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A Phenomenological Study of Millennial Mothers' Decisions Regarding Childcare Choices

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Abstract

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MPS, Manhattanville College, 2005

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

In the United States, over 10 million children under the age of 5, including half the infants and toddlers, spend time in the care of someone other than their parents. Changes in family roles and the need for dual-earner households make childcare decisions important for middle class millennial mothers. Research addressing middle class millennial mothers' experiences in choosing childcare for their infants and toddlers and their adjustment to family changes is limited. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the lived experiences and decision-making processes of these mothers concerning childcare. The conceptual framework was informed by the theories of Bowlby, Bronfenbrenner, and Bandura. Interviews were conducted with 15 middle class mothers, who were 19 to 36 years old, who had a child between the ages of 6-18 months, and who had children in nonfamily care for at least 5 months. Participants from the northeastern states were recruited through social media. A combination of a priori and open coding was used to reveal emergent themes. Findings showed that the mothers balanced societal expectations and meeting their children's needs with self-gratification; also, additional financial resources were important to the participants. Emotional connections with caregivers and comfort level with the setting were the most influential elements in placement decisions. Each participant was content with her choice of childcare arrangement and confident that their children would benefit, both educationally and socioemotionally. These findings can inform early childhood practitioners of factors that contribute to mothers' decisions related to nonfamily childcare and can help educators provide millennial mothers with effective support and information systems.

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Dedication

The changes in the American family have driven me to learn more about the millennial generation and the need for both parents to work. I have never lost my focus and continued to drive myself to the end of this journey. I hope to impact millennial mothers and provide them with the support to strive as a working mother in this new generation of family life. To any student who has been doubted in their academics, this is proof what you can accomplish when you stay focused, and when you find your passion, anything is possible!

Acknowledgments

A big thank you to my committee members for providing me with wonderful insight and giving me the confidence to keep on going! Thank you to my parents for supporting this journey in every aspect and never doubting what I can accomplish.

To my husband, Andrew, you have been my rock and support system. No matter how many times I have excluded myself to do work, you never questioned it … for that; I love you and thank you for continuously supporting this great accomplishment!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Over the second half of the 20th century, family life in the United States changed dramatically (Young & Hinsley, 2012). The employment of women has increased, and the need for childcare outside of the home has surged. These trends have had a profound effect on the last group of children born in the 20th century, known as the millennial generation. The millennial generation in the United States faces rapidly changing family roles including work and family life, especially middle class millennial families. In the United States, the middle class represents about 45% of the American population and faces making childcare choices since both parents need to work (Flynn, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Current research has been dedicated to millennials in the workplace (Bianchi, 2011; Flynn, 2014; Ray, 2013), but there is minimal information about the mothers of this generation, specifically the middle class millennial mothers' lived experience in choosing childcare for their infants and toddlers. Millennial mothers can be defined as mothers born between the years 1980 and 2002 (Insch, Heames, & McIntyre, 2010; Kwok, 2013; Ray, 2013). Members of this generation are known for distinctive traits such as a high-degree of self-involvement, child-centric attitudes, high esteem for their abilities, and large emphasis on success in the workplace. Millennials have a desire for immediate gratification and impulsivity related to work, and a millennial view of the American Dream is family and a successful career. Millennials have lifelong familiarity with communications, media, and digital technologies. They have strong personal points of views and particular attitudes towards work and relationships with

each other (Holt, Marques, & Way 2012; Insch et al., 2010; Kwok, 2013; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010; Ray, 2013).

Between 2003 and 2008, labor force participation of mothers with children under the age of 3 almost doubled, increasing from 34.3% to 59.6% (Cote, Geoffro, Tremblay, Borge, & Rutter, 2008; Swick & Williams, 2009). The most affected population of labor force participants are mothers with an infant/toddler under 18 months of age. Since the United States has one of the most restrictive maternity leave policies, middle class mothers are forced to go back to work 6 or 8 weeks after having a child, increasing infant or toddler care to 60% within middle class families (Chang, 2013; Im, Kim, & Sung, 2014; Moss, Mooney, O'Connell, & Statham, 2014; Vicedo, 2011). Researchers have documented that since WWII, middle class American women have entered the out-of-home labor force in greater numbers (Cooklin, Westrupp, Giallo, & Martin, 2014; Ray, 2013).

It was important that I focused on social class, in particular the middle class, since changes in the economy and family contexts have increasingly resulted in the need for both parents to work, even in the middle class (Berdahl. 2013; Stuart, O'Connor, Cramer, & McKim, 2010). Middle class mothers find themselves negotiating the high costs of childcare with their low wages. Many middle class works spend about 30% or more of their wages on childcare costs (Bianchi, 2011). Flynn (2014) found many issues facing working middle class mothers. The author found mothers are facing many issues when juggling work and a family. The mothers in the study felt there was a lack of information and understanding of publicly funded programs about early childhood

education or options for working mothers (Ray, 2013). Many parents—mothers and fathers alike—are spending longer hours than ever in the workplace, drastically reducing the time they have available to spend with their children.

Stuart et al. (2010) found it imperative to analyze the work-family policies in the United States and shift their focus to societal changes to assist working parents with achieving positive work-family balance. In this study, I sought to explore the knowledge base of early childhood educators to support middle class millennial mothers when deciding on childcare to determine the best options for their infants and toddlers and themselves as they adjust back to work. Howe and Strauss (2013) discussed the striking change in the labor market activity of mothers as demonstrated in Antecol (2015). The researchers reported that half of all women return to work by the time their child is 4 months old; many return even earlier after childbirth (Berdahl, 2013). This accounts for most of the women who return to work that first year. In addition, older, more educated women with higher wages are most likely to return to active work following the birth of a child. Nevertheless, working women across all occupations struggle with the allocation of work time versus family time, and working women are strongly influenced by family responsibilities. However, at the time of this study, there was limited research about the middle class population of millennial mothers and their adjustment to family changes. Most of the literature has focused on working women as whole, and if social class is considered, a majority of focus may be on low socioeconomic families with limited education (Bornstein, Cote, Haynes, & Hahn, 2010; Garavuso, 2009; Young & Hinsley, 2012).

My study adds to the knowledge base of exploring middle class millennial mothers' lived experiences in choosing the best environment for their infants and toddlers and examining their reflections about that choice once their infants and toddlers have been in childcare for at least 5 months. In previous studies, nonmaternal care (NMC) or family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care have been several of the options for mothers when deciding the type of care they select for their children (Cassano, Zeman, & Sanders, 2014; Vincent et al., 2010). In the current study, childcare choices of mothers of the millennial generation and their reflections on those choices were explored. Understanding the lived experiences of middle class millennial mothers will help childcare providers offer better continuity of care for infants, toddlers, and partnerships that are more effective with middle class millennial mothers. It may also add to the body of literature relating to parenting in the millennial generation in the workplace.

This study may lead to social change by advising early childhood educators about middle class millennial mothers' lived experiences in the decision making process and may help them connect more effectively with mothers about their infants' and toddlers' care. Enlightening early practitioners and educators about the factors that may add to a mother's decision to help understand the decision-making process from the mother's standpoint and hope to create effective home-center networks with middle class parents in the millennial generation. Based on an extensive review of the current literature, there is no empirical evidence or research specifically focused on middle class millennial mothers and their decision process of placing their infant or toddler in a childcare setting.

There is research on characteristics of millennials in the work force, which is included in Chapter 2 of this study.

Between 1975 and 2008, the percentage of mothers in the workforce with children under 3 has almost doubled from 34.3 to 59.6% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). However, this increase was the highest with mothers with children under 18 months. The rise in mothers in the workplace with very young children has led to a large body of research studying a mother's decision process when choosing the appropriate form of care for her child (Ng et al., 2010; Ray, 2013; Sihto, 2015). Research is needed on middle class millennial mothers as they enter the workforce and are faced with childcare decisions. Past researchers have focused on the effects of maternal employment on child development, mother-child relationships, and mothers' psychological well-being (Bradley, 2011; Hamman, 2010; Meunier et al., 2012). Few studies have specifically focused on the decision process when choosing care but do not consider the lived experience of the mother, particularly mothers of the millennial generation (Bianchi, 2011; Flynn, 2014; Garavuso, 2009). Most research on maternal decision making about childcare for their infants and toddlers has used questionnaires and surveys completed via telephone, neglecting the emotions of the experience of these mothers in making this challenging decision (Shpancer, Dunlap, Melick, & Spivery, 2009). I analyzed millennial mothers' lived experience deciding on the type of care for their children. With over 5 million children in childcare, there is a breach in research recognizing the reasons that may contribute to this decision (Flynn, 2014). Furthermore, current studies have addressed the importance of mother/child attachment (Feldman & Masalha, 2010;

Frolland, 2011; Liu, 2015; Morrissey, 2008). The caregiver becomes the third party

when the mother is at work. The mother will learn how to have positive self-regulation

to provide her infant or toddler with a positive attachment with the caregiver. This study

included an analysis of millennial mothers' perceptions about the decision process, based

on interviews conducted after their infant or toddler had been in the selected childcare

setting for at least 5 months.

In Chapter 1, I provide information about the topic of my study and its

significance, the problem to be addressed, the purpose of the study, research questions,

theoretical framework, an overview of key studies that will be reviewed in detail in

Chapter 2, and information about the study design and plan for analysis of data. The

potential significance of the study will also be discussed. Current research provides

insignificant evidence on why a middle class millennial mother may choose a certain

childcare arrangement; however, the research supports that mothers are going into the

workplace and need some form of childcare in order to do so. The research and theories

address the different types of care and their effects on a child but not why a millennial

middle class mother may decide on one form of care over another. In this study, I sought

to provide information to parent support affiliates about aspects that affect millennial

generation mothers' decisions about childcare for their children and help to improve

practitioner-parent communication.

Background

In the 1950s and 1960s, most women left the workforce when they married or

after the birth of their first child and remained absent from the workforce until the child

was nearly grown (Davis, 2011; McNally, Share, & Murray, 2014; Sihto, 2015). In 1950,

11% of women with children under age 6 were working outside the home (Belsky &

Pleuss, 2013). Since the 1970s, the percentage of children raised by a stay-at-home

mother who has a working husband has fallen by half, from 41% in 1970 to 20% in 2012

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Millennial mothers are defined as mothers born between the years 1980 and 2002

(Sihto, 2015). In this study, I focused on only female adult participants born between

1980 and 1997, resulting in the participants being at least 18 years of age and eliminating

the vulnerable population of females under 18. This child-centric millennial generation is

known for distinctive traits and characteristics such as high self-esteem, self-

centeredness, a high level of education, and propensity to multitask (Holt et al., 2012;

Kwok, 2013; Ray, 2013). Millennial mothers are troubled today by the condition of the

American family due to the drastic changes in work roles, gender roles, source of

authority, and daily schedules that are completely different from when their parents were

raised. According to Ng et al. (2010), social change may be linked to parents'

perceptions that they are not paying sufficient attention to their children, and their need

for parental affirmation that their child "needs" their attention. Millennial mothers'

parenting styles refer to attachment parenting such as sleeping with toddlers and taking

them to work (Leitner, 2011). Attachment building in a multitasking environment and

maternal feelings of guilt may be the biggest challenges faced by millennial mothers.

The changing family is part of a changing structure of work and a changing labor

market, particularly affecting the American middle class, which comprises 45% of the

American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). With more intense global competition and a more globalized worldview, time management takes on greater importance, as middle class families need both parents to work to afford all costs that go into raising a family today. The middle class has a comfortable standard of living, significant economic security, considerable work autonomy, and a college education (Murdock, 2012; Percheski, 2008). A flexible work structure is one that better uses time in performance of a greater number of tasks. A change in the labor market affects family as well as the striving for expertise in a parent's chosen profession, which can overshadow family as the highest priority.

The economy and the workplace are not the only institutions that are changing dramatically. The meaning and definition of family are also increasingly controversial. Working mothers are now becoming the norm, numbers of men being the primary earner may be shrinking, and latchkey children are commonplace (Puckering, 2011). More than half of all United States women in the workforce have young children. In 2013, about 12.5 million, or 61%, of the 20.4 million children under 5 were in some type of regular childcare arrangement (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). A generation ago, most women left the workforce once they married or after the birth of their first child and continued to stay at home until their children were nearly grown (Kim & Kochanska, 2012; Puckering, 2011; Weidmer, 2015).

By addressing the current gaps in literature, advising early practitioners and educators about the influences may add to a mother's decision and help with the stability of care. The educators can provide the mother with an effective support system, rather

than solely relying on social networks for information (Dexter, Wong, Stacks & Beeghly, 2013; Lee & Bauer, 2009; Mantyma, Puura, Luomma, & Slamelin, 2009). Mothers can be educated about the elements that should be considered to make a logical and educated decision based on the information gained from this study.

Family Policy in the United States

Family policy in the industrialized world is one that affects all children and their families, not just low income families or those afflicted with hardship. Family policy may be explicit or implicit. The explicit family policies include those policies and programs deliberately designed to achieve specific objectives for families. Some policies may provide income security policies designated to assure a particular standard of living for families with children, employment related policies for working parents, maternal and child health policies, childcare policies, and gender equity policies. Implicit family policy includes actions taken in policy domains for nonfamily related reasons that have important consequences for children and their families (Zigler, 1996). Family policy can be viewed as a policy field or domain, a policy instrument, or a perspective criterion by which all social policies can be assessed as to their consequences for family and child well-being. The family policy field includes those laws directed at families, such as family law, income transfer policies (child or family allowances), Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), maternity and parental benefits, tax benefits for dependents, maternity and child health services, and childcare services (Bandura, 1997; Evans, 2011).

The reliance on family policies for childcare subsidy is largely due to the rise in both double-income families and in single-parent households headed by women. The median income for families in the United States, adjusted for inflation, has fallen steadily over the past 2 decades (Barnett, DeBaca, Jordan, Tilley, & Ellis, 2014; Santelices et al., 2009). Family income would have declined even more dramatically if a larger percentage of women had not joined the paid labor force to supplement family earnings. In order to accommodate these women entering the workforce, social policies were established to support the needs of women requiring childcare as they entered the workforce. The United States has put into effect within the Social Security system a policy that provides two working parents 7.65% of their income into the Social Security fund for use at some future date and can assist families for their children when they get older to pay for their college fund or other family needs (Bandura, 1977).

Children and family policies. Current patterns of employment for women in the United States increasingly resemble those that were previously typical for men (Spinrad, Eisenberg, Silva, & Edwards, 2012). Most American women participate in the labor force, whether they are single or married. They enter the out-of-home workforce for the same reasons men do: to support themselves and their families. Almost three-fourths of women who received maternity leave returned to work within 6 months of childbirth (Liu & Anderson, 2008). In 1960, fewer than 1 in 5 women returned to work after they had children (Zigler, 1996). The United States was the third-to-last industrialized nation in the world to establish a national parental leave policy; only New Zealand and Australia still lack such a plan. The American policy only covers a small percentage of workers and

provides no wage replacement. Seventy-five other nations pay such a benefit, which includes, on average, a 4- to 5-month leave with the replacement of 60% to 90% of a woman's wages. Only 50% of United States workers are eligible to take the leave, and fewer can afford to (Zigler, 1996).

Zigler (1996) and other researchers have found a steady decline in the quality of infant or toddler attachment to their parents, which they associated with early nonmaternal care. Other researchers have found no ill effects (Baron, 2009). These inconclusive results suggest the need for further research to explore the relationship between early care and parental attachment with infants and toddlers. Infants and toddlers, starting at 6 weeks, are being placed into care so that their mothers can return to work once leave time has been depleted. Fewer than half of United States children under the age of 6 have a nonemployed parent who can provide for full-time childcare (Berdahl, 2013; Wiedmer, 2015)

Decades of research have shown that parents and their infants/toddlers need the time to establish a pattern of interaction that will enable them to respond to each other's signals and be able to understand one another. Secure attachment provides the foundation for exploration that promotes learning and development. Therefore, having a sufficient amount of leave is essential in benefiting the socioemotional development of the child. Given the state of childcare in the United States, there is potential for detrimental effects related to both cognitive and social development (Bryant, Erwin, Ndambuki, & Williams, 2012; Spinrad et al., 2012; Walsh, 2010).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the factors that may contribute to decisions made by middle class millennial mothers to place their infant or toddler in a particular type of care and to examine their reflections on those decisions after their infants and toddlers have been in the chosen placement for at least 5 months. Existing research with earlier generations of mothers indicates three types of care chosen by a mother: parental care, center-based care, and neighbor or relative care (Bradley, 2011; Lindsey, Caldera, & Tankersley, 2009; Liu, 2015; Mantyma et al., 2009; Vuillez-Coady, Ellertsdottir, Obsuth, & Torrieriro., 2013). According to their research, each type of care chosen may rely heavily on several factors. The literature supports social networks, parental beliefs, and socioeconomic status as factors that may influence the choice of care (Davis, 2011; Murdock, 2012; Palmer, 2011). Further research is needed to determine the factors that influence middle class millennial mothers, unlike the current studies (Cassano et al., 2014; Neal & Hammer, 2009; Vincent, Braun, & Ball, 2010), which were completed with mothers prior to the millennial generation. In order to examine and analyze a mothers' critical decision regarding infant or toddler care, a more in-depth response is needed to determine its contributing factors. The more in-depth study would require extensive one-on-one interviews and would require examination of verbal cues, body language, and intonation.

Problem Statement

Buehler and O'Brien (2011) and Vicedo (2011) established that multiple factors play a role during a mother's decision in choosing the type of care for early childhood development. Research on parenting attitudes and activities has historically concentrated

on mothers, acknowledging they have traditionally assumed primary (across cultures), if not exclusive, responsibility for early childcare. They participate in child-rearing activities at significantly higher rates than fathers do or other caregivers (Bornnstein, Cote, Haynes, & Hahn, 2010; Poms, Botsford, Kaplan, & Buffardi, 2009). In the United States, over half of all women in the labor force have young children (Cassano, Sanders, & Zeman, 2014; Leitner, 2011).

The research has shown mothers must choose a type of care, but further information is still needed to determine what factors may contribute to this decision and why each mother's decision can vary so greatly (Leitner, 2011; Poms et al., 2009; Troxel Forbes, & Trenacosta, 2013). The need for research is particularly indicated for middle class mothers of the millennial generation, who have some unique characteristics influenced by career expectations set by themselves and current economic and social trends. Middle class families consist of 45% of all American households (Huston, Bentley, & Bobbit, 2015). Overall, middle class persons are characterized by conceptualizing, creating, and consulting and consist of the majority of working class individuals who are in need of childcare while working. A college education is one of the main accomplishments of the middle class status. Largely attributed to the nature of middle class occupations, middle class values tend to emphasize independence; adherence to intrinsic standards, valuing innovation and respecting nonconformity; and striving for success. Income varies considerably from near the national median to well in excess of $100,000 (Spinrad et al., 2012) Most middle class homes are dual-earner households, and lower middle class households may out-earn a small, one-earner, upper

middle class household (Bradley, 2011). The middle classes are very influential, as they encompass the majority of voters. Most societal trends in the United States originate within the middle classes.

The dissertation provides an examination of middle class millennial mothers' lived experience as they decide on care arrangements for their infants and toddlers. This research addresses the gap of inconclusive information that exists in current research (Garavuso, 2009; Moorman & Pomerantz, 2008; Ray, 2013) and addresses the needed information about a millennial mother's decision for the best care for her child. In this study, I analyzed the experiences of mothers making a decision and their reflections on that decision once their infant or toddler has been in the chosen setting for at least at least 5 months (Buehler & O'Brien, 2011; Cote et al., 2008). This study adds to the existing literature by identifying the current contributing factors that influence mothers of the millennial generation in making a childcare decision from the mothers' perspective (Fergusson, Maughhan, & Golding, 2008; Leitner, 2011; Meunier et al., 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to discover the lived experiences and processes middle class mothers in the millennial generation undertake while determining the type of early childcare that is required and to shed light on their perceptions and childcare decisions. A phenomenological study was needed to explore issues and experiences of middle class millennial mothers (Bornstein et al., 2010). According to Goldstein's (2008) quantitative study with earlier generations of mothers, he found numerous issues that may influence a mother's decision from the participant's rating scale of contributing

factors. These factors may include social networks, families, parental beliefs, continuity of care, and childcare quality and work-related factors such as work-family interface and job retention. The intent of the study was to describe the middle class millennial mothers' lived experiences in deciding the best possible care arrangement for their infant or toddler and to explore their experiences and reflections on childcare choice.

Research Questions

- What are the lived experiences of mothers as they choose initial childcare for their children?

- What are important decision elements the mothers identify?

- How do the mothers experience the first 5 months of childcare participation?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was aligned with theories based on Bowlby (1979), Bronfenbrenner (1981), and Bandura (1986). The theories in the framework support each of the research questions. Bowlby's (1986) attachment theory discussed the patterns of attachment between parental and nonparental caregivers. The importance of this internal working model can guide a mother's thoughts and feelings about child rearing and leaving her child in the care of someone other than herself. Bowlby researched the patterns of family interactions and determining the type of attachment that is healthy for both mother and child. His research was important to this study by considering mothers' instincts and feelings regarding the care of their children. Bowlby's theory added to the need to address a mother's perceptions of her childcare decision. Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory frames the importance of

systems and their functions (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem). The study specifically focused on the micro and mesosystem levels since I am addressing mothers' perceptions of the interacting systems. According to Bronfenbrenner (1981), mothers are participants in the systems of home, work, and community. Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory proposed a system of several influences, which are inner personal factors (i.e., mothers' self-efficacy cognitions), mothers' behaviors, and their environment. A mother's self-efficacy, as described by Bandura, may include personal accomplishments, personal experiences, verbal interactions, and physiological state. Lastly, Bandura believed human behavior is partly regulated by a mother's social interactions and can be applied to this study by learning about mothers' lived experiences at work, childcare choices, and how it can contribute to self-efficacy.

The research has shown that mothers are placing their children in care once they return to work. There is a need to learn more about this decision process about a mother's lived experience of making this choice. The conceptual framework including the theories discussed above supported this phenomenological study. The framework will be discussed further in Chapter 2 of this study.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative phenomenology study was chosen as the most authentic way to focus on individuals' lived experience (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). The findings of this study were derived from the phenomenon as seen through the lived experience of millennial mothers. Phenomenological studies share an individual's

experience directly through lived experiences and can share with others (Patton, 2002). The focus of a phenomenological study is to discover the essence of participants within a given experience and to understand the inner essence of participants' "cognitive processing regarding some common experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 182).

The study consisted of an eligibility screening and two interviews of 15 middle class millennial mothers from the northeastern United States. Middle class mothers were determined based on household income of minimal $94,000 per year to $200,000 (Howe & Strauss, 2013). This population was chosen since middle class families make up at least 45% of American households (Howe & Strauss, 2013). Interpreting the millennial mothers' experiences of childcare choices may contribute to social change by providing information to educators, practitioners, and administrators for use in support programs for infant or toddler parents. Interviews were conducted after the infants or toddlers had been in the chosen childcare placement for at least 5 months to permit reflection on the outcome of the decision. The interview questions connected to the middle class millennial mothers' lived experiences of making any decisions related to childcare experiences, as well as their reflections on the care their infants or toddlers received in the chosen placement. The interview questions were relevant to the participants' experiences and feelings to connect with the problem statement and research questions. The information received from the interviews was directly linked to how the participants felt during the lived experience.

