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Expanding the Self: Motherhood and Identity Development in Faculty Women

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Abstract

Research on women's identity development has indicated that women generally form and view their identities within the context of their relationships and connections to others. Previous research has looked at various aspects of motherhood identity including paradoxical, conflictual, and ambivalent components of motherhood. The current study contributes by exploring 30 university faculty women's personal experiences of motherhood through a grounded theory framework to determine the contributions of motherhood to adult identity development. Mothering expanded the women's selves and identities multivariously, by developing new personal qualities, by increasing relational capacity and concern for others, by creating a sense of lasting influence by contributing to younger generations, and by enhancing their engagement with their careers. In this way, motherhood was personally, relationally, generationally, and vocationally expansive. Implications for clinical work and research are included.

Keywords

motherhood, identity, women, faculty, career

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American society has long expected that motherhood be an integral part of women's identities (Hare-Mustin & Broderick, 1979; Shelton & Johnson, 2006). Although this social expectation is slowly beginning to change, there are many stereotypes about women and motherhood that still influence women's and men's views of the roles of women. In fact, in American culture, being a woman and being a mother are often considered tantamount to one another (Arendell, 1999), leading Nancy Russo (1976, 1979) to identify the "motherhood mandate" under which women develop their sense of female adulthood. This can potentially have an unfortunate effect on women's experience of themselves as mothers when taking into account that the stereotypically *good* mother sacrifices her own needs and wants for those of the child (Arendell, 1999). This latter expectation can be particularly problematic to women with careers who are employed after becoming mothers, which may influence their experience of motherhood. In light of these cultural expectations, how does motherhood influence the identities of mothers with careers? The present study qualitatively investigated this topic in a sample of 30 women working as faculty in higher education in the United States.

Erik Erikson largely founded the research movement on identity in 1950 when he proposed his eight-stage developmental model. This model includes the concept of identity, which Erikson conceived as an individual's experience of self that coheres previous, current, and future self-perceptions. These perceptions of the self that comprise identity include not only how an individual perceives himself or herself but also the individual's beliefs about others' expectations and perceptions of the individual.

Although Erikson's theory has historically provided a strong basis for understanding identity development, some researchers believe it falls short in adequately explaining the influence of interpersonal attachments and intimacy on evolving personal identities, particularly for women (Franz & White, 1985). Erikson (1968) recognized that men and women may develop identities differently, thereby originally postulating that women slip into identity moratorium until they are able to form an identity in relationship to their families through their roles as wives and mothers. Erikson's (1950, 1968) research focused primarily on the experience of men in the process of identity development and neglected the role gender and socially normed gender roles play in identity development. Several researchers have since endeavored to remedy this. As a means of gaining a more adequate understanding of women's processes of developing identities, Josselson (1987) used Marcia's (1966) identity statuses as a springboard to investigate ways in which women's identity development parallel with or diverge from men's development as elucidated by both Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966).

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Josselson (1987) concluded that there is an underlying difference in the tasks of separation and individuation between men and women. According to Josselson, women are constantly balancing their autonomy with their relatedness to others. This balancing influences their task to not only create or commit to an individual identity but also to maneuver the meaning and consequences of their individualized identity within the context of their relationships and interactions with others. In her study, women's decisions were often framed in relational terms, and the women found more personal satisfaction in accomplishments when they were interpersonally relevant. For example, it appeared that women's family roles were more closely tied to their self-esteem than were their occupational accomplishments.

Gilligan (1982), when studying women's moral development, found that women often contemplated moral dilemmas within the context of relationship. The female participants in Gilligan's studies often considered their relationships with others to be of primary importance when making moral decisions, resulting in moral decisions that reflected their conflicting responsibilities to others. Thus, Gilligan concluded that women's dilemmas were solved in ways that reflected both their responsibilities to others as well as their concern for the well-being of those involved. In fact, Gilligan stated that for women "to see themselves as women is to see themselves in a relationship of connection" (p. 171). In other words, women viewed themselves as individuals within their *webs of relationships* that helped define for themselves who they were. Gilligan's findings, though intended to investigate moral development, reflected what Josselson (1987) later found: that women are often anchored in intimacy.

In light of the relational context of identity development for women, what changes in identity occur when women become mothers? Becoming a mother is a time of multifaceted change in a woman's life, in that a woman's biology, sense of identity, and social relations change when she has a child. The process of pregnancy can be a catalyst for self-evaluation and self-reconstruction among first-time mothers (Smith, 1994). Becoming and being a mother causes women to modify their internalized ideals about parenthood as well as to modify their understandings of themselves and who they are in relationship to other people (Steinberg, 2005). Additionally, becoming a mother causes women to lose or alter much of what they defined themselves by prior to motherhood. Women, thus, must reevaluate how their autonomy, physical appearance, sexuality, and occupations influence their identities differently than they had before motherhood (Nicolson, 1999).

