facebook and Pinterest that subject us to constant advice on

how to be a good mother and how to be more involved in our children's lives by giving

us ideas for weekend crafts and family game nights, and for packing healthy lunches with

sandwiches and fruits and veggies all cut into cute adorable shapes. Many of us are left

feeling as though all of these other mothers (sometimes referred to as 'The Pinterest

Moms' by my participants) have it all together and that we are woefully lacking what it takes to be a good mom.

Being employed outside the home is no excuse to be anything else than the ideal, dedicated, nurturing, and selfless mother that society expects us to be. There seems to be a pushback in society that informs mothers that decided to (or in many cases must) work outside the home that working is inherently a selfish act for mothers, unlike for fathers, who work *for the benefit* of the family, women working is seen as *detrimental* to the family, therefore, women who work outside the home must prove that they can be both a good mother and a good employee. When this is applied to mothers in graduate school, the idea that working outside the home is selfish and detrimental to the family is compounded by the fact that many see graduate school and higher education as a privilege, a hobby, and an unnecessary choice that causes sacrifice and suffering to the children. The lack of living wages for graduate student mothers coupled with sometimes crippling student loans further serves to label them as selfish and uncaring mothers. The harmful internalizations of implicit and explicit criticisms over not meeting cultural expectations of ideal motherhood results in the alienation and isolation of graduate student mothers, constant feelings of guilt, and contributes to attrition rates for graduate student mothers being higher than almost any other group of students (Gardner 2008; Lynch 2008). "If academic mothers cannot assimilate and internalize our motherhood into our intellectual selves, neither motherhood nor our scholarship is likely to gain its deserved social value. For as long as we leave it outside our intellectual selves we tacitly

devalue its social and intellectual significance" (Pillay 2009:510). As Dorothy E. Smith (2005) reflected about her return to finish her undergraduate degree at the age of 26:

> *I thought I had entered a realm of mind in which I was no longer limited by my sex-fool that I was. It is hard to describe how deep the alienation of intellect and imagination had gone in me. I became aware of it only in what was at first the work of finding out how to resituate myself as an intellectual subject in my alienated being as a woman, at home with her children. I discovered that I did not cease to be present and active in the everyday world when I went to work.* (P. 21)

It is clear through the words of my participants that Smith's critique of sociology is still relevant today, despite the original essay being published forty years ago, in 1974. While Smith focused on a radical critique of sociology, extending this critique to the university as a whole seems entirely relevant today as university life is still dominated by men and reflective of patriarchal ideals and values that situate the single white male as the "normal" graduate student while students who differ from this ideal are "othered," stigmatized, excluded, and treated as though they are less competent and committed to being successful in graduate school.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The intent of this study was to explore the lived experiences of graduate student mothers and to gain a better understanding of what their unique needs are in order to be successful in graduate school. There were six main research questions guiding this study. The first research question explores indirectly in what ways dominant cultural beliefs concerning motherhood and 'intensive mothering' as well as their status as paid workers outside of the home affect the lived experiences of graduate student mothers. The second research question explores indirectly the strategies graduate student mothers employ to negotiate their dual roles as mothers and graduate students. The third research question asks graduate student mothers how graduate schools, departments, and universities could better support their needs. The fourth research question asks how graduate student mothers balance motherhood and graduate school. The fifth research question explores the support networks of graduate student mothers and how these networks help them to be successful or by contrast how the lack of a support system may impact success. The sixth research question explores how the experiences of graduate student mothers are shaped by university and department policies.

DESIGN

I used semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews to acquire data from graduate student mothers. In-depth interviews are helpful for obtaining a participant's perceived version of their social world and to persuade interviewees to contemplate their experiences or principles (Reinharz 1992; Sprague 2004). I developed an interview guide using previous literature exploring the lived experiences of graduate student mothers as well as adding my own research questions to the interview guide (See Appendix). Once I developed a test-set of questions, I mock-interviewed a friend, also a graduate student mother, to ensure that all of the questions were neutral and non-judgmental (Charmaz 2010) and that there were no overlapping or unnecessary questions. This pre-test of the interview questions resulted in the removal of some questions and the rewording of some other questions and was very helpful to hone my research questions to ensure that my questions were not "closed-ended" or "multiple questions as a single prompt" and to help assess the quality of my questions (Saldana 2011:36).

In every interview, answers were sought to all the questions in the interview guide, although, it should be noted that in some interviews, extra questions were asked based on the give and take of conversational or interactive qualitative interviewing. Miller and Crabtree (2004) argue that the "...depth interview is a constructed dialogue focused on a creative search for mutual personal understanding of a research topic" (P. 196) with an emphasis on the "personal and intimate" (P. 188). At the heart of intensive or in-depth qualitative interviewing techniques is the belief that an interview is merely a directed

36

conversation that allows for a thorough investigation of the participant's interpretation of their experience (Charmaz 2010). While a normal conversation typically follows certain social rules and norms, an intensive or in-depth interview follows slightly different etiquette than a normal everyday conversation (Charmaz 2010). While it might be considered poor manners to pry and ask for more details in an ordinary conversation, as an interviewer, your responsibility lies in helping your participants explore and articulate their intentions and meanings by asking clarifying questions and "going beneath the surface of the described experience" (Charmaz 2010:26). Saldana (2011) sees the researcher as non-judgmental, sympathetic and empathetic, and supplying a forum for the voices of participants to be heard. Ellis (2004) writes that interactive or conversational interviewing is a more self-conscious approach to collaboration with research participants and is an exceptionally valuable tactic when the subject matter is something that all participants have had personal experience with. Personal and/or emotional topics such as mine require a building of trust and reciprocity and the give and take of interactive interviewing is perfect for building trust and allowing the stories of the researcher and participants to play off one another and to be stimulated by each other (Ellis 2004). Interactive interviews likely work the best when both parties already know each other well and can serve less like a formal interview and more like a conversation with friends and the sharing of the researcher's story can help lessen the power differentials and hierarchy in the interview process (Ellis 2004). Ellis (2004), drawing from her own previous collaborative work with Kiesinger and Tillman-Healy (1972), notes that:

37

[O]ne person's disclosures and self-probing invite another's disclosures and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and to probe deeper into another's feelings and thoughts; where listening to and asking questions about another's plight lead to greater understanding of one's own; and where the examination and comparison of experience offer new insight into both lives. (P. 66)

The flexibility of qualitative research allowed me to pursue leads or hunches that participants mentioned that seemed as though they might be important (Charmaz 2010). Using a semi-structured interview meant that my open-ended questions could be rearranged to go in the most logical flow of conversation rather than abruptly changing the subject to move on to the next question. That same flexibility also allowed for prompts such as "Could you please say more about that?" or "I noticed that you mentioned X, can you tell me a little bit more about that?" and allowed me to follow emergent leads in order to add new directions to the research design that were previously not explored (Charmaz 2010). On occasion, a participant brought up a point that I felt it important to explore in order to have a more clear understanding of the full context of my participants' comments and occasionally to add to the list of questions I explored with subsequent participants. As Charmaz (2010) notes, "…your research participants may give you materials you had not anticipated collecting but help to further your ideas (P. 15). One such example is the issue of health that came up in my third interview. All subsequent participants were asked about the impacts of graduate school on their health because it seemed as though it may be an important lead. I expected that through in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews, rich contextual data and common themes would

38

emerge through interviews with graduate student mothers. Kathy Charmaz (2010) writes, "Rich data get beneath the surface of social and subjective life" (P. 13) and "Rich data are detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives" (P. 14).

Qualitative research methods seemed to best fit my research goals, as well as my own theoretical, methodological, and epistemological standpoints. Rather than the positivist-focus on the detached, neutral, objective, and unbiased researcher, my own beliefs about scientific neutrality, values, feminism and reflexivity led me to take a critical feminist standpoint method coupled with a social constructionist approach as well as an advocacy or action-based approach that is focused on making changes for marginalized groups. Qualitative researchers recognize that we all have been influenced and formed by our own experiences and upbringings, as well as the social institutions operating in our lives. There is no assumption that we are "scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming scientific neutrality and authority" (Charmaz 2010:14). As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state:

> *The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting. The political bricoleur knows that science is power, for all research findings have political implications. There is no value-free science.* (P. 5)

A social constructionist approach values the analysis of the connections between social domination and the organization and legitimacy of knowledge; broaches questions for scholars about our own roles in institutions that decide what knowledge is valuable

and worth production and distribution, as well as questioning our own embeddedness in academic culture; and deconstructs ideas, practices, methods, and theories that can expose multifaceted and conflicting meanings rooted in cultural values (Sprague 2010). Constructivists assume that there multiple realities and that the researcher and participant co-create knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

Levin and Greenwood (2011) argue that action researchers have a duty to engage in socially meaningful and responsible research and call for a civic social science to be at the center of a contemporary university and to radically transform relationships between the university and society, state, and community. I contend that the university and action researchers do have a responsibility to use their knowledge to create positive social change for the marginalized and oppressed, however, I suggest that the university would do well to turn a critical eye at itself and its own systems of power and oppression. Women and mothers in the academy have a lot to offer in terms of researching marginalized populations and helping enact social change, but in order to help mothers in the academy succeed, some serious changes must be made and more inclusive methods of support need to be drafted in order to help them thrive. As Levin and Greenwood (2011) note, "Since the larger organizational structures and processes of universities, campus administrative structures, national and international professional societies, and national and international ranking systems currently are inimical to the development of socially meaningful theories/practices in social sciences, then those structures have to be analyzed and changed as well" (P. 27). Sociologists and social scientists claim to be experts in

society and culture and yet, they choose to estrange themselves from "local organizational life" and therefore have a lack of collective and individual self-understanding because they have positioned themselves as removed and objective observers rather than as "participants in their institutions and society" (Levin and Greenwood 2011:32).

It is also important to discuss power and status differentials that may come into play during the research process (Charmaz 2010). As Charmaz (2010) argues, interviewers need to be paying particular attention to how their participants are perceiving them, as well as how the past and present identities may shape the interaction. When the participant and interviewer are both women during the research process, differences in race, class, ethnicity, and age may have some bearing on how the interview progresses (Charmaz 2011). All of my participants were women and the majority of participants were white like me. There were some age differences present, however, I felt as though age was not as important as educational attainment differences. While most researchers have to negotiate their power differential in terms of being the most highly educated person in the dyad, because I was interviewing other graduate students, many of my participants already held Masters degrees and one was even post-dissertation defense and set to graduate the month after our interview. I often felt as though I was actually the party that was weaker and less powerful, despite being the researcher and in a supposed place of "authority." This became particularly salient for me during an interview where the participant questioned my theoretical standpoint, my coding techniques, and even my

choice for research participants, admonishing me that I should have thought about how busy my potential participants were already as graduate student mothers and I should realize that I was likely not going to get much participation because graduate student mothers were too busy to take time for my interviews. She then informed me that several women in her program had expressed interest in my study but ultimately decided that they just really didn't have time to participate. Hockey (1993) discusses similar difficulties faced by other researchers who have interviewed or done research upon peers, noting that many researchers have had their professional competence questioned by peers, including being questioned about sampling procedures, questions about competence as an interviewer. In academic institutions, the pursuit of individual superiority makes an egalitarian approach to interviewing difficult, even among those that are peers, due to competition inherent in such spaces and status differences (Hockey 1993).

Another issue that came up a few times that was directly related to interviewing peers and fellow social scientists was the tendency for the respondents to filter their experiences through their own academic lenses, thus, I was occasionally presented with the interpretations and conclusions of my participants rather than raw data (Hockey 1993). My participants also occasionally answered my questions by noting that they weren't sure they could answer the question objectively because they were already aware of existing research. This happened in particular when I asked participants if they felt as though colleagues and professors perceived them as less competent and less committed to

42

graduate school than their non-mother peers. Several participants were already familiar

research by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) in which mothers were considered less

competent and less committed to their careers than non-mothers. Another way of viewing

their awareness of research, rather than as bias, is point out that "truth" is subjective

anyway. There is no one truth and being aware of existing research may simply serve to

validate their experiences.

        Dorothy Smith's argument for the standpoint of women in sociology and a

sociology for people that values the standpoints of all women was employed to ensure the

voices of graduate student mothers were heard. Standpoint epistemology, for Smith, is a

place to begin making translucent the social structures and processes dependent upon the

resources within reach to those of a particular social location (Sprague 2005). Because of

the particular social location or standpoint of graduate student mothers in sociology or

women's studies, my participants should exemplify Smith's (1987) claim that the

demands of both work and family require women to frequently traverse the boundaries

between being actors that maintain the social world and those that study the social world

and allow us the opportunity to observe the disparities between official explanations of

the social world of graduate school and the everyday/everynight lived experiences of

graduate student mothers. Smith encourages us to begin our discourse by examining how

actors perceive their everyday/everynight lives and how those lives are influenced,

shaped, hindered, and made unreasonable by the operation of ruling relations that are not

always immediately discernible. Smith argues that sociology is alienated from the social

lives of women due to the bifurcation of experience due to the sexual division of labor; those who develop knowledge about the social world are disconnected from the actual practices that nourish their everyday/everynight life and the invisibility of women's work in sustaining the institutions of knowledge that create sociology (Sprague 2005).

PROCEDURES

I obtained permission to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board at Texas Woman's University. After obtaining permission of the Institutional Review Board to conduct the study, I began recruiting participants through word of mouth, emailing out recruitment flyers to department heads and secretaries asking for their help in notifying graduate students who might be interested in participating. Social media networking sites such as Facebook were immensely helpful in getting the word out about this research and I approached multiple sociology and women's studies departments in this manner. Availability and snowball sampling were utilized by asking participants to pass along information to any friends or colleagues that are also graduate student mothers who may be interested in participating in the study. Each potential participant contacted me through email (an account set up specifically for this study) to set up an interview.

Basic demographic questions were asked to ascertain the participant's age, income, marital status, living situation, occupation, and ages of children. Follow-up questions were used to prompt participants to discuss their experiences in graduate school as mothers. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were asked about their work-loads, varying roles they occupy, help they receive in

44

negotiating their multiple roles, and how their experience has been within academia regarding their children or being a mother. Lastly, participants were asked if and/or how they think that their institution or department has supported them in their negotiation of their multiple roles; and if there is anything they would like to see their institution or department do differently to better support them and if there are any policies that impact their success as graduate students.

Three of the twelve interviews were conducted on the telephone and the remaining nine interviews conducted in person. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a relaxed, non-intimidating manner and took place in various locations such as the participants homes, participants offices, and local restaurants or coffee shops and each at the respondent's convenience.

If a telephone interview was requested for participant convenience, a consent form was sent to the participant through email and received back before the interview began. If an in-person interview was requested, before the interview began, each participant was asked to read and then sign a consent form in which confidentiality and the purpose of the study were explained. The participant was then asked if they had any questions. Participants were asked if they agreed to have their interview audio recorded so that the researcher could transcribe and further review the interview at a later date, with IRB approval. Participants were informed that they could stop or reschedule the interview at any time during the interview process. Participants were also instructed that they could ask questions at any point during the interview process. Each participant permitted me to

audio record the interview. Interviews were expected to take between one and three hours, depending on the degree of openness with which the participant speaks with the researcher. Actual interviews ranged anywhere from thirty-five minutes to around four hours but most interviews lasted roughly 2 hours, for a total of 947 minutes of audio recording. After the completion of each interview, each participant was asked if they had anything else to add that they felt as though I had neglected, as well as given the opportunity to ask more questions. Interviews took place during December 2013, January, and February of 2014.

PARTICIPANTS

The respondents ranged in age from 25 to 56 years old with a mean age of 39.8 years old. The children of participants ranged in age from 1 year to 18 years, with the mean age of the children being 10.1. Total number of children between the twelve respondents equaled 20. Six participants were mother to one child, four participants had two children and two participants had three children. Of the twelve participants, seven worked outside their academic departments and seven worked within their academic departments. Six participants are currently parenting without a partner or are unmarried and six participants are currently married. No exclusions were made on the basis of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality or sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or any other means of exclusion. It was my hope that I would have participants in a wide range of ethnic and racial backgrounds, however, ten out of twelve participants were white with only two participants were non-white. It should be noted that this is in line

with the student population in higher education according to the Council of Graduate

Schools (2007), which shows that about 72% of graduate students in 2006 were white,

13% African American, 1% Native American, 6% Asian American, 8% Latino.

Additionally, two participants were not born in the United States. In order to protect the

confidentiality of the participants, I do not feel comfortable giving more information

about their racial and ethnic backgrounds. My participants were enrolled in four different

universities across North Texas and there were eight PhD students in sociology, one PhD

student in women's studies, one Master's student in women's studies, and two PhD

students in other disciplines that were receiving a graduate certificate in women's studies.

In addition, two of the sociology PhD students had either a focus area or a minor in

women's studies. This means that of my respondents, roughly half were very familiar

with women's studies and half were trained in sociology only. As the researcher and

interviewer, I am an insider with this group as I am also a graduate student mother and I

share some of my experience in interviews as a means of establishing rapport with

participants. Please see the appendix addition on researcher reflexivity and personal

stance. I should also note that some of these women are women I know through

coursework and have established acquaintanceships and friendships with.

To protect confidentiality, I collected all data, organized and analyzed the data, and wrote

the results. Respondents were not identified with their data in the written report, even

when direct quotes were used. Original code names have been changed in order to protect

confidentiality and participants have now been coded as Participants 1-12 in an order

known only to myself. The key identifying the respondents was shredded as soon as the results were written. The audio-recordings were deleted as soon as transcripts were written and all consent forms and transcripts are de-identified and stored in a locked file cabinet, for which only I have a key, in my locked office at the university.

ANALYSIS

Qualitative research seeks to make the world visible and to transform the world through representations that attempt to understand or interpret phenomena by closely examining the meanings people bring to the routine and problematic moments in their lives (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). After obtaining data from the twelve respondents, I mined the data for emergent themes or connections between the interviews (Charmaz 2010) and findings were analyzed for the common themes, concerns, or threads of the participants. I coded the data initially for common themes among the interviews that reoccurred among participants and looked for patterns among the experiences of the graduate student mothers. Charmaz (2010) writes, "Coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data. Coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations" (P. 43). Several common themes quickly became evident such as "guilt" being a unifying factor among participants and childcare being a common concern. Once initial coding was complete, I began focused coding to integrate and clarify larger fragments of data to decipher "which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize [my] data incisively and completely" (Charmaz 2010:57). I performed

a third round of coding, axial coding, in order to provide major categories and subcategories and to better examine how those categories and subcategories are related and the initial categories and concepts that could be clustered together were identified (Charmaz 2010). During this stage of coding, some categories of coding were renamed or narrowed, such as some initial codings of "guilt" being renamed "struggle to be present" and the initial concept of "guilt" being narrowed and refined with its own subcategories. Additionally, some concepts were combined such as concerns about "eating habits" being added as a subcategory under "health" due to the effect that food and eating habits have on health. The categories initially named "workload" and "feeling overwhelmed" were also combined due to overlap between those categories; participants felt overwhelmed because of workload and so those concepts fit nicely together. A fourth and final round of coding was used and all previous codes and data were reexamined and cases and quotes that effectively illustrated each theme were marked for inclusion.

The coding process enabled me to identify the common themes and concerns present among graduate student mothers. It also allowed better conceptualization of theoretical perspectives and identification of areas of future research. Information was also uncovered about coping strategies that the participants use to rectify their role conflicts, overload, and threats to their identities as both mothers and graduate students. Several other possible theoretical perspectives have arisen that will be explored at a later date.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this qualitative study of twelve graduate student mothers explored issues related to their unique challenges in graduate schools, ways in which graduate departments, schools, and universities could better support these students to avoid the "brain drain" when a graduate student mother is forced out of the academy under the guise of "choosing" their family, as well as issues related to societal expectations of what it means to be a "good mother." Twelve graduate student mothers participated in in-depth interviews regarding their perceptions and experiences in graduate school. Multiple rounds of coding were utilized as a means to identify major and minor themes that emerged as important to the participants. In the next chapter, I discuss my findings.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

To provide a foundation and framework for the research questions, participants were asked background questions. They were asked their ages, children's ages, social class, and where they were in their graduate program, as well as what ages their children were when they began pursuing their graduate degree. Questions such as relationship status were not asked but rather came out during the course of the interview, as I did not want it to seem as though there was an assumption of the respondent having a significant other. To learn about their experiences and perceptions of their graduate education, participants were asked about their support systems, their perceived support from faculty members and their departments, if they perceived that they were evaluated differently from non-mothers in their departments, what policies either helped or hindered them in their pursuit of a graduate degree, what advice they would offer to graduate schools, departments, and universities about how to better support graduate student mothers, what their concerns were about juggling their roles as graduate students and mothers, how they balanced being a mother and a graduate student, how their health had been since returning to school, if and how they engaged in self-care, and when and how they got their academic work done. I also indirectly explored how cultural expectations or ideologies about motherhood shaped their experiences. This chapter will relay their

responses in the women's own voices and draw conclusions about their experiences. When half or more of the respondents' answers echoed one another, the responses were identified as a primary or major theme. If less than half of the respondents' answers were congruent, it was identified as a secondary or minor theme.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD

The first research question explores indirectly in what ways dominant cultural beliefs concerning motherhood and 'intensive mothering' as well as their status as paid workers outside of the home affect the lived experiences of graduate student mothers. Several themes emerged that reflect the ongoing struggle to meet both societal expectations of motherhood, as well as their own ideas about being good mothers and even wives/partners. Participants were acutely aware of gender role expectations and the ways in which they do not meet societal expectations as wives/partners or as mothers.

Ideologies About Motherhood

While participants were not asked directly about what they think makes a 'good' or 'bad' mother, these cultural expectations and ideologies about motherhood came out indirectly in other areas. There are other examples of this throughout other sections but it is clear that, taken all together, my participants have very clear perceptions of what the cultural expectations of motherhood are, as well as all the ways in which they don't see themselves measuring up to these cultural expectations. Some of these quotes also reflect the gender roles inherent in ideologies about motherhood and the double standard that exists for mothers and fathers.

P1: "I'm sure there are people who probably think I'm a really horrible person for even leaving him home the amount of times that I do, you know. When I tell people 'Oh, I'm going to check my phone because he's riding the bus,' I'm afraid people are like, 'You're letting your kid stay home at the apartment by himself. You're a horrible person.' But I think that's more like me and society than them."

P2: "It's entirely possible that grad school's kind of a distraction for me…I don't know, this sounds kind of silly but like, it's a reason for me not to be like a Pinterest perfect mom. Like, because I'm like…'Oh, I'm in grad school, I can't do that stuff. I don't know that I would be that mom even if I weren't in grad school, but I feel like it gives me a pretty good excuse to not be that mom. I'm spinning that as a positive thing, but sometimes I wonder if like, you know, 'am I just doing this to make myself look like I have stuff going on?' Otherwise, I would just look like a bad mom for not doing it. I'm pretty sure I would not be that mom either way. So, it makes me feel better that at least I'm doing something productive while not being that mom. In my mind, all the moms at her daycare who are like, only stay-at-home moms send their kids with like these amazing hot lunches and whatever. And I'm just like 'here's a peanut butter sandwich and pretzels."

P4: "Before I was working on my PhD, I did all those things…I dropped them off, I picked them up, I made their lunches, I was volunteering, reading in their classrooms, and I was going to all the field trips, but that's what moms do. You know, it's sort of like, that's what all the moms do, but then if a dad does it, he's the hero. So, it's totally gender inequality and you can never win. I'm not a good mom because I work so much but when I stayed home when my kids were babies, I was dependent. So, I was like a lazy whatever because my husband had to provide for me. I don't fit that stereotypical wife, like, I don't cook. My husband does all the cooking. I'm just not good at it and I don't enjoy it. Rules are different when you're the man and when you're the woman and if men break the rules, nobody cares…but if a woman does, especially if she's the mom, then everybody has something to say and you are like blacklisted. I think, 'how come it's okay for men to spend a lot of time working, almost admirable…poor man, he's working so hard to provide for his family, but yet, if a woman does that, she's not a good mom, she's not a good wife, she's not a good woman. She is resisting the gender role expectations, so, she's bad.'"

P4: When discussing Mother's Day, "I just noticed it this year where I don't think people perceive me as being a good mom so they can't say 'You're such a good mom' because they see me as a workaholic kind of mom, I think. I think my kids are well taken care of, their needs are met, but I do wonder if the stereotypical view of what a mom should be will cause problems for them because I wasn't that."

P5: "There's like this conflict within myself 'cause I'm having to have somebody else pick them up from school and I've always picked them up from school. I think it's important that I pick my kids up from school. I want to be active in my kid's life and I just can't." She discusses going 48 hours every week without seeing the kids because of commuting to school. "It was just…not okay…for a guy, it probably would be fine, but because I am a mom and we have these different expectations, not even the kids have them, I have them for myself. The expectations I have for myself, I set the bar high as a mom and so, because of that, grad school is harder. If I could not have those expectations for myself, grad school would be easy."

P6: "It's been interesting and frustrating how many people (friends, aquaintances, colleagues) are surprised that we have the kids in full-time childcare. This indicates both a lack of understanding about doctoral work (for non-academics) and some assumptions/judgment about childcare and mothering when it comes to colleagues. I try not to feel guilty/judged when people assume the kids are with me part or all of the time. There are times when, well, most of the time, I wish I had more time with my spouse and I wish we had more money so we could get babysitters and go on dates. And there are times that I wish I could get my student's grades back quicker or things like that. But usually it's not the parenting. I feel like I'm the same parent probably that I would be. I mean, I feel like [the baby] has missed some stuff but think that's actually more about just having 2 kids. To me, it's the same dilemma that any mom who does fulltime work, not the same, it's never the same but it's similar in the dynamics of fulltime work. But in other ways, it's not because there is constant pressure in deadlines and stress and anxiety and, you know, I'm staying up late, and in that sense, it's not."

P6: "I mean, it's both a blessing and a curse to be aware theoretically of how women in academia and women generally…the conflicts and the double standards with parenting when it comes to women. [My mentor] said 'Women who work actually often spend more quality time with their kids than women who do full time family work 'cause they're so

54

intentional about then time they get. Plus, it just doesn't make sense, if you have to work, you have to work…to expend energy feeling guilty doesn't help parenting."

P9: "I think sometimes I see women and its like they're perpetuating this myth. There's a myth that you can have it all. You can't. You can have all half-assed or quarter. But something has to go. There's just not enough hours in the day."

P10: "When the school sends you a note saying, 'We expect some parents to volunteer for the sale of this,' and you're thinking, 'No, they have to find another parent. It won't be me.' And just putting on a straight face when you meet these teachers and say, 'Yeah, yeah, I'm back to school,' and you hope that will, sort of, earn you some points, but, you know, bad parenting does show. And that goes down in my book as 'bad parenting,' it does. So, you look at your parenting skills and say, 'I have to find a balance.' and so you tell yourself, 'I'm not altogether a bad parent, I just have to recreate myself.'"

P10: "I always have to have my phone on, because being a mother is 24-hours. Even when I was sitting in class, I always had my phone on, on vibrate, and the professor knew [if he was sick] I had to leave. So, your phone is there not because you're looking at everything else that's going on in the world, but because you have to be mother by remote control. So, how to reduce the stress of that event is something I've had to learn, how to get the message off my mobile phone and not to stand up and say 'I'm leaving!' but to be able to tell the next person, 'During the break, please tell the professor, this is what happened.' and to slip out quietly."

P12: " I think partly because he's grown up in an academic home, it's mostly not being involved, I'm not. When he was in elementary school, moms volunteered. He went to a public school where most of the moms didn't work. And I wasn't the mom who came in a Xeroxed for the teachers. The choices I made were: if they needed a volunteer in the classroom to do something with the kids, versus PTA. I didn't get involved in any of those institutional programs. It's really hard for me, I'm a community organizer in the work that I do so…my time is limited, I'd rather do something in the classroom with my child."

Supermom

Several participants discussed those around them calling them super mom or

super woman or equating them to some sort of super hero for being able to have children

and go to school at the same time. Clearly this reflects my own experience as well, as

evidenced by the title I chose for this thesis. It is not uncommon for myself or other

participants to be told when feeling doubtful or overwhelmed to 'just go get your cape' or

to be told 'I just don't know how you do it, but you really are super woman.' Although

this was not specifically asked about during the interviews, it came up throughout and

several participants have contacted me since then to tell me about specific instances of

these statements being made to them. Some participants felt pride in their ability to

manage all their commitments, while one participant took issue with this analogy as she

felt it allowed others to put her in a separate box (above) others and to not work to make

the system better for everyone.

> P2: "I've also had the experience where people are like 'oh, you're really super mom' and almost like they feel bad about themselves then because of all that you're doing. And especially because everything happened for me at once…divorce, moving to a different town, having a child, and starting grad school all within a year. Everybody was like 'Oh, my gosh, I don't know how you're doing what you're doing.' And so I think some friends feel bad about themselves, which I hate. Like, that's never—like, I don't want to do that, you know. But you know, I want to be doing it so it's not like a huge sacrifice. Internally, I do not feel like super mom. I'm just surviving, like, I'm just trying to keep my head above water here."

> P3: "When I'll give a presentation, I very often get responses like 'Wow! That was a great presentation. Your presentation was better than mine and you're a single mom. How do you do that?' No sleep. That's how I do that."

56

P4: Describes getting recognition from her son and it being a very affirming experience. "He said, 'Mom, I don't know how you do it. You drive all the way [to campus] and then you walk across the street with all your books and you work and work for hours and then you drive all the way home and take care of us. I don't know how you do it.' and I was like 'Awww, you just made my whole life, just with that statement.'"

P6: "The colleagues that I say are part of this later cohort who have spouses that stay home and don't really, I mean, they want to think that they kind of get it, but they don't. So, they're the ones who will always say, 'I don't know how you do it,' right? I can tell when it's a genuine compliment and I'm not suspicious of that…but that's just like when someone does something good and somebody says, 'Oh, what a saint you are!' and that truly is just their way of not being good by someone's a saint to put them in a different category…it's kind of like, you can do that to mothers and exempt yourself out. 'I don't know how you do it.' You could, because you could do it too. Yeah, you would have to do your fair share of the family and housework, that's how you would do it and you would find a way to do it but you probably wouldn't have a kid during coursework. That's your privilege, but there are other people that…there are also times when I appreciate when people say, 'yeah, that's a lot.' There's either an extraordinary support system, or extraordinary intelligence, or extraordinary work ethic, or extraordinary financial situation. You know, the women that can do it and survive have something extraordinary."