A qualification for this study was that each middle class millennial mother currently had an infant or toddler; the child should have been in care for at least 5 months

prior to the study and needed to be at least 6 months old at the time of the study. Participants were currently employed in the workforce. The open-ended interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants, along with field notes pertaining to questions being asked or additional informational questions pertinent to the interview as a secondary method of note taking. Interviews were conducted after at least 5 months of the infant or toddler placement in the chosen setting. The resulting data were analyzed using NVivo for themes present in the analysis as well as hand-coded. Themes or patterns present may be concepts, terminology, behaviors, or interactions. The themes present were organized into categories that summarize and bring meaning to the study.

Definitions

In this dissertation, I evaluated existing policies, theories, and factors that may contribute to a mother's decision-making process. Using the qualitative design of open-ended interviews, I attempted to analyze the mothers' experiences when choosing a type of care for their children and to examine their reactions after at least 5 months in the chosen placement. The following section provides operational definitions of the education-related concepts, terms, and theories discussed throughout this dissertation.

Adult attachment interview (AAI): An interview open-ended assessment. The questions pertain to the mothers' early relationships with importance to attachment figures and a mother's internal working model affecting social behavior (Von Der Lippe, Eilertsen, Hartmann, & Killien, 2010).

Aid to families with dependent children (AFDC): Federally provided maternity, parent, child health services, and childcare services offered from 1935 to 1996. In 1996,

President Bill Clinton passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act.
One of the crucial contributions was a lifetime limit of 5 years for the benefits and
referred to as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Many Americans
may refer to TANF as welfare or AFDC (Zigler, 1996).

Attachment theory: Bowlby's (1988) theory examines parental responses to
development of patterns of attachment; this may lead to guide a mother's thoughts,
feelings, and expectations in future relationships.

Continuity of care: The settings may change, but continuity of care emphasizes
having a minimal number of caregivers, including parents, to increase the likelihood of
secure bonding and attachment. Continuity of care also implies coordinated care, where
all caregivers are aware of children's needs, patterns of behavior, and approaches
(Bandura, 1997).

Corporation: The corporate setting follows the fiscal year and is controlled by a
board of directors (Raeymaeckers, Dewilde, & Snoeckx, 2008).

Ecological theory: Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological theory frames and guides
the importance of systems and their functionality (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem,
exosystem, and macrosystem). The mother-family dynamic (microsystem), school to
family (mesosystem), and community (exosystem) functionally and cross-systemically
are considered in connection to a mother's choice of care (Bronfenbrenner &
McClelland, 2007).

Emotional availability (EA): Support for caregivers to improve the child-
caregiver attachment. This type of attachment is predictive of attachment security

between a mother and child. For example, children of sensitive mothers are often securely attached and children of less sensitive mothers are more often insecurely attached (Birigen, Altenhofen, Aberle, & Baker, 2012).

Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN): This term includes care in someone else's home, care at home by a relative or nonrelatives, or care in an early learning center (McNally et al., 2014).

Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA): United States federal government legislation for family leave. The FMLA in the United States consists of 12 weeks unpaid leave every 12 months to care for a newborn, newly adopted, or seriously ill child, parent, or spouse. The use of leave time will provide job protection (Zigler, 1996).

Family policy: A policy issued by the government pertaining to state or government policies. Policies can assist in both subjective and objective decision making pertaining to family options, such as the FMLA. Family policy may be explicit or implicit (Baron, 2009).

General educational development (GED): Secondary-level tests in five subject areas. Successful completion of the GED certifies that the test taker has American or Canadian level academic skills equivalent to those required for high school completion (Chang, 2013).

Infant: The term infant or toddler is applied to young children between the ages of 1 month and 12 months (Baron, 2009).

Interagency day care requirements (FIDCR): This law was proposed and revised in 1972 and 1980 respectively (Zigler, 1996). The 1980 version recommended standards for health, safety, staff training, social services, and staff-child ratios (Zigler, 1996).

Knowledge of infant or toddler development inventory (KIDI): The KIDI is a formal 75-item instrument that was designed to retrieve information about parents' knowledge of child rearing practices and development. The KIDI is designed to be applied to all levels of socioeconomic backgrounds and education level. The KIDI scale is accompanied by a 17-item questionnaire (the Catalog of Previous Experience, or COPE; Cote et al., 2008).

Labor force participation: The ratio between the labor force and employment in a given cohort or population (Percheski, 2008).

Middle class: The American middle class is a social class in the United States. The middle class represents 45% of American households with a combined income of at least $100,000 annually (Bianchi, 2011; Flynn, 2014).

Millennial generation: Individuals born between 1980 and 2002 (Holt et al., 2012; Kwok, 2013; Ray, 2013).

Mother autonomy support (MAS): This type of support provides information to educators and practitioners to help build this in expectant mothers (Rafferty & Griffin, 2010).

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): A nationwide organization supporting early childhood educators and others dedicated to the improving the quality of early childhood programs (Puckering, 2011).

Nonmaternal care (NMC): This includes the various forms of childcare by someone other than the mother (Sarti, 2010.

Parental self-efficacy (PSE): Murdock (2012) added to Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy and referred to mothers' self-efficacy beliefs as parental self-efficacy (PSE). PSE beliefs are described as one's self-esteem and estimations of his or her abilities to be competent and successful parents (Whipple et al., 2009).

Self-efficacy: A mother's outlooks on her own personal efficacy described by Bandura (1997) includes performance accomplishments, experiences, verbal intonation, and biological/physiological effects,

Social cognitive theory: Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory proposes a transactional system of triadic reciprocal influences over time in which inner personal factors (i.e., mothers' self-efficacy cognitions), mothers' behaviors (i.e., parenting beliefs and practices), and the environment (i.e., social networks and family) interact to determine outcomes.

Socioeconomic Status (SES): Financial status based on yearly income (Bornstein et al., 2010).

Strange situation procedure (SSP): This form of assessment is observational and consists of observing a child playing for 20 minutes while caregivers and strangers enter and leave the room. The situation will allow for a variation in stressfulness for each child, and the responses are observed (Von Der Lippe et al., 2010).

Toddler: A toddler is between the ages of 18 months and 3 years of age. This is a crucial time for social/emotional development, cognition, and motor development (Baron, 2009).

Assumptions

It can be assumed that with the use of open-ended interviews, the participants would answer honestly and as completely as each was able. Using the information from the mother's experience, I assumed the knowledge that can be used for practitioners, educators, health care officials, and human resource directors to help them to understand the process of making a decision from a maternal standpoint and will enlighten better continuity of care for childcare providers and mothers.

Scope and Delimitations

The study was limited to interviewing 15 mothers of the middle class millennial generation who have infants or toddlers, ages 6 months to 18 months, as the current literature supports that mothers ultimately are the decision makers regarding their children (Garavuso, 2009). Patton (2002) described a phenomenological design as interpreting people's perceptions in depth and the sample size is to obtain enough data appropriate to the study from a sufficient small sample size. The mothers chosen for this study were middle class mothers from the millennial generation born between 1980 and 1997 even though any individual born between 1980 and 2002 is considered a millennial. I omitted participants who are under the age of 18 at the time of the study to avoid interviewing minors, a vulnerable population. The mother needed to be currently

employed defined as middle class to be considered for the study, and from the northeastern United States.

      Specifically, I addressed the causes that would contribute to a mother's decision of placing her child in an early childcare setting, whether in at-home care, center care, or with a parent or relative. I did not intend to portray a single type of placement as the optimal environment but to discover a mothers' lived experience of the decision process in order to improve their options when making this decision. Participants were mothers from the middle class, members of the millennial generation, from the Northeastern United States, and currently employed in a workplace setting. This qualitative study was meant to discover and examine a mother's decision process and her evaluation of that decision and aid in the procedure for early childhood educators who could provide a support system for them. I enhanced transferability by clearly describing the research information and the assumptions that were essential to the research topic through the interview process and use of open-ended questions. The determination of adequate sampling size in qualitative research is a matter of experience and information gained and the uses of the information when applied to the research method and purposeful sampling. The age of the children whose mothers participate in the study and the number of mothers were considered as a delimitation of the study. I focused on mothers of infant and toddlers who have been in their chosen childcare setting for at least 5 months. Member checking was used after data collection was completed. The mothers in the study were revisited after 1 month of initial data collection for validity with a follow-up telephone interview. Transferability was provided by clearly defining procedures and

populations studied so that readers can determine whether the findings could be applied to other contexts.

Limitations

When conducting open-ended interviews, there may be some limitations. I may react to different personalities, moods, and/or interpersonal dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee than other qualitative methods such as surveys. The use of interviews tends to be more subjective than quantitative research methods. During data collection and analysis, I was sure to accurately report the experience of my participants and be sure no judgments were made in cause and effect scenarios that I have experienced in my own work setting. Bracketing was used to identify potential sources of bias based on my work experience. I chose a phenomenological design to explore the lived experience of the participants. A member check and bracketing helped with validation of the participants to improve credibility with the participants and minimize bias. The member checks were completed throughout the interview process by allowing me to build a connection with the participant in order to receive open and insightful responses. After initial data collection and preliminary analysis, the participants heard their responses during the follow-up phone interview and reaffirmed the summaries after the interviews were transcribed. Through member checking and transcription of the interviews, the participants viewed the transcribed interviews, validating their responses reflected their views and feelings. This step helped to clarify the responses that were received from the participants.

The small sample size permitted a more profound level of data analysis but limited the ability to generalize findings to other contexts (Patton, 2002). A common misconception about sampling in qualitative research is that numbers are unimportant in ensuring the adequacy of a sampling strategy. However, sample sizes may be too small to support claims of having achieved either informational redundancy or theoretical saturation or too large to permit the deep, case-oriented analysis for a qualitative design. For this study, qualitative interviewing techniques were useful for reducing bias. The techniques required for reducing bias allowed flexibility to respond to the particular concerns of the individual and experiences with any factors that may have been taken into account prior and while in care. I analyzed the participants' lived experience after their infant or toddler has been in the chosen care for at least 5 months. I had compassion and sensitivity toward the experience of adjusting to the child being in care and triangulated data to minimize the effect of bias when the data were analyzed. I incorporated multiple data sources from the research participants for triangulation such as initial and final interviews and review of the transcripts of interviews. The advantages of having triangulation are to provide confidence in my research and deepen the validity that it provides.

Significance

Changes in the American family and composition, as well as changing women's roles in family and work, have led to extreme changes in how women raise children while they are going back to work (Cooklin et al., 2014; Goldstein, 2011). According to Leitner (2011), early childcare has become a normative experience for American

children. Today, most kindergarten children have had childcare experiences prior to

school entry. The phenomenological study may lead to positive social change by giving

information to early childhood educators about the new generation of millennial mothers.

This information about mothers' decision making processes could contribute to positive

social change by helping early childhood educators communicate more effectively with

middle class millennial mothers about their infant or toddler care and provide strategies

to adjust to the changing dynamics of the family and work pressures as they are related to

the middle class millennial generation (Howe & Strauss, 2013). Cooklin et al. (2014)

confirmed that there is a strong negative relationship between fertility and labor force

activity on the part of mothers, as well as a positive correlation between labor force

activity and limiting the number of young children a woman may have due to the

mother's desire to put her career first. The population of women in this study expressed

that if a woman was to work and have a child, she should not have more than one child to

be able to handle motherhood and the job. The women believed multiple children can be

a more of a distraction than having only one. Percheski (2008) confirmed in her study

that professional work and families are both "greedy institutions"—institutions that

demand undivided commitment and do not accommodate a working mother (p. 241).

　　　　With an increase of women in the labor market, the government must reevaluate

policy to assist families across the socioeconomic spectrum including the ever-growing

middle class. Many middle class families cannot qualify for the Universal

Prekindergarten Programs that are beginning to be implemented in the United States to

support low-income families. Based on economic prosperity, labor development and new

child-rearing patterns have now stimulated the interest of the United States government in addressing family needs, both through the provision of direct support to employees and through other social policies. There is also a growing discrepancy between the image of the United States as a family-oriented nation and the failure of United States social policies to keep pace with the new realities of family life. For example, the lack of universal parental leave policy in the United States reflects one of the most limited provisions for parental leave in the industrialized world. The importance of continuity of care would enhance support systems for young children (Bradley, 2011; Goldstein, 2008; Huston, Bentley; & Bobbitt, 2015; Leitner, 2011). Informing early practitioners, policy makers, and educators about the factors such as continuity of care may add to the current knowledge of a millennial mother's decision process and support the nature of the process from a mother's perspective.

Summary

Few studies (Boyd, Thorpe, & Taylor, 2009; Chang, 2013; Frolland, 2011; Garavuso, 2009; Kushnick, 2013) have addressed the effects of the decision made by a mother, but the researchers did not focus on mothers of the middle class millennial generation and the external or internal factors that contribute to the decision process. In this study, I examined multiple factors that contribute to an educated middle class millennial mother's decision to place her infant or toddler in an early learning center based on her lived experience. Due to the social change of middle class families in the United States and substantive changes in the rearing practices of infant and toddlers, there is a need to learn more about the contributing factors (Goldstein, 2011).

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a background of existing research that addresses the need for a more comprehensive understanding of recent research on the decision process a mother may experience in making a decision about her childcare options. Theoretical frameworks of Bandura (1986), Bronfenbrenner (1981), and Bowlby (1965) are also included, with supporting literature combined with the conceptual framework providing a foundation of supportive information. In Chapter 3, I describe the research methods used for this phenomenological study and open-ended interviews. In Chapter 4, I report on the data and results of these open-ended interviews of the phenomenological study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results in comparison with the existing literature. It reports these issues in terms of their relation to the lived experiences of mothers. I conclude this dissertation with a discussion of future research needs, along with information provided to administrators, practitioners, health care officials, and human resource directors to promote more effective home-caregiver coordination and continuity of care.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study was an exploration of the lived experiences of mothers from the middle class millennial generation in deciding the best possible care arrangement for their infants/toddlers and filled the gap found in existing literature. Currently, there are two types of care that make up two-thirds of all subsidized care: NMC and FFN (McNally et al., 2014; Young & Denson, 2014). NMC consists of care from someone other than the mother. This includes day care centers or home-daycare options. FFN care consists of a grandparent, friend, or neighbor to care for the child when the mother is at work. NMC and FFN care have been among the most common options chosen by mothers. Studies have indicated the importance of attachment to these caregivers and the educational significance the chosen type of care may have on the infants/toddlers (Im et al., 2014; Liu, 2015). The middle class millennial mother is now faced with more than a simple decision when choosing a type of care for her infant or toddler and must take into account the emotional importance of the caregiver relationship and continuity of care when making childcare choices.

This study provided an analysis of the experiences of middle class millennial mothers who are making decisions for their infants/toddlers. Current studies (Flynn, 2014; Murdock, 2012; Ray, 2013) have provided minimal information on why a mother may choose a particular type of care but do not address middle class millennial mothers who are faced with making a childcare choice. Ray (2013) supported that there is a need to know more about a middle class millennial mother's decision process since families of middle class income need both parents in the workplace, resulting in a need for childcare

in order to do so. Current researchers have discussed the variations of care and a choice made by mothers but have not examined the middle class millennial mothers' decision process when choosing a type of childcare (Belsky & Pluess, 2013; Linville, Chronister, Dishion, Todahl, & Miller, 2011).

This chapter will include the search strategies used to find current literature about middle class millennial mothers' decision processes for placing their infants/toddlers in care. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of recent research and social trends related to middle class millennial mothers. The conceptual framework consists of theories of Bowlby (1988), Bandura (1997), and Bronfenbrenner (1981) to provide a foundation for the study. Major contributions of each theorist support the conceptual framework in which this phenomenological qualitative study is based. Bowlby's attachment theory, parental autonomy support (PAS), and emotional availability provide a foundation relating to parental attachment and patterns of attachment between caregiver and mother. Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological theory provides a framework for analyzing the influence of all systems families encounter on a daily basis, which includes home, school, and community. Bronfenbrenner (1981) believed in the balance of influences for a healthy environment for all members. Lastly, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy encompasses three aspects of the self. This includes a mother's cognitions, behaviors, and environment. Bandura's theory emphasized all three aspects may build a strong self-efficacy, resulting in a women feeling confident and having positive self-worth (Bandura, 1986).

The conceptual frameworks of Bandura (1986), Bowlby (1988), and Bronfenbrenner (1981) may help early childhood practitioners understand the factors that may affect a mother's decision when choosing childcare, place an importance on the continuity of care, and provide a more effective support system for mothers facing childcare decisions (Bornstein et al., 2010). Bornstein et al. (2010), Meuiner, Wade, and Jenkins (2011), and Neal and Hammer (2009) described that future research is needed to examine rapid social changes, including distance from kin and friends and the scarcity of time, which fuel greater reliance and exploration on the world wide web and in resources such as social networks for child-rearing information. Bornstein et al. (2010) suggested exploration of parents' media outlets and decision-making factors to provide the support needed by mothers.

Changes in the United States economy and family dynamics have placed pressures on middle class millennial mothers to work full-time and be full-time mothers soon after the birth of their children (Ray, 2013). As a result, millennials are faced with time management constraints and demands of work and family. Middle class millennial mothers are faced with the decision of childcare when they go back to work. The purpose of this study was to examine middle class millennial mothers' decisions and understand how those decisions are made, based on a mother's lived experience. Existing research (Bornstein et al., 2010; Bradley, 2011; Lindsey et al., 2009; Mantyma et al., 2009) has indicated two types of care chosen by a mother: center-based care and/or FFN care. The purpose of this study was to analyze a mother's choice of one type of care

over another and what factors may contribute to that decision. Current research on these factors are explored in this chapter.

This qualitative study provided an examination of middle class millennial mothers' lived experiences, reflections, and perceptions surrounding the childcare decision-making process to compare with prior studies of earlier generations. Middle class millennial mothers are of specific focus since the changes in the economy and family contexts have resulted in the need for both parents to work, unlike prior generations of middle class women born before 1980. Working women across all occupations struggle with allocation of work time versus family time and are strongly influenced by family responsibilities. Research on millennials in the workforce has inspired this research to learn more about the lived experience, specifically of the middle class millennial mothers and how to connect with this generation in their working and childbearing years, unlike generations before them where mothers most likely stayed home when raising a family (Holt et al., 2012). Currently, the only research provided on millennials has emphasized working characteristics to define this generation. There is no current research specifically on middle class millennial mothers' lived experience making childcare choices. The objective of this study is to contribute to the understanding of millennials and inform better continuity of care for infants/toddlers in nonmaternal settings. This will allow healthcare providers to establish a more effective partnership with middle class millennial mothers and add to the body of literature relating to parenting in the millennial generation in the workplace.

Current researchers (Flynn, 2014; Ng et al., 2010) on millennials noted strategies on millennials in the workplace but did not address the 45% of middle class millennial mothers who are in the workforce dealing with childcare decisions and the importance of continuity of care (Way, 2012). The next section consists of a description of the strategies used to search the literature that informed the study design. Using the terminology and current literature, educational implications of childcare and infants/toddlers learning are discussed to support why development and attachment of infants/toddlers are important in the choosing of childcare other than maternal care. This study involved an exploration of factors and educational implications that go into the decision process for development and learning of infants/toddlers. According to Leitner (2011), early childcare has become a normative experience for American children. In this chapter, I defend the need for a study to examine the lived experiences of middle class millennial mothers placing their infants/toddlers into childcare.

The literature review includes a discussion of recent research that relates to millennial mothers and the trends affecting today's middle class millennial mothers. The review supported the need to understand these experiences and build upon current phenomenological studies (Garavuso, 2009; Vincent et al., 2010) that relate to childcare choices and millennials. I emphasized the importance of understanding millennial mothers' decision process in making childcare choices when conducting supporting evidence. The theoretical frameworks include Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory of patterns of attachment in supportive networks composed of parental and nonparental caregivers. Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory is relevant to this research

using the importance and functionality of systems. This includes microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. Bandura's (1967) social cognitive theory proposes a transactional system of triadic influences, of which inner personal factors include mothers' self-efficacy cognitions as well as mothers' behaviors and the environment. I conclude the chapter with supportive literature to the conceptual framework, including the current problems mothers face in childcare choices, phenomenological studies related to the research questions, the effects of nonmaternal care on development, and the increase in parental employment resulting from social change and social policies**.**

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted an exhaustive review of research pertaining to factors that contribute to a mother's decision to choose a particular type of care as well as methodological issues relating to phenomenological studies on the topic. This included, but was not limited to, research databases through Walden University's library in areas of counseling, education, psychology, and sociology. Academic research databases included ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, Educational Research Information Center (ERIC), SAGE, EBSCO, and other peer-reviewed research and educational websites for books, journal articles, and published dissertations. Key terms for this literature review were *mother's decisions, childcare, social networks, parental beliefs, mother's choices, nonparental care, maternal sensitivity, self-efficacy, socioeconomic status, middle class, millennial mothers, millennial generation, family systems, maternal attachment, grandparent care, work/family interface, center-based care, home/community, macrosystem, mesosystem,*

microsystem transactional model, self-regulation, caregiver styles, and *parental styles.*
Several terms were combined to enhance the search process within these databases. Two
phrases were then combined in order to obtain more in-depth research on mothers' actual
lived experiences with childcare. Two terms *social networks* and *childcare* helped me to
review articles about the decision making process and its multifaceted components. The
term *childcare choice* was placed into the databases for understanding the elements that
go into choice and the decision process. I also examined current references from each of
the articles cited to obtain further research on the same topic, which aided in the
acquisition of scholarly sources when the search terms were exhausted within the
databases themselves. I decided to incorporate a narrower topic including middle class
millennial mothers in the search of databases. This change provided more articles on
millennial characteristics but not on millennial mothers and their experiences with
childcare choices. I found relevant studies to this topic focusing on childcare choices.
However, there was a gap in research on millennial mothers and childcare choices. I did
find supportive studies related to millennial characteristics of that population in the
corporate workplace, but no studies were related to millennial mothers and their lived
experiences of childcare choices.

In this chapter, I defend the need for a study to examine the lived experiences of
middle class millennial mothers placing their infants/toddlers into childcare and to
understand the importance of continuity of nonmaternal care. The literature review and
conceptual framework supports the need to understand this experience along with

theoretical concepts from Bowlby (1988), Bronfenbrenner (1981), and Bandura (1986)

and expand on current knowledge of the millennial generation.

Conceptual Framework

Social change has been evident in recent years in American families. The

change is due to women's concepts of their role in society and in family. Women have

been using different forms of childcare while they need to return to work (Goldstein,

2011). The conceptual framework for this study was based on the works of Bowlby

(1988), Bronfenbrenner (1981), and Bandura (1977). Each theory provides a framework

to support the research questions.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1988) analyzed parental responses to the development of patterns of

attachment, which in turn may lead to internal working models that can guide the

mother's thoughts, feelings, and expectations in later relationships. Attachment theory

evolved from his work with infants and their mothers. Bowlby believed that if this bond

was never experienced between the infants/toddlers and the mother or other caregiver, the

child may lack the understanding of what a loving and affectionate relationship can be.