The process of defining oneself as a mother and integrating motherhood into one's identity usually involves maneuvering ideals about how a woman

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ought to mother, juxtaposed with the lived reality of motherhood (Choi, Henshaw, Baker, & Tree, 2005; Shelton & Johnson, 2006). Women are often expected to experience only positive feelings about motherhood, and to be the ideal mother that is portrayed by society (Hare-Mustin & Broderick, 1979; Hays, 1996; Marshall, 1991). Although there is not space here to discuss in any detail the literature on prevailing motherhood ideologies, it should be noted that these idealized notions of motherhood are the context in which women develop motherhood identities. When women who are mothers do not reach this ideal, they often feel guilty or blame themselves for their shortcomings as mothers (Arendell, 1999; Phanco, 2003). Therefore, it seems that women incorporate motherhood into their identities, but not without the tumult of facing the actuals and ideals of who they are as mothers.

Arendell (2000), in her review of scholarship on motherhood, noted that motherhood identity remained understudied, in spite of indications that motherhood influences identity more powerfully than either marital status or occupation (Rogers & White, 1998) and is an important source of meaning in women's lives (Ross & Van Willigen, 1996). A small body of research on the transition to motherhood has emerged in the ensuing decade. The focus has primarily been on the conflictual dynamics of identity change: myth versus reality discrepancy (Choi et al., 2005), "good mother" ideals versus experience (Lupton, 2000), paradox (Nicolson, 1999), conflict (Raskin, 2006), ambivalence (Parker, 1995, 1997; Shelton & Johnson, 2006), unity versus fluidity (Baraitser, 2006), individuality versus intersubjectivity (Hollway, 2010), achieving balance amid a "matrix of tensions" (Oberman & Josselson, 1996), and reconciliation of discrepancies in maternal experiences (Smith, 1994). This focus on problematizing the experience of motherhood has been a necessary corrective, in light of society's idealization of motherhood, and the ways in which this idealization has contributed to pressing social debates, such as abortion and women's labor, in the past century (Arendell, 2000). However, in these efforts, the actual ways in which their identities are perceived differently by mothers has been largely neglected, with few exceptions (e.g., McMahon, 1995).

The focus of motherhood identity studies has also been on the transition to motherhood; few studies exist that examine experiences of motherhood past the period of early childhood (e.g., Francis-Connolly, 2004), and none of these focuses on motherhood identity. Nor has the topic been studied in a sample of career women who choose to work while mothering. Research has demonstrated that mothering practices are diverse and subject to multiple influences, such as ethnicity, marital status, social economic status, and historical factors. This diversity in the experience of mothering suggests that

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motherhood identity is also influenced by these factors. In fact, the only study identified that addressed socioeconomic influences on motherhood identity (McMahon, 1995) found both similarities and differences in the motherhood identities of working-class and middle-class mothers.

The present study contributes to the study of motherhood identity by examining the role of motherhood in the identity formation of career women with children in various stages of development. In addition, although the women's status as working mothers also suggests the possibility of work–family conflict, the emphasis in this study will not be on their experiences of interrole conflict but on their experiences of their identity.

Method

Participants

Data for this project were gathered as part of a larger study examining identity, institutional support, and spousal support of mothers in higher education. Consequently, all participants met the twofold requirements of holding faculty status at a college/university and having at least one child younger than 18 years of age living in their homes. To ensure a variety of backgrounds among the women, participants were recruited from universities across the United States. They were recruited via an email describing the project and its intended population that was sent to administrators of schools within a network of private institutions of higher education. The decision to remain within this specific network was related to the focus on institutional support that formed part of the larger project.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) are not overly prescriptive in their discussions of participant numbers for grounded theory studies. Other researchers, such as Creswell (1998), suggest typical ranges for reaching theoretical saturation of 20 to 30 participants. Thirty women were interviewed for the current project. Theoretical saturation was achieved prior to analyzing all interviews, though all interviews were analyzed. Twenty-three held doctorates in their respective fields, and the remaining seven held master's degrees. Participants in this study held positions within a variety of different academic disciplines. The disciplines represented by the participants spanned several areas, including but not limited to biology, economics, English, history, philosophy, and social work.

The majority of the participants were European American, though three were African American, one Chinese American, and one Korean American. Twenty-seven were married, two divorced, and one was single, and the

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average length of marriage was 16 years. The women ranged in age from 34 to 54 with a mean age of 43. The women had between 1 and 5 children, and their children living at home ranged from less than 1 year to 17 years of age. Some participants had additional children with ages ranging up to 37 years of age. The choice to limit the inclusion criteria allowed for variability in ethnicity, marital status, age, and number of children. As with all methodological decisions, this influences the data collected. Our inclusion criteria allowed for confidence that the emerging thematic material was not limited to specific subgroups of women within this population and to see how the themes might manifest themselves across this variability. At the same time, the lack of systematic collection of data across these variables does not allow for conclusions to be reached regarding subgroup differences.