P8: "I did get my proposal defended while I was pregnant, I was out of breath the whole time I was defending. And I got all of my data collected before I had the baby. And I was working full-time…so, it was a lot…it was a lot. It was…looking back on it…I can't understand how I made it through that…getting married, buying a house, moving, and pregnant and having a baby…people thought I was superwoman when I finished. I hear that all the time, like, 'what are you made of? Are you superwoman?' and 'I just don't understand where your strength came from.' But the flip side of that is it has encouraged some other people that if you can do it and you've got all this going on, surely I can do it too."

P10: "I remember when I was taking my qualifying. It starts at 8:00am and ends at 5:00 and I had to be home when he was coming home. So, I had one of my friends who doesn't have any kids, sort of pick him up from school, sit with him until I come home, get him his dinner, and they were glad to. And they're glad for the experience. 'How do you even do this?'

and it makes you feel good, because you're not thinking about it, but people are telling you, 'Gosh, and you hand in your work all the time, on time,' and you're thinking, 'With a few hazards along the way!' Like, someone pressing a button on a page you just type and it's all gone. And so, you smile, because you're trying to give off this impression that you have it together because even if you told them the nitty-gritty, they would never understand it. So, the motherhood badge has not been one that will give you mileage if you hid it. I think, by people knowing that you're a mother, they have been fascinated by the fact that you are a mother and you're trying to do what they're doing. They're having problems but you're hardly showing that you're having problems they're having."

Doing Differently

One of the first questions the participants were asked is if there were things they had to begin doing differently since beginning graduate school. Later, they were also asked about things they've had to stop doing or that graduate school has made difficult. During the coding process, these questions garnered very similar answers so they have been combined into one theme. Many participants discussed their disappointment in no longer being able to make it to all their children's school activities, missing out on family activities, and quality time.

Participants discussed missing out on important family events and their children's school and afterschool activities, as shown in the following quotes:

> P6: "I've got a conference and a board meeting in January and I'm going to miss [child's] basketball games. I think in terms of direct time with the kids, there's not a huge difference there [between full-time work]. But when I think of that first year with [my first baby] and how much time I have to put into school and this program now, I definitely don't get to read as many parenting books or do things like picture albums or keepsakes. I think in my case it's linked to flat out not having time or energy given other demands."

58

P5: "Last semester, I missed orchestra concerts and choir concerts and all of that because I had class and didn't want to [skip class]."

P7: "My son had a thing in the Art Show and I couldn't go to the Art Show because I'd already missed 2 classes because of other things…so, I hate that. I hate missing their stuff. I want to be at everything, so I've had to decide that there's times where it's going to be a priority that I have got to go to class or there's times that I'm just gonna make it a priority that I'm gonna be at their thing and I have to be okay with that and I'm not. I try to be perfect at everything and I have to decide that something's gotta, I just gotta commit. Just pick something, do it, and don't feel guilty about it…not feeling guilty about the thing I'm missing, that's probably the biggest thing. And then traveling back and forth, I can't be there every time they get home and do their homework with them. I like to be the one who's taking care of everything 'cause nobody knows what they're doing if I don't tell them what they're doing. So, I have to trust people to take care of things."

P12: "A great example is last night, my son had a basketball game at school and it was teacher appreciation night and I couldn't be there. I thought about not going to class because, especially, I think, when you lose a child, those moments are really precious. And so, I struggle a lot with that. He's only gonna be around for three more years…that balance is really hard for me."

P4: "When my husband's cousin got married and I literally could not, I could not go that weekend. And I felt really bad 'cause like, they all, like, everybody in the family, 'Oh my God, she's not here.'"

Two participants discussed having to quit their jobs in order to be able to succeed in the program and also meet their expectations of themselves as mothers.

P5: "I quit my job and we moved here because last semester I was driving back and forth and I wasn't home on Mondays and Tuesdays. Honestly, as a mom, it was impossible [to commute 3 ½ hours] because I had to choose between my kids or doing my papers when I was supposed to…it was hard. So, I quit my job, and we moved."

P9: "I don't see her as much because normally she's at school all day and then by the time she gets home, its five o'clock and I've already left for class. So, I live an hour away, I've already left for class so I don't see her. And then she goes to bed and I get home from class and I don't see her.

59

So, it's 24 hours before I see her on days I have class. I had to leave my job to start the program."

Other participants discussed that they were missing out on quality time with their children:

P1: "As much as I don't like to admit it, I probably don't play with him as much as I used to."

P10: "We went to the movies more, we went outdoors and did more outdoor activity. He played the piano and tennis and went swimming and we did a lot of visiting. A lot of that had to change or has to change when you're in higher-ed because you can't spend too much time visiting and talking, because that's your hours gone. You look at your day more in terms of hours and output. By the time you're getting in bed, you're asking yourself 'What did I do today?' and if all you did was go to a tennis game in the morning and then go visit his friends in the afternoon, you begin to beat up on yourself. So, all of those things, we've had to scale back or just put them away all together."

Struggle to be Present

While participants were not asked directly about this, five participants discussed their ongoing struggle to be present and engaged with what they were doing right then and there. Often, feelings of guilt and worry overwhelmed them to the point that they had trouble concentrating on enjoying time with their children.

P1: "I think you have to figure out what's most important at that time and you have to sort of be willing to do that and this is super hard for me, but kind of actually be present and not feeling guilty when you're doing it. So, I'll take a day off to hang out with my boyfriend, or son, or both, but the whole time I'm thinking that I should be reading and tell them that I should be reading which makes them feel like crap."

P2: "I'm still at home with her a lot because I do distance classes primarily. And so, being with her, it's really hard to be fully present because I'm constantly thinking about things I need to be doing right now.

60

So, I think that's been the biggest shift for me is figuring out how to be present in where I am right now and like juggling those multiple roles. You know, like having to like have so much energy for grad school, like mental energy, and then trying to shift between that and like having energy for her during the day and not being frustrated because, for me, with school, it's always on the back of my mind."

P3: "My kids need to know that they're loved. I think of myself as a person who puts my kids first but then I stop and examine my life and every single day they're like 'Mommy, can we play Battleship or Othello?' or 'Can you come jump on the trampoline with us?' and I realize that I really am not putting my kids first. I'm always like no, no, no, I've got this homework I have to do. You know what, I'm just not going to get my homework done sometimes because it's meaningless to say that I'm a person that puts my kids first if it's not actually happening every single day because life is made up of every day. And if I do my regression homework instead of guessing how many miles it is to the sun, that's a choice I'm making in this moment and I can bullshit myself and tell myself that I'm a person who puts my kids first. But if I don't put them first in this moment, it's useless. And my career is going to suffer; I will not go to a tier-one university. I will not do the things I wanted to do with my career. I will not because there are only so many hours in a day. I have to choose. Am I going to be the person who spends time with their kids or am I going to be a person who has a great career? And that means that last night I put my homework down and guessed the distance to the sun because I don't know what else to do because I don't have multiple lifetimes. So, it sucks."

P9: "My nose is always in a book. I really have to be conscientious and aware, you know, and make myself put down a book and engage with [her]. I find that I'm more task-oriented with both of them [daughter and husband]. I just don't enjoy them as much. I don't just sit down and enjoy them. I'll say to my daughter, 'have you cleaned your room? Okay, you need to do this, this, this, its like a big management thing. I don't really enjoy that as much because it's like we're not enjoying each other, its just one big giant job just to keep things moving and running. I feel like there's always something looming school-wise. There's always something looming depending on how pressing it is. And there are days when I feel like I do a good job at being present, and there are days when I just feel like I did a lousy job."

P10: "The circus was lovely but as I sat there, I was thinking of what I was not doing. Sometimes you have to give up what you think you ought to be doing and just not even make-up, do their stuff, really put it on a pedestal, so to speak, and never knock it off…you've made a choice and people shouldn't have to do back-flips for you, least of all your children."

What Would You Like to do More of?

Participants were asked what they would like to be able to do more of. Eight participants discussed the need for quality time with their children and wishing they could be more spontaneous about leisurely activities.

P2: "…really, the structure of our lives has stayed pretty much the same which has been really nice. I think it is just a matter of spending time [together] and my frame of mind about the time we spend together."

P4: "I would like more time with them. I want to communicate to them that they are valuable and they are important to me and that I cherish the time what we have together and that it's quality time and that we do things centered around their interests. I think once I'm done, I kind of want to be the fun house where I have the good food and all the kids want to hang out at my house. I also want to travel more with my kids."

P5: "We have a Netflix addiction and we binge watch and I can't do that. They watch TV without me and I go hide in the bedroom and do my reading for class. So, it's more about quality time with them, I can't…I just don't have time."

P7: "I'd like to be able to just wake up in the morning and just be able to do whatever we want to do. [We make plans to go to the movies] and then we plan it all week and then we get to the weekend and I'm like, 'I just don't have time to go dedicate 2 hours to go to the movies.' I'd like to do more spontaneous stuff with them and I don't like missing their stuff so I'd like to be able to be at everything without having to miss something else to go do that. I'd like to read more…and I'd like to travel. Just having the time to do something fun, it's more like I don't have the time so there's not as much just spontaneous…just, okay, let's go to the park…I have to think about it…do I have time to go to the park or do I need to read first and then we can?"

62

P8: "Since I submitted my dissertation, all I want to do is sit around and hold my baby. I just want to hold him. I want to cuddle with him because sometimes I feel like I missed out on his first year because I was so busy. And, I mean, busy with school, busy with work, and busy trying to learn how to be a mom…that's a business by itself. Ever since I submitted my dissertation, I get to hold him more and that's kind of where I am right now; I just want to cuddle him. I want to enjoy him and I felt like I didn't because I was gone too much."

P9: "I would just enjoy talking to her more, just talking without the details of life interfering…talking without talking about logistics, I guess."

P10: "Finding time to have a conversation. You have to create time for consciously draw in the other world, rather than making him a part of your day because that is not meaningful. I found I would have to go to the library with him at the same time; tell him that was a way we could spend time together without me telling him I would spend time with him in the evening because that almost always looks like an addendum to your day. He is happy to come and have a computer to himself without me telling him I need to use it. So, he'd have his own and I'd have my own. So, working together, I've found has been what we've had to do."

Relationship Strain

Five participants brought up relationship strain with both their husbands/partners, as well as their children. The demands of graduate school left many participants feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, guilty, and like no one understood them.

P1: "My boyfriend is still there, so he' s 3 ½ hours away. So, I spend time with him and it's tough because I always have reading to do. I always have homework to do…I always have this to do…but I try."

P4: "My husband, he'll call like every hour or he'll text [when I'm working on school work]…I think that my husband and really pretty much everybody I know outside of here doesn't really understand how much time it takes to do academic work. I just tell my husband, 'If you want me to finish then you have to understand that I have to work because otherwise I will be here another semester for sure, or another year. I would be so tired that I wouldn't get up to go to church, and I'd be like, 'Can you just let me sleep?' and he [husband] would get really angry at me. And

then, there were a few times where he was out of town and I just wouldn't go to church and he'd get really angry. He'd be mad. But…I'm just so tired, like, you don't get it…it's not even the kind of tired that can go away when you sleep. It's sort of like I'm burnt out and I totally understand that I am but there's nothing I can do about it. It's generated a lot of resentment. My husband toward me, and then, maybe my kids a little bit…There's mutual resentment between us and it has everything to do with the PhD program and how much work it is or how much time it takes. It might reduce resentment if [I] felt that my husband was a true cheerleader rather than someone who resented my work. I know of one graduate student (not a mom) whose husband proof reads her papers and offers insights from the articles she reads. He will even read her textbooks just so that he has something to contribute in conversations about her work. I admit I would relish a relationship like that. It is not something everyone can do though, and that's okay. For my part, I could try to be empathetic to how it is not always easy to be the parent that is home with the kids the majority of the time. I, after all, had been in that role for many years, and at times, it is not easy. Going to graduate school can put a strain on a marriage, and that is a reality that both partners, ideally, should know full-well, from the get-go."

P5: "I want to be a really good mom. I want to be a really good student. Ultimately, my husband is picking up my slack. I need to be a really good wife too and when I'm overwhelmed…I, like, 'don't touch me, don't look at me, don't…just let me sit in this chair and do what I'm supposed to do.' It affects your sex life, it affects your dietary, you know, we eat crap."

P6: "My husband got fairly neglected for…definitely the first 2 years. I mean, I banked on us having a solid marriage, and we did, so we were fine, but you know, that's not really a great situation. And it's why divorce rate in our program is higher than the drop-out rate. And it probably is for most doctoral programs, just like so much of academia and the broader work force, it's not set up to be conducive to any sort of balanced living."

P10: "By Thursday, you've lost the tone; you don't know whether you're okay. Is this my friend, or my child, or what is going on? Learning not to take your work pressure out on the other individual, your child, is something you learn; you have to learn to do, because if you had a partner with you, you'll talk shop, air, you'll vent…so, maybe this is representing people who are single…and then when you come to the child, you're able to give the child time but in this case-where that individual [a partner] is not there with you, basically, you'll vent in that direction [towards the

child] and they're wondering, 'What? Freud? Marx? What?' I've been there. 'Don't bring your Freudian attitude in here!'"

Feeling Overwhelmed by the Workload

Expectations for workloads are intense in graduate school and while this was not asked about directly, several participants brought up the heavy workloads they are expected to carry and how these workloads affect them disproportionately in comparison to non-mothers. Many participants expressed feeling overwhelmed with workloads and expectations that they could never quite seem to meet all of.

> P1: "There's always something that's not getting done. There's always a feeling that you're behind. I think it's normal for grad school in general, but it's probably worse if you're a parent because you also feel like you're slacking at that as well as slacking on your schoolwork. I think you have to go back and forth on both and then just be willing to say, 'Well, that didn't get done. Oh well.' They are very clear that they expect us to be working 80-90 hours a week and that's how it is. I don't think that I'm working 80-90 hours a week…perhaps if I read everything that was assigned, I would be, but there's a lot of skimming going on, which, I learned very quickly the first semester, is the only way to live. I definitely think I'm more busy and working more than when I had a full-time, 40-hour a week job. But it's hard to calculate when you're doing 30 minutes here and then you go cook dinner and you do 30 minutes here and then you go do this. And you're not on campus the whole time, you're doing it at home. When they say 80-90, it's almost like when they assign the readings, they know we're not going to read it all, or we're not going to read it all carefully. But it's like this big mysterious front of it…it has to be super hard. Almost like maybe they want us to drop out…because, there's no jobs anyway, so what's the point?"

> P4: "I just work all the time. I guess that's kind of how I define myself right now is I feel like I work all the time; like, I feel like I don't have a life outside of working except to be a mom…and maybe a wife…"

> P5: "It's a sacrifice for all of us and we're okay. But it just, like, this morning, I just want to sit on the floor and cry (begins to tear up), like, I

65

feel like I've reached that overwhelmed place. It's only the third day of school and I just want to sit on the floor and cry. If you caught me later on in the semester, it'd be like, I'm just overwhelmed and I have headaches and I'm tired, but the beginning of the semester is always more overwhelming…It's just overwhelming…it'll be okay. I'm not gonna rock in the corner. It's very overwhelming to be a wife, a mom, and a grad student, and work a job."

P6: "I was prepared for coursework to be demanding and I'm still not prepared for just how demanding it was and you know, having to go back to patterns of not sleeping a lot and just stress, and I just wasn't prepared. I know from the start that doctoral work was gonna be fulltime work. PhD has been the first time that I've been in a school where I've had any sort of limits on my time or energy. When I was doing my Masters, I was single and didn't have kids. In undergrad, I was valedictorian of my class. I was just able to pull all-nighters and do. So, graduate school was definitely a really humbling experience and ego check. No one [in my area] had kids and they were all just these frigging rock stars who could work 80 hours a week and did. You know, I'd pull like one all-nighter every semester. But I can't do any more than that. I'm older and I have kids and I have to space out energy, and you know, especially once I got pregnant. I had to actually take care of my body and I couldn't just abuse myself, you know, the way colleagues could. That's the nature of academic work, it's not like my husband's work where you do it and you leave. It follows you."

P7: "I'm just unwilling to give up everything. There's people that work like that's all their doing…[other student] was just talking about how she doesn't have any other responsibilities really so she's able to just be reading and writing and in class, and that's it. Kids are grown, no husband to take care of, nothing else, no job to go to…but…I have all these other things so…and I'm not willing to sacrifice all of that…I just can't…I can't be miserable. I like school. I want to keep liking school."

P8: I think the last three years of my life were the hardest I've ever had. And the thing of it is, when I got married, I had finished all my coursework and all I had left was to take my major and minor exams and start working on my dissertation. It was bad. It was a lot, so, if I had to do this all over again, I wouldn't do it; not like this. I tell people all the time, get your education first, and then have a family. There were times when I actually had to get on anxiety medication because I had so much going on. In fact, I had an anxiety attack one time…I was so overwhelmed. When I felt myself becoming overwhelmed, I'd step back from something. I began

to communicate with my advisor and say, 'I need to push this back because everything is getting a little overwhelmed right now.' Because, at the end of the day, my family was priority, or I would just take a day off work and just not communicate with the students for a while."

P9: "At the end lies either maybe a job in the academy or outside. Outside looks like full time. Inside looks like full time plus. How will that be better for me? How will that be better for my family? Sounds like less time than ever with my family. So, I've been giving serious thought to what that might look like for me because I don't think it looks like working 60 hours a week trying to make tenure. I'm bombarded by constant communication. Email…and even though I take face-to-face classes, there's some sort of expectation that I'm always available. I'm like, 'I just had class with you. I don't want to see you or hear from you until the following week. I'm done with you.' How is that even helpful for anybody? I don't feel necessarily they are micromanaging me, I feel like they're micromanaging themselves 'cause they can't manage their time allotment. Doesn't anyone see the value of disconnecting, of unplugging, of turning off? It drives anxiety…I started the program because I had the idea that I wanted to teach and now I have decided that I probably don't and it is for precisely that reason; the expectation that I'm always on, always available to you."

Guilt

Guilt was a major theme among participants involving their children. Nearly all participants discussed feeling guilty at some point during their interview and the concept of mommy-guilt can be found throughout this results section. There did seem to be some common threads expressed over what triggered feelings of guilt. Most of this guilt stems from our cultural expectations of motherhood and at the root of the guilt the participants experience is feeling as though they don't meet our cultural ideology of motherhood in the United States. The guilt that the participants are feeling is a direct symptom of feeling as though they are not living up to the expectations of what it means to be a 'good mom.' Reasons for feeling guilty abound throughout and there are certainly more examples of

my participants experiencing guilt than what I gathered for this section, however, some common themes of guilt revolved around being selfish, guilt that they didn't spend enough time with their children, guilt about having to be away from their children for class and in a similar vein, guilt about having to rely on childcare for their children. Three participants expressed guilt over being selfish. One participant felt as though her decision to move away for graduate school, thereby uprooting her child from the rest of his family and knowing that they will likely move again was selfish. One participant expressed guilt if she tried to take any time to do something for herself instead of studying while the kids were at school. And one participant feels guilty for having to use the laptop for school when her kids want to use it.

> P1: "I feel, guilty, in some ways, that he doesn't have a more normal, stable kind of childhood. We moved here [and] when I get done with my PhD, we're probably going to move again. It [moving away from home for grad school] was basically the most selfish decision I've ever made in my life."

> P5: "I'd feel guilty [about getting a manicure] taking time for myself because I know I need to be studying and so that when the kids are home, I can be with the kids. I just don't have time to do for me sometimes because I have to do for them and it's emotionally draining."

> P11: Gosh, yeah, there's guilt involved with telling your kid, 'Hey, I can't do that. I've got to write this paper. Hey, guys, I need the laptop; I gotta hog the laptop again.'"

Seven participants expressed guilt over not spending enough time with their children, making it a major theme, and several expressed that they struggle to be present when they are with their children because they are worried about all the work for school that they need to be doing. In essence, participants felt guilty for not spending time with

68

their children, but when they did spend time with their children, they felt guilty that they

were taking time off that they felt they should have been spending working on school.

These expressions of guilt show both the unrealistic cultural expectations of motherhood,

as well as the unrealistic expectations of graduate students in terms of workloads and

work-family balance.

> P1: "Because I'm thinking, 'How much time is it going to take and how long are we going to be there? I still need to do this, I still need to do that, still need to do laundry, all these things. I have a ton of reading to do that I didn't do earlier when I should have. And so, things definitely get pushed, but I try to make a point, like, we went to the zoo a while back when we had a random Monday off. So, I try very hard to do these things, but I'm not real good with daily, like, sitting down and playing with him for like an hour a day. It's more like 'Ok, we're going to have a day to spend together, and we're going to do it all on this one day because for the next week, I'm not going to talk to you.'"

> P3: "Last semester I was always like, 'oh, no, I'm too busy, I'm too busy, I'm too busy. Sorry, I'm doing homework. Sorry, I'm writing this essay…that was constant. I might as well have put a tape recorder on myself…and I didn't think of myself in that way. I wasn't being self-aware enough to realize that was what was happening, but it was. But I feel like I have to make a choice between spend[ing] time with my kids and then I'm behind the eight-ball in every other area of my life. Or I can stay caught up in everything else and then neglect my kids."

> P4: "I feel like I try to connect with my kids. I think as a wife…I've…I've…really haven't….I've not…I've failed…I think in a lot of ways."

> P7: "I felt really guilty at first, like I was doing…like, I wasn't giving enough to school if I was doing something with them and I wasn't giving enough to them if I was reading. But I just had to stop feeling so guilty…this all has to get done."

> P8: "I kept telling myself, I'm just trying to get this done. I'm just trying to get this done so I can have more time with him. But as he got older, mentally, it got harder for me."

P10: "The interesting thing is it makes you sad. Sometimes I have this guilt trip. I am sitting down on my 13 page paper and there is this guilt that I have done nothing all day with him and I have to finish this so that I can find…and it doesn't work that way sometimes; and the next day is just the next day with its' own problems. Some things have faded away and you work more towards integrating him into your day than you working your way into his day. Sometimes he would act up and just pull a face and I'd say, 'Why are you sad?' and he would say 'Well, that's because you never spend time with me. You never know what I'm doing. You never know what I'm up to.' And yeah, that's…it's terrible, but you have to put on a face and say, 'No, we're doing this;' almost explaining to him that the benefits of all this at the end will include him. And so, how do you make it look like it's not this big burden that you're carrying that you will drop off one day…but it's your way of life, because even when you get your PhD, you are expected to publish, you're expected to network, you're expected to produce certain output and he has to become part of that output."

P10: "You're guilty a lot of the time and it's painful. You get back home and your child is asleep and you never asked, 'How is your coursework?' But you feel guilty, you really do…so, you make up for that guilt, but it still hangs in there and you keep telling yourself, when I finally graduate, we will all be happy."

Five participants discussed feelings of guilt surrounding being away from their children in order to attend class and guilt about having to rely on childcare for their children. Missing out on time with their children in order to work on coursework or attend classes, especially missing out on dinner and homework was something that came up in various places in the interviews and can be observed elsewhere in this paper as well.

The guilt experienced by academic mothers is likely similar to that experienced by working mothers who have to rely on childcare and have to miss out on important events in their children's lives due to work, however, I propose that there are actually some important differences between graduate student mothers and working mothers. One

70

of the things that I have heard over and over from participants (this can be seen elsewhere in the data), friends in my life who are also graduate student mothers, and even from friends, family members, teachers, and other mothers at my own children's school, is that graduate school is not considered 'real work.' There seems to be this idea that graduate work is merely a hobby or something that graduate student mothers do to avoid sitting at home all day. Unfortunately, even spouses of graduate student mothers see the pursuing of a graduate degree as a hobby.

Because graduate school is not seen as real work, there are some other implications that make things difficult for graduate student mothers. Other people in our lives simply do not understand that we are unable to just 'take off work' or 'skip class' anytime something else is going on. Missing out on events at our children's schools or missing out on sports games is a common occurrence for graduate student mothers and it is frustrating when people just don't 'get it' (See the section on *Isolation and Alienation*). As I recently explained to a well-meaning mother at my children's school, when you are only expected to be in class for 3 hours once a week per class, the university expects you to be there and to schedule the rest of your life around them. In addition, when I am the instructor of record for a course, I cannot simply cancel my class because I'd rather go on a field trip with one of my children, that just simply is not the way that academia works.

Graduate students are also not paid as though we are full-time workers, despite the expectation that we are working around the clock. This also makes it hard for others (especially spouses) to realize the expectation of workload inherent in graduate school,

71

when not only are we not getting paid well to be there, but we are often also racking up

student loans and excessive debt at alarming rates and with a dismal job market to

graduate into.

> P2: "This past semester, I actually commuted [to campus] once a week and left her with my parents overnight while I drove up there and then drove back the next day. And so, that actually did affect our relationship, because, you know, just because she was not spending like every day with me anymore. Like, she had basically these two days that I was away. I think it generated some like mom-guilt in me, just, you know, that I was putting my priorities, you know, on my education, and that I was having to leave her, like physically leave her, in order to do that."

> P3: "[Child] has also said to me 'Mommy, when are you going to get out of grad school so you can spend more time with us?'"

> P6: "I feel guilty about [baby] having to be in daycare at three months. I wanted to not put my kid in daycare until he was at least 4 months old. I hated that we had to put him in daycare at three months. I really didn't like that but I didn't have any choice."

> P7: "My little one, he went through a little phase last semester where he didn't want me to go to class and he was sad and that breaks my heart. I hate leaving him when he's, 'I don't want you to go.'"

> P8: "[having to rely on child care] really stressed me out because I felt like I had nobody to keep my baby. So, I had to get online and do some research [into childcare] and I didn't want to just give him to anybody and that was another emotional barrier on me right there. You just don't want to trust your child with anybody, so, to have to try to find childcare was hard emotionally for me."

> P9: "I think guilt is huge. In three short years, she's going to be gone. I'm never going to have this time back. Just in terms of guilt, I don't know if there's ever a time."

Concerns

Participants were asked what concerns they had about their decision to return to school and balancing both motherhood and graduate school. Several participants expressed concerns about missing out on important moments or even just the day-to-day sacrifices that they had to make. A few wondered if their children were going to need therapy to recover from their mom missing out on stuff and if the sacrificing the whole family is having to make is going to be worth it. Some concerns reflected our cultural ideologies about motherhood and feeling as though they don't measure up to the other, more involved mothers at their child's school. There is much overlap in this section with other sections about *Guilt* and *Ideologies about Motherhood*.

Concerns about missing out and sacrificing are seen here:

> P1: "By the time I have a job and a house and like…a normal…he'll be grown, like, he'll be done. So, his whole childhood is just going to be this like frenetic me running around like a chicken with my head cut off kind of thing."

> P2: "I think occasionally there's definitely some guilt about just, like, the sacrifices that I have to make as a parent. Or at least maybe the perceived sacrifices—not being 100 percent present all the time and like my threshold for frustration is lower because I'm always operating at this elevated level of stress and expectation."

> P6: "I worry that I'm not reading enough parenting books, especially given that both boys are high strung and I hate that I don't have pictures printed or albums made and feel mildly guilty that we don't do art projects or science projects or Elf on the Shelf or Pinterest ideas. They are loved and I know that's most important. We have some traditions, family movie nights and we read together a lot. And they end up in bed with us more often than not these days. But there are things I could be doing for them that I flat out don't have time or energy for because of the particular work I'm doing."

P9: "That I won't do either well or that I can do one well and I can't do the other one well. I wonder, at the end of the day, will it be worth it? Will it be worth the sacrifice? I'm not sure it will be."

P10: "Maybe the biggest concern is that life has passed you by and you didn't notice. The friendships, being able to have conversations and enjoy them for what they are…I think that is something you don't have time for. My concerns are more for my child than myself. I'm more concerned about articulating him as a human being than myself. So, if I go through the program and I have lost him I think is my biggest concern. If he's not that conversant with life in general and he hasn't made as many friends because we're always in the library that would be the tragedy for me. At the end of the day, you could have your degree and everything, but if along the way you lost everything else, there's nothing to celebrate there, nothing to celebrate."

P11: "It was kind of three-fold [when I was in coursework], I was a commuter student, so I wasn't on campus anyway; I was an hour away from [campus]. I worked fulltime 8:00-4:00 so I couldn't do any daytime meetings; couldn't come to things where people could get extra help during the day; I have kids; all those things together made it pretty difficult."

P12: "What's most important is that he, as a boy, sees mom in school, working. I just want to finish and because I have experience not finishing, that scares me. And some days I just say, 'I'm done, I've had enough.' But I'm still plugging away at it."

This participant worries about not living up to cultural expectations of

motherhood and not being perceived as a 'good mom.'

P4: "I wonder sometimes if my kids will be in therapy when they grow up because of me. I do kind of worry about their perception…the moms that are in our circle, most of them don't work, or if they do, it's part time. So, they're the kind of moms that they're always cooking and coming up with new recipes and they're the cheer moms and the gymnastics moms. So, I wonder if my kids see me as a failure. I don't want them to grow up to resent me or I worry that they resent me now because I'm not the mom that's there all the time and they see their dad there all the time. I wonder

if they like him better than me…which is kind of stupid…but I wonder if they see him as a good dad and me as not a good mom."

This participant discusses concerns over her children needing therapy as well as concerns over whether she could do better in graduate school if she was a man or did not have children:

> P5: "We call it the therapy list, like, things I've done to screw them up that later on they'll be in therapy and blame on me. So, I'm sure it'll be, 'my mom didn't attend my orchestra in 7th grade because she had class.' I don't want my kids to feel like they've had to sacrifice…and they are…they're going to." She then goes on to discuss her concerns over making B's in some of her coursework and how she questions if she was a man or if she did not have children if she would be able to make A's."

One participant discusses concerns that she be an example for her daughter and that perhaps her daughter doesn't see her as doing meaningful work:

> P7: "One of the things that worries me lately is, I talked to my daughter about what she wants to do and she doesn't think I do anything, so…I go to school and so when I ask her about what she wants to do, she's giving the impression that women don't do anything, I think…I'm a mom and that's…I'm a mom and I go to school but I don't feel like she has career ideas because she thinks that I don't. I feel like I'm late at finishing this up so I can show her that women also have careers. I try to talk to her more about the work part of what I do and that…I call it work instead of saying I'm going to school, you know, I'm going to work today, I have school tomorrow because it—it worries me that she's getting that impression that it's not [real work]…so, she wants to be a mom, which is fine, that's wonderful, but I worry that she doesn't just want to be a mom because that's her aspiration but because that's what she thinks you're supposed to do and I worry about that."