Such an experience may potentially affect him or her through childhood and adulthood,

creating a deficit in the child's ability to experience a healthy emotional relationship. He

believed the lack of emotional attachment in infancy and childhood would create a lasting

effect throughout a person's lifetime.

Attachment theory, as proposed by Bowlby (1988), emphasized the infant or

toddler needs for warm, continuity of care with the mother or substitute. This bond of

attachment can be formed with a person who provides love and dependability. Bowlby researched patterns of family interactions and attachment in healthy development. He specifically researched the attachments formed with primary caregivers, even those other than the biological mother or other maternal figure, who provided care and affection for the infants/toddlers (Vicedo, 2011). Bowlby explored the roles of nonmaternal and maternal care giving as they relate to mother-child attachment as well as attachment between the infants/toddlers and nonmaternal caregiver.

Bowlby (1988) examined the attachment that may be gained by both the caregiver and the mother. According to the attachment theory, children have the potential to develop representational models or working models of the self, others, and self-other relationships based on lived experiences in early mother-child relationships. The early relationships that exist within the framework of this attachment theory can be considered as filters through which new incoming experiences may be processed. As the infants/toddlers are exposed to new faces and experiences in a childcare setting, they are learning how to adjust to new experiences. These early experiences help encourage and support the infants/toddlers to have secure attachments with others. Bowlby's attachment theory also applies to relationships with significant others, which include persons other than the mother. This may imply that infants/toddlers who are less securely attached to their mothers may nevertheless be completely capable of developing a positive relationship with a caregiver other than the mother (Bowlby, 1988). Whipple et al. (2009) stressed the need to explore Bowlby's attachment theory in relation to maternal behaviors and attachment. The researchers found a gap in their study in that it failed to examine the

bridge between infants or toddlers' need for protection and comfort and their need to explore the environment, placing an importance on continuity of care. The researchers found that overall maternal security of attachment could be learned over time through parental behaviors. Attachment is considered a way of thinking and a mother's processing of thoughts and feelings regardless of her own experiences. Bowlby's attachment theory is beneficial to my study incorporating the possible importance of new experiences for an infant or toddler in a childcare setting in relation to attachment and understanding a mother's lived experience of making a childcare choice.

Parental autonomy support (PAS) and attachment. Recent studies have clarified different types of attachment exhibited by mothers (Barnett, Cabeza de Baca, Jordan, Tillie, & Ellis, 2014; Davis, 2011; Horst & Van de Veer, 2010; Licata, Kristen, Paulus, Thoermer, Sodian, & Woodward, 2014; Whipple et al.,2009). Whipple et al. (2009) suggested through their research that mothers with an autonomous state of mind tend to have infants/toddlers who display a secure attachment. However, if an infant attachment is not secure, the infant may exhibit learned behaviors from the mother's insecurities.

Licata et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between mother-child interaction qualities with infants' ability to interpret their mother's actions as goal directed at 7 months. Licata et al. (2014) found three distinct styles: predominantly sensitive, unresponsive and moderately controlling. These styles were determined during a free play interaction between the mother and infant. Using a CARE-index, the authors assessed the infant's goal-encoding ability at 6 months. The CARE-index assessed

maternal sensitivity, control, and unresponsiveness on a 0-14 scale by looking at seven aspects of interaction behavior, such as facial and vocal expression, body contact, affection, turn-taking contingencies, control and choice of activity. The researchers showed that infants of moderately controlling mothers, and not, as previously expected, infants of predominantly sensitive mothers, were better able to encode actions as goal-directed. The authors explained their findings by suggesting that moderately controlling mothers have an educational interactional style and expect their infants to read their intentions, which makes these infants more attentive to what happens in their social environment.

The authoritative mother tends to be more controlling and more likely to have a secure relationship with her child. The authoritative parenting style is about setting limits, reasoning with kids, and being responsive to their emotional needs. This approach is common in middle class settings throughout the world, and it is linked with the most successful child outcomes. Kids raised by authoritative parents are more likely to become independent, self-reliant, socially accepted, academically successful, and well behaved. They are less likely to report depression and anxiety, and less likely to engage in antisocial behavior like delinquency and drug use (Licata et al., 2014). Since the maternal figure is accessible and responsive to the needs of the infant or toddler, the child feels the consistency of the mother's sensitivity, and the infant or toddler is able to find the security needed from the maternal figure. The infant or toddler whose mother does not respond to the signals from the child or respond appropriately to their child cries or

needs may form an insecure and anxious attachment because the infant does not have consistency from the mother with a lack of predictable and safe responses.

In order for the infant or toddler to feel the security of a maternal figure, the mother must be responsive and a certain number of interactions must occur. The most current research on attachment has been done on face-to-face interaction; studies (Buyse et al., 2009; Davis, 2011; Vuillez-Coady, 2013) have found that bodily interaction or closeness to feel the heartbeat of an individual, in particular the mother, is important in sensitivity and development. It is not how often the baby is held that reflects attachment but *how* the baby is held and whether or how responsive the baby is to that action held for attachment development. There lies some argument in whether an infant or toddler who forms insecure attachment relationships with the mother do so because the mother is particularly insensitive to her child's needs or because of differences in personality (i.e., in temperament) and life situations. A dismissing mother tends to avoid all the signals that an autonomous mother would respond to immediately such as feeding signals and the infant or toddler's signals of being happy or sad. This may result in an avoidant infant or toddler. A preoccupied mother tends to have an infant or toddler who is ambivalent. The infants/toddlers will respond to anyone and fail to establish an evident attachment to the mother or other caregiver. An unresolved mother has an infant or toddler who cannot become comfortable with any type of caregiver, often described as fussy or unsettled when eating or sleeping.

Despite the variations of parenting styles and attachment there was no correlation with the amount of time a stay-at home mother versus a working mother spent with her

child. Huston, Bobbitt, and Bentley (2015) found working mothers, who spend more of their nonworking time with their infants, were more sensitive and provide more stimulation during their nonworking time. An online survey was conducted using 183 female participants rating their parenting style. Each family had a child under the age of four. The authors found based on the mothers' responses the time a working mother spent with her child was found to be extremely engaging and interactive.   This pattern was not characteristic of a mother who was. Huston et al. (2015) supported the importance of a mother-child relationship but also defended a working mother, stating there were no negative effects to the child or attachment if a mother worked 40 hours or less. Any engaging time spent with their children can contribute to their attachment and bond. This study will build upon the knowledge gained and analyze the millennial mothers' feelings towards attachment towards their infants/toddlers.

I used Bowlby's (1993) theory of parental autonomy support (PAS) and applied it to experiences and perspectives of middle class millennial mothers regarding continuity of care, attachment, and the relationship between a mother's feelings about employment and how attachment to her child can be affected. The researcher added to this literature and theory through a mother's lived experiences of making her childcare choices.

Emotional availability. Birigen et al. (2012) examined their potential intervention based on Emotional Availability (EA) to enhance support for caregivers and to improve the child caregiver attachment. Researchers observed 33 professional caregivers and their interaction with the children. This study examined whether caregivers could develop positive relationships with infants/toddlers and parents with

appropriate training. As described by Birigen et al. (2012) and Puckering (2011), the level of healthy connections in the adult-child relationship on the emotional availability scales can be used as predictive measures in the attachment of mother and child. There have been gaps in links to the context of child-based care, which is seen as riskier than nonparental care for infants/toddlers and toddlers compared to in-home care, potentially because center-based care has more children in one room at any given time than at-home care. Birigin et al. (2012) hypothesized that if caregivers improved the emotional attachment, then the transition to care would lessen the attachment factor faced by mothers. Licata, Paulus, Thoermer, Kristen, Woodward and Sodian (2014) found caregiver behavior and interactions has a direct effect on a child's social behavior and temperament in a childcare setting. Licata et al. (2014) found social interactions and relationships with teachers and peers are particularly important for the development of social behavior. Positive relationships with teachers and supportive peer climates enhance skilled peer interaction, whereas negative peer interactions and negative peer climates increase the likelihood of aggressive and disruptive behaviors at the toddler age. In numerous observational studies (Huston et al. 2015; Licata et al. 2014; Vuillez-Coady, 2013) emotionally supportive care and positive caregiver-child relationships were related to positive social behaviors among peers. A phenomenological design of a mother's lived experiences when making childcare choices can inform early practitioners to communicate more effectively with mothers about their infant or toddler care.

Parent-child caregiver bond. Despite the research of Birigin et al. (2012), which addresses the importance of improving emotional availability of caregivers, there

continues to be a gap in the literature regarding the relationship between parent-infant or toddler-caregiver bond and how attachment to the caregiver can provide the infant/toddler with continuity of care when in a nonmaternal care setting. The attachment to caregiver may be an important factor when a millennial mother is making a childcare decision. This may be a precursor to enrollment in a childcare setting or care provided by someone other than the mother. The first relationship established by an infant or toddler is with the mother, placing a large importance on making the relationship autonomous and providing the infant or toddler with an ability to be emotionally available to a new relationship. A secure approach to a new environment such as a childcare center or nanny arrangement can be beneficial to the child and increase the likelihood of a positive caregiver relationship with the child (Antecol, 2015; Baron, 2009; Licata et al., 2014; Rholes, Kohn, Simpson, & Haavind, 2011; Wai Wan, 2009).

Landry, Zucker, Taylor, Swank, Williams, Assel, and, Klein (2014) conducted a longitudinal study of interventions that can improve caregiver-child relationships. The participants included sixty-five childcare classrooms. This included sixty-five teachers and the children from each classroom. The children were between the ages of two and three. The researchers defined characteristics of responsive caregiving including such things as providing emotional support, offering reciprocal communication, accepting the need for growing independence, and providing cognitive stimulations that scaffolds the young child's early learning. The importance of the caregiver –child bond was of importance for this study, and researchers wanted to address the gap of providing quality care and education by the caregivers. They created a curriculum, the Responsive Early

Childhood Curriculum (RECC), which was implemented in all classrooms. This program was designed to train teachers to respond to the child's signals and behavior, manage child behavior, and support self-regulation. It provided teachers with supportive tools to enhance the child's behavior and scaffold their learning. The results of the program evaluation supported the importance of the caregiver bond with the child. The learned responsiveness strategies learned through the RECC program allowed the caregivers to strengthen their communication with children and minimize behavior issues. For example, interventions for the caregivers included orienting children to expectations through established routines and involving them in carrying out the "work" of the classroom as well as engaging with cognitive activities in centers and in small and large groups. This appeared to be key for understanding the effects of intervention and increasing children's emotional and social skills as well as decreasing their anxiety during the transition into a childcare setting.

Regardless of the type of care chosen, there is a need for research to explore the importance of the caregiver/child bond and the lived experiences of millennial mothers choosing the type of care and understanding the benefits of quality caregiver interactions in a childcare setting.

Middle class millennial mothers are working approximately 40 hours a week while their child is in some form of nonmaternal care (Antecol, 2015 & Cooklin, Strazdins,Westrupp, and Nicholson, 2014). Millennial mothers assume primary responsibility for their children's emotional, social, and intellectual growth and may worry about their infants and toddlers' development both cognitively and emotionally

due to working constraints. With the information gained from this study, early childhood professionals will attempt to support mothers as they make decisions about childcare for their children and understand the importance of continuity of care with the caregiver. By doing this, childcare providers will build a better relationship with middle class millennial mothers and provide support adjusting to the childcare experience.

Mother-child bond. It appears each of the studies analyzed (Baron, 2009; Huston et al., 2015; Rholes et al., 2011; Wai Wan, 2009) either focused solely on the infant or toddler, the caregiver, or on the mother; they did not focus on the mother-child bond. These studies also found that mothers often experience feelings of guilt for leaving their children with a stranger rather than with a relative or neighbor. This research would provide support to a mother that regardless of the type of childcare environment, the true effects of attachment remain with the mother and can possibly be the determining factor in her child's experience.

Moro-Egido (2012) conducted a study exploring how mothers' division of types of time with children has changed from the baby boomer generation to millennial mothers. Moro-Egido (2012) consisted of 620 respondents born between 1981-1990 consisting of only millennial mothers, who at the time of the study needed to be married and had up to three children. The respondents used time diary surveys. When using a time diary survey, participants are asked to fill out how they use their time over a 48-hour period. This involves stating for each period of the day what they were doing, anything else they were doing at the same time, where they were or how they were traveling, and who they were with. Interviewers also ask a series of questions to find out the amount of

time they would dedicate to their child. Since activities were reported on real-time basis, the risk of misrepresentation is reduced, providing a more accurate measure of childcare time than questionnaires. Socioeconomic status was not considered for this study. Moro-Egido's (2012) study revealed that mothers have increased the time dedicated to their child, mainly through active time, which includes activities that children benefit from directly instead of passive time, which is a parallel interaction between a parent and the child. There has been a change in social norms and expectations concerning not only what parenting involves but also what children need. Millennial mothers are emerging as intensive mothers that strive to be experts on child development. Due to lack of time, however, they must ensure that the time spent with children is quality time. At the same time, they prefer to avoid including children in their own leisure time and free-time activities (Moro-Egido, 2012). Moro-Egido's (2012) concluding data supports the trends and characteristics of emerging millennial mothers but does not identify the social class most affected by this social trend. There continues to be a need for further research middle class millennial mothers and to provide strategies to health care providers on how to create healthy mother/child bonds that are developmentally beneficial to their child.

Cooklin et al. (2014) conducted a study on employed mothers with children under the age of five. The study was a quantitative study using survey data from 2,151 working mothers. The authors investigated the associations between work-family conflict, work-family enrichment, and mothers' behaviors and perceptions of the couple's relationship, and for mothers of pre-school aged children. For mothers, there has been much research describing the negative outcomes of combining employment with family care, for

themselves, for their partners, and for children development. One result from the study was that a higher-work-family conflict was independently associated with less warm, affectionate responding towards the child and more negative irritable interactions, even when maternal sociodemographic characteristics, maternal mental health, and child temperament were controlled. Such parenting adversely affects children's optimal social, educations, behavioral and physical development. The researchers also established that if a mother had a high-quality job, this was associated with higher levels of work-family enrichment and lower levels of work family conflict. Cooklin et al. (2014) support the need for effective interactions between the mother and her child and the significance of job quality in maintaining those interactions. Middle class millennial mothers need to understand how infants/toddlers can sense the mothers' internal conflict. The dissertation examined the lived experience of millennial mothers and the effects of working as it relates to attachment with their infants/toddlers.

As Licata et al. (2014), Huston et al. (2015), and Cooklin et al. (2014) explained in their research the importance of temperament and positive interactions are beneficial to the infants/toddlers and maternal behaviors. The authors concluded that more research must be conducted to explore maternal behaviors and the behaviors of their infants/toddlers when entered into care (McElwain, Holland, & Engle, 2011; Verhage, Oosterman, & Schuengel, 2013).

In Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, there is an emphasis on attachment when a mother places her infant or toddler into a childcare. The literature included in this section includes information about characteristics of millennial mothers and attachment

between caregiver/parent/infants/toddlers, but it does not provide any literature specifically on middle class millennial mothers who are making decisions regarding childcare choices and the factors that may go into making this decision (Belsky & Pleuss, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological theory frames and guides the importance of systems and their functionality (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem). These systems functionally and cross-systemically considered a connection to a mother's choice of care. They include all the environments in which the child interacts (microsystem); the connections between the home and childcare center (mesosystem), all the environments that affect the child's life, but with which the child has no direct contact, such as the parents' workplace (exosystem); and cultural traditions and values (macrosystem). Bronfenbrenner (1981) discusses the subsystems that exist in a given organizational system (i.e., neighborhoods, family's corporations, or school boards). Given that people individual interact with in a face-to-face situation constitute a part of their environment; there is a significant body of theory and research dealing with the impact of interpersonal influence in decision-making and the evolution of behavior. Continuity of care and a healthy relationship between the mother and caregiver provides the foundation for healthy child development. Daily face-to-face interactions of the mother, caregiver, and child that promote a feeling of security make the transition back to work comforting for the millennial mother and her child.

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1981) theory, employed mothers are active participants in their children's microsystem. The child's home, childcare, and community are also part of the microsystem. All of these environments interact and may have effects across all systems. Mothers anticipate some guidance and support from outside sources in balancing the demands of work, family, and the influences of each system (i.e., work, family, and neighborhood). Barnett et al. (2014) and Bronfenbrenner and McClelland (2007) support the role that home, neighborhood, and community play in childcare decisions. Few qualitative and quantitative studies have examined this issue and the contributing factors to a mother's decision-making process in choosing childcare. There is a need for a deeper understanding of a mothers' lived experience in the decision-making process, specifically for middle class millennial mothers (Feldman & Masalha, 2010; Johnson, 2008; Kushnick, 2013; Landry et al., 2014; Moss et al., 2014).

Interrelation of systems. Parents tend to feel more comfortable about using childcare (especially care by non-relatives), and the care provided may aspire to higher standards, when community members are involved in the decision-making process. The parents' workplace (exosystem) is part of the system that the child experiences vicariously, yet it may have a direct impact on the child and parents. The exosystem may bring about stress in families, because parents may not address stress, as they should. For example, many children realize the stress of their parents' workplace without physically being in these places. Bradley (2011) and Landry, Zucker, Taylor, Swank, Williams, Assel, Crawford and Huang (2014) found how chaos in family life affects the quality of consistency in the childcare experience. Environmental chaos may produce significant

stress reactions in children and be exhibited at school (i.e., hitting a friend, getting frustrated with a task, throwing things, etc.). Adults are more likely to take notice; however, the likelihood that adults would exhibit any particular response connected to their awareness of the child's stress reactions is much more difficult to predict. Though parents may think stresses may go unnoticed, Bronfenbrenner's (1981) theory of the interrelations of systems supports the negative effects a non-interacting system may have on a child. Parents need to encourage more family-friendly experiences in the workplace and practices to minimize stress at work reduce stress at home. Since the study was concerned with mothers' views about childcare arrangements, it primarily addressed mothers' perceptions about supports for their child's development at each level of Bronfenbrenner's (1981) systems theory.

Burchinal et al. (2008) concluded that in making childcare decisions, community characteristics appear to contribute to parental decisions about childcare even after adjusting for family characteristics. These characteristics included neighborhood structural characteristics that included household incomes (assessed through the U.S. Census Bureau and parental employment). The other variables considered for Im et al. (2014) and Liu (2015) found family income, parental education, children's ages and ethnicity have all been linked to childcare choices and quality. There is a relationship between all systems: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-. The importance of interacting systems is essential to the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's theory and can be applied to this study. The research finds that systems relating to the mothers' work, the family at home, and childcare setting are important in contributing to childcare decisions.

These systems can have a direct impact on the child. Minimizing stress in any of the systems involved in the decision process can have a positive effect on the child.

Work-family interface. Neal and Hammer (2009) contributed to the knowledge of the work-family interface by testing a new model of work-family-coping strategies using longitudinal data from members of both work (exosystem) and family systems (microsystem) and the system components that link the two (mesosystem). Research on work and family, has become increasingly prevalent over the past 25 years, much of the previous research has focused on the negative effects of combining work and family without considering the more positive outcomes and the adaptive strategies needed to achieve those outcomes by individuals within the system (Gameiro et al., 2010; Kushnick, 2013; Landry et al. 2014). Neal and Hammer's (2009) research examined the effects of work and family coping strategies used by dual-earner couples caring for children. The sample size consisted of 309 couples who completed a survey that consisted of questions pertaining to work-family coping strategies. The questions in the survey assessed several areas. They included life satisfaction, depression, affect balance, work/family conflict, work/family spillover, and negative effect. The research found couples who have demanding roles at work and home begin to withdraw socially to allow more time to complete at-home duties.

Neal and Hammer (2009) found withdrawing from social engagements induced more stress on the work-family model. The authors added further research is needed to provide families with coping strategies such as time management, emotional coping strategies, and household task achievement. Neal and Hammer's (2009) study implied

the need for mothers to have coping strategies to balance work and family to minimize

stress. The purpose of this study was to also provide childcare practitioners with

effective strategies to help millennial mothers minimize stress and to enhance self-

efficacy on a daily basis (Dunning & Giallo, 2012; Frolland, 2011; Liu, 2015;

Raeymaeckers, Dewilde, & Snoeckx, 2008; Verhage et al., 2013). The results of this

study provided me with more information about a mother's perceptions about childcare

decisions and can provide strategies for administrators, early practitioners, and health

care providers based on middle class millennial mothers' lived experience.

Neal and Hammer (2009) supported the importance of Bronfenbrenner's (1981)

model of work/family interaction. The study consisted of 59 families with children under

the age of eight. The working mothers and children were interviewed separately. The

purpose of this study was to analyze the importance and use of social supports within a

family. The role of social support was extended from the individual, familial, and societal

characteristics that help a working mother. Mothers and children are usually embedded in

complex extended family support networks that interact with individual, familial and

contextual characteristics to shape family functioning and child well-being. The authors

found when working mothers felt support from home, family members and work there

was direct associations with a mother's performance. Therefore, social-emotional support

appears to be an important resource for working mothers. The interrelation of

Bronfenbrenner's Systems theory (2007) and Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy

both support the need for a strong social support system to improve a mother's parenting

efficacy.

This dissertation added to the information relative to systems theory and the

interrelations of systems; this includes the home, family, work, and childcare settings, as

discussed in the studies above. The family is the child's early microsystem for learning

how to live. The caring relations between child and parents (and many other caregivers)

can help to influence a healthy personality, environment, and continuity of care. This

study builds upon the importance of interacting systems to provide a child with a positive

learning environment. Middle class millennial mothers can learn more on how to provide

their child with an optimal learning environment despite the changing roles of family and

parenting.

Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy

Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory proposes an influential model that

focuses on a person's inner personal factors (i.e., mothers' self-efficacy), mothers'

behaviors (i.e., parenting beliefs and practices), and the environment (i.e., social networks

and family), which interact to determine outcomes. The theory supports mothers'

learning through behaviors socially and the role of cognitions to strengthen personal

skills and ability to have a positive self-efficacy of themselves. Mothers' expectations of

personal efficacy described by Bandura (1997) include performance accomplishments,

experience, verbal intonation, and physiological states. The more dependable and

experiential the sources, the more marked the increase in self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is

an individual's ability to organize and execute given types of performances, and the

outcome of expectation is a judgment of the likely consequence such performances will

produce (Barnett et al., 2014; Boyd, Thorpe, & Taylor, 2009; Dunning & Giallo, 2012;

Kim & Kochanska, 2012). Performance, as described in Bandura's (1997) theory, can be related to a mother's notion of her performance as a mother and question her decisions throughout raising a child. The relevance here is to offer childcare providers ways to support this need of a mother's "performance" of self-efficacy. Early practitioners and educators can provide support to middle class millennial mothers through the decision-making process and developmental effects of nonmaternal care. The results from this study can help early practitioners and educators understand the nature of the process from the mother's perceptive and will inform childcare centers on how to improve home/childcare provider connections with middle class millennial parents.