Researchers

The first author was the principal investigator in this study; she was primarily responsible for analyzing the data. The other investigators, all licensed psychologists and psychologists-in-training, participated in designing the basic parameters of the study, initiating contact with the primary sources of recruitment, conducting the interviews, and serving as auditors of the analyses.

Interview Questions

A list of questions was developed as a result of reviewing the literature on working mothers and on identity. The questions can be found in the appendix.

Procedure

The interviews used in this study were conducted by licensed psychologists and psychologists-in-training. Data were gathered by conducting individual face-to-face, semistructured interviews with each of the participants. Although scripted, the interviews were conducted in a semistructured way such that the coinvestigators were encouraged to follow the interviewee's lead in order to obtain a richer, thicker description of the experience of motherhood. Prior to each interview, the participants received, reviewed, and signed an informed consent form. The interviews each lasted 1 to 2 hours, allowing time for probing if necessary. This is typical for qualitative inquiry, as the flexibility allows for greater breadth and quality of data gathered (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each of the interviews was audio taped and transcribed for analysis purposes.

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To maximize the number of participants involved in our study and allow for the participation of nonlocal parties, coinvestigators travelled to conduct face-to-face interviews. Of the resulting interviews, half were from Southern California; the remainder represented all major areas of the country.

Analysis

Qualitative methodology is particularly useful in studying the internal and interpersonal dynamics inherent in phenomena such as identity, as it places fewer restrictions on the data than does quantitative research, and allows the nuances of individual experience to surface (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Grounded theory was chosen as the method of data analysis by which the participants' reported experiences were coded and organized within the context of the data. This was done so that a theory might be built that was warranted by, and grounded in, the data (Creswell, 1998). The paradigmatic underpinning of the study was a synthesis of constructivism and postpositivism, in that we assume an objective reality that is only imperfectly apprehendable (Ponterotto, 2005) and thus see the value of using semistructured interviews across individuals, assuming some commonalities in experience. At the same time, we recognize that exploration of the internal world and experiences of our sample places us in the realm of what is constructed in the mind of specific individuals; our task is to facilitate the articulation of the constructed meanings individuals have through the interview process.

The interviews were analyzed based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) four-stage method of grounded theory analysis. All the interviews were read to gain an understanding of the general experience of the women who participated in the study and to tentatively identify common themes among the data. *Microanalysis*, or line-by-line analysis, was first performed on part of the data to more solidly identify themes. Line-by-line analysis is vital in the qualitative process as it provides an opportunity for the researcher to suspend his or her biases and magnify the data, in order to determine more clearly what the data may contain. A multitude of basic descriptive themes (often called *codes*) emerged in this stage, such as being available to others, cooperation with others, and having multiple selves or using the self in different ways. After identifying themes through microanalysis, the remainder of the data were then subject to *open coding* into the identified themes, so that initial themes could be solidified and to allow subthemes to emerge in an effort to understand the women's understanding of themselves and how their various roles affect their identities. For example, a theme that emerged during this stage was that of becoming more emotional through motherhood. After thorough examination and open coding of the data, interviews were coded *axially.* In this stage, themes

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were organized into categories and subcategories, such as becoming more emotional through motherhood relating to the category of motherhood enhancing the self. *Selective coding* then followed, as an overarching category was selected that incorporated and subsumed the other categories and subcategories, taking into account their relationships with one another. Expanding the self was chosen as the overarching category. The initial steps in coding, microanalysis and open coding, were done with HyperRESEARCH software. Further steps, axial and selective coding, were completed without the use of software.

Trustworthiness

Because of the potential for biases to affect the outcome of qualitative data analysis as explored above, the researchers exercised caution in analysis to ensure trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of the project was supported in three ways. First, we elicited participants from varying backgrounds and locations to obtain within-method data triangulation (Denzin, 1978); data triangulation occurs when instances of a phenomenon in several different settings result in richer descriptions of phenomena. Second, all theoretical statements were grounded in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which Seale (1999) considers an indicator of quality when theoretical statements become convincing because of their link to data. Theoretical saturation, which was reached during analysis, also provides some degree of confidence in the categories used for analysis. Third, reflexivity was encouraged through regular consultation with a research team. The primary author is not a mother but anticipates becoming one in the future; one way in which reflexivity proved helpful was in becoming aware of the possibility of idealization of the mothering experience through discussion of the different perspectives brought to the data analysis by the mothers in the research team. Morrow (2005) notes that a research team can serve as a mirror, "reflecting the investigator's responses to the research process . . . [and] proposing alternative interpretations to those of the investigator" (p. 254). Throughout the interviewing process, a group of no less than five researchers consistently met to discuss the interview process and the emerging themes and subthemes in the data and their apparent relationships.

Results and Discussion

The overarching theme emerging from the analysis was that of motherhood expanding the self. Motherhood generated new qualities within the women to a degree that they felt they would not otherwise have developed, such as the

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capacity for increased compassion, empathy, and availability to others. In this way, motherhood proved to be personally expansive. The way motherhood changed the women extended to the way they interacted with others, even others with whom they were not in significant relationships. In this way, motherhood was also relationally expansive. Furthermore, becoming a mother allowed the women in the sample to extend themselves through time and influence future generations. Finally, motherhood was vocationally expansive in that, while the women articulated increased time constraints within their careers after becoming mothers, they also often indicated that motherhood had influenced their abilities to participate more fully in their careers and enhanced their capacities to perform their duties well.

