

2022

# Maternal Identity of Modern-Day Mothers with High Identity Centrality

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Kimberly D. Anderson (Lewis)

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Maternal Identity of Modern-Day Mothers with High Identity Centrality

by

Kimberly D. Anderson (Lewis)

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

August 2022

## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore conceptualization of maternal identity among mothers with high identity centrality in suburban Virginia. The role of motherhood is culturally recognized as central to female identity, which historically has been described, defined, and maintained through various forms of media. This study involved using the social identity and self-categorization theories as explanatory frameworks to address development and maintenance of maternal identity. A qualitative approach was used to explore identity centrality and conceptualization of maternal identity with a purposefully sampled group of 10 mothers. Data were collected via demographic surveys followed by one-on-one semi-structured virtual interviews. Findings revealed sources that informed participants' maternal identity, including family, friends, spiritual sources, and the media. Participants identified good mothers in the media portrayed as predominantly White and middle class, attributing maternal success to the success of the child, while participants admitted to struggling with feelings of guilt and shame for not consistently meeting social pressures to adhere to the good mother model. Participants distinguished contemporary mothers by age, specifying behavioral differences as younger generations of mothers are perceived to be self-focused, while older generations of mothers are more child focused. By identifying subjective conceptualization of maternal identity, this research can inform and update social and cultural expectations of mothers that are presented in the media and marketing, thereby influencing positive social change.

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## Dedication

The doctoral journey has been one of growth, bringing great pain and joy throughout. This document is dedicated to my father, as it is his voice that has carried me throughout the journey, entrusting in me his full faith in my ability and intellect. It is with my father's guidance and modeling, that I have become the woman I am today.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge all educators that have taken part in my educational journey. It is with their support, criticism, and sincere faith, that I have accomplished this journey, delivering me unto a new horizon of scholarly status. I would also like to acknowledge my family. My children for their patience, love, and support as I am aware this journey has taken precious time away from them. My brother for his respect and guidance throughout the course of my life. And my mother for modeling perseverance, work ethic, and true grit. To you all, thank-you.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

In this qualitative study, I explored how women who view their maternal role as central to their identity conceptualized this identity. The formation of identity is a developmental process shared by all individuals which defines individual experiences as they shape and ultimately predict behaviors. Throughout the lifespan, individual identity shifts and changes because of life events and social influences (Erikson, 1968; McLean & Syed, 2014; Mercadal, 2019; Panuel & Wertsch, 1995). One experience that has been identified as a life changing event for women that has a significant impact on identity and consequently behavior is the experience of becoming a mother (Arnold-Baker, 2019; Laney et al., 2014; Laney et al., 2015). Because women are biologically assigned the role of mother due to their physical ability to birth children, cultural expectations have historically been maintained that maternal identity is universally defined as not only central to the female identity, but also conceptualization of maternal identity follows universal behavioral patterns in which the child is the primary focus (Hays, 1996).

The extent to which women view maternal roles as central to their sense of self and conceptualization of maternal identity varies among modern day maternal populations (Atkinson, 2014; McGannon et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2015; Oshin & Milan, 2019). In the absence of a clear understanding as well as acknowledgement of a subjective maternal identity, mothers are confronted with social pressures to adopt culturally prescribed maternal identities and conform to emotional, physical, and behavioral patterns (Hays, 1996). As a result, many mothers experience psychological,

physical, social, and behavioral consequences when they cannot or choose not to conform to prescribed maternal identities (Rizzo et al., 2012; Seymour-Smith et al., 2017; Van Mulken et al., 2016). To date, an exploration of the subjective conceptualization of maternal identity among mothers with high identity centrality (strongly identifying with an identity) has not been conducted. By exploring subjective conceptualization of maternal identity among mothers with high identity centrality, trends in maternal behavior can be better understood and modern-day mothers can be more accurately portrayed in media.

### **Background of the Problem**

The transition into motherhood and realization of maternal identity has been identified as a complex life event that poses a significant challenge to women's existing identity. After conception, women function in new roles based on their biological sex and reproductive potential which involves assuming adoption of emotional, physical, and behavioral attributes of the socially constructed maternal identity. As such, women are confronted with social pressure and culturally constructed stereotypes of the mother that maintain their primary and most rewarding role in life is to become a mother (Hays, 1996; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015; Russo, 1976), and a rejection of such norms suggests a rejection of femininity (Grundetjern, 2018). Maternal identity is culturally maintained and illustrated in media reflecting an identity that is most often exemplified by White and middle-class women who seemingly have available resources, support, and enthusiasm that illustrate the good mother model (Chae, 2015; Friedan, 1963; Grundetjern, 2018; Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2014). While women experience this as a significant transition in

life they do not universally conform to prescribed identities (Arnold-Baker, 2019; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015). Consequently, many women struggle to find relatable and accurate exemplars to affirm their subjective conceptualization of maternal identity. Fouquier (2011) said African American women were not able to find relatable exemplars as they were most often portrayed in terms of extreme and outdated stereotypes involving being poor, single, or young. Grundetjern (2018) studied women who either consumed or dealt illegal drugs and said mothers who were in structurally disadvantaged positions attempted to adapt to the socially-constructed maternal identity but failed to meet standards of prescribed identity. Arnold-Baker (2015) said new mothers struggled to feel like mothers because their experiences as a mother were neither blissful nor satisfying as the cultural ideals assume the experience of motherhood to be, yet they had no alternative exemplars to refer to; thus, they experienced feelings of guilt and shame.

As women struggle to find relatable exemplars in contemporary culture and the media to which they can identify, they are considered incompetent mothers if they do not prescribe to idealized maternal identities or meet characteristics of a good mother (Henderson et al., 2016; Newman & Henderson, 2014; Okimoto & Heilman, 2012).

While existing research suggests mothers interpret and experience the maternal identity differently, those women who adhere to the intensive mothering ideology are those who view the maternal role as central to their identity. What is not clear is how women who view their maternal roles as central to their identity can conceptualize maternal identity differently compared to culturally prescribed ideals according to contemporary media.

This study was intended to address this gap in literature to address contemporary maternal identities via the media.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the increase in modern day mothers defying traditional intensive mothering ideologies as evidenced by more mothers working outside of the home (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019), having fewer children (Caumont & Wang, 2014), spending more time in the labor force, and having children later in life (Geiger et al., 2019), little is known about maternal identity among mothers who view motherhood as central to their personal identities. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018) said 5.9% of women between the ages of 15 and 44 became new mothers in 2018. This significant life event leads to notable changes in the female identity due to changes in physiology and physical appearance during and after pregnancy (Henry & Sherwin, 2012; Soma-Pillay et al., 2016), as well as changes in group membership (Seymour-Smith et al., 2017) and changes in family and spousal relationships (Grylka-Baeschlin et al., 2019). It is a traditional cultural stereotype that women are communal and naturally drawn to caretaking, and group membership is socially expected based on the shared belief that mothering is a definitive characteristic of the female identity (Newman & Henderson, 2014). The ideology of intensive mothering introduced by Sharon Hays (1996) summarizes motherhood as the most significant and rewarding part of life, and the central focus of maternal identity is the child's wellbeing. Such traditional ideologies imply maternal roles should conform to predictable behaviors.



However, contemporary mothers can maintain a strong identity and also have diverse conceptualizations of their maternal roles, which may have important consequences in terms of behavior of mothers. This suggests the identity characteristic of centrality, which is the extent to which maternal identity is important to sense of self, which may remain high among modern mothers, but they do not conform to behaviors of maternal identity universally in terms of intensive mothering. While contemporary research has identified different types of mothers and maternal behavioral trends within those groups such as athlete mothers, midlife mothers, and green moms whose maternal behaviors involve environmental awareness, as well as racial/ethnic differences in mothers, there remains a gap in literature involving how modern mothers with high identity centrality conceptualize maternal identity.

Based on the social identity theory, women derive meaning of the role of mother from socially defined group, and maternal identity is a result of characteristics that are consistent with social expectations of the group (Capozza & Brown, 2000). Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, maternal image and collective group identity was challenged by events such as the opening of the first birth control clinic in 1918, the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920, FDA approval of the birth control pill in 1960, passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, and Roe V. Wade in 1973. According to Smith (2008), 30% of women polled in 1988 disagreed that women desire to make childrearing their sole occupation, and this percentage increased to 52% by 2002. Moreover, women also experienced significant changes in the workforce after 1950, when 12% of married

women with children under the age of 6 were working, but by 1998, this number had increased to 64% (Caplow et al., 1999).

First generation mothers who experienced apartheid emphasized a protective maternal identity based on survival, while second generation mothers focused more on promoting success and independence of their children, and third generation mothers developed their maternal identities based on independent choices as women and partners (Moore, 2013). Pustułka (2016) said traditional Polish maternal identity was modeled after the Virgin Mary, dominated by self-sacrificing qualities. However, Pustulka found maternal identity of Polish mothers who had migrated to Germany and the UK were influenced less by traditional values and more by social and economic status. While such evidence suggests changes in maternal identity, it does not suggest a departure from commitment to maternal roles, but rather an expansion of focus where mothers appear to maintain maternal roles that extend beyond the singular focus of children based on various contexts and influences. No research to date has involved subjective conceptualization of maternal identity of modern women who have high identity centrality (strongly identifying with an identity); thus, little is known about different ways in which women articulate their maternal roles in the contemporary world.

Understanding subjective conceptualizations of maternal identity is important because differences are likely predictive of various maternal behaviors. Feinstein et al. (2020) said individuals who have high bisexual identity centrality (strongly identify with the bisexual characteristic of their identity) and feel positively about their sexuality use direct communication as opposed to those who feel less confident and use more indirect

communication and rely on public displays. Hagiwara et al. (2018) explored athletic identity and sport commitment and said the more strongly an individual identifies with athletic identity, the more enthusiastically they engage in sports. It is not well understood how women who maintain high identity centrality diversify their subjective conceptualizations of maternal identity.

### **Purpose**

The more individuals identify with a particular identity, the more predictable their behaviors become (Filice et al., 2019; Gatersleben et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2020). However, maternal populations do not all identify the same way and are not behaviorally predictable, and groups of mothers share behavioral patterns and trends. The purpose of this proposed qualitative study was to identify various conceptualizations of maternal identity among modern mothers with high identity centrality in order to better understand trends in maternal behavior. A qualitative approach was used for a comparative analysis of subjective conceptualizations of maternal identity among mothers with high identity centrality.

### **Research Question**

The research question of this qualitative study was:

*RQ:* How do modern-day mothers with high identity centrality conceptualize maternal identity?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (SIT) and Turner's self-categorization theory (SCT) were used as guiding frameworks for this research. The SIT posits

individuals develop a positive sense of self based on self and social identities which are facilitated by a self-serving bias as individuals are motivated to maintain positive self-evaluations (Goethals, 2007). During the development and maintenance of social identity, the individual identifies and favors their ingroup as the group they most closely identify with over the outgroup, and they adopt behaviors of the in-group, integrating such behaviors into their identity. Social identity is an evaluation of self, based on shared characteristics of the group with which they identify (Hogg, 2004). Stevens et al. (2017) said individuals are more likely to engage in physical activity when they identify with physically active groups. Similarly, Best et al. (2018) said group identification facilitates identity change, and recovering addicts are more successful when centrality of the group network is stronger, as the individual sees themselves as more similar to other members of the network and is thus more connected and supported.

According to Spears (2011), the self is composed of multiple selves that become salient based on context. The SCT is most often applied as an extension of the SIT to establish and identify contexts in which the salience of one's social identity increases, whereby the individual more strongly identifies with a particular factor or component of an identity. Women who become mothers also become part of social groups consisting of mothers; however, salience of maternal identity may vary based on context. Hernandez and Sarge (2020) said participants who used niche dating sites came to these sites based on shared identity among members, and because of contexts generated via these shared identities, their behavior showed they approached others with a trusting and open attitude. Hoffman et al. (2020) said individuals who strongly perceive themselves as like a

contextually salient group have feel more positively about themselves. I used the SCT to address variations in maternal identity to understand subjective conceptualizations of maternal identity among mothers who strongly identify as mothers.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a qualitative design to gather in-depth data involving subjective conceptualizations of the maternal identity. This qualitative study involved using a phenomenological perspective. The phenomenological perspective involves investigation of subjectively constructed realities from which qualitative methods of inquiry involving semi-structured interviews yield descriptive data (Taylor et al., 2016). This was accomplished by reaching out to local mothers in suburban Virginia (VA) through Facebook community and neighborhood networks. Invitations to participate were for existing mothers only, and participants were originally intended to be recruited via purposeful sampling. Those who responded to invites via Facebook were asked to complete a demographic survey which helped to identify mothers with high maternal identity centrality. Of those mothers, 10 were randomly selected and invited to participate in semi-structured interviews via videoconferencing.

### **Definitions**

The following terms were used in this study:

*Centrality*: Subjective significance of a particular role that informs unique patterns of behavior and characteristics that contribute to individual identity (Tripathi et al., 2020).

*Identity:* Self-defined concepts involving sameness and differences that individuals refer to when recognizing and defining unique patterns of behavior and characteristics (McLean & Syed, 2014).

*Maternal Behavior:* Behaviors of women who are identified as mothers that are directly related to care of children (Mercer, 2004; Venes, 2012).

*Maternal Identity:* Subjective ways in which women define their roles as mother, sense of self, and specific maternal behaviors, traits, and attitudes that are characteristic of self-defined identities (Garcia-Hallett, 2019; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015; Mercer, 2004).

*Mother:* An individual with sexual characteristics that allow her to have successfully conceived, carried, and birthed a child, and is currently responsible for and actively engaged in care of a child (Akhtar, 2012; Venes, 2013).

### **Assumptions**

To conduct this study, I made several assumptions. I assumed the qualitative strategy was the best method for this topic to provide an in-depth approach involving subjective conceptualization of maternal identity. Likewise, it was assumed that the choice of semi-structured interviews and demographic survey would lead to identification and in-depth exploration of maternal identity. Second, I the SIT and SCT were most applicable as guiding frameworks. The SIT helped to address development of the maternal identity, and the SCT was used to explore variable contexts of identity salience. I assumed all participants had access to the Internet or cell phones, knew how to operate devices, and were interviewed from a secure location to participate in interviews. Fourth,

I assumed participants understood the definition of mother and had physically conceived at least one child. Fifth, I assumed participants understood the English language enough that they were able to comprehend interview questions and respond to the best of their ability. Finally, I assumed participants were reflective during their discussions of maternal identity, contributing freely, openly, and honestly in terms of their responses to interview questions.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study involved subjective interpretations of maternal identity according to existing mothers who had physically conceived and birthed at least one child and were actively engaged in mothering roles. I emphasized mothers defined by their sex because individuals physically capable of having a child not only look at mothering as a defining characteristic of their identity, but behaviors are exclusively centered around the maternal role (Hays, 1996). This is not to dismiss the existence of mothering roles that can be supplemented by individuals who have not physically conceived children, such as individuals who fulfill mothering roles for adopted children, or individuals who are not physically capable of conceiving and turn to surrogates. This study involved perspectives of individuals who conceived at least one child and were actively engaged in maternal roles in order to fully explore the subjective process of conceptualizing maternal identity when participants had experienced physical, psychological, and social changes that accompany biological maternal experiences.

The geographic location from which participants were selected was suburban Virginia. Participants were existing mothers from suburban VA who were either

pregnant or had previously birthed a child, were raising, or had raised a child, maintain high maternal identity centrality, were over the age of 18, able to read, write, and speak fluent English. Additionally, mothers selected to participate in this study had consistent Internet access and a reliably functional device such as laptop, tablet, or smartphone with a functional camera for live video option. Mothers selected also had an active Facebook account. However, it is noted that mothers who have the time and resources to engage in social networking may have significantly different experiences compared to those who do not, which would likely also impact generalizability of findings.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study involve access, timing, and population issues. First, given current contact restrictions due to COVID-19, participants in this study needed to have the technical capability to engage in surveys and semi-structured interviews since the interviews would be held virtually. As a result of this, mothers who did not have access the technology to support the interviews were excluded. Likewise, participants were recruited from Facebook communities; thus, they needed to have an active Facebook account. As of 2018, 58% of Facebook users were between the ages of 25 and 34 (Statista, 2018). This likely impacted data as the sample involved in the study may not have accurately represented the maternal population due to potential differences in perspective by age. Finally, due to the financial and social impact of COVID-19 globally, families are experiencing emotional and psychological stressors that may have negatively impacted relationships and interactions. Specifically, reported levels of anxiety, stress,



and depressive symptoms are higher (Brown et al., 2020; Peltz et al., 2020). Such psychological impacts likely had an impact on conceptualization of maternal identity.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research filled a gap in terms of understanding by focusing on identifying subjective interpretations of maternal identity among mothers with high identity centrality. Because research has not yet involved identifying various conceptualizations of maternal identity among mothers who maintain high identity centrality, this population continues to be regarded in the social context as a homogenous population despite variable behaviors.

Because of lack of understanding and acknowledgement of various conceptualizations of maternal identity, mothers are socially observed and judged in terms of their mothering capabilities based on expected behaviors and characteristics of good mothers (Chae, 2014; Henderson et al., 2016; McGannon et al., 2015). Therefore, they risk having to defend their maternal identity, which could be alleviated via a collective acknowledgement of various conceptualizations of maternal identity.

This study presents a more realistic view of maternal identity that can inform and update social and cultural expectations of mothers. This information can be applied to the media and marketing, and campaigns intended to influence behavior may be more successful if various conceptualizations of maternal identity are presented.

### **Summary and Transition**

Becoming a mother is a significant life event that results in physical, social, and psychological changes (Arnold-Baker, 2019; Ladge & Greenburg, 2015). Culturally

established ideologies of maternal identity such as the intensive mothering ideology are predicated on the assumption that women view the maternal role as central to their identity, and behavior reflects a singular focus on the wellbeing of the child (Hays, 1996; Russo, 1976). Consequently, many mothers struggle to find relatable exemplars in media resulting in social and psychological issues such as anxiety and depression because their own maternal behavior differs from the current exemplars in media (Arnold-Baker, 2015; Fouquier, 2011; Grundetjern, 2018). The purpose of this study was to explore subjective conceptualizations of maternal identity of modern-day mothers with high identity centrality to more accurately inform modern exemplars of maternal identity represented in the media and relieve modern mothers of psychological and social pressures to conform to maternal identity as prescribed by the intensive mothering ideology.

Chapter 2 includes information regarding development of identity, as well as biological theories that guide identity and social influences as they inform the developmental process. This is followed by identified function of identity, and information explaining why identity development is critical to sense of self. The literature review also includes historical influences that impacted maternal behaviors in various cultures and how women have struggled to conform to prescribed maternal identities and behaviors. Theories involving maternal identity development are discussed to explore development that is specific to motherhood. Finally, literature on media influence, current trends in media, social norms, and consequences of deviant behavior is discussed to clarify the impact of one-dimensional approaches to conceptualizing maternal identity.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The maternal role is central to the development of children; thus, society places a significant emphasis on behavioral patterns and centrality of that role for mothers.

Globally, women have attempted to redefine maternal roles as well as how to these roles into their identities (Fouquier, 2011; Gardner et al., 2020; Grundetjern, 2018). However, despite movement toward redefining maternal roles by way of deviating from prescribed maternal behaviors, women continue to struggle with social and psychological consequences when they choose to do so (Gunderson & Barrett, 2015; Newman & Henderson, 2014; Okimoto & Heilman, 2012). This is largely in part due to continued emphasis in the media on one-dimensional maternal identity that assumes women embrace motherhood similarly, specifically by way of behavior. There are studies that explore struggles women have in terms of conceptualizing maternal identity; however, none involve conceptualization of maternal identity among women with high identity centrality who continue to deviate from prescribed maternal behaviors.

In the literature review, I explored existing research regarding maternal identity first by discussing the meaning of identity as it relates to human behavior and existing theories of influence involving development of identity. Reviews of studies involving dimensions of identity are included to develop a better understanding of how and why identity is multidimensional. Discussion of the development of the SIT and SCT are included to address social influence in terms of identity development, identity change, and behavioral prediction. Next, I explore evolution of maternal identity as it relates to

indications of change in maternal behavior in the United States as well as globally to fully explore social influence on behavior and how various groups of women have behaviorally expressed maternal identities. Finally, current literature on maternal exemplars in the media is included to explore how mothers are represented in the public sphere.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

For the purposes of this review, I gathered literature using various online search strategies and tools. I focused on publications between 2010 and 2022, although I did consult previous studies and publications prior to 2010 to provide insights on historical changes and influence on theory and development over time. Terms used for search purposes include variations and combinations of the following: *maternal, identity, female, gender roles, motherhood, parenting, physical activity, behavior, dimensions, advertising, social media, film, commercial, marketing, mothering, culture, exercise, self-categorization theory, social identity theory, self, and differences*. Via the Walden library, I was able to retrieve relevant peer-reviewed scholarly texts, publications, and reports via the following databases: PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, Thoreau, and Academic Search Premier. I primarily searched psychology-related sources; however, I also investigated health and human services as well as public policy. I used various data websites to gather statistics on health facts and behavior, including the World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control. I also used Google Scholar to obtain various scholarly literature I could not retrieve via Walden databases. Literature that was selected to inform this study was based on relevance to the general topic, research

question, and applied theory. While most sources were produced within the last 10 years, some older sources were included to gain insight on progression and development of relevant concepts and theories.