Bandura's (1997) view of self-efficacy is accepting of the diversity among different people and their personalities. He stated that self-efficacy is not a fixed trait but rather fluctuates in response to the changes in a person's own environment. These changes include getting a new job, going back to work, or having a child. Self-efficacy perceptions are thought to be different in each individual. Individuals maintain their own perceptions of themselves as they function in different roles (i.e., work ability, family ability, or parenting). A person continually engages in self-evaluation to determine the effectiveness of performance in different areas. Bandura (1997) felt a person needed to have positive self-efficacy in order to maintain composure through the demands of working and raising a child. Mothers being involved in school activities or even working at the center would further enhance the childcare experience. Garavuso's (2009) qualitative study of three women making early childcare choices found that, in addition to initial choice of care for their child, the childcare experience was important to them. The

three women in this study volunteered at their child's school to spend more time in their

child's school environment. The women in this study felt that contributing their time to

the school enhanced their own self-efficacy and caused them to feel they were

contributing, even though there was no compensation for their time. The mothers felt

their time with their child's school was priceless. Garavuso (2009) and Barnett et al.

(2014) highlighted the importance of Bronfenbrenner's (1981) systems theory of

interacting systems and Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy. Each mother in this

study showed positive social/emotional development for both the mother and child.

Garavuso's (2009) and Barnett et al. (2014) outcomes of improved self-efficacy is just

one of the ways this study can support millennial mothers as they experience placing their

child in nonmaternal care. Early practitioners will gain strategies from this study on how

to assist millennial mothers in childcare choices.

   Current trends: Self-efficacy in working mothers making childcare choices.

Boyd et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study of 124 expectant mothers from the

transition of their third trimester until the child is 18 months old. The authors provided a

unique perspective on both generalized societal views on motherhood, maternal

employment, and the personal process of making a childcare decision. The participants

were also given a questionnaire that pertained to the questions of current and expected

paid work engagements and entitlement, preferences and intentions regarding care and

paid work, and the salient factors that influence these preferences. This study was

relevant to Bandura's notion of self-efficacy. The researchers found women's

satisfaction to include achieving something, contributing to the family's income, and

receiving appreciation from the employer for optimal work performance were all attributed to improving a mother's self-efficacy. The authors reinforced important aspects of self-efficacy in Bandura's theory and the need for women to feel confident. Similarly, I took into account the importance of Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy to explore middle class millennial mothers' strategies that promote their feelings of self-efficacy as workers and parents. The literature supports that mothers need to feel confident when raising their children despite their full-time work and not being stay-at-home mothers. The information gained from the mothers' lived experience can provide educators with coping strategies and ways to support middle class millennial mothers during the childcare decision-making process and while their child is in care.

Boyd et al. (2009) also found when women were committed to going back to work; they were concerned about finding the best environment for their child. The mothers felt strongly about the quality and continuity of care to serve the emotional needs for both the child and mother. The research found when assessing childcare choices, the quality of care was most important. This included trustworthiness, nurturing, and continuity of care. These feelings were more evident towards nonmaternal care in the first 18 months, when caregiver attachment is essential for learning and social/emotional needs (Boyd et al., 2009; Huston et al., 2015; Liu, 2015).

The information learned from the lived experiences provided the researcher with scenarios and explicit events that may occur through the decision process when making a childcare choice. Informing early practitioners and educators about the factors that may contribute to a mother's decision attempted to understand the nature of the process from

the mother's perspective to help increase her self-efficacy while making a childcare choice.

Support to improve self-efficacy for working mothers making childcare choices. In an attempt to ease a mother's decision-making process, providing support and options making a childcare choice can help ease and improve a mother's self-efficacy in transitioning to motherhood and the workforce (Dunning & Giallo, 2012). Murdock (2012) added to Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy and referred to mothers' self-efficacy beliefs as parental self-efficacy (PSE). PSE beliefs are described as an individual's self-esteem and estimations of his or her abilities to be a competent and successful parent. This can be determined by an individual's experiences in specific parenting tasks.

Murdock's (2012) quantitative online questionnaire examined mothers' experiences with placing their children in any type of nonmaternal care. Based on past research, fathers were not considered for this study; others have assumed that fathers are more difficult to recruit and less accurate than mothers (Landry et al., 2014; Dunning & Giallo, 2012; Kim & Kochanska, 2012; Barnett et al., 2014). For this reason, fathers continue to be underrepresented in research, despite paternal involvement with children.

Murdock (2012) concluded that women achieved increased self-efficacy when they felt confident in their roles as mothers and achievement in the workforce. This conclusion was also supported in studies by Dexter, Wong, Stacks, & Beeghley, (2013) and Drobetz, Maercher, Speiss, & Wagner, (2012). A mother's feelings of success with herself increased her parental effectiveness and moral judgment in raising her child.

Stay-at-home mothers found a decreased self-efficacy in achievement and felt that staying at home was not enough. It is apparent from this research (Dexter et al., 2013; Drobetz et al., 2012) that there are several components needed in order to support a mother in achieving parental self-efficacy (PSE). Along with Murdock (2012), Barnett et al. (2014) found that parenting support represented an important resource for working mothers and was positively associated with parenting efficacy. Barnett et al. (2014) found social networks (i.e., mommy groups) as a crucial support system for the mothers of the study. However, while social support network members may provide crucial support to mothers, those same network members may also demand support from mothers, thus contributing to increased stress. Barnett et al. (2014) hypothesized that parenting support represented an important, under-studied resources that would be positively associated with parents' efficacy and reduce any depressive symptoms a mother may feel. The results of both studies may support a mothers' need for self-efficacy and inform parent support personnel about factors that influence a middle class millennial mothers' childcare decisions and educate practitioners on how to help mothers achieve the balance they are striving for when going back to work and faced with childcare decisions. Practitioners may offer parenting classes, life coach support, and mommy and me classes within a family's neighborhood (Barnett et al., 2014; Murdock, 2012)

Summary of Theories in the Conceptual Framework

The frameworks of Bowlby (1993), Bronfenbrenner (1981), and Bandura (1977) supported the important social and emotional aspects that a mother may feel or experience in placing her child in care. The importance of early learning, social

interaction, and attachment are evident in each theoretical framework. Early childhood

centers may build upon a child's cognitive, linguistic, social/emotional, or motor skills.

Children can learn judgment and self-esteem and develop relationships with caregivers

and friends through the promotion of social development. Also beneficial is a mother's

improving self-regulation, including the self-efficacy mechanism, which plays a role in

thought, affect, motivation, sensitivity, and attachment. Thus, a need arises to examine

the lived experience of middle class millennial mothers when making childcare decisions

and to reflect on the changing dynamics of contemporary work-family relationships. In

attempt to ease a mother's decision process, providing support and options throughout the

decision-making process can help ease and improve a mother's self-efficacy in

transitioning to motherhood and into the workplace. Such research is needed to help

provide support to caregivers and to help balance the needs of both mother and child.

Childcare practitioners and educators can close the gap of the parent/community

relationship by providing support to improve their child's continuity of care based on the

lived experience of the middle class millennial mothers in this study.

Several studies (Dexter et al., 2013; Drobetz et al., 2012) showed the importance

of continuity of care and the importance of the childcare environment to provide the child

with trustworthiness and nurturing. Despite a middle class millennial mother working

full time, a healthy nonmaternal emotionally stable environment can provide the child the

emotional needs when the mother is not present. This study elaborated on those needs

and added to the current literature on the importance of continuity of care but specifically

focused on middle class millennial mothers.

Educational Implications of Childcare on Infants and Toddlers Development and

Learning

Educational implications of childcare are an important component in development and learning for infants or toddlers. At this age, infants/toddlers are beginning to understand who they are, what they are feeling, and what to expect from those who are caring for them (Huston et al., 2015; Von der Lippe et al., 2010). These concepts are the beginning of infant or toddler social-emotional wellness. The infants or toddlers' ability to develop meaningful and lasting friendships builds a sense of importance or value for those around them. It is important to learn. Infants or toddlers' social-emotional development influences all other areas of development: Cognitive, motor, and language development are all greatly affected by how children feel about themselves and how they are able to express ideas and emotions.

Berry, Willoughby, Blair, Ursache, and Granger (2014) conducted a quantitative study on the Executive Functioning (EF) of children under the age two in a childcare setting and its relation to childcare experience. Executive Functions (EF) are described typically as a set of higher order cognitive functions such as working memory, inhibitory control, and attention shifting. Berry et al. (2014) found the children's executive function skills increase dramatically across early childhood, and growing evidence indicates that early caregiving experiences may play an important role in their development. The researchers also concluded that higher quality childcare from 7-36 months old has a positive association between childcare quality, caregiver continuity and the child's executive functioning. However, the researchers did not include the type of childcare the

children came from or the definition of "quality" care for this study. Therefore, additional research can support what is effectiveness of childcare on executive functioning (EF) from the viewpoint of the millennial mother.

Several researchers (Im, Kim, &Sung, 2014; Huston et al. 2015; Licata et al., 2014; Sihto, 2015) examined the developmental effects on an infant or toddler entering childcare at 12-18 months and the effects on learning when the infant or toddler enters kindergarten. Licata et al. (2014) and Huston et al. (2015) have demonstrated that children who attend childcare since they were infants and toddlers are developmentally at or above kindergarten level versus infants and toddlers who did not receive childcare until they were 3 years of age. Garavuso (2009) examined the positive effects of childcare using only informal evaluations such as portfolios, observations, and developmental milestones to document a child's progress throughout their childcare experience. However, many contributing factors may affect a mother's decision to place a child in an early learning center besides excelling academically. Research supports other factors that can affect the choice of center-based care (McNally et al., 2014; Rose & Elicker, 2010; Sarti, 2015). Childcare can provide an environment to build educational foundations and support language and conceptual development, particularly in infancy (Landry et al., 2014; Rose & Elicker, 2010; Sarti, 2010), but no research exists to analyze why a middle class mother from the millennial generation may have chosen child-based care or at-home care

The greatest influence on a child's cognitions and social-emotional development is the quality of the relationships that he or she develops with his primary caregivers.

Positive and nurturing early experiences and relationships have a significant impact on a child's social-emotional development. They also influence how the young child's brain develops (Bouchard, 2010). The following section includes current research on maternal attachment and its link to a child's development of cognitions and social/emotional skills.

Social-Emotional and Cognitive Development in Infants and Toddlers

The influence of maternal sensitivity on infant or toddler attachment and executive functioning skills were studied in a longitudinal qualitative study by Von der Lippe et al. (2010). The authors examined attachment security of infants and toddlers in the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) and its relevance to maternal attachment security. Mothers were evaluated with the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI). The researchers proposed to understand the caregivers' cognitive representation of early attachment relationships assessed in the AAI. This study consisted of 40 infants/toddlers 6 to 7 months of age and 40 mothers. The children were interviewed at 6 years of age, assessing the children's attachments to their mothers. Results indicated an association between maternal attachments during infancy and the 6-year-old child's cognitive functioning. This study validates the importance of the environment and security when infants and toddlers are in a childcare setting, identifying mechanisms through which early attachment experiences with the parents are associated with the child's behaviors throughout the first 6 years of life. Whereas research has been particularly focused on the predictive power of maternal attachment representations on the child's attachment through maternal, social, and affective responsiveness in caregiving, less attention has

been paid to the explorations of millennial mothers' perceptions and attitudes regarding childcare choices for their infants/toddlers.

The relationship between infant or toddler characteristics and parent attachment patterns on childcare choice is still not clear. Several studies found parents felt more secure when their children were in a childcare setting versus at-home care (Boyd et al., 2009; Gamble, Ewing, & Wilhelm, 2009; Stuart et al., 2010). The primary caretaker of the infant or toddler, most often the mother, is regarded as a secure base. The prerequisites for a secure base are dependent upon the caretakers' own experiences of early relationships from their youth. Secure relationships are represented and developed through childhood experiences. If the mother and her child do not have a secure attachment, the caretaker relationship may be just as insecure (Afferlerback, Anthony & Carter, 2014; Boyd et al., 2009; Stuart et al., 2010). It is important that the mother have a secure environment at home to ensure a steady transition into the childcare setting. Studies have noted the relationship of maternal attachment and positive caregiver relationships to children's cognitive performance (Barnett et al., 2014; Chang, 2013). Additionally, in childcare settings, the importance of encouraging language skills is evident through everyday learning and provides infants/toddlers and preschoolers multiple opportunities to develop and learn, thereby encouraging language skills at a pivotal time in their lives before they enter kindergarten (Bouchard, 2010). Positive caregiver relationships can lead to many positive influences in a child's life. Secure attachment to the caregiver and a healthy parent/caregiver relationship allows the child to meet the milestones developmentally and emotionally. The existing research emphasizes

early attachment but less attention on the explorations of maternal perceptions and attitudes of childcare choices in relation to mother/child/caregiver attachment (Bryant et al., 2012; Afferlerback et al., 2014; Stuart et al., 2010). This study used the information on continuity of care and added to existing literature by identifying the current contributing factors that influence mothers of the millennial generation in making childcare decisions, from the mother's perspective.

Importance of Secure Infant or Toddler Relationships

Whipple et al. (2009) found a strong correlation between the mother's attachment securities and those of the infants/toddlers. Mothers allowing their children to explore the environment are described as having infants/toddlers with secure attachment relations and who are able to seek out their caregivers for comfort and protection when their mother is not around. However, avoidant infants/toddlers do not present the same balance between attachment behaviors and exploration. Avoidant infants or toddlers tend to be tense in the given environment until their mothers return to the environment to comfort them. Ambivalent infants/toddlers exhibited no difference in reactions to mothers or caregivers; the infants/toddlers were non-responsive to the change. Disorganized infants or toddlers were not able to self-soothe or comfort themselves (Broude, 2009; Horst & Van de Veer, 2010). Given that security attachment is a balance between emotional security and competent exploration, it may follow that maternal behaviors aimed at fostering confident exploration are just as important in shaping the development of infants' and toddlers' security and learning. The purpose of this study was to learn more about how mothers make a childcare choice through a phenomenological designed study.

Early practitioners and childcare center directors can use the strategies gained to support

middle class millennial mothers as they balance work and family.

Vicedo (2011) attempted to answer the social debate about gender roles with her

study. Vicedo (2011) built her study around Bowlby's (1988) instinctual need for

maternal love and focused on mothers who have gone back to work after having a child.

Bowlby (1988) believed the personality of the mother and her emotional attitude towards

the child would frame the temperament of the child when not in her care. Vicedo's

(2011) study consisted of 37 working mothers who completed a questionnaire about

attachment. These mothers were asked three questions based on attachment and rated

their responses from 1-5 (1 being the least and 5 being the most). The responses would

help them to improve their self-regulation and attachment to their infants or toddlers.

Did not provide supportive information to help close the gap in research regarding the

attachment of mothers and their infants/toddlers while making childcare decisions.

However, Vicedo (2011) identified the importance of maternal attachment based on

Bowlby's (1996) original theory of attachment and introduction of the term "caregiver"

as another person who interacts with the child on a daily basis other than the mother. The

researcher did not provide how the questions were created and/or the goal of the research.

The relevance of this study to the present study is the application of Bowlby's importance

of maternal attachment and continuity of care. When a mother goes back to work, it is

important to have continuity of care with the caregiver to improve a mother's self-

efficacy when her child is placed in care. This type of security builds a mother's self-

efficacy knowing that regardless of the environment the child is in if the mother is

confident in her attachment to her child, resulting in the child benefiting from any

learning environment and being a confident learner.

Santelices, Ollaberry, and Carvacho (2009) compared the dyadic attachment

relationships with mother, child, then child, and caregiver. The researchers used a Care-

Index, which is a toddler-adult interaction evaluation index using 3- to 5-minute videos of

free-play and interactions with mother and/or caregiver. The authors found both types of

attachment to caregiver and mother can be beneficial to the child. The mother and

caregiver both provided emotional support, but the caregiver demonstrated a higher

degree of sensitivity than the mothers for interacting with the children, taking into

account the child's interests and start of interaction. This study focused on the actual

interaction and not the experience of the mothers when making childcare choices or how

their experiences. This study was an analysis of the interaction between a child and its

principal caregivers in the home and childcare center. The sensitive response of the

adults to the children was complimentary; mothers and primary caregiver showed greater

sensitivity of the interaction, while the caregiver staff showed a greater sensitivity to the

cognitive aspects of learning. This study showed significant differences in caregiver

sensitivity as well as the child's cooperativeness, which demonstrates that a child could

benefit from interacting with adults whose different cognitive skills could strengthen

diverse aspects of healthy child development.

There continues to be inconclusive research on the relationship between maternal

attachment and decisions regarding childcare choices related to caregiver relationships.

There is a need to know what the contributing factors to a childcare decision-making

process and if maternal sensitivity is the main reason, a mother may choose not to place her child in care. This study sought to gain more information about the attachment between caregiver/mother to the child. The information gained from the study through a mother's lived experience can provide information on a middle class millennial mother's decision process when making a childcare choice.

Continuity of Care – Mother to Caregiver

Continuity of care is the reassurance to mothers that the care for their children provided by those other than the mother will not affect the bonding and attachment a mother has with her child. However, even though the settings may change, it is important to strive for minimal numbers of caregivers to help increase the secure bonding and attachment of caregivers other than the mother. The caregiver and mother bond helps to support Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and to improve the attachment between mother and child. A mother is always evaluating herself, especially when going back to work and trusting her infants/toddlers in the care of someone else. Bandura (1997) felt a person needed to have positive self-efficacy in order to maintain composure through the demands of working and raising a child.

Infants or toddlers need a warm and continuous relationship even when the mother is not present. A secure and self-regulated mother will build upon the caregiver/mother relationship with her child to provide the continuous bond needed while in childcare. An insecure mother/infant/toddler's relationship has shown to result in externalizing behaviors in the classroom once the child reaches kindergarten (Barnett et al., 2014; Young & Denson, 2014). The results found in these studies on insecure

attachments show the importance of establishing a secure attachment to not only the mother but also the caregiver. This balance begins with the mother being secure with herself and knowing her child is in a safe and developmentally appropriate environment. The relationship between the caregiver and mother may be a contributing factor to childcare choices. The need to learn more about these factors that may contribute to a mother's decisions process when making childcare choices was considered for this study.

Emergence of Self-Regulation and Temperament in Infants and Toddlers

Kim and Kochanska (2012) have added to the growing research on the importance of early interactions between infants and toddlers' temperament and environment and the emergence of early self-regulation. The effects of the history of the mother-infant or toddler relationship on self-regulation (i.e., work-family coping strategies, parenting beliefs, etc.) moderated infants or toddlers' early negative emotionality. The relationship history was particularly significant for infants or toddlers who were prone to negative emotionality from experiences with their mother instead of a calming environment. These infants and toddlers were especially susceptible to the quality of maternal care and sensitive to environmental changes. Kim and Kochanska (2012) addressed the importance of a healthy childcare environment as well as a healthy home environment with minimal stress-inducing situations.

Kim and Kochanska (2012) also placed a large importance on the continuity of care from mother to caregiver. The ongoing interactions with caregivers helps the infants/toddlers to develop internal working models of attachment relationships, patterns of expectation about interpersonal relations that include images of the self as lovable or

unlovable, and images of the attachment figure as available or unavailable to meet the infants'/toddlers' needs. Infants or toddlers use these working models to forecast the caregivers' availability and responsiveness and to develop behavioral strategies that are utilized to maximize closeness to the mother or other important people.

Internal working models of attachment are thought to guide expectations about relationships throughout life (Fergusson et al., 2008; Giannini, Gori, Sanctis, & Schuldberg, 2011). For example, when a caregiver reads the verbal and nonverbal cues of infants/toddlers and mirrors them back, the infants/toddlers look at themselves through the attachment figure; it is through that communication process that the infants or toddlers' needs self-development is planted and realized. Insecurely attached infants/toddlers lack this reflective function, either because their emotional responses are suppressed as in the case of the dismissive attachment, or insecure attachment (Bradley, 2011; Garavuso, 2009; Giannini et al., 2011). The importance of infants/toddlers to this study is derived from John Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory that infants/toddlers have a biologically based survival-promoting desire for closeness to their caregiver and need this attachment as a foundation for building strong, secure relationships and self-regulation. This desire is needed to provide the infants or toddlers three types of support essential for developing and learning. They are maintaining proximity to caregivers during early interactions, offering a safe basis to explore the world through their mother or caregiver and developing an internal working model based on attachment and healthy learning environment (Stuart et al., 2010). Stuart et al.'s (2010) study is relevant to this study supporting the need for continuity of care for a child and the importance of having

ongoing interactions with the caregivers. Learning more about a lived experience of middle class millennial its mothers' decision process can help close the gaps on important factors during the decision process. The results of this study can give educational practitioners the ability to communicate effectively with millennial mothers and will add to the body of literature pertaining to parenting in the millennial generation.

Researchers (Bradley, 2010; Garavuso, 2009; Giannini et al., 2011; Liu, 2015) provided minimal information on why a mother may choose a particular care arrangement but do not specifically focus on middle class mothers of the millennial generation. This study focused on a specific class and generation due to social change and changes in family roles. Previous literature has addressed mothers' decision process when choosing a childcare setting, but with societal changes, there is a lack of research on middle class millennial mothers making childcare choices. Drastic changes in the economy and family dynamics have resulted in both parents having to work, specifically middle class millennial families (Bianchi, 2011; Cassano et al., 2014; Walsh, 2010). Millennials are the generation that is now in adulthood and experiencing parenting. The characteristic of millennials in the workplace has been of particular focus due to their need to attain job fulfillment and be a full-time parent.

The following section contains a review of the literature that relates to the constructs of interest and chosen methodology of this study. This study may contribute to positive social change by informing early childhood educators of the characteristics and expectations of middle class millennial mothers. The researcher can obtain this through the study of middle class millennial mothers lived experiences in the decision-

making process and will attempt to assist early childhood practitioners to communicate more effectively with mothers about their infants/toddlers care. By informing early practitioners and educators about the factors that may contribute to a mother's decision may help them understand the nature of the process and provide strategies and support to balance work and family for mothers of the millennial generation.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

The modern family is a product of the changing structure of the work and labor market. With more intense global competition and a more globalized worldview, time management takes on greater importance as both parents try to manage work and family responsibilities. Change in the labor market affects family as well as the individual striving for expertise in his or her profession. Women in the millennial generation tend to desire jobs that include a good salary and professional accomplishment. For most, being a stay-at-home mom and tending to children is not enough (Ng et al., 2012). The research and theories address in this chapter explored the variations of care and their respective potential effects on infants/toddlers but do not examine why middle class millennial mothers may choose a particular type of care. After reviewing extensive research on this topic, there is minimal to no empirical research on middle class millennial mothers and no research specifically on the decision-making process when choosing childcare, but studies were found on millennials in the workplace.

Middle Class Mothers

Women have made significant strides in the workplace. Between 1975 and 2009, the labor force rate of mothers with children under age of 18 months increased from

47.4% to 71.6% (Bianchi, 2011). Mothers today also return to work much sooner after

birth of a child than did their mothers half a century ago. In the middle class household, a

male breadwinner and a female caregiver no longer exist. A large majority of families

with young children now have employed mothers to help compensate for childcare costs

(Cahusac & Kanji, 2014). Middle class American families consist of 60% of families

with a combined household income of at least $100,000 (Berdahl, 2013). The jobs for

working middle class are relatively stable but may be of low pay, resulting in both

parents having to work (Cooklin et al., 2014). According to Sihto (2015), due to greater

economic and educational capital, middle class women no longer have the choice

between work and home making. Thus, for the middle class, employment is a financial

necessity, resulting in the mother returning to work soon after her maternity leave lapses.