Personally Expansive

Over and over again the women in the sample indicated that becoming a mother had allowed them to develop qualities within themselves that otherwise would not have been engendered. This happened in a myriad of ways that seem to reflect a renegotiation of their sense of autonomy and relatedness to others (see Josselson, 1987) through the experience of motherhood. Several women stated that having children made them less self-centered and brought about self-awareness by becoming more aware of others' needs:

> In some ways it's like having this little model of you because with my oldest son he looks a lot like me, he has a lot of my dispositions and inclinations and it's like, "Whoa, do I do that?" It's like having this mirror and it just makes me stop and realize how much what I do and what I say can make a difference or break a difference in a person's life. So that influenced me—is that the word you used?—impacted me. I think you find this whole nurturing thing that you never knew was there before. I think it's impacted me to be a better teacher too because I know better the stages of development. I know a little bit about what it's like to live with a child and have and see how hard they work and don't work and that impacts their lives. So I think it's made me a better teacher.

For this woman, insight accompanied motherhood and increased her awareness of her impact on the lives of others. Another woman expressed her experience of motherhood similarly:

> It's been irreplaceable in my personal growth. I am a much more mature, giving, other-centered person because of the experience of motherhood. I think I could have continued being very self-centered, I still do continue, but it has helped to not be so self-centered by having others that you must think about. Not that you

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> wouldn't like to or get around to it, but in some cases you must think about them right now. Children are not patient. If they are sick, they need you now. Some of this, it's not due to sickness, they have something to tell you, they want to tell you now. It's made me a much bigger person, a much more mature person, a much wiser person than I could have been had I not had children.

The immediacy of her children's needs weighed heavily on the way she evaluated her own needs. This, in turn, changed who she was. Another woman echoed these very sentiments:

> I can't imagine not being a mother. I have friends who aren't parents, but I just think that it's so enriching; it makes you come out of being egocentric because you have to focus on needs that are louder and more important [than] yours. . . . I think it's just fulfilled parts of me that wouldn't have been tapped into.

Interacting with the pressing needs of their children changed these women, as they felt that doing so had made them "bigger" with a greater capacity for awareness and understanding of others. This is consistent with Erikson's (1968) expectations that when encountering new challenges, and when taking on new roles, identity may need to be renegotiated to some degree in order to incorporate the new role into one's identity. These women constructively negotiated their identities as mothers by allowing their children to affect them and by stretching themselves to create more internal space for their children and their children's needs.

Just as the previous woman described, many of the women relayed gaining a sense of fulfillment from mothering. One woman aptly stated,

> My two boys are my heart and soul. I feel with them such a deep contentment and satisfaction and surprise and this sense of completion—they're my heart and my soul. I would be so much less of a person if I didn't have them.

Another woman stated that though she felt little need for fulfillment, as she had defined her identity and was satisfied with her career, her children nevertheless created a sense of fulfillment for her:

> I'm very proud of my girls. I think I have an advantage because I became a mother late. I was already well defined and I didn't need them to fulfill me. I chose to have children but I didn't need to have children. And yet, even though I was well defined before I became a mother, they have still fulfilled me. It's been interesting. They fulfilled a need in me to be a nurturer and care for some other human being that wouldn't have happened otherwise. . . . So, I feel a great sense of reward and they do

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> help define who I am. It has added a new dimension to my personality of which I'm glad it's there. It has been a very painful road but it has been a very rewarding one.

Another woman, reaffirming a sense of fulfillment from motherhood, also felt motherhood expanded her influence and increased her accountability:

> I think when I became a mom, I felt like a grown up. I felt like I had a voice. It was interesting in "Women's Ways of Knowing" [a popular book] it really touched me how many women said the same thing. And especially women of a certain cultural background . . . but there is still a huge impact there that when a woman becomes a mother, [she] has a much different authority. I mean, when she becomes a grandmother, that's like she is supreme over the whole clan so you really look forward to becoming, not for the power trip, but there is a level of fulfillment in life that comes with each level of maternal responsibility. I just really felt like a different person, becoming a mom was a big thing.

Motherhood appears to have fulfilled the women in various ways; one woman talked about a sense of fulfillment through loving her children and having an entirely new perspective of the world become available to her because of the way she was changed through having children:

> [Being a mother] means that you get to see the world through the eyes of another person. It means that I can touch that nurturing side of me, and it means that there are surprises as far as what love is and what the whole world is that I never ever dreamed of; they're available to me, thanks to my children and our experiences as we grow up.