### **SIT and SCT**

According to the SIT, identity development is significantly impacted by environment, interaction, and identification with others in terms of situating the self via identification and adopting behavioral characteristics with what is viewed as the in-group (Goethals, 2007). The SIT was developed by Henry Tajfel and Turner in 1979 as a theory to explain and understand intergroup behavior, appraisal of self, and identity. The development of the SIT extends other theories of development in that it combines cognitive and motivational processes to explain identity (Capozza & Brown, 1999). In its original development, Tajfel sought to develop a theory to explain intergroup behavior, operating on the assumption that an individual has both a social and individual identity, wherein the social identity impacts the self-concept by way of cognitive, evaluative, and affective consequences because of a need to see oneself positively in relation to others (Brown, 2020; Hogg, 2004). Social identity is identified through a process of social categorization in which the individual identifies existing groups and connects themselves to groups that they identify with, integrating characteristics of that group into the self-identity (Spears, 2011). The self-identity is believed to take shape as the individual learns who they are in relation to others, categorizing themselves as a member of a group or various groups to which they seek positive distinctiveness by comparing their group

(ingroup) to other groups (outgroup), ultimately validating their positive self-identity by the positive distinctiveness of their group in comparison to others (Spears, 2011).

Tajfel developed a theory involving intergroup phenomena by connecting situations and behaviors via motivation and cognitive processes involving categorization and appraisal. Tajfel used Piaget's stages of cognitive development during formative years as the child develops schema which they assimilate into and accommodate through culture and interaction. Ultimately, children learn to evaluate their own groups based on such processes, developing a sense of self that is justified by group membership and appraisal in comparison to other groups (Tajfel, 1969). The idea that an individual claims membership in a group in all circumstances poses an obvious conflict due to changes in identity salience based on context. As such, an important application of the involves social mobility and group behavior, in which the SIT involves how an individual member of a low status group might respond when consequences of being a member of that group are negative, such as in the case of minority groups (Brown, 2020). Because the underlying assumption of the SIT is that individuals strive to maintain a positive sense of self via a positive social identity, Tajfel and Turner (1979) said they engage one of three possible strategies when they are members of a negatively distinctive ingroup: social mobility and leaving or dissociating from the group, social change or changing the status of the group, or social creativity strategies.

When individuals are not able to change, dissociate or leave the ingroup they are more likely to engage in creative strategies such as gender studies where men and women compensate for poor psychological adjustment by rating the group more favorably by

masculine/feminine traits, likeability, and competence (Jackson et al., 1996). Hajek (2016) applied SIT and identity management to explore middle aged gay males impacted by the impermeable group boundaries who engaged in various creative strategies to reconceptualize and distance themselves from younger gay males, as well as aging populations while maintaining membership as a middle-aged gay male. Chonody and Teater (2016) found women were more likely to undergo plastic surgery to maintain status in the ingroup if they feared they were associated with older populations (outgroup) due to signs of aging, thus showing creative strategies to maintain ingroup status. Studies on identity management strategies of SIT in relation to poverty suggest that when ingroup boundaries are impermeable, individuals are more likely to engage in creativity strategies such as comparison to other poorer groups (Akfirat et al., 2016). It is important to note that the application of the SIT in predicting behavior is most accurate by how significant the social identity is to the self-identity, thus the extent to which the individual will engage in identity maintenance strategies and which strategies they will engage are contingent upon the centrality of the social identity (Best et al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2017).

As motherhood is most associated with being a woman and femininity, women have demonstrated variable identity strategies arguably based on the salience of the maternal identity. However, what SIT does not offer is an explanation of the self-identity separate and apart from the social identity, nor identity apart from behavior. Otherwise stated, a woman may or may not identify as a mother, she may identify as more than a mother, or she may identify as a mother yet display behavioral patterns not characteristic

of the mother group. Or, in Tajfel's case, an individual may identify as a group member only in certain context that are non-threatening as he chose to acknowledge his identity in the French military but not as a Polish Jew, resulting in his imprisonment in a POW camp instead of the Nazi concentration and death camps and survival of the war. Based on the SIT the salience of the personal and social identity are thought to be the determining factors in what governs the behavior of the individual; however, the addition of the self-categorization theory was developed to identify the context in which the individual would engage behaviors characteristic to a self among a collection of various selves (Hogg, 2004; Spears, 2011).

SCT is an extension to the SIT to establish/identify the contexts in which the salience of one's social identity increases, developed to address distinctions in behavioral trends characteristic of various identities and circumstances of the individual that SIT did not address (Brown, 2020). Developed by John Turner, the SCT offers a general theory of self, suggesting the possibility for various selves that surface at various levels of abstraction applicable to both the personal and group level self-definition (Spears, 2011). The value in this distinction of the personal and the group level self-definition is it offers a theory to identify the selves in context and with a broader comparative analysis. Based on this theory an individual can identify as a group member such as a woman, a mother, an athlete, in comparison to other members of those groups, but also acknowledge personal selves in comparison to a more diversified context of comparison beyond the



group such as myself as a mother at work, myself as a mother at home, and myself as a mother at the gym.

Central to both the SIT and the SCT is that of social comparison as this clarifies the construct of comparison used in the development of the individual and group identity, as well defines the salience of identity in context (Spears, 2011). However, the SCT does not distinguish social and personal identities as distinct forms of identity, but rather it distinguishes different self-categorizations dependent on the circumstance (Irina & Lyudmila, 2020). For example, in a study on news coverage of the Rugby World Cup sporting event and self-categorization, researchers showed how the media portrayal of the same event across various nations positively impacted group identification by way of self-categorization as viewers showed more support for their nation's teams based on careful framing (Scott et al., 2018).

In a study on exercise behavior and attitude, researchers applied self-categorization theory to explore whether groups engaging in exergaming (video games involving physical activity) would improve intent to engage in exercise, finding following 12 weeks of game play participants were more likely to engage in various forms of exercise, identifying more closely with exercisers as a group (Nguyen et al., 2016).

In studies of online dating behavior, researchers found niche dating (dating sites established by shared identity) improved participant behavior by way of a more trusting and open attitude due to a shared identity (Hernandez & Sarge, 2020). In studies of the psychological impact of context and group identity Hoffman et al. (2020) found

individuals who identify as more prototypically like the contextually salient group report higher levels of psychological well-being thus this would suggest individuals in a context where they struggle to identify with the group may experience distress.

Women who become mothers also become part of a social group as a mother, however, variable maternal behaviors suggest the salience of the maternal identity may vary not only by how strongly she identifies as a mother, but also by context. As such, the group the woman identifies with is that of the mother group, however, the question of consistency in displays of mother behavior that is exemplar of the group may be variable, thus the self-categorization theory addresses the possibility of situation and circumstance that may impact the variable behaviors of the maternal populations.

### **Development of Identity**

Crucial to understanding human behavior is understanding the uniqueness of an individual which is conceptualized as the identity and often regarded as the source of behavioral attributes. Development of identity is a process involving exploration of self in comparison to others that ultimately yields a recognition of sameness and difference in comparison to others (McLean & Syed, 2015). Debate regarding development of identity prior to the establishment of the social sciences originated in philosophical disciplines with philosophers such as Rene Descartes who argued that the individual reality is composed of innate knowledge that informs the senses to pursue stimulus that is beneficial and to avoid harm, followed by stimulus filtered through the senses that then informs the subjective reality (Hatfield, 2018).

In contrast, enlightenment philosopher John Locke argued that the source of human knowledge was not innate, but rather purely based on experience, thus the self is informed by experience where the individual has no sense of self prior to environmentally introduced stimulus (Lowe, 2005). By the late nineteenth century theories of identity developed in the psychological and sociological disciplines which emphasized the role of environment and self- reflection. One of the first theorists to suggest the self to be socially constructed was George Mead which led to the sociological theory that would later be referred to as symbolic interactionism (McLean & Syed, 2015). Mead suggested that the individual identity is constructed through participation in social interaction from which the individual learns to distinguish themselves from others first by learning concepts of sameness and difference (McLean & Syed, 2015). By the 1970's Henri Tajfel introduced the social identity theory (SIT) which like Mead's emphasis on the socially constructed self, is based on social categorization in which the individual develops an understanding of social categories from which they identify with and integrate into their sense of self (Brown & Capozza, 2000). As theories such as SIT advanced the trend in the environmental emphasis on identity development, advances in technology and understanding of genetic predisposition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century furthered nature-based theory on predetermined influences on identity development. However, research as to the universal direction and pathway of development of identity is complicated due to the infinite number of variables that can weigh on the developmental trajectory of the individual. Consequently, contemporary research is relegated to

different perspectives, each with empirical support, falling into one of two categories, nature, or nurture.

### **Biological, Cognitive, and Social Identity Development**

On a biological level, the individual state of subjective identity neutrality and the absence of a cognitive awareness of what the self is at birth, is expressed as developing neural connections, that when information is learned it is integrated into the biological system in a permanent state via stable synaptic connections (Santrock, 2018). One salient characteristic to identity often studied is that of gender development which is a social construct that holds subjective social, psychological, and behavioral characteristics (Liao et al., 2012). Gender, often referred to synonymously with sex, is assigned at birth and is done so based on the genetically predetermined sex characteristics that distinguish individual reproductive attributes as either male or female. Gender variant identities are those in which the individual does not identify with the assigned gender, and in some cases will make necessary changes to their body to permanently assume the self-identified gender (Veale et al., 2010).

Based on the brain organization theory, gender identity is a consequence of genetically determined developmental directives given during the fetal period that are stimulated by steroid hormones (testosterone and estrogen) (Jordan-Young, 2012). The phenotypic attributes that result from fetal exposure to steroid hormones are determined by genetically inherited genotype, to which male characteristics are associated with masculinizing effects of testosterone more readily produced by the testicles, and female characteristics associated with the feminizing effects of estrogen, more readily produced

by the ovaries (Reiner & Reiner, 2012). Brain organization theory suggests that sex assignment by genotype determines the organizational pathways of the gonads (testicles and ovaries) resulting in guiding the development and expression of sex characteristics, traits, and behaviors throughout the lifespan (Jordan-Young, 2012).

Among individuals who have gender variant identities, research shows a slight correlation in the presence or absence of estrogen and androgen receptor genes (Veale et al., 2010). However, the impacts of such genetic influences cannot be generalized given that researchers have identified equally significant findings of individuals who carry the same genetic predispositions and identify with the birth assigned gender (Veale et al., 2010).

Other research on the presence of SHGB (Sex Hormone Binding Globulin) in utero, which lower levels would lend itself to the development of masculinizing characteristics, suggest self-reported presence of masculine traits and sense of self are more strongly related to levels of SHGB as opposed to feminine (Davis & Risman, 2015). Research via MRI on sex related structural differences in the brain suggests men compared to women generally have larger brain volume, as well as specific lateralized distinctions in density by gender, with higher tissue density in the left hemisphere of men (Ruigok, 2014). More specifically, research shows the amygdala and hypothalamic regions of the brain generally have higher density in males, while women show higher density in the hippocampal area (Akiko et al., 2012).

Other areas that show significant differences are in the frontal region of the brain, as women tend to have more grey mass volume in the right frontal region, and evidence

via PET scan shows more glucose metabolism in the frontal lobe of females which may explain distinctions in emotional perception between males and females (Zhang et al., 2020). Researchers believe the influence of estradiol and testosterone during fetal development significantly influences sexual differentiation in brain structures, however, findings to support such assertions is limited to animal studies (Akiko et al., 2012; Goldstein et al., 2001). Likewise, the extent to which lateral and structural differences by sex influence's identity development is not fully understand, however, identification of structural differences and functional capacity combined with developing understanding of localized function allows for a clearer representation of how such differences can impact behavior. For example, in review of functional connectivity in the amygdala, a structure of the limbic system identified as integral in the experience and regulation of emotion, research suggests distinct differences in activity thus providing support for variations by sex in emotional experiences (Wu et al., 2016). In review of risk-taking behavior, research suggests men are more prone to risk taking behavior and when compared, fMRI images of risk processing show distinctions in activity in the somatosensory cortex by sex (eZhou et al., 2014).

In the cognitive context, identity is defined as response to the question who am I, with initial answers as basic as a recognition of the self in the mirror and not as a novel stimulus, to a more complex sorting of selves in various context and circumstance. Further, the development of identity is a process of differentiation and comparison that facilitates the grounding of an individual in the expression of self with a relative sense of predictability and consistency (McLean & Syed, 2015). Russian psychologist, Lev

Vygotsky's work on development outlines cognitive developmental processes facilitated by sociocultural interaction in which the individual observes, interacts, and internalizes in social practice (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction in learning and facilitating cognitive growth in the formative years lends itself to the influence of external sources on identity development as the individual learns from those around them such things as gender roles and social norms.

Social cognitive psychologist, Albert Bandura explored the relevance of learning by observation and developed the social cognitive theory, suggesting that experience in one's environment based on observation shapes thought and behavior, to include how an individual see's themselves in relation to others (Hogg, 2004). Bandura's work aligned with learning theories such as Skinner's operant conditioning in emphasizing the value of consequences, where behavior is repeated when rewarded (Bandura, 1986). In observation individual behavior is not directly rewarded, however when desirable outcomes for others are observed, behaviors are more likely to be adopted (Bandura, 1986). Otherwise stated, the adoption of behaviors either observed or through direct experience, can be seen as an interactive process of trial and error, that with desired outcomes, are progressively integrated into more predictable trends. Importantly, these processes rely upon stimulus in the environment which initiates growth and change.

In the social context, Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of development, an eight stage, lifelong journey of identity reflection and transition, is explained as a process through which the individual is tasked by conflict as they are confronted with psychological and social changes (Mercadal, 2019). The emphasis of change and context

throughout the lifespan is central to Erikson's theory as each of the stages of conflict is identified as a subjective reflection of space and time. Moreover, the individual foundation of identity reflects individual environment in the younger years thus the social influence is a critical determinant of the direction and outcome of identity (Erikson, 1968). This emphasis on environment would suggest that identity is not a choice, but rather it is the sum of experience, where the individual internalizes the learned values, concepts, and ideas of the dominant culture. According to Erikson, in the timeline of development it is not until adolescence that the individual has the cognitive maturity to actively sort through the experiences of the childhood years at which point the individual is confronted with the social pressures to present a more unified, mature and coherent self as adulthood approaches (Erikson, 1968). Prior to adolescence, the individual lays foundational milestones such as trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry. The later stages of Erikson's theory are more complex conflicts in which the individual negotiates the existing identity with the context and circumstance that is inspired by natural aging processes. Interestingly, Erikson's model suggests identity while it is more substantially established throughout the earlier stages and a central theme in adolescence, it is in a state of flux throughout the lifespan and does not appear to acknowledge a unified self completely stable and unchanging due to the transitions that result from the aging processes.

Within the social context, the impact of parental presence in shaping and guiding identity development is observed as a significant influence as the individual seeks input and exemplars from those directly around them. This process of reference is believed to



begin in the earliest years as children's lives are organized and structured around the flow of their environment, in which their introduction to and interaction with stimulus is initiated by what is within reach. Green (2017) observed environmental identity development (how the individual interacts with environment) among 5-7-year-old Alaskan Native children from a small rural Alaskan village finding children developed a strong connection to nature when parents modeled behavior and children explored with peers. The integration of environmental awareness and survival skills into the identity was notably established by the facilitation of those directly influencing the child as they would take their cues from others when situating their self-efficacy (Green, 2017).

As children begin to make meaning out of the environment and their place within it, this is constructed by the narrative they generate as they learn to articulate and understand their place in space and time (Mclean et al., 2007). Such narrative takes the shape of autobiographical stories that function as reflections of the events that shape one's life, develop the context wherein the individual identifies, and assist in streamlining the coherent self-concept (Mclean et al., 2007). Central to the development of such narratives are the parents, particularly mothers, who help to develop the child's ability to make meaning out of their narrative whereby the child can develop a sense of continuity of self (Mclean & Jennings, 2012). As the child develops, moving into adolescence, the social influence and role of peers extends the development of the self-narrative as the individual can explore identity with peers and apart from mothers in a comparative process (Mclean & Jennings, 2012).

## **Development of Identity by Gender**

In understanding distinctions in identity development and expression, research indicates society is largely divided by gender, wherein men and women are assigned specific roles that place expectations upon the individual to satisfy that role, but distinctions vary slightly by culture and context (Da Silva et al., 2014; Gaunt & Scott, 2017; McLean et al., 2020). McLean et al. (2020) explain the individual identifies and finds themselves within society guided by a master narrative that scripts the nature of the expected role, where narratives are situated based on power and privilege, noting that the traditional master narrative for gender roles identifies women as caregivers and are expected to be submissive, and of lesser economic power to men. This acknowledgement poses a significant challenge to women in identity development as newer generations continue to gain frustration at more traditional gender roles and attempt to reinvent the female identity, while the maternal identity remains relatively stable due to her being the carrier of the child.

Da Silva et al. (2014) explored perceived gender differences of adolescent women in Brazil, to which participants expressed frustration at prejudicial attitudes that reinforce hierarchical ordering by gender from family and friends. Importantly, the participant's expressed frustration at their experiences is indicative of a historical shift where women are now recognizing such expectations may be inappropriate, however, they are still feeling the pressures within their own culture and communities to accept such realities as central to their role and identity (Da Silva, 2014). Women are observed in Latin culture as the preservers of the culture and tasked with educating and enforcing cultural

traditions to other members of the family as mothers, thus they are expected to behave more conservatively, often subjected to strict rules as children and teens about social interaction in comparison to men (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). In Mexico gender specific distinctions in behavior connected to masculinity and femininity are particularly salient, identified as marianismo (women are to be protected and behave sexually conservatively), and machismo (men are to be the protectors and express aggressive traits) (Schroeder et al., 2019).

### **Function of Identity**

According to Adams and Marshall (1996), the most commonly identified functions of identity for the individual are: structure, meaning and direction, a sense of personal control and free will, a sense of consistency, and the ability to contemplate future possibility. Identity is defining to the individual consciousness as it illustrates the subjective experience by identifying sameness and differences from others (McLean & Syed, 2015). As individuals develop a sense of identity, behavior becomes predictable, thus the individual can establish a grounded sense of self, that not only distinguishes, but provides the unique qualities of purpose and value in the social context. Identity establishes a background of understanding that allows the individual to reference in decision-making processes thus the role of identity in behavior is as a basis of comparison, as research has consistently shown the more an individual identifies with a particular identity the more likely they are to display the characteristics and behaviors common and consistent to that identity (Filice et al., 2019; Gatersleben et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2020).

Identity, and consequently the various functions of identity, are uniquely complicated by motherhood as a woman undergoes significant physical (Soma-Pillay et al., 2016; Matthews & Rodin, 1992), psychological (Yang et al., 2017; Henry & Sherwin, 2012), and social changes (Seymour-Smith et al., 2017). However, central to a functional change in identity because of motherhood is the extent to which women experience satisfaction from mothering as this increases role commitment (Rogers & White, 1998). Research shows variations in maternal satisfaction and role commitment are influenced by her subjective conceptualization of the maternal identity prior to and immediately after giving birth and is directly influenced by her experience and understanding of the maternal role (Vizziello et al., 1993). Laney et al. (2015) explored the experience of identity change because of having a child, finding participants who reported a commitment to the maternal identity experienced a change in conscious experience and behavior as the child's needs became intertwined with their own needs, having more empathy, care and concern for others than prior to becoming a mother.

The centrality of the maternal role is consequently reliant on the immersion and subsequent salience of the identity. This concept of immersion as a catalyst for identity salience and change has been seen in other identity statuses such as ethnic identity and integrated into models of identity specific development such as Cross' Nigrescence Model of Racial Identity. In Cross' model, varying attitudes of salience are present until an individual has an encounter or experience that draws their attention to their racial status, emerging them out of a former identity and immersing them into their current status (Cross, 1991; Worrell, 2008). In studies of racial-ethnic identity, findings suggest that

individuals who more often experience racial-ethnic discrimination and stereotypes establish stronger racial-ethnic identity commitment (Hughes et al., 2017). This would suggest that the distinction in identity emergence is based on the significance of the event/experience, thus the identity commitment offers structure, meaning and personal control (Adams & Marshall, 1996).

For women the subjective conceptualization of the maternal identity is confronted in pregnancy as this event would effectively emerge her into her maternal status whereby her commitment to the maternal identity will guide her approach to mothering. For example, in studies of gender differences in criminal behavior, research has shown that a significant factor in desistance (discontinuing criminal behavior and committing crime) is new motherhood which is specifically related to the salience of the maternal role upon pregnancy as well as the social bonds established because of motherhood (Rodermond et al., 2015). Alternatively, motherhood has also been identified as a pathway to criminal behavior when mothers believed they had no other way to support their family (Garcia-Hallett, 2019). This transition in thinking and consequently behavior is based on the introduction of motherhood as a reality as opposed to a social construct as evidence shows women identify the shift in behavior either upon conception or at the birth of the child (Garcia-Hallett, 2019).