Along with Sihto (2015), Shepherd-Banigan and Bell (2014) found in their studies of

working middle class mothers in the United States that they will take less maternity leave

and receive far fewer paid leave benefits than women living in other comparably

developed countries receive. This is due to the need to work and have a dual-earner

household. Maternal employment then results in the household income being too high to

qualify for subsidized care such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten Programs (UPK), which is

becoming more prevalent throughout the United States to assist families of a lower

income (Flynn, 2014). Most middle class homes are dual-earner households with each

parent having a degree. The middle class consists of the majority of voters, including

teachers, blue-collar workers, and journalists. Most United States societal trends begin

with the middle class since this is the most influential and predominant class to everyday people interacting day-to-day (Berdahl, 2013; Hamman, 2010; Young & Hinsley, 2012).

Millennial Mothers

Changes in family composition in the United States, as well as changes in women's concepts of their role in society and in family, have led to substantive modifications in the rearing practices of infants/toddlers for mothers of the millennial generation, particularly middle class mothers (Goldstein, 2011; Kwok, 2013, Wiedmer, 2015). Millennial mothers are defined as mothers born 1980-2002, and 83% of new mothers are millennials in the United States (Goldstein, 2011; Kwok, 2013; Ray, 2013). Millennials are known for their different outlook on life compared to Generation Xers (1965 to 1980) and Baby Boomers (1946 to 1964). This millennial generation is known for distinctive traits such as the multiplicity of communication devices, rapid information processing, high self-esteem, self-centeredness, propensity to multi-task, and continued nurturing from their parents well into their adult years (Holt et al., 2012; Ray, 2013; Weidmer, 2015). Before analyzing the decision-making process for choosing childcare, the researcher must understand the characteristics of the middle class millennial generation and all the factors of this generation and apply it to millennial mothers to determine the factors in making a childcare decision.

Ng et al. (2010) suggested millennials possess characteristics of "wanting it all" in terms of high-paying jobs, benefits, and work/life balance. However, millennials have the desire to meet unrealistic expectations for material comforts (i.e., expensive car, large

home, boat etc.), which may hinder their advancement between reward and performance.

This, in turn, leads to disconnect in family life or lack thereof (Ng et al., 2010).

Much, Wagener, Breitkreutz, and Hellenbrand (2014) conducted a study on the

emerging adults of the millennial generation using an interview protocol for 20 millennial

college students. The researchers wanted to explore the issues that traditional-age

undergraduate students of the millennial generation experience during the transition to

college, as perceived by the university staff and the continuation of parental support. The

university staff described millennial students to be reluctant to accept the responsibility

for their actions and more likely to blame others or expectations to be made for their

transgressions. Millennials relied heavily on their parents to help them navigate

problems, often asking them for support and guidance even when it would be more

appropriate to discuss with a professional. Since the use of communications technology

(i.e., cell phones, internet access, social networking sites), millennials no longer have

difficulty contacting their families. This may explain, in part, who it was perceived that

the students continue to rely on their parents to help them navigate through problems.

Contact with parents continues just like in high school, except now electronically and not

face-to-face. The researchers concluded that when dealing with millennials the university

staff must also be prepared to working with their parents as well, typically described as

"helicopter" parenting (Insch et al, 2010). For those who seek to understand the

millennials and the effects of "helicopter parenting" from a generational lens, more

information is needed to learn about how this generation copes with cultural and social

influences. The focus of this dissertation is to understand cultural and societal changes

affects the middle class millennial mothers as they make childcare choices (Much et al., 2014).

Holt et al. (2012) conducted a study of 150 randomly sampled participants using a survey. The participants were asked two open-ended questions: What drives you? In addition, how do you connect? The authors focused on how to motivate the millennial generation and found a drastic difference from the baby boomer generation. The millennial responses showed they are not trying to seek out career experience, nor are they interested in climbing the corporate ladder. The millennials do not respond productively when simply placed in a cubicle and expected to perform at a desk for eight hours a day. Since millennials are well educated, highly skilled in technology, and self-confident, this generation expects stimulation, collaboration, and compensation. Work needs to be interesting, and there must be immediate gratification to motivate this generation.

Belsky and Pleuss (2013) found similar characteristics of the millennial generation in the workforce. The researchers found millennials bring with them narcissism, virtually immediate reward and recognition in the workplace. Their study consisted of 10 focus group interviews with five subjects in each. A convenience sample was used based on responses by undergraduate students. Standardized, open-ended interviews were used to make data analysis easier and added credibility to the interviews. Holt et al. (2012) did not provide the questions that were asked to the participants to see if the questions would be pertain to mothers making a childcare choice. Similar to other studies in this section, this study concluded that millennials feel they can do anything,

everything should revolve around them, and they rarely feel independent from their parents (Holt et al., 2012). This study elaborated on middle class millennial mothers and determined if these characteristics are apparent throughout the decision making process, and if so, how early childhood practitioners and educators can support the millennial mothers and guide them in making a decisions most beneficial to them and their children.

Holt et al. (2012) and Belsky and Pleuss (2013) reported there are over 75 million millennials who will be or currently are in the workforce. Research on characteristics of the millennial generation in the workplace exists, but the research does not elaborate specifically on middle class millennial mothers' experiences as they enter the workforce, which is a dilemma for new mothers entering the workplace. Social change has affected women's everyday routine since past generations, and there is a need to know more about these changes and provide millennial mothers with information and provide additional information about the factors that may contribute to making childcare decisions. While the studies included in this section generally discussed millennials, the studies did not focus specifically on millennial mothers or socioeconomic status of the participants. The current literature confirms women's participation in paid employment has substantially increased in the past 50 years among married women, resulting in a substantial reorganization of work and family, but there is no research focusing on middle class millennial mothers and how they are adjusting to the reorganization of work and family (Much, Wagener, Breitkreutz & Hellenbrand, 2014). Research is needed specifically on middle class millennial mothers and their adjustment to the work and family balance. As social change has affected the millennial generation, there is a need to understand the

decisions millennial mothers make during the decision process of childcare choices and how current mothers can utilize the information to gain a positive self-efficacy and provide their child with an emotionally developing environment.

Marriage is less important to the millennial generation than to previous generations. Only about 60% of millennials spent their childhoods in two-parent homes, and 44% of millennials think marriage is unimportant (Dexter et al., 2013; Ray, 2013). Millennials are getting married later in life, and many will live with their partners before they get married. Consistent with these views, 53% of millennial mothers are unmarried (Ray, 2013). While millennial mothers may not value marriage, over half of them place being a good parent as one of their priorities in life, validating the current literature on millennial mothers being overprotective and needing constant communication with the caretakers of their child. This need may be related to maternal guilt about spending many hours at work and the resulting lack of time with their child (Cassano et al., 2014; Moro-Egido, 2012; Walsh, 2010). The need of knowing their child is every decision and development may relate to the desire to be the "perfect" parent. A culture of intensive mothering is emerging. Mothers try to compensate for lack of time spent together by analyzing the child is every move in development and social interactions (Kwok, 2013; Moro-Egido, 2012, Ray, 2013).

To define the motivations of millennial generation, Kwok (2013) completed a grounded theory study. A grounded theory was used to allow the theory to emerge from the data. Field research, involving in-depth interviews and direct observation in natural settings of 50 subjects born in the millennial period. The 50 participants completed an in-

depth interview in their natural settings. The author found the social environment shaped

the attitude and behavioral patterns of people amongst this millennial generation. The

influence of the technological and social environment, as well as socialization agents

such as family, peers, and mass media, provide common life experiences that create

common values and attitudes among people growing up in this particular generation of

millennials. These values and attitudes distinguish them from people who grow up at

different times. The result of this is due to the social changes of economic, technological,

and social changes in the workforce and family. Kwok's (2013) research provided

information about the characteristics of the millennial generation but did not elaborate or

distinguish the difference in the participant section of the study or state if any of the

participants were millennial mothers.

   Millennial mothers are challenged by the condition of the American family due to

the drastic changes in work roles, gender roles and source of authority, and daily

schedules, all of which are completely different from when their parents were raised.

Young and Hinsley (2012) conducted a study consisting of 46 female participants using

an online survey involving questions pertaining to current job placement, their own

parents' involvement in life decisions, use of social media, and work/family balance. The

authors analyzed the characteristics of millennials in the workplace. Millennial mothers

were described as wanting to share details of their lives and their children's lives by

posting photos, videos, and anecdotes online. Since this study was an online

questionnaire, the research lacks an in-depth analysis of the lived experience of young

mothers in the workplace and understanding how millennial mothers are attempting to

make childcare choices. This research is supportive of the millennial generation but disclosed the need for a qualitative phenomenological study to understand the factors mothers are using to make a decision. A phenomenological design allows the researcher to understand the participant's feelings and gain meaning into the decision process highlighting any new themes present unlike a questionnaire, which most of the studies have used (Berdahl, 2013; Insch et al., 2010).

Ng et al. (2010) investigated the career expectations and priorities of members of the millennial generation (born after 1980) and explored differences between this cohort related to demographic factors (i.e., gender, race, and year of study) and academic performance. The research used a national survey of 150 millennial graduates. The ages of the participants were 22 years of age to 27 (ranging from 18 to the millennial cutoff of 27). The cited studies focused primarily on millennials in the workplace but did not specify millennial parents. The results showed a variation of millennials' expectations across gender. Women outnumbered men as participants in this study. The authors found women were more likely, unlike men, to accept a less-than-ideal job and have lower salary expectations, reflecting on the reality that women continue to be undervalued in the labor market in terms of wages and the positions they hold. Women were less likely to consider staying with the same employer, which could be due to in part childbirth and a desire for a less demanding career to raise a family (Berdahl, 2013; Ng et al., 2012; Ng et al., 2010). The cited studies focused primarily on millennials in the workplace but did not specify millennial parents. The research does provide information about the characteristics of millennials, which is beneficial to this study but also supports

why more information is needed on how millennial mothers are impacted when working and making childcare decisions. The factors learned from the anticipated study can support millennial mothers when making their decision since their employer or health care provider will know how to use provisional options to this new generation because of social change in family and work roles.

The second goal of Ng et al. (2010) was to examine whether there are significant differences in expectations at work priorities among millennials that are attributed to demographics. The findings suggested differences do exist in the expectations and priorities within the millennial generation based on traditional demographic groups such as gender and minorities. These findings showed although generational cohort groups are meaningful and useful, researchers must not stereotype this generation of these characteristics as a whole, and researchers need more information to understand the diversity among gender for millennials and provide strategies to employers of millennials on how to support this generation in the workplace. However, current research on millennials does not focus specifically on the middle class millennial mothers who are going back to work while raising a family, which seems to be the social change for middle class families today. I found similar results as Insch et al. (2010), in that millennials place great importance on seeking rapid advancement to ensure a meaningful and prosperous life outside of work

Helicopter parents

Insch et al. (2010) conducted a study about "helicopter parents" among millennials. Millennials are not reliving the life of their Boomer or Generation X parents.

Many of the millennials are the product of "helicopter parents." Helicopter parents can

be defined as parents who have programmed their children's lives through grade school,

high school, and college and many are now attempting to handle their children's job

search and process. The study consisted of 128 participants currently enrolled in online

business courses. This quantitative study used an online survey. Out of the 128

participants, 96 responded to the survey. The research showed complete dependency on

the parents and living in their parents' home as long as possible, resulting in marriage and

children occurring later on in life (Insch et al., 2010; Much et al., 2014). The researchers

concluded that millennials are closer to their parents than any previous generation.

Eleven percent of those between the age of 25 and 34 still live with their parents,

according to the results. The second phase of Insch et al.'s (2010) research included a

longitudinal study of a scale to measure helicopter parents' traits and attributes of these

hovering parents. Their parents support some millennials until well into their 30s. This

raises the question of over-protectiveness and guilt that could be causing maternal

deprivation when a mother goes back to work and not being the sole caregiver of their

child like their mother was to them (Insch et al., 2010). There is more information

needed to understand middle class millennial mothers' childcare choices and the factors

that influence their decisions.

     Before analyzing the decision-making process for choosing childcare, the

researcher must understand the characteristics of the middle class millennial generation

and all the factors of this generation and apply it to millennial mothers to determine the

factors in making a childcare decision. Today's middle class millennial mothers,

choosing a type of care for their child has become just as important a decision to have a child. The research found on millennials is beneficial to examine this generation but does not specifically focus on middle class millennial mothers who have to make a childcare decision. This study can apply the information gained on middle class millennial mothers and add to the current research on millennials while focusing specifically on mothers adjusting to social change. The information gained will support mothers going back to work and allow early practitioners to understand the choices and challenges millennial mothers face.

Current Phenomenological Research on Maternal Choice

The patterns of studies that have focused on childcare choices have consisted of a few phenomenological studies using the mothers' lived experiences. Garavuso (2009) conducted a phenomenological design and interviewed three mothers from an urban population, studying their experiences with childcare choice. The women's notions of appropriate environments for their young children were fueled by beliefs that were transmitted by family and culture. The women in the study revealed their need for active participation in the constructing of their understandings of choice of care and education for their young children through many levels of interaction, reflections, and participation. Garavuso (2009) highlighted the need for further research to understand best practices in guiding specifically the middle class millennial mother in the decision-making process for childcare choices.

Another phenomenological study probed the experiences of mothers returning to work. Not only are middle class millennial mothers faced with childcare choices but they

also feel pressured in their work environment. Cahusac and Kanji (2014) used in-depth interviews to explore professional working mother's experiences going back to work after having a child. Their research highlights how masculine cultures play a key role when mothers return to work. The participants wanted to work after having children but felt the expectations by senior employees was intimidating. The mothers in the study felt that they either could not or did not want to conform to organizations' masculine norms about working long hours. Leaving the office "early" was highly visible. Although some of the mothers had identified innovative ways to combine work and being active parents, the organizational culture was not receptive to creative solutions. This study focused on working mothers but did not classify age or social class as a delimiting factor. The study consisted of women from different socioeconomic backgrounds as well as a range of ages not focusing on a specific age group. Cahusac and Kanji's (2014) research is important to the dissertation by probing the corporate experiences for certain mothers when they return to work. Since the work environment is a component of Bronfenbrenner's system theory that relates to influences on children's development, this study can support the need for all systems to be in balance for middle class millennial mothers.

Building upon Cahusac and Kanji's (2014) phenomenological study on working mothers, Im, Kim, and Sung (2014) conducted a phenomenological study of 14 Korean-American working mothers. The authors found that the working mothers were satisfied with their self-image as professionals despite the struggles women may face in a corporate work setting (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014). The women felt like they were contributing to the family income and had better relationships with their husbands. The

working mothers in this study felt a sense of achievement from their jobs, enjoyed their

career life, and could develop themselves because of their jobs. On the other hand, the

authors found the mothers had guilty feelings for not caring for their own children and

using other forms of nonmaternal care. Korean-American working mothers sometimes

felt guilty. They felt as if other people would criticize them for not giving attention to

their children because they had a job. The mothers would then compensate by allowing

their children to do what they wanted to do and repeatedly telling their children how

much they loved them.

Im, Kim, and Sung (2014) provided a study most similar to this dissertation.

However, the authors focused on only Korean-American working mothers, unlike using

American millennials and middle class mothers. Im et al. (2014) found a clear connection

through interviews; working mothers are faced with emotional pressures between their

careers and raising a family. This study supports the need for supporting research on

working mothers in the middle class millennial generation, providing the mothers of that

generation with information to guide childcare choices. Given that information, early

childhood administrators, directors, and healthcare providers will better understand what

the mothers of this generation need and may use this information to improve service

delivery.

Despite different types of phenomenological designs, the studies (Garavuso,

2009; Im, Kim, & Sung 2014; Insch et al., 2010) focused on mothers' childcare choices

and caregiver experiences, but they do not exclusively focus on the experiences of middle

class millennial mothers. The literature provides some information about the experiences

of mothers making a choice but not of middle class millennial mothers when making childcare choices. There is a need for this information because of the number of families faced with childcare choices due to economic and social challenges of millennial mothers. Even though the present study was not longitudinal like other studies listed above, I was able to analyze the experiences of mothers making a childcare decision regarding the best environment for their infants/toddlers while their child is currently in care.

Relevance of the Problem in Current Research

Several studies have been dedicated to finding and identifying the most important factors in parental childcare decisions (Bouchard et al., 2010; Chang, 2013; Huston et al., 2015; Im et al., 2014). Researchers have found that factors such as cost (McNally et al., 2014), location (Afferlerback et al., 2014), caregiver experience (Vuillez-Coady et al., 2013, and caregiver warmth (Cassano et al., 2011) may be the contributing factors of greatest import. While much of the current research examines the different types of childcare and their resulting effects on children through elementary school, there is lack of research concerning a mother's lived experience in making that choice and the factors that may contribute to it (Garavuso, 2009; Ng et al., 2010; Smith & Ellwood, 2011).

Researchers believe there is more to explore why mothers may choose a specific type of non-parental care over another as well as their insights about the selected settings after placement (Bianchi, 2011; Flynn, 2014; Sihto, 2015). In recent studies, researchers have studied socioeconomic status and family income as factors of childcare choices (Guhn, 2009; Harkness, Super, Bermudez, & Bonchini, 2011). However, the majority of

research is quantitative and includes the cost of childcare as the deciding factor for the result of a mother's childcare choice; it does not include family demographics or the expectations of quality care a mother may seek for her infant or toddler. The average United States family with an infant or toddler can expect to pay between $7,000 and $12,000 per year in childcare costs (Hammon, 2010). Poms et al. (2009) found in their survey that the cost of childcare was among parents' highest concerns when selecting a childcare provider. Many of these parents also indicated they frequently compromised on the quality of the childcare to pay for it. Current authors found parents' ideas about anticipated characteristics of day care, yet researchers use a quantitative design, omitting a mother's lived experience. Researchers emphasized the importance of determining the factors that may add to the mother's decision process (Meunier et al., 2012; Santelices et al., 2009; Small, 2010). Some research has been conducted using the prototype of parental belief complexes. By identifying the value parents placed on particular characteristics of childcare arrangements, Rose and Elicker (2010) identified the active sets of belief structures identifying the value of characteristics of parents placed on the characteristics of childcare arrangements. However, once again, a survey was employed using a Likert scale; an in-depth understanding of individual parents' perceptions was not possible using that design. This study provided a richer context for examining the millennial mothers' lived experiences as they tackle decisions about childcare choices and their perceptions of the outcome of those choices.

Another limitation of previous research was that participants were chosen from one type of care, such as NMC or at-home care or grandparent care. Participants were

interviewed by telephone and questionnaires, and some of the studies included diary observations from the parents themselves on a daily basis. There is minimal research inspecting mothers' perceptions of all types of care and identifying what may contribute to the decision of the mother, but no research particularly for mothers of the millennial generation (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Leitner, 2011; Puckering, 2011; Rholes et al., 2011).

Previous quantitative research has proven through surveys that parents have their own values and beliefs regarding best placements for their children, and they consider they can make the best choices. Yet, the most of parents in these studies conveyed their decisions to social networks including friends or neighbors for information about cost, quality of care, safety, and curriculum or experience (Huston et al., 2015; Landry et al., 2014). Furthermore, the knowledge from the parents of what actually goes on in the childcare center is limited and not accurate. Most parents in these studies never actually visited the childcare center and took the feedback from their social networks to determine if the place was adequate for their child (Baron, 2009).

The needs for economic success and financial security are affecting the definition of "family" as it changes and becomes controversial. Working mothers are now becoming the norm; many men are no longer primary earners in their households, and "latchkey" children are commonplace. In 2014, the labor force participation rate of mothers with children under 6 years old (64.2 percent) was lower than the rate of those whose youngest child was 6 to 17 years old (74.7 percent). The participation rate of mothers with infants under a year old was 57.1 percent. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). A generation ago, most women left the workforce once they got married, or after the birth

of their first child, and continued to stay home until the child was nearly grown (Buehler & O'Brien, 2011; Much et al., 2014). To understand the experiences and processes mothers may undertake while deciding on the type of early childcare that is necessary and to shed light on their perceptions, a qualitative study is needed to explore issues and experiences surrounding mothers' childcare decisions (Bornstein et al., 2010, Liu, 2015).

Women in the Workforce: Recent Trends

Millennial mothers are driven by success and the ability to manage motherhood and a career. The pressure of a dual income to survive or the woman being the sole breadwinner has placed more pressure on the mother with having to support the family and raise the children (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014). Today's young women seek jobs that offer a good salary and professional accomplishment. For most, being a stay-at-home mom tending to children is not enough (Kim & Kochanska, 2012; Moss et al., 2014). The consequences that began to arise as women were becoming more self-sufficient were the undeniable collapse of the family structure and increase in maternal employment. The research indicated women were now focusing on a career instead of only having children and staying home. The working mothers' attention was now divided between career and motherhood, collapsing the traditional family structure because of less time for raising a family (Kim & Kochanska, 2012). A study by Antecol (2015) focused on educated women in the workplace. She found little evidence that professional women are leaving paid work to raise children, unlike working mothers in previous generations. Indeed, the full-time, year-round employment rate of professional women with young children in middle class Generation X or millennials is higher than for any previous

cohort. Among highly educated women in traditionally male-dominated professions, there has been a steady increase in working hours and employment among middle class millennial women. There has been a steep upward trend in market work among mothers of preschool children, increasing at a rate of 4.3% per year over a 30-year period from 1948-1988, since nonmaternal childcare has now become more socially acceptable (Liu, 2015). Nearly two-thirds of women with young children work outside the home, largely out of economic necessity and vulnerability focusing on the middle class families. Historically, college-educated women have had higher labor force participation (LFP) rates than the general population of women and different fertility and marriage patterns, which is common among the millennial generation (Antecol, 2015). According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey 2013 panels of the U.S. Census Bureau of Survey Income and Program participation (SIPP), only 17% of new mothers who had their first baby during the years of 1961-1965 were working. Between 1981 and 1985, 56% of new mothers were employed when the child reached 1 year. Since 1985, the employment rate has risen to about 72% (50% full-time) (Bradley, 2011). Both educators and parents place great emphasis on this generation of female millennials and their adjustments with career and family. The focus of early childcare spending has been on policies to support the societal changes that are occurring in the workplace but have primarily only focused on mothers in the low-socio economic income bracket, not realizing the middle class millennials may be having the same struggles (Moss et al., 2014).

Increase of Parental Employment Results in Increased Childcare

According to current research, it is clear that American women have entered the out-of-home labor force since World War II in increasing numbers. Many parents— mothers and fathers alike—are spending longer hours than ever in the workplace, drastically reducing the time they have available to spend with their children. Stuart et al. (2010) found it imperative to analyze the work-family policies in the United States and shift employers' focus to societal changes to assist working parents with achieving positive work-family spillover. This study can help support mothers when deciding on childcare to determine the best options for their infants/toddlers and themselves as they adjust back to work.