Extracurricular Activities

Involvement in extracurricular activities was a complicated subject for my participants. Some simply did not have their children involved in extracurricular activities

due to time commitments and the changing nature of academic semesters as well as

evening classes interfering. Other respondents felt as though having their children

involved in extracurricular activities was very important and said it made them feel like

good moms or good parents, again, reflecting the cultural expectations or ideologies

about motherhood.

The following respondents discussed having to cut out or limit the involvement in

extracurricular activities due to time constraints:

> P1: "There was a karate thing that was, like, really cheap…but then I started to look at it and was Tuesdays and I'm like, 'Oh, I have class Tuesday…oh no, next semester I have class Tuesday, too. I can't take you to that. That's not going to work.'

> P5: "They're sacrificing in ways I wish they didn't have to because I simply can't drive them everywhere I need to drive them. So…that time element. There's so much homework…and I get it, you have to have it in a PhD program…no complaints to my teachers there, but, it just is what it is. And [daughter] wants to try our for cheerleading…that means I have to deal with cheer parents and go sit when I should be doing my homework, watching you go hip-hip-hooray and I hate cheerleading. Right now she's doing basketball…I need a schedule so I can make sure to go watch [her] miss the basket 'cause she's not very athletic. I haven't quite worked out when I'm gonna study…ultimately, my stuff will come after their stuff."

> P10: "I have had to cut most of the that out to be reasonable because you've got driving time, and getting there time, and coming back time, and his time. I've had to cut back on that that even, and what I consciously did was look at his school timetable and make sure that one of his activities is not too academic, which is orchestra. So, he does orchestra and he has all the concerts. But I have noticed that I've tried to steer him towards the academics. I guess what I'm saying is something has to give but more has to give on my part than his. I have to try to keep ensuring that. Steal from his a little bit but not when he knows that I'm doing it."

Reflecting the cultural expectations of motherhood, these respondents felt as though having their children involved in extracurricular activities made them good mothers:

>P4: "My daughter does swim and my son does karate. So, I take them to their activities. I like taking them because it makes me feel like I'm a good mom 'cause I'm taking them. And then, I feel like I'm connected to them still, you know, in that way. I'm tired a lot though…I wish I had more energy, like, I sort of feel like they get my leftover energy, but I do like to do that for them."
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>P6: "I've appreciated the flexibility of, you know, I am able to get to stuff. [Child] played soccer for the first time and practice was at five o'clock. I would have to leave school at 3:30 to go get him and then go get [Baby] and get him to soccer practice because it was a night that [Husband] had class, but I could. Now, it meant that I was gonna have to catch up on work another time. So, I guess, I feel like the one thing I've been consistently committed to is being a good parent."

Some participants had their children enrolled in extracurricular activities but also felt as though involvement in these things were a hindrance to them because it took away time for them to work. They also found it incredibly difficult to get their children to and from their activities and to schedule around them.

>P7: "It's a hindrance for sure 'cause I like to be at everything so it's not…I mean, I have to schedule around everything…religious education, bowling, Brownie's, dance, basketball, cub scouts…I have to keep up with it, making sure they get where they need to go. And everyone wants to schedule extra things for everything…Brownie's can't just be Brownies…they planned this caroling thing, which is wonderful, but they gave no thought to the fact that had no time to practice, it ended up being like 6 times in 2 weeks, and then a float in the parade, so, last minute, 2 more days. Are you serious?! So, it's…their extracurriculars pile on."
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>P9: "She's an equestrian, she used to have lessons on the weekends, now the lessons are during the week, which is a lot harder because she doesn't get off the school bus until five o'clock. The best day for her lesson is

Thursday but I have class so now its on Fridays. I'll pick her up from school and take her straight to the barn. Ideally it'd be great for her to have two lessons a week but we just can't do it because I can't count on when my husband will be home. And I can't commit…I can't take three hours and go…I need to be working. I don't know what I'd do if I had two children in activities. I don't know how I'd manage. I can't even think about that."

P11: "Not only did the kids have activities, baseball, basketball, and all sorts of stuff, but just the parent meetings and things like that. I really had to struggle with picking one night per week that I could travel to a class and then try to do some online classes. They're involved in sports, music, piano lessons, VI competitions, some academic things, I think they're well rounded and as a teacher, it's very important for them to stay into something. I've been very fortunate to have their teammates' parents to trade-off with carpooling and things like that. There were certainly times that while they were practicing, I was reading journal articles and highlighting while waiting in the car. In between games, I would have a textbook or journal articles and that seemed to be the best time that I could just sit and read research journals."

P12: "He does a sport every season 'cause he's athletic. He's involved in a religious youth organization so we spend a lot of time there. He's involved there with a couple of other kids so we split it. I do most of it because I'm single. I'll go with a book and find a Barnes & Noble somewhere and that's where I do a lot of studying. Sometimes, if he's going to be overnight, I'll even get a hotel room. So, yeah, he's very involved, and sometimes it's a juggle. My weekends are pretty much devoted to his needs-driving him and his buddies to a restaurant and picking them up, and that kinda stuff."

Participants clearly expressed dominant cultural beliefs concerning motherhood and 'intensive mothering' affected the ways that they thought about themselves as mothers. Several themes emerged that reflect the ongoing struggle to meet both societal expectations of motherhood, as well as their own ideas about being good mothers and even wives/partners. Participants were acutely aware of gender role expectations and expectations of good mothers, as well as the ways in which they do not meet societal

expectations as mothers or as wives/partners. Participants reported feelings of inadequacy as mothers and as students; feeling as though others were judging them as bad mothers; beliefs that they were not meeting their own expectations of being a good mother; and expressed concerns about the sacrifices their children were having to make; many reported feelings of guilt about missing out on important events and not spending enough quality time with their children; struggling to be present and engaged with their children when they were together; feeling selfish for pursuing a graduate degree; and concerns about whether this would all be worth it in the end. Concerns about being a failure carried over into their relationships with their partners and spouses and several participants reported relationship strain and mutual resentment in their relationships. Participants felt as though they were judged harshly for their commitment to graduate school and as though their partners were not supportive and did not understand them. Participants also reported feeling overwhelmed by the incompatible demands of motherhood and graduate school, both of which expect total commitment. Having their children involved in extracurricular activities was seen as important, however, many participants were unable to make this a reality due to financial restraints, scheduling conflicts with their own class times, and time constraints involved with taking children to and from activities. Graduate student mothers who did have their children involved in activities often had a good support system in place to help with the logistics and did so out of a belief that having children involved in activities was emblematic of good mothering. My participants have unmistakably shown that the pervasive cultural ideologies of what it means to be a good

79

mother have been internalized and are shaping their decision making processes and their inner-most feelings of self-worth and success. As long as we continue unrealistic expectations of intensive motherhood and impossible expectations of graduate students, graduate student mothers, such as my participants, will continue to be overwhelmed by workloads and to feel inadequate and guilty in both realms. In addition, some of the strategies that graduate student mothers use to negotiate their multiple and often conflicting roles, such as maternal invisibility, are actually harmful to the long-term success and acceptance of mothering, motherhood, and families within the academy. In addition, continuing to hide, ignore, or gloss over the struggles that academic mothers experience only serves to further alienate and isolate us not only from non-mothers in academia or from faculty and administrators, but also from one another.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: ROLE NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

The second research question explores indirectly the strategies graduate student mothers employ to negotiate their dual roles as mothers and graduate students. Williams (2007), draws heavily on Goffman in her assessment of the strategies used by her own participants to manage their own conflicting identities and roles as "mom" and "student." Williams (2007) writes that when the idealized conventional performances of the perfect mother and perfect graduate student are unattainable in the individual and organizational milieu, Goffman's concept of role discrepancy becomes most salient. Williams (2007), quoting Goffman (1959):

[social roles are]…socialized, molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of a society in which it is presented…Thus, when an individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole. (P. 35)

Lynch mentions graduate student mothers engaging in "academic invisibility" while mothering, in order to avoid stigma associated with being a graduate student and engaging in "maternal invisibility" while present in their academic realm in order to avoid stigma associated with being a mother. My participants reported both of these strategies as ones they engage in, along with hypervisibility and overcompensation in terms of working much harder and taking on leadership roles in order to prove they were worthy of being in graduate school. Williams (2007) also discussed overcompensation as a strategy employed by her participants as well as employing Goffman's concept of 'face time' and hypervisibility. Williams (2007) also points out that this drive for overcompensation is reminiscent of Kanter's (1997) dialogue regarding tokenism and the inherent performance pressures to be highly visible representative of their groups. One participant, P6, comes to mind in this regard as she repeatedly stated that she was serving the academic community by serving in leadership roles and trying to counteract the lack of women in her department. At one point during P6's interview, she even states that graduate student mothers are tokenized in order to recognize that the system is unjust but no one is willing to do anything about it. Being a mother within the academy becomes a stigma, or, as Goffman (1963) defines it, "an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction" (P. 3). The stigmatization of motherhood in graduate school

81

leads to a deviant identity and ultimately reproduces discourse regarding the inadequacy

or incompetency of graduate student mothers and the exclusion of graduate student

mothers from important career building activities and social participation (Williams

2007). As we saw under *Ideologies of Motherhood*, my participants engaged in the

performance of social roles and sometimes overcompensation and academic invisibility

in order to fulfill the social expectations of motherhood. In the following section, we look

at some more ways that my participants attempt to negotiate their conflicting roles.

Lowered Expectations

One role negotiation strategy employed by five participants involved lowering

their own expectations of themselves. While this strategy can also be found less directly

in some other areas of the interviews, there seemed to be a certain focus in these

particular quotes on coming to the realization that they might not be able to continue

being a straight A student and still meet the expectations of themselves as a mother that

they would like to be. There is also an inherent realization evident in these quotes that

they are not able to devote the same kind of time to their course work as a man without

children would be able to and, for some, the realization that this might negatively effect

their job prospects.

> P3: "I'll probably be one of those assembly line professors at a community
> college for the rest of my life, teaching the same class 100 times in five
> years. But you know what, that's okay. I mean, in 20 years, do I really
> want to see myself as a person who focused on their career and my kids
> suffered because of it? No. If I work at a community college, that's okay.
> It's not humanly possible to be, as far as I can tell, to be the best mom I
> can be and the best grad student I can be. And I feel like, for me, accepting
> that truth made me less hard on myself for trying and feel less bad about

how I failed with my kids the times that I had failed because I was trying something impossible. It's easier once you realize you were trying something impossible. I want both—both of those things. I want to be a good student. I want a good career and I want to be a good mom. And it seems like it's just impossible. It's not going to happen. That sucks."

P5: "Maybe we have to lower our expectations for ourselves. A B isn't, by any means, a bad grade. It's a lot of sacrifice and I want it. I want it bad, but I'm not…I don't have the emotional, mental capacity to be the same level of student as that single man…"

P6: "I got a couple A minuses that I wouldn't have gotten if I hadn't needed sleep and needed to tend to my child and I just kind of said 'you know what, nobody looks at these grades. What matters is that I have faculty that believes in me and that have seen me do good work and that know that I can.' And then, I'm gonna just have to let some of these A minuses go. When I think back to what it's been, you know, me doing a gut-check in course work and exams and saying I'm gonna be an average PhD student…and…an average PhD student is pretty…that's still an achievement. I'm used to being the rock star student, but most people in PhD programs are, right? And so, it wasn't so much, I don't need to be the smartest kid in the room, and in fact, I'm not necessarily the smartest kid in the room, ever, I'm just willing to work my tail off. And that's been the limit, that's been the hardest, is that my energy has to be shifted. There are days when I feel like nobody gets a good deal, and then there are some days where I feel like, you know, my kids get a good deal, and there are some days when I feel like a good student."

P10: "If spending more time at his activities will make me hand in work that is not really up to my standards, I will do that, but know that I have to compensate in another paper and hope that I have time in the semester to show [my best]. And we will not be perfect. Being a mother and being an "A" student is something you can achieve, but it's something you'll have to tell yourself, 'I should be able to accept the "B" if I have to."

P12: "I have to say to myself, 'Well, if you get a B because you had to go or chose to go to something with your child, so be it.' And that makes me angry, especially in the field of women's studies where it should be a more understanding climate. It's not. And I don't think it is necessarily their fault, I think it's the patriarchal institution in which we're under."

Getting Academic Work Done

Finding time to complete academic work was a struggle. Many participants reported working after their children were sleeping or while they were at school, however, a common problem was getting distracted by the chores and errands that also needed to be done or being interrupted by children if trying to work while they were home. I conceptualized this category under the research question about role negotiation because of the answers I received. Most participants reported trying to complete their work while their children were not around, thereby trying to maintain their role as the ideal mother type they strove for by engaging in what Lynch (2004) termed "academic invisibility". This section could have also been conceptualized under ideologies about motherhood as well.

> P1: "He's got to go to bed so that I can have that time to work. Especially when I was working on my thesis, because it's a more sustained thing, I found that I often couldn't get in a rhythm of writing until like 20-30 minutes in. And then if you have someone coming in to ask for a snack or juice or whatever it is, it really throws things off. During the day, Thursday, in theory, I should be getting work done, but I tend to be doing errands, like going to the grocery store and all that stuff. Once he goes to bed, so…like from nine to midnight, sometimes later, but I tend to find, especially if we get up early, at around midnight, I can't really focus real well anymore."

> P2: "I feel like I can't work when I want to or when my inspiration strikes or when I'm really needing to. It has to kind of revolve around her schedule. It takes more organization, I think, than normal to balance that out. Yeah, naptime and bedtime, and then while she's at her little preschool. But that is also my time to get everything done that I can't do when she's around like cleaning the house or certain other things that I feel like she would not be able to come with me for. And then when my parents take her. Like, my parents will take her, if I have a big paper due,

they'll take her for the whole weekend and I'll be able to just work on the paper all weekend, which is really nice."

P3: "I'm able to set aside time where I know the kids will be out of the house and I can do my homework. So, I try to do all my homework every other weekend because every other weekend, they're at their dad's house and I try to do homework two weeks ahead. [If work isn't all done while kids are away] Each of them has about an hour of screen time…every day. So, I'm like 'are you sure you don't want to go play a computer game right now'…I can sit down and do some work. Also, at night when the kids go to bed, I do my work then. And then, if my work really piles up, which it always does, then I end up working while they're awake. But I've been making a very concerted effort to make sure they don't feel like they're second to my work. So, if I just don't get my homework done, then I don't, and that just happens."

P4: Explains that all academic work is done on campus (an hour commute from home) and that she works on campus 5 days a week-2 of those being weekend days. "I just can't work at home, I just can't get anything done. My kids constantly interrupt me, and then my husband makes me feel guilty because I'm on the computer. So, [after work and the gym], I go to [my office on campus] and I work until I cannot work anymore and I just…until I have absolutely no more energy 'cause I feel like I want to maximize the time that I'm there. So, most of the time, on [weeknights], I'm there until 12:00 or 1:00 in the morning and then I drive home."

P5: "Usually it's nights while the kids are watching TV 'cause that's when my brain functions the best. I'm also teaching a class online, so, I do that in the morning, which is when I could also be doing homework, but right when I sit down to get something started, it's time to go pick up the kids, so, I fit it in where I can, honestly. Like, last night, I was doing my homework and I came out when dinner was ready and we all are dinner together and watched a television show and talked and spent some time together and then I went back to what I was doing. It messed up my flow. I had to start all over again. I lost my train of thought, I wasn't as focused when I went back 'cause I had too many carbs in my system, but it was…I had to do it because I didn't want to eat alone in the bedroom."

P6: "Pretty much everyone that I know that has been able to finish their dissertation and be a mom at the same time has had to take some time away to just exclusively write…or has taken 12 years…And so, a friend of mind did this residence program and they call it a reverse sabbatical. They

basically want scholars to come in and present on their research one day a week. Like, just have a class one day a week and then spend the rest of the time doing whatever they need to do. And so, next summer, for six weeks, I've [commited to that].

P7: "While they're at school, I have all day to work on my homework, to read, to do those things. I don't do it in the evenings really after they're home. And it's not even just to spend time with them, but also because I can't concentrate when the house is full of people. I do a lot of late night stuff for the online classes. If stuff is due is midnight, I'll start grading them until I realize I'm not reading so well anymore or that I'm getting lazy about it, then I'll just quit. I try to have at least 2 days [at home] because I get more done at home anyway. But also, I can take one day and actually do stuff around the house. I can grocery shop and clean and all those things I can't do on the other day…but honestly, those things get done first because I don't want to do the homework,. The groceries are bought, the house is clean, but the reading gets pushed off."

P8: "Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday after 3:00 when my husband was off work [and could watch the baby]."

P9: "If it's the day of classes, I'm pretty shot, that day is sort of a loss. I mean I can do a little bit, maybe put in a couple of hours, but by the time I spent three hours in class and two hours on the road…I've still got laundry, I need to feed myself, I need to take care of my dog, you know, all of those things. Those days are kind of shot, so the other days I just try to really hit it in the mornings. I find that I'm really a morning person; mornings are my best time. If I have to stay up late doing something, my work sucks."

P11: "Activities away from the house were more helpful because when you're home, well, now, I've got to do this, I've got to take care of the dog, I've got to wash the dishes, I've got to wash clothes, I 've got to cook and things. But when we were away for an activity, that was when they could do their thing and I would have about two hours to read or write a paper or whatever I needed to do. And really, my work, I can, you know, read an article or look up some stuff on the computer and I've been lucky there. I was able to, in downtimes, read articles and kind of get organized on what I needed to do. I prayed they would never do a keystroke or something on my computer but I was able to save the articles and actually look up articles and pring them. But I was always in a good position of

being able to read during the day and the writing of journal articles or whatever I was doing would be at night."

P12: "Mostly in the early morning. When I come home at night, I go to bed. We have dinner and if he needs help on a test or something, my academic work is done. I'm in a class this semester with a writing schedule. So, my writing schedule is from 5:30-6:30 every morning. But mostly, it's just binge writing. And I'm finding that I can even steal an hour or two away during my workday, because then, I'll take something from work home. It's this constant weaving of both work and studying. So, I do, you know, I always have a book with me. Emma Goldman said, 'You never know when you're gonna end up in jail; always have a book with you.' So, I always have something I need to do with me. What I do on Sundays is I have all my schoolwork in the backpack and my other work and I make a list of my classes and everything I need to do for a week."

Another strategy employed by participants was to either overcompensate for their status as mothers or to try to adapt what Lynch (2008) called "maternal invisibility" by hiding their motherhood status from colleagues and faculty. This practice of "maternal invisibility" or of overcompensation comes up again when participants are asked if others evaluate them differently because they are mothers.

P7: "I just wanted to be on the ball and show everybody I was on the ball. Even when I had to miss class because of [my children], I wouldn't say that, I would say something different because I just felt like that would make me look bad that it was my kids, like, moms can't do it."

P10: "If you've got group work at 2:00 and you're arriving at 2:20, you hope the people in the group understand, but you're probably doing a lot more than others in the group. Why? Because you have to make up for those faults; you're coming in late, you possibly forgot your paper on top of the table, and so, you come, and you don't have this thing and everybody in the group is looking at you like, really? So, what do you do? You take on that task and another task. So, you learn to multi-task both within your workspace and in compensation to your child's needs, and I think that is part of the balance. The scale is always tilting against you to

different degrees. You're a single parent, to a greater degree against you if you co-parent with someone else; that co-parent may think you're getting more time to yourself than they are. You have to be that student that's not always tired. You have to be working double hard not to make your motherhood an excuse, but to fit it in and to blend and exceed expectations. [Worried] that you'll turn up somewhere and you'll be wrongly dressed because the child threw up on what you had that matches the shoes and so you're this flustered person and you can come off as aggressive, short tempered, because you don't have time to hang around and chit-chat."

Perceptions of Evaluation by Faculty Based on Motherhood as Status Characteristic

Cecilia Ridgeway and Shelley Correll (2004) showed that women previously viewed as competent and committed to their jobs prior to their status as mothers being known, were viewed as less competent and less committed once their motherhood status was known. In contrast, fathers were seen as more committed and more competent than non-parents. Participants in my study were asked if they felt they were evaluated differently by faculty members than non-mothers were evaluated. Participants had varying answers to whether or not they felt they were evaluated differently by faculty based on their status as a mother. This section also reflects some of the nuances of *Family Planning* and the advice that many female graduate students are given surrounding whether or not to have children in graduate school. This section should help highlight ways in which graduate student mothers can be better supported despite not fitting the mold of the traditional graduate student.

Some, such as this respondent, felt as though entering graduate school with a child perhaps made a faculty member question her decision to have children before

88

beginning school. The respondent echoed my own experience of having children young

and before thoughts of graduate school were ever even on either of our radars:

> P2: "The professor I talked to was like 'yeah, you know, I didn't have my kid 'til after school' and so it was almost like that was…you know, like, 'obviously, I made a superior decision.' It's like definitely an inferior decision, like, kind of just make the best of it if you're already a mom. And which I think just kind of really erases like the nuance of the whole situation because I didn't plan to go to grad school until after I had a child. So, it wasn't this conscious decision for me."

Other participants, such as these found that their prior knowledge of the research,

such as the research by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) made it difficult for them to answer

the question objectively, but did feel as though she had to overcompensate in order to be

perceived at the same level of others. Some other participants did not mention the

existing research but did mention they felt the need to work harder or overcompensate in

order to feel as though they belonged.

> P3: "My sense is probably informed from the research I've seen, so, it's hard to separate out what I think is probably how people evaluate and then what I know that research to say because now that I know that research says that, I'm probably perceiving that in other people. So, I feel like people probably perceive mothers in a way that we have to go above and beyond in order to be perceived at the same level that other people would be perceived at."

> P4: "I've never really thought about it, to be honest. I know that in the workplace, mothers are viewed as less competent than women that are single."

> P6: "If you look at everything that I've done while I've been there, like serviced the community, and everything else I've done, and I've taught more than any student I know and I'm adding this whole other discipline to learn the methodology to do my project. If I do graduate, I will have been as productive as anyone plus a little bit more since I've had to show up at everything trying to compensate for the lack of women."

89

P10: Because you cannot hide motherhood, the evaluation will be there. I think your faculty evaluates…from what I have seen…they're very professional about it. They don't let the fact that you're a mother trump your identity as a student. They're very good at blending the two. And so, they take what you have given; they expect the excellence. They do not tell you they don't expect it, but what they will do is possibly, if something is really bad, they'll tell you, 'Please look again.' Give you more time; I would say 'accommodating' if I had to give it a word. The faculty and other students have been very accommodating to mothers and motherhood and they jump in to help, if you let them. But, on the other hand, they're able to evaluate us that way, because mothers themselves, if I may speak for myself and others, have not worn the motherhood badge or worn it as a crutch. We have learned not to be flimsy and to know when we need to be serious. One hour for us means so much more than one hour to a student who has no care in the world because they can find another hour in the day. You will not find it. So, I think the fact that mothers are aware that their identity matters and their status should not be the lead status. That we keep aside and continue with the business of the day and should I be unable to perform a task because of being a mother, they are aware of it…I think the evaluations have been based on what we have given up as mothers. So, we've earned a lot of respect and I hope that will not fade away or dwindle because of one irresponsible act."

P11: "Competent; yes. Being able to juggle things all at once; yes. I just don't think people pull that [mom card] out. I really think moms kind of hide the fact that they're moms from any of the academic part of it. I would never use that as an excuse of why I couldn't get anything done. I always made sure I got my work done. It was almost like you…you kind of feel like you have to prove that you're even more organized or this super-duper mom that you can just get it done…and I think you try harder. I just think you have this inner something or else you would never have signed up for it."

P12: "Wow…I don't know if I can even answer that because I've done so much research on mothering. It's still the social construction of parenting and if women have pictures of their kids in their office, they're not focused. If a man does, 'Oh, what a family man.'
That was a concern with the department with me was, 'How are you going to manage this?' and kind of question bothered me because, again, women's studies. That shouldn't be a question. But I've never had the experience [of being only a student and not working and mothering]."

Others expressed wishes that there was a way to make evaluations of work reflective of the limited time that graduate student mothers have to put in to their work in comparison to non-mothers but also acknowledged that they didn't want to be assessed with assumptions about whether mothering impacts the quality of their work. Some also expressed that their departments seemed understanding when unexpected things came up and felt as though their department was supportive of their 'disadvantages' that came along with being a graduate student mother.

> P1: "I don't think there's a lot of consideration for the fact that maybe it's a little bit harder. I mean, I think it's kind of just like, 'Well, you still have to do the same amount of work; get over it.' Which is totally true. I mean, I wouldn't expect to like have my paper requirements shortened or something. Because I have a kid, I don't know that I feel like there's a whole lot of acknowledgement. And then, I don't want to be that person who's like, 'Hey, by the way, it sucks more for me! Just so you know!'" (laughs)

> P5: "I wish there could be a different grading system because my quality of work, the time I have to put into my work will never be as high as somebody who really has nothing else going on in their life and so…I wish there was a way to be fair and be fair. You know, it's not fair to grade one student differently than you grade other students, but in some ways, I think there has to be a difference there."

> P6: "I think that they understand when stuff comes up, but that doesn't change expectations of work, which is good in the sense of, I don't want to be assessed on any sort of assumptions about how mothering impacts my work. I think that there are some people who genuinely get what it's like and respect that and respect the fact that I do good work most of the time and I've gotten published and I've gotten some grants. So, obviously there are people out there that have confidence in what I'm doing and so yeah, I would say that there's colleagues and faculty that see that."

> P7: "I don't see a big difference, I think it depends on who I'm dealing with, but I think in this department, there's a positive to having any kind of disadvantage or any kind of difficulty to working in this department. I

91

think people value that, working through the hardship…I feel like sociology is pro-difficulty. So, I don't see in this department it being a negative, but I've had reactions from other professors where I can tell like, if my kid is sick, it is not a great reason for me to not be there."

One participant felt as though her news that she was pregnant was perhaps not taken as enthusiastically as she would have liked and expressed frustration that her baby was seen as a 'hindrance' to her graduate education:

> P8: "I think they were very understanding but…this may sound…I don't think they were particularly happy that I got pregnant. I think they saw that as a 'You're not going to finish' type of thing because I did kind of pick that up a little bit in conversation but it was in a subtle way…like 'This could really be a hindrance." You know…are you calling my baby a hindrance?! It came out in subtle ways. I don't think they were particularly happy. I think there was a wish there that I had waited to both get married and have a baby, but I couldn't do that. I was in my 40's, I was too old to be waiting. I felt like my time was now to do it."

One participant also felt as though there was disappointment from her advisor when she had to begin taking less class hours in order to 'still be sane' and expresses concern that this might impact her formal evaluation.

> P9: After deciding to drop a class and take 7 hours instead of 10: "All he said was, 'if that's what you need to do in order to do well..' and I perceived some disappointment. And I don't know whether it was real disappointment or perceived. And then this semester, I realized there's no way I could carry nine hours and still be sane. So, I went ahead and registered again for six hours, and again, I perceived some disappointment. I wonder how that will shape my evaluation in the Fall. I wonder how I'll be evaluated other than my grades?"

Advice for Incoming GSM

Participants were asked what sort of advice they would give to an incoming graduate student who was either pregnant or already had children. I conceptualized this as

92

ways that my participants attempt to negotiate their roles in their own lives. Advice

ranged from assembling a support system, engaging in self-care, not feeling guilty,

prioritizing, lowering expectations for yourself and being okay with making B's, and

making sure that you actually have the support system in place that you need to be

successful.

> P1: "Start working on some kind of support system. It would be a lot easier if you have people who can help you…and along with that kind of goes the idea of not trying to be superwoman and doing it all. Like, at some point, you're probably going to have to ask for help…forgiving yourself that you didn't play Candy Land with your kid last night because you were working on your dissertation…or forgiving yourself, by that same token, that you didn't really read all day because you took him to the zoo…it goes both ways. If you're going to take an hour to play Candy Land, take an hour to play Candy Land and don't worry about anything else and try, not that it's easy or possible, but try not to beat yourself up over it"

> P2: "I would definitely emphasize the self-care aspect just how important that is, and definitely just affirming the decision to be willing to balance both of those roles together. I would probably give them readings on the meaningfulness of motherhood and self-care and that kind of thing."

> P3: "If I was around somebody who actually wanted to hear the truth as I see it, then I would probably tell them what I told you, which is you cannot do both…do it all…it's impossible. It really is. And I feel like admitting to myself that I cannot be the best possible grad student and the best possible mother at the same time has made me a better person."

> P4: Recommends prioritizing school and making sure that you have the support system-even outside help such as babysitters-needed to help you be successful. "It comes down to what is that I really want and do I want it bad enough to make the sacrifices necessary to be there. 'Cause, for a mom, the reality is, it's gonna be harder than for people that are single or that don't have kids. I am responsible for my children and they are a priority so I have to make sure they're taken care of. Be realistic about the sacrifices that it will take for you…and that might be different than what it will take for somebody else."

P5: "Be okay with a B. Lower your expectations for yourself. You can't be a perfect mom and a perfect student. You're gonna have to decide what your priorities are and pick your battles. You have to decide what's most important for you and if that means you take a B in a class, you know, it was more important to spend that time with my kids than to really invest in that assignment."

P6: "Don't feel guilty. Find people to help you avoid guilt, know that you're never going to be perfect on all fronts on any day. So, choose what you want to be on that day. Some day's you'll be a great parent, some days you'll be a great student, some days you'll be a great spouse or partner. Find systems of support whether they're there naturally with family or extended family or whether you create them deliberately but you gotta be willing to ask for help. As cliché as it sounds, it does freakin' take a village and there's nothing to feel guilty about. I don't know what to [say] to people who have spouses or partners that don't get it, but, to the extent that you can find a way to help them understand and get it and in a way that doesn't compromise the relationship, put pressure on them to do their fair share."

P7: "One thing is to talk to other moms 'cause its not something I ever did but as I do it incidentally and I hear things, I always feel better walking away from the conversation. Don't do it alone…and not feeling guilty too. I wish somebody had told me that it was okay 'cause instead, people don't say it's okay. They give you a hard time if they say anything at all and I went through a lot of…if I was at class, I was guilty about missing something. I missed class to go to Halloween and I'm like, I should be in class, there [are] other moms in class and I'm out here trick or treating and so, you can't do that to yourself. You just have to be able to...make the decision you can live with. I just need to be able to just walk away from it and say I did it…you're gonna feel guilty everywhere you are and then its gonna be really really hard."