### **Maternal Identity**

The term “mother” describes a woman who has the capability via their sexual characteristics to have successfully conceived, carried, and given birth to a child and who is actively engaged in the care of the child (Venes, 2013). The significant impact of the

role of mother to the well-being and care of the child has been noted throughout various culture and context, regarded as both the primary source from which the child enters the developmental process, and the source which situates their sense of self (Akhtar, 2012; Hrdy, 1999; Rich, 1976). As women are biologically the only sex capable of birthing a child, society holds the expectation and mandates that motherhood is inevitable, expected to be regarded by the individual as a predestined duty to self and society (Ross; 2016; Russo, 1976). This expectation has been established and reinforced throughout historical literature and religious dialogue such as the Hebrew Bible where the birth of Israel is associated with Gods “motherhood” as women are charged with building the nation via their maternal role (Bergmann, 2020).

In the Christian faith the Virgin Mary is regarded as the ultimate exemplar of righteous motherhood as she is celebrated for her sacrifice and devotion to the birth and care of Jesus (Oh, 2010). And, in the Qur’an Mary is referred to as Maryam, and like Christianity, Mary is revered as iconic in her role as mother, and role model to all women as selfless and nurturing (Salih, 2017). Such references have helped to establish the position of women both in society and as mother, as they inform the cultural expectations of the maternal role. Consequently, the term motherhood is a state of being that is regarded as a state of goodness wherein mothers are assumed to be engaging their motherhood with predominantly positive feelings of joy and warmth (Ross, 2016).

Young girls are socialized in their early years as they are taught gender roles and educated on gender specific spheres of influence to which girls are predominantly taught their primary sphere of influence is within the home (Abrams et al., 2016; Erden-

Imamoglu, 2013). In this sense, women are raised in preparation of becoming a mother with the traditional conceptualization of womanhood directly tied to the duty of becoming a mother (Walentynowicz-Moryl, 2020).

Research on the early stages of development for a child, specifically those that focus on attachment lend support for the critical nature of the maternal role, suggesting that the extent to which the child builds a strong and trusting bond with the mother directly impacts the child's socioemotional and psychological development (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1982; Norholt, 2020). Further, research on attachment suggests that central to healthy development of the child is the contact and comfort the caregiver provides, wherein the mothers consistent responsiveness to the child's needs via her availability and nurture are critical (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Evidence of this social norm as a learned, gendered expectation, is observed both cross-culturally and across generations (Abrams et al., 2016; Erden-Imamoglu, 2013; Hunt et al., 2015; Liamputtong & Benza, 2019; McLean et al., 2020; Yamamoto, 2016). For example, Cook (2018) found among Australian women between the ages of 18-34 that despite the recognition of movement toward gender equality in both policy and perceived gender norms, the majority of participants expressed career plans that supported childbearing and ultimately focused on the domestic sphere.

Yamamoto (2016) found despite an increase in young women's attendance in higher education in Japan, education is seen only as enrichment for women as socialization processes thus continue to support gender norms, holding that the woman's primary function is to fulfill her maternal role. In a cross-cultural comparison of

Australian and Italian female perceptions of gender-role norms, Hunt et al. (2015) found consistency in the emphasis of the centrality of child-rearing to the female identity. Similarly, Abrams et al. (2016) found culturally defined gender norms focusing on the maternal role among Vietnamese American women and African American women to align despite having different sociohistorical influences.

In review of women who defy gender norms and pursue positions of power, particularly in the political realm, research shows they often experience a “double-bind” in that the traditional gender norms in western culture support women’s central role of mothering thus a woman pursuing a political career must successfully demonstrate her ability to navigate both the political and maternal roles simultaneously in order to secure voter support (Teele et al., 2018; Schreiber, 2016). For women who struggle to or are not successfully able to conceive a child, they often experience feelings of shame or doubt in their femininity as childlessness challenges the gender identity (Abrams, 2015; Bell, 2019; Liamputtong & Benza, 2019; Walentynowicz-Moryl, 2020). Likewise, for women who have unwanted pregnancies they often resort to unsafe or illegal practices to terminate pregnancies due to fear of social stigma and discrimination as this is often seen as an act that rejects her maternal identity and defies gender norms (Abrams, 2015; Macleff et al., 2019; Norris et al., 2011).

### **Nurturer and Caregiver Maternal Behaviors**

As researchers have concluded that developmentally, the infant years are by far the most critical in that the child is wholly reliant on the caregiver for survival, caregivers, particularly mothers, are charged with securing the child’s healthy adjustment



to both the physical and social environment (Bjorklund et al., 2002). As such, infant-mother interaction immediately after birth not only ensures the survival of the child, but consistent patterns of interaction are predictive of more stable psychological tendencies and social competency for the child (Grazia et al., 2010). Cross-culturally, mothers who are consistent in response to the child's needs are central to establishing a secure base for the child and situating their successful foundation for healthy social and emotional development (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1982; Posada et al., 2016). The impact of interaction on social competence because of mother-child interaction as opposed to father-child interaction suggests that positive interaction with mothers by way of her responsiveness, encouragement and support of the child is comparatively more impactful, which is attributed to infant care often performed by mothers as opposed to fathers thus the most common first attachment is established with mothers (Attili et al., 2010; Cabrera et al., 2011). As a socially expected role, the maternal role is seen as one of caregiver and nurturer (Ross; 2016; Russo, 1976) however, maternal behaviors and how a woman cares for her child vary based on culture and context.

Cross-cultural comparisons of maternal and infant behaviors suggest that general maternal practices involve social and physical development as mothers guide children in developmentally specific areas, yet differences are culture specific, largely based on the conditions of the environment, and are identifiable in differences in childhood behavior such as children in more developed countries being more physically and socially independent (Bornstein et al., 2017). Maternal behaviors varying by culture reflect a cultural perspective of either interdependent or independent, also referred to as

collectivist or individualist culture and are developed by various levels of interaction where interdependence is facilitated by more body contact (physical closeness) and body stimulation (touch and movement), and independence is facilitated by more object stimulation (engagement with the physical environment) and language interaction (Hofer et al., 2012; Keller et al., 2004). Western cultures predominantly foster independence and autonomy in child-rearing and are seen as more individualistic, whereas non-western cultures predominantly foster obedience and group membership and are seen as more collectivistic in cultural orientation (Mesman et al., 2016).

In more traditional cultures, countries that family life is strongly emphasized, and birth rates are higher such as Israel, breastfeeding is more commonly practiced in comparison to western countries where birth rates are lower, less emphasis on family, and more emphasis on individual success shows breastfeeding practices are lower (Shloim et al., 2015). Distinctions in play, specifically emotional expressivity, and vocalization (how she speaks to her child) are noted by culture such as first generation Chinese American mothers display less outward emotion during play and use less complex language via fewer syllables and more often singing or rhyme, in comparison to first generation European Americans who are more emotionally open and expressive, and use more complex language (Liu et al., 2013). Further cultural distinctions are noted in sensitivity, which is identified as responsiveness and attention to the child's needs (Ainsworth et al., 1978), where despite physical closeness noted in collectivist cultures, research shows individualistic cultures more commonly value sensitivity to the individual child's needs (Feldman & Masalha, 2010; Keller et al., 2009).

Regardless of culture, variable levels of stress show significant variation in maternal practices, specifically about warmth and sensitivity. Research suggests middle class mothers are more directly involved in parenting, practice more face-to-face play, more object stimulation, and engage children with language more often, as opposed to mothers in impoverished areas where child rearing is more communal, mothers engage children with more body contact but less language and object stimulation (Otto et al., 2017). Mothers in impoverished areas are more likely to develop symptoms of depression and anxiety and show lower levels of responsiveness to child needs (Beeber et al., 2013; Hahn-Holbrook et al., 2018; Mazza et al., 2017; Özcan et al., 2017). More specifically, research on maternal responsiveness to infant cries shows that mothers in impoverished areas have less neural response to infant cries (Kim et al., 2016), as well as higher levels of physiological response to stress as evidenced by increased levels of cortisol comparatively (Finegood et al., 2016). Thus, when in stressful environments mothers are less likely to process infant cries as a cue for need of care and are less likely to be responsive to infant needs as opposed to mothers in less stressful environments.

### **Influences of Development of Maternal Behavior**

The development of maternal behavior has been shown to be influenced by various factors to include biology (natural physical processes), developmental history, sociohistorical context, culture, and socioeconomic status (Finegood et al., 2016; Fouquier, 2011; Forbes et al., 2020; Keller et al, 2004; Kim et al., 2016; O'Reilly, 2014). Biologically the female sex organs make it possible for a woman to conceive a child, thus her anatomy and physiology is constructed with her maternal potential by design. While

this does not function as a direct causal agent for maternal behaviors, it may help to explain the origin of the predisposition women have to engage in maternal behavior. For example, the brain organization theory asserts the exposure to steroid hormones during fetal development directs the organization of the brain, to include sexuality, gender, and behavior by either masculinizing or feminizing the individual (Jordan-Young, 2012).

Women who have been diagnosed with classical congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), a genetic disorder that impacts the adrenal glands exposing the female to unusually high androgen levels (testosterone) during fetal development, are often born with atypical or male appearing genitalia, show male-typical behavioral and psychological traits such as increased aggression, often identify with male gender identity, display lower levels of sexual activity and libido, and are more likely to identify as bisexual or lesbian (Jordan-Young, 2012). In studies of women who have been diagnosed with CAH, women report feeling less satisfaction with the female role and displaying less gender specific behaviors (Hines et al., 2004). About behavior, it is important to note that while this theory emphasizes the behavioral influence of the potential impact of exposure to androgens during prenatal development, it may be that the masculinization in appearance alters how these women are treated, thus their behavior may also be shaped by the environment based on gender defined behavioral expectations. Behavioral expectations are believed to be introduced in the earliest years, established, and reinforced by the child's environment by gendered stereotyping such as gender reveal parties, gendered naming of the child, gender specific clothing selection for the child, and gender specific play (Boe & Woods, 2018; Endendijk, 2013; Halim & Ruble, 2010).

Research on the subjective approaches to the socialization of infants suggests that mothers respond to infants differently based on their sex, such as offering specific toys to male vs female assigned infants (Boe & Woods, 2018; Will et al., 1976), mothers spend more time holding and assisting male infants than female (Fausto-Sterling et al., 2015), and parents show more physical play with male infants and toddlers than females (Lindsey & Mize, 2001). Based on gender specific behavioral expectations, young girls are educated early on their role as a woman, educated on gender specific spheres of influence, and that womanhood is defined by the role of mother (Abrams et al, 2016; Erden-Imamoglu, 2013; Walentynowicz-Moryl, 2020).

The social identity theory suggests that as children continue to interact with their environment, they begin to integrate learned behaviors into their sense of self to which the social identity of the individual is composed of the shared characteristics of the group which they identify (Hogg, 2004). As the maternal role is culturally reinforced, both males and females learn what is expected of them by various socializing agents with women consistently shown as nurturers and caretakers and males as providers (David & Mykol, 2005; DeWitt et al., 2013).

Exemplars of the good mother are present in the earliest exposures to media such as children's books, where in review of the roles exemplified in children's books David and Mykol (2005) found fathers to be largely absent from caretaking and when present, shown to be ineffective. Moreover, these exemplars are predominantly white, middle-class women who appear to have infinite resources (Chae, 2015; Friedan, 1963; Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2014; Grundetjern, 2018). In a similar study of over 300 children's

picture books in the United States, Cready & Seward (2013) found mothers to be portrayed traditionally as homemakers. This is further reinforced in mainstream media as maternal role models are shown in film, internet, television, and print with similar emphasis on mother as caregiver, promoting the intensive mothering ideology, as the mother selflessly devotes herself to the raising of the children (Chae, 2014; Deirdre & Debra, 2003; Gibson, 2019).

The sociohistorical context has impacted the development of maternal behavior as different groups of women have been confronted with social and political circumstances. In the United States the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about significant change to the role of women and consequently the maternal role as women began to challenge what was thought to be oppressive and restrictive policy. For example, a woman's right to control her own fertility was introduced with the opening of the first birth control clinic in 1918, later followed by the FDA approval of the birth control pill in 1960, and then the landmark case of *Roe V. Wade* in 1973 which legalized abortion (Milligan, 2017; History.com, 2019). Further, the expansion of women's rights in the political sphere was initiated by the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920 in which the battle to gain the right to vote that began in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention ended (History.com, 2010). Such changes to the rights of women impacted maternal behavior by way of expanding the opportunities for women and consequently impacting the number of women who chose to pursue work as opposed to motherhood as her primary occupation as evidenced by a 52% increase in the labor force from 1950 to 1988 among married women with children under the age of six (PBS.org, n.d.).

In other countries maternal behavior has been significantly impacted by more restrictive policy. For example, colonization has led to massive efforts to assimilate indigenous populations where the dominant culture and ideologies are taught and reinforced socially via media, and politically by way of legal action to ease resistance. One specific example of this is the discrimination and legal persecution of Aboriginal women in Canada from which the behaviors of Aboriginal mothers have been particularly impacted by colonization. The Indian Act of 1876 which restricted the religious, family, and educational practices of the Aboriginal peoples was intended as part of an assimilation framework to facilitate the development of a patriarchal family unit to mirror that of the colonizing western culture (Henderson, 2020; O'Reilly, 2014). Traditional family practices were largely impacted by the legally sanctioned removal of children and their placement into the residential school system under the Indian Act, not only impacting the behaviors of mothers as they were not able to teach their children as per their cultural norms, but children were not taught their culture thus the disconnect for future generations to traditional cultural practices (O'Reilly, 2014).

Aboriginal women in Australia experienced similar restrictions due to colonization where prior to European contact the Aboriginal culture was one of a kinship system where the mother is identified as the nurturer, protector and educator of the children, and mother as a role that all women occupy, thus helping other women to mother their children (Jones et al., 2018; Wheeler, 2006). Following colonization, Aboriginal traditions were viewed as uncivilized and inferior to western views resulting in the forced removal of many children from their mothers, impacting not only the access

from mother to child, but ultimately the self- confidence of Aboriginal mothers in their ability to parent their own children (Atkinson & Swain, 1999; Jones et al., 2018).

However, in undisturbed areas where colonization has not occurred and the Aboriginal culture and customs are practiced, there remains a consistent acknowledgement of the maternal role and consequent maternal behaviors unique to the Aboriginal culture (Jones et al., 2018).

This is like behaviors of migrants where Polish women who migrated to Germany and the UK show an integration of western influence on parenting practices following acculturation in comparison to traditional Polish mothers who model their behavior to that of the self-sacrifice emphasized by the iconic Virgin Mary (Putulska, 2016). But it is not only through transition, but also time that history has impacted the maternal behaviors such as those that vary by generation among South African mothers where maternal behaviors of mothers who experienced apartheid reflect a focus on survival, keeping their children close, while later generations not immediately impacted by apartheid shows the maternal behaviors of mothers focus on teaching success and independence (Moore, 2013).

Socioeconomic status has been shown to significantly impact the development of maternal behavior. Intensive mothering ideology suggests that time and attention to the needs of the child are primary, thus sensitive parenting by way of the mother's responsiveness to the child is central to "good mothering" and is supported by research on attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Hayes, 1996). However, research suggests that mothers with little education and in poverty, are less likely to practice sensitive parenting



by way of dedicating less time and emotional investment to caretaking because they are more focused on survival (Mesman et al., 2012; Mesman et al., 2016). Evidence indicates that maternal responsiveness to the child among mothers in poverty is observable behaviorally, but also in neurological response observable via neuroimaging, and structural changes. For example, in a study of socioeconomic disadvantage and neural response to infant crying, Kim et al. (2016) used fMRI and found evidence of reduced responsiveness in the prefrontal cortex, specifically the medial frontal gyrus and middle frontal gyrus. These areas are particularly critical in that each of the areas has been identified in both human and animals as an evolved area of the female brain functional in its capacity to evaluate and respond to infant cues (Kim et al., 2010a; Kim et al., 2010b). Importantly, Kim et al. (2010b) found correlates of such development and subsequent responsiveness comparatively in specific regions with mothers who perceived sensitive and responsive maternal care in their own childhood, thus this may reflect the significance of early experiences in their own maternal behavior.

Other research suggests the stress of poverty and low socioeconomic status on mothering behavior has been connected to the development of post-partum depression, a disorder impacting nearly 1 in 7 mothers (APA, 2019). More specifically, predictors of post-partum depression include poverty and low social status because it impacts access to resources such as education and security, (Fernandes Moll et al., 2019; Hahn-Holbrook et al., 2018). PPD can develop during pregnancy or within days after delivery and some of the symptoms of post-partum depression are loss of or increased appetite, loss of motivation, loss of energy, inability to sleep or excessive sleep, loss of interest in the

baby, mood swings, thoughts of hurting oneself or the child, and in more extreme cases women can experience hallucinations or delusions (APA, 2019). Research on the impacts of PPD on maternal behavior suggests that women with PPD are unable to bond with the child, lack feelings of self-efficacy with regard to caring for the child, or may be abusive or neglectful to the child (Abuchaim et al., 2016; APA, 2019; Hahn-Holbrook et al., 2018; Mersky & Janczewski, 2018).

### **Motherhood in the Media**

Media has historically functioned as a tool to develop and maintain cultural norms and expectations of the maternal role, where men have been established as the providers and women as the caretakers (Chae, 2014; Deirdre & Debra, 2003; David & Mykol, 2005; DeWitt et al., 2013; Gibson, 2019). Some of the earliest examples can be found in religious text such as the Hebrew Bible in which mother is central to the birth of Israel whereby women are directly tied to the success of the state by their maternal role (Bergmann, 2020). Likewise, Christian, and Muslim faith refer to the iconic Virgin Mary (Maryam in Islam), exemplifying the maternal role as selfless in her sacrifice to her child (Oh, 2010; Salih, 2017). This expectation of women in their sole occupation of motherhood continues to be present in contemporary media to include print, television, film, and internet, reinforcing the behavioral patterns characteristic of the intensive mothering ideology of sacrifice, selflessness, and modeled by white, middle-class women as they are portrayed as the worthiest and qualified to mothering (Chae, 2015; Friedan, 1963; Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2014; Grundetjern, 2018).

For children, gender specific exemplars are presented in the earliest years whereby children are taught gendered expectations that are integrated into their sense of self and identity. Contemporary media targets multiple age ranges beginning with the youngest populations in which gender specific models are presented in children's films and children's books. Specifically, research shows children's books present fathers as ineffective caretakers in comparison to mothers, and mothers predominantly as homemakers (Cready & Seward, 2013; David & Mykol, 2005). In review of 101 of the most popular G-rated films from Canada and the United States, Smith et al. (2010) found a significant gender bias in that women were more likely to be represented as mother and wife, compared to men more often portrayed as single.

In review of advertising and consumer culture, maternal populations are notably heavily targeted based on consumer trends where mothers characteristically care for the family thus make decisions on various products consumed within the household (Cook, 2011; de Laat & Baumann, 2016). Likewise, because of the pressure placed on mothers via culture and intensive mothering ideology is to be the "good mother", mothers as consumers are considered to be a vulnerable population, as they are more likely to engage in consumption that fulfills the "good mother" role by providing the best products and services for her child (Dobscha, 2010).

Review of mothers and non-mothers in Canadian commercials aired on prime network television suggests mothers are most commonly white, middle class, most frequently depicted as caring for others, either consuming products with or for the benefit of their children, and are most often passive, not directly addressing the camera (de Laat

& Baumann, 2016). Non- mothers are portrayed as more direct, directly addressing the camera, shown as more self-indulgent, self-oriented and hypersexualized (de Laat & Baumann, 2016). In a review of 50 studies conducted globally involving television and sex roles since 2000, Furnham and Lay (2019) found that despite the sociohistorical events that have challenged gender roles, television ads continue to maintain stable in the portrayal of traditional gender roles.

However, Fowler and Thomas (2015) found evidence of a shift in male representation in primetime television advertising between 2003 and 2008 in which there was an increase of men shown in paternal roles, although men were still less likely to be shown in a home setting. Notably, this shift is not present in advertising during sporting events where men continue to be represented in positions of power and authority, masculine, career oriented and not in paternal roles (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Hatzithomas et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2019).

Review of women in advertising during sporting events does show significantly more female presence as advertisers recognize a growing female audience during sporting events with women shown significantly more often engaged in non-traditional activities, consuming products outside the home such as her involvement in purchasing a car (Hatzithomas et al., 2016). This is supported by consumer interest as manufacturers recognize the increase of women's consumption of automobiles since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has led to a growing trend in SUV and family friendly vehicles (Walsh, 2011). In review of Superbowl advertising from 2008 to 2017, research suggests men continue to be principal characters and celebrity endorsers are predominantly male, and

while women are less often shown in the home, it is still more common for advertisements where women are alone and/or the principal character, to be placed in the home setting (Taylor et al., 2019).

Media focusing on the “bad mother” predominantly focuses on minority maternal exemplars, most portrayed as unfit, poor, drug using and single (Fouquier, 2011). For example, in review of NY Times articles featuring pregnancy and the usage of crack cocaine, alcohol and tobacco, Springer (2010) found articles relating crack and pregnancy more commonly focused on the race and social status of the mother, in comparison to articles on pregnant women and alcohol or tobacco which did not emphasize race or social status as significantly. In review of news coverage of welfare reform Kelly (2010) found that the welfare mother is highly racialized, most commonly featuring African American mothers, accompanied by four stereotypes: lazy, childlike, hyper fertile, and bad mother. This suggests the role of framing in media and how this establishes a clear bias that reinforces the implication that the “good mother” is a position exemplified by the white, middle-class mother.