Bryant, Williams, Ndambuki, and Erwin (2012) discussed a survey by the Families and Work Institute indicating that American men currently work an average 48.8 hours of work per week and women an average of 41.7 hour. Employers have begun to implement on-site childcare since this makes smart business sense for their employees. Child and dependent care problems are having a serious impact on worker absenteeism, recruitment, and retention, ultimately affecting America's bottom line.

The labor force rate of mothers with children under 18 years of age was 69.9% in 2013, 74.7% for mothers with children 6-17 years of age, and 63.9% for mothers with children under 6 years of age, 61.1% for mothers with children under 3 years of age, and 57.3% for mother of infants (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2014). Of particular note, the labor force rate of mothers of preschool children has climbed more rapidly than the overall female labor force rate. Women are also working later into pregnancy and

returning to work more quickly after childbirth. About 50% of mothers with young children, for example, remain strongly attached to the labor market. Sihto (2015) emphasized the balance working mothers are looking for. Women are staying longer while pregnant and come back to work after their maternity leave lapses, which supports the need to know more about middle class millennial mothers and how they are making decisions when choosing childcare. The present study builds on current knowledge about millennials but also adds information about childcare choices of millennial mothers, to inform educators about ways they can support a balance of work and family responsibilities.

Cooklin et al. (2014) discussed the striking change in the labor market activity of mothers as demonstrated in Sihto (2015), who reported that half of all women return to work by the time their child is 4 months old or younger. This accounts for nearly all of the women who will return to work that first year. In addition, older, more educated women with higher wages are most likely to return to active work following the birth of a child. Nevertheless, working women across all occupations struggle with the allocation of work time versus family time, and working women are strongly influenced by family responsibilities. Cahusac and Kanji (2014) discuss the pressures corporate mothers feel when they return to work and try to keep up with their male employees. The authors concluded that management needs to become friendlier for mothers as a whole, allowing mothers to possibly work from home, maintain flexible work hours, and engage in child-friendly activities such as Halloween parades, holiday events, and family barbeques. Corporate work environments are beginning to realize the need to have a balance of work

and family and have been implementing more child-friendly activities in the workplace (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Kim & Kochanska, 2012; Sihto, 2015;).

Decades of research have shown that parents and their infants/toddlers need the time to establish a pattern of interaction will enable them to recognize and respond to each other's signals and be attuned to one another. Secure attachment provides the foundation for exploration that promotes learning and development. Therefore, having a sufficient amount of leave is essential in benefiting the social/emotional development of the child. Given the state of childcare in the United States, there is potential for detrimental effects related to both cognitive and social development (Spinrad et al., 2012; Zigler, 1996).

Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

The government's eagerness to enforce legislation for family leave was to protect the numerous women entering the workforce. However, the original laws relating to women in their childbearing years were not equally supportive to women in the labor force, intentionally discouraging them from working and therefore securing these jobs for men. The discriminatory nature of such laws was made a target in the 1960s and 1970s. By 1978, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act specifically mentioned pregnancy in its definition of sex discrimination practices. The focus of this law was on maternal and child health, but its primary purpose was to reduce or eliminate any discrimination related to the provision of employment benefits (Zigler, 1996).

Parental leave legislation was introduced in Congress in 1985 and again in 1987 before finally being passed in 1990. President George H.W. Bush vetoed the legislation. However, in 1993, President Bill Clinton enacted into law the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). As the first non-disability-based parental leave law in United States history, the FMLA was a revolutionary piece of legislation. The FMLA includes 12 weeks of unpaid leave every 12 months to care for a newborn, newly adopted, or seriously ill child, parent, or spouse; job protection; and a certain amount of flexibility in the use of leave time. Employers are granted the right to require 30 days' notice. A serious drawback is that coverage excludes employees who work for companies employing fewer than 50 workers, employees whose jobs are in the upper echelons in large corporations and those who work part-time or who have worked less than a full year. Moreover, even those who are covered by the provisions of FMLA are seldom able to take the leaves offered because they are unpaid. In total, the act provides (unpaid) family leave for only about 5% of the nation's employees (Evans, 2011; Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2013; Wai Wan et al., 2010; Zigler, 1996).

By 1997, only about 4% of eligible workers had taken family leave under the provisions of the Act. The most significant impediment to greater reliance on its benefits has been the lack of income replacement. Studies indicate that mothers of newborns take shorter leaves than their eligibility permits because no income replacement is available. The United States, along with Papua New Guinea, Liberia and Lesotho are some of the only countries in the world that provide no type of financial support for mothers. In fact, over 30 developing nations, including Angola and Ghana, offer paid leave, but the United

States does not. Most other industrialized nations have generous policies in place that allow leave from work with a high proportion of the worker's salary provided (Zigler, 1996).

Shepherd-Banigan and Bell (2014) examined parents' views on family leave and its aftermath by conducting a cross-sectional survey. In the survey, researchers collected information on the amount or maternity leave the mothers took from work, and explored mothers' feelings on their return to work. The researchers used a Listening to Mothers (LTM) Survey, a telephone and on-line survey documenting the experiences of women from pregnancy to 18 months postchildbirth in regards to the FMLA policies. These mothers felt being "superwoman" was overrated and wanted to focus on the importance of a happy home life. The stress in the workplace and working demands along with care for a child was overbearing. Shepherd-Banigan and Bell (2014) concluded there is a need for working mothers to be given options by the government to support families to balance family and work to help retain their employees. The research has confirmed women in the United States take less maternity leave and receive far fewer paid leave benefits than women living in other comparable developed countries. On average, the participants in this study took about 10 weeks of leave after birth of their babies and only 40% received salary compensation. Over half of the women who had returned to work reported that they did not stay home as long as they would have liked and, of those women, 81% cited lack of financial resources as the primary reason for an early return to work. The findings suggest that financial constraints may limit the amount of time that women can take to address family demands in the postpartum period.

Challenges in Social Policy for Working Mothers in the United States

The passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in 1993 guaranteed unpaid parental leave to most that work in firms with 50 or more employees, which encompasses only 5% of the workforce (Zigler, 1996). Following its passage in 1993, after the original implementation of the FMLA, the provisions of the plan have been, as a rule, both easier and more cost-effective to administer than most private sector groups had anticipated. As of June 2014, the FMLA has now included military personnel and same-sex marriages to be considered under the requirements to be met for qualification for FMLA. The policies for families, however, have been less positive. The FMLA has not achieved for millions of families what Congress and President Clinton originally intended. This is because parents are either ineligible to take leave, or taking an unpaid leave is not a viable option. Even with the FMLA in place, American parents are often forced to choose from a limited range of less-than-optimal alternatives. One parent, usually the mother, must stay home, at the risk of the family's economic stability, or parents must place their infants/toddlers in substitute care long before they feel ready to do so. Parents are well aware of the unsettling state of childcare in the United States and the potential for detrimental effects on both cognitive and social development. Zigler (1996) believes that many families feel their only options are to place their children in substandard childcare or to risk family economic stability by taking unpaid leaves of absence from work during the earlier weeks and months of their children's lives.

The FMLA has major drawbacks since it does not cover everyone. Coverage is excluded for employees who work for companies employing fewer than 50 workers,

whose jobs are in the upper echelons in large corporations, and who work part-time or who have worked less than one full year. Moreover, even those who are covered by the provisions of FMLA are seldom able to take the leaves offered, because the leaves are unpaid (Zigler, 1996). In essence, the act provides (unpaid) family leave for only about 5% of our nation's employees. This percentage is evidence that change is needed to accommodate the societal changes that are occurring in the United States, in order to support the needs of the working class (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2014). There have been no legislative changes have been introduced to amend the FMLA to help support families monetarily and their working mothers, and there is little or no support to help parents balance work and family obligations. Some corporations offer flexible scheduling for child-rearing responsibilities. However, the only steps the government has taken were the passage of the Family Support Act and the Childcare and Development Block Grant (Evans, 2011; Murdock, 2012). These measures provide families in need with financial assistance for childcare. These and other pieces of legislation are not enough to meet families' needs. The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit allows for a portion of a family's childcare costs to be credited against taxes (for example, $700 for one child and $1,400 for two children), but this is nonrefundable and tends to benefit mostly the affluent parents who are employed by either school districts, government offices, large institutions, or large corporations (Murdock, 2012).

Another challenge is the lack of infrastructure in childcare. There is no unified federal system of childcare, nor are there federal regulations in place to govern and guide the operations of childcare facilities. Each state has its own regulations and standards,

leaving childcare open to extreme variations both between and within states. Not all states even have such regulations, and those in existence are not always enforced. To help improve this lack of consistency, attempts have been made since 1941 to regulate childcare. In 1941, the Office of Education recommended specific staff-child ratios. In 1968, the first Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements (FIDCR) were proposed and were revised in 1972 and 1980 (Zigler, 1996). The 1980 version recommended standards for health, safety, staff training, social services, and staff-child ratios. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a professional organization of early childhood educators and others dedicated to improving the quality of early childhood programs, developed another set of standards for center-based programs in 1984. Criteria were then developed for accreditation of childcare centers, with the goal of improving the quality of life for young children. These regulations and standards were voluntary. Childcare centers did not have the force of a universal mandate (Zigler, 1996).

Organizations such as the NAEYC hoped to improve the standards of childcare to improve the consistency of health standards, staff training and staff-child rations. Today, receiving a NAEYC accreditation for a childcare is highly respected. Many childcare centers strive to achieve NAEYC accreditation, which requires a two-year process. NAEYC Accreditation of programs for young children represents the mark of quality in early childhood education. NAEYC Accreditation began in 1985 with the goal of providing an accrediting system that would raise the level of early childhood programs. Today, over 7,000 programs are NAEYC Accredited (Evans, 2011; Im et al., 2014; Murdock, 2012)

NAEYC accredited programs invest in early childhood education because of the benefits of quality programs for children and their families. Early childhood experiences—from birth to age eight—have an enormous impact on children's lifelong learning and positively contribute to their health and development. Early childhood education programs with the mark of quality benefit children with greater readiness for and success in school. It is for this reason that parents and families seek out NAEYC-accredited programs. Parents choosing an early childhood education program can be overwhelmed by trying to find the highest-quality program for their child. Accreditation gives families the chance to make a childcare choice that has met the quality standards NAEYC has established. NAEYC accreditations have helped many families make a childcare decision (Berry et al., 2014; Im et al, 2014).

After considering the lack of policies and support in childcare for working families, this study sought to provide information to educators, practitioners, and administrators for use in support programs for infant, toddlers, and their parents. Several studies (Bouchard et al., 2010; Chang, 2013) have extensively focused on this area. Each of these studies have included research on the various forms of childcare by someone other than the mother, usually referred to as NMC or FFN care. This includes care in someone else's home, care at home by a relative or nonrelatives, or care in an early learning center (Boyd et al., 2009; Cote et al., 2008; Haavind, 2011; Smith & Ellwood, 2011). Although NMC and FFN have become a normative experience for preschool children, mothers still face the challenge of deciding on the most beneficial environment for their children.

Numbers of Children in Childcare: Recent Trends

The labor force participation rate (the percentage of the population working or looking for work) for women with children under age six was 68 percent in 2011, up from 63 percent in 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Three-quarters of full-time employed mothers (75.2 percent) utilize some form of childcare, compared to 86.3 percent of part-time employed mothers. Parents often alternate their work schedules to tag-team responsibilities, a major reason for the high costs of childcare (Cooklin et al., 2014). However, during the same time, a more dramatic increase was found in the number of labor force participants consisting of mothers with a child less than 18 months of age. Since the United States has one of the least supportive maternity leave policies, mothers are forced to go back to work either 6 or 8 weeks after having a child, increasing infants/toddlers care to 60% (Chang, 2013; Moorman & Pomerantz, 2008; Stolk et al., 2008; Vicedo, 2011). Today, approximately two-thirds of children in the United States under age 5 experience some type of non-parental childcare on a regular basis (Gameiro et al., 2010; Kushnick, 2013). National studies indicate that between one-fifth and two-fifths of these children experience a "patchwork" of multiple childcare arrangements during a typical week, with many of these children experiencing a combination of formal (center, preschool, or regulated family childcare) and informal (relative, nanny, or babysitter) care. These findings inform the reader of the importance of continuity of care in the childcare setting and at home.

Millennial mothers are going back to work upon lapse of maternity leave. This change has confronted women with the decision of selecting the type of environment that

they believe is most beneficial for their children. In North America, more than half of

infants/toddlers receive NMC on a regular basis (Harris, 2009; Leitner, 2011; Liu, 2015).

The increase in employment of mothers with very young children has led to an escalation

in research focused on the effects of maternal employment on mother-child relationships

and on mothers' psychological well-being.

Women's Decisions to Seek Childcare

Several studies (Bouchard et al., 2010; Chang, 2013) focused on this area but not

specifically on middle class millennial mothers. This includes the various forms of

childcare by someone other than the mother, usually referred to as NMC or FFN care.

This includes care in someone else's home, care at home by a relative or nonrelatives, or

care in an early learning center (Berry et al., 2014; Boyd et al., 2009; Haavind, 2011;

Huston et al., 2015). Although NMC and FFN have become a normative experience for

preschool children, mothers still face the challenge of deciding on the most beneficial

environment for their infants/toddlers and continuity of care.

Choice of care. A limitation to current research is the paucity of literature on the

concept of choice. Preliminary research (Rose & Elicker, 2010) suggests that maternal

preference for childcare and actual childcare choice may not be the same thing. What

mothers prefer may not be what they ultimately choose, due to other constraints.

Therefore, it is important to understand these factors in relation to how adequately they

meet the needs of working families and the lived experiences of working mothers. With

more options aligned to their maternal needs, mothers may be able to utilize the type of

care that is closest to their ideal preference, leading to increased levels of self-regulation to support a balance between work and family.

Vincent et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study on "choices" for childcare. The study consisted of 71 working- and middle class families. In this respondent group, 57 were mothers and 14 fathers to determine how their choices were made. Vincent et al. (2010) argued based on their research within its particular mechanisms and practices. Choice reflects on specific affective responses to settings and "gut" instincts when choosing a center. Many of the respondents had the resources and were able to access a wider range of settings, often visited four or five different providers before making a decision, and sometimes elected instead to employ a nanny. Several low-income families expressed concern over a lack of information available to consumers, from which they could evaluate the quality of the center (Im, Kim & Sung, 2014; Liu, 2015; Rholes et al., 2011; Wai Wan, 2009). Vincent et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of choice in his study and did not focus on any other factors contributing to choice. However, although the study was qualitative, the participants in the study were unbalanced fathers to mothers, and only minimal information was provided about the participants to address the age or socioeconomic bracket of the participants.

As far as dissatisfaction with the centers in which their children were currently enrolled, seven of the working class families expressed substantial unhappiness. However, there was little evidence of a parent withdrawing her child. Limited options and cost played a big part in children leaving the program. The majority of middle class parents chose nannies for their children under the age of 3, with nursery schools

becoming more popular in the immediate preschool period (3 to 5 years) due to the need

for more intellectual, creative, and social interactions (Giannini et al., 2011; Im, Kim &

Sung, 2014; Liu, 2015; McNally, Share & Murray, 2014). The parents that did choose

care in a childcare setting were far more likely to place their children in a small, intimate

care space. The research also showed no value in home-based care. All parents preferred

a childcare setting. As Vincent et al. (2010) concluded in their research that "choices" are

guided by social norms of community and family, social relationships continue to be of

importance when seeking to "do the right thing" for children. However, some families

continue to use research and instinct as a factor. Vincent et al. (2010) illustrated a similar

study to this study but was not a phenomenological design and analyzed the mother's

lived experience while her child was in a childcare setting. This study specifically

focused on millennial mothers, excluding fathers, since research from other studies

confirms mothers are the main decision maker when it comes to childcare choices

(Bornstein et al., 2010; Sihto, 2015).

Several studies from the literature examined the developmental effects on a child

after the type of care was chosen (Berry et al., 2014; Guhn, 2009; Huston et al., 2015;

Lindsey et al., 2009). Landry et al. (2014) and Haavind (2011) have demonstrated that

children who attend childcare are developmentally at or above kindergarten level more

often than children who have not experienced such care. Garavuso (2009) examined the

positive effects of developmental documentation of childcare protocol using informal and

formal evaluations such as portfolios, observations, and developmental milestones to

document a child's progress through age 5. Research continues to support the positive

effects of center-based care to improve overall factors of social interaction and the timely achievement of developmental milestones. However, there is no research exists on analyzing the middle class millennial mothers' lived experience of choosing the type of childcare and if the appearance of meeting these developmental milestones is the most important component in choosing their childcare of choice (Berry et al., 2014; Rose & Elicker, 2010; Sarti, 2010).

Analysis of choice. The literature research strategy supported the social networks, parental beliefs, and socioeconomic status as factors that may affect the choice of care (Davis, 2011; Murdock, 2012; Palmer, 2011). However, limitations found in the research were the overuse of questionnaires and surveys to provide information about mothers' reasons for choosing a specific type of care. The questionnaires used were Likert scale, Maternal Care Questionnaire (Frolland, 2011; Gamiero et al., 2010; Liu, 2015), and Knowledge of Infants/Toddlers Development Inventory (KIDI) (Bornstein et al., 2010). Each questionnaire requested numbered responses denoting agreement, disagreement, or uncertainty. The use of quantitative design lacks the lived experiences of mothers throughout the decision-making process. The phenomenological design allows the research to retrieve the feelings and emotions of the experience of millennial mothers while their child is currently in care. Chang (2013) used telephone interviews and asked questions that pertained to the consequences of maternal employment but lacked the emotional connection of the participant since the interview was conducted over the phone. Phone interviews may not be as personal compared to a face-to-face interview with the researcher.

Garavuso (2009), Im et al. (2014), and Vincent et al. (2010) used interviews as part of their research method. Because of the use of interviews for data collection, both of these studies were most similar to the present study. The present study included 15 working middle class millennial mothers participating in interview questions that pertained to choice and factors that may contribute to their decisions.

Another limitation of the literature review studies was the lack of comparison between the types of care chosen and why (Im et al., 2014; Moore, Calkins, Mills & Propper, 2009; Vincent et al., 2010). Most studies only included participants from one type of care (i.e., childcare setting or grandparental care) or examined the caregiver or working mother. The continued variation of care analysis is evident in Neal and Hammer (2009) and Liu (2015). These studies interviewed the caregivers and their interactions with the children in small focus groups, while Birigen et al. (2012) interviewed and observed the child caregiver pair. Currently, literature does pertain to childcare choice. However, There is a lack of support on middle class millennial mothers and factors that may contribute to this decision (Cooklin et al., 2014; Leitner, 2011; Rholes et al., 2011; Puckering, 2011). In order to examine and analyze a middle class millennial mother's childcare decisions, a more in-depth response is needed to determine the contributing factors. In addition, the process must examine verbal cues, body language, and intonation to understand millennial mothers' lived experience of working and raising a child in the most optimal environment cognitively and developmentally support their child.

Influencing factors. According to Liu (2015), multiple contributing factors may influence a mother's decision. Bradley (2011), Buehler and O'Brien (2011), and Haavind (2011), have established that multiple factors may play a role in a mother's choosing a type of care for early childhood development. These factors may include social networks such as those found in the neighborhood in families and in peer groups; parental beliefs about self-efficacy, caregiver dependability, and childcare quality; and work-related factors such as work-family interface and job retention, among others (Dunning & Giallo, 2012).

Huston et al. (2015) found that a mother's satisfaction with her childcare arrangement was based upon caregiver attentiveness, dependability, and nurturing component with their children. Mothers felt their children received more attention in a childcare setting than with any other form of care.

Despite the prevalence of multiple childcare arrangements, much remains unknown about the different types of care middle class millennial mothers choose based on their current work/family arrangements and why. The reasons may vary across all family types. However, there is need for more information pertaining to middle class millennial mothers. Understanding the decision process and motivation for each decision has important implications for families, for children, and for the mothers in this study. The driving force of this study is to determine the factor(s) that may contribute to a middle class millennial mother's decision.

Despite the prevalence of multiple types of arrangements, much remains unknown about middle class millennial mothers' decision process and motivations for choosing

certain types of care. The next section will carefully examine the implications and limitations to current research pertaining to childcare decisions made by mothers. There is a need for a more in-depth analysis of the decision process and its factors through a qualitative study focusing on middle class millennial mothers.

In a qualitative study, Broude (2009) found no evidence that dissatisfied parents with children in childcare withdrew their children from the unacceptable situation, even though they were unhappy with the arrangement. They felt their options were minimal and cost was a significant factor. This study can be compared to the current study by focusing on a parent's lived experience of childcare effectiveness. However, the current study differs in that Broude's (2009) study used both parents in the interview process, and they were not millennial parents.

Rose and Elicker (2010) found that the age of the child played a major role in the decision process when choosing a childcare arrangement and often influenced a mother's preference to establish herself as the sole caregiver for her child. While the researchers understand that most mothers would ultimately want to stay home to care for their children, it is unrealistic amid the current societal demands; social changes have made necessary a dual-earner household to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. Limitations continue to arise in studying the effects of maternal employment during the toddler years and have produced inconsistent data on the negative effects that a mother's employment may have on a child (Frolland, 2011; Raeymaeckers et al., 2008; Verhage et al., 2013).

Social networks. Dunst and Trivette (2009) and Liu (2015) found childcare decisions (i.e., whether they chose care in centers, childcare homes by non-relatives, by

relatives, or exclusively by parents) are predominantly determined by mothers or influenced by a mother's social network. Liu (2015) found evidence that the density of the social network within a community may be related to the decisions about the type and quality of center care. Social networks including neighbors, relatives, and peers have an effect on the decision process, and mothers often feel more comfortable using childcare (especially by non-relatives), as care providers may strive to provide higher-quality care. In communities, where parents use friends more than they use relatives, as caregivers, parents tend to use their social networks for advice and information (Buehler and O'Brien, 2011; Frolland, 2011; Giannini et al., 2011; Sihto, 2015).

On the other hand, research by Gameiro et al. (2010) has demonstrated that following the birth of a first child, parents increase contact with family members and begin to diminish ties with friends and neighbors and rely solely on information and support from family members. It seems, therefore, that across the transition to parenthood, parents-to-be move toward their familial kinships but withdraw from friends. This inward movement toward family members, a kind of social nesting, may result from the desire of parents-to-be to build a more appropriate environment for the provision of optimal childcare and from a nest of extra support in the face of the new demand of caring for a newborn (Gameiro et al., 2010). The literature on social networks supports the need to learn more about the contributing factors to a millennial mother's decision process. The researcher considered the use of social networks to make a decision for childcare and apply social networks to formulate questions for the participants in the

study. The literature supports that mothers do reach out to their parents and members of their social circle to learn more about the childcare experience.