Connected to the sense of being able to love and be fulfilled in so doing, the women often talked about emotional expansion they experienced through motherhood. One woman described the influence of motherhood in this way:

> It means living on an emotional plane that I am still discovering. It has changed my viewpoint and world at an emotional level . . . it has made me more compassionate towards my students as children and as having parents themselves.

Another woman described motherhood similarly:

> Being a mother gives me more joy than I ever thought possible and I think that's been a surprise. I had no idea the level of joy and completeness; I'm going to tell you I was really cynical about the whole motherhood thing for a while and I thought that for a long, long time, for many years. . . . Even with adopting I remember thinking before adopting that I wasn't sure how it was going to work

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> out, where does this love come from for kids you don't give birth to? But, boy it's there, it comes in a miraculous way and once it's there, it takes hold of you in a way that is indescribable and gives you something that I can't imagine life without. I can't imagine life without these children. . . . Seeing that in her eyes, the joy and the wonder, you know, it's an incredible experience and it gives you such a great perspective for life. I mean, it carries over into your work and into everything. It's really something.

This woman described a sense of feeling vicarious joy when her young daughter experienced delight and excitement. For her, feeling such delight in the excitement of her daughter was an experience that she could not have had through anything else. The emotional terrain accessible to her through her love for her daughters was unique to her experience of her children, and could be facilitated no other way.

Although the previous examples spoke of positive emotions motherhood had elicited in the women, many participants also articulated that motherhood had opened to them an awareness of fear, concern, and the pain of others:

> Well, [motherhood] certainly made me a more emotional person. I saw *Schindler's List* only a few months after my oldest was born and I can't watch stories like that. I can hardly watch the news any longer and that's no exaggeration. Before I had children, I watched the news every day. . . . It's just so disturbing because as a parent, you begin to realize the world is a violently threatening place and you want it to be so much the antithesis of that for your children and so there is this whole host of fears that are awakened and you also realize that everyone else has been someone's baby at some point in time. There is a parent or two somewhere that feels about the student in the hallway and about the murderer on death row the way I feel about my children. And that changes you. At least, that has changed me irrevocably. . . . Children live in the present and they need you now and there is no waiting. Even when they grow to need you less and less, they're always occupying space in your cognitive world and your emotional world. So, it changes you in every way. In every way.

Having children made this woman not only more sensitive to violence but also more aware of others' pain. Another woman, when asked about her experience of motherhood, discussed the wide array of emotions that accompanied it:

> It's a mixed bag. I can't answer that clearly one way or the other. It's both extremes. It's the best thing I ever did; it's the worst thing I ever did. . . . But, motherhood has brought a wide range of emotion that I didn't expect. . . . So, I don't

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> know—motherhood has been a real trip! And it continues to be something that gives me a great deal of joy and a great deal of sadness at the same time because of the circumstances.

For these women, motherhood appeared to broaden a sense of their own emotional experience, as well as their sense of others' emotional experiences.

At the same time, many of the women described a reconnection to a child-like part of themselves that helped them take delight in their children and in life that they had on some level failed to engage with for some time:

> . . . with children I learned how to give up my schedule and how to give up control . . . they also showed me—or helped me to be—unconditional love and acceptance. . . . They've taught me how to play and have fun and to slow down. Those things I think were in me anyway but I can get real caught up in the other—so I enjoy walks in parks, and all of the craft projects, and cookies, and they've brought more mess into my life in a really good way and you just say, "It's not so important."

Another woman articulated a similar change in herself after having children:

> [It's helped me] get in touch with my inner child with the sparkle inside of me that, the playful side, which I think, you have to have in relationships. It also helps here at work. There are times when you've got to knuckle down. But it has helped me to crystallize that and realize the playful part of me is a good part, and it has also helped me to see responsibility. And it has kept me from being totally self-centered, helped me to see the world through another person's eyes. It has helped me to grow and to realize the dimensions of love and of discipline and responsibility and life itself. It just broadened everything.

These women's accounts illustrate the wide range of experience and empathy for others that opened to them through mothering their children. In this way, the women themselves were changed, as they also changed the ways they viewed the world and developed more emotional space for others. First-time mothers have been shown to go through the process of self-evaluation and reconstruction as a result of having children (Smith, 1994). The women in this sample indicated that this process of self-evaluation and reconstruction may happen even as their children are growing older, not just at pregnancy. This process is consistent with Steinberg's (2005) results that women who become mothers must reconsider who they are and who they will be in relationship to other people. The women in this study were continually modifying how they saw themselves as mothers, and

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continually allowing their motherhood to influence how they negotiated their identities paralleling the new challenges posed by their children's advancing development.