However, the bad mother image appears to be a growing trend in film and television polarizing the selfless nature of the good mother to that of the hedonistic acting out of the bad mother by way of excessive drinking, partying, and selfish disregard for her maternal responsibilities. Films such as *Bad Mom's*, *Bad Mom's Christmas* and the television drama *Motherland* and *Mad Men*, all feature this similar plotline. Importantly, these cinematic portrayals of the bad mother behavior contrast the “welfare mother” and that of the crack mother in that these Hollywood interpretations are satirical, explained as

a blatant attempt to challenge the demands of the intensive mothering ideology, yet the characters are invariably white, middle class women, who ultimately have social support, and through their temporary acting out, find resolve in her ability to successfully balance work, life and motherhood (a). For example, the famous character Betty Draper in the hit show *Mad Men* is a white, upper-middle class mother set in a postfeminist setting, displaying behavior that challenges the model of the American housewife by her battle between selfishness and perfectionism (Littler, 2020). While the struggles of Betty Draper in the time period, during transition, and the evolution of the gendered roles does challenge the intensive mothering ideology, the sympathy garnered for her does not transcend those of minority status thus both exemplars in media of the ‘good mother’ and the forgivable bad mother remain confined to white women of middle-class status.

Role models in media who are celebrity mothers such as Jennifer Lopez and Kim and Chloe Kardashian, are often influential to everyday mothers portraying they can maintain a perfect figure, attend to their child consistently, and maintain full attention to their career yet they benefit from financial security and paid support (Martínez-Jiménez & Gálvez-Muñoz, 2019). Therefore, this representation of mothering presented by these celebrity mothers may not accurately reflect the realities of what all mothers are confronted with, much less minority or socioeconomically challenged mothers. Timing is also often a factor in media and in review of newspaper, magazine and television media involving coverage of celebrity women in Britain, Mills et al. (2015) found older women frequently spoke of wanting to focus on career first to secure financial freedom and time by first conquering career goals to be fully available when they decide to have children.

This notion of the right time supports the intensive mothering ideology in that the wrong time suggests she is not prepared to meet the demands of mothering successfully. Media coverage of newer technology where women can freeze their eggs and effectively plan for the right time has received increasing coverage in western countries (Baldwin, 2017).

Other celebrity role models include political icons such as Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin, each of which have publicly made strong claims and maintain that their first priority is that of their maternal obligations (Dillaway & Pare, 2014; Kohlman et al., 2013; Meyers & Goman, 2017). For each of these mothers they confronted various issues such as Obama as an African American, Clinton as an older woman, and Palin identified as a “failed supermom”, each of which attempted to overcome by publicly addressing their commitment to motherhood and developing campaigns that were hyper focused on the maternal role (Kohlman et al., 2013). However, research shows that women who run for political office are more likely to get elected if they can show that they are highly successful in both the professional and domestic realm, thus this is seen as a double bind as women, unlike men must show they can be successful in both private and public sphere (Teele et al., 2018).

In sports the elite female athlete mothers are portrayed as either an elite athlete and mother, or mother first and athlete second as she becomes a mother there is social pressure to present a focus on the maternal identity as a primary, and she must provide evidence of how she can maintain her first goal of mothering responsibility (McGannon et al., 2012; McGannon et al., 2017). For this reason many celebrity athletes such as elite runner Paula Radcliffe and tennis pro Kim Clijsters made very public comebacks after

having a child, both of which emphasize publicly how they now had it all, as both mother and professional athlete they publicly portray how they can mother successfully, fully devoting their attention to the child's needs, while also meeting the demands of preparation and participation in professional sports (McGannon et al., 2012; McGannon et al., 2017).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The purpose of this proposed study is to identify the subjective conceptualization of the maternal identity among modern mothers who have high maternal identity centrality. There is extensive research on motherhood and mothering behavior however, this study focuses on the existing gap in the literature about the variable behaviors of mothers who maintain high identity centrality. The information presented in Chapter 2 discusses previous research related to motherhood and the maternal identity first by reviewing research and theory related to identity development and the functionality of identity. To situate the theoretical framework for this study, general discussion of theory on the development of identity is included followed by a focused discussion of the development and application of social identity and self-categorization theory. Research on the functionality of the maternal identity specifically, development of maternal identity in various culture and context, and influences of maternal behavior suggests motherhood is cross culturally a recognizable identity with considerable significance about establishing womanhood. Further, the significance of the cultural pressure to fulfill the maternal identity has been relatively stable despite considerable effort by women to confront gender norms in the political, professional, and private spheres.



There remains a gap in the literature about a clear understanding of the conceptualization of the maternal identity among contemporary mothers who maintain high maternal identity centrality. Consequently, displays of the intensive mothering ideology continue to dominate exemplars of maternal populations, offering no counter interpretation of alternative maternal identities outside of the bad mother construct. Research shows that deviations from the culturally defined maternal identity may result in negative impacts on mothers at various levels to include psychological, physical, and social. As such, research focused on addressing this gap in the literature is necessary to improve the perception and well-being of maternal populations.

In Chapter 3, I present the research design and rationale that is intended for this qualitative study, as well as the methodology, any issues of trustworthiness, and how I addressed them. Finally, I offer a clear discussion of ethical procedures necessary to engage in this study.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the present study was to qualitatively explore subjective maternal identity among modern day mothers who maintain high identity centrality. A significant amount of research has involved identifying variations in maternal behaviors, but there appears to be an existing gap in literature involving variations in maternal behavior among mothers who maintain high identify centrality; thus, mothers who do not follow behavioral patterns of culturally defined models such as selfless devotion to her child similar to exemplars such as the Virgin Mary, are likely assumed to have low identity centrality, and consequently not as good mothers because they do not maintain the same behavioral patterns prescribed by intensive mothering ideologies. Therefore, focusing on mothers who maintain high maternal identity centrality but may deviate behaviorally from a prescribed maternal identity can help to inform subjective maternal identity and identify variations in maternal behaviors. In this chapter, I address the research design for this study and my rationale for choosing such a design and define and explain my role as the researcher. I also explain my methodology, including participant selection, instrumentation, and data collection methods. Finally, I discuss trustworthiness, reliability, and validity, as well as my ethical responsibilities as the researcher.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The purpose of this study was to explore the subjective conceptualization of motherhood among modern day mothers with high identity centrality. There is limited research involving mothers who have high identity centrality, how they conceptualize

maternal roles, and how mothers can maintain high identity centrality as well as maternal behaviors that do not align with the intensive mothering ideologies. The research design for this study was qualitative and intended to gather in-depth and descriptive data using the transcendental phenomenological approach.

The following research question guided this study:

*RQ1*: How do modern day mothers with high identity centrality conceptualize maternal identity?

There are three research approaches (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods) which are contingent upon the researcher's objective as well as philosophical assumptions. A philosophical assumption is an orientation that shapes and guides how an individual views the world as well as how he or she make sense of and observes phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Motherhood is a unique yet common and largely universal experience in that human beings are conceived within female bodies of childbearing age; however, maternal identity and how they experience being a mother is unique. As such, understanding subjective conceptualization of maternal identity and subsequent unique behavioral pattern requires a subjective inquiry. The constructivist worldview involves a researcher who seeks understanding of phenomena in depth and interactively through engaging participants directly to share their experiences and background and is reliant upon the complex perspective of participants, from which the researcher can construct a holistic understanding of phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Of the three research approaches, the constructivist worldview aligns with the qualitative approach due to research processes involving an inductive style that focuses

on individual meaning from the perspectives of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Likewise, because the intent of this study was to gather in-depth data based on individual experiences as mothers, the most appropriate research approach was the qualitative design.

Phenomenology is a method of inquiry involving phenomena from which reality is believed to be constructed and subsequently best understood by understanding experiences and perceptions of individuals (Moustakas, 1994). Developed by Edmund Husserl, phenomenology involves a construction of reality in which meaning and understanding of reality is derived from lived experiences. Phenomenological designs in research include the existential design, which involves the general meaning of experiences, transcendental design, which involves the structure of experience, hermeneutic design, which involves interpretations of experiences, and case study design, which involves a small group or individual as opposed to identifying shared patterns of a group (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

I applied a transcendental phenomenological approach to use the participant perspectives directly via their sharing of lived experiences, in this case their experiences as mothers, and compare these experiences to identify common themes. The transcendental phenomenological approach expressly relies on conscious experiences of individuals to articulate their reality. Based on the reliance on the conscious experience, this would assume that what it means to be a mother can only be understood by an individual experiencing motherhood. Importantly, transcendental phenomenology involves not identifying and clarifying phenomena, but exploring the unique complexity

of individual experiences. Husserl's phenomenology is based on the epoche`, which means understanding phenomena involves the suspension of one's own intentions (Ferguson, 2001). Because I used the transcendental phenomenological approach in this study, I believed that understanding subjective maternal identity required avoiding interpretations, biases, or prejudgments.

### **Role of the Researcher**

To explore conceptualization of maternal identity as experienced and articulated by modern mothers who maintain high identity centrality, I assumed the role of the primary researcher. This role involved recruitment of all participants, communication of intent of the study to and acquisition of informed consent forms from participants, design and collection of interviews, organization, management, recording, and transcribing of interviews, and data analysis of interviews in order to identify common themes among participants.

This topic of inquiry is personally relevant to me as I am single mother and therefore familiar with demands of motherhood in terms of my own children as well as society's standards of what it means to be a good mother. Personally, I have found that while I feel confident in terms of successfully raising my children as evidenced by their physical and psychological health, I often feel that I failed to address cultural exemplars I see in the media and among other mothers. I am extremely busy, working multiple jobs, continuing to pursue my education, and remaining dedicated to my physical and mental health, which requires mindfulness and meditation, all of which take me away from my children. Consequently, I feel abnormal, and an outsider compared to the maternal

community largely because I do not approach mothering completely selflessly, nor do I feel complete satisfaction with my maternal role. This has led to my exclusion from certain activities and groups as I can recall attending children's activities and noting differences in terms of appearance, behavior, and commitment between myself and other mothers, as well as instances where I was not invited to attend extended activities while other mothers in those groups were. Due to experiences such as this, I have felt shame, guilt, and doubt, and acted in defense of my mothering, yet my children were just as if not more articulate, functional, active, and healthy as other children.

As I have a connection to the research as a mother, this could have resulted in bias in terms of my review and data collection. However, it is for this reason that I was so drawn to the phenomenological approach as the emphasis is on the individual experience, of which each of the participant's experience is apart and separate from my own and should be treated as such. Likewise, phenomenology focuses on description of the experience only, not interpretation or analysis of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The objective in this study was not to analyze the maternal identity, but rather, it was to identify the subjective conceptualization of the maternal identity. Further this inquiry was to confront the one-dimensional cultural construct of the maternal identity prescribed by the intensive mothering ideologies, of which a bias in my own research would risk compromising any expansion beyond my own experience. To control for my own biases Hursell's approach in employing the epoche` engaged the intentional suspension of my own biases or prejudgments, refraining from interpretation, and simply recording data and identifying common themes throughout (Ferguson, 2001).

To specifically suspend my own biases, I began this process by engaging in self-reflection via journaling reflexively by reviewing my past experiences as a mother, followed by identifying how I could foresee such experiences to influence my review of data, noting any themes that may be more or less likely to stand out to me such as mothers who could directly identify with my experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To continue reflexive thinking throughout the study I engaged in notetaking to highlight my own experiences, themes, hunches, or observations that stood out to me, which helped to record my experience in engaging participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By maintaining such notes throughout, this helped me to reflexively challenge my own biases during data collection, and to control for bias more clearly in data analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

As a qualitative research study focused exclusively on modern day mothers with high identity centrality, the participants selected for this study were intended to be selected such that they specifically fit the characteristics of the population of interest which is referred to as purposeful sampling (Given, 2008). In purposeful sampling the participants are selected for their unique expertise and experience that can offer the insight necessary to provide the in-depth and insightful information relevant to the topic of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The sampling frame, which establishes the eligibility criteria, consisted of existing mothers from suburban Virginia who were either pregnant or had previously birthed a child, were raising, or had raised a child, and who

maintained high maternal identity centrality. Further inclusion criteria included: (a) being over the age of 18, (b) being able to read, write and speak fluent English, (c) having consistent internet access and a reliably functional device such as laptop, tablet, or smartphone with a functional camera for live video option, (d) have an active Facebook account, (e) are an active member of a Facebook community network of mothers. Because the nature of the study is to focus on mothers who maintain high maternal identity centrality, the sampling process involved two stages: first to develop a population of mothers who met all criteria (who may or may not have maintained high identity centrality), and second to identify a population of mothers who exclusively identified as having high identity centrality.

Once the second target population was identified, mothers were then intended to be purposefully selected from that group to develop a total sample consisting of 10 mothers who met all eligibility criteria. To ensure that participants met the eligibility criteria, mothers living in suburban Virginia were contacted through Facebook community/neighborhood networks and asked if they would be willing to participate in a study on the maternal identity by way of a Facebook invite. If the invite was accepted, mothers were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) which allowed for successful review of the inclusion criteria and qualification to participate in the study. This questionnaire outlines the nature of the study, establishes the eligibility criteria for the study, and identifies demographic information (including age, family size, income, education, weight, ethnicity, religion, employment, relationship status and age of children).



The sample size and site of this study was carefully selected to best achieve saturation while recognizing the current restrictions because of the COVID-19 virus. Due to the COVID-19 virus the restrictions on contact and gatherings suggested that a face-to-face interview protocol would put myself and the participants at unnecessary risk, thus a potential ethical violation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this reason, the site chosen for this study was exclusively virtual with the survey delivered online and the interview performed virtually in a live Zoom session. As a qualitative study, the target sample size was 10 participants. The rationale for this number of participants was based on the design of the study, first as qualitative research which characteristically have a much smaller sample size than that of quantitative or mixed-methods research, and second as a transcendental phenomenological approach which commonly ranges from 3 to 10 participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target goal of 10 participants was intended to allow for saturation. Saturation is the point at which the researcher stops collecting data because no new insight is offered and themes that are presented via data collection are overlapping thus the need to continue inquiry is no longer apparent (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

### **Instrumentation**

In qualitative research the most common form of data collection is the interview, in a person-to person format, as this yields in-depth information that defines the qualitative method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This kind of interaction provides the opportunity for a conversational approach in which participants can share their experience and insight in a comfortable and meaningful exchange (Rubin & Rubin,

2005). As the maternal identity is a complex and culturally significant role, engaging participants in such a way is necessary to provide the opportunity for them to express their experiences openly and honestly. Likewise, because this study employed the transcendental phenomenological approach, the objective was not to guide the participant by formal and structured questions, but rather, to learn of their lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To achieve this, I developed interview questions (Appendix A), semi-structured in design consisting of open-ended questions to obtain the data to address the research question, and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) consisting of close-ended questions to determine eligibility criteria for data collection.

In the developmental process of the interview questions and the demographic questionnaire used in this study I consulted various handbooks on in-depth interview processes to include Gubrium et al. (2012), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Creswell and Creswell (2018), and Rubin and Rubin (2005), as well as reviewed multiple qualitative studies cited throughout the literature review which utilized the qualitative interview. For the demographic questionnaire I used the SurveyMonkey tool to develop an original questionnaire which established the eligibility criteria for the study and identified demographic information. For the interview questions I focused on the research question and the transcendental phenomenological approach of the study to achieve content validity by constructing main questions that focused on the individual experience specific to the research question, as well as developed multiple probes intended to clarify or keep the conversation on topic throughout the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The structure of the interview was intended to develop detail about the individual experience in history

and context, such that the participant engaged in a semi-structured conversation openly and comfortably as they were led by main questions that helped to scaffold the interview then follow-up and probing achieved depth and expansion in detail (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview question design was intended to explore: (a) the subjective definition of mother, (b) the subjective understanding of the behaviors that define a mother, (c) the subjective satisfaction from being a mother, (d) subjective experience of being mothered, (e) subjective evaluation of personal success as a mother, (f) subjective assessment of how mothers are represented in the media. Along with the main questions, I developed several follow up questions to pursue any concepts or themes that may have surfaced during the course of the interviews as this was central to the objective of achieving rich, in-depth data, however recognizing that in some instances follow up questions may have needed to be constructed on the spot or following the interview when I had the opportunity to review the transcripts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The interviews were intended to last 45-60 minutes and were held in a live Zoom session as opposed to face-to-face due to COVID-19 restrictions. The choice in the live Zoom session as opposed to phone interview was so that the participant and the researcher could freely see each other's faces, facial expression, and emotional reaction which would help to facilitate trust and openness, a key component of the interview process and it was because of this that consent to participate in the study would require agreement to participate with the camera on (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Likewise, the live 1/1 Zoom session option protected the participants privacy by maintaining 1/1 interaction only, outside of a group setting, and provided convenient access for the live interview

option without having to secure a physical interview location. The interviews were recorded by the Zoom recording option for credibility as well as data collection purposes and later transcribed and reviewed to which participant consent to be recorded was established prior to the commencement of the interview. At no point in transcription was participant content restated, paraphrased, or rephrased as it was the intention of this study to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the subjective experience to inform this research. Further, each participant's transcribed interview was delivered via email to them for their review and verification of accuracy.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Upon approval from the Walden University IRB, I posted an invite to Facebook community/neighborhood networks in the suburban Virginia area inviting mothers to participate in a study on the maternal identity. In this invite potential candidates were advised that participation was voluntary and if interested they would be compensated with a \$10 Amazon Gift Card, retrievable upon completion of the study. If the invite was accepted participants were then emailed a link to review the informed consent form, and if agreed, they were asked to complete a demographic survey via SurveyMonkey which included the inclusion criteria. Upon review of inclusion criteria, I randomly select 10 mothers and contacted them via email to schedule a 1/1 meeting to address any questions, concerns, to reconfirm they met all inclusion criteria to participate in the study, and to schedule the interview. I reached out a second time via email prior to the interview to reconfirm our meeting time, as well as to address any questions they may have had about

the informed consent, that they fully understood the nature of the study, and verified informed consent form.

I was the only one who collected and handled data, collected from the live Zoom sessions which was recorded using the Zoom recording feature, transcribed by me, and held securely on my laptop which is password protected. The expected timeline for the interviews was 4-6 weeks as I planned to hold a minimum of four interviews per week, each of which were expected to last 45-60 minutes in length. Upon completion of each interview, I advised participants to expect a follow-up email within a week for the purposes of member checking, that had a copy of the transcribed interview for them to review and confirm all information was as they intended and approved for analysis, as well as an opportunity for them to offer any additional insight. Participants were asked to confirm this email within 1 week, and to attach any changes, or offer any additional insights within their response email. Upon receipt of this email, I responded via email within 48 hours with a rough estimate time of completion of the study, at which point I electronically delivered compensation for participation, thanked participants for their participation, and provided the findings of the study. After this point no further contact occurred.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

During this qualitative study data analysis occurred during and after data collection due to the unpredictable nature of what was found and when. This is a recommended practice for qualitative methods because despite the intended purposeful selection of participants and interview questions structured to address the nature of the

study, the subjective experience is such that the researcher cannot predict what would be discovered thus the study had to be fluid with continuous review of findings as well as formation of follow up and probing questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Likewise, because this study applied a transcendental phenomenological approach, each participant's experience was treated uniquely and separate from the experiences of others, to include my own. This process required reflection throughout the research entirely, beginning with the epoche, which is the suspension of my own biases and preconceptions, a practice which Husserl believed would allow for a pure vantage point to observe phenomena as it is, apart from our own experiences (Moustakas, 1994). To achieve this, I began journaling reflexively of my own experiences to identify anticipated themes prior to the start of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Throughout the study I continued notetaking and journaling to include during and after interviews to continue reflexive processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Immediately following each interview, I reviewed notes, transcripts, and the recording of the interview to identify emerging themes and engage the coding process. The coding process is the systematic labeling of emerging themes that once I had collected all data, could then be analyzed, and grouped into categories making it much easier to observe similarities and differences in the subjective maternal experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The initial coding process involved open coding and was kept in hard copy form, where upon review of transcripts and notes I handwrote in the margin of the printed transcript of the interview any potential themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After open coding was completed, I then reviewed the codes and looked for common themes to group open

codes into categories that I noted on a separate sheet of paper and kept with the complete set of notes for each individual interview, all of which were kept in separate folders. This process was repeated for each interview. Following the completion of all data collection all codes were merged, categories created, and data was organized into an excel spreadsheet that was saved to my laptop as well as saved to a thumb drive.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Based on the qualitative method, issues of trustworthiness were addressed by establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These concepts are often conceptualized as reliability and validity and are the extent to which research conducted measures what the researcher intends to measure based on the research question, and if the findings are consistent and dependable. The value in providing evidence of reliability and validity in any research is such that the findings can be applied to the population of interest to inform positive social change however, reliability and validity are somewhat different based on the research method used. Comparable to internal validity in quantitative methods, validity in qualitative methods is established by credibility as this is a way to establish the accuracy of data and how research findings align with reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), often achieved by such measures as triangulation of data, rich description of data, reflexivity, saturation of data, and member checks (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). External validity in quantitative methods refers to the generalizability and application of findings to populations outside of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because qualitative methods focus on specific phenomena, findings are often less generalizable thus the focus is not on the external validity of the

data but rather on the transferability of data. Reliability in quantitative methods is the extent to which the study can be replicated, however, because in qualitative methods the studies are based on in-depth data as opposed to the quantification of data, reliability is established by the dependability of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To achieve credibility, I conducted member-checking comparing and cross-checking data that was collected in interviews and follow up emails to all participants, and themes identified were situated by the convergence of the perspectives of participants. I maintained an audit trail to accurately account for all data collection and notes alongside the member-checking throughout the study which provided for the dependability of findings. To maintain a rich description of data I transcribed all interview material directly from the Zoom recording verbatim, keeping all notes, audit trail, and observations from the interviews and any correspondence in detail with the transcripts. Additionally, the inclusion of 10 participants was intended to reach saturation of data, at which point redundant information was noted and helped to qualify the credibility and dependability of findings. I also emailed the transcribed interviews to participants and requested that each participant offer their feedback on my initial findings from their interview and verify that I had not misinterpreted any responses they offered throughout the interview. The process of reflexivity was especially useful in establishing credibility and confirmability as it clarifies the researcher's position to the study in how they are affected and how they may affect the study by their biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I engaged in reflexivity from the start of the study by using the *epoche`* to expose my own biases prior to engaging participants and continued journaling throughout the



study in reflection of each interview, noting thoughts, reactions, and conclusions.