Garavuso (2009) reported, based on her interviews of three urban mothers, that their notions of appropriate environments for their young children were heavily fueled by beliefs that were transmitted by family and social networks. Each mother communicated, in these interviews, that she had learned much of her information from friends or formal "mommy groups" while her children were rather young. Liu and Anderson (2008) found, in a random sample of 300 respondents, 233 relative caregivers and 68 nonrelatives, that FFN caregivers provide as much as two-thirds of subsidized care in some states and are often preferred by parents. The authors additionally found that the most common motives were "wanting to help out" (20.7%), "wanting the focal childcare for by them" (16.8%), and "enjoy being with children" (12.9%). The least identified motivations were "the only job the provider can find" (.4%) and, lastly, "caring for other children" (.7%). Liu and Anderson (2008) also found that this type of care is often provided by the least educated in terms of academics and childcare training. Garavuso (2009) supported the use of social networks but also reiterated that mothers just want to be a part of their child's experience with childcare and help at the school so they feel connected to their child and the experience of being in a childcare setting. The information gained from this study will help to understand how to incorporate working mothers into the childcare experience so each mother is able to participate in daily activities or during holiday parties. The mother will have less guilt and build a stronger relationship with the caregiver since she is spending more time at the childcare center.

These social networks serve as role models in collective efficacy and ability to positively influence and trust one another in providing a nurturing community for their children. When neighbors trust one another and share common values, they rely on one another to monitor and supervise their children and protect the public (Buehler & O'Brien, 2011; Leitner, 2011; Lindsey et al., 2009). However, the research is limited in its failure to provide the precise influential factor in choosing the NMC. The research proposed no valid data that neighborhood characteristics influence parental decision, but parents may make their decisions about their children's care based on the neighborhood in which they reside or information gained from neighbors (Bradley, 2011; Evans, 2011; Kushnick, 2013).

Parental beliefs. Bornstein et al. (2010) and Landry et al. (2014) found parental beliefs (i.e., parenting styles, self-efficacy, caregiver dependability, and childcare satisfaction) can alter a mother's decision about care. Parenting knowledge includes the qualities of listening when interacting with their children, cultivating emotional awareness and self-regulation in parenting, and bringing compassion and nonjudgmental acceptance to their parenting interactions (Bornstein et al., 2010; Dunning & Giallo, 2012; Fergusson et al., 2008). Millennials are known for their attention to social media outlets (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc.). Parents in the 21st century are more knowledgeable than their own parents about child-rearing and development and are likely to act and respond more positively, skillfully, and effectively in executing their child-rearing roles and responsibilities (McNally et al., 2014). The authors explored more about the role social media may play in the decision-making process and how mothers

obtain media information to contribute to their childcare choice or if a mother's own,

beliefs alter her decision about care.

However, Bornstein et al. (2010) found that some parents, based on their age,

were at risk of being misguided or influenced by older adults who are directive toward

younger parents, and this does not always constitute a sound basis for decision-making.

Young and Denson (2014) and Vicedo (2011) analyzed the impact of intergenerational

transmission and the sole reliance of mothers' decision-making process on their own

mothers. Young and Denson (2014) study generated data through means of semi-

structured interviews to examine the interactions between mothers and grandmothers.

Both mothers and grandmothers were interviewed and asked questions pertaining to

family life, work history, childcare strategies, domestic responsibilities, and attitudes

towards women. The results showed the significant impact a grandmother can have on

the decision if she prefers to stay at home with her grandchild instead of enrolling the

child in outside childcare. Through the mother's lived experience and interview process,

the researcher was able understand the relation of intergenerational transmission has on a

mother's childcare choices (McNally et al., 2014; Young & Denson, 2014).

Rose and Elicker (2010) also examined parental beliefs about the care of children

focusing on non-parental care that children receive. Rose and Elicker (2010) surveyed 22

parents of young children who are currently in childcare to learn more about their beliefs

and the reasons they cited for their choice of care. Several factors were found in the

choice of nonmaternal care: practical concerns, institutional structure curriculum,

scheduling, child-centered orientation, and school readiness. However, this study was

limited in using a questionnaire to determine these factors. The researcher considered

Rose and Elicker's (2010) research and applied the factors found to the current study.

The interview process showed reliability and validity in the information gained because

of the mother's lived experience of currently having their child in the childcare setting.

In their quantitative study, Whipple et al. (2009) found maternal feelings about

childcare using a Likert scale. The researchers found that mothers whose infants/toddlers

receive nonmaternal care demonstrated a strong desire for open communication with the

childcare provider and control over their children's lives. The mothers expressed concern

over the safety of the environment their children would experience as well as the amount

of cognitive stimulation their children received. Other researchers (Haavind, 2011;

McNally et al., 2014; Wai Wan et al., 2009) suggested that mothers seek non-parental

care that most closely matches their own parenting and caring styles. In the present

study, consideration of a mother's feelings and knowledge while their child is still in care

shed light on her reasons for selecting a given type of care and the relevant factors being

considered. To seek this information, the researcher formulated questions pertaining to

feelings towards parenting and caregiver caring styles, placing importance on continuity

of care.

Chang (2013) conducted a similar study analyzing parental decision-making

about childcare. Chang (2013) recruited 355 mothers from their places of employment or

educational institutions to complete a questionnaire in which they rated and ranked

characteristics of childcare that they felt were most important to their decision. Each

participant also rated her likelihood of choosing 18 hypothetical conjoint scenarios

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describing different childcare arrangements as their ideal selection. The results showed warm caregivers, highly educated staff, and play-based curriculum were of most importance. However, when findings were disaggregated by maternal levels of education, trade-offs in characteristics were observed, and maternal education level proved highly predictive in defining selection criteria. The results of this study continue to support that selecting a childcare environment is a dynamic and complex process. Parental attitudes and available resources (Chang, 2013) can easily affect these decisions. Chang (2013) is limited in its sole reliance on quantitative data, finding information provided only by a rating scale, a mechanism that cannot highlight the lived experience in the manner of qualitative research.

It is clear from Troxel, Trenacosta, and Forbes (2013) that maternal decision-making about childcare is changing, but it is still not clear what mothers prefer when presented with different methods for indicating what is important to them or can influence their decisions.

Self-efficacy in mothers. Mothers' self-efficacy in returning to work is directly linked to their beliefs about staying home the first year of care and maternal sensitivity. Cooklin et al. (2014) found that mothers who worked the first 12 months after giving birth exhibited fewer depressive symptoms and less sensitivity in parenting (i.e., opportunities in child learning, involvement in children's schooling and couple intimacy) than those who did not work. Cooklin et al. (2014) found that the use of nonmaternal care had an impact of caregiver dependency and poor self-image among mothers, who often self-cognized as inadequate and characteristically feared a lack of attachment with

their children. On the other hand, Poms et al. (2009) suggested that the more reliable, dependable, and attentive the childcare provider is to the child, the more likely the parent feels less distracted and able to complete their work-related responsibilities while experiencing less conflict from trying to balance multiple roles (as cited in Buehler & O'Brien, 2011).

Buehler and O'Brien (2011) found gaps in the research in that it failed to account for the number of hours per week a mother works or response to family needs, which may adjust a mother's focus at work. Buehler and O'Brien (2011) also felt that because families change over time, the research might not be currently valid or provide a complete picture of the correlation between maternal employment and family life. Maternal choice in the workplace would need more examination, which would consist of the process and interactions of employed mothers such as professional status, scheduling flexibility, shift schedules, work beliefs, work commitment, and perceptions of the impact of work on family life. Maternal employment status is dynamic, and mothers frequently alter their work hours, perhaps in response to family needs at some times and to employer demand to others. My study will address the gaps in knowledge about a mother's self-efficacy after having children. The literature states a mother can benefit in her decision process from positive self-efficacy. A confident mother, according to the literature, makes a better decision than a mother who exhibits poor self-esteem. Researchers believe mothers who learn how to increase their feelings of self-efficacy and positivism with raising a family and working have better effects on their ability to make a clear childcare decision with confidence.

Grandparent care. Grandparent care is another form of nonmaternal care. Young and Denson (2014) found that in 20-40% of families, grandparents cared for their grandchildren, ages 2-4, on a daily basis, with higher rates when mothers worked full or part time. In terms of childcare provision, grandmothers often play a vital role and there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that working mothers have a strong preference for childcare provided by family members, in particular maternal grandmothers (Morrissey, 2008). The parents in this study felt that grandparent care was more reliable and comfortable for the parent returning to work and often minimized feelings of sensitivity and vulnerability when they are at work. As stated in previous sections, a mother needs to have a positive self-efficacy to be able to apply herself at work and know her child is in a safe and nurturing environment. Parents choosing grandparent care found it to be easier and less straining on the mother to make a decision, not realizing there are other beneficial factors that may support her child developmentally and socially outside of grandparent care. The purpose of the current study was to understand middle class millennial mothers' perceptions of childcare choices through her lived experience.

Unlike Morrissey (2008) who researched the importance of grandparent, Poms et al. (2009) conducted a study highlighting mothers looking for a nonmaternal arrangement but relying on parental beliefs and intergeneration transmission for support in making the decision. Poms et al. (2009) used two samples were drawn from the same population: employed mothers working outside the home for at least 30/hours per week, with at least one child in day care. The first sample was collected through childcare centers. The directors of the childcare center distributed the surveys and had a final count of 2,202

employed mothers. The second sample was a convenience sample identified through 11

agencies serving employed mothers. The surveys measured caregiver issues of

disciplinary style, qualifications, flexibility, feedback about the child's day, and financial

components regarding tuition cost and flexibility. The researcher analyzed two childcare

arrangements such as Nonmaternal Care (NMC) and grandparental care. The researcher

found when using grandparental care by 24 months the child would exhibit aggressive

and nonsocial behavior, which, in turn, causes vulnerability of a mother's confidence in

her decision-making. Poms et al. (2009) found that respondents had difficulty

articulating why family was the only option available and why no other childcare

arrangement could be made before the maternal grandmother's decision to suspend care

for the child, which would occur by 18 months. The researcher assumed parental beliefs

were the influencing factor in why 18 months was the most fitting age based on the

responses gained. It is logical, therefore, to argue that not only do mothers call upon their

mothers as means of support but also may be influenced by their own mothers' parenting

practices and values when it comes to raising their child. However, as childcare becomes

the norm for children of the millennials, more information is needed to analyze how

influential a millennial's mother may be on the childcare decision process and how

developmentally engaging being in a home-care environment is beneficial compared to

the opportunities of learning and exploration potentiality in the childcare setting.

McNally et al. (2014) found, based on the respondents and ages of maternal

grandmothers, that those who were born in the post-World War II era showed evidence of

intergenerational transmission of childcare. Maternal grandmothers of the post-war era

tended to follow traditional models of full-time motherhood and believed that if their daughters needed to work, the grandmother should care for the child. The strength of intergenerational influence appears to have a significant impact on the behavior of the next generation and on components of social and cultural aspects of parenting practices.

Further research needs to be conducted on social changes in the workforce, whether mothers are looking to their mothers as a deciding factor in their decisions or supporting the use of parental beliefs and trans-generational intermission as a factor in making a childcare decision (Leitner, 2011; Liu, 2015; O'Conner, 2011). Mothers are solely the final decision-makers in the type of childcare setting (Leitner, 2011). The mother, based on what is easier to help balance work and family (Cooklin et al., 2014), makes this decision.

All the factors discussed in this section helped the researcher to formulate interview questions pertaining to mothers' lived experiences when making childcare choices. The researcher further developed questions that can provide an in-depth understanding of the emotional decision of making a childcare choice and inform early childhood administrators how to support millennial mothers when they place their child in care.

Effects of Nonmaternal Care and Maternal Employment

Morrissey (2008) conducted telephone interviews with 100 participants, consisting of parents and childcare providers. The mothers and childcare providers were

interviewed and observed in the children's homes and nonmaternal childcare settings.

The data were collected when each child was 5, 13, 23, 34, and 53 months of age. The

questions pertained to the number of childcare arrangements, employment characteristics,

program characteristics, and family income status. The research found that despite a high

degree of maternal care during the early years, a mother typically returns to work within

12 weeks of giving birth. The results suggest that the lack of extended times of

affordable, full-time, high-quality early care and education programs may be paramount

in childcare decisions between both low- and higher-income families. First-year

employment is associated with negative socio-emotional development of children,

including weaker attachment, greater behavioral problems, and low social competences.

The research also suggests mothers should strive to have their child in one environment

versus multiple types of care to help improve the child's attachment to the caregiver

placing an importance on continuity of care (Dexter et al., 2013; Drobetz et al., 2012) did

not observe these negative associations. In fact, some studies (Berry et al., 2014; Huston

et al., 2014; Sarti, 2010; Steffen et al., 2009) show a positive correlation between

nonmaternal care and children's developmental outcomes, such as independence and

social skills (Chang, 2013). The importance of early maternal employment and the

mothers' perceptions of the quality and type of care provided have been supported by

several studies (Horst & Van de Veer, 2010; Landry et al., 2014; Lee & Bauer, 2009;

Linville et al., 2011). Collectively, there is no consistent support for the notion that

employed mothers who have chosen a particular type of care have hindered their

relationships with their children, based on the amount of time spent with a caregiver or

someone other than herself. Through the interview process of the current study, the researcher learned more through a millennial mother's lived experience when making a childcare choice and showing evidence of the benefits for both the mother and child.

These inconsistent findings indicate that maternal employment does not predict a child's development, calling attention to the potential role of individual variations in maternal and family characteristics (Chang 2013; Frolland, 2011; Garavuso, 2009; Im et al., 2014; Kushnick, 2013). One reason for these conflicts during childcare experience may be that the decisions made by mothers about maternal employment differ in meaning and consequences across families. Specifically, there may be a variation in maternal well-being and child outcomes for the families of employed mothers or stay-at-home mothers as a function of personal, familial, or societal factors. In order to understand the effects of mothers' decisions, many factors must be considered, such as the mother's lived experience of caring for her young child and the belief system of the society as a whole regarding a mother's decision in caring for her child. Mothers' values, beliefs, and attitudes about working may also affect their interpretations of particular situations and experiences with regard to the childcare decision (Baron, 2009; Dumka, Gonzales, & Wheeler, 2010; McGillivray, 2009; Palmer, 2011; Rafferty & Griffin, 2010).

Depending on how mothers interpret and value maternal employment, the psychological and emotional experiences of maternal employment are assumed different for mothers, other family members, and particularly children. There is also congruence between what mothers believe and what they do in making their childcare decisions (Puckering, 2011; Stuart et al., 2010; Vicedo, 2011). This may be an important factor to

consider in determining a mother's psychological well-being and the quality of her interaction with children. On the other hand, Chang (2013) reported that woman who preferred to work but stayed home showed significantly more symptoms of depression, supporting the previous research of Cooklin et al., 2014, Dunning and Giallo (2012), Kim and Kochanska (2012), and Steffen et al. (2009). These studies reported that homemakers who wanted a career demonstrated the lowest self-efficacy and self-esteem lower than working mothers using nonmaternal care (Chang, 2013). This gap highlights a need for future research that goes beyond evaluating the simple distinction of working and non-working mothers but must examine the lived experience of mothers with children, whether in nonmaternal care or at home

Choosing Childcare

By the time children are in kindergarten, a vast majority have had childcare experience prior to school entry. Im et al. (2014) suggested that parents in communities in which people feel emotionally close to their neighbors are more likely to feel safe leaving their children with unrelated care providers, which may not be the ideal placement for their child. Some parents, because they feel emotionally secure with a neighbor or friend, may be only hindering the social-emotional development of their child. Mothers should feel confident enough to reach out to early practitioners and educators about the importance of a stimulating environment both developmentally and emotionally. The community may provide the mother with an effective support system, rather than sole reliance on social networks for reliable information, through this

vulnerable decision and explore more options outside of Family, Friend, Neighbor (FFN) care (Mantyma et al., 2009; Young & Denson, 2014).

According to Huston, Bobbitt and Bentley (2015), mothers may inquire about the decision to utilize childcare to their social network, but they also refer to books and the Internet for other sources of information. Knowledge about such topics as proper parenting, norms and milestones, and health and safety is believed to shape parents and their cognitions and practices, to influence child development, and to indicate consequences for children's health and well-being. When faced with a need for special information, parents supplement advice from their personal social networks with additional sources, such as written materials, educational programs or professionals (Dexter et al., 2013; Drobetz et al., 2012). Berry et al. (2014) reported that books and magazines were popular sources of information about general child development, but their most frequent users were first-time and middle class parents.

The current study may assist educators, policy makers, healthcare informants, corporate human resources directors and doctors by informing them about the motivations and reflections of mothers who are influenced by recent societal changes in family and work life. The information gained from this study will allow these administrators to provide coping strategies for directors and health care providers to support middle class millennial mothers. Administrators/social workers can formulate workshops or focus groups to discuss how mothers are balancing work and family as well as being a mother and to have continuous care for their child. Bradley (2011) found that family choice in type of care was strongly determined by the mother's work situation.

Families would adjust the child's care arrangements around the mother's job or hours. Relatively little is known about the factors that contribute to this decision process and determining reasons for a particular type of nonmaternal care. Studies (Boyd et al., 2009; Chang, 2013: Frolland, 2011; Garavuso, 2009; Kushnick, 2013) do show that mothers look for nurturing caregivers and for someone who will care for their infants/toddlers just as they themselves would. There is also a correlation between decision-making and parental self-efficacy as stated by Bandura (1977). The more self-efficacious an individual feels as a parent, the more he or she relies on formal information sources and the more he or she reads to the child (Barnett et al., 2014; Bradley, 2011).

For many years, experts have argued that parents are not particularly skilled consumers of childcare. Parents both in the United States and in Germany indicate that they value the same qualities as professionals but tend to rate the caregivers and the caregiving situation more positively then do trained observers. Very often, parents wind up relying on information networks (social networks) in making choices about where to place their children or make assumptions based on what was heard about a particular form of care (Cassano et al., 2014). This study attempted to close the gap on the knowledge unknown and begin to provide the information needed to educators, practitioners, corporate human resource directors, and affiliates who work with mothers and expectant mothers. This information will enable early childhood professionals to support positive social change among mothers in the 21st century.

Trends Affecting Social Policy for Working Mothers in the United States

Early Childcare to Support the Trends of Social Policy

According Sara Evans (1989) and Zigler (1996), the 21st-century approach validates that maternal workforce participation and interest in early childhood education have increased, as the supply of formal childcare has expanded all over the world. Policies for supporting and incorporating childcare for employees served as an incentive to retain female workers. Horst and Van der Veer (2010) researched the importance in parental satisfaction when their childcare is of high quality and holds to good standards. Between the two types of formal care, center based and home-based, center-based care providers tend to emphasize learning activities and hire staff that are more qualified. They achieve accreditation from national early childhood associations such as National Association for Education for Young Children (NAEYC) or National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC). Thus, increasing parental interest in early childhood education is likely to amplify the demand for high-quality center-based care.

The focus of early childcare spending has been on policies to support the societal changes that are occurring in the workplace (Shepherd-Bannigan and Bell, 2014). Shepherd-Banigan and Bell (2014) concluded that with an increase of women in the labor market, the government must reevaluate policy programs to assist families across the socioeconomic spectrum. Based on economic prosperity, labor development, and new child-rearing patterns have now stimulated the interest of the United States government in addressing family needs, both through the provisions of direct support to employees and through other social policies.

With the majority of American children experiencing regular care by someone other than their mothers, it is important to understand and examine their mothers'

experience in choosing a type of care and the underlining factors that may contribute to the decision process. While the research by Rose and Elicker (2010) and Vincent et al. (2010) provides information about childcare and on what types of care children are experiencing, it is not accurately reflective of the mothers' decisions to choose that type of care when certain types of care may be chosen for convenience or price. This discrepancy in research suggests that while mothers are choosing nonmaternal care, more research is needed to ascertain why they are choosing certain care and how educators and practitioners can help to inform this decision (Frolland, 2011; Sihto, 2015; Verhage et al., 2013).

Family and Demographics

Family demographics were also considered; these demographics included maternal ethnicity, educational levels, and family size. Gamble (2009) found middle-income families tend to find their own beliefs and social networks influential in the decision process. However, low-income families found cost to be the only determining factor in their decision. Gamble (2009) and Giannini et al. (2011) along with several other researchers relied only on questionnaires to find themes in the results. The authors may have explored the themes that were present, but the responses were impersonal and lacked the lived experience of the respondents.

The socioeconomic status of mothers as stated by Cooklin et al. (2014) considered the work-family interface and parents' satisfaction with the decision of childcare. A parent who had a working class childhood tends to continue the same pattern of working and raising a family (as cited in Buehler & O'Brien, 2011). The income of the parent is

the determining factor in whether the mother will continue to work and follows the same tradition as her own family. The current study examined the middle class millennial mothers who are faced with the decision of childcare choices. The interview process through a phenomenological design allowed the researcher to learn more about the work-family interface of middle class millennial families and examine the trend of dual-earner households and adjusting to social change of the millennial generation in childcare choices.

Gamble (2009) explored characteristics of childcare arrangements that parents should value. These characteristics were not identified as important to parents and not distinct from the characteristics that a childcare program should possess as critical for quality care. Building upon the conclusions found, this research address a need for a useful knowledge base for parents and researchers to examine childcare choices for middle class millennial mothers. Researchers can explore issues related to childcare choices based on the possible factors discussed in this section. The factors were revisited during the interview process when articulating the interview questions for the participants. The effects and factors of the decision process were revisited in Chapter 4 and 5 of the dissertation. (Moore et al., 2009; Murdock, 2012).

Summary

This chapter provided the conceptual framework relating to childcare choices for middle class millennial mothers with infants/toddlers and included theories of Bowlby (1979), Bronfenbrenner (1981), and Bandura (1997). John Bowlby's attachment theory pertains to the different types of attachment styles exhibited by mothers and the

emotional availability of mothers' when caring for a child. The literature supported the

importance of attachment of the caregiver and mother being coordinated to the needs of

the child supporting the emotional needs of a mother when making childcare choices.

The conceptual framework also included Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1981),

with particular emphasis on three systems in which a millennial working mothers' child

directly participates. The environments in which the child interacts (microsystem), the

connections between home and the childcare center (mesosystem), the parents'

workplace (exosystem), and lastly the traditions and values (macrosystem). There may

be continuity within each of the environments, or there may be different expectations

within those environments, and the role expectations may be similar or different Albert

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and the need to improve a mother's expectations of

personal efficacy through social behaviors, strengthen her perception of reality and the

ability to self-regulate. A mother's ability to strengthen her self-efficacy allows her to

feel comfortable with the decision of childcare choice

Middle class millennial mothers are of interest to this study based on the lack of

literature on millennial mothers in the workforce, which make up 83% of new mothers

who are millennials (Wiedmer, 2015). I found a minimal amount of characteristics of

millennials in the workforce, but a lack of studies specifically on middle class millennial

mothers and their childcare choices. Middle class mothers are the focus of this study, due

to social and economic changes that led to growth in dual-earner families. A review of

the current literature supports the need to learn more about the factors that go into

childcare choice and the trends affecting the working millennial mother in today's

workforce. These trends include Family Medical Leave Act policies, childcare choices, social networks, socioeconomic status, mother's self-efficacy, and parental beliefs. Information from the current study can provide information to guide further research and practice, particularly where current research may be limited, inconsistent, or contradictory.