Relationally Expansive

Becoming more aware of the vast emotional terrain of motherhood and of others' emotions influenced the ways that the women interacted with other people. Josselson (1987) suggested that women's identities are negotiated within relationship because women are constantly balancing their autonomy and relatedness to others. When the women in this study had to renegotiate their autonomy and sense of relatedness to others through motherhood, they were personally affected in a variety of ways. Motherhood having altered identity so deeply further altered the ways that women perceived and responded to others with whom they were in relationship. For example, one woman, by being aware of her children's needs, was able to be more aware of others' needs, and thus extended this awareness to her interactions with them:

> I think it's made me very aware of practical needs like my kids need their lunch made. So you have to make their lunch. They have this need to eat and when you interact with people, you learn that people just have very basic practical needs that they need to have fulfilled. So you start to identify and see those things and try to fulfill them as best as you can. So, probably from a nurturing point of view and that kind of extends to all your interactions. I tease my students about being a mom to them, you know, once you are a mom, you are a mom to everybody; you have no choice.

This woman described the impact of motherhood on her identity; the impact that it had on her inevitably changed the way that she viewed other people and treated them. Another woman reiterated the same effect of motherhood on her interactions:

> Doing things with, not only my kids, but kids who are close to our family is critical and I consider all of that part of the mothering role to me. So, I have two kids that have known me as Mama "———" for a long, long time; in fact, that's how they reference me consistently. . . . And I have 6-8 neighbor kids who are just part of the extended family for my children. . . . So, that is very important to me. Nurturing and mothering not only my kids, but any of the kids in the vicinity.

This woman's motherhood so strongly defined her that she extended herself in relationship to others in her community in a mothering way. For this

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woman, and for many other women, being a mother was an integral part of herself that once educed, could not be eliminated in her relationships. This tendency is consistent with Gilligan's (1982) conceptualization of women as individuals connected to others through relationship (as are many men). This woman extended herself in relationship to others as a mother because her motherhood was such a strong aspect of her identity.

Another woman discussed the increased understanding resulting from motherhood and its effect on her relationship to those with whom she works:

> Being a mother makes me a more sensitive person. It makes me more aware of grace and mercy and responsibility and hardship because when I see a faculty member who comes in and he/she is bent out of shape over something, I think about that person's family and I think about their children or their relatives and I look beyond just what's going on with that person now professionally and I look at family and I wouldn't have done that before. I'm trying to think of another example. Maybe it's better illustrated with a student situation—a student is sick and can't come to class or a student who is going through some kind of ordeal or problem—I'm a whole lot more understanding. I just don't let things go, but I look at students now and they are somebody's child. I'm thinking this could be my child, how would I want people to treat this person? So, I think I'm a more compassionate administrator and faculty member because of being a mother.

Another woman's experience resounded in the same way:

> Being a mother has definitely made me more empathetic to students, to other parents, especially because of the difficulties I had with my one daughter, that has made me a lot more empathetic to parents, for parents, and with parents who have behavior problems with their kids. I don't think I did that before.

The influence that motherhood had on the women also influenced the way they understood others in close and intimate circles. One woman described how the relationship with her children helped her better understand her own husband:

> When I was pregnant with my first child, I thought it was going to be a girl, I was certain it was going to be a girl. But, what would I do with a boy? How can it be anything but a girl? And here it was, this boy child and it's just been a complete delight and journey of otherness, the wonder of otherness in having boy children and in some ways it makes you love your spouse even more, since I am in a heterosexual relationship, I can speak this way. But, it helps me to see my husband in different phases of what he must have been like, the layers of the self that are in

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> there and sometimes I access but not all the time. But of course, he's a grown man now. But it's been a wonderful experience. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

The women felt that they had changed as individuals and subsequently changed the ways they interacted with others. This is consistent with Nicolson's (1999) findings that once women become mothers they must change much of what they previously defined themselves by. The women in this study did so partially by making motherhood a significant part of their identities, and then extended this part of themselves to others. In this way, the women were able to expand relationally because of their motherhood. The women's negotiation of their identities in relationship to others also reflects the intimate effect of motherhood on who these women were. It further reflects Josselson's (1987) findings that women's identities are given meaning within the context of relationship. For these women, their identities were both formed within the context of relationship—to their children and to other people with whom they interacted—and were expressed in relationship also.

Generationally Expansive

In addition to influencing the ways that women viewed themselves as individuals as well as within relationships, themes of being generationally expansive also emerged. The women in the study often articulated feeling that motherhood was something that they had been "entrusted" as an opportunity to influence future generations. As one woman put it:

> I think when you are a mother, you get a chance to have an impact on the direction of the future. So, when you have children, you get to see them develop and think about what they are going to be doing in the future and how the world is going to be 50 years from now and whether or not you are there and you know that there is a chance that one of your children will be there and be able to make a difference in the world. So, to me, it's like part of the future and it's having children and being a mom to them and teaching them the things that I've learned and the things that I know and how to deal with life; I think it's pushing to the future that way.

Another woman stated it like this:

> It means that I'm helping to impact society positively by trying to be a good mother and get my kids having a good start, get them raised right.

These women felt that by affecting their children, they were also affecting the generations that followed them. Although not identical, these women's

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experiences reflect similar sentiments and motivations that Chodorow (1978) also expected to find among women: that women extend themselves in relationship in a variety of generative ways. These women, by mothering, feel that they have extended themselves into future generations and made a difference that will outlast their physical existence.