P8: "Pray first. Build a great support system and relationships with people that you can trust with your child because you will need them. Even if it is just for a mental health day, you need a good support system. And don't do like me, try to get some rest in there. Just say 'nothing will get done today.' I tried to do something everyday and that's why I ended up on anxiety medication, because I never said 'No' until the baby got here and then I had to get to the point where I said 'This deadline is not going to be met, but while I was pregnant, I stressed myself out. And probably four months after the baby was born, I had to learn to say 'I can't do this.' But learn to take some time and set a reasonable goal. There are some people

that don't have a family and a baby and it takes them a good seven or eight years to do this. But I didn't step back and allow my goals to change the way they should have. I damaged myself with a lot of stress and weight gain and just health issues as well. I stress myself out too much. So, set some reasonable goals, get some rest, pray, and get a good support system. More than anything, I would tell them not to let anybody discourage them. If you want to do it, do it. A lot of people think it's insane to be a mom and wife and go to school and work and all. You can do it but you've got to find a balance between all of it and set reasonable goals for yourself. Keep moving. There is light at the end of the tunnel."

P9: "You might feel a lot of external pressure to move through this program quickly but it's okay for you to prioritize for yourself. You're going to have to give a lot of pushback but if you do that and have the support of other mothers, I think that would be the most helpful. "

P10: "Rely on your friends, build capital-friendship capital, have boundaries, know your strengths and weaknesses. Don't come in with a lot of apprehension, anxieties, or fears; everybody's experience is going to be very different. Finding what works for you but sharing with other mothers, others in the same boat. Your program might last longer than all the other people. Find what works for you. Some people work in disarray and it works for them. I think balancing, negotiating, the guilt feeling…is all part of it. Compensating, you'll be doing that a lot. Just being the kind of mother you've always wanted to be is what you should aim for and not try to fit into a mold that you read somewhere or that you imagined; there isn't such a thing."

P11: "Well, with a brand new mom and new infant, you would just absolutely have to have help. I can't imagine…I would assume that the statistics would show they would be the ones that would tend not to make it in grad school. So, I don't know if I would actually tell somebody if they've enrolled to put it off until the kids are older, but it's much easier when the kids are independent and can walk and feed themselves. And I just think your priorities need to be with an infant more so than grad work and then once you've got them to a certain age, then you can, you know, change your priorities a bit."

P12: "I would probably just encourage them to speak up…to have a voice…and to advocate for that. I'm all about protest, so advocate for it…don't use it…but advocate for it. I mean, you still have to do your best and you made a choice. Is this the best time to do it? Do you need to wait? Or do you want to go ahead? But you still have to perform. Don't

ask for special favors because that makes the rest of us…it does affect all of us."

Participants used several strategies to negotiate their roles, including lowering their expectations for themselves and trying not to feel guilty about not meeting everyone's expectations of them as a mother and graduate student. They also engaged in what Lynch (2008) termed "academic invisibility" by trying to complete their academic work while their children were at school, sleeping, spending time with their other parent or family members, or at daycare. A few also reported what Lynch (2008) termed "maternal invisibility" where they hid or downplayed their motherhood status from colleagues or faculty members. Participants tried to compartmentalize mothering and academic work and engaged in overcompensation in an attempt to cover up the stigma associated with graduate student mothers. As I stated in the conclusion to Research Question 1, and as Pillay (2009) argued, the strategy of hiding academic work from children and other mothers and of hiding mothering from friends and colleagues in academia means that academic mothers are unable to reconcile their whole self and are living fragmented, bifurcated lives. We cannot expect serious changes to take place in the institution of academia or in the institution of motherhood if we continue to hide our multiple roles and identities in order to manage stigma. It is only by truthfully addressing the inherent challenges in these multiple roles and being honest about them that we can expect to see real social change. As long as we all don the so-called "mask of motherhood" and pretend to be perfect unencumbered students who refuse to acknowledge our struggles or challenge the patriarchal and greedy institutions of

intensive motherhood and graduate school, we will continue to feel as though our

academic lives and home lives are bifurcated and incompatible. While we must challenge

the existing paradigms, we must also challenge ourselves to be honest and

straightforward about our experiences if we are to enact any meaningful social change.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WAYS TO BETTER SUPPORT GSM NEEDS

The third research question asks graduate student mothers how graduate schools,

departments, and universities could better support their needs.

Women in Academia

Participants were not specifically asked about being a woman in academia but

several important themes emerged from the data that I felt were important to include and

that I felt could be examined in order to craft methods of support for graduate student

mothers. Many participants discussed lower tenure rates of women professors in

comparison to male professors, as well as stigma associated with women and more

specifically mothers seeking higher education, and one participant discusses some

outright glaring instances of sexism in her graduate department and discrimination

against her as a mother as well as highlighting some points of concern regarding graduate

school admissions. Many of these reflect existing gender roles, as well as cultural

expectations and ideologies about motherhood as well. While I have chosen to include

this section under the research question about how to better support graduate student

mothers, there is also a lot of overlap with other sections, such as ideologies about

motherhood, etc. I have chosen to include it here because I feel as though by reading

about the experiences of these mothers being women in academia and the difficulties they

have faced, perhaps graduate departments, schools, and universities can help craft ways

to better support them.

> P1: "Through the program there'll be this [symposium] and the [woman that won an award from our program] came and did a presentation. We talked a lot about why women professors are not getting the same kind of tenure that male professors are. She was like, 'Because they're having kids or they're moving because their husband wants to move.'"

> P1: "We did read this one article [in Intro to Grad School] and it was about parents in grad school and then we didn't talk about it much because I was the only parent in the room. The professor is not even a parent. It was talking about how if you're normally working…like, you work on average an extra 10-15 hours a week [on school work]. I guess it's just taking you longer to get everything done because you're getting interrupted so much or you're sidetracked or whatever."

> P4: "I hope that the world is a different place for my children than it is for me. I hope that the stigma doesn't continue to exist. I would hope that it would be viewed with less stigmatism than it is now, that if women want to be ambitious or they have desires in their heart that they want to see fulfilled, that they can feel the freedom to do that without being led to feel like they're not as good of a mom or they're not as good of a wife. So, if it is truly a partnership, and this really is a family, then my goals are your goals and vice versa. And we should support each other in that. And it's not that way, then we have to ask each other, are we really accepting each other for who the other person really is or are we trying to put each other, more specifically a woman, in a box and saying, 'You must be like this, otherwise, you have failed.' And that's awful. I think that's a travesty."

> P5: "I really do think grad school was and is and probably always will be made for men. And then you hear people in class whining about their life and I just want to knock their heads together because they clearly do not have as much on their plate and…I just…'Shut up! Quit whining! Oh, sorry you have a headache…I've had one for 4 days and 2 kids and a husband. Take some drugs and go on about your day. Take a nap.' Part of the PhD program is sacrifice and it sucks that I have to sacrifice more than people with no children…but it is what it is, so…"

P6: "Those are my big things, finding community, not being afraid to ask for help, not feeling guilty, and recognizing that we all have to use our voices to name stuff when we see it. Graduate school was the first time I noticed that women can say things and it doesn't get taken seriously until a man says it. I'm like, 'Ha! That's funny, I said that 3 minutes ago. I don't know what about it made you take it seriously when he said it, but I would just like to note, that that's what I just said."

P6: "The females ahead of me had established this graduate women's organization and they established a women's interest group that included faculty. We met regularly and there were several of us that kind of had feminist projects in different areas. And so that was a big part of the core ethos was dialectical exchange with our colleagues that were less aware of those sorts of things. So then, that next year, when they admitted an all-male cohort, we raised holiness about that being a problem. And they said they'd offered it to females and females turned us down. And I'm like, 'you start looking at admissions criteria and some of the biases built into things like the GRE. And they didn't really take us seriously. And I think…since then…in the last 2 years [since the all-male cohort], it's become very much an old boys club. And I rail against it and I name it and they consider themselves to be progressive-minded and not exploiting their spouses or they know they are but they're gonna make it up to them when it's all over. And I've talked to the program director about it and even said 'here are ways we can recruit more females' with me saying 'here are some systemic changes that need to happen to get more females here' and they didn't act on any of it."

P6: "I was elected to the steering committee last year and I got to be in on the admissions process. And…mothering [discrimination], not so much…but I watched sexism play itself out and I would say racism and classism too. I watched those privileges operate and particularly by the head of our program who had denied these sorts of things and then I watched him privilege a male candidate applicant who had done terribly on his GRE's and actually had a really suspicious undergrad and even one of his graduate degrees was not necessarily…with grades that were only so-so…over a female from <Tier One University> with a 3.94 [GPA] and great recommendations, great GRE scores and a female of color. And I watched him give the male student the highest rating and the female none."

99

P6: "Another piece of my story and part of distrust is that for the last 2 years, I have had to show up at everything, every colloquy, every meeting, every everything to be the only female, which stinks and ultimately half the time ends up being counterproductive because anytime I raise my voice to bring in some sort of alternative perspective, it'd like, 'oh, here comes the feminist,' whereas before, there were enough of us coming from different perspectives that there was this respect and this dialectical kind of relationship. And when the [gender makeup] shifted, it was just like…it sucked, you know, it sucked because I loved my program. And it's been really a grief process because it wasn't like that before. And when they admitted that first class of all males, we told them this would happen. And they admitted another class that only had one female and she's never been real engaged. And then they admitted another class of all males. And this year's class has 2 females and they're just treading water. I mean, they're experiencing sexism all over the place and have example after example. I'm in the position where I'm trying to support them and be with them and have conversations with them. And now you've got these 2 females who are…one of them uses her voice and the other one just feels completely depressed and oppressed. One of the things about us not getting women [in our program] is that there's not a second layer of applicants that are female. So, we get applicants that are in the top tier that are male or female and we do offer it to women but those women are the ones that are getting offers everywhere. There's no women in that middle position and that's where I think this cultural systemic piece of entitlement and…men…men who are maybe in that middle tier, they still feel like they're entitled to get a PhD. Women don't. There are so many ways to offer gifts and insights and perspectives…somebody who makes an A minus can produce something that is incredibly valuable. It's saying there are things that this particular set of experience has to bring and to bare on scholarship and academic life both of the community and in the actual work and scholarship that's being produced is valuable. And so, creating a system where they're either marginalized or they have to have something extraordinary going on, in order to succeed, then we tokenize them and say 'Oh, I don't know how you do it' and on the one hand, that's the recognition that the system is unjust but on the other hand, not enough that they'll actually do anything about it."

The participant gives an account of sexism experienced during her own

dissertation proposal:

> P6: "So, the chair is the one who defends your proposal [in front of the
> steering committee] and the student's not there. So, when my proposal
> came up, and one of my colleagues had gone right before me, and he had 2
> children that each one is a year older than my children… pretty much
> everybody after that has small kids. So, my chair and I actually brought
> the other person on my committee that's on IRB because she does
> ethnography, to the meeting to be able to defend the ethnography as well
> as the intersectional analysis piece. So, the two of them went, and
> apparently someone on the steering committee actually said 'So, is she
> actually gonna get finished with this 'cause she has a family, you know?'
> And no one has told me who said that, which is probably for the best. But
> they've never said that about another candidate. And so, God bless my
> advisor, who is supportive and strategic and fierce, and she was like, 'let
> me tell you about [P6]. Let me tell you what all [she] has accomplished in
> the last four years and let me tell you what all she has done and why that is
> a ridiculous question.' And I don't know if she said, 'and by the way, it's
> an incredibly sexist, inappropriate and possibly an illegal question,' but
> you know, she just went with the 'well, here let me talk up everything
> [she] has done.' But the fact that they said that in the steering committee
> is insane."

Two participants reported having to previously make the 'choice' to leave academia.

> P5: "I actually have…almost have…a Masters in [another field], but I quit
> because of the kids. Because that was when all of that [serious problems
> with one child self-harming] started happening, so, instead of finishing a
> Master's, I focused on my kids and did what I needed to do because
> of…so…it's not all negative but it hasn't been easy. It's definitely not an
> easy walk."

> P11: "This is my second go-round; my first one was years ago, I didn't
> finish my dissertation. The first go-round, I was on the second-draft of my
> dissertation when my older son was born and died. My committee told me
> my study was flawed. It was not a good time in my life, so, I just let it go."

101

Family Planning

Participants were not directly asked about family planning, however, five of them brought this up in some way during the interview, making it a minor theme. In academia, there are always conversations going on about the 'best' time to have a child. Given that, for most women, their prime childbearing years happen to coincide with their graduate career or their attempts to complete requirements to achieve tenure, the decision of when to have a child is a fairly important one.

> P1: "I know it's not talked about a whole lot, but I know there's kind of a whole, like, 'Oh, if you want tenure, you might not want to have kids at the time when normal people have kids (laughs) because that's going to be hard to do.'"
> P5: "I would tell women everywhere, 'don't get married and make babies, go to school, get your education because you don't understand how difficult it is once you start having kids and try to go to school."
>
> P6: "We decided we wanted to have a second child…and we figured out timing 'cause word on the street is that the best time, if you're gonna have a child, is when you're writing your dissertation."
>
> P7: "I wouldn't want to have a baby in the middle of the semester, like, I planned everything around never having to do that. I think I would have taken the semester off, even if it was unplanned, I probably wouldn't have gone that semester."
>
> P12: "I think the whole institution in and of itself has not changed. The tenure track system, and you've probably heard this, women are almost forced to make a choice between babies and tenure track because of the way the six years, it you think about the average age of someone finishing a PhD and all that. The institution in and of itself is very oppressive to women and the rules solidify that."

Financial Concerns

Participants were not asked directly about their financial situation but it did come up indirectly, and finances were a concern for six participants, making it a major theme. By better compensating graduate students, departments could avoid students leaving simply because they couldn't afford to support their families and pay for childcare in order to attend class.

> P1: "If I hadn't gotten funding to come here, I wouldn't be here. There's absolutely no way I would have been able to do that."

> P3: "I do finally have child support from him and that is extremely helpful…like, I can eat now. I am literally, literally, struggling to be able to buy Ramen Noodles."

> P4: "I mean, money is always an issue. I know I have heard this so many times from my husband, 'You work so hard and it's not for any money…you're just working but you're not getting paid for it.' If there were a way to help with some of the extra expenses associated with going to school, gas, daycare, laptops, etc. I think that could make a huge difference for moms.

> P5: "With the move, I'm broke and I still need to sign [my child] up for gymnastics and I still…[my other child] wants to do voice lessons and I've got to find somebody to do orchestra and bass lessons…so, this semester is going to be challenging financially towards the end and I feel guilty that I'm gonna have to say things like 'oh, we can't afford that.'"

> P6: "I took a month off [after having the baby] but I did not take the official parental leave because we couldn't afford to not have my stipend. For the love of God, we couldn't afford not to have my stipend. I had to quit the part-time teaching jobs, which feels awful in terms of finances but there's only so much mental energy and so much time and I've got to write. I've just got to write. So, we take out student loans, which may well be crippling once I graduate if I can't find a position, [to pay for full-time childcare] so that I can take school seriously (which I want to do), while my [male] colleagues and others sometimes look askance at that choice while getting a pass [for not having childcare and turning in substandard

work], whether they are doing more care work or not, with fewer financial consequences."

P12: "My big concern is being able to pay all my bills. 'Cause I've basically paid for this out of my pocket. I wasn't full-time, I didn't get a graduate assistantship, but I couldn't afford to be a graduate [assistant]."

Worries About Marketability

Five participants expressed concerns about marketability due to the constraints on time graduate student mothers experience in contrast to their non-mother counterparts. Offering more opportunities for mentoring, co-authoring, and increasing feedback and encouragement to these students is crucial to help them succeed and have the presentations and publications necessary to secure a job once they graduate.

P3: "I'm having trouble getting all of my work done and my research done and my papers done because I'm so busy. So, the longer I take, the more papers I can turn out, which, if I didn't have small children, might be a dozen, and now, because I do have small children, might be two. They don't hire you because you graduated quickly, nobody cares about that…they actually care about how much research you do. So, you've got to find a sweet spot where you don't look like you're a slacker who's been in a program for twice as long as you should be…but at the same time, the longer you stay in, the more research you can do."

P5: "But when it comes to the end of school and we want a job, will whoever's hiring us look at those B's and say, 'good job, I mean, you're a mom and you have all this other stuff going on' or are they gonna hire the single man who made straight A's because he had time to do his homework? Or the married man who had time to do his homework? I mean, those are questions to ask. That's a problem with our field, with any field in higher education. My professional development has never been what it's supposed to be because I've always had kids. I don't have time to stay up all night editing a paper. I need sleep 'cause I have to get up and get them off to school and I have to do it with a positive attitude and I don't like mornings. So, if I stay up 'til two working on homework and get up at six to get them ready for school, I'm gonna be a bitch and they're not

going to like me and I don't want to be that person. So, if that means I miss the deadline and I don't submit…"

P6: "I came to the realization that I could get the work done in four years-although now I'm not even sure I could because field work takes longer and I eventually came to that realization too-but I wouldn't be able to do the things that would also make me more employable and marketable. And some of my colleagues could, and they were the colleagues that either were single or just married or were males who had spouses who stayed home and did full time family work. And even with a spouse that did his fair share and sometimes more, the fact that I still made family time a priority and my kid a priority meant that I didn't have time to do things like publish and teach extra and do all those sorts of things. So, somewhere in there I said 'It's gonna take a little longer because I need to be employable and its gonna take me longer than it is because I'm doing this balance. Volunteering [to teach] meant that I suddenly had two opportunities to teach in the Fall. So, I knew that I wouldn't get any writing done, but I also knew that I would be able to show if I did that, that I had taught in three different areas, which again: marketability-the job market's terrible."

P7: "My criticism on my evaluation this semester was that I haven't done much above my class work. 'You really need to present papers' and that sounds great…can you give me like six extra hours a week to do them 'cause I'm not here enough to…and not having a support system affects that too. I could be done with my coursework in the summer but I will not have done anything like as far as presentations, conference presentations, or publications or anything like that. So, I don't know if I'm supposed to slow down so I can figure those things in or can I do those things while I work on dissertation? I mean, if I didn't focus on that, I could be done by next spring, but I know that I need to, and that's hard, it's hard to figure out. I plan to every semester at the beginning like I'm really gonna start working on this, get a paper for a conference, but seriously, once I have my syllabus, okay, I'm going to be busy the entire week working all these things in and then I'll be grading and then…there's just not enough time for…so, if I want to do a good job, probably gonna take me a little bit longer but I think I could be done in a year if I just get done. Which is what I am inclined to do, so I gotta try not to do that because I know I won't be very marketable when I'm done."

P9: "Is there a job out there anyway? Is there a job for a woman my age? I'm going to be at least 50 by the time I'm done with this program…so I can tool around and be an adjunct? Are you joking? That's just out of the

question, that adjunct business. That's dismal and shameful. Not only is it hard to find time to [present at conferences], I don't know what I want to do. Am I supposed to know on day one? Everywhere, I feel pushed. I feel pushed all the time, decide, decide, 'cause you need to do this and this and this in order to get a good evaluation…you need to present…present what? Like, I'm still deciding if I'm even here."

Understanding from Department When Missing Class

Most participants felt as though their departments expressed understanding if they had to miss classes, with one exception. While most participants stated that their departments were understanding if they had to miss class, elsewhere, one of the major points of contention among graduate student mothers are the attendance policies in place that they feel unfairly disadvantages them. Because graduate student mothers are often reliant upon childcare to attend classes, sick children or sick childcare workers can easily affect ones ability to attend class. For a mother with multiple children, contagious illnesses being passed from one child to the next could seriously impact her ability to pass a course if the maximum number of classes is missed during a semester. Attendance policies are meant to be equal to everyone because everyone is held to the same standard, however, this is certainly a policy that disproportionately affects graduate student mothers over non-parent students, and even graduate student fathers because women still do most of the work of caring for children (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Attendance policies will be discussed more in its own section.

One participant told of her women's studies department not being supportive of a colleague missing class after a miscarriage. This was particularly troublesome to her because she felt like the discipline of women's studies should honor the variety of

experiences and places that women in their program are in and craft methods of support

for them.

> P2: "Motherhood is not really a valid excuse for anything. And not just an excuse but, like, it's not a reason for your experience—your graduate school experience—to be any different from anyone else's. And that's frustrating because I feel like, especially in the women's studies department, it should be a priority to value the varying experiences of women and try to support them in whatever place they're in. I feel like it takes a lot of sacrifice and a lot of, like, different sacrifice because I'm a mother, to stay enrolled in the graduate program. I'm not asking for any recognition or anything like that, I think that like, you know, to have maybe a little bit better support structure in place or at least the recognition that everyone's experience is not going to be universal in grad school and that's okay, I think would be really helpful. I had a friend in the department last semester that had a miscarriage and basically that wasn't a good excuse for her missing any of her work or not responding to emails right away. And so, I think that was…that was really frustrating to see and hear her talk about."

The other participants found their departments to be supportive when having to

miss class, however, as I noted above, elsewhere, attendance policies were a major point

of contention for participants.

> P5: "They're fine…I mean, I only missed…you can only have two or it affects your grade and that's all I did."

> P8: Did not have her baby until after coursework but did have to push back dissertation deadlines. "My advisor pretty much worked with me to meet the deadline or get as close as I could to meet the deadline. He understood that once I had the baby, life was going to change. I didn't understand the way he did, he told me he had gone through the same thing when he was in graduate school. Prior to having the baby, he worked with me really hard to stay on the timeline I had set but after that, I didn't get done on time but my advisor was okay with me revising that part of my plan because he knew my life had shifted."

107

P11: "One hundred percent were supportive and it was usually something that I knew beforehand so I would tell them I would be missing and I made every effort to either turn in the work early or at least on time."

Importance of Having Their Voices Heard

Several participants discussed how important it was to have their voices heard and expressed hopes that the study might lead to policy changes. Smith ([1999] 2012) asserts, "Insisting on women's right to speak from the actualities of our experience is always potentially disruptive; there is always something new to be heard; there is always rethinking of established positions and representations to be done" (P. 17). I heard from participants over and over, both during and after the interviews that one of the things about the interview process that was helpful to them was hearing bits and pieces of my story and assurances that they were not alone. Smith ([1999] 2012) believes that in order to create a sociology for people, we must listen to the voices of women and their experiences and "…write a sociology that speaks in and of the world as it is in women's, in people's, actual experience. If we are to be writing a sociology that serves people, we have to create a knowledge of society that provides maps or diagrams of the dynamic of macro-social powers and processes from the standpoint of people's everyday/everynight experience" (P. 25). Smith ([1999] 2012) argues that our lives are not only controlled and overpowered by the ruling relations in society, but that we are also working to produce and reproduce "the social relations of discourse or large scale-organization, and inversely, the ways in which those social relations overpower our lives" (P. 226-227). This means that while I am honoring my participants' voices and have included them for

the most part, rather than using a disembodied, all-knowing, objective researcher voice, it

is also necessary to turn a critical eye inwards towards myself, as well as to critically

evaluate my participants, and even the ways this project have served to produce and

reproduce the institutions of motherhood and graduate school even while criticizing them.

> P2: "It's a very unfamiliar thing to people and it's like if they could just cultivate a tiny bit of empathy and even just talk to women and ask questions about their experiences, which is what you're doing right now— like, which is the point of your whole study—I feel like we can find a way to support women and understand their experiences, it would really…I mean…it's just insulting sometimes how out of touch people are, even when they're trying."

> P4: "I don't think what I experience is unique. I hope that your research and research like yours will help moms or women in general to feel like it's okay to pursue an education if that's what you want. And yes, it does take a lot of work, but that's okay. You can still do everything you want to do. 'cause that's the key, you want to do it. We can still be productive and still be good mothers. But there's still that guilt factor for sure."

> P5: "Part of the PhD program is sacrifice and it sucks that I have to sacrifice more than people with no children…but it is what it is, so…"

> P6: "One of the problems with the system is not seeing that there are certain things that were missing and some of my work probably…what was usually missing was my own constructive analysis 'cause I would make sure that I had done all of the research I could possibly do in the amount of time that I had and then what would get the short-shift was my own…which is a fascinating metaphor when you think about it…my own constructive thinking time…."

> P3: "My perception is that other people in my department who are single or don't have kids they think that they understand and they think that they're being understanding. And they are being as understanding as they possibly can be but they have no clue. I'm not trying to fault them for it. It's the same way that I don't really understand what it is to grow up to be a black man. I will never understand that. And I try to have empathy for it and I try to accept it when somebody tells me this is my experience. Then I would be an idiot if I was like, 'No, that's not really your experience.'

So, I try not to do that. And I feel like other people don't do that probably because we're in sociology. So, other people are also like 'Wow, that's your experience as a single mom? Wow, I don't know anything about that but I feel a little bad for you.' or something like that."

P9: "I didn't know all of the things that I told you…it wasn't very coherent in my head. So, actually saying it out loud, it's been really interesting for me. This has been an opportunity. I came here to help you but it may have really helped me."

Advice to Graduate Departments, Schools, and Universities

Participants were asked what advice they would give to graduate departments, graduate schools, and universities to help them better support graduate student mothers. It seems as though better communication in terms of training, workshops, and mentoring were popular suggestions, as were more suggestions about class times and listening to the needs of graduate student mothers within their departments and not just assuming that a one-size-fits-all approach to graduate education is appropriate.

P1: "I think even something as small as…some kind of orientation; something as small as recognizing that people are aware that maybe they have kids with crazy schedules…There's a decent amount of people that have children that are school-aged that would have that kind of information [about schools and daycares]. When you go to grad school…a lot of times, you're moving to a new place…not knowing what schools are good and what daycares are decent. Changing class times would help; I do think it's doable for some departments to potentially organize the class times to where not like every class you're taking is right at the time when your kid has to ride the bus and wait for you."

P2: "I approached [faculty] about possibly having like a workshop or something for mothers and trying to help because there are quite a few mothers in the women's studies department and trying to like, you know, not advice really but just talk about how the experience is different and how to kind of like try to negotiate those roles even as, not [just] graduate students but future professionals. In our department, they have a peer mentor-matching program. And so that was really helpful actually. I think

110

that was a huge part of what helped me navigate those spots of like 'Oh, I just shouldn't be doing this because I'm a mom.' I think my biggest advice at this point would be just listening and crafting methods of support for women based on the women in their departments. I feel, like, it's just…kind of…the motherhood experience is not understood at all. And women's experiences as mothers are so wide that what works in one department to support mothers may not work in a different one. And so, I think, just the willingness to listen to women and understand what can be done to support them.

P5: "Better communication about [conferences and professional development]. Maybe some more guidance from professors on like, hey, you did a really great job on this paper.' Maybe a mentoring program would be helpful."

P9: "I think mentoring is really vital. I think they really need to do some serious evaluation of the class times they're offering. I think there is effort to foster community but if you're a commuter, that's hard anyway. And we've got a department full of men. We need more women and not just 'lean-into-your-career-women' but women who have been in and out and prioritized things differently for themselves; we need to support each other to change that expectation."

P12: "I would also include fathers in that. Because until we change the system from the way it has been, it's not gonna allow for the change to occur. So, I think there needs to be a larger discussion, and I think the discussion has to include both parents or parents in general and people that aren't parents. So, that dialogue really helps organically create a situation. I also think that it shouldn't just benefit parents and not benefit people that don't have children. But I think it needs to be an open dialogue and creating a system that really allows for all voices to be heard. We have town hall meetings a couple times a semester, faculty [members] are there and graduate students who choose to be there and lunch is served. Faculty go all around the room talking about what work they're doing so that students can get involved. And then students voice their comments and concerns so we all can hear it. And I think it's about claiming your voice. I think it's okay to have high standards but what are those standards and how they are designed has to accommodate the way in which the world works today. And then you have to ask yourself, who are they that are [working 60-70 hours a week]…White males. They're still in control of that. And until we start to dismantle that, and the norming changes, we're still in that situation."

Class times and offerings are mentioned as something that graduate departments

should try to match to the needs of their students (class times are brought up under

Policies as well):

> P2: "Take some sort of poll about class times…why isn't there some like
> democratic way for us to figure out when is the best time for the students?
> We should be able to negotiate this a little bit instead of just 'your classes
> are in the evening, that's just how it is.' I think that's a huge deal. Just an
> interest in courses being a reflection of reality rather than just assuming
> that people work a 9-5 job…it's like a power structure for sure…like, 'you
> will participate and it is at this time and if that doesn't work for you,
> you're just not going to do this.'"

> P5: "Change class times. Don't wait 'til the last minute to tell us what the
> books are going to be."

> P9: "I think they need to offer more classes…I'm really disappointed that I
> have to trip over to [sister university]. I hate it. The other thing is their
> summer schedule…really? You supposedly want me in and out of here
> but that's what you're offering me this summer? No, I need a face-to-face
> class and I need something that is actually of interest or helpful to me in
> my degree. Family Violence…what? So, I won't be going to school this
> summer."

Attendance policies are brought up as something that needs to be addressed as

being an unfair policy, although, they are discussed elsewhere (under *Policies*) in much

more detail.

> P7: "Be realistic with what expectations will be…like attendance policies,
> marking down to a D for one absence…that's just kind of ridiculous
> considering that people have those responsibilities and I don't like
> attendance policies anyway. I feel like if I've met all the requirements,
> I've done everything I need to do, I'm not saying I skip class 80% of the
> time and you give me an A, but I'm here most of the time, I miss a couple
> of classes, but I've done everything that you've asked me to do well. I
> think that should be good enough. I don't see the point in having an
> attendance policy. If I'm missing class, that's really hurting me and not
> anybody else. Understanding people's situations and taking those things

112

into consideration but also being realistic with people when they come talk to you so that you know what to expect."

One participant suggested that departments rethink how they are treating their graduate students, and stop exploiting them.

> P3: "First rule of thumb is if you are treating someone like an indentured servant, you're probably treating them badly. They need to stop that bullshit because it's not okay. And especially for a sociology program…we study conflict and Marxism and different status groups who have different privileges and then we treat people like this…this is not okay. Even the single white dudes, it's untenable for them, it's certainly untenable for us as moms and as single moms. This is ridiculous. It's fucking ridiculous. I'm getting paid $1600 a month, no matter what. If I teach nothing, $1600 a month, if I teach three classes, $1600 a month. Of course the university is going to keep on asking me to do more and more and more classes, because they're paying me a flat rate of $1600 no matter what. And that is a system that anybody can see, whether they're a sociologist or not, can see people are going to be abused in that system. Of course they are; you're getting paid the same amount no matter how much you work. Of course you're going to get abused. The system itself is set up in a way that people are going to be abused and their time is going to be abused. I mean, the university has a vested interest in making us work as much as possible because we have a very small salary. We're supposed to know this; we study Marx. We read everything Marx ever wrote. We read Marx's shopping lists…we know this, right? But we don't act that way. So, I'm an employee of my department and I'm barely holding my head above water and I really have no incentive to actually teach well at all. I don't really have any incentive at all because I'm getting paid far less than what I'm worth and I'm the picture of the strung-out, disgruntled employee. Luckily, I love what I do so much that I end up doing it anyway. But this is all also part of Marxian analysis…that if you can get people to do a job they love, they they'll be willing to put up with a whole, whole, whole, lot of bullshit. But we're in sociology…we're supposed to know this. We aren't supposed to be taking advantage of it like capitalist douche-bags. We're supposed to be better than that and use our sociological imaginations to figure out that we're mistreating people and abusing people."