Because the objective of this study was to apply the findings to maternal populations and address the one dimensional culturally constructed maternal identity, it was critical that transferability was established such that the findings could be applicable to all mothers.

To achieve transferability, I included rich description of data, to include extensive notetaking during the interviews, transcribed interviews verbatim, member checking for clarification, and intended purposeful sampling of participants.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The purpose of conducting research is to contribute to science, furthering human understanding and ultimately benefit the good of society. To that end, the process of obtaining data through research with care and concern for the participants and the reporting of that data requires that the researcher's approach is trustworthy as this is a direct reflection of their ethical practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is particularly sensitive in that the subject matter is often of the personal details, probing the intimate experiences of the participants, achieved by direct interaction between the researcher and the participant (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2017). In exploration of the subjective maternal identity, I recognized this is a highly valued role in society that some women may struggle to identify with or define based on the cultural norms which would likely be a sensitive topic for some women and may induce feelings of stress or anxiety. While the population of interest was not considered to be a vulnerable population, I took great care to secure the welfare of participants and minimize risk.

As a student in the doctoral program in the field of psychology, conducting research psychological in nature, the first measure taken to address my ethical obligation was that I had thoroughly consulted the code of ethics in research published by the American Psychological Association (2017). As stated by the APA (2017) to conduct my research I had to receive IRB approval to which I carefully reviewed the Walden IRB protocol and submission of the application to Walden for approval to proceed addressing the following: recruiting processes and informed consent, the protection of the participants identity by maintaining confidentiality by using coding processes, the secure and safe keeping of the data during and after the study for a minimum of 5 years, and clear description of the data collection processes and research procedures to provide transparency and clarity in my intent to fully protect the participants from harm.

The recruiting processes for this study involved voluntary participation only, of which potential participants were sent invitations to participate in the study by way of a Facebook invite clarifying their participation is completely voluntary, virtual interview with compensation, and signed consent and recognition of this factor was obtained first. If interested and the invite was accepted, participants were emailed the link to the informed consent form which detailed the nature of the study, the procedures, clearly stating that their participation was completely confidential, virtual interviews were be recorded with the expectation that cameras were to remain on, the risk and benefit of their participation, offering of their compensation and when it would be received, and my contact information. To maintain confidentiality, I used a coding system referring to participants based on the order of interview such as I1, I2, I3, etc.

As I was the only researcher in this study, I was the only one in contact with the participants and our communications were secure and private, with all interview transcription, audit trails, raw data, notes, recording, email, and text correspondence kept securely on my private phone and laptop which are password protected, and my thumb drive and hand-written notes held in my private office in a secure filing cabinet which always remains locked. I will keep record of this data for five years after which I will destroy all data.

Additionally, because of the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential for participants to experience stress or anxiety throughout the interview process I took the time throughout the interview to provide comfort and reassurance to the participants, clarifying at the start and throughout the process that participants could withdraw from the study at any point, as well as followed up with participants after the interview for debriefing and to discuss any concerns they may have. Finally, there are no known conflicts of interest, however, if I had encountered any once the study was underway, I would approach my committee chair to seek guidance as well as bring it the attention of the Walden IRB.

### **Summary**

Throughout this chapter I have discussed my research methodology for this study. As a qualitative study with a transcendental phenomenological approach the intended design was to obtain rich data, detailing the experience and subjective conceptualization of the maternal identity from those mothers that identify with high maternal identity centrality. The careful design discussed throughout this chapter first discusses the

rationale and background for the selection of this design, followed by a clear description of my role as the researcher in this study, the participant selection process and logic behind the choice in process, the choice and design in instrumentation used for data collection, and the data analysis plan to include the rationale for the coding process used. This is followed by a clear discussion of the issues of trustworthiness that are common in qualitative methods and how I planned to address such issues to ensure the trustworthiness of my work by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability for this study. Finally, I offered a clear discussion of my ethical obligations as stated by the APA and further enforced by the Walden IRB and detailed how I intend to meet such obligations.

In Chapter 4, I discuss data collection and data analysis processes that were implemented in the study as they apply to research findings, provide evidence of trustworthiness, and thoroughly discuss results of data collection.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

This qualitative study involved investigating maternal identity based on one research question:

*RQ:* How do modern day mothers with high identity centrality conceptualize maternal identity?

As women are biologically predisposed to motherhood because of their biological sex, cultural expectations have historically prescribed the conceptualization of maternal identity with universally expected behaviors that involve satisfying the role of mother (Hays, 1996). However, as evidenced by varied maternal behaviors, identity centrality and conceptualization of maternal identity remains subjective, varying significantly among contemporary maternal populations (Atkinson, 2014; McGannon et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2015; Oshin & Milan, 2019). Because of societal pressures that involve assuming maternal identity is central to identity and consequent maternal behavior, women who deviate from such pressures have been shown to experience psychological, physical, social, and behavioral consequences (Rizzo et al., 2012; Seymour-Smith et al., 2017; Van Mulken et al., 2016). Thus, the objective of this study was to explore subjective conceptualization of maternal identity among mothers who self-identified as having high identity centrality to better understand trends in maternal behavior and more accurately inform exemplars that are modeled in the media. Because maternal identity is subjective in nature and conceptualized from one's own life experiences, I applied a transcendental phenomenological approach with the intent of using unique perspectives

of 10 interviewed participants, followed by a comparative analysis to identify common themes among interviewees. Results of data analysis are presented in this chapter as well as descriptions of the setting and format of interviews, descriptions of participants, and evidence of trustworthiness of data and findings.

### **Setting**

To capture depth of maternal experiences of participants for this study, I chose to engage them in a one-on-one interview format. Because I employed the transcendental phenomenological approach, I did not use formally structured questions. Instead, I developed semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) consisting of open-ended questions, as well as a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) with close-ended questions to determine eligibility criteria and collect consent forms to engage in the study. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, I was not able to conduct interviews face-to-face, thus I conducted interviews using Zoom. This choice was made so that both participants and I could still see each other's faces, facial expressions, and emotional reactions. This facilitated trust and openness, which is a key component of the interview process (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Zoom also provided for privacy for participants in on-one interview settings as I conducted interviews from my private home office, and participants were free to choose a space of their likin. Each participant chose to participate in interviews from their home, and all interview sessions were undisturbed; however, two participants were disrupted by their children during the interview, which appeared to impact their focus and attention temporarily, resulting in a brief pause in recording. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes with only one follow-up

interview lasting 15 minutes, in which a participant contacted me wishing to provide deeper insight on a specific point. Prior to starting each interview, I confirmed with participants that they were comfortable in their space and wished to proceed. Interviews were recorded via Zoom for credibility and data collection purposes, as well as transcribing interviews. Consent to record was given by all participants immediately prior to commencing each interview verbally as well as in advance via the invitation to the study and confirmed via the demographic form (see Appendix B). All recorded interviews and transcriptions remain confidential and currently exist on my password-protected laptop in my office where they will remain for 5 years, at which point they will be destroyed per IRB rules. Following interviews and transcriptions, transcripts were emailed to participants for review and verification of accuracy. All participants verified data, with only one participant requesting that personal statements regarding their spouse be removed from the transcript and not used in the study.

### **Demographics**

A demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) was used for a purposeful sample of mothers who had high identity centrality. Participants were existing mothers from suburban VA who were either pregnant or had previously birthed a child, were raising or had raised a child, maintain high maternal identity centrality, were over the age of 18, able to read, write, and speak fluent English, had consistent Internet access and a reliably functional device such as laptop, tablet, or smartphone with a functional camera for live video option, had an active Facebook account, and were an active member of a Facebook community network of mothers. Due to limited response and interest in participating in

the study, my initial objective of focusing on active members of a Facebook community network of mothers was extended to include mothers who were on Facebook but not specifically members of this group. Of the 13 participants who consented to the study by completing the demographic survey, only 12 met eligibility criteria. Of the 10 who were randomly selected from those eligible, one did not respond when I reached out for scheduling, and one did not show up for the interview, resulting in my having to reach out to the remaining two participants who were not initially selected. All participants were currently living in the state of VA. One participant was between the age of 25 and 34, six were between the ages of 35 and 44, and three were between the ages of 45 and 54. Nine of the participants were currently married, and one was separated. One was pregnant at the time of the interview with her second child. All participants had a college degree and had at least one child living at home currently who was under the age of 17. All participants had at least a part time job. One had a minimum annual income of \$25,000-\$50,000, and the majority averaged between \$75,000 and \$100,000 per year. All participants were White/Caucasian. Two participants exercise 5-7 days a week, six participants exercise 2-4 days per week, and two do not exercise regularly. When asked how many hours a week they spent on their own activities or interests, two participants had spent zero hours on self-focused activities, four had spent 5 hours, one had spent 20 hours, two had spent 15 hours, and one had spent 10 hours. In terms of ranking maternal identity centrality on a scale of 1-10, 10 being very high and 1 not at all, three participants were ranked at 10, two mothers were 9, three were 8, and two were 7. All



participants spoke English, had reliable devices and active Facebook accounts. Eight participants were members of a Facebook community network of mothers (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Demographic Data*

| Data<br>(Number of<br>Participants) |  |                              |                              |                              |                    |
|-------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Maternal ID<br>(Ranger 1-<br>10)    | 10 (3)                                 | 9 (2)                        | 8 (3)                        | 7 (2)                        |                    |
| Age                                 | 18-24 (0)                              | 25-34 (1)                    | 35-44 (6)                    | 45-54 (3)                    | 55+ (0)            |
| Annual<br>Household<br>Income       | \$0-<br>\$24,999<br>(0)                | \$25,000-<br>\$49,999<br>(1) | \$50,000-<br>\$74,999<br>(0) | \$75,000-<br>\$99,999<br>(9) |                    |
| Language                            | English (10)                           |                              |                              |                              |                    |
| Days of<br>Exercise                 | Do not<br>exercise<br>regularly<br>(2) | Once a<br>week (0)           | 2-4 days<br>per week<br>(6)  | 5-7 days<br>per week<br>(2)  |                    |
| Weekly<br>Hours of<br>free time     | 0 hours<br>(2)                         | 5 hours<br>(4)               | 10 hours<br>(1)              | 15 hours<br>(2)              | 20<br>hours<br>(1) |
| Education                           | College degree (10)                    |                              |                              |                              |                    |
| Residence                           | VA (10)                                |                              |                              |                              |                    |
| Relationship                        | Separated<br>(1)                       | Married<br>(9)               |                              |                              |                    |

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this study began with my obtaining IRB approval to engage in the study followed by my posting of a flyer to multiple Facebook community and neighborhood networks (see Appendix C). Potential candidates were advised via the flyer that participation would be voluntary, compensation would include a \$10 Amazon Gift Card that would be retrievable at the completion of the study, and if interested, participants would be emailed a link to review the informed consent form. At the bottom of the consent form was a link to a demographic survey (Appendix B) developed by me, through SurveyMonkey which included the inclusion criteria. Completion of the demographic survey served as consent to participate in the study which was specified to the participants in the original flyer and reviewed at the time of scheduling. I also advised potential participants that upon review of inclusion criteria, I would be randomly selecting 10 mothers to review consent and schedule the interviews for the study.

I chose to utilize the purposeful sampling approach to find participants due to their unique expertise and experience that I believed could offer the insight necessary to provide the in-depth and insightful information to inform the topic. The sampling process involved two stages in which I first identified a population of mothers who met inclusion criteria, and second to identify mothers within the group that identified as having high identity centrality on the demographic survey. Mothers selected and scheduled were then contacted a second time 48 hours prior to the interview to confirm meeting time, and to address any questions they may have had.

Obtaining the desired number of participants took several weeks as I initially had some issues retrieving the sample of 10 participants that I had intended to. To address this, I had to adjust the inclusion criteria to include mothers who were not members of a Facebook network of mothers but did have a Facebook account. Likewise, I asked mothers who did respond to also reach out to other mothers they knew who they thought might be interested in participating by posting the flyer in their Facebook pages. While this was not my original intent or approach to gathering participants, mothers who did end up participating were not associated with one another directly but were connected professionally, as several of the mothers were part of the educational community as teachers. However, at no point were participants interacting directly as I asked mothers to repost the flyer as opposed to directly ask other mothers, nor were they made aware of who was participating in the study as all data was collected and stored with anonymity. I was able to successfully achieve my objective of 10 participants for the study.

For the location of the interviews and communication, due to the COVID-19 virus and current restrictions on contact and potential ethical violation of harm, the site chosen for data collection utilized the Zoom platform resulting in an exclusively virtual interview as well as digital delivery of the survey through email. At no point did the participants and me make physical contact or come in proximity of each other. For confidentiality, I was the only one who handled and collected data from the live Zoom sessions and surveys with data held securely on my laptop which is password protected. The timeline for the interviews lasted 6 weeks, with each interview lasting 45-60 minutes in length. When each of the interviews were completed, I advised participants to expect my follow-

up email that would include a copy of the transcribed interview for member checking.

When transcripts were emailed for verification, all participants verified the data with one participant who requested the removal of personal statements related to her spouse and a second participant requested a follow up interview to discuss topics related that they failed to emphasize in the original session. The second transcript from the follow up interview was then emailed to the participant and verified with no further request for follow up or revision.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process began prior to each of the interviews as I needed to be sure that I was continually suspending my own biases, beginning with identifying what I expected to encounter throughout the interview process. This is consistent with the epoche` (the suspension of my own biases and preconceptions), a practice suggested by Husserl to identify one's own experiences prior to engaging the interview process to observe phenomena from a clear vantage point (Moustakas, 1994). I chose to begin this process by journaling reflexively, detailing my own experiences as a mother which allowed me to identify anticipated themes. Likewise, because the nature of this study is qualitative, applying the transcendental phenomenological approach and intended to explore the subjective experience of mothers, the continuation of my journaling before and after each of the interviews was necessary, acknowledging that each interview resulted in a slightly different experience thus requiring the continuation of the reflexive process throughout.

The process of coding began during the first interview as I was taking notes throughout, then following the conclusion of each interview I reviewed my notes and the recording of the interview to cross reference and reflect. With the interviews conducted and recorded via Zoom I was able to use my laptop to auto transcribe using the Office 365 dictation device while replaying the recorded interview into a word document to which I re-watched the interviews, reviewing my notes while simultaneously transcribing. Once transcription was complete, I then cross-referenced with my handwritten notes in the margin of the printed transcript to highlight any potential themes. The initial coding consisted of extended phrases in response to questions from the participants own words that emerged as I processed each of the interviews. Prior to beginning the second interview I created a spreadsheet in excel on my laptop to organize codes into potential themes based on extended responses from the first interview, which I was then able to begin to clearly see some emerging themes between the mothers after completion of the second interview. I repeated this process for each interview resulting in 45 common responses. Once I had reviewed, transcribed, and coded each of the interviews I then reviewed the final product. At the conclusion of the final interview and adding the data from that interview to the first spreadsheet I then began merging codes and identifying themes based on common ideas and similar language, identifying key phrases or descriptors such as spiritual influence and innate ability used by participants in response to questions. As I went through this process, any statements that did not directly address or provide insight into the phenomena of motherhood or did not offer

response to the questions asked in the interview were eliminated. This process resulted in 34 themes.

The next step of my data analysis was to further condense the many themes into overarching themes related to the maternal identity specific to influences in identity formation and impact to which I was able to identify three common themes: media does not accurately represent mothers, maternal identity formation influenced by environment, and the good mother. From these three themes, I developed twelve subthemes. Table 2 provides this list of themes and following subthemes.

**Table 2**

*Themes and Subthemes*

| Theme A: Maternal ID Influenced by Environment | Theme B: Media Does Not Accurately Represent Mothers                        | Theme C: The Good Mother                           |
|--|---|--|
| (a) spiritual influence                        | (a)media moms are white middle class  | (a)solely responsible for the success of the child |
| (b)mothers influence                           | (b)fathers are not as capable   | (b)unconditional love, patience, and support       |
| (c)extended family influence                   | (c)younger mother more self-focused, older mothers waiting to have children | (c)struggle to have time alone                     |
| (d)peer influence                              | (d)minorities not represented   | (d)feelings of guilt and shame about               |

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### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

To address issues of trustworthiness when applying qualitative methods I established credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. First, the value in taking these measures to establish trustworthiness is such that I have measured what I intend to measure as posed by the research question and that what I have concluded is consistent and dependable by way of credibility. Secondly, the data collected can be applied to the population of interest by way of transferability. Thirdly and fourthly, for data to be considered reliable it must be dependable and must be confirmable by way of consistent data and the ability to verify such data. Thus, to achieve trustworthiness I employed multiple methods to include member-checking, reflexivity, a rich description of data, an audit trail, and purposeful sampling.

#### **Credibility**

For this study, I achieved credibility by conducting member-checking by comparing and cross-checking data that I collected from each of the interviews. Following each interview, I sent each of the participants a follow up email once I had transcribed the interview with the transcribed interview attached and requesting their approval or request for revisions. I also maintained an audit trail to accurately account for all data collected and notes taken throughout the process. All transcribed material was not altered in any way as it was done so verbatim from the interview using the dictation device on my laptop following the interview directly from the Zoom recording. Using

direct quotations, this provided for rich thick descriptions to enhance credibility and trustworthiness overall. The inclusion of 10 participants was strategically established to meet saturation of data and reflexive journaling was done throughout to identify and suspend my own biases. Finally, any themes identified were situated by the convergence of the perspectives of participants, whereby credibility was achieved.

### **Transferability**

To achieve transferability, which is the ability to apply findings to other settings specific to the population of interest, which in this case are biological mothers who are actively or have previously engaged in mothering a child, I intentionally included rich description of the data collect. This process involved extensive notetaking throughout the interview process, as well as verbatim transcription of interviews and member checking following each of the interviews by emailing participants the transcribed interview for verification and/or clarification, and purposeful sampling of participants.

### **Dependability**

To achieve dependability by way of reliable data I engaged in member-checking, establishing that participants had clearly articulated their thoughts and that I had accurately understood their intention. This was done by their verification of the transcripts that were formatted verbatim following the interviews and sent via email to each member, providing them with the opportunity to clarify or revise statements made. The inclusion of 10 participants also supported my achievement of dependability as I was able to reach saturation by noting once findings had become redundant.



### **Confirmability**

By establishing dependability, transferability, and credibility I was able to achieve confirmability as I was able to demonstrate clearly that the interpretations and findings that I had concluded because of the research process were directly from the data collected and is verifiable by way of the audit trail I kept. Likewise, engaging in the reflexive process helped to clarify my position and suspend my own biases in my data analysis process, which I did from the start of the study and throughout the data collection process.

### **Results**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the subjective conceptualization of the maternal identity among mothers who acknowledge they have high maternal identity centrality, to better understand variable trends in maternal behavior. I chose to use a qualitative approach to gather subjective, in-depth data on the maternal identity of the individual, how she came to develop her identity, potential influences in the environment, then engaged in a comparative analysis of subjective conceptualizations of maternal identity among mothers and behaviors. I also explored various influences as perceived by mothers in the media, perceived impact, and satisfaction of the maternal identity in comparison to perceived exemplars. To accomplish this, I interviewed 10 participants who were selected through purposeful sampling. Participants were invited through Facebook with a flyer (Appendix C), and each participant interested in the study was sent a digital consent form with a linked survey (Appendix B) at the bottom of the form which functioned as their confirmed

consent if completed. All the participants who completed the consent form via completion of the demographic survey that were invited to return for the interview were identified as having high identity centrality in the survey given, as well as had given birth to a child and all were actively involved in the raising of the child/children at the time of the interview. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, with questions developed by me (Appendix A) and approved by the committee and the IRB prior to engaging in the recruitment process. There was a total of 15 questions originally designed for the interviews in a semi-structured format to allow rich and detailed data collection, providing for an organic approach and feel to the interview, expanding on details where necessary and adding follow up questions for clarification when needed. Each interview was conducted through the Zoom platform privately, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes, with interviews transcribed verbatim following the live interview, and verified through the member-checking process by the participant in a follow up email approximately 1-2 weeks after the interview. All participants verified the transcripts with one asking for the exclusion of comments made about her spouse and a second participant asking for a follow up interview to clarify the significant spiritual influence on her maternal identity that she had not expanded on in the original interview. The following research question guided this study: How do modern-day mothers with high identity centrality conceptualize the maternal identity?