Vocationally Expansive

Motherhood also interfaced with the women's careers in a variety of ways. Many of the women stated that motherhood restricted the time that they were able to invest in their careers but simultaneously enhanced the ways that they were able to participate in their careers. One woman described children as "the great vortex" reflecting that investing in her children required extensive, and potentially endless, amounts of her own resources. Although this seemed true for many of the women, that motherhood was personally and relationally expansive overrode the time constraints of mothering. Mothering appeared to influence the women in such ways that even with increased time constraints they felt as though they participated more authentically and relationally in their careers. By having become a mother, one woman explained,

> I think I am more willing to accept students' difficulties: health concerns, if they are sick I say, "Go home and go to bed, don't come to class"; that kind of thing. I am very willing to do that because of my experience as a mother. . . . I think that the mom in me brings out the nurturing for my students. The authoritarian figure in me, which is embarrassing to say that, makes me be involved with what's going on in the classroom and not let things slide for my older children as well.

For another woman, mothering had a similar effect insofar as it allowed her to appreciate the uniqueness of her students, and the unique relationship or teaching styles that each of them required:

> When I thought about teaching, I didn't think about how individual students are and how individual their needs are. I think becoming a mother roughly at the same time I became a teacher, becoming a mom a little bit before was essential to me becoming a good teacher and it really taught me that you can't learn how to be a mom in a general sense. You have to learn to be a mom to a specific child and what they need, you have to really be sensitive; I really had to pay attention to her, what she needed, how was she developing as an individual, what was her personality. So in that sense, it was a different journey and it helped me to be a much better teacher.

In this woman's experience, being a mother changed the way that she thought about her students, by giving her a more specialized understanding of how

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teaching can be particular to the student after having learned how specific her own daughter's needs were. Many of the women reflected on similar changes in their careers resulting from mothering:

> It's kind of what I said before. I do my job differently because I'm a mother. I do it more efficiently than I did before and that can be a very good thing. It could also have its downside too, because I don't take the time to go home and worry over things. I just put it aside and I go home and I have everything I have to do and I don't desert myself 100% to who I am at school. There are margins on my life. When I took this job, to prep, my Provost who is a wonderful person said, "Establish the margins so that you would remain sane," and I have lived by that. I leave it and I go home and so being a mom has caused me to establish those margins. I think I probably function better in both places for that reason.

This woman's experience seems to resonate with many of the other women's included in the study: if the women viewed work and motherhood as competing commitments, motherhood reigned over career commitments. However, because of the limits that motherhood caused the women to implement in their careers, and because of the limits that work created with respect to the amounts of time the women were able to spend at home with their children, the women felt that they were exercising a broader panorama of themselves. Being able to exercise a broader range of their selves in turn enhanced the women's authenticity and performance in both mothering and working. Even if the women did not experience career and motherhood as competing endeavors, but rather viewed their careers as necessary for supplying basic provisions for their families, the women still articulated an appreciation for the opportunity to employ various parts of themselves through the outlet of their careers.

Although other research to this point has not examined the ways in which motherhood expands work-related capacities, first-person narratives confirm many of the themes found in the present sample. For example, Green (2003), in an article titled, "What's Love Got to Do With It? A Personal Reflection on the Role of Maternal Love in feminist Teaching," spoke of the influence of her changed identity in aspects such as curriculum decisions and pedagogical style.

The identity expansion of these mothers in the vocational realm is particularly noteworthy in light of some of the constraints imposed on their identity development by those vocations. The women's narratives confirmed existing literature on the challenges of the academic environment for mothers, including issues such as the tenure structure (Bickel, 1995), lack of support for research endeavors, difficulties in promotion, and salary discrepancies

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(Blakemore, Switzer, DiLorio, & Fairchild, 1997; Caplan, 1993). Of particular interest to identity development, however, are the ways in which external factors facilitated or hindered the achievement of a motherhood identity. In this population, developing this identity required an internal negotiation of the sense of being both a professional and a mother. Several women talked about the desire to experience themselves as a seamless whole. One woman stated, "I used to try to separate [my roles] and I find that it is impossible. You don't do as good a job trying to separate the roles as you would if you understood that you are a mom no matter what role you find yourself in . . ." This expresses a concept labeled "weaving" by Garey (1999), reflecting a "strategy of being" or strategy for constructing identity in which being a worker and being a mother are interwoven.

This process of construction required the women to establish priorities, to develop strategies to meet needs in both the work and family spheres, to set boundaries around the demands of these two spheres, and to renegotiate the priorities, strategies, and boundaries as the needs of the workplace and of their children changed over time. Workplaces varied in their institutional support for these processes. On the positive side, one woman stated, "It was a marvelous situation because the person that I answer to has three kids and knows what I'm dealing with and that's a very encouraging situation." Another reported a lack of institutional support, summarized by a conversation with her dean in which he stated, "I think you are starting to put your family ahead of your career and I am concerned about that." Faced with the internal tension caused by her inability to balance work and family in that environment, she sought employment at a different institution.