The need for affordable and accessible childcare was mentioned by eight participants, making it a major theme, as a vital means of support for graduate student mothers to be successful. Childcare is also mentioned elsewhere and this clearly was one of the most important ways that institutions could help provide a stable foundation of assistance for graduate student mothers.

> P1: "…childcare would be awesome! See, I'm like, 'Don't tell them you're home by yourself! Act like I'm there! If someone comes to the door, don't even go look. I don't want anyone to know you're there by yourself.' He's got to go in, he's got to lock the door, he's got to text me that he's there. No cooking, no answering doors. [I] can't really keep him in the classroom because there are conversations that happen and you don't want people thinking they can't say something because you've got a kid sitting in this class. So, you still have to leave him in the hallway. I don't know if that's a whole lot safer than locked up in my apartment, to be honest with you, but I guess maybe it is in some ways. But it's the classes that straddle right when he gets off school. I thought the Boys and Girls Club might be cheaper than a childcare place, but I have a friend who used to work at the Boys and Girls Club and she was like, 'I'll just be honest with you, I wouldn't recommend it. One person, 50 kids. They don't know what's going on. You have to pay for the whole week even if you're not going the whole week. And it's really not cheap.'"

> P4: "Daycare on campus…having that option for moms would be very helpful. Especially for single moms, sometimes they can't make it to class simply because they don't have somebody to watch their kids and if there was a daycare option, that they could pay for, especially if it was connected to financial aid…that would be a huge support."

> P5: "Why don't we have a daycare? Even where you drop your kids off so you can go to the library and do your homework…it'd be a great fundraiser."

> P6: "But certainly, you know, childcare, I mean, because the financial stress is, it's set up to privilege the people with privilege, right? I mean, like most things, so, <university> has a childcare that we could have access to, but it's got a 2-3 year wait period and it's more expensive than all the places around here. So, it's not actually accessible."

114

P8: "Some sort of childcare on campus would be good. Especially, some graduate students go to school at night and the daycares shut down at six o'clock. So, sometimes it was challenging for people to find babysitters at night and they would be sitting outside the classroom drawing and I often thought that I would've had to do the same thing had I had a child [while in coursework] because who would keep my baby at night; especially if my husband worked? But I wish they had-especially with the early childhood education department, they could have some childcare on campus that would help out. Hey, rather than take tuition and fees for a gym that I don't use…I never use…and other little stuff, it could be built into our tuition and we could choose that instead of choosing a gym membership or something like that. A drop-in…it doesn't have to be every week, but a back-up plan so we don't ever have to miss, you would never have to miss school because you couldn't find a babysitter. I just wish the school had something in place for mothers that would help out."

P10: "If they could provide childcare, especially because of night classes, I think that would be fabulous. If I was coming with him to class and I was dropping him off in the next building that would make everybody happy. Maybe student activism can take that on so they take that up to the university as a body but the university will be providing the space and we're looking for a safe space. Is a child safer at home, an hour's drive away from you, or are they safer with you there? A play area…yeah…that is the only suggestion."

P11: "Daycare, if you would have a place there the child could come with the parent and…those kids don't belong sitting in the classroom, I've taken all sorts of classes that were very inappropriate for kids to be sitting there…but if there was a place that was centrally located to the classrooms, I think people would take advantage of that. A drop-off situation where there is a room with video games or other games. Not an activity place where you have to take them outside or anything but just a place where they could go for that 3-hour class. If I was commuting, I would pick up the kids from school or daycare and least during the drive, you could catch up with them, get them something to eat, and then drop them off at this place where they could stay. They could do their homework, play, and be around other kids and then you could pick them up and be with them for that hour drive back home. Because, really, think about it, I had a two and a half hour trip every time I had class."

One participant suggests a much more holistic approach, starting with more

realistic workloads and encouragement of healthy balanced lives and relationships,

pointing out the high divorce rate in graduate school, lack of financial support, and the

need to institutionalize parental leave policies.

> P6: "Certainly the workload needs to be lighter…there's this [unrealistic expectation] with the acknowledgement that nobody can do that and yet, some of us are going to try. So, yeah, more reasonable expectations, and active mentoring that encourages it, so, consistent mentoring that says, 'we want you to have healthy balanced social lives, no matter what. And somebody needs to address the divorce rate. You know, I mean, parenting compiles it, but the divorce…I've watched five or six in the last five years and it's not just the people with kids, right? This is hard on relationships, period." And I know everybody is in a financial bind but a big part of it is finances because a lot of us are working…my committee said 'we want you to get done, you need to learn to say no.' and I'm like, 'I know how to say no.' The problem is, right now, I'm measuring what I say yes to by three criteria; the first is, is it going to help us financially?; second is, is it going to help me professionally?; and third is, is it going to help women in our program?; because, right now, I mean, that's taking a lot of my time and energy, which is, you know, what happens to marginalized people who are trying to do anything. Our program is not great about helping people get grants, scholarships, funds…these are things that would help everyone, but they are things that would help people live more balanced lives. [Parental leave] needs to be institutionalized as a value and a priority and not just for the moment you have a child but for the whole way through and generally healthy relationships. There needs to be some sort of institutional recognition of 'we don't actually want our divorce rate to be higher than our graduation rate.' There needs to be conversations, brainstorming, collaboration, conversations with students [and] faculty and saying 'What's workable? What's manageable?' There's a reason women don't get tenure and it needs to be addressed at these levels, the conversation needs to be happening everywhere."

One participant expressed frustration with a unique arrangement between two

universities where students can (and often must to complete their degree) take classes at

both universities.

116

P9: "And if [sister university] is going to be our second home, they really need to make the process more seamless. Add a bus route directly from [university A] to [university B] and back. They need to put the schedules together too. They talk about it being a federation and the same thing but it's not. It's a pain in the ass is what it is. We need more professors that are actually available and they need more classes."

Participants seemed to have a lot of suggestions for ways the university and their departments could better support them. Beginning with the most often mentioned or requested methods of support, overwhelmingly, here and elsewhere in the data, respondents suggest that affordable, accessible childcare is desperately needed and is needed at times when graduate classes are actually held. While I am not aware of the childcare options at all of the universities that my participants attended, I did check into childcare options on the campus of my home university. The office of Commuter Services does have a page on the Texas Woman's University's (TWU) website that gives resources about finding childcare in the area and I can see this as being a valuable resource, indeed, one participant actually said that she wished her university had helped with any of those types of things. In addition, TWU's Department of University Housing does have a childcare program called "The Clubhouse" for school-aged children, ages 5-12 that will pick children up from local public city schools and keep them from 3:00pm to 6:00pm during the Fall and Spring semesters and is open from 7:30am-5:30pm during the Summer. According to The Club House's pricing sheet, to send my children from 3:00pm to 6:00pm during the Fall 2014 semester, would cost $585 for the first child and $575 each for the other two, coming to a grand total of $1735. For teaching two courses at TWU as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (the instructor of record), I make $1498 a

month for the 4-months of the Fall semester. So, to have my children in TWU childcare would cost over a month of my salary at TWU. I also pay for tuition, books, and half the cost of healthcare for my children and myself. Just these expenses alone already deplete my meager income from TWU.

Further complicating the childcare issue is the fact that my courses generally don't begin until 6:00pm which happens to be when TWU's childcare ends. By meeting the childcare needs of graduate student mothers, universities could vastly improve the experiences and retention rates of graduate student mothers.

Another aspect that came up many times is the idea of polling students to see what class times work best for them. Classes that begin at 2:30pm and last until 5:30 interfere with children being able to be picked up from school while classes that begin at 6:00pm are not finished until 9:00pm, causing graduate student mothers to miss out on dinner and homework time with their children. Nearly all participants reported these times as problematic and expressed hopes that students might be able to have more say in class time offerings.

Attendance policies were also seen as something that disproportionately affects graduate student mothers, as discussed elsewhere.

Overall, graduate student mothers needs could be better supported by our departments and universities by having more women faculty members (and especially those that are mothers and are tenured or in tenure track rather than adjuncts); having more mentors around to help encourage graduate student mothers by giving them

118

feedback, publishing and conference help, a willingness to co-author; having more women and mothers that are graduate students-as one participant pointed out, it's hard to have a voice when you're one of only a few women and are considered the crazy feminist; the double standards that assume than men and non-mothers are more competent or committed to their pursuit of higher education than graduate student mothers must be critically evaluated and examined; women should not have to choose between tenure and babies and their pregnancies or children should not be seen as a hindrance; recognize that degree completion may take longer for graduate student mothers who are trying to build their research and conference activity and that this does not reflect less competence or less commitment but rather, a very real dedication to growing and learning as a scholar and researcher and to doing it the right way.

Many participants discussed the importance of having their voices heard, not only through this research project, but also through methods such as workshops in which the unique challenges of graduate student mothers could be looked at and offered methods of support or through town hall meetings where students can openly discuss their concerns in a safe forum. In addition, an orientation for both graduate students and their families that would make everyone aware of the expectations and rigors of graduate school would be helpful in letting everyone know up front about the workloads and challenges of graduate school.

Family or child-friendly events, campuses, and housing would also be helpful to support graduate student mothers. While my home institution of Texas Woman's

University does offer family housing, TWU does not allow children in the Recreation

Center, the Indoor Pool, or Student Health Services. This means that a mother living on

campus at TWU is not able to go to the gym to workout, despite paying to do so through

university fees, cannot take her child to the indoor pool to swim and get out energy, and,

if she is sick, she cannot take her child with her to the campus doctor. These types of

policies function as effective barriers to full participation in the TWU community for

both mother and child and operate to alienate and isolate them by making their very

existence on campus problematic and clearly not valued or wanted. What is especially

striking to me is that TWU is an historically women's only university and, therefore,

should be setting the stage and serving as a model on how to best meet women's and

mothers' needs in higher education.

Several participants called for the reevaluation of the entire university system and

the institution of graduate school, pointing out that by not adequately financially

supporting graduate students, not encouraging healthy balanced lives and relationships,

not having a larger discussion about the demands of parenting and graduate school and

failing to stress a balance between those two worlds, as well as refusing to offer more

realistic workloads, graduate students are being treated as indentured servants, being paid

just enough money to pay tuition back to the school but not enough to afford to live. We

face tuition hikes nearly every year (according to the Board of Regents, a 3.9% tuition

rate was approved for the 2014-2015 academic year and Board Designated Tutition has

increased by 34.4% over the last 6 years), and yet, our wages as graduate teaching

assistants or graduate assistants have not reflected this price hike. Just yesterday, I did

realized that TWU has given me a raise for my job as a Graduate Teaching Assistant that

equals roughly $.19 an hour, the first raise in the three years I have been employed by the

university. That doesn't even come close to covering the tuition hikes they keep imposing

on us.

Clearly, if graduate schools, departments and universities would like to

adequately support the needs of graduate student mothers, they need to begin crafting

methods of support by first asking questions and listening to the needs of their students,

by offering incentives such as better financial assistance and childcare or childcare

assistance, help subsidizing health insurance, by offering more mentoring opportunities,

and by the institutionalization of family-friendly policies such as parental leave, child-

friendly campuses, by showing that women are a valued and essential part of the

academic production of knowledge through the hiring of more women and mothers for

faculty positions and by admitting more women and mothers into graduate school.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: BALANCE

The fourth research question asks how graduate student mothers balance

motherhood and graduate school.

Balance

Participants were asked how they balanced their work and home lives and five

participants reported that they really didn't feel as though they were living balanced lives.

Work-life balance literature revolves around the demands of work and home life and how

those realms overlap. Williams (2007), quotes Mitchell, author of *The Ultimate Grad-School Survival Guide* (1997), writing: "The balancing act can be extremely complicated, especially for women who serve as caretakers for their families…traditional household responsibilities may shift when one partner is in grad school, adding potential stress to the relationship" (P. 65)

For the purposes of this study, the concept of balance referred to whether participants believed they were able to spend adequate amounts of time focusing and giving attention to their academic responsibilities and home and mothering responsibilities as well concepts such as self-care and social lives. However, this being said, no definition of what I meant by 'balance' was given, so participants were free to interpret that term for their own purposes. Because the concept of balance is a personal construction of values and idealizations of roles based on societal expectations of roles, participants interpreted the question of balance based on their own preferences for how they wanted to spend their lives. Hence, if the most important aspect to a participant was meeting the cultural expectations of intensive motherhood but the requirements of graduate school have made it impossible for them to meet those expectations, participants may feel unbalanced or overwhelmed because the balance in their lives is not what they want it to be. Alternatively, if the main goal that a participant had was to be the rockstar student in their department, and the demands of motherhood meant that they were unable to spend as much time on their school work as they would like, they may report feeling as though they aren't able to balance all their commitments or expectations. Most of us are

only able to truly be great at one or two things at a time. It is simply not possible to be the best at every single thing that we do, therefore, we must be honest with ourselves that we can be great at one thing and fair at others, or can be simply good at a few different things, but not great at anything. As reported under *Lowered Expectations*, several participants were aware that they were not able to be the best mom and the best graduate student.

Some participants reported a lack of balance in their lives, while others touted the benefits of self-care and support systems to help them balance. Still others reported sacrifice of their own time and counseling as ways they sought balance. One student criticized the system for not promoting balanced lives for graduate students.

Participants reported that they constantly felt overwhelmed and like there was always more to do, as evidenced by the following quotes:

> P1: "Um, I'm still working on that! Last semester was really…tough. I feel like I'm still sort of juggling and hoping the balls don't all fall. So, I don't have probably a great answer for that other than it's just kind of a mad rush. I never get anything done that needs to be done. I always feel like I'm behind. I always feel like there's more reading to do. I don't! That's the answer! I try, but I don't!"

> P3: "Balance? That's for Martha Stewart. I feel like it's not really a matter of balance for me anymore. I mean, it's impossible. Balance is for people who have time. I mean, it's impossible. It is impossible. I don't know…maybe there's somebody else who is able to function on four hours of sleep or speed read or speed write or something. I don't know, maybe there is some person who's capable of it. But for me, I cannot be a good mom and actually do grad school at the same time. It's not working and one of these has to go and I know which one it is. So, my career is going to suffer. And I haven't finished my thesis that's two weeks from completion and I should have. And I haven't done my homework for today that's due at 2:00. So, I don't know what else to do. I mean, I've

tried all kinds of thing and it just doesn't happen. I guess I am mostly managing by giving up…which…I guess is a kind of depressing thing to say…but it's realistic. I don't know what else to do."

P5: "Not very well. With lots of tears honestly…if I didn't have the husband I have right now, I don't think…there'd be no way I could be back in school. He is very supportive…without him, I can't even imagine. I couldn't do it as a single mom. I'm not emotionally unstable by any means, but I think sometimes I'm on the fence of one more thing is just gonna push me into…you know…Let's hope I can get through this (tears up)."

P9: "Well, last semester, I didn't do a very good job of that. I was so burned out after the two nights in a row [in class] that usually the next day, I was practically in a coma. And after that, I was trying to prepare for the next week. So, I did not do a good job. This semester, I think I'm doing better. I'm seeing my friends more. And when my husband is home [in town], I'm just trying to spend a couple of good hours with him so that we're talking. If we're really going to talk about self-care and be realistic about it, if we're really going to talk about a balance between home and the work that we do, you know, something has to give. I just think it's a constant juggle figuring out…there's not really a formula, you just have to make constant adjustments."

P12: "I don't balance. I get up at 5:30am. I think I'm gonna start at that time and sometimes I do. I mean, what is balance? I think…balance…I don't know…I just try to do the best I can do with whatever I can do. Sometimes I find myself sitting on the couch just staring into the…I don't even wanna put the TV on. What I do do, I guess, is that I travel. It may be a weekend and then I end up totally overwhelmed with work, but the only way I can really get away is by traveling and so, I do that."

Other participants reported reliance on self-care to help them feel balanced, as well as scheduling and allocation of dedicated work times:

P2: "I guess the self-care is probably the biggest way I balance it. And then, time-wise, just having to schedule my work in specific time slots based on my daughter, so I work a lot during her naptime or after she goes to bed or while she's in school twice a week, or while she's with my parents."

124

P7: "I'm more rigid probably than I should be but I decide that I'm not available at this time because I'm doing this instead. Like [skipping class for Halloween], I didn't feel bad, I'm not going to class, it's Halloween. That's really the only way I can do it. And the same thing with homework, I'll say, 'I've gotta do this at this point.' I try not to be [on campus] because it's far from home, more than a couple days a week."

P8: "I would have to be honest and say counseling. The counseling helped because it all drains you emotionally. But I made sure I talked to somebody when I was at my low point, and then, I tried to plan as much as possible. Although, with a child, sometimes it's hard to plan, but I remember when I first got pregnant, my sister-in-law [told me] 'all them to-do lists and schedules you got going to go out the window.' Now I see that because you don't know from one day to the next when you have a child what's gonna come. The day of my defense, my baby had a fever and so we had to shift gears. But I tried to plan as much as possible and tried to stick to the schedule, and talk to people and make my husband and I work together on a lot."

P10: "Boxing things? Allocating time to things? Saying that the weekend is coming up; if I spend Saturday entirely on my stuff, Sunday, we'll do his stuff. So, sort of by conscious negotiation. You have got to consciously compartmentalize and have small moments in the month when you'll give rewards. Moments of the month when you'll give rewards like going out for dinner-and hope that it comes out as a reward because you're not carrying your book with you, you're not talking shop, you're not picking up the phone, it's your child's time. You mentally allocate that…of course, the good thing about mentally allocating it and not sharing that conscious negotiation with the child, for instance, is that you can break the rule and you discover that you break them often. You also get used to disappointment and learn to grow a thick skin and you keep telling yourself, 'Okay, I can do this thick skin for the next three years and then after that, I'll find my moment when, you know, I won't have to explain and make excuses.' The thing is, three years is a long time; what you've lost, you've lost."

One participant equated her attempt at balance to 'sacrifice' and not having any 'me-time':

> P4: "You just do it. You sacrifice…I don't even know what me-time is. I
> really think that people do what they want to do. So, if you want it bad
> enough, then you just make it happen. You put your energy into that
> 'cause it's important. It's…after my kids, it's probably more important
> than anything else…and that sounds awful. It sounds so terrible to say it
> but it's reflected in how much time we spend [working on it]."

One participant criticized the lack of balance in the lives of graduate students and attributed it to the shortcomings of the educational system and felt as though the system should do more to encourage healthy, balanced relationships:

> P6: "The system is set up to not encourage healthy balanced relationships,
> generally. I would like to see the system set up to encourage healthy
> balanced relationships generally, so that we're all doing our work from
> those sorts of places, which, I think, creates a richer sort of work, because
> it's a work that comes from a place of being more healthy and balanced
> and contextually situated as opposed to just studying books all the time
> and writing and not developing and maturing in those other sorts of ways.
> The demands of the program are such that some can do those but at the
> cost of their own healthy balanced life. So, even if they don't have kids or
> aren't married, they're still not living a healthy balanced life if they're
> putting in this much work, you know, and yet, they're setting this bar and
> the standard for the rest of us."

One participant balanced by involving her children in her school activities and research:

> P11: "If I've gone to the library, I've had to take them with me. I've kind
> of had them help with research, you know, things that they could look up
> for me, definitions or things like that that kind of kept them involved and
> they've been very patient with the whole process. And they've known

126

when I needed to be in another room, they know, they've known…all the typing and research and hours and hours spent at the computer."

Self-Care

Some participants discussed what types of self-care they engaged in and I began actively asking about self-care for the remainder of the interviews. One participant actually saw pursuing their dreams in graduate school as a means of self-care.

> P2: "I think that graduate school actually is me taking care of myself. That's how I see it because it's me pursuing things that I'm passionate about and things that help me relate to other people well. And so, even though it's really taxing mentally, and sometimes even physically, like lack of sleep and that kind of thing, I find it really meaningful, and so, I see that as part of self-care."

One participant noted that she tried to engage in self-care while her parents took her child for a an overnight visit:

> P2: "If I need to just sit in bed for the whole morning and read or if I need to go to a coffee shop with a friend or have a phone call with someone. I think it ultimately helps me to deal with everything and from such a better place than if I were to focus on completing tasks."

Other participants talked about the things they engage in to practice self-care such as eating healthy, exercising, and little treats to themselves or lunching with friends.

> P1: "I probably don't as well as I should. I try to…like, on campus sometimes, I'll have days where I'll have just an hour or two here or there happens to be somebody else, so we'll go get lunch and so it's not a huge amount of time but it's a little amount of time for venting and stuff like that. I don't do like spa days and stuff like that. My taking care of myself is like 'Ok, I'm going to look at Facebook for 15 minutes.' Or 'I'm going to watch just this one TV show.'

> P4: "I go to Starbucks…that sounds really dumb but that's kind of like my treat to myself. I go almost every day, which is kind of pathetic, but that's sort of my little thing that I have to have every day or almost every day.

127

And then going to the gym…they say if you exercise that produces the feel good hormones and that it helps you think more clearly. And I do let myself sleep in on the days I don't come here."

P9: "The one thing I didn't let go last semester was cooking. I cooked for myself and I ate really-really well all semester long. I didn't let that go last semester. I was determined not to let it go. Instead of just taking 2 yoga classes a week, I now take 4. I just make sure I get there because it's the only thing that's going to keep me calm and grounded."

One participant noted she doesn't really engage in self-care:

P10: "I don't. I don't. There are many parts of you and there's nothing new to me right now. We used to do it at the disco…what is it called now? To hang out? I would have absolutely no pleasure in going to just sit at a bar swinging my legs and having a martini. So, unless we [she and her child] are there together, it has no meaning to me. So, me is defined by him. There is no me, as such. I remember one time friends in the program said 'You know, we need me-time. Let's go and get a pedicure.' And for a few minutes, well, it feels nice. Somebody's taking care of your toes and all, but can I be doing that every week? No, it's totally meaningless. I would rather be lying in a field with him staring at the stars or the sun saying, 'What does that cloud look like?' and just eating popcorn."

Graduate School as a Positive Experience and Empowering

Three participants spoke of graduate school as being a positive and empowering experience and that it actually helped them feel like they were doing something for just them. I have decided to include this under '*Balance*' because I feel like even though these same participants may have said elsewhere that they don't feel like they are balancing very well, they still see graduate school as a very positive and affirming experience for them.

P2: "It shows you your own strength. Like, for me, I respect myself so much more because of everything I've gone through. I think psychologically and emotionally, grad school has actually really helped me to value self-care and value developing my own interests as a way of

128

parenting well, and a way of being the best parent that I can for my child, and seeing that as a positive thing instead of like torn between two different interests. I am able to learn more about myself and learn more about how I'm empowering myself and empowering other women with the decisions that I'm making. I think it's made me feel like I am doing this for my daughter. So, I think ultimately, it's been a really positive experience."

P3: "As soon as I got into college and then started going to grad school, I felt like a fish that had been put back into water after suffocating on land. That's how I felt. I'm kind of like nerdy and academic and people appreciate the fact that I know things and that I am nerdy. And I'm so much happier now. My kids have talked about it, that they can see the difference with me being happy in grad school in spite of the fact that it's a lot of time. But at the same time, being happy, my kids can see it and they are happy for me and they're happier people. And I'm able to interact with them in ways that are positive and loving and kind because when you feel bad about yourself and you hate yourself, you cannot be kind to the people around you."

P4: "Being a mom in graduate school shows your children you value education. This, in turn, will give them 'capital' of various kinds to aspire to educational achievements in their own lives. My son said recently, 'I think I may get a PhD once day, but I think I will get it *before* I have children, but I know I will at least get a master's degree.' [This was] a positive statement, though an underlying hint of his felt reality."

Health

One theme that emerged through the interviews was health problems. I began actively asking participants how their health had been since beginning graduate school after the first interview. I chose to put this section under the research question about balance because the existence of health problems is likely indicative of a lack of balance and stress. Some participants struggled with chronic health problems that were present before graduate school, while others had health issues that had cropped up since

129

beginning graduate school. Seven participants reported ongoing health issues, making it a

major theme.

> P2: "I have something called [chronic illness] and so like, it's tough. I carry a lot more tension in my body during school. I can definitely tell a big difference in the tension in my body and my muscles.
> And I think, you know, I get sick a lot because of [my child] because she just brings home stuff. And so, I think I get sick quite a bit because of her, which makes it difficult for doing school consistently when you're sick and your child is sick. It's really hard to keep up with school for that week or whatever."

> P3: "I have [chronic illness], so my health is…you know, if I do things wrong like eating unhealthfully or not sleeping enough or whatever, my digestive track in out of whack in like two days, three days. So, I really have immediate direct feedback for how healthy I am.

> P5: "You mean that high blood pressure that I have? I mean, my mental health is probably not as good as it was pre the decision to go back [to school]. I just feel like I teeter on having to be that crazy person that finishes her degree and everybody's like, she's crazy…maybe not…"

> P6: "I've struggled with migraines and tension headaches since adolescence, but they've been at a whole new level since starting doctoral work. My first two years, I had a headache about three times a week. I usually got it managed with meds before it escalated into a full-blown migraine (with vomiting and bed rest required). When I had the second baby, they shifted to daily, and I had to start seeing a neurologist. In the past two years, all we've done is managed meds, which I now take daily. It's still not super common to be unable to manage them with meds but when they are full-blown, it's debilitating. And it's worrisome to me to be taking so many meds. Massage would help, but we can't afford it. And the new insurance has denied coverage of the rescue meds that work. I haven't had time to appeal or explore this but it's scary and frustrating. I notice when I get the rare break from school they diminish somewhat. I'm lacking energy more so than I once was (even though I exercise regularly and eat fairly healthy), and I'm having some short-term memory issues that are just from the stress and overwhelming nature of this huge balancing act (and act might be the right word as I definitely miss things. Also, for what it's worth, I got my first gray hairs towards the end of my first year."

130

P8: "I was stressed and after I had the baby, I battled post-partum depression…that bothered me, you know, it affected me mentally to that I was going through that mentally and it was crazy. At the same time, I was still analyzing my data."

P9: "Last semester, I got a tick in my right eye that didn't go away all semester long. I think it was from nerves. I had two night classes back to back so I wouldn't see my daughter at all [for 48 hours]. I got sick at the end of the semester during final exams-I got the flu. I haven't had so much as a sniffle in a decade. I was not happy with last semester at all. I was a lunatic. I didn't have time for anybody; I was speaking really fast. It was weird. It's no way to live. I practice yoga, modern dance…I have a meditation practice but last semester I couldn't focus at all. I would sit in meditation but it was really weird…I couldn't…and I have meditated for years."

P10: I have a lot of migraines but I try not to make my physical discomforts not show because there isn't time for it."

Five participants reported health impacts due to lack of sleep that plagued them since beginning graduate school. Sleep problems are also mentioned in other sections of the paper (See *Relationship Strain*).

P1: "I feel like I'm always tired, even when I feel like I've probably slept enough or like I have done nothing that day, I feel tired."

P3: "I've tried to cut out as much sleep as I can. I'm not getting as much sleep, and you know, there are issues there."

P7: "I don't sleep as well either because I'm not…I have to get up and I don't have the time to do it…so, it's not as good, you know.

P8: "My sleep patterns changed because I didn't get any sleep. Once I submitted my dissertation, my body just shut down. I felt like rest was just waiting on me."

P9: "I think my health suffered a lot. I couldn't sleep. My stomach was in knots all the time and I think that was just pressure that I felt on myself to do well. But I can't just be in a program and not do well. Even when I would force myself to go to bed, I couldn't sleep."

Seven participants discussed eating poorly, making it a major theme, since beginning graduate school and how this has impacted their health.

P1: "Last semester I forgot to eat for a while at the beginning…it was just…I was so busy and I think I was so stressed that I wasn't super hungry. I didn't do it for a long period of time but there were definitely several days that I didn't eat."

P2: "Eating, I think, suffers a lot. I really love to cook but I don't like to just cook for myself. And I don't have a lot of time or energy to go to the grocery store consistently and make lists and do menus and then cook and do the dishes. And so, I end up eating a lot of crap and eating what she eats which is like a quesadilla and like ham and cheese. Because like, I have to make that and so it's like 'well, okay, I guess I'll eat that too. So, there's definitely some sacrifices on that front, which I think, you know, holistically does affect my health even if it's not like an obvious outcome."

P3: "It got to a point 2 semesters ago where my best friend was paying my daughter 50 cents to ask me every single day if I'd eaten a meal yet today and then make sure that I ate in front of her if I hadn't eaten yet. So, I went out to eat, $10 burritos from Taco Casa, which makes everybody really unhealthy and feel bad. Certainly I'm not eating as healthfully but happiness is making me healthier than anything."

P5: "We eat crap sometimes. Those kids like Ramen Noodles…they're prepared for college, that's what they say. [Grad school] affects your dietary, you know, we eat crap…and that's not healthy…"

P6: "I didn't realize just how much caffeine and alcohol I drank in my first year until I was pregnant [and could no longer use them]."

P6: "I went into that exam [after an hour and half of sleep] and I called my brother, and I was like, 'okay, this is how much caffeine I have just consumed. This is how much [caffeine] I'm going to consume over the

next seven hours. I need you to figure out when I can safely [nurse] my baby again, and by the way, don't respond to me until after seven hours have passed.'"

P7: "I don't eat well in school. I can definitely tell a difference."

P8: "My eating…I gained a lot of weight because I didn't have time to eat right."