Throughout the interview process I was able to capture rich detail from each of the participants as well as body language and emotion due to the live Zoom option for the interviews where cameras were left on. I noted that six out of the ten mothers became

extremely emotional when I addressed the question of whether they felt they were a good mother based on their conceptualization of a good mother and all ten of the mothers' expressed feelings of guilt when asked to elaborate on the question of the most challenging aspect of motherhood, each suggesting feeling they had not spent or were not spending enough time with their child/children. Upon completion of the interview and member checking process I then began to analyze the data by first coding then identifying themes that had emerged with the sample of participants. From the data collected I noticed three common themes and twelve subthemes. The common themes and subthemes were identified as follows: (A)maternal identity formation influenced by environment, (a) spiritual influence, (b) mothers influence, (c) extended family influence, (d) peer influence; (B)media does not accurately represent mothers, (a) media moms are white, middle class, (b) fathers are not as capable, (c) younger mothers are more self-focused, older mothers waiting to have children, (d) minorities are not represented; (c) the good mother, (a) patience, (b) unconditional love and support, (c) time, (d) feelings of guilt and shame. The following sections will provide detail from the responses of the participants that helped to develop the common themes and subthemes.

### **Theme A: Maternal Identity Formation Influenced by Environment**

As the research question of this study was regarding the conceptualization of the maternal identify, several of the questions asked at the start of the interview were related to what most inspired each of the participants understanding of what it means to be a mother. As such, the first theme that emerged was related to influences in the

environment as all the mothers stated that they had developed their understanding of motherhood and consequent maternal identity based on various environmental influences.

### ***Spiritual Influence***

Based on subtheme (a) spiritual influence, six of the mothers stated that there was a significant spiritual influence on their conceptualization of the maternal identity using such terms as family centered, foundational, strict, divine. P7 acknowledged there was a definite influence on her understanding of motherhood and general role in her family based on Christian teachings stating, “We are practicing Christians and so we attend church regularly and that's important for us and so like just having a good foundation for, you know, the way we live our life.”

P5 more specifically noted that the Virgin Mary was a significant influence and role model stating, “It's divine, everything she has done is divine, and all the pictures of her, I actually have one on my wall, she's just like porcelain and beautiful with like the most beautiful blue around her.” P9 described similar exemplars but used more real-life examples as well as biblical models stating: “You know there's of course mother, Mary, the mother of God, older members of the church, females who I consider to be strong leadership to motherhood.”

In describing her upbringing and spiritual influence, P2 mentioned church activities and community, emphasizing how the church community had similar behavioral trends stating “Growing up we were involved with a religious group that was very family centered, the mother stayed home and the kind of they took care of the children.” P3 also mentioned behaviors modeled and emphasized by her church

community stating “I grew up American Protestant, so you know if I go back growing up like some of my early Sunday school teachers and the way like they were, they were very strict.”

P8 emphasized the Christian faith as a support for modeling behavior to which she stated:

A good mother is a good role model for their children. In my house. That's a good Christian role model, seeking God first praying together as a family. I'm looking to God's word for guidance, I'm teaching, you know, if I've taught my children well then when they go out on their own. I shouldn't be worried.

I should know that when I walk away, I'm worry free because I know that

I've instilled in them the principles that they need to function.

### ***Mothers' Influence***

The second subtheme that emerged was the influence of each of the participants mothers where two of the mothers discussed how their mothers were role models for how not to behave as they described their mothers as absent and “closed off”, “manipulative” and “uninvolved”. For one of the two mothers who learned what not to do from their mother they acknowledged this was a source of anxiety as she expressed making blatant efforts to take the opposite approach with her own child yet struggled with feelings of guilt for her anxiety and impatience for fear that she may in any way behave like her mother. Seven of the other mothers stated that their biological mother had influenced their conceptualization of the maternal identity however, only P7 offered detail about her mother's influence, however emphasizing more significantly the impact of older generations and the changing trend of women working, stating:

My parents were married for 46 years, my mom's parents were together so like I've always had kind of like this role model of, like, marriage and women and mothers. My grandmother's both were like stay-at-home moms, I feel like that just generationally was what you did and then my mom worked.

### ***Extended Family Influence***

P7's statement helps to lead into subtheme (c) extended family influence, in which eight acknowledged the influence of extended family on their maternal identity stating grandmothers and aunts as being influential. P8 stated:

My maternal grandmother stayed at home and was a seamstress though she still worked in the home. So, growing up in that kind of atmosphere, the mother in the family canned and cleaned and kept the garden, and even mowed the lawn. So, growing up I've seen strong Appalachian women take a strong role in their family.

Some of the participants recognized the change in women's roles like P7 from earlier generations where mothers exclusively stayed home, then progressively more mothers started working as opposed to the traditional dynamic of the working father and stay at home mother. Some participants expressed this change in role seems to have expanded the expectation of mothers to work and help support the family monetarily outside of the home but did not relieve them of the expectation of caring for the family in the home. As P10 stated:

My great grandmother, they grew up on a farm and she was in the house all day, preparing foods, taking care of the family...my grandmother worked outside the home, and still have some of those roles of you know taking care of family

preparing foods. Then, you know, my mother, who worked two jobs and worked outside the home... so it definitely went from inside home to outside home. So, I think it became progressively more complicated, taking on more roles as women often do, you know, to take care of the family.

P7 stated “My grandmother's both of them were like stay-at-home moms, I feel like that just generationally was what you did and then my mom worked.”

### ***Peer Influence***

Four participants stated they were influenced by peers. P5 stated, “My friends’ mothers in high school were making their kids clothes, they drove them around everywhere like their kid’s social life was their social life... so like it seems like that's what you were supposed to do.”

Several of the mothers discussed how they found support in social media groups with friends who offered support, guidance, role modeling successful mothering, answering questions and concerns, and sharing their general experiences. P10 mentioned she was a member of professional group of mothers in the same field who shared experiences related to the career choice and how that impacted motherhood to which she stated:

It’s very hard to try to balance work and motherhood, in this profession. It's a big issue for a lot of us and we struggle with it a lot. It's a lot of guilt associated with it..feeling like you're devoting more time to your profession versus your child, especially when they're younger, you know, day care issues ... I guess it's that that age old conversation you have, you know, are you choosing your profession,

being a career mom versus stay-at-home mom ...finding that balance...can you do both?

P10 explained that she found the social media friend group extremely helpful because she struggled with her own feelings of guilt for choosing her profession, loving her profession, but also wanting to be a good mother so the other mothers were influential in that they could identify with each other, support each other, and offer tips and modeling on how to manage career and motherhood successfully as she stated:

That's supportive in many ways, so you have issues going on that are related to motherhood, but they're also specific because they are issues that are also related to work... so you have two different supports, like in one. And that's been very helpful.

P6 discussed a tight network of friends of which she was the last to have a child, so she was able to observe her friends in their maternal role and consult them when she became a mother stating:

I have a handful of college friends ....so we've kept in touch over the years since we graduated ...I would say that those friends really like carried me through, not just pregnancy, but then this first year to where I've just been able to go to them and they're my sounding board. They've just given to me so much great advice just in the practical preparation but also in in those hard moments where I'm like, all right, I need somebody who's safe to tell but I don't know that I like this. They are 100% not judging me and they're like yeah actually I felt the same way.



P9 discussed how her choice in friends were those who she saw as mother figures who contrasted her own mother, providing her with models and support of what she found to be a better approach to parenting stating:

Maybe because of the type of mother I had, I kind of seek out mother figures. So, I have a lot of older friends who kind of maybe fill that role for me a little more, and they definitely gave me a perspective that you know I couldn't expect to get from my mother about. Being nonjudgmental about what you do as a mother because it's hard. So, it's not going to be perfect, you're not going to be a saint ...you must have a little bit of self-compassion and, you know, and my mother was not a compassionate person, or capable of empathy in any way.

### **Theme B: Media Does Not Accurately Represent Mothers**

In exploring the conceptualization of the maternal identity, one of the primary considerations was the impact of media influence, and to determine if mothers found media exemplars influential and to what extent. To address this, several of the questions I developed were directly related to media from which the second primary theme emerged which was media does not accurately represent mothers. Of the ten participants, seven stated clearly when asked if they felt media represented mothers accurately that it did not. P10 stated, "I don't think that are probably accurate. I think they are ideal." P7 stated as a matter of fact, "I think they are fake." Similarly, P4 stated, "I think it's what the expectations are, the reality is so different than what the expectations are, but unfortunately if that's what the expectation is then that's what we spend our lives trying to live up to."

***Media Moms Are White and Middle Class and Minorities Are Not Represented***

Seven participants stated media moms tended to be White and middle class and minorities were not adequately represented. P4 stated:

All you ever see is white people I mean that's what seems to be the big thing. and if you do see minorities, it's usually in a very unflattering light you know I mean if I'm paying a lot of attention you know unfortunately if you do see a minority mother there's rarely a husband or you know a significant other in sight and there's usually more than one child and usually the message is oh look how poor they are and how awful their lives are.

When I asked P4 about demographic representation as a follow up she responded, “The ideal mother ideally is strong middle class.” P2 stated that she feels like two types of mothers are portrayed predominantly in media which are either the soccer mom or the career mom and when I followed up and asked which group was most represented in both types she stated, “I'm seeing more of the stay-at-home mom and I'm seeing more of a Caucasian group versus a variety of ethnicities.”

P2 stated that you could find a diverse representation of mothers however only if you seek it out stating she could identify a few minority moms on television however:

George Lopez is the only like Hispanic mom show that I could think of, like there's an Asian mom in supernatural and that's about it so I mean there is you know I could name off twenty other white TV moms but as far as everybody else goes then not really.

P5 discussed how the minority mothers were represented negatively consistently whereas white mothers are portrayed more positively stating:

Mexican mothers are usually the crazy kind that are like loud and like controlling and then you have African American mothers who usually have attitudes and their meaner and their um wisecracking I think um and then I think white mother is you usually have like the wine or the crazy kind like Roseanne Barr or like married with children under her name or you have the perfect ones...white mothers, you either have the crazy or you have like the perfect mother.

P9 stated:

There is more diversity however, like a Jane Austen novel, where the main characters are the people who are of a certain class, and you don't know what the maids are doing, but they're still kind of like working middle class, they're not like homeless people on the street ... there's no story about that.

P10 agreed there is some diversity however she clarified stating, “Yeah, there is some diversity, different race. But all like I said well put together taken care of mid, 40’s probably well, not well off but middle class, attractive.” When asked if she found any diversity in, media P3 stated, “Mainstream American culture yes, it is not diverse.” P4 stated, “All you ever see is white people.”

When asked about demographics, P6 stated, “Middle to upper class. Definitely like either a working mom or stays at home but husband has a really good job so they can support the family and live comfortably.”

*Fathers Are Not as Capable*

Nine out of 10 participants stated that to some extent, fathers or men were portrayed as incapable of managing children in the same way, with the same success as women. Often even satirically, portraying men as easily overwhelmed, suggesting that only women could successfully fulfill the role of taking care of the household. P2 stated:

He is being portrayed that he can, but you can see there is more chaos versus in hers in media examples and they always show in commercials like the dad is got the kids and their mess everywhere where the mom has cleaned and they're still playing having a good time but it's not as chaotic.

P3 used terminology describing the maternal role as more female stating:

I think that that's the comedic touchstone is if you have dad trying to play more female role that involves multitasking and he always falls flat because it's just not something he's accustomed to or has a natural ability to do.

When I asked P4 to describe what she recalled seeing on television of the stay-at-home dad she stated, "Stay at home dads don't know what they're doing you know, oh my goodness you know he can't figure this out or you know look at the mess he made or look at the disaster the kids are in." P5 stated the representation of fathers is unflattering comparatively, stating, "In the media either they're losers and they need to get a job or it's like cute and funny you know it's not really like a serious thing." P6 described the media representation of fathers as "He seems a little out of his comfort zone and is just trying to figure out and is often satirical."

P7 said:

I always feel like shows make dads look incompetent, or they're like, really mean... Usually I feel like if it's supposed to be a lighthearted show the dads are just kind of like dumb or just like camp, don't know how to parent like the mom has to do all the work.

P8 emphasized the misrepresentation based on how it compared to her own household stating:

The man is being seen as less than or not as important, but in my house, you know we are Christians, and the man is the head of the household. We, in my house we're equal partners. They'll try to create humor, and make the dad look like a kook make him look like he's incompetent.

P9 discussed a specific show as an example stating, "They kind of made him like a feminist, you know... which you know that sends the message of men who do this aren't really men."

### ***Younger Mothers are More Self-Focused and Older Mothers Are Waiting to Have Children***

I also explored the impact participants perceived the media had on other mothers' maternal behavior and maternal identity, and younger mothers appeared more self-focused compared to older mothers were waiting to have children. While the maternal exemplar in media is conveyed as predominantly white, upper middle class and either as a stay-at-home mother or working mother, some of the participants found the message to be more self-focused, with a shift in which women are encouraged to have a career, but also to fulfill the maternal role. P2 stated:

Media is moving away from traditional maternal identity and is very me focused. This newer generation of mothers are less of mothers in most senses actually. I feel like it's a biological thing to become a mother and I think at some point that this generation is more of it kind of fell into my lap versus I wanted this. More materialistic.

Five of the mothers stated they believed women were waiting to have children resulting in a growing population of older mothers. P3 explained how she felt exclusively being a stay-at-home mom was no longer acceptable, impacting younger women as she stated:

For women who might have chosen to stay at home and really invested their identity in their children I think that there's some devaluation that like they didn't live a full life and we kind of get that message and I think that younger women are getting that message more and more is that without these values being shared that person doesn't have that value as a person...

P3 also addressed social media and the impact on younger mothers stating:

So entrenched in social media and so many other things that encourage them to not necessarily think of a family dynamic younger and the idea is more focused on the individual self not the family self and I see that really missing in a lot of the peer produced media for younger people.

P4 addressed social media and the impact on younger mothers to which she emphasized the suggestion that breastfeeding was significant characteristic of successful mothering where the alternative meant the mother was not an adequate mother or person as she stated:

They were getting all these messages about how horrible of a mother they were if they couldn't breastfeed and the guilt that they were you know experiencing and they were getting this message you know Instagram and Facebook and all these places you know the mommy groups that they were members of, and you know what do you mean you're not breastfeeding and you're a terrible person

P5 stated:

I think it might encourage older women to have children. I think that it might be more encouraging to like step into motherhood and older age I do see a lot of people my age quote 40 that don't have children and don't want children and I did that there's like a lot of them and I think that's a big change too.

When asked about the impact on younger mothers, P5 stated:

Oh my gosh I can't imagine... the younger generation is having less children now and I can see why you think it's gonna have all this pressure. Pressure to like be a good parent right to look good after giving birth like right away definitely.

P6 discussed an example of a mother who is 21 and stated:

I'm imagining like if I were in her position and I were seeing these TV shows, you know, showing these moms with like a middle age, middle class or upper middle-class kind of lifestyle I feel like that would put a lot of pressure on me to make sure that I was providing the same thing for my family. And same thing for social media everybody puts out the best of their lives on social media so if you're looking around at other people who have kids and if you're looking at people that

have that lifestyle than that just adds that internal pressure to try to keep up with everyone else even if it's not truly a realistic goal.

P8 discussed the impact on older mothers stating, “We're seeing a lot more women who are waiting now and are becoming older mothers.”

P9 identified various social media platforms and her perceived negative impact stating:

Social media mostly- Tok-tok and Instagram, cancel culture, and how that could impact motherhood, because like I said I grew up with a person who is very critical. When you do certain things on social media and you get likes and whatever, you could become addicted to that. So, if you're going to call somebody out for instance, putting your child on a leash, and then it goes viral, and you're shaming another mother for something that she's doing to correct because maybe she's coming from a place of, she wants her child to be safe. We don't need that, as mothers, that's not something that we need to have

P10 described the impact of social media on both younger and older mothers, but positively as it provides a resource and reference for mothering with less pressure exclusively on the mothers:

I just feel like maybe it's becoming more accepting to have males or my husband take on more of a role or not have as much guilt about having my child in daycare more or, or things like you know being more accepting of working outside the home or, you know, these ideals, as, as compared to what it was 20 years ago, or having these forums that we have now I can talk to somebody about it, versus, you know what I had, you know, 20 years ago, where you have to pick you know



careers or stay at home mom and deal with it, you know, come home and do everything yourself and, you know, you take care of home to work. 45-50 hours a week. I think if I was coming out now and had all the stuff that we have now, maybe I would have been able to mentally compartmentalize.

P8 discussed the impact on younger mothers suggesting they are so self- focused that they are not successfully parenting their children stating:

They're just absent parents, I don't know what it is. That's one thing, they're absent or they're in their job or they're working two jobs or they're so distracted... I don't know but I just, I think that not all mothers out there are doing what they need to do for their children. They're letting their children pick too many things. Too many, too free, there's no guidelines or ramifications.

### **Theme C: The Good Mother**

The nature of this study was to explore the maternal identity to which identifying what mothers with high identity centrality believed the characteristics of a “good mother” was critical. The reason for this is I wanted to see if the mothers measure their own success as a mother in comparison to their own conceptualization of the “good mother”. In developing questions that captured participant conceptualization of the “good mother” I asked participants to describe the characteristics of the “good mother”, to include how she behaves, how she presents herself, and how they felt they compared to their own conceptualization of the “good mother”. From these questions four subthemes emerged which were (a) patience (b) provides unconditional love and support, (c) time (d) feelings of guilt and shame.

### *Patience*

The first subtheme, subtheme (a) patience, was a theme that nine out the ten mothers identified as a significant characteristic of a good mother. When asked to describe the key characteristics of a good mother P1 identified patience and immediately acknowledged she struggled with this characteristic stating, “Being patient that one is definitely one of the ones I have struggled with over the years definitely working on getting better with the patience.” P2 described a good mother by stating, “A good mother is you have, to be uhm available and open and understanding and caring and loving.” P4 described the characteristic of patience as a way of being available to her child, where she wanted the child to feel she was always reachable, and they could maintain an open line of communication stating:

He talks to me and I think that's probably the most important thing to me because I didn't always have open communication with my parents this is not who they are we do now I'm an adult but as a child they just didn't know how to talk to us and so for me being a good mother I want him to know that he could come talk to me anytime about anything and we will talk about it.

P6 also connected availability to listening and patience stating:

Definitely loving, caring, nurturing and just easy to talk to, I think, I mean both of my parents are really easy to talk to. But just somebody that offers a listening ear and doesn't always jump to give advice or jump to judge a situation but is kind of patient and giving feedback.

P7 described her idea of a good mother first by stating it was important to be available and paying attention and when asked what she struggles with she identified a lack of patience as struggle for her stating:

To be a good mother to care for my kids to support my kids to pay attention...I am not patient. And I actually really struggle with the age of children, like, I'm, I feel like I'm probably going to be better when kids are older. I don't do well I don't play well with kids like little baby kids I'm just like, I don't really want to play.

P8 referenced understanding as a form of patience, stating, "A good mother seeks first to understand and doesn't jump to conclusions and knee-jerk reaction."

### ***Unconditional Love and Support***

The second subtheme, was mentioned by eight of the 10 participants, all of which suggested that the good mother supporting the child was instrumental in securing the success of the child. However, each of the mothers described support somewhat differently. In both P3, P4, and P6's description of the "good mother" they emphasized the health of the child. P3 stated, "Make sure that their child stays as healthy as possible", P4 stated "Making sure he is not in any danger", and P6 stated, "Making sure that the child is nurtured and safe and happy and care for."

P5 said:

The good mom definitely makes dinner, definitely makes sure every night when they go out, they have all these snacks prepared and like organized and um,

they're in all the activities-they're just happy with their kids and they have it all together.

P7, P9 and P10 described love and support as an awareness and presence. P7 stated, "To support my kids to pay attention to, you know, what they eat, and what they're, you know, watching on TV or, you know, the people they're around the kids that they're around."

P9 stated:

Observant, helping him label his emotions like you sound like you're frustrated when you're frustrated. Oh, you do this right, and you know like just helping him label his emotions-I think that you have a responsibility for your children to be a healthy person, physically, and emotionally.

P10 stated it was important to be there for her child, but this was something that was challenging for her as she stated, "Good motherhood is being there for your child. For me that was a struggle because I always felt like the more time, I spent with him the better mother I would be." P8 also referenced the child as a central focal point as evidence for love and support stating simply, "She puts her children first."

### ***Time***

Time was a common theme in response to the question of what they found to be the most challenging aspects of motherhood. P1 stated, "Challenging to find personal time, time with my partner, privacy, and alone time."

P3 discussed the issue of boundaries and time, stating:

How to enforce boundaries without causing the child harm or to cause that a loss of confidence or that feeling that they've lost their moms love somehow so to me the boundaries is the hardest both enforcing them and always determining where they need to be.