Summary and Conclusions

In sum, the present study found that motherhood emerged to *expand* the self personally, relationally, generationally, and vocationally. Motherhood allowed the women to develop greater capacities within themselves and these capacities were extended to others in relationship and through the women's careers. These findings echo Bailey's (1999) qualitative findings in a sample of pregnant women. Though these women had not yet given birth, Bailey concluded that the experience of pregnancy produced a "refractive" effect on their identities: like a beam of white light moving through a prism, their personality was experienced as revealing elements that had been hidden. Although these elements differ from those found in the present study, given that the women had not yet given birth, Bailey's work confirms that identity changes are not experienced solely as problematic and conflictual by women

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but also as growth-inducing. In 1996, Oberman and Josselson, building on Josselson's (1987) earlier work, formulated a theory of motherhood identity in which they describe a "matrix of tensions" that must be negotiated. They state,

> Both the strengths that are utilized and the weaknesses that are activated in the motherhood activity must be integrated into a woman's sense of self when she becomes a mother . . . the act of mothering represents an expansion of the capacities of the self. (pp. 348-349)

These findings confirm Oberman and Josselson's insights and build on their theory by proposing some specific areas in which the self is expanded in a population of professional women.

Further research might explore whether the expanding capacities of the self differ across cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. In the only comparative study examining this issue to date, McMahon (1995), in her qualitative study of middle- and working-class mothers, observed that her participants "experienced themselves as new persons by becoming mothers" (p. 129), and concluded that "the experience of self-transformation . . . was one of the dominant, if not *the* dominant, experience of motherhood" (p. 147). Although she found differences in the area of preparing for motherhood, commonalities were found in the areas of personal growth and development (learning about one's self, awareness of one's values, and a transformation in one's personal qualities, such as becoming more patient, less selfish, and more mature and confident, becoming more responsible), transcendent change (changed relationship with the universe, the rest of humanity or some generalized other), and practical changes in lifestyle and the use of their time. Some of these changes parallel those found in the narratives of the current study, lending further support to the notion that women from diverse backgrounds share some elements of growth in the transition to motherhood, while differing in others.

The current study also lends support to research findings that advocate viewing particular roles as contributing to an overall identity (i.e., Vondracek, 1992). Mcquillan, Greil, Shreffler, and Tichenor (2008) found in a sample of mothering and nonmothering women that mothers consistently placed a significantly higher value on motherhood than did nonmothers. The authors commented that the difference in importance was unsurprising. However, they found that nearly *all* women who were mothers consistently placed higher values on motherhood than did nonmothers controlling for all other variables. This is both surprising and perplexing considering that motherhood happens at

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unexpected and unplanned times for many of the mothers. Although Mcquillan et al. (2008) postulated as to why mothers may value motherhood over non-mothers, no specific conclusions could be drawn from the data. The women in the present study indicated that motherhood contributed to their careers, and even expanded their very selves. When considering the contributions of the women in this study, it seems that motherhood can potentially influence self-growth among women in ways that are unique to mothering. The intimate effects of motherhood on the women in this study may contribute to a broader understanding of the phenomena discovered in Mcquillan et al.'s study: that women who mother value motherhood because of the ways in which it promotes personal growth and contributes distinctly to their identity negotiation through adulthood. Although the current study would indicate this as a possibility, further research is needed to explore this possibility.

This project also affirms theories of identity that emphasize the role of connectedness in identity formation rather than the focus on autonomy found in earlier models of identity based primarily on samples of men. The women in the present study experienced their relationships to their children as the impetus for an expansion and redefinition of their identities, in ways that emphasized their connectedness to others in several domains. What remains unanswered is whether this change is specific to women, or whether men who assume primary care roles with their children encounter similar identity changes.

As with all research, the present study has certain limitations. First, because the sample was largely European American, Protestant, educated, and socioeconomically middle- to upper-middle class, the results are limited in their generalizability. As noted above, a limited body of research has found important differences in the ways in which women from different socioeconomic backgrounds conceptualize motherhood and incorporate it into their identities (e.g., McMahon, 1995). Additionally, future research could determine whether or not women's experience of motherhood and their work outside the home is different among "women who work" as opposed to "career women."

Despite the study's limitations, the current research expands our knowledge of motherhood identity by identifying the domains in which motherhood's expansive forces operate. It also supports conclusions of other researchers, which indicate that identity is a multifaceted concept and that the major aspects of one's identity should be studied in concert with one another (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, & Colwell, 2006; Warner, 2008). As the various layers and components of identity influence one another, it is more holistic to study the ways that individuals are affected by this mutual influence in order to best understand the concept of the individual's identity.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What does being a mother mean to you?
2. How has it impacted who you are?
3. How important is being a mom to who you are? How would someone else know that about you?
4. What comes to mind when someone asks, "Who are you?"
5. Where do you find your identity? What does that look like or mean to you?
6. Tell me what it's like being a mom and a faculty member.

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