Participants had varying answers to the question of how they balanced their lives, with many stating that their lives did not feel balanced and they felt overwhelmed and as though there was always more to do and they were always behind. Some participants reported spending time with loved ones and children as a means of balance, one discussed her reliance on her husband and one reported sacrificing any time for her self, yet another reported taking her children to the library with her. Some participants discussed self-care in terms of doing physical activity and one discussed going to Starbuck's for a treat, one discussed having lunch with friends, and one reported healthy cooking. Additionally, as I reported earlier, the health problems that participants discussed were conceptualized as symptomatic of a lack of balance. Chronic health problems, lack of sleep, and poor eating habits are all negatively affecting graduate student mothers. Balancing workload and relationships is important in order to avoid high attrition rates due to burnout. Perhaps graduate schools, departments, or universities could offer workshops or mentoring that would encourage healthy, balanced lives.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: EXISTENCE OF SUPPORT NETWORKS

The fifth research question explores the support networks of graduate student mothers and how these networks help them to be successful or by contrast how the lack

of a support system may impact success. A woman is restrained by the social capital she

has to work with including the support system she has in place to help her succeed such

as family, her workplace, and the institutions in her life (Williams 2007). Support for

graduate student mothers must come from multiple sources in order to optimize success,

including the university, in terms of policies that are student-centered, child-centered, and

parent-centered (Williams 2007), and better means of financial support along with

flexible and affordable childcare; the department in terms of policies, advisors, mentors,

funding, more flexible course and program options and times, as well as an orientation

that includes information that may be helpful for parents; support from family and friends

in terms of helping out on occasion, fostering a sense of acceptance, being non-

judgmental about graduate school and mothering; and support from spouses or partners in

terms of helping meet household and childcare responsibilities; and finally, I argue,

graduate student mothers need support from other graduate student mothers. My

participants told me over and over that they felt alone, alienated, isolated, as though they

didn't belong, and they felt like no one understood them, other graduate student mothers

would seemingly be able to understand their feelings better than anyone else. Grenier and

Burke (2008) challenge the university to taking a closer look at the current supports for

female graduate students while also noting that prior research by Thagaard in 1994 and

by Maher, Ford, and Thompson in 2004 has shown that female mentors are particularly

important to female graduate students as role models. Among early-finishers [of their

degree], those students who had established and positive working relationships with

134

faculty members were more likely to complete their degrees early. Early-finishing

women were also more likely to report support from family members (74% versus 53%

for late-finishers. As Williams (2007) argues:

> *The truth is, unless these graduate students who are mothers are "superwomen,"
> a term which holds all kinds of connotations on its own, they won't progress
> without support, real and perceived. Therefore, support needs to come from the
> academy, from the family, from friends, from childcare facilities. In short,
> anywhere possible.* (P. 166)

Support System

Participants were asked what sort of support system they had in place in order to

assess the ways in which a support system could either help or hinder their success. Four

participants had little to no support system to help them in terms of advice, childcare,

finances, or illnesses, etc. This lack of support system could prove problematic over the

long term in terms of retention rates.

> P1: "I don't have anything here now (laughs)."
>
> P4: "I have none. I mean, having other graduate students around, I think
> that makes a big difference, like, they can relate. And they can offer
> advice or you feel like we are communicating in the same language. I feel
> like that makes a huge difference and even though the exchanges are small
> and brief, it makes a huge difference for me. But yeah, I guess if I really
> think about it, I don't really have a support system outside of the little
> friendships I have on campus."
>
> P5: "Moving is lonely…I don't have a lot of friends…I was filling out the
> paperwork for the kids' stuff [at school] and so it was [asking for an]
> emergency pick-up [person] and…I don't have anybody…don't have an
> emergency [person]…like, I didn't know…"
>
> P7: "Most of my family and friends are [out of state], so that has actually
> been an issue since we've been here, the whole time we've been here,
> because I don't have a support system. I don't have people I really talk to

135

or…I went to therapy for a while…I mean, there was no specific…I just need[ed] somewhere to say things…these things that I can't…My goal is to not feel so frazzled and I don't know how to just calm down and I don't want to burden my husband with everything and…he tries to fix it 'cause that's what men do is try to fix it and I don't want it fixed, I just need you to hear that I'm having a stressful week or I've got a lot."

Some participants reported having very supportive family that helped them in terms of advice, childcare, finances, and illness.

P2: Discussed her family, parents and sisters in terms of how they help support her by providing childcare.

P8: "My mom will help financially and when she comes out, she'll keep [child's name]. My sister would help. The babysitter, she will work with us sometimes so we could still pay the drop in rate. I talk to my friends a lot and I have a spiritual mentor that I talk to a lot too, and my husband."

P9: "My husband is huge; I'm really lucky that way. I mean, he's the one that keeps me going when I get discouraged. He's my best friend. I have a best friend that lives close by and she's really encouraging. My mom, even though she's long distance."

Others discussed having a good network of other friends and graduate students that they turn to for help.

P3: "Certainly the other grad students around me, like, I can commiserate with them but all of us are in the same boat. Like, none of us know exactly what to do about this. We're all stuck in the same position."

P10: "Mostly friends. I've got lots of friends and his daycare and church group. So, a give and take with people in similar situation has been healthy. So, that's the new family structure. I can call it that."

P11: "I had friends that could put the kids to bed and then I would be there and I would miss 'em on those days, but, you know, I was lucky to be able to communicate by phone and if it was a ballgame I was missing, someone would keep me up to date on what I was missing. I mean, I couldn't have done it without other people and I just feel fortunate it has worked out so far. I had a boss that guided me as far as staying on deadlines and not

putting things off and letting me leave early or miss a day. My best friend would watch the kids and schedule around where I was going to be and get the kids where they needed to go and then I could pick them up when I was through. So, really, it was a big network."

P12: "I don't have family here. My ex-husband is not from here either. We don't have family here. We have a group of friends who have been our family. So, that's been one of the issues is that it's not like I could get away and leave our child somewhere. So, who do I call? My best friend who lives [out of state], my family, or friends here; I mean, I have a great support network. I go to different people for different things. I don't know if this is ironic, but I was one of the last of my friends to have a partner, to get married, and so, my child is younger by years. I could be his grandmother, which people have asked me. And then a lot of my close friends don't have children. They chose not to have children. So, it's a very different world for me. My social network isn't a bunch of families who the kids met in elementary, 'cause I worked."

Childcare Arrangements

Some participants reported what I have conceptualized as a patchwork childcare system. Due to the ever changing schedules of graduate students, obtaining reliable and consistent childcare can be challenging, especially because childcare needs change by semester based on the times and days that the graduate student mother is taking and/or teaching and assisting with courses. Some of the married participants have worked out arrangements with their husbands or older children to watch the kids while they attend class.

P1: "Two days [a week] he rides the bus home, gets in the apartment, locks the door, and texts me. And then, I'm home shortly after him, but I can't be home then because I'm in the middle of class."

P2: "[my parents] take her usually once a week at least [and] maybe every other weekend for like a night or two. And If I need them during the day or when I was commuting [to campus overnight] they usually kind of step up to that as well. So, they're my like primary child care providers. And

137

then my sister, kind of like, if I need to run errands or go to [an appointment] for my job and just maybe for like a couple of hours at a time. She [also] goes twice a week to a little preschool for like 5 hours. And then I have like a drop-in daycare kind of thing for if I need to, you know, like, that's kind of my last resort."

P4: "We used to rely a little bit on friends. We have used after-school care but it hasn't been everyday. It's just been like one or two days a week for like an hour. And my daughter could babysit now if there's like an in-between time. I mean, we don't see each other but we're…one of us is always with the kids."

P5: "I'm taking [class] and its from 2:00-5:00 in the afternoon so I'm…I'm…there's like this conflict within myself 'cause I'm having to have somebody else pick them up from school and I've always picked them up from school.

P6: "I knew from the start that doctoral work was gonna be fulltime work and so that meant we were gonna have to have fulltime childcare."

P8: "We have him set up [at daycare] on the drop-in rate where we pick two days a week to take him but she would tell us if we're gonna bring him three days, then we have to pay the full rate for that week, which is $150. And so, if we decide to do that, then we would just take him for the whole week and not take him three days. We're not going to pay $150 for three days. My husband doesn't work Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, so, those were my library days and he gets off at 3:00pm on Sunday. Those were my days to work on my dissertation. Then Mondays, I would keep the baby at home with me and Tuesday and Wednesday, I would take him to childcare so I could do my work-work and then on days when [husband] was off, that's when I worked on my graduate stuff."

P10: "I was just lucky that in the same apartment complex, there was an Indian girl who was at the end of her coursework. And so, I had her coming in for the three nights that I'd be out from 6:00-9:00. That's how I worked it out. And so, when she left 2 years later, when he was now 12, and then I had day classes so I had to do the marathon back home to make sure he was home when the bus was dropping him. So, we had a few close calls but my neighbor, the old lady downstairs, was very happy to keep him for the 10 minutes before I got there."

P11: "I haven't had to use childcare (she states elsewhere that her friends have picked up the kids for her-see *Support System*). I know TWU has daycare but those are during the day…I looked on their website but I think it ends at 5:30 or 6:00. So, for commuter students or evening students, I don't think there is an option and I think that's a great need that they might want to explore is something for the full-time workers who are trying to juggle commuting and full-time work and a grad degree. And also, too, the daycare is so expensive and because I work full-time, I don't qualify for any assistance there. When the kids were little, you know, one was in elementary, one in daycare, I couldn't fathom picking up from daycare and then plopping you into an evening daycare. I'm glad I didn't have to make that decision and I just put off going back to grad school until the kids were older."

P7: "We haven't had to have any help for school stuff because [husband and oldest child]."

P12: "When my first son was born, I was ABD and thinking that was all gonna be solidified. So, we had a nanny and all that. And when he died, I made the decision that childcare [with future children] was gonna be minimal. So, because we were two academics, we could work our schedule, so he had very limited childcare. I was very, very blessed with that, that we didn't have much childcare. It's been more of a problem now and he's still not driving. But it's working out okay 'cause he's older and he can ask friends for a ride home. So, childcare really hasn't been that much of an issue for us."

Family Support

Participants were asked how supportive their families have been of their decision to return to school. Seven respondents stated that their families were supportive of their return to school.

P1: "They're supportive…I don't think they're happy that I had to move away to do it…like 'If something happens and you want to give up, we won't think you're a quitter! You can come home anytime!"

P2: "They are supportive, yeah. I think they kind of question the value of it, just because it's a liberal arts degree. They understand that it's important to me, it's something that I'm passionate about. I think they

139

respect that [it's something that I really need to do] and they have shown it in really tangible ways even if, you know, in the long run they don't think it's maybe the best idea. My sister has been fully supportive. She's been in grad school at the same time as well. And so she totally understands and she has been kind of like my cheerleader whenever I'm like 'I don't know if I can do this anymore.' So, that's been a really nice source of support."

P6: "There's no way I could have survived the first semester, much less the whole thing without both [my husband] and my parents. My mom was living here so we didn't have to put [our child] in daycare, which was nice both financially and just nice and so she stayed home with him and thrived, and like had more energy."

P8: "My mom even paid child care so the baby can go to the daycare and I can go to the library and finish writing my last few chapters."

P10: "They're very supportive, I guess because of the kind of family I'm from. Everybody is an achiever; everybody has a career. So, career moves are not seen to be in contradiction to your mothering or parenting."

P11: "Absolutely, and I am a single mom so that kind of threw another element of having to depend on other people."

P12: "They just see me as just always being in education. They're excited. We're gonna go to Paris for graduation. I have a lot of support and a lot of people who don't understand what I'm doing, but that's okay."

Two participants reported that their parents and family are semi-supportive or try to be supportive but maybe are not as supportive as the participants would like them to be.

P3: "My parents are more supportive than you'd expect. They act supportive in spite of the fact that I'm pretty sure internally they don't feel supportive."

P7: "They are all kind of tired of me being in school now. My husband is more supportive this time than with my first masters…and with my second masters….he was not happy I was getting a second masters when he would have preferred I'd just gone to work. [My mom] is really supportive and my husband's mom too. A lot of my friends and other family

members, it's jokes…but it gets old hearing the jokes. So, it's a mixture. For the most part, they're good, but I can tell by the jokes that they're kind of making fun of me."

Two respondents reported that their families are not supportive of their decision to return to graduate school.

> P4: "I get a lot of the same, like, you shouldn't be working so much kind of feedback. And that's been hard, I think. They sort of take my husband's side on all that stuff. Now that I'm almost done, they're like 'Oh we're so happy for you' and I think 'Yeah, right.' This whole time when I've been slaving away, I feel like I've had so much resistance. Like, no support at all. So, sort of mixed, like, we're proud of you, but at the same time, what you're doing is anti-mom, anti-wife, so, not pro-family." She also discusses being told that her dream to teach abroad for a semester is "anti-family." "I think, how come I can't have a dream or a desire, why does it have to be bad just because I'm a woman?"

> P5: "No, I come from a [specific religious background]…women should stay home with their children. My own personal family refers to me as 'overeducated' and I'm…I'm done…I'm just…I…I…believe strongly that you have relationships of choice and you have relationships of circumstance and unfortunately family is a relationship is a relationship of circumstance unless you make it a choice and so, I have chosen to just walk away rather than be belittled because I'm back in school."

Father Involvement

Participants were asked about the involvement of the father in the lives of the child/children. Three respondents were single, never-married, and responded in this way:

> P1: "Once a month, sometimes more if we can swing it. And then he gets him like half the summer, spring break, all that kind of stuff. But he's not here to handle all of the day-to-day…that kind of stuff."

> P2: "I don't have a co-parent, it's all…I have full custody of her with supervised visitation for him."

141

P10: Looking at my progress in the program, I don't understand if I had a husband how I would do it. I honestly must say that, because that's a third factor. I don't even know where they fit it. I almost feel like sometimes you have to tell them 'I'm doing this for four years, that's it.'"

Three participants are divorced with some sort of custody arrangements and responded in this way:

P3: "Actually, I was just saying a couple of days ago that I don't think I could go to grad school if it weren't for the fact that I was divorced. But when I was married, he was out of town constantly. I was basically a single mom but I didn't get a break from my kids because they weren't shuffled between two houses, which I know is not necessarily emotionally good for kids…but I'm only talking here about my own ability to do my school work. It's definitely been helpful for me for them to go between two houses. [Ex-husband] is somewhat supportive. He is not the world's best dad but he certainly isn't a horrible dad. My kids probably won't end up in therapy."

P5: "He only takes them every other weekend if they want to go. And I don't force it. He can't be inconvenienced to do anything. But my current husband is great and he does anything he needs to do. He cooks meals, he does laundry, he counsels them, he tries to motivate them, and he takes them to school every morning so I can drink my coffee."

P12: "He picks up my son most days from school except on the day that we're both at school. But I still manage…we don't go by the state custody and stuff…I made a promise that he could see his son whenever he wanted to because we lost a child. But the truth of the matter is that my son stays with me most of the time."

Other participants reported very active and involved fathers as seen in the following responses:

P4: "He's kind of like the dad that all the moms think is so awesome 'cause he goes to all the field trips and he volunteers at their school and he…just does a lot of stuff with them. And he makes their lunches and he drops them off and picks them up more than I do. And so, everyone thinks he's a superhero."

P7: "I think there's times he kind of resents…he's kind of had to take care of things for me to do that. But he's really involved anyway as a dad, so that helps. I think if he was less involved, it would probably be harder for me to sell him on, it's been a little easier for me that way. He does a lot of the hands-on doing things but I do all of the planning and scheduling. I get frustrated because he minimizes that like it's not a big deal but it is a big deal to keep track of five people's schedules."

P8: "For the first 3 or 4 months, he just stayed at home. He wasn't working and that was our original plan, that he would stay at home and keep the baby and I would work until he finished school and then he found a part-time job. And that changed the dynamics of everything a little bit because I really didn't want him to work, I wanted him to stay home with the baby. But if I have to go to the library and I need to go there for 10 hours, he's going to keep him, so he was a great support system for me. I don't think I could've completed this and be a mom if it wasn't for him because he-whenever I said I needed to go he-he just took him. It wasn't like he saw himself babysitting his son; he saw himself being his son's father and that's what he was supposed to do, but I always say he took on the role of a mother, because I felt he kept my son…our son…more than I did. Even with getting up at night, for a while, him and my son would sleep in a separate room just so I could sleep at night and have a fresh brain to write the next day. So, he did all the getting up at night and changing pampers, he did all that…I never did that."

P9: "I don't want either of us to have to carry it alone. I would like it if there is a little more joint…it's like either I'm doing it or he's doing it. I like it when we do it together. I'm just more organized as far as, I tell him 'here's what needs to happen this week' and he'll pick up that ball and run with it but it still all filters through me. I feel like I'm CEO of the corporation."

Gender Roles

Participants were not asked specifically about gender roles, however, this came up in several different places. Conceptually, I see this section as being intricately interwoven with *Ideologies about Motherhood* as well as *Women in Academia*, however, the quotes chosen for this section seemed to reflect an ever so slight difference from the quotes

chosen for the aforementioned sections. These quotes seem to refer more to the double

standards for men and women involving work, graduate school, and even childcare

responsibilities. Through examining the women's experiences, it is my hope that ways of

better supporting women who have returned to school will emerge and be enacted

through a better understanding of sexism in our institutions and in our homes.

Participants point out glaring differences in expectations for men and women in both the

world of work or graduate school and even at home in their parenting responsibilities.

> P4: "You see men all the time who work in places different from where they reside. They're military maybe or they have to spend large amounts of time traveling for their work. So, in essence, if you add it all up, they probably are gone months out of the year. But that's okay if you're a man…but if you're a mom or a woman, then you're bad. Even if the other person is there, like, if the husband is there to take care of the kids. I think, how come I'm less of a mom just because I want to do something different than what all the other moms do? If a man was pursuing graduate school and his child was sick, then it would be the expectation that the wife or the mom would take care of the kid…whereas, it doesn't go both ways. It's definitely major, major, major, gender stereotypical roles that I think women in graduate school have to overcome big time."

> P5: "I have a friend whose husband is working on a PhD and he has an office in the house and he locks himself in his office for six or seven hours at a time and she brings him dinner and it's no big deal. He never once has to worry about how the kids are going to be taken care of…never a concern. But for me, every class I take, every assignment I have to work on, in the back of my head, I have to think 'what about the kids?' I've always been very clear that full-time parenting family work is not…doesn't make me the best parent that I can be…it's just not me…I think I'm a better parent whenever I'm doing things. I paid my cousin to come to my house [during my first masters degree] and watch my baby while he sat on the couch because he couldn't do it. And I don't think I'm alone in that. There are so many men who think raising children isn't their job and post things on Facebook like, 'Well, I have to babysit the kids because she's in class…It's not babysitting when it's your own damn child. Learn to be a parent. So, until the conversation changes about who

144

is the parent and what it means to be a dad, I'm not sure that academia will ever adapt enough. As long as men are thinking it's not my job, then how are moms going to go to school?"

P6: "I watched male colleagues have kids in the middle of coursework, you know, I've watched 4 or 5 of them have kids in the middle of coursework. And I'm like, 'Your wife is getting exploited.' I tell them that. I do have a few [male] colleagues in my year and the year after me who have been primary or main caregivers during coursework or the program [and not relying on childcare]. Their work has suffered, I would say more so than my own. And no one that I know of has raised any concern. This seems like the typical double standard because I strongly suspect that if my coursework suffered that much (they hardly read anything and turn in substandard work; I've just gotten a couple of A-minuses), and I didn't have my children in childcare, I would be scrutinized much more for not being properly focused. As is, they are seen as devoted fathers (I relate this to single mothers and single fathers)."

P9: "I think for women, from what I've noticed, is that my whole family sacrifices so that I can be in this program in a way that maybe my whole family wouldn't have to sacrifice if my husband was [in school]. My husband, when he is home, there is nothing he won't do. He cooks, he cleans, we really share the workload. I look around and realize how fortunate I am. I see what's happening in other women's households and I realized that I should be skating through. So, the fact that I'm not tells me just how hard it really, really is."

P12: "My ex-husband is an academic. He spent our entire 16 years of marriage writing a book, which is now published and he is alone because that's what he chose to do. And I think men are constructed to do what they need to do because there's always been somebody…and I don't know if it's changed that much. He wanted to work out, he worked out. He wanted to write-he wrote. He wanted to teach-he taught."

Peer Mothers

Participants were asked if they had a peer group of graduate student mothers that they could share their struggle with and ask advice from. None reported having a close-knit group of student mothers to rely on, despite many of them saying they felt better

145

after talking to me during the interview and wished they had realized earlier that they were not alone in a lot of the areas they were struggling in. This is one reason some sort of workshop or mentorship program for graduate student mothers, as suggested by one of my participants, might be really helpful to help graduate student mothers make connections with other student mothers in similar situations.

> P2: "I think through Facebook, that's been a good source of support for me. There are several other students that are mothers and I found people who are not mothers are really supportive in my department."

> P4: "No, besides you and [other student] and she is different because she is a single mom, so, I think, her challenges must be astronomical compared to mine."

> P7: "Not really, I mean, once in a while in conversation, but its not like, I can't say there's anybody that I reach out to…not another mom that might understand…"

> P8: "I didn't talk to a lot of student mothers. It probably would have been good but I didn't."

> P11: "Being a commuter student, you're kind of set apart and you're only there for that class you don't get a chance to really bond like the other students that are on campus or just bump into someone accidentally. I did have a good network of people that I could email and ask questions if I missed and for each class, I would just find a couple of people that I could depend on there and vice versa. But as far as a group, no, that wasn't my experience."

> P12: "There are three of us in my cohort that have children. It's really not a focus because we spend so little time together that we really don't talk about our kids, our families. It's more about school stuff and our work together. But our cohort is pretty close, there's no competitiveness between us. We actually enjoy working and learning together."

Community in the Program

Some participants brought up the idea of community in their programs. Many expressed hopes that they would have found more community in their program than what they did.

> P1: "There's a lot of social stuff that goes on that I cannot participate in, because I don't have anybody to watch him. In theory, I could find some random 16-year old babysitter, but I don't know anyone here and I'm not going to, like, go drink at a bar because that just seems wrong. I don't really have a whole lot of time even if I didn't have him to go do that stuff. But there's definitely a community aspect that I'm not a part of because I can't ever go do stuff. I mean, people don't even ask me to go do stuff anymore."

> P5: "In terms of the community I thought I would've had in the program, I don't have it because I simply just don't have time…unless I can bring my kids…even if it was a 'just bring your spouse,' my kids are old enough to stay home."

> P6: "I was really craving community so I was super excited about the collegiality community aspect too. I was elected president of our student organization in my second year and in my third year and so, we had meetings and did things, and one of the pieces that I brought into, is we need to have a spouse orientation. When we do first year orientation or program orientation, we need to have some sort of spouse orientation because spouses need support in the community and just to know what to expect. 'Cause the program is just…it's exponentially harder than one expects even when one kind of has good expectations. And so, I think families and spouses need to know that…just that opportunity to have that community depending of if they've moved here or whatever.
> My first 2 years, we did a babysitting coop where different families took turns hosting and everybody brought their kids and went out and we took turns and we did that my first two years."
> P6: "Meanwhile, the old boys club, they go out for beers and they started that the semester I wasn't there (when I was home with the baby). I'm like 'Hey, y'all should ask me!' These are the sorts of networking sorts of opportunities that build up conversation and build up skill sets and it's all shifted. And it used to be everybody and everybody got included and

147

everybody got invited. And [there was] this awareness of feminist perspective and now it's just gone."

P10: "I remember a time we landed in the hospital and all I could do is tell my classmates, 'Okay, go into my house, you'll find a stash of books on the floor. Bring those. I need those. So, that's one time I had to rely on other people. Interesting thing is when you become a mother, you learn that you're not perfect. You have to rely on others to succeed at it. Other people want to help as well, and letting them help is a useful thing. Good neighborliness; you've got to have been kind to the person you sit next to and not, sort of, put on this great dark face as you sit there and don't talk to me and I know it all. You really have to be mellow and knitted it…woven with many threads."

Isolation and Alienation

Six participants discussed feelings of isolation or alienation, making it a major theme. They also felt like no one understood them or the workload required in graduate school. Many of them cited a lack of social life or social activities. This is fairly reflective of a lack of a consistent support network, at least in the social realm.

P3: "Most of the time I just get my homework done when they're not there. But, unfortunately, that also means that I don't get to see my friends very much."

P4: "I don't have any social life and that sounds so mean. I think at first my friends, they went, 'well, you're never available' and they'd complain and I'd feel bad but they sort of stopped calling. And I sort of feel like I don't miss them…that sounds so mean…but I have one friend who had major issues with me being in school because I was gone so much and she said a lot of things that…it was just kind of hurtful…we just sort of went our separate ways. I sort of alienated everyone. I just don't have time to go out for lunch and I don't have time to go have dinner with so and so or go to their party or whatever. And so, people don't get that and it makes…again…one more strike against you where you're the bad wife and you're the bad mom because you don't come to all these social events. It's frustrating…you just sort of wish someone would understand you somebody could understand you. I guess that's kind of how it feels. I've sort of gotten a little bit calloused in that way where I just think I'm good

148

without feeling like I need to impress anyone, 'cause I sort of feel like I've disappointed everyone, so, you know, I can't impress anyone anymore anyway. So, that's that."

P5: "I know when I have time to study and I know my social life is gone because if I have a social life, I can't be a parent. It is nice that we don't go to church anymore 'cause that's kind of an extracurricular activity but there'd be no way. If we were still active, I just don't think I could do it. I don't have time to make new friends…I don't want to make church friends."

P8: "My life changed tremendously…a lot of my social things that I used to do, I couldn't do anymore but especially when I became pregnant and having the baby, and marriage, and grad school, it was like I felt alone again. I felt like I had no friends and it wasn't that I didn't have any, I just didn't have time to associate with anybody. I might've talked to my friends once a month when we used to talk everyday or every other day. I do talk to [my husband] a lot. Although, I bombard him with some stuff, I try not to dump all this on him. Sometimes he just doesn't understand. I think it's just a guy thing, but most of the time, a female can understand where I'm coming from better than a guy can but I will let him know what's going on so he can understand if he sees me acting a certain way or sees me over in the corner crying, he'll know what's going on."

P9: "I feel really isolated. It feels lonely to push back alone; to have to feel the disappointment because I'm not moving as quickly as they'd like or I don't know my research interests. It'd be great if I had other mothers that had come before me that I could talk to about that because as much as I know that it's okay…you know, the stress of internal pressure and external pressure and perceived disappointment."

Department Support

Participants were asked if they felt as though their faculty or department was supportive of them. Responses varied from respondents feeling very supported by their department, to respondents feeling exploited and as though their department had little to no regard for the needs of their students.

149

Some participants reported that their departments were very supportive of them and instrumental in supporting them:

> P1: Discussed that she felt supported by her faculty members and appreciated little things like faculty sending along research articles in her area.
>
> P4: "I think very supportive, I've never had any complaints. Like, I've never felt marginalized. It's been a positive experience overwhelmingly."
>
> P6: "I mean, it's just all about who you're surrounded with as to whether you can even survive. My advisor let me use her office [and] gave me an office key. She's not on campus that much, so I could pump in her office, which made all the difference in the world."
>
> P10: "Very supportive actually. They have been very accommodating and have never made me feel like this motherhood thing…I have never had to sit and think that I'm in the wrong place."
>
> P11: "Absolutely wonderful. If you took the issues you had with being a mom, some people are struggling with having to deal with aging parents and there are people having to struggle with illness so I think everybody brings that situation to the table. I think the department has been good at being supportive and fair. I think fairness is probably the keyword. They've been very fair."

Some felt as though their departments fell somewhere in between support and discouragement:

> P2: "I think that the fact that they have distance classes in actually a huge thing. But there was no guideline [when I entered] about how many distance classes you could take. They ended up making a rule that you couldn't take more than half your classes online. I just felt kind of like the rug got pulled out from under me, because when someone is enrolled in your program that is three hours away and doesn't have any intention of moving, it seems like it should be fully disclosed and clear what the expectations are. It's just been kind of just the small interactions of like, lack of explicit support rather than anything like explicit discouragement."

150

P7: "I feel kind of lost and I really don't know who…I set up an appointment to talk to [faculty member] because he was my match for research and we had talked about that he was gonna help me and then when I came in, he said I really should have set up the meeting with [another faculty member]. I thought that was what we were meeting about…him becoming my advisor because our research interests match…and they say those things about conference papers but I don't know what a conference paper looks like. I have no idea if anything I have completed so far is something I could develop into that. I think that would help if we got those final papers back with some kind of feedback about okay now, do this and you can fix this and do that."

P8: "After he got past the fact that I was pregnant, I felt that he was understanding and like I said, he did a great job of keeping me on my timeline as best as we could. I would say he was supportive in helping me get it done."

And some participants did not feel supported by their department and one even felt as though her department was completely out of touch with the lives of their graduate students and is exploiting them:

P3: "I had this conversation just the other day where my mentor said 'Why isn't your thesis done yet?' and I'm like 'Yeah, I realize that it's two weeks from completion but I'm just not finding time to do it.' He goes 'Oh, well, I see where your priorities are.' I said 'yeah, that's true, I do feel as though I need to prioritize teaching because I need to have stuff ready by the time I get into the classroom.' He goes 'but, I mean, you don't have to prioritize it that much that your thesis has to suffer.' I said 'yeah, I guess I could just give the students a video. But you know, one day wouldn't actually work, I'd have to give them a video every single day that I go in, because that's about the amount of hours…" And he said 'Oh wait, you're teaching classes that you aren't an expert in, right? ' and I said 'Yeah, I'm having to teach myself the material before I can even go to class because I'm not an expert in it already and I don't know the material. And so, it's taking hours and hours of prep time just to teach myself the material and then to figure out how I'm going to convey it to the students, creating PowerPoints, or whatever I'm doing, and create, you know, pop quizzes, and tests, and papers. But yeah, that was one of those situations where I'm like 'come on, dumbass!' Let me lead you down this logical path until you figure the fuck out that I can't do this. But there's no

thought at all for what we want [to teach] because every single semester grad students come to [the chair] and they say, 'This isn't okay, my life is falling apart.' The people end up breaking down and crying in the hallway, not part of the calculation, doesn't matter. This is why the mother of two who is taking three classes and teaching two ends up having a total breakdown in the hallway. And no one thought she was being dramatic. Everyone was like 'well, it's time—I'm surprised she didn't break down sooner because of the amount of work they had given her.' There is no thought about how we're supposed to be able to sleep or eat. When our program is at the point where the single males are having a hard time keeping their heads above water, there's something fucking wrong."

P9: "What faculty? I'm not being nasty when I say that…but what faculty would that be…?"

In attempting to assess what the perceptions of participants about what types of support systems they had in place, a few different themes emerged. First, four participants reported no support network due to having moved either for graduate school or because of a spouse that they are no longer married to. A few reported that they rely on friends to help them in terms of childcare and other means of support. Family support (which could have been done long-distance) was reported as positive by seven participants while 2 participants stated their families were not supportive at all (interestingly, both linked this non-support to traditional gender roles and the church).