P5, P6 and P9 referenced the issue of time and multiple roles as P5 stated, “Working and being a mother it's challenging, raising teenagers.” P6 stated the most challenging part about being a mother was “time with husband and work.”

P9 stated:

Sometimes it's the combo role of mother, wife. My husband works a job, or he deploys, a couple months out of the year. And to some extent, like there was, there were moments of being a solo parent that I would relish because I didn't have to pick up after a grown man.

P10 referenced the complication of work stating:

A lot of the times it's work related. And literally, I'll be there from, like, 8am till you know sometimes 830 at night. And so that's a huge influencer for me is my job. And that makes me feel like I'm not being a good parent a lot of the time.

### ***Feelings of Guilt and Shame***

Feelings of guilt and shame came up in multiple questions, most often as a follow up question to whether mothers felt that they satisfied their own standard of a “good mother”, and if they experienced guilt and shame if they felt they did not. P1 said:

I definitely do have anxiety and depression they're thinking that I might have bipolar disorder and so when I'm you know having a rough mental health day I do

have a lot less patience than I would like to have and then at night that's usually the nights when I let her sleep in the bed with me because I feel bad and the only thing I can do is tell her I'm sorry I shouldn't have yelled at you.

In response to the follow up question of whether she felt guilt or shame in comparison to the exemplars in the media, P2 stated:

Yes, constantly. There is anxiety that didn't really show itself until within the last year and I mean the pandemic didn't help that but so anxiety is there and the feeling of being incapable of keeping up with the personal demands of being a mother and also the household all that all of these things so that there's definitely stress.

P3 discussed the stress she felt because of not being able to bond with her second child as she stated:

The first three months of her life we just did not bond and that's always kind of felt like the little bit of a stain.. she won't really remember it I don't think, I don't think unless it's somewhere deep, deep inside of her mind I don't think she'll remember it, but I will and that's been hard.

P4 discussed her feelings of stress and anxiety in relation to perceived societal judgment as she stated:

But there's a lot of guilt that goes with that you know there's a constant struggle and pull and sometimes you have to you know I find I have to justify myself you know even to some of my own friends you know I have to justify myself that you know no I'm going to do this for me you know no he's not going to do blank

because I need that time for me and he's OK not to do whatever activity this is because I'm not going to become the Wallace show for the next 10 years that's not my life that's not who I am nor should he have that kind of life I don't want him scheduled 24/7.

When P5 was asked as a follow up on the “good mother” construct she noted availability was key to which I followed up and asked for clarification and it this resulted in guilt or anxiety which she stated:

Yeah, honestly the problem probably the only part is not spending more time with them like just sitting and spending time and like being with them but everything else yeah, I think it's just that part that I feel bad about... I had Catholic guilt too so that's probably a thing...: When everything you do is wrong, and you just have to do it you can't even be late like ask for forgiveness for everything like you need to be perfect or like you're going to hell.

P6 discussed anxiety because of her comparing her timeline and experiences to other others who are friends, stating:

Yeah, I mean with these you know with these college friends, they're so awesome and supportive and yet, basically the whole time that I've been friends with them I've always been either the last or one of the last to experience you know milestones whether it was getting a job after graduation getting married now having kids I've always been, I've always watched them reach these, you know milestones that everybody looks forward to buying house, things like that. And so of course, we're supportive of each other and no one's flaunting anything or

bragging you were genuinely happy for each other and yet there is that internal like twinge of like, when's it going to be my turn. When am I going to be able to experience, am I going to be able to experience this at all? And it really just comes down to that feeling of comparison and reminding yourself like just because that's that person's story doesn't have to be mine it might not be mine so I shouldn't be focusing so much on trying to match up and just live my own life but that's something I think a lot of people struggle with.

P8 discussed feeling of guilt and shame in a follow up question to her discussion of her child's earlier years and her focus on her career to which she stated she has since apologized for to manage feelings of guilt stating "I've apologized like I'll randomly come up with something and I'll say to one of the boys. I'm so sorry if I was mean to you at this time..."

P9 discussed feelings of guilt and shame at her inability to breast feed, stating:

I did feel kind of like a failure when I wasn't able to breastfeed my children as well. It's not easy. Just what they mean by failure, that's an interesting word. Because I know that that breast is best, but babies need to eat, you know, and my body just wasn't doing what I needed. It wasn't performing how I needed it to perform for my babies and where did they both got.

P10 discussed feelings of guilt and shame related to her occupation and lack of time stating:

...feeling like you're devoting more time to your profession versus your child, especially when they're younger, you know, day care issues, you know, that was a



huge one for me, when he was younger, you know, so you need to, you know. I guess it's that that age old conversation you have, you know, are you choosing your profession. Being a career mom versus stay-at-home mom that you know age old conversation, people have finding that balance, you have both. Can you do both?

### **Summary and Transition**

Within this chapter, I have provided findings for this study. This qualitative study was intended to capture in-depth data on the subjective conceptualization of the maternal identity of mothers with high maternal identity centrality to identify variable trends in maternal behavior. The research question for this study was: How do modern-day mothers with high identity centrality conceptualize the maternal identity? To answer this question, I interviewed 10 participants who were selected through purposeful sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data with 15 questions originally designed by me for the interviews. Throughout the interview process, the semi-structured format allowed for expanding on details and provided for follow up questions for clarification when needed. Interviews were conducted through the Zoom platform privately, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Interviews were transcribed then verified through the member-checking process. Upon completion of the interview and member checking process I began coding manually, resulting in three common themes and twelve subthemes. The common themes and subthemes were identified as follows: (A)maternal identity formation influenced by environment, (a) spiritual influence, (b) mothers influence, (c) extended family influence, (d) peer influence; (B)media does not accurately

represent mothers, (a) media moms are white, middle class, (b) fathers are not as capable, (c) younger mothers are more self-focused, older mothers waiting to have children, (d) minorities are not represented; (C) the good mother, (a) patience, (b) unconditional love and support, (c) time, (d) feelings of guilt and shame.

The participants in this study identified various sources that informed their maternal identity from the environment to include family, friends, spiritual, and the media. Participants identified a bias in the presentation of the good mother in media, most agreeing the good mother was portrayed as white, middle class and having ample resources. Participants did not see minorities to be accurately represented, if at all. Participants also identified the maternal role as significantly connected to the success of the child, where exemplars of fathers were satirical in media, suggesting that fathers were less capable than mothers at managing children and insuring the child's long-term success. Participants perceived younger generations of mothers to be more self-focused and older generations of mothers to be waiting longer to have children to have their career. Participants admitted to struggling with feelings of guilt and shame for various reasons, each of which were connected to not feeling as if they were meeting their conceptualized standard of a good mother. Participants identified characteristics of successful mothering as exemplified by the good mother model to be patience, time with the children, and unconditional love and support. However, each of the mothers struggled to meet these characteristics consistently, many of which they related back to influencing feelings of guilt and shame.

Participants were able to describe their conceptualization of maternal identity and reference exemplars from their environments that informed their unique conceptualizations. Chapter 5 includes interpretations of findings as well as application of the SIT and SCT. Chapter 5 also includes a discussion of limitations, recommendations, and social implications of this study, followed by a conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand subjective conceptualization of maternal identity among mothers who have high maternal identity centrality. Maternal identity is unique in that women are biologically assigned the role of mother because of their physical ability to birth a child. As a result, the female identity is largely based on fulfillment of mothering potential. Mothers uniquely fulfill their maternal identity as evidenced by variable maternal behaviors. However, the good mother conceptualizes their maternal identity by following the intensive mothering ideology, which presupposes only the good mother views the maternal role as central to their identity. Moreover, cultural expectations reinforce this construct through mainstream media, such that good mothers follow similar behavioral, emotional, and physical patterns, with the child as the central focus (Hays, 1996). Mothers who deviate from behaviors consistent with the good mother prescription threaten their achievement of good mother status, resulting in many women experiencing negative psychological, physical, social, and behavioral consequences (Rizzo et al., 2012; Seymour-Smith et al., 2017; Van Mulken et al., 2016). There is a gap in literature involving variable maternal behaviors of mothers with high identity centrality. The research question for this study is:

*RQ1:* how do modern day mothers with high identity centrality conceptualize maternal identity?

To explore this gap in literature, the present study was designed to explore perspectives of individual participants who identified as having high maternal identity

centrality by examining their lived experience as mothers, followed by a comparative review of participant experiences to identify any common themes. This chapter includes an interpretation of findings of the study, as well as limitations, future research recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

This qualitative phenomenological study involved semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. From interviews, I was able to identify three common themes. The first common theme was that maternal identity formation was influenced by the environment, and participants identified the following environmental influences: spiritual influence, their own mother's influence, influence of extended family, and peer influence. The second common theme was that the media does not accurately represent mothers. Participants said media mothers tended to be White and middle class, while fathers are modeled as not capable, and minority mothers are not represented. Participants specifically acknowledged younger mothers are becoming more self-focused and older mothers are a growing group of mothers, as many women are waiting to have children. The third common theme was the good mother, whom participants identified as patient and having unconditional love and support and time. Participants stated they experienced feelings of guilt and shame for not meeting ideal standards of the good mother.

#### **Maternal Identity Formation Influenced by Environment**

One's environment has a significant influence on identity formation, wherein an individual learns from others around them who they identify with, associating with their ingroup and adopting behavioral attributes of the group (Goethals, 2007; Spears, 2011;

Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The individual identifies with the group, gaining a sense of self through positive distinctiveness in comparison to other groups, also known as outgroups (Spears, 2011). The individual learns through observation as they observe behaviors and models in their immediate surroundings (Bandura, 1986).

Mothers are a distinct group due to their sex and learned gender identity in the earliest years of life, as young girls are socialized to conform to gender roles (Abrams et al., 2016; Erden-Imamoglu, 2013; Walentynowicz-Moryl, 2020). Girls learn these roles through interacting with and observing those in their environment, and a significant influence is one's own mother, and then later one's peers and environments (Hogg, 2004; McLean & Jennings, 2012). Universally, young girls observe and learn a master narrative through models, typically the mother, which affirms the role of women as caregivers (Da Silva, 2014; McLean, 2020; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004; Schroeder et al., 2019). As such, an individual who identifies as a woman and possesses the female anatomy and is capable of birthing a child is more likely to associate motherhood with being a woman, as this is a culturally-established gender norm and universally taught association (David & Mykol, 2005; DeWitt et al., 2013; Grundetjern, 2018; Hays, 1996; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015; Russo, 1976). Therefore, women who identify as mothers, are part of an ingroup that share similar behaviors that distinguish them from non-mothers, which in this case would be the outgroup.

In this study, I focused on women who had high maternal identity centrality; thus, they strongly identify with the mother ingroup. Of primary significance in this study were influences in the environment that contributed to understanding and formation of

maternal identity. Participants identified four primary influences: spiritual influence, participants' own mothers as models, extended family influence, and peer influence.

Of the environmental influences that were described, one's own mother was recognized by nine of 10 participants. Where mothers differed from each other and previous research involving maternal influences was they were impacted differently by the influence of their own mothers. For example, two participants referenced their own mothers using such descriptors as absent, manipulative, and uninvolved. Other participants described their own mothers as positive maternal influences. Six of the 10 participants recognized spiritual influence, suggesting their own mothers reinforced significance not only maternal role and behaviors, but also spiritual values and religious ideals. Thus, cultural emphasis on gendered roles was established via spiritual factors in terms of Christian values that were taught by participants' mothers and reinforced through modeling and spiritually defined family rituals such as going to church, prayer, and devotion. The six participants who mentioned strong spiritual influence on their maternal identity also maintained that their values and understanding of family dynamics (in terms of the father as provider and mother as caretaker) were central to how they maintained their own families.

The third subtheme related to environmental influence was that of the extended family influence to which eight of the ten mothers stated they were influenced by other family members, six of which noted grandmothers and great grandmothers who modeled the more traditional maternal models where the mother worked from and tended to the home. Likewise, these same mothers who noted the influence of their grandmothers, also

noted the strong spiritual influence that their grandmothers emphasized, which further extends the reach of cultural influence passed on from generation to generation.

However, several of the mothers discussed witnessing the family sizes getting smaller, over the years, women in their families working more outside of the home from generation to generation, and feelings of not being as dedicated to the maternal identity as they perceived their grandmothers to be. Those that noted this change attributed it to expanding roles of women in society, where they perceived the exclusive role of women from earlier generations to be that of motherhood, where now women are working more outside the home and diversifying their responsibilities. When mothers discussed this, they compared their own mothering to earlier generations with guilt at their desires to expand their role, referencing earlier generations as superior mothers, but also taking great pride in their professional identity. This suggests women appear to feel pressure in two directions: the maternal identity and other. This emotional response coincides with the impact of the cultural emphasis on the intensive mothering ideology that negatively impacts mothers in that earlier generations modeled the selfless devotion to children, yet sociohistorical influences have extended the potential for women to expand their identity, not mothers.

The women in this current study discussed their own role models of motherhood to fit that of the intensive mothering ideology, expressing guilt and even shame of not consistently satisfying what they perceived to be that of a good mother in comparison to their role models. Yet, the mothers also stated they enjoyed the benefits of their own professional lives apart and separate from their children, as mothers with careers, and



mothers with hobbies and other interests that were more self-focused. In this sense, they referred to their role models as better mothers overall. This finding coincides with the second theoretical framework of the study, the self-categorization theory, developed by Turner, where in various contexts, various selves can exist while maintaining the larger self-identity (Spears, 2011). Women can identify as mothers as the participants of this study acknowledge high maternal identity centrality, while differentiating maternal behaviors in different contexts such as mother in the home, mother at work, etc. based on the salience of the maternal identity. However, what was found in this study is that women experience guilt and shame often because their most significant role models demonstrated behaviors consistent with the intensive mothering ideology, yet as individuals they sought to expand their identity, and are encouraged to do so as women, but not necessarily as mothers.

Given the changes and consequent expansion of the roles of women in society, the mothers in this study, each of which holds a job outside of the home as well as raises the children, demonstrate high maternal identity centrality. Yet, they demonstrate variable maternal behaviors based on the context and struggle to acknowledge their consistent success as a good mother due to a lack of contemporary exemplars that realistically model behaviors consistent with good mothering and the modern woman who is more independent and self-focused. The emotional responses by participants at the questioning of their success as good mothers provides rich insight into this very visible struggle, where mothering is central to her identity, but she also seeks to benefit from the modern conceptualization of women's role in society, beyond motherhood, expressing her unique

talents and goals as an individual. Five of the ten mothers directly stated they perceived media to encourage mothers to be more independent but at the expense of her achievement of “good mother” whereas media appeared to have many exemplars of successful, independent women, not associated with the maternal identity.

Based on the SCT (Brown, 2020; Irina & Lyudila, 2020; Spears, 2011), the salience of her maternal identity is less prevalent at work, or at the gym, etc., but this does not also compromise her commitment or maternal ability, it only emphasizes her desire to expand her identity, developing and focusing on her individual interests apart from her maternal identity which modern exemplars of woman, not mothers, are encouraged to do. Yet these women all experience guilt and shame when they compare themselves (their maternal selves) to their maternal role models which is believed to be so because mothers have limited models of everyday successful, professional, independent mothers in contemporary media.

The final subcategory of environmental influences is that of the peer influence in which four of the ten mothers stated they were influenced by peers. Of particular interest here is the role of social media as women have begun to find friend networks online that provide support, answering maternal questions, and reference for failing or successful approaches to mothering. For those who acknowledged this influence, they appeared to have a space that they could openly and honestly approach their maternal identity with some degree of anonymity that offered a sense of community and similarity, as they identified they could address struggles, insecurities, and concerns about mothering.

Five of the other mothers saw the virtual maternal communities as less

representative of what they believed to be optimal mothering, and more of a separation from the intensive mothering ideologies, of which they resented. Participants expressed appreciation for the changing role of women in society, expressed stress and anxiety over their own maternal identity as they too were engaging in more contemporary approaches to mothering such as working outside the home and expanding their roles, yet were frustrated, and some even offended by the women who publicly (via social media) were more self-focused or woman who were openly acknowledging they were not interested in becoming mothers. Based on the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1969; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this may be due to the social comparison, where the ingroup (mothers in this case), compare themselves to non-mothers or bad mothers (the outgroup) to maintain positive distinctiveness, thus validating their own sense as a good mother.

Because so much of the gender norms taught to women suggest that motherhood is directly tied to being a woman (Hays, 1996; Ross, 2016; Russo, 1976), and the intensive mothering ideology emphasizes good mothers engage selfless devotion to motherhood (Chae, 2015; Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2014), other women who publicly choose not to be mothers, or mothers who publicly present behaviors that are non-maternal, are looked down upon and blamed for the evolution of the more self-involved mother, also known as the bad mother and the non-mother (Hays, 1996; Newman & Henderson, 2014; Norris et al., 2011).

### **Media Lack of Accurate Representation of Mothers**

Seven out of 10 participants in the current study stated that media does not accurately represent mothers, with the majority noting they would like to see a more

diversified approach to the maternal identity. Specifically, mothers in the current study indicated they felt the struggles of motherhood were not accurately portrayed in the media, resulting in many women feeling as though they were not a good mother all the time, but they felt the pressure to achieve such status. Additionally, mothers in the current study noted a strong focus on white, middle-class exemplars, with minimal minority representation in the good mother model. Each of the mothers indicated a desire to be a good mother and each stated they measured their success in this role by way of the success of the child in various ways, to include such characteristics of the child as independence, respect, and honesty. In discussion of the impact of media, each of the mothers acknowledged a strong bias in the media that ultimately it was the mother who was charged with the success of the child, thus the pressure to meet the needs of the child was part of her fulfillment of her role as mother. These messages were identified to be exemplified in various media influences to include religious, commercial, film and social media.

Review of current research on media and mothers provides a long timeline of maternal exemplars confirming both the prevalence of the intensive mothering ideology prescribing patterns of behavior to that of the good mother, contrasted with newer maternal model's representative of a deviation from the traditional "good mother" construct exemplifying a new construct of bad mother. In the more traditional models found among religious icons, the Hebrew Bible credits the mother as central to the birth of Israel, connecting mothers to the success of the state (Bergmann, 2020) and in the Christian and Muslim faiths, the Virgin Mary (Maryam in Islam) is the iconic maternal

figure of reference (Oh, 2010; Salih, 2017). These exemplars are suggestive of the intensive mothering ideology and that of the good mother construct in that she is consumed with the success of the child, selflessly engaged in the needs of the child first. Evidence of such religious icons impacting the maternal role were confirmed in my current study as six of the ten mothers stated such exemplars as impactful in their own conceptualization of the maternal role.

Current literature on media and print targeting younger audiences specifically suggests gender norms and expectations are prevalent in children's books, predominantly featuring women as caretakers and homemakers (Cready & Seward, 2013; David & Mykol, 2002). In children's films, women are portrayed as mothers and wives in comparison to men often portrayed as single (Smith et al., 2010). Mothers from the current study also confirmed the existence of such exemplars in media targeting children recognizing a prevalence of gender norms wherein the mother is portrayed as the caretaker of the home.

Research on television and models of maternal identity reveal that mother characters are most often white, middle class, often depicted as the caretaker of the home and family, passive and do not often directly face the camera, in comparison to non-mother characters portrayed as self-indulgent, and hypersexualized (de Laat & Bowman, 2016; Furnham & Lay, 2019). This in comparison to findings from the current study, 9 out of the 10 mothers interviewed stated they observed men predominantly portrayed in media as less capable in comparison to mothers, and seven out of ten mothers stated the most common exemplar of a mother is white, upper middle class.

Research focused on minorities suggests this group has historically been portrayed in media as poor, having many children, drug using, uneducated and single (Springer, 2010; Kelly, 2010). In the current study, most mothers did not acknowledge such extreme exemplars in the media, as only three stated they observed negative minority maternal exemplars in the media, however, an overwhelming majority (9/10) of the mother's stated media mothers were predominantly white, upper middle class, thus suggesting a significant underrepresentation of minorities as the good mother.

Research of the media portrayal of the bad mother image suggests there is a growing trend in this model and challenge to the traditional maternal construct as more television mothers display non-maternal behaviors that do not align with the good mother image, such as excessive drinking, partying, and self-indulgent behavior. However, this attempt in media to defy the good mother continues to be exemplified predominantly by white, middle-class mothers and more satirical in nature (Littler, 2020). Mothers in the current study acknowledged such characters in contemporary shows and films, confirming that the bad mothers depicted in film were still often white, middle-class women whose behavior was seemingly more forgivable as they often had ample resources to care for the children.

Mothers in the current study also referenced social media as a factor of influence, with four stating they found media exemplars to be accurate, and three stating they were inaccurate, both noting women seek social media for advice, support, and exemplars. However importantly, all mothers noted that social media consumption by younger generations promoted a self-indulgent approach to mothering, as younger women appear

to be more consumed with vanity than mothering and there appears to be a growing population of older mothers, now waiting to have children until after they have established themselves professionally and independently. This trend has been found in current research as Mills et al. (2015) interviewed older women who reported wanting to wait for the right time to have a child, after career and the establishment of stability, and an increase in women now freezing their eggs early in anticipation of pregnancy later in life (Baldwin, 2017). This finding was unexpected as there was no data specific to the influence of social media on the maternal identity, and many of the mothers were quite disturbed by the younger generations self-focused perspective and move away from the child focused maternal identity, as well as older mothers who challenged the traditional family construct by choosing to birth children alternatively and alone.