Childcare arrangements in terms of support varied greatly, but most participants have multi-layered aspects of childcare that are interwoven and piecemealed together to cover the gaps. Four participants reported the fathers of their children as being very involved three participants who were divorced said that the fathers were involved but there was some sort of split custody arrangement. Two participants reported no father involvement.

152

Tightly interwoven with father involvement is the concept of gender roles, which was not asked about but rather came about indirectly. Five participants brought up the glaring differential expectations for men and women/fathers and mothers when it comes to parenting, caring for children and the home, and in terms of graduate school expectations. It is my hope that through taking a closer look at the sexism that women experience that is all wrapped up in ideologies of motherhood and traditional gender roles, we can begin to dismantle this discrimination and these double standards in order to better support graduate student mothers from their standpoint.

An additional area of support that was probed and explored was whether participants had a group of peer graduate student mothers that they could share their struggle with. Only one participant reported having any friends or colleagues that were also mothers in graduate school that they could share their struggles with regarding the difficulties and challenges of mothering in the academy (and one of those named was myself). In addition, 4 participants reported being disappointed there was not more of a community aspect in their programs and 5 participants reported feelings of isolation and alienation (although, hints of this can be seen elsewhere as well).

The final area support that I asked participants about was whether they felt supported by their departments. Five participants responded that they felt as though their departments were very supportive or accommodating of their challenges as graduate student mothers, three reported that they were not specifically supported but they didn't feel discouraged either, and two participants reported strong feelings of disconnection

153

between their departments and the students with one feeling as though faculty help was non-existent and the other feeling exploited and taken advantage of.

If we want to construct a better and more effective means of support for graduate student mothers, we must tackle not only the institutional barriers to support within the academy, but also the institutionalization of gender roles and sexism that discourage women from being fully active outside of the home. Mentoring by women who have successfully navigated motherhood and academia would help struggling student mothers to have a role model to aspire to and the encouragement and support that graduate student mothers could be seeking out from one another, but apparently are not, could be invaluable in terms of helping graduate student mothers find the sense of community and encouragement that they need in order to be successful. Finding support, encouragement, and community would also help graduate student mothers to feel less alone and less isolated.

One important thing to note is that while I can suggest all sorts of policy changes and means of better supporting graduate student mothers, if graduate student mothers continue to hide behind the "mask of motherhood," pretending everything is perfect and practicing academic invisibility within their realm of motherhood, as well as enacting maternal invisibility and donning the "superwoman cape" and presenting themselves as women who are able to "lean-in" in Sandberg's terms, nothing will ever change. No real meaningful social change can occur if we're all pretending as though we have it all together and our lives are perfect and especially not if we continue to live bifurcated

lives, keeping our roles as mothers and roles as graduate students separate and hidden from one another.

We cannot expect those without children, those making and enacting the policies that sometimes hinder and constrain our success to somehow simply "know" what our needs are. I cannot expect the university or my department to be aware that a mid-afternoon class causes all sorts of logistical problems for me in terms of picking up my three children from school (over an hour away from campus) and to also be aware that taking a course from 6:00pm-9:00pm means that I have to rely on a sitter to not only pick my children up from school, but also that the sitter has to be able to help them with their homework, and be able to get them prepared for school the next day and in bed because their bedtime is a good two-hours before I can make it home from class.

I cannot expect the university or the department to be able to read my mind about how difficult it is to afford childcare, tuition, books, gas money, and pay my bills when my roughly $16,000 a year stipend almost all gets paid back to TWU for my tuition. If graduate student mothers want their struggles recognized and want better support from the university, they are going to have to be willing to speak up, to actively work to destigmatize motherhood in the academy, to be out and loud and proud about the ways in which their often conflicting roles contradict one another and overlap and lead to feelings of inadequacy in every realm.

Instead of hiding behind the mask of motherhood and wearing their academic superwoman capes, pretending everything is fine while they are crumbling and struggling

on the inside, graduate student mothers who want to see positive change and more support from their departments and the university must be willing to use their voices and advocate for themselves. We must be willing to call out inadequate means of support and policies that disproportionately affect graduate student mothers and demand meaningful change such as more realistic workloads and emphasis on more balanced lives, especially when the policies in question and the changes we'd like to see made would help all graduate students, not just mothers in graduate school.

RESEARCH QUESTION 6: HOW EXPERIENCES ARE SHAPED BY POLICIES

The sixth research question explores how the experiences of graduate student mothers are shaped by university and department policies.

Attendance in Classes

Most participants were not having problems with attendance for children's illnesses, but a few reported (here and elsewhere) using the allowed number of absences for a course to attend important events for their children. Here and in other sections, such as *Policies* and *Advice to Departments, Schools, and Universities*, some participants report being frustrated by attendance policies that they feel affects them disproportionately to their non-parent classmates. Online classes were mentioned several times because of their flexibility as a means of ensuring that attendance was not a problem for graduate student mothers.

> P1: "It's been okay so far. I didn't ever miss, I don't think, an actual one of my classes. I missed the classes I was teaching just because that's how the days had wound up on. People were willing to cover for me."

156

P2: "I have missed some work mostly because of being sick or her being sick. [Taking online courses mostly], I mean, it's so much more flexible. So, I think, I've been pretty good with my attendance, and I think that the times that I skipped classes when I was commuting was less about being a parent and more about the distance that I traveled. I think there's maybe one instance where I didn't have child care and I was like 'I'm just not going to go.'"

P3: "It's actually been really good but I schedule classes in a way that I know that I can attend them. So, the kids are with their dad on Monday and Wednesday and I have them Tuesday and Thursday. But if I wasn't divorced, I have no idea. I don't think I'd be able to make it through the first semester of grad school if I wasn't divorced and have fifty percent of the time that I can count on them being with their dad."

P5: I missed two [classes] last semester. I think, in terms of attendance for class, I'm fine, but part of grad school is that 'hob-nobbery' and I feel like I'm not on campus as much as I need to be."

P7: "I usually take that whole [approach] of if I get two absences [without penalty], I'm going to take them, but for the most part, I don't like to miss class. I really don't like to miss class. I had to miss for Halloween and then I'll miss if my family comes into town or whatever but, and usually, when I miss, I'm deciding that this is something that is important enough to me. I feel guilty every time."

P11: "I've only missed maybe one day a semester. Sometimes that was for a championship game or an event they were doing. But I think I've only missed because it was something that I thought was so important that I be there because I did realize I was not as attentive [to my children] while I was studying and doing research."

P12: "There have been a couple of times that he has been sick. Mostly what I've had to miss is because of conferences for this field. I can honestly say that I've missed more because of conferences than I have because of my child. I had a flat tire and couldn't make it to class and because I waited too long to get the receipt to Student Life, it was not an excused absence. And that's just bullshit to me; it drives me nuts. Or the fact that I did the work and one semester I had to miss three times and two is the limit and I was gonna get a B and I wrote the provost…'C'mon. We're PhD students.'"

Class Times

A major theme that emerged was unhappiness with the times that classes were offered. Evening courses are the norm for graduate school because we operate on the assumption that graduate students work an 8:00-5:00 job and then come to classes at night. This does not seem to be reflective of the majority of the graduate students interviewed for this project, nor for the department that I reside in. Participants reported not liking not seeing their children in the evenings, not being able to share dinner with their children, and even just not being at their best for evening classes. Classes that are in the middle of the afternoon, such as the 2:30 class, are also often problematic for graduate student mothers as they overlap with children getting out of school, making it challenging for mothers to pick their children up from school or to be home when the bus drops them off. Two participants, mothers to older children, were fond of the 2:30 classes because it got them home in time for dinner and the children were old enough for the gap between the children getting home and participants getting home to not be problematic and to not require childcare. Many participants liked the idea of hybrid or Saturday classes if morning classes were not a possibility.

> P1: "It's the classes the straddle right when he gets off school. So he's got to ride the bus home. It is frustrating, the grad classes…in theory, if you had a real job…but our class times don't really allow for that, either. I mean, it would be almost as frustrating to have a really late class and then have to get him in bed…let him sit in the hallway or something…because where it is right now just makes it so awkward. He doesn't like riding the bus and he has to ride the bus and that upsets me."

> P2: "I did a hybrid class and that was really good. I came up like four times during the semester and it was like 3-4 hours. I loved that format.

158

I've heard other women have bad feedback about the class times…in the evening…because for women with children, it's hard to get childcare in the evening.

P3: "Every semester, I only have 2 days that I can possibly take classes [because of custody arrangements] and I have nine hours. So, I have to do two classes on one day and then another class on another day, which makes days kind of hellish. Like, I've taught at 9:00 a.m. and then I didn't leave the university until 9:00 at night. And I had been busy the entire day with only a small break for lunch and a small break for dinner. That sucks."

P5: "Why aren't classes offered while kids are at school? Why isn't this class eleven to two instead of two to five? I want to put my kids to bed at night…I want to be home and be like, 'I love you, have a good night.' I don't think it's made for parents. Why can't classes be on Saturday morning?"

P7: "I would like more classes early. I don't like being gone at night. I hate it and I don't…I'm so ready to go every night when I have a night class, I'm exhausted and I just want to get home. And I find myself getting pissed when they go over two minutes because I'm like, it's nine o'clock; I want to go. I'd love it if they had more 2:30 classes or even earlier so I could go when the kids are at school and be home in the evenings. I don't like missing dinner. I have to miss dinner a lot and that's one of the reasons I don't eat as good, 'cause I'm not gonna go home and cook at ten o'clock so I'm picking something up and having to figure out their dinner in the morning. I'd love less six o'clock classes and almost everything I have to take, that when I have to take them. The easiest class for me to get to was at 9:00am. I could drop the kids off and I was home before they got home from school and it was wonderful."

P9: "I hate it. I'll be honest…I hate it. I'm not at my best in the evening at all. That's a time normally when I'm cooking dinner, serving dinner, winding down the day, and [instead] I have to go drive an hour, sit for a 3-hour class under these awful lights which suck the energy out of me, and then drive an hour home. It's really hard. I pack my food and try to eat during the break but I can't eat all of my dinner in a 10-minute break…that's kind of hard…packing a meal and then trying to choke it down within 10-minutes is just not ideal for self-care at all. It's not ideal for family…it's not ideal for self-care. Ideally, for me, [classes] would be mid-morning or early afternoon…sometime after lunch…get out at four

159

o'clock. [During my Master's], they offered more morning and daytime classes so that when my daughter was in Mother's Day Out, that worked great."

P10: "Challenging because of the night classes."

P12: "I actually love the 2:30 class because it gets me home not too late to have dinner with my child. I did have to take one semester of the 6pm and that was hard. I have to drive an hour in traffic and I don't like not being home at least some part of the evening with my child."

A few participants did not seem to take issue with the class times, although, it should be noted that one of them actually does work full-time during the day, thus meeting the criteria for whom these class times are designed for, and the other has a husband that is available in the evenings for her to take classes.

P4: "I just made it a priority. I think if someone didn't have the flexibility where they couldn't take off work, assuming that they did work full-time, that might be frustrating. But again, I think it comes down to your priorities and what you want."

P11: "The 6:00 classes were a plus. All of my classes started at 6:00, so, as a commuter and full-time worker, I left work at 4:00 and then drove out so I could get to class by 6:00 and then usually I was home by 11:15 or so."

Two students also really like the idea of encouraging online classes as well, although, one student was frustrated that there seems to be a stigma associated with online courses.

P2: "It just really frustrated me that it was like a stigma around [online classes] because I felt like it'd do really well for the women's studies department to recognize that women's experiences are not often conducive to the traditional student environment of being able to come to campus twice a week. I liked [online courses] in the beginning but it wasn't intended to be the support structure that I thought it was supposed to be."

160

P4: "I think if graduate schools could offer more online classes, that might make it easier for some moms who have a tough time with daycare or even commuting issues."

Several mothers brought up frustrations with having classes on holidays. Halloween was mentioned as being a holiday that they felt like they routinely had to miss out on with their children OR had to skip class for because it isn't a recognized holiday and yet, they felt as though they needed to be with their children because it was important to them. Another participant expressed frustration at her professor insisting on holding class the night before Thanksgiving [despite the university being closed] when she had family in town and needed to be cooking for the following day.

P2: "Halloween is really hard because it's not…like, it's a big deal but it's not like, a national holiday. A professor wouldn't make you miss Christmas with your child…or like, Thanksgiving with your family…we put priority on those things. But then when it comes to Halloween, we're like 'only parents are really expected to celebrate that.' I don't know, I think the importance of it is not really recognized."

P6: "You kind of get a holiday but not really a holiday. I mean, it's like, Memorial Day means nothing to me because it doesn't change how much work I have to do, right?"

P7: "I've skipped class the last 2 falls because I had night classes on Halloween and I refuse to miss Halloween with them. And I felt guilty because I knew that there were moms that were going to class and I felt bad about not…they were there, their kids were trick-or-treating too…I felt like I was being selfish or something. [The day before Thanksgiving], I had a theory class and my family was coming in and he held class the night before Thanksgiving. Are you kidding?! And so he started guilting us and he's like, 'Well, if you're not leaving town, you should come to class.' I'm not coming to class 'cause I'm just not. I cooked all day the day before Thanksgiving. I don't have time to go to class."

161

Policies

Participants were asked if there were any policies that either helped or hindered their success in their graduate program. Many participants were not entirely familiar with university policies, however, quite a few had policy recommendations for the university. Childcare seemed to be the overwhelming suggestion that participants felt as though would be useful to them to have, as well as a generally more family friendly and family inclusive environment.

> P1: Discusses the need for campus childcare and family housing. In addition, policies that prohibit her from taking her son to the rec center make taking care of her own fitness difficult. She asks why the rec center cannot have a few hours a week where children can come and play basketball so that parents can work out-pointing out that we pay for the rec center too. She also discusses that having counseling at the university that her son could access would be helpful.

One participant brought up her frustration (again) that online courses or programs seem to have stigma attached to them, despite being easier for non-traditional students to schedule around. Another participant appreciated that online courses are offered at all and yet another praised hybrid courses as being helpful to her success in graduate school but also wished that required courses were offered more frequently.

> P2: "The only thing that comes to mind is the whole being a non-online program. That is kind of indicative of a stigma of online education. When you limit that, it's saying that experience, the online experience, is subpar."
>
> P10: "The fact that there are online classes, is policy that is friendly."
>
> P11: "The hybrid classes were helpful. Some of the required courses weren't offered enough."

162

Having food on campus for students taking evening courses was also a suggestion as many students are forced to consume junk-food from the vending machine when on campus late.

> P4: "I wish they had more little [food] kiosks at campus, especially late at night, they should have stuff open so that you can get something to eat [during night classes]. I don't have time to get dinner and I was so frigging hungry…so, I'm eating chips for dinner, which is terrible."

Attendance policies were also a sore subject and brought up in various places throughout the interviews (See: *Attendance in Classes* and *Advice to Departments and Graduate Schools*). Participants felt as though losing entire letter grades for missing classes was extreme and certainly affected them as mothers more than non-mothers due to illnesses with children or needing to attend special events in their children's lives that happened to coincide with class time.

> P5: "I know part of the commitment to grad school is committing to being in class…but on the other side of that, attendance policies that say you only have 2 absences and it affects your grade are very difficult because I have two kids and that's 2 absences if I go to [an orchestra concert and choir concert]. There's usually 2 per semester for each kid."

> P7: "I noticed in [one of my classes] that if you missed one class, your attendance grade dropped to a D, and I had to miss 2, and that was ridiculous. I'm not gonna argue with him but…the attendance policy, to me, was…that's extreme to mark people down that much. So, I knew, right off the bat, I'm not getting an A in this class, I'll just be okay with that. So, he gave me my first B."

> P12: "Attendance policies. That kinda stuff is just bullshit to me. That's where I just…bureaucracy I hate…"

163

One participant expressed satisfaction and disappointment with a parental leave

policy that she helped advocate for at her university. She feels as though the lack of

support, normalizing, or institutionalization of such a policy, as well as only women

taking advantage of it, means that it is still not helpful or useful:

> P6: "There had been a couple of women's groups who had advocated to get a parental leave policy in place and we got it for graduate students. It looks different in each program, so, [one department] for one for their PhD students that included a paid stipend. Our department just protected you. So, our department was like 'We'll give you time off and we'll stop the clock, but yeah, you don't get a stipend that semester.' And we [couldn't] afford to do that. And so, the parental leave policy, what sucks is, none of these parental leave policies, unless they come with money, none of them are ever gonna be helpful unless males start taking them. As long as males don't take parental leave, there's always gonna be these questions surrounding hiring women or admitting women of child-bearing ages of, 'Are they gonna have kids? Are we gonna have to do maternity leave?' and nobody's ever gonna make sure that there's fairness until the men take it too."

The same participant also expressed frustration that her university (although I

would add that my own university did this as well) did not close during a dangerous ice

storm, despite all the surrounding school districts and day cares closing. The participant

points out that these types of decisions show a lack of respect or regard for the safety of

students, faculty, staff, plus the children of all of those groups, many of whom had to

come to campus with their parents on dangerous and icy roads and sidewalks.

> P6: "[During the ice storm], campus didn't close…so, when all the school [districts] close, all the daycares cancel. So, I had to teach, I had a steering committee Monday morning and I had to teach Monday afternoon. It was my last class of the semester and <university> didn't cancel, all the schools cancelled. So, I needed to find childcare desperately, and so, I was up until one in the morning on Sunday night trying to find childcare. [Older child]'s old enough that I can put him in front of a screen and put

headphones on him, but it was our last class and we were talking about rape culture and Miley Cyrus and the VMA performance and the Robin Thicke performance, raunch culture, purity culture, and racism in the performance as well as female chauvinist pigs and I was like, 'this is not the best class for either of my children to be hearing.' It'll be a really powerful statement when all these things collide to have my kids in there the last day because <the university> doesn't pay attention to anything. I mean, think about all the messages with that…and not only is it students who have kids, faculty have kids, staff have kids, but also, when every school district closed, it means they think the roads aren't safe, so really, quite frankly, anyone driving to campus is unsafe. So, it's not considerate of anyone, but yeah, it's particularly problematic if you have to pay extra or just don't have any options. And I saw tons of kids walking around campus that day with their kids and I'm like, 'that works once [the kids] get a certain age, but for a 2-year old, it doesn't work because they can't…you can't just sit them in front of a screen."

One participant reported extreme dissatisfaction with the exploitation of graduate students at the hands of a broken educational system.

P3: "I feel like the system is totally broken. I'm not at all trying to say that's not an elite privilege because it is and we're in a privileged position. But it is in some ways a sacrifice and we're trying to go to school to better ourselves, but, I mean, the system is so broken; the university system as a whole is so broken…I read an article comparing grad students to indentured servants. I actually read the article and I go…'Um…we are exactly like indentured servants…' I was shocked. We're living the same life that you expect people to live when they're extremely low income and the whole household is working two jobs. That's the kind of life we're living. Like, that kind of life where you're so exhausted you feel like you just can't make yourself go anymore. In reality, I have way more in common than I expected with somebody who is working a job at Walmart or another factory.

The university and our departments in particular have no incentive to treat us well, to pay us well, to make sure that we have any sort of quality of life. Why do they care? There's a whole line of people ready to replace us…and every system is going to push that boundary with its workers as far as it possibly can. Notice that nothing I've said so far is asking for consideration as a mom…it's asking for the system to be fair to everyone,

including single white guys because it's not even fair to them. If your system isn't fair to single white guys, it's fucking unfair."

One participant expressed that we are aware of policies and rules coming into the program and so we should work within the existing institutional guidelines.

> P10: "When I come in as a student mother, I'm not expecting the rules to be created for me. I think I work within the existing institutional guidelines. Of course, except for exam type policies where you got qualifiers for the whole day…but, you know the exam is coming a semester ahead so, you can use your network of friends."

When examining the ways that the policies and politics of the university, the graduate school, and the department we work within shape our lives and experiences, it is important to look not just at the ways that these policies shape our lived experiences, but also the ways that we serve to reproduce and give power to the institutions that shape our lives. Smith (1990b) argues that women are not simply passive bystanders but instead are "active as subjects and agents" and "give power to the relations that overpower them" because "capitalism is dependent upon and must be receptive to the active participation of women" in the marketplace (P. 161). Many of my participants, all of whom are students who study systems and institutions of oppression, reinforced dominant ideologies about motherhood and graduate school when asked to give advice to incoming graduate student mothers who were either pregnant or had small babies. Policies and class times were also defended or reinforced by a few participants, such as P10, above who argued that we are aware of the policies of the institution before we enter graduate school or the participant that said that she was able to prioritize class attendance and therefore class times were never a problem for her.

166

My participants did discuss several university or departmental policies that were either helpful or a hindrance for them. We'll begin by looking at the policies that participants found helped them be successful in graduate school. Several participants mentioned that hybrid or online classes offered a flexibility that was ideal for graduate student mothers because they reduced the amount of time they had to spend commuting to campus as well as lessening the burden of finding and affording childcare. Parental leave policies, where present, were also seen as a positive, however, the need for parental leave to be institutionalized, normalized, utilized by men, and to not evoke the dreaded "mommy track" or increase the already ever-present stigma of motherhood in academia is an important distinction and addition that is desperately needed.

Policies that participants felt could be immensely valuable to them in terms of alleviating some of their disproportionate disadvantages in graduate school if enacted included the availability of affordable, flexible childcare that actually meets their unique needs, increasing the offerings of online or hybrid classes, polling students about alternative class times and what times actually work best for them, and the addition of healthy food choices on campus, especially late at night.

Participants also discussed policies that they felt hindered their success in graduate school. Probably the most pervasive of these policies, repeatedly discussed both here and elsewhere, were attendance policies. Participants saw attendance policies as affecting them differently than non-mothers and as punishing them for being mothers with commitments outside of graduate school.

167

Williams (2007) argues, "The types of policies enacted and how they are enacted define the level of commitment the university has in educating all its citizens and providing each one with a fair and equal shot" (P. 156). For graduate student mothers to successfully complete their degrees, a culture of inclusion and legitimization, support networks, collaboration and encouragement, determination and resolve, and policies that honor diversity not only in terms of race, ethnicity, and nationality, but also diversity in terms of students who do not fit the "normal" mode of the single, white, male graduate student; students who are older or who have children should not have their presence in graduate school marginalized and denigrated and any new and existing policies should be carefully examined and evaluated to see how they might even unintentionally have a negative effect on the ability of graduate student mothers to complete their degrees.

As noted by Gouthro and Grace (2000), there are structural relations of power that are systemic within the dominant culture that determine the inequities and expectations of women's experiences. By better understanding these gendered divisions of labor, we can better understand how women students (especially mothers) may be at a disadvantage. Gouthro and Grace (2000) state that the university is blind to the concerns of women graduate students, and that by having equal policies for both male and female students, the university makes the assumption that males and females are equally affected by such policies.

My participants have shown the ways in which policies that are equal in terms of being identical are not equal in terms having the same impacts upon mothers and non-mothers such as the ways in which attendance policies unfairly punish graduate student mothers and force them to choose to attend class, unable to stay home with a sick child or to attend their child's musical or play, thereby allowing criticisms of their mothering to take place, OR, if they choose to stay home with their sick child or to attend their child's special event, it calls their commitment to the program into question and opens the door for questioning their dedication and competency, both of which were likely on shaky ground already simply due to the fact that motherhood in the academy is a stigmatized identity.

Other policies that graduate student mothers in my study found to be problematic included the stigmatization of online classes and a lack of parental leave policies. Additionally, class times, as mentioned earlier, that interfere with either the need to pick up children from school or the ability to help with homework, cook dinner, or take children to extra curricular events were also problematic for graduate student mothers and often caused mutual resentment, relationship strain for them and their spouses or partners, and undue financial burdens for those that had to turn to childcare or day care to close the gaps. Class times that are in the evening are particularly problematic for graduate student mothers without support systems in place because daycares and childcare facilities are not typically open this late at night so they are not even an option.

Classes that occurred on holidays were also challenging for graduate student mothers, especially Halloween. Halloween is one of those holidays that is only important to small children, therefore, the university does not deem it important to cancel classes for, however, for those of us with small children, missing out on Halloween can be horribly traumatic for all of us. If a student chooses to skip class to take their child(ren) trick-or-treating, again, their commitment to the program is called into question and they will undoubtedly be stigmatized by that decision.

One student was also frustrated that an instructor held class the night before Thanksgiving, despite the University officially closing at noon that day. His insistence that students should attend class if they were still in town reflects a total disregard for the need for balanced lives and family time for graduate students and his guilting and shaming of students who "chose" not to attend because of family responsibilities further exemplifies the impossible situations that graduate student mothers are forced to choose between and why so many graduate student mothers feel overwhelmed, underappreciated, and as though they will never be enough, their best will never be good enough to satisfy others expectations of them.

Refusals by universities to close due to inclement weather, despite all surrounding school systems closing, as discussed by P6, is not only inconsiderate in regards to the safety of students, staff, faculty, and the children who may now be forced to accompany parents to campus and sit through classes, it is also reflective, once again, of the prevailing attitude in academia that children and mothers are outsiders and are not

considered when making policy decisions and further shows that the needs of mothers and children are invisible and unimportant within academia.

There is a need for policies and discourse within academia that does not tokenize and make graduate student mothers the "other" and that welcome and encourage graduate student mothers and honors the diversity and knowledge that graduate student mothers have to offer.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

As Dorothy E. Smith suggests, this research into the lived experiences of graduate student mothers was born out of my own experiences and frustrations as a graduate student mother struggling to meet the overwhelming, and quite honestly, impossible, ideologies of the perfect mother and perfect graduate student. The incongruities and incompatibility between my multiple roles as "student," "mother," and "graduate assistant," conflicts in my personal life, internal turmoil over feeling pulled and pushed in too many directions, mounting anxiety over no longer being the mother I wanted to be or the student I wanted to be, and casual conversations with other graduate student mothers that made me realize I wasn't the only one having these same conflicts, drew me to question the dominant ideologies of motherhood and the ideal graduate student and to question what strategies other graduate student mothers utilized to negotiate what I saw as contradictory identities that were weighted down in outdated gender roles and sexism.

In Chapter 1, I briefly reviewed the existing literature on graduate student mothers and the rigors of graduate school, including research that examined the demands of graduate school and the differential experiences of mothers in graduate school when compared to fathers and non-parents. I also looked at research that details the existing dominant cultural ideologies of motherhood, including Hays (1996) concept of 'intensive

motherhood' and Maushart's (1999) explanation of the conspiracy of silence surrounding

the challenges of motherhood and donning the "mask of motherhood." I explored

Hochschild and Machung's (1989) now iconic study on the second shift that showed

women are still responsible for the majority of the household work and childcare work

inside the home, despite the fact that more women work outside the home than ever

before. Additionally, I briefly explored Smith's radical critique of sociology and her

initial call for a sociology of women and women's perspective (now a sociology for

people and women's standpoint) as well as her take on the relations of ruling and a brief

introduction to institutional ethnography.

In Chapter 2, I more fully discussed the research that has been done to date on the

role of motherhood and university life. I specifically explored the previous work

regarding motherhood and academia for faculty members and for graduate students (both

mothers and fathers). I then discussed the literature on intensive mothering, the dominant

parenting paradigm of the last decade or so, including expectations of what it means to be

a good mother. Finally, I discussed Smith's essays and books regarding "Women's

Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology" (1974), the updated "Women's

Experience as a Radical Critique of Sociology" (1990a), the ruling relations (1990b),

institutional ethnographies (2005), a sociology for people (2005), and her poignant

assessment of mind/body divide in sociology departments (1990a, 1990b, 2005). I also

answered the questions, "How relevant is this article today?" and, "Is the experience of

graduate student mothers a radical critique of sociology or of university life as a whole?"

In Chapter 3, I presented the methodology for this project and my methodological approach. I detailed the advantages of qualitative research for a project like mine and I included an overview of the research design, procedures for data collection, information about the participants in the project, and a discussion of how I performed the analysis.

Chapter 4 presents both the results of the study and a discussion of the findings. I present a variety of themes emergent from the data to highlight the richness of qualitative data that reveals the thoughts and feelings of participants and provided me with a more complete knowledge of the social world of graduate student mothers.

In order to honor the voices and lived experiences of the participants, I drew heavily on the interview transcripts in this chapter. Anderson, Armitage, Jack, and Wittner (2004) argue, "If we want to know how women feel about their lives, then we have to allow them to talk about their feelings as well as their activities (P. 229) and by allowing "women to speak for themselves, they reveal hidden realities: new experiences and new perspectives emerge that challenge the 'truths' of official accounts and cast doubt upon established theories (P. 224). My participants gave in-depth and rich accounts of their lives and the challenges they face both at home and in graduate school and challenge the dominant discourse that women are now equal participants in academia.

LIMITATIONS

This study attempts to explore the perceptions and experiences of graduate student mothers and the ways their lives are shaped and influenced by dominant cultural

ideologies of motherhood and the institution of graduate school. This study has several limitations:

1. Findings and results are based on perceived support and subjective perceptions of challenges experienced by participants. Many participants were admittedly unaware of how the policies in their departments or the university affected them, therefore, it is possible that more support was available than participants realized, however, if participants were not aware of available support at the university or department level, it is reflective of the lack of communication that several participants mentioned.

2. Participants may have been influenced by my presence, known as the "Hawthorne Effect," although, I tried to minimize my position as a researcher and to instead use a method of friendship in order to engage my participants.

3. Participants may have chosen to engage in "face-negotiation" or even have worn the "mask of motherhood" or what I have termed the "superwoman cape" of academia in order to manage their presentation of self and minimize their stigma of motherhood, even with me.

4. My sample was small, with only 12 participants, and limited geographically as well, and therefore is not generalizable to the greater graduate student mother population. However, my goal was gain a deeper understanding of my participants' lives that could be utilized for future research and possibly to advocate for some positive social change in this area, not to generalize and make sweeping assumptions about the lives of graduate student mothers overall. I would point out, however, that my findings are generally in

175

line with prior studies of the challenges of graduate school for mothers and is high in validity, even if lacking in reliability.

5. My study only examined the lives of graduate student *mothers* and not fathers. Research on the experiences of graduate student fathers is nearly non-existent and it is possible that they may have similar concerns and challenges, especially in terms of finances, relationship strain, lack of balance, lack of support, feelings of guilt, loss of social lives, and childcare needs among others.

6. Additionally, the perspectives of the spouses/partners and children of my participants were not represented and being able to explore their perceptions might be helpful. For instance, many participants worried that their partners or children resented them or worried that they were "bad mothers" and hearing the perceptions of children and partners would be useful to further evaluate the gender roles at play in households.

7. I was only able to assess the participants' perceptions of how they were evaluated by others in terms of competence and commitment based on their status as mothers. Research that explores perceptions of mothers in terms of competence and commitment in graduate school by colleagues and faculty members would be beneficial to further complement research about motherhood as a status characteristic and reports by graduate student mothers of being treated as outsiders.

8. Using semi-structured interviews and methods of conversational or interactive interviewing meant that questions were not asked in the same order every time, sometimes participants actually brought up and answered questions before I had a chance

to answer them, and on occasion, a question was not fully answered or was left out due to the flow of conversation. Additionally, I feel that follow up interviews or even emails would be helpful to address missed questions and to give participants an chance to give more information when warranted once they had time to further reflect upon questions.

9. Despite my desire to have a diverse group of mothers in terms of nationality, racial and ethnic identity, and even in terms of sexual orientation or gender identity, unfortunately, my sample, as reported earlier, was relatively homogenous and heteronormative.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should perhaps explore more directly the ways that dominant ideologies about motherhood and even messages about who is considered the ideal graduate student are internalized. Additionally, examining the lived experiences of graduate student fathers and even households where both partners are graduate students would provide for interesting discourse and greater insight about the demands of graduate school and parenting and how these demands are experienced either similarly or differently by gender. Examining non-heteronormative couples and the ways they negotiate the demands of graduate school and parenting would also provide more comprehension and awareness about the lives of graduate student parents. Ideally, future participants would also be more diverse in terms of racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as nationality. I would also like to extend future studies outside the realm of sociology and women's studies and examine more male dominated fields. Researching spouses and

children of both male and female graduate students would also provide a better grasp of the gender roles at play regarding graduate school. Finally, research into faculty and graduate student perceptions of graduate student parents in terms of competence and commitment would also be advantageous in order to better understand the various difficulties and stigmas faced by graduate student mothers and how those compare to those faced by graduate student fathers.

SO WHAT?

What is the potential impact of this work? How might it improve the experience of graduate student mothers while also benefitting the universities who have invested so much in their success?

Smith's (2005) institutional ethnography seeks the ways that the experiences of people have either positively or negatively been affected by the institutional practices that have affected their lives and how institutions might be able to work more effectively. Smith encourages us to begin our discourse by examining how actors perceive their everyday/everynight lives and how those lives are influenced, shaped, hindered, and made unreasonable by the operation of ruling relations that are not always immediately discernible. Smith argues that sociology is alienated from the social lives of women due to the bifurcation of experience due to the sexual division of labor; those who develop knowledge about the social world are disconnected from the actual practices that nourish their everyday/everynight life and the invisibility of women's work in sustaining the institutions of knowledge that create sociology (Sprague 2005).

The stories that my participants shared of feeling alienated and isolated, overwhelmed, and afraid of being stigmatized by their motherhood to the point of adopting strategies such as maternal invisibility to hide their motherhood while at school and academic invisibility to hide their status as students while mothering, clearly fit with the disconnect that Smith spoke about, as well as the ways that the institutions of motherhood and academia are placing unreasonable demands on graduate student mothers.

It is my hope that this study can contribute to the small body of knowledge regarding the challenges faced by graduate student mothers both at home and in the academy. Because I am a proponent of applied sociology and social justice, I would like to disseminate this information and my participants' experiences to graduate schools, universities, departments, and faculty, as well as to mothers in academia who are likely also struggling and feeling alone, alienated, and locked out of the ivory tower while still wearing their mask of motherhood and their academic superwoman cape, both which serve to further alienate graduate student mothers from one another.

Over and over my participants spoke of feeling alone and alienated. Over and over they indicated that they go to great pains to hide their status as mothers or to overcompensate to manage their motherhood stigma once their secret is out. While there are certainly many changes that can be made at the institutional level to better support the needs of graduate student mothers, I have to ask, how are graduate schools, departments, faculty members, and universities supposed to know what changes to make and what the

needs are of graduate student mothers if those student mothers are so busy hiding behind their mask of motherhood and their academic superwoman cape that they never tell anyone, *even one another*, that they actually don't have it all together and are struggling? Universities can do their part to offer more orientations and workshops to cater to the needs of graduate student mothers, departments can design mentoring programs, and change class times, but they can't do those things if graduate student mothers are so busy hiding the fact that they are mothers and pretending things are fine that they fail to mention the ways in which the university is failing them.

Additionally, the myth of the superwoman graduate student who somehow heroically manages to get everything done and then is tokenized and othered, is harmful to graduate student mothers in the same way the concept of the model minority is harmful to Asian students and other minority students alike. The idea that graduate student mothers are somehow superhuman and thus able to complete unrealistic demands for their time serves to perpetuate the existing patriarchal system of oppression by attributing success to individual triumphs and failures to individual shortcomings. Instead of examining the high attrition rates for graduate student mothers and asking how the system is failing them, thus recognizing that failure as a systemic inadequacy, universities and departments seem content to assume that these are isolated deficiencies that have more to do with personal weaknesses and faults than with institutional discrimination and lack of support.

Other minority groups that have high attrition rates are typically examined for the reasons why they are dropping out. Institutions generally try to offer minority scholarships to make up for financial difficulties, more cultural sensitivity training and diversity awareness and even cultural celebrations to honor diversity in the university. There are no institutional supports for that challenges faced by mothers within the academy. Myself, nor my participants are not going to be offered childcare assistance or scholarships in recognition of our greater financial burdens of attending graduate classes and needing childcare, but my specific department will continue to offer scholarships to international students so that they can pay in-state tuition, thereby not only getting $1000 off their tuition, but also saving money on the cost of tuition. The Intercultural Services Office on our campus does an awesome job at promoting cultural diversity on campus through mentoring programs, the Multicultural Student Network, and diversity training, as well as having information about minority scholarships, and yet, that diversity does not include mothers, despite the fact that many of those mothers are likely minorities in terms of racial, ethnic, and/or cultural backgrounds as well.

I attend, as I stated earlier, an historically female university that espouses the idea that they are a welcoming and supportive environment for non-traditional students. Upon further examining my department, the sociology department, a field typically at the forefront of knowledge of the systems of institutionalized discrimination and oppression, I was rather disappointed to realize that out of our (at the time) 4 faculty members, 3 were tenured men and 1 is a recently tenured track female. We have since gotten one more

addition to our department, a new department chair, also female bringing us to 3 males and 2 females as faculty members in our department at Texas Woman's University. In addition, the previous chair of our department, along with the graduate student advisor for our department were kind enough to sit down and speak to me about the student population in our graduate program. According to those professors, gathered from a rather informal examination of our cohort rosters and reliant on memory of the students personal lives, our department, in the Spring of 2014, was comprised of 53 graduate students. Of those 53 graduate students, 33 were female and 20 were male, meaning that roughly 38% of our department is male. Of those 33 females, approximately 15 were mothers and 5 were fathers, of the fathers, 4 out the 5 were either Turkish or Nepali, both cultures where it is appropriate to have children, as well as cultures where it is likely that women are participating in the majority of the childcare duties. Our department also had 7 male international students, 1 male immigrant student, 1 female immigrant student, and 1 female international student. Out of the students that had dropped out of our program since Fall of 2009, there were 8 women, 5 of which were mothers. One of the other women who dropped out reportedly needed to care for an elderly family member. No single men without children have left our program since the Fall of 2009, but 2 fathers have, reportedly due to financial constraints. To reiterate, out of the 10 students that have left our program since the Fall of 2009, 7 were parents and 1 needed to care for an elderly family member. Eighty-percent of our attrition rate is contributable to parents or those engaging in other caregiving. This speaks to the disconnect that Smith stated was present

between sociology and sociologists, as well as to the desperate need for our department, the graduate school, and the university to gain a better understanding of what factors conspire to constrain the success of graduate student mothers (and fathers) and how better support methods could be ingrained in the academy to avoid losing talented students.

Universities and departments put in a lot of time, effort, and expense in training graduate students and when graduate students are forced out of the academy by unrealistic and incompatible expectations, it is not only the disenfranchised student that is losing out. The department and university is losing out on time, money, and talent, as those students they trained take their abilities to other industries where they are better compensated for the demands of their time and less exploited by an unjust system.

I propose that universities begin by offering graduate students realistic financial support that doesn't assume they are single white males with no commitments who can live in the dorms. A graduate student employed by the university should also have their tuition covered by the school. It is complete and total exploitation of graduate students to only hire them part-time for wages that are barely enough to cover their tuition and books, and then to also refuse to hire them part-time if they have full-time employment elsewhere. If graduate students are expected to devote full-time-plus to the pursuit of their graduate degree and working for the department, they should be paid accordingly. Miring graduate students in huge amounts of debt and keeping them impoverished (with sketchy job prospects in academia after graduation), and also expecting them to be brilliant and creators of knowledge is simply unrealistic. Research (Mani, Mullainathan,

Shafir, and Zhao 2013) has shown that poor people have poorer decision making abilities and cognitive function. If graduate schools and universities want to see their students succeed, they should begin by paying living wages and overhauling the student loan system. Offering other methods of support such as affordable and flexible childcare will make a difference in the lives of graduate student mothers and parents.

Since completing the data collection and coding of my data, I have presented my research on three separate occasions. I first presented at Texas Woman's University's Student Creative Research Symposium. Feedback from this presentation was helpful in answering questions about why graduate student mothers were more marginalized than faculty mothers in academia or other working mothers also struggling with work-life balance. As I discussed previously, financial means is one of the most important ways that graduate students differ. Not only are we not getting paid much for our work, we are also likely racking up huge amounts of debt for the privilege of being in school. Outside of the academy, the status of graduate students is not seen as "real work" despite the exhaustive time-demands of a graduate program. This further exacerbates issues of gender roles and caretaking when support systems are less than supportive and understanding of what they view as a hobby.

The second time this project was presented was as a guest speaker for Alpha Kappa Delta, the international sociological honor society. This time, the audience was primarily undergraduate mothers with the exception of a few of my graduate student friends and the chair of my department. The undergraduate mothers were incredibly

engaged and were asking me for solutions and ways to remedy the experiences of graduate *and undergraduate* student mothers. Attendees asked me about starting petitions, support groups, protests, and so on, and a fellow graduate student (without children) brought me a book later about open-space technology where people with social problems to solve, gather in a room to talk out their issues and brainstorm solutions. He was so impressed with the reaction I received that he felt I should begin focus groups.

The third presentation occurred at the Southwestern Social Science Association 2014 Annual Meeting in San Antonio. I was approached afterward by several professors who were interested in my work, one who expressed interest in hiring me after graduation, and several who excitedly shared their own stories of parenting while in graduate school.

I also began a support group on Facebook for graduate student mothers called 'You Must be WonderWoman! Networking and Support Group for Graduate Student Mothers' based on my participants stories of feeling alone and isolated, as well as repeatedly telling me how much talking to me and hearing they weren't alone had actually helped them feel a lot better about their own perceived shortcomings. The group now has 68 members, the vast majority of which I did not know previously, and participants are fairly active, encouraging, and supportive of one another. Best of all, within that safe space, the masks of motherhood are tossed aside, the academic superwoman cape ripped off and we are vulnerable, honest, and real about our shared struggles and feelings. Within this shared space, we are not only seeking affirmation, we

185

are utilizing that space to construct what hooks (2005) called "community" as a means to help us survive a world in which we are seen as deviant, stigmatized, inadequate, and as less than our non-mother counterparts. The truly ironic thing about perceptions of graduate student mothers as being less committed and less competent than non-mothers is that graduate student mothers are likely actually more committed as they certainly face far more hurdles and difficulties than the "normal" graduate student. Graduate student mothers and their children must sacrifice greatly for them to pursue their dreams of higher education and it would seem that only someone who is highly committed to obtaining that degree would continue to pursue it despite the overwhelming challenges and difficulties reported by my participants as well as other graduate student mothers interviewed by Williams (2007) and Lynch (2008). It would also seem that the greater demands of home life faced by graduate student mothers who are also managing to succeed in graduate school would also perhaps be indicative of *higher* levels of competence rather than less competence. Imagine what these graduate student mothers could achieve with proper support systems, equal gender roles at home, lack of a stigmatized identity and without all the stress that accompanies a status that is devalued within the academy.

There is no way for me to know at this point if my study will have any real lasting impact on the lives of graduate student mothers or will lead to any positive changes, however, I am convinced that the research process itself made a difference for many of my participants in terms of having their voices heard and helping them feel less alone.

186

The resulting support group has also led to a feeling of community and mutual affection and support that might make a difference to at least some of the members. While I hope that my study and subsequent follow-ups will be utilized as a way to better support graduate student mothers and I am committed to continuing to share my story and the stories of my participants in hopes of changing the ways in which graduate student mothers are viewed in the academy.

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189

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190

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APPENDIX A

Situation of Self: Researcher Subjectivity, Reflexivity, and Personal Stance

As I sit here trying to write my section on my own subjectivity, reflexivity, and personal stance, it is amazing to me how far I have come since the Fall of 2011 when I entered graduate school. In my life before graduate school, I was a stay at home mother for 8 years to my amazing 3 children. I had managed to finish my undergraduate degree with minimal interruption to my daily life of taking care of my children. I went back to finish my undergrad in the Summer of 2009, taking 18 hours that semester and maintaining a 4.0 GPA. I quickly finished up my undergraduate, taking at least 5 courses a semester, winning the Outstanding Undergraduate Award for the Sociology Department in the Spring of 2011, maintaining my 4.0 GPA since returning to school with the small exception of one B in an Earth Science course, and graduating in May 2011, and still maintaining the façade of being what I thought of at the time as a "good mother."

My first semester in graduate school in the Fall of 2011 can only be described as brutal. I was taking 3 courses and as a 'pass-through' doctoral student and ended up in all doctoral level courses the first semester, including both a qualitative research course and a classical theory course. I also got an assistantship with the department and was assisting with 2 classes. Because I had classes on both Monday and Tuesday evenings, I went from hardly ever not being the one to tuck my children into bed at night to dropping my 2nd grader, Kindergartner, and preschooler off on Monday mornings, not seeing them again until Tuesday morning when I took them to school again, and then not seeing them again until Wednesday morning. This, coupled with the work load and my own perfectionist tendencies proved to be incredibly hard on me, my children, and ultimately, helped bring

197

about a lot of resentment within my marriage.

Before long, I was so anxious and worried all the time that I was randomly bursting into tears in the middle of class (which is horribly embarrassing, by the way), I was having all sorts of stomach problems related to stress, and before I made it out of that first semester, I no longer had eyebrows (because I had nervously pulled them all out one by one), the skin around my fingers had been pulled off or chewed off and the tips of my fingers were bloody and sore, the insides of my lips and cheeks had been anxiously chewed on until I had huge sore spots and canker sores in my mouth, and I was overburdened by feelings of guilt and as though my efforts in graduate school would never be good enough and I felt was failing miserably at being a mother as well. When I was feeling like being particularly abusive to myself, I would ask myself questions like, "What kind of mother goes all day Monday and Tuesday without seeing her children?" I let myself be controlled made to feel guilty about the expectations that everyone else had for me and I internalized not meeting those expectations to mean that I was a failure. I was a failure as a mother, a failure as a student, and I certainly felt like I didn't fit in at all in graduate school and never would. I nearly killed myself trying be everything for everyone because I was trying so hard to please everyone else, and failing miserably at pleasing them, I might add. And yet, as my counselor pointed out, while I was trying to make everyone else happy, I had no one supporting me, lifting me up, or trying to do anything to help me. Even when possibly well-meaning people would try to "help," they usually approached it in the form of telling me that I needed to cut back and I had taken

on too much; had too much on my plate; something needed to give; I needed to give up something…on and on and on. Not a single person ever just said, "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

Like many of my participants, I was plagued by the feeling that I must overcompensate in both of my worlds. I needed to be super involved at the kid's school so that maybe at least their teachers and the other moms didn't see me as a bad mom. I also had to be hyper-visible and very involved in my department in order to be taken seriously as a graduate student. I agreed to be the Vice President of Alpha Kappa Delta and I continued to serve as the Education Adviser for the university's chapter of Alpha Omicron Pi (although this mentoring role is something I eventually had to 'give up'). The more I tried to prove myself competent as a mother and competent as a graduate student, the more overwhelmed I became due to all the demands placed on me by each role I was trying to fill. Truthfully, I probably did have too much on my plate but I don't think all the blame falls on me. I also suffered (and still suffer from) a lack of a support system, even more so in a lot of ways now that I am divorced and all of my family lives out of state. Having more support and help from people in my life would have (and still would today) lightened my burden considerably. Having mentors at the university who could have assured me that I wasn't alone, having other mothers who were going through the same things I was to talk to, having some guidance from professors who had successfully negotiated this path before…all of these things would have been incredibly helpful to me at a time when I felt so incredibly alone, alienated, and like a disappointment to everyone

that I loved.

Each entering cohort takes a class called ProSeminar that is supposed to teach us how to be successful graduate students. My cohort was 13 people and we were told frequently that we were the largest cohort to ever enter the program. I was the only parent in the room. We were assigned readings about parenthood and graduate school and while I do not remember what the articles were or who the authors were, I vividly remember being asked about my thoughts on the articles during class. I tried to express my frustration that it seemed as though all of the articles about parenthood in graduate school basically advised waiting until after graduate school to have children and advised us of the dismal careers we were certain to have if we dared to procreate before we got tenure. Instead of eloquently expressing my thoughts to my professor, I tried to speak, burst into tears from stress, exhaustion, anxiety, embarrassment…you name it…and I choked out between embarrassed sobs that these articles did nothing to offer advice to those of us who already had children on how to find balance in our lives. I tried to point out that being a mother was on my radar long before graduate school ever was.

As my time in graduate school has moved on, I have become increasingly frustrated with people (non-parents) who make statements to me about how important their sleep is to them and how they never work at home or never stay up past 10:00pm. This type of response usually happens after they have informed me that I look tired and I have acknowledged that I was up until three or four in the morning working (or, on occasion, that I never went to bed). They usually shake their heads sadly, tell me I need to

get more sleep, and then tell me all about their own healthy sleep and working habits and all the things I need to do differently. As a sociologist, I sometimes have to fight the urge not to point out to them their own privilege of being able to not work at home or being able to go to bed whenever they like, of not having the responsibility of feeding 3 children dinner, helping them with their homework, guitar and piano lessons, or taking them to and from dance lessons or soccer practice, not having to get up at 6:30 in the morning and get 3 children out of bed, fed, lunches packed, ready for school, and dropped off at school.

I've felt my face burn with shame and humiliation when other students have discussed authoritatively in class how children are being harmed by being raised by babysitters and nannies and parents are never around while my own 3 children were at home with their sitter because their dad was on a business trip and I was only able to attend class because I was able to leave my children with a sitter. I felt myself burn with anger at the judgment classmates made about convenience foods and the harmful health effects on children and pointed out that often, my choices come down to helping my children with their homework and spending some time with them OR spending a large amount of time cooking and missing out on quality time with them but doing both in the same night is a luxury that I, and many of my participants, do not have.

As I interviewed my participants, I was frequently struck by the similarities in our stories. A few participants mentioned their frustration that courses were still held on Halloween night, forcing us to choose between class or trick or treating with our children.

For those of us already struggling with trying to overcompensate and be hyper-visible in graduate school and trying to still be present for our children, the dilemma of Halloween presented a unique problem. My own experiences have resulted in similar aggravations as during the first year of graduate school, I had class on Halloween and my children, who were 4, 5, and 7 at the time were heartbroken that Mommy was not going to be taking them trick-or-treating. Seeing them inconsolable and my 4-year old daughter hysterically sobbing and being told by my 7-year old son that I "never had time for them anymore" left me crumpled in the bathroom floor, sobbing until I was heaving, my eyes burning and stinging, and seriously questioning why I was sacrificing time with my children for an institution that made me feel like an imposter, inadequate, deviant, stigmatized, and as though my best efforts would never be enough for me to be taken seriously as a scholar.

The second year of graduate school, I was, thankfully, able to take them trick-or-treating. However, the third year, I had to be in a Social Psychology class, the only mother that actually attended class that night, and, perhaps somewhat ironically, I was presenting the Ridgeway and Correll (2004) on motherhood as a status characteristic. How fitting that I spent that night explaining to the class that the instant that my motherhood status is known, my competency and commitment is reevaluated and I am suddenly considered less competent and less committed to graduate school. Indeed, how poignant that as I am presenting on being a mother making me be seen as less competent and committed within the academy, the very act of choosing graduate school and class, the very act of choosing to present this article, has also simultaneously called my

202

commitment to my children into question, even by another graduate student mother in the course who looked at me incredulously earlier in the semester when I stated that I would be attending class in response to her adamant statement to me that she refused to miss out on trick-or-treating with her child. I tell of this experience, and the other experiences I shared above, because I feel it compliments and echoes the experiences and frustrations of my participants who feel as though their roles as "student" and as "mother" are hopelessly impossible to reconcile and fulfill. Carolyn Ellis (2004) writes, "…there's something to be gained by saturating your observations with your own subjectivity" (P. 89). Reinharz (1992) notes that Dorothy Smith also advocates for beginning with the experience of the researcher in order to do sociology from the standpoint of women and asking how the experiences of the researcher and other women (participants) are organized, asking how those experiences are determined, and asking what the social relations are that produce it.

That is exactly how I have approached this project. Instead of assuming that this is an area that I am too intimate with to be objective, I have drawn on my own experiences and my own standpoint. My research and the questions I asked my participants was shaped and informed by my own experiences as a graduate mother and conversations I had with friends and colleagues who were also graduate student mothers. I wanted to explore the ways that women like myself experience motherhood and the academy as social institutions that shape and inform our perceptions of ourselves.

As a feminist researcher who sees our world as being socially constructed, I do

not believe that it is possible for me to objectively remove all bias and subjectivity from my research or my analysis. My status as an insider in this group has, without a doubt, affected the way that I approached my research and analysis. Insider status has both advantages and disadvantages. It is possible that because my participants' experiences were so familiar to me, that there were topics that seemed normalized during the interview and analysis and therefore I did not explore them further. An outsider may have seen some of the things that came up differently, however, my insider status also allowed me to share parts of my experiences with my participants and to further bond with them, creating an environment of mutual reciprocation and trust. Rather than claim scientific empiricism and objectivity, I must acknowledge my own standpoint and the ways in which it has shaped this project. Carolyn Ellis (2004) advises that we allow ourselves to be vulnerable in our work, that the more vulnerable we allow ourselves to be, the more acknowledge how our lives have been affected in similar ways as our participants, the closer we come to understanding our participants. Ellis (2004) states, "Good autoethnographic writing is truthful, vulnerable, evocative, and therapeutic." (P. 135) for ourselves, our readers, and our participants. Hearing the stories of my participants helped me to understand my own story in an alternate way, while also allowing me to rethink my experiences, reminds me to be kind and forgiving to myself, or as one participant suggested, encourages me to treat myself as I would my best friend. With each retelling of my participants' stories, I am also telling my own story, allowing my own voice to be heard, and healing and nourishing myself in the process.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Thesis Semi-Structured Interview Questions: You Must Be SuperWoman! How Graduate Student Mothers Negotiate Conflicting Roles

1. How old are you?
2. How many children do you have and what are their ages?
3. Tell me where you stand in terms of your graduate education?
4. How would you describe your social class? (Low, middle, upper?)
5. Did you have children before or after you began your graduate work?
   a. If after: Tell me the story about finding out you were pregnant? How did everyone react to the news?
   b. Tell me about your experience being a pregnant graduate student. Was there ever a time that being a pregnant graduate student was an advantage?
6. What things have you had to start doing differently as a result of having children and attending graduate school?
7. Are there things that you previously did with your children that being in graduate school has made difficult or that you have stopped doing with them since beginning graduate school?
8. How has your family reacted to your pursuit of a graduate degree? Are they supportive?
9. How do you balance being a mother and a student?
10. What is the role of the father/s of your child/children?
11. What is his involvement with the children? Is this helpful or stressful?
12. How do you and the father get along?
13. Who handles the primary day to day care of your child/children?
14. What would you enjoy doing more of with your child/children?
15. How has your experience as a graduate student mother changed/shifted or been impacted as your children have gotten older?
16. Are your children involved in any extra-curricular activities? Is this helpful or a hindrance to your time?
17. What are your concerns about being a mother and a graduate student?
18. What kind of support system do you have? Who helps you in terms of advice, childcare, finances, illness, etc.?
19. What are your childcare arrangements?
20. When and how do you get your academic work done?
21. How has your overall attendance in school been since you have become a mother?
22. When you miss class, how often is it because of your children (due to daycare reasons, financial reasons, sick children, etc.)?
23. When you miss class due to the reasons we just spoke about, how understanding or considerate are your professors?
24. What is your sense of how mothers are viewed or evaluated by both fellow students, by faculty, and (if you teach) by your own students?

25. Do you have a peer group of student mothers in your department that you can share your struggle with?
26. How long will it take you to complete your degree plan? Will you be graduating within a reasonable time frame? How has being a mother affected your timeframe to graduate?
27. How supportive has your department been of you in your pursuit of a graduate degree? Do you feel like this is more or less than they have been of non-mother students?
28. How well does the university schedule (such as times classes are offered) fit with your schedule as a mother?
29. Are there any university policies that you feel help or hinder your success as a mother in graduate school?
30. Do you currently work in addition to going to school? Do you work part-time or full time?
31. Has your current job helped or interfered with your role as a mother? And what about your role as a graduate student?
32. What advice would you like to give to graduate departments or graduate schools and universities about supporting graduate student mothers?
33. If you were mentoring a newly pregnant graduate student or a new graduate student who is already a mother, what advice would you give her for balancing her roles as student and mother?
34. Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Flyer

Are you a mother pursuing either a Masters Degree or a Doctoral Degree in Sociology or Women's Studies?

This is an invitation to participate in a voluntary research project and have your voice heard!

Can you take classes, teach, do research, write that thesis or dissertation, and be a mom? Do you have a choice?

What the statistics say:
Academic mothers with babies are nearly 30% less likely than women without babies to attain a tenure-track position (Wilson 2003).

Only 56% of women with children earned tenure within 14 years of earning their PhDs. 77% of men with children earned tenure within 14 years (Crittendon 2001).

Studying Graduate Student Mothers in Sociology
In 1972, Dorothy Smith made a radical critique of sociology in which she called for a new perspective in sociology; a woman's perspective. Now I am calling for the perspective of mothers in graduate school. Our voices need to be heard.

Universities are increasingly becoming like businesses and "graduate student" a job title. For graduate students who are mothers, work and family balance is not just a pertinent research question, but necessary for success.

Women and mothers in the academy are frequent research topics. Graduate student mothers have had a limited amount of research on them and the research that has been done has ignored non-white mothers and mothers of older children. This research is seeking to fill that gap while keeping the focus to Sociology and Women's Studies, fields that should recognize institutional barriers to education that women like us face. The purpose of this study concerns the experiences and perceptions of graduate student mothers in balancing and negotiating conflicting roles.

This is an ethnographic study of graduate students of Sociology and Women's Studies who are also mothers.

This study will be conducted by Erin Graybill Ellis, a doctoral student at Texas Woman's University. Her research interests include medical sociology, motherhood, women and children's health, and deviance.

Join the Discussion, not just the Statistics
Join a study that will gauge your experiences as a student and mother to help assess the needs of graduate student moms. Research questions include:
How do you balance motherhood and graduate school?
What do graduate student mothers need?
How do these needs depend on a support network (or lack thereof), age of children, and number of children?
How are your experiences shaped by university and department policies?
How can change be enacted through collective action?

What's in it for you?
As a participant in this study, you'll have the opportunity to share your experiences, make suggestions for institutional, departmental, and domestic changes.

Get in touch today to schedule a face-to-face or telephone interview!
Erin Graybill Ellis
Email: graduatestudentmothers2013@live.com
Phone: 940-898-2052

There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions.

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

TWU
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
DENTON   DALLAS   HOUSTON

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378   FAX 940-898-4416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

November 18, 2013

Ms. Erin Graybill Ellis

Dear Ms. Ellis:

Re: *You Must Be Super Woman! How Graduate Student Mothers Negotiate Conflicting Roles*
       (Protocol #: 17493)

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and
appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data
collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is
enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining
consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request
to close the study file at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from November 1, 2013. Any modifications to this study must be
submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be
notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. If you have any questions, please contact the
TWU IRB.

Sincerely,

Rhonda R Buckley

Dr. Rhonda Buckley, Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc.   Dr. James Williams, Department of Sociology & Social Work
      Dr. Mahmoud Sadri, Department of Sociology & Social Work
      Graduate School

211

APPENDIX E

Texas Woman's University Clubhouse Rates

Fall 2014 Clubhouse Dates of Operation & Rates

During the fall and spring semesters, Clubhouse is open Monday – Friday from 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Program dates are: August 25, 2014 – December 19, 2014

Special Days
On special days Clubhouse is open 7:30 am – 5:30 pm and there is a $25.00 per day fee. A minimum of 4 pre-paid, registered children is required for Clubhouse to open on these days.
The Special Days are:

October 13, 2014   November 24, 2014   November 25, 2014

Extended Days
Clubhouse will be open from 1:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. on the following DISD early release days.
There is no additional charge for Clubhouse extended days. The extended day dates are:
Elementary Schools
October 6 – 10, 2014 (Monday – Friday)

Clubhouse Closure Dates
Clubhouse will be closed in accordance with the TWU and Denton School District calendars.
September 1, 2014(Labor Day)   November 26-28, 2014 (Thanksgiving Break)

December 22, 2014 – January 6, 2015

Fall 2014 Rates

	1st Child	Each Additional Child
TWU student living on campus	$515	$505
TWU student living off campus	$585	$575
Faculty/Staff	$625	$615
Special days Fee	$25 per day	$25 per day
Application Fee	$25.00	$0.00

Monthly Payment Rates

	1st Child	Each Additional Child
TWU student living on campus	$144	$130
TWU student living off campus	$161	$148
Faculty/Staff	$160	$158
Special days Fee	$25 per day	$25 per day
Application Fee	$25.00	$0.00

Monthly payments will be due September 2, October 1, November 1 & December 3

Go to http://www.twu.edu/housing/clubhouse.asp for printable versions of all Clubhouse forms and documents.

E-mail questions to clubhouse@mail.twu.edu
We also encourage you to use this e-mail address to notify us of absences or changes in pick-up person for your children prior to 2:00 p.m.

All returning and new students must update enrollment forms and pay an application fee each fall.

Clubhouse is a program supported and implemented by TWU Department of University Housing

213