The SIT as Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed individuals will attempt to maintain a positive sense of self via a positive social identity if they perceive themselves as members of a negatively distinctive group, in this case, if the mothers perceive themselves to be associated with the bad mothers by way of her behaviors. To achieve this, Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest the individual is more likely to do one of three identity maintenance strategies: they will dissociate themselves from the group, attempt to change the status of the group, or creatively reinterpret the dimensions which the group is compared. Research supports each of these strategies such that the objective of positive distinctiveness is critical to the self-concept (Akfirat et al., 2016; Chonody & Teeter, 2016; Hajek, 2016; Jackson et al., 1996). However, research on SIT suggests not only that these strategies are utilized to maintain positive distinctiveness, but that

predictions of behavior and which strategies the individual will employ in response to challenges to the self-concept are most accurate when identity centrality is high (Best et al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2017).

Mothers are unlikely to dissociate themselves from the group due to the significance of motherhood to the female identity and changing the status of the group is also unlikely as mothers in this study showed a clear desire to want to be identified as a good mother as well as having high maternal identity centrality. Leaving the most logical identity maintenance strategy to be that of creatively reinterpreting the dimensions of the group to which mothers in the current study seem to acknowledge a definite separation to that of “younger” mothers, or “younger” women by way of generational distinctions. This is similar to the research of Akfirat et al. (2016) who explored identity maintenance strategies of individuals in poverty, finding that when the individual perceives the ingroup boundaries are impermeable, they are more likely to engage in creative strategies such as comparison to others who are also poor, finding distinguishing factors that separate members within the group.

The concept of successful women as mothers modeled in media is apparent when reviewing experiences of political mothers, as the struggle to do both (mother and politician) poses a challenge to both their maternal role, but also their professional role. Research on successful mothers in the political realm such as Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin suggests the existence of a double bind as these women are charged with having to demonstrate they can be successful in both the public and private sphere as politician and mother, if they are to gain voter support (Kohlman et al., 2013; Teele et al., 2018).



Mothers in the current study acknowledged their own struggles to do both, noting that such role models demonstrated how it could be done, but that success in both realms required resources that only wealthier mothers could afford. Likewise, celebrity mothers such as Kim and Chloe Kardashian and Jennifer Lopez demonstrate similar success in both spheres, yet they all have access to financial resources that many non- celebrity mothers do not, thus can be perceived as the good mother but the average mother struggles to achieve the same success.

### **The Good Mother**

The good mother is identified as the mother who holds the child as her primary focus, aligning with the intensive mothering ideology, is self-sacrificing and charged with the success of the child. Each of the mothers in this study expressed a clear and direct interest in being a good mother, but each also expressed insecurity, guilt, and shame in not achieving what they perceived to be good mother status consistently. During discussions of subjective interpretations of characteristics of a good mother, the following subthemes emerged: patience and provides unconditional love and support. Nine out of 10 participants expressed patience as a primary factor in good mothering, and eight participants stated a good mother provides unconditional love and support. These characteristics support the selfless devotion to mothering that adhere to the intensive mothering ideology and are associated with the ingroup.

In review of some of the most highly regarded universal maternal role models, religious models most clearly exemplify such behaviors to which six of the ten mothers in this study acknowledge as highly impactful in informing their own conceptualization of

motherhood. Similarly, the same mothers who saw these behaviors modeled in religious models, noted their grandmothers demonstrated the same behaviors, and emphasized a strong spiritual influence in the home, to which this would help to explain how behaviors are learned through environment.

The third subtheme associated with the good mother is the issue of time for seven of the ten mothers, in which the question that prompted the issue of time was regarding what participants found to be the most challenging aspect of motherhood. As each of the mothers discussed this issue, the time constraint of meeting the demands of multiple roles, complicated her ability to be patient, and able to provide unconditional love and support, which evoked emotional responses in several of the mothers. As the role of women has expanded from previous generations, women have seemingly less time, yet the pressure to be a good mother remains, to which she is faced with how to manage time constraints.

Despite multiple women in the study having a husband to potentially lean on, each of them felt more confident in her own ability to meet the needs of the child. Interestingly, exemplars of paternal models in media are limited, and those that are present are satirical suggesting men are less capable of managing the success of children in comparison to women (Cready & Seward, 2013; David & Mykol, 2002; Smith et al., 2010). This is confirmed by mothers in this study in which nine out of the ten participants stated they did perceive paternal media models as less capable, often as overwhelmed by the caretaking of the children. Thus, this struggle for time, despite having a partner presents an interesting question as to whether fathers really are less

capable, or if mothers perceive them to be less capable based on environmental influences. Regardless, mothers in this study appreciated the benefits of the expanding role of women, enjoying their professional lives, yet expressing a powerful emotional response to whether she perceived herself consistently as a good mother.

This leads to the fourth subtheme of guilt and shame which emerged when mothers were asked if they felt they satisfied their own standard of good mother. Based on the SIT, mothers' identification as a good mother is connected to the characteristics they associate with the in-group, in this case the "good" mother group to which characteristics of patience, unconditional love and support and no time constraints distinguish this group. Those who align their behavior with the perceived traits and behaviors of good mothering would likely see themselves as good mothers and part of the ingroup. This identification is important to the self-identity as Tajfel emphasized that group affiliation is critical in identity maintenance and a positive self-identity through positively distinguishing themselves from bad mother groups/individuals (Spears, 2011). This would suggest that mothers who see themselves as part of the good mother group consistently would be less likely to experience guilt and shame.

Evidence of the desire to distance oneself from the bad mother image was visible in the current study as several of the mothers were frustrated and some even offended by mothers who blatantly disregarded the intensive mothering ideology. This coincides with the general underlying assumption of SIT in which an individual will strive to maintain a positive sense of self through maintaining a positive social identity and engaging in maintenance strategies when they are not able to leave or dissociate from the group

(Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this case, the strategy used by mothers was to reinterpret the dimensions which the group is compared by referring to generational distinctions in mothers.

However, most participant mothers expressed guilt and shame, despite efforts to reinterpret the groups which would suggest that such maintenance strategies are not sufficient in application to the maternal identity consistently. Importantly, mothers expressed the feelings of guilt and shame were not consistent, in which feelings of guilt and shame were most apparent when they were around their children, whereas at work or away from the home and family, mothers did not acknowledge such feelings. This would support the SCT in which the self is composed of multiple selves, that dependent upon the context, become salient (Spears, 2011).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of this study are related to the ability to generalize findings to other maternal populations and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the sample size consisted of 10 mothers, which given the qualitative approach to data collection as well as a transcendental phenomenological approach, coincided with the recommended sample size of 3-10 participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I chose to recruit 10 participants to reach saturation, the point at which participants insights and data begin to overlap (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rubin & Rubin 2005). In the recruiting of participants, I originally wanted to use Facebook invites to maternal groups exclusively, however due to low response rates, I ultimately had to ask mothers who had responded, to invite mothers they were friends with on Facebook, thus incorporating snowball sampling. This presents

a limitation to the study because the population of mothers was homogenous in that these were more connected networks, sharing more similar traits than I had intended such as income, race, and marital status. However, despite the mothers recruited being friends on Facebook, they did not directly interact because I asked mothers to simply repost the flyer as opposed to directly ask other mothers, and those that were recruited were kept anonymous. Still, because of the lack of diversity between the mothers recruited, this poses a limitation to generalizability to other populations. Likewise, because all mothers were residents of Virginia, this also limits the generalizability of findings because of the variable conditions in other locations that could potentially impact responses.

Secondly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this presented an issue of access as I was not able to hold face to face interviews for the protection of myself and the participants health. This restriction required that participants have virtual access and the technical capability to support a virtual interview which eliminated potential candidates who did not possess such access. Additionally, because of the financial and social impact of the pandemic, this likely presented emotional and psychological stressors that could have impacted the conceptualization of the maternal identity as post pandemic research suggested increases in anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms globally (Brown et al., 2020; Peltz et al., 2020).

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of this research study was to explore the subjective conceptualization of the maternal identity among mothers who identify as having high maternal identity centrality to better understand the variable trends in maternal behavior. Previous research

and the findings of the current study suggest mothers do not identify in the same way nor do they display similar maternal behaviors (McGannon et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2015; Gaunt & Scott, 2017), yet they are observed and judged on their maternal behavior based on socially established expectations as mothers (Chae, 2014; Henderson et al., 2016; McGannon et al., 2015). Consequently, many mothers experience social and psychological consequences when their maternal behavior is inconsistent with maternal models (Arnold-Baker, 2015; Fouquier, 2011; Grundetjern, 2018).

The findings of the current study confirmed previous research in that mothers are informed and heavily influenced by maternal models from their immediate environment in their early years as they are socialized to understand gender roles (Abrams et al., 2016; Erden- Imamoglu, 2013; Walentynowicz- Moryl, 2020). Mothers are informed by media exemplars to include religious icons (Bergmann, 2020; Oh, 2010; Salih, 2017), as well as print, television, film, and internet sources (Chae, 2015; Cready & Seward, 2013; O'reilly, 2014; Smith et al., 2010; Grundetjern, 2018). This would suggest that maternal behavior is socially established to which a good mother would align her behavior with the social constructs of mothering behavior.

The majority of mothers in the current study confirmed the struggle women feel to consistently engage in the socially established maternal behavior meets the good mother construct, resulting in feelings of guilt and shame. Many of the mothers felt the desire to satisfy personal goals such as career, physical fitness, and more time for themselves, but also felt that in doing so compromised their maternal obligations and ultimately, consistently feeling as though they were a good mother.

Findings from the current study also suggest that maternal models in media do not appear to support the complexity of both motherhood and womanhood. Instead, media appears to suggest that women who are not mothers are encouraged to benefit from the expanded role of women in society, while mothers must maintain their primary focus on her role as mother.

A recommendation for future research would be to explore the paternal role in media, as the current study indicates exemplars in media are satirical in nature, suggesting that fathers are not as capable or qualified as mothers to manage the caretaking of children. Exploration of the conceptualization of the paternal role on both the social and individual level would be meaningful to extend understanding of the extent to which media influences fathers and the development of gender roles from the male perspective. Because mothers in the current study indicated they felt the success of the children was her primary responsibility and functioned as a measure of her success as a good mother, research on the paternal role could inform media models on the changing role of fathers in society thus potentially relieving mothers of the perceived primary responsibility of ensuring the success of the children.

A second recommendation for future research is to explore the maternal identity of mothers specifically by age. For example, many of the mothers in the current study expressed frustration at the perceived change in focus on younger mothers, where they felt younger mothers were more self-focused, in comparison to older generations of mothers. Likewise, research on older generations of mothers who chose to pursue alternative methods of conception such as freezing her eggs and intentionally conceiving

children as a single parent may shed more light on the evolving conceptualization of motherhood because of sociohistorical changes and technology.

A third recommendation is to explore the impact of social media on the maternal identity as the current study revealed mothers use social media for multiple reasons, to include relating to and learning from other mothers in social media forums. What is not well understood however, is to what extent mothers find this beneficial or more damaging as several mothers in the current study suggested they found the consistent posting of specifically younger mothers was not perceived to be realistic of the true struggles of motherhood.

Finally, recommendations for research comparing the conceptualization of the maternal identity among mothers who identify with high identity centrality from multiple cultural and socioeconomic statuses would provide rich insight into whether the findings of the current study transcend cultural and socioeconomic boundaries.

### **Implications**

The findings of the current study provide rich insight into the influences that inform the conceptualization of the maternal identity, to include the impact of media (religion, film, television, print and social media), and environment (immediate and extended family, friends, and culture). Women learn from these influences what it means to be a “good” mother as the behaviors are modeled and reinforced, where those mothers that are exemplary as the good mother, are those that have time, patience, and selfless devotion to the child.



Theoretical implications are such that based on the SIT, women develop a positive sense of self based on identification with the ingroup to which they identify and learn the behaviors that are consistent with that group, in this case the mother group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As the mother group is idealized as good mothers based on the behavior expected of mothers culturally and that this is an unchangeable group, the assumption of SIT suggests mothers will strive to see themselves as a good mother to maintain a positive sense of self through maintaining a positive social identity. To do so, she is likely to engage in maintenance strategies because she is not able to leave or dissociate from the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Women in the current study demonstrated maintenance strategies consistent with SIT in which they appeared to reinterpret the dimensions of the group, referring to generational distinctions in mothers. Likewise, based on the SCT, mothers in the current study demonstrated variable salience of the maternal identity (Spears, 2011), in which they expressed feelings of guilt and shame most often because of direct contact with the child or home, whereas they disconnected to an extent, and did not appear to experience such feelings when away from the home, most often in her workspace. Many of the mothers stating that their work was extremely important to them, and they experienced great satisfaction personally through their career. Still, each of the mothers of this study indicated to some extent, feelings of shame and guilt for not consistently engaging such characteristics, which aligns with the research findings that mothers often feel incompetent, and struggle with social and psychological consequences when they do not

adhere to the intensive mothering ideology (Arnold-Baker, 2015; Fouquier, 2011; Henderson et al., 2016).

These findings suggest that mothers struggle to negotiate the changing role of women in society as she has expanded her role in both the private and public sphere, appreciates the ability to do so, yet is relegated to reconciling that with the cultural expectation that the mother is the primary responsible party for securing the success of the child/children. Despite the expanded role of women in society, the role of mothers does not appear to have evolved in the same way nor with the same consideration, acknowledging that as a mother, she can have diverse maternal behaviors that do not compromise her ability to be a good mother. This is reinforced in media as both the maternal and paternal exemplars appear to clearly emphasize caretaking is the sole responsibility of the mother, and that her success as a mother is contingent on her selfless devotion to the child. Thus, while the salience of the maternal identity may change, particularly in the workspace and offer some relief to the feelings of guilt and shame, she still experiences such feelings consistently, measuring her success as good mother based on the exemplars in her environment.

The implications of this study and consequent findings are such that the impact of media is significant in influencing the conceptualization of self and identity as mothers in the current study identified changing trends of the maternal identity in their own families to align with changing trends in society. This was evidenced through generational changes in the occupations of grandmothers and mothers of participants, as well as family sizes, where earlier generations of mothers did not work, and their sole occupation was to

tend to the home and raise the children. Mothers in the current study all worked outside of the home and none of them had more than two children. This changing role is reflected in media about the role of women, but not the role of mothers, where the current study suggests women feel the desire to expand their role as women, working outside the home and taking on more diverse responsibilities and interests outside of her familial obligations, but do not have accurate exemplars in media that support such expansion as mothers. Thus, there is a strong need for a diverse interpretation of the maternal identity in media as it is through the media that the individual refers to exemplars and models that can ultimately influence the social expectations of mothers and what it means to be a good mother.

### **Conclusion**

The narrative offered by the mothers of this study provides rich insight into the conceptualization of the maternal identity among women who identify strongly as mothers, yet they also struggle to feel as though they are good mothers consistently. To date, this is the first study to explore the subjective conceptualization of the maternal identity among mothers who identify as having high maternal identity centrality. To which this study fills a gap in the literature as to how mothers whose primary role is that of mother, and what has informed her conceptualization of that role.

Through the lens of the SIT , mothers in this study provide evidence for the impact of group influence on the formation of identity and self-concept as they engage in a comparative process with other mothers, desiring to view themselves as good mothers, and engaging in maintenance strategies to distance themselves from mothers who

blatantly display behaviors that do not coincide with the selfless behaviors situated by the intensive mothering ideology, and that which is maintained through media exemplars of the good mother.

Mothers in the current study also show variable levels of abstraction, consistent with the SCT in that they experience feelings of guilt and shame for not consistently adhering to the intensive mothering ideologies but appreciate the ability to pursue personal endeavors such as advancing their careers. However, this is an evolution of the female role in society, not the maternal role. The feelings of inadequacy as mothers, despite their devotion to their children and high maternal identity centrality, is strongly influenced by the social expectation and pressure on women to surrender her identity to motherhood exclusively, which is taught at a young age as an extension of her femininity and obligation as a woman (Hays, 1996). Whereas women who do not strongly identify as mothers and align their behavior as mothers with the selfless devotion modeled by exemplars in multiple media platforms to include religious, television, film and print, results in social and psychological consequences for her (Rizzo et al., 2012; Seymore-Smith et al., 2017; Van Mulken et al., 2016).

Because many women become mothers, and because there is rich evidence for the powerful influence on media in maintaining cultural and societal expectations, media producers and researchers can use the results of this study to explore the development of the complex role of mothers, and to intentionally portray more accurately, diverse exemplars for future generations of mothers to refer to whereby alleviating the social and psychological consequences mothers are likely to experience.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How would you describe motherhood?
2. What informed your understanding of motherhood? Influences, role models, media, culture, etc.
3. Can you give me some media examples that come to mind?
4. How would you describe the media portrayal of motherhood (to include film, commercial, music, social media)?
5. Do you find exemplars in media to be accurate representations of motherhood?
6. How do you see yourself in relation to these media examples?
7. Do you think these media examples impact other mothers? Younger, older, middle aged, race?
8. What does it mean to be a “good mother”?
9. Do you believe that you meet the standard of your definition of a “good mother”?
10. What influences your satisfaction with the maternal role?
11. What influences the quality of your maternal role?
12. What identities/roles do you have outside of motherhood?
13. Are there any times where your maternal role is more/less significant in the choices that you make?
14. Is there a point in the future you believe your maternal role will be more or less significant in the choices that you make?
15. What do you find are the most challenging aspects of motherhood?

## Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

**Demographic Questionnaire: Examining the Maternal Identity of Modern-Day Mothers with High Identity Centrality**

1. What is your age?

Under 18

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65+

2. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

Married

Widowed

Divorced

Separated

In a domestic partnership or civil union

Single, but cohabiting with a significant other

Single, never married

3. Are you currently pregnant?

Yes

No

4. What is the last grade of school you completed?

Did not complete high school

High school or G.E.D.

Associate degree

Some college

College graduate

Post graduate degree

5. How many children are you parent or guardian for and live in your household (aged 17 or younger only)?

None

1

2

3

4

More than 4

6. In what city do you live?

7. What is your approximate average household income?

\$0-\$24,999

\$25,000-\$49,999

\$50,000-\$74,999

\$75,000-\$99,999

\$100,000-\$124,999

\$125,000-\$149,999

\$150,000-\$174,999

\$175,000-\$199,999

\$200,000 and up

8. Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

Sales and Related Occupations

Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations

Business and Financial Operations Occupations

Personal Care and Service Occupations

Stay at home parent

Healthcare Occupations

Education, Training, and Library Occupations

Office and Administrative Support Occupations

None of the above

9. Who, if anyone, currently lives with you in your household? Please include permanent residents only. (Please select all that apply.)

Child

Grandchild

Parent

Grandparent

Roommate / Friend

Romantic partner (spouse, partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, etc.)

None of the above

10. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian / Pacific Islander

Black or African American

Hispanic

White / Caucasian

Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)

11. In a typical week, how many days do you exercise?

I don't regularly exercise

Once a week

2 to 4 days a week

5 to 7 days a week

12. During the last week, how many hours did you spend engaging in activities that were exclusively for your own needs/interests?

13. Using any number from 0 to 10, where 0 is not important and 10 is the most important, how would you define your maternal role?

14. Are you able to read, write and speak fluent English?

Yes

No

15. Do you have consistent internet access and a reliable device such as a smart phone, tablet or laptop?

Yes

No

16. Does your device have a functional camera for live video option?

Yes

No

17. Do you have an active Facebook account?

Yes

No

18. Are you an active member of a Facebook network community of mothers?

Yes

No

## Appendix C: Social Media Post Invitation

Attention mothers! Letter of Invitation to participate in Research Study

**Invitation:** You are invited to participate in a current study on motherhood. This study is being conducted by Kimberly Anderson (Lewis), who is currently a doctoral student at Walden University. The purpose of this study is to explore how women think about motherhood by examining the unique experience of motherhood among existing mothers.

I am looking for 10 mothers to engage in a live, virtual interview via Zoom to share their experience. Mothers selected will be those who have given birth to a child and are currently responsible for or have previously, actively engaged in the care of a child and live in Virginia. Additionally, mothers selected for this study will be over the age of 18, be able to read, write and speak fluent English, have consistent internet access and a reliably functional device such as laptop, tablet or smartphone with a functional camera for live video option, have an active Facebook account, and are an active member of a Facebook community network of mothers.

If this is something you are interested in, the first step will be to contact me via email, and you will then be sent the informed consent form and link to a demographic survey. Once the informed consent form is reviewed, if you would like to continue, please complete the demographic survey. 10 mothers will then be randomly selected and contacted to schedule the virtual interviews. Mothers selected to participate in the study will have a total time commitment of approximately 2 hours that will include 45-60 minutes for the interview, 10-20 minutes for the initial demographic questionnaire and 10-30 minutes for email response regarding follow up and review of the interview for accuracy. Additionally, please know that I recognize your time is valuable to which mothers who are selected to participate in the live interviews will be compensated with a \$10 Amazon gift card send via email.

If you have any questions, feel free to email me.