In a society where both parents need or want to work, there are still choices that a mother must make. The purpose of this study was to examine middle class millennial mothers' lived experiences in choosing the type of care for their children, while experiencing the social implications of continuously changing roles at work and in the family. Societal implications are a key influence in choice making for these families on behalf of their children, and the implications found can addresses the gap of middle class millennial mothers in the workforce since millennials are the current generation of interest. The mothers in the current study allowed the researcher to examine their lived experiences of the decision process regarding childcare for their infants/toddlers. In Chapter 3, I present a detailed methodology of the study that was conducted followed by a detailed analysis of the interviews and themes present in the decision process. The results provided insight on how to support middle class millennial mothers through social change and provide options for health care providers and early childhood practitioners to offer advice and guidance in choosing a nurturing, developmentally appropriate environment for their children.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of the study was to discover the lived experiences and processes that middle class mothers in the millennial generation undertake while determining the type of early childcare that is required and to shed light on their perceptions and childcare decisions. This study consisted of a semistructured interview protocol process to explore issues and experiences surrounding middle class millennial mothers' decision-making process in making childcare decisions. Through the interview process, I attempted to identify perceptions, explore insights and beliefs of the participants, add to the current knowledge base of working mothers, and specifically fill the gap of lack of middle class millennial mothers in the workplace. At the time of this study, I found insufficient evidence of the factors that contribute to middle class millennial mothers' lived experience in choosing childcare for their infant and toddlers. The research found was mostly quantitative research and used surveys to attempt to understand this decision process. However, each piece of literature does support the need to learn more about a mother's decision process. These strengths found in the current research can provide a foundation to build upon with new research gained through this phenomenological study.

In this section, I review the research design that was used to explore the factors that may contribute to a mother's decision in her childcare choice. This chapter includes the discussion of the chosen research methodology and design, the selection process of participants, and the materials and instrumentation used in the experiment. Further data collection procedures, issues of trustworthiness, limitations, and assumptions conclude this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative study was needed to explore the issues and experiences surrounding millennial mothers' childcare decisions. Qualitative research is an effort to understand the setting and experience of the participant. It does not forecast the future but rather an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of mothers' experiencing the criteria needed to this study (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach was used to understand the mothers' lived experience when making a childcare choice and the factors that may contribute to that decision.

Research Questions

In this study, I examined and analyzed middle class millennial mothers' lived experience in the decision process when choosing their infant or toddler type of care and explored their experiences and reflections on childcare choices. While this type of study allows participants to provide their lived experiences based on their own experience, three primary questions provided the framework for guiding the direction of the study.

- What are the lived experiences of mothers as they choose initial childcare for their children?

- What are important decision elements the mothers identify?

- How do the mothers experience the first 5 months of childcare participation?

Phenomenology

A phenomenological qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study to examine the individual lived experiences of middle class millennial mothers in deciding the best possible care arrangement for their infants and toddlers and examining

their reflections about that choice once their infants and toddlers have been in childcare for at least 5 months. A phenomenological methodology was chosen due to the primary goal to summarize the full meaning of the participants' lived experiences and to be able to share in their own words using intonation and feedback of their true emotions versus just a response survey with numbers representing their feelings (Van Manen, 1990). Moustakas (1994) stated, "Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experiences, leading to ideas, concepts judgments, and understandings" (p. 58). The researcher also is able to understand the life experiences of the participant describing the decision process and the factors that may lead to a decision. Moustakas believed phonological principles assert that scientific investigation is valid when the information gained comes from rich experiences that allow the researcher to understand the essence of the experience. Some factors and theories stated in Chapter 2 may be applied to the experiences of the participants.

Another reason a phenomenological study was used was that it enables the researcher to examine the life experiences of mothers making this decision but also to understand the meaning of that experience. A phenomenological research study understands people's perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation—in other words, Patton (2002) described phenomenological research as study that tries to answer the question, "What is it like to experience such and such?" (p. 231). Phenomenological research methods facilitated the study of middle class millennial mothers' experiences and perceptions towards making early childcare decisions and help

communicate more effectively with mothers about their infants' and toddlers' care.

Informing early practitioners and educators about the factors that may contribute to a

mother's decision will help them to understand the nature of the process from the

mothers' perspective and will inform better home-center connections with middle class

parents in the millennial generation. I examined the participants' experiences and the

contexts or situations in which they experience it (Van Manen, 1990). This research

illustrated the understanding and experiences of middle class millennial mothers' current

process for decision-making and provided additional information to early childcare

practitioners about millennial mothers making this decision. It allowed me to develop an

understanding of their lived experiences of making a childcare choice and to refrain from

applying my own knowledge conceptual or factors that may be contributing to this

decision process. The use of phenomenological inquiry attempted to provide a collection

of data and analysis based on the lived experiences of mothers who are faced with

making a childcare decision.

     According to Patton (2002), phenomenology is used for the researcher who is

interested in what people have experienced and how they understand their experience. I

was able to understand the pertinent information of how a mother may conclude about

why she chose a certain type of childcare arrangement. According to van Manen (1990),

the four aspects of lived experience that are of interest to phenomenologists are lived

space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human

relations (relationality). Some factors may be more important to some mothers but may

not be considered at all by others. This type of study allowed me to understand the

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thinking process and variations that may exist between all the mothers. The research aimed to provide additional resources and support positive social change by helping early childhood educators communicate more effectively with mothers about their children's care and improve home-school communication that would enhance support systems for young children.

Phenomenological-based interviews were used to understand the lived experience of other people and the meaning of their experience. The use of interviews helped me to understand the attitudes, thoughts, and feelings of the participants, giving an in-depth look at their behaviors and actions. When the participants described their behavior or why they chose to do something, the researcher can put that behavior into context, creating an understanding of those participants' feelings and actions gained from the interview experience (Patton, 2002).

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was to interview each of the participants and document her lived experiences when making a decision about childcare arrangements. I took field notes and tape recorded as the participants were asked questions pertaining to the research. I am currently an owner of a preschool located in the Northeastern United States and did not work with any families from my school to avoid bias. There was no supervisory authority over participants in the study. I was sure to use families who did not attend my school or who graduated. Since I have knowledge and experiences with mothers making childcare decisions, I avoided bias by not leading the participants by implying answers or using facial expressions or gestures implying the perspective I

wanted them to share. I also employed a peer debriefer to review the data to ensure confirmability. I did not pressure participants to continue answering questions they preferred not to answer or share my own stories or experiences. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time.

The study was not conducted at my school to avoid any association with my building or any attachment to the school in which I own. If potential participants knew who I am or what I do, they were not included in the study. Through the intuitive process, I acquired an understanding of the experiences by bracketing out the assumptions and current knowledge. Through bracketing, I put aside or kept assumptions in suspension, rather than conceal them, so that they did not interfere with the information given by the participants (Creswell, 2013). Using this design, I bracketed my personal experiences, biases, and perceptions prior to conducting research in order to allow the participants to express their own experiences without being influences and during data collection so that I could analyze my perceptions separately from those of the participant. In phenomenology, bracketing is particularly important so that the participants' perceptions of a phenomenon remain intact (Moustakas, 1994).

Methodology

This qualitative study used phenomenological inquiry through interviews and field notes to obtain lived experiences of 15 millennial middle class mothers who have faced childcare decisions and explored the meaning they ascribe to those experiences. A phenomenology design is about getting depth, not breadth, of peoples' perceptions. In determining an appropriate sample size, the goal should be to obtain enough data

appropriate to the study, from a sufficient number and variety of individuals. Most often,

participant numbers are between five and 15 (Patton, 2002).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The data for this research were tape recorded during the face-to-face interviews. I

asked the questions and took field notes during the interview process. I had a transcriber

transcribe the information after all the interviews were conducted. The first attempt of

data collection was the eligibility screening concluding if the participants met the

requirements of the study. This eligibility screening was a questionairre however, the

information was validated at the interview for member checking and reliability.

Recruitment procedures. The millennial middle class mothers currently had an

infant or toddler who has been in care for at least 5 months prior to the study and needed

to be at least 6 months old at the time of the study. Participants were currently employed

in the workforce. Middle class mothers were determined based on combined household

incomes of $94,000 per year to $200,000 (Howe & Strauss, 2013). This population was

chosen since middle class families make up at a least 45% of American households

(Howe & Strauss, 2013). Millennial mothers who participated in the study were born

between 1980 and 1997, disqualifying any participant who was under the age of 18 to

eliminate minors, a vulnerable population. Race was not a delimiting factor in this study,

but a racially diverse mix of participants was sought to allow me to attain different

experiences through race.

First, I placed an ad for participation on social media. Using snowball sampling,

my third attempt used referrals from the current mothers in the study to expand

communication for mothers of similar interests. Since working mothers tend to be a part

of mommy groups, groups formulated through social media sites who have similar

characteristics such as working mothers, stay-at home mothers, or friends who have

similar work arrangements as themselves, they tend to have a lot in common. In using a

small sample, size would ease any issues if there were too few participants.

Delimitations for this study were middle class mothers from the millennial generation.

The participant process began with an ad in the local paper and social media outlets (i.e.,

mommy groups, Facebook, and Craigslist) to mothers in the Northeastern United States.

The ad (Appendix A) introduced me, stated the purpose of the study, described the

research, and clarified the criteria and process of selection.

 If the participants were interested, they could contact me by phone, and I

determined if they met the criteria for the study. The intent of the Eligibility Screening

(Appendix C) was to review the purpose of the study, criteria being met, and answer any

questions they may have. The participants chose the interview site. I was sure to

recommend the location to be a quiet, out of the way public place like a conference room

or library. A follow-up confirmation letter was sent to all the participants who verbally

agreed to participate in the study. The letter thanked them for their willingness to

participate, requested that a brief questionnaire be filled out, and provided the consent

form for their review prior to the meeting. The letter also provided a confirmed date,

time, and meeting place for the interview.

The consent form (Appendix B) for the 15 participants included the following

information: who is conducting the study, the criteria for the study, the purpose of the

study, beginning and end times of the interview, the voluntary nature of the study, and copy of informed consent that would be provided at the conclusion of the interview. The participants were informed that they would not be considered if they knew me to ensure that participants would not be influenced by me. The participants were also told they could withdraw from the study at any time and their documents would be disposed of after the study has been completed. I had several alternate participants who qualified for the study if a participant for any reason needed to withdraw. For confidentiality reasons, names were not used during the study; each participant was given a number to protect her identity.

Data collection. Only I had access to the information and allowed a member check after the completion of the study with a follow-up phone interview (Appendix E) using the transcribed interviews as well as my notes. A transcriber was used after the face-to-face interviews to allow accuracy between my field notes and the transcription. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement prior to transcribing the information (Appendix F). A peer debriefer was used to review the data collected once transcribed. The peer debriefer also signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix G). All information obtained and transcriptions were locked and destroyed after the publishing of this study.

Sample size. The sample size selected must have been one that allowed me to address the research questions posed. Sample sizes in this type of design focus on achieving saturation. A good study design built in the flexibility needed to evaluate when saturation was reached. Based on previous phenomenological designs, I decided 15

participants would approximate the kind of sample size needed in the study (Patton, 2002). Sampling continued until I reached saturation. After the face-to-face interviews, I recognized patterns in the interviewees' experiences and patterns emerged. Additional interviews confirmed or expanded upon what I have already noted. Sample size is an important consideration in qualitative research. Typically, researchers want to continue sampling until having achieved informational redundancy or saturation—the point at which no new information or themes are emerging from the data. Bradley (2011) found that 12 interviews of a homogenous group is all that is needed to reach saturation. I also needed to be aware when saturation was reached, which can be found under the assumption that data collection and analysis are related. It is important to keep in mind that saturation or informational redundancy can be reached prematurely if an individual's sampling frame is too narrow or the perspective is skewed or limited the method employed is not resulting in rich, in-depth information (Moustakas, 1994).

Instrumentation

After the 15 mothers met all the requirements through the eligibility screening (Appendix C), the participants signed a consent form (Appendix B) and scheduled an interview. The participants were told about the purpose of the study and were asked to sign a consent form. The participants were informed that their names were not used in written reports based on the confidentiality clause in the consent form. Participants were informed the interview would be tape-recorded and would be transcribed by a third party. A clause in the consent forms informed participants of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Collection Procedures

The interviews took place in a quiet place and took approximately 60 - 90 minutes with each participant. Each session was taped and I took field notes to capture verbatim language and voice inflections. The participants had an opportunity to review their interview during the follow-up phone interview to guarantee accuracy. At the beginning of the interview process, I reviewed the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality as outlined in the eligibility screening. I verbally reviewed the informed consent form with each of the participants making sure they understand what they are agreeing to. I then reviewed the eligibility screening (Appendix B) to verify information from the participants pertaining to socioeconomic status and work history to validate what was learned through the phone pre-interview. I then collected the questionnaire and begin building a rapport by reviewing the information they provided.

All interview questions (Appendix C) were in the format of open-ended using probes and follow-up questions if needed. An expert panel reviewed all the questions in Appendix B and C that were used to be sure there would be adequacy of the instrument and data collection procedures. The expert panel consisted of an adjunct professor from a local college who has served on other dissertation committees, an early childhood department chair, and a director of an early childhood facility. The questions are researcher produced, nondirective, and consist of floating prompts and have been approved by the expert panel and support the research questions of the study (Moustakas, 1994). I was sure the questions were a guide for key aspects only and acted as a stimulus to help the participants' thinking along, but the true essence was derived from the

experiences of the mothers. The questions were prepared ahead of time, but conversations remained flexible and adaptable to investigate each participant's unique experience. I documented observations of the physical and emotional behaviors of the participants as well as body language. I conducted more than one interview; there was the eligibility screening, an initial face-to-face interview, and a second follow-up phone interview. The use of several interviews ensured member checking to address validity issues. A follow-up telephone call was made to the participants allowing them to state concerns, make corrections, or ask questions. All the data collected were stored and managed in a locked filing cabinet in my home. The audio recordings and transcripts were saved on an external hard drive on a password-protected computer. Only the committee members and the researchers may have access to the data collected.

Researcher-Developed Instruments

As the initiator of the interview, I was taking an active role in making certain decisions about the progress of the interview. The entire interview was tape-recorded. I produced the questions used for the interviews from my extensive literature review and similar phenomenological studies found in Chapter 2. An early childhood expert panel was used to ensure content validity. I had the panel review the protocol and provide feedback for changes that needed to be made. The expert panel consisted of an adjunct professor from a local college who has served on other dissertation committees, an early childhood department chair, and a director of an early childhood facility. This panel was used in lieu of a pilot study and improved the data collection to answer my research

questions. The expert panel approved interview protocol being used for this study.

Withdrawal from the Study

First, I placed an ad for participation through social media. Using snowball sampling, my third attempt used referrals from the current mothers in the study to expand communication for mothers of similar interests. Since working mothers tend to be a part of "mommy groups", groups formulated through social media sites who have similar characteristics such as working mothers, stay-at home mothers etc., or friends who have similar work arrangements as themselves, they tend to have things in common. The use of a small sample size would ease any issues if there were too few participants. Delimitations for this study were middle class mothers from the millennial generation.

Participants could withdraw from the study at any time; however, the participants could officially exit the study after the follow-up phone call was made. This phone call served as the debriefing procedure for the study so the participants can state any concerns, make corrections, or ask questions.

Data Analysis Plan

Once the interviews concluded, I had a transcriber transcribe each of the interviews. I then used the transcribed interviews and field notes to locate themes and strands for using the instrumentation tool of NVivo Qualitative Data Instrumentation. NVivo is another set of tools that assists a researcher in undertaking an analysis of qualitative data analysis (QDA), and I can identify themes that may exist. NVivo is computer software designed for qualitative researchers working with text-based information. The software does not prescribe a method, but rather, it supports a wide

range of methodological approaches. It manages and organizes the qualitative data, provides a system to answer the research question, and develops image of the whole study for better understanding. NVivo allowed the emerging themes to be categorized and coded. Once the categorization was completed, the data were coded according to indicators from the literature. New categories were considered as well.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I chose a phenomenological study because I wanted to understand the participants' lived experiences. Elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability support the quality of this study. In this section, I discuss the steps I took to make this study trustworthy.

Credibility

Each participant was chosen based on the criteria for the study. Credibility with this type of design uses a member check, which is the most important component and credibility technique for this research design. In a member check, the participants and peer debriefer were given an opportunity to review their interview transcripts and invited to read them thoroughly for clarity and accuracy and the ability to add where needed. I used bracketing and triangulation to reduce bias. Bias was also reduced by disqualifying any potential participants who know my subordinates at work or myself. I included a self-reflection at the end of the study to allow the participants to interpret the questions based on their background and experiences. This was discussed under the heading of researcher's role in the previous section (Creswell, 2013).

Using NVivo in the data analysis process has been thought by some to add firmness to the qualitative research. The content validity through the interviews provided feedback from the participants, which improved the validity of the information. However, I must use the themes imputed into the NVivo software but also look on the transcripts for any other themes that may arise that the software may miss. NVivo can only locate themes that are added into the program (Patton, 2002).

Transferability

Transferability was validated by having information about the participants' background information, including demographics and criteria that meet the needs of the study. This ensured validity of the participants and the information gained in order to have them considered for the study. I then compared the characteristics of each of the participants to use for dependability and credibility when themes are being analyzed at the completion of the study. It is also critical the researcher provides in-depth background information of the participants and the research context and setting to allow others to assess how transferable the findings are. Another way to look at transferability is to consider data rather than the subjects (Patton, 2002). Specifically, I must determine if the content of the interviews, the behaviors, and observed events are typical or atypical of the lives of the informants. The time sampling and member checking strategies are useful in identifying whether data are typical.

Dependability

Dependability is the degree to which the results are consistent with the data and emphasizes the importance of the research and the ability to replicate the study.

Triangulating of different sources of information was used to examine the evidence from other sources and use it to build justification for the themes that are present in the data (Van Manen, 1990). The cross-examining of sources consisted of checking for consistency of what people say about the same thing over time. I also compared the perspectives of the participants from different points of views to see if their views change from different perspectives or compared the participants' responses in a public setting (childcare arrangement) and in private.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a strategy to ensure neutrality. It means that the findings are free from bias. The use of audit strategies is a systematic collection of materials and documents so that reviewers or other researchers can come to comparable conclusions about the data. A peer debriefer was used to check my work for acceptability in terms of bias and confirmability. The purpose of confirmability is to illustrate that the data found and conclusions give another researcher the same results. Some auditing strategies include collecting the data from tape recorders or making sure that the conclusions of the study's findings are supported by the analyzed data. Confirmability occurs in the presence of credibility, transferability, and dependability (Moustakas, 1994).

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Ethical Procedures

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All of the participants were treated in accordance to the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) and Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I obtained all necessary IRB approvals before conducting the study; there were minimal identifiable risks for participating in this study. The IRB approval number

was 08-13-15-0179990. Stress and feelings of guilt or embarrassment may arise simply

from thinking or talking about the participants' own behavior or attitudes towards

childcare decision-making and child rearing. These feelings may be aroused when the

participant was being interviewed or filling out a questionnaire. Stress may also be

induced when I manipulate the subjects' environment and/or choices based on their

decisions. It is important for me to comment on the strengths of the participant, while at

the same time allowing the interviewee to terminate the interview if too distressed. Part

of the response may require me to respond to, rather than ignore, a participant's question.

A failure to respond to the participant may lead to a loss of trust and alter the quality and

nature of the data. A principal concern for any data collection process, regardless of the

methodology, is that asking people questions about their views, knowledge, attitudes or

life experiences, particularly related to "sensitive" information, may generate emotional

responses that I should acknowledge and the research process. I was sure to minimize

these stressors and take every caution to ensure that the all mothers feel safe and

comfortable and have the freedom to withdraw from the study if they felt the need to.

The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if

they wish to. This right was explained to them prior to engagement in the study, before

the interview. This right to withdraw at any time is part of the informed consent. All

data gained were securely kept at my home office. The transcriber and peer debriefer

signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix F). The transcribed data and peer-

reviewed data were stored in a locked cabinet. The committee members and I were the

only people having access to the data gained from this study.

Limitations

The very select and specific populations limit this study. The study focused on a small sample of millennial middle class women who reside in Northeastern United States and have an infant or toddler who has been in childcare for at least 5 months. The study does not include non-working mothers, and each participant had to be born between 1980-1997. Millennials born from 1998-2002 would be under the age of 18 and would be members of a vulnerable population. Participant selection automatically disqualified minors.

The searching tools in NVivo allowed me to interrogate her data at a particular level. This can, in turn, improve the rigor of the analysis process by validating (or not) some of my own impressions of the data. However, the software is less useful in terms of addressing issues of validity and reliability in the thematic ideas that emerge during the data analysis process, and this is due to the fluid and creative way in which these themes emerge (Creswell, 2013). Of course, details can be checked on the content of particular nodes, and this could affect the inter-relationships of the thematic ideas, but in terms of searching through the thematic ideas themselves in order to gain a deep understanding of the data, NVivo is less useful simply because of the type of searching it is capable of doing. It is important that I recognize the value of both manual and electronic tools in qualitative data analysis and management and do not reify one over the other but instead remain open to, and make use of, the advantages of each. It would have been difficult to find other responses by using the search facility because of the different ways this idea was expressed. The searching options in NVivo can add accuracy to the analysis process

by allowing me to carry out quick and accurate searches of a particular theme and can add to the validity of the results by ensuring that all instances of a particular theme are found (Patton, 2002).

The research is important because the existing research fails to provide valid data that gives in-depth information regarding a mother's lived experience of choosing the type of care for her child while she is working. Most of the literature gained for this study included questionnaires and surveys pertaining to the decision process but never a lived experience of the mother's perception of the experience and a valid account of her experience. The literature revealed there might be factors that could contribute to the decision process such as social networks, parental beliefs, and socioeconomic status. The outcome of this study can support social change by providing needed information to early childhood educators about the new generation of millennial mothers. The information about mothers' decision-making processes could contribute to positive social change by helping early childhood educators to communicate more effectively with millennial mothers about their infant or toddlers' care and provide strategies to the changing dynamics of families in the United States.

Summary

In this I chapter provided a detailed description of this study's research methodology. A qualitative phenomenological study was used to examine the lived experiences of millennial middle class mothers and choosing a childcare center for their infants/toddlers. The participant sample was made up of 15 millennial middle class mothers. The data were collected through personal interviews and analyzed through the

themes that were present. Credibility and dependability were accounted for through

member check. Chapter 4 will review the data in explicit detail, and Chapter 5 will

examine and analyze the lived experience of mother's and present the themes uncovered

comparing the information to the literature gained in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 will conclude

with an in-depth analysis of all information.

Chapter 4: Results

In this study, I explored the lived experiences and intellectual and emotional processes of middle class mothers in the millennial generation making childcare choices and understanding their perceptions in making these decisions. The research approach for this study was a qualitative phenomenological study to understand the lived experiences of middle class millennial mothers. The study consisted of two interviews for each of the 15 participants to analyze the issues and experiences of the participants' decision-making processes in making childcare choices. The transcriptions from each of the two interviews were used along with a follow-up questionnaire for member checking. The intent of the interviews was to understand the individual lived experiences of each middle class millennial mother in deciding the best possible care arrangement for her infant or toddler, whether it be NMC or FFN care. The eligibility criteria for this study were established to focus on millennial mothers of the middle class; this group, which makes up 83% of new mothers (Hamman, 2010), was targeted because a lack of literature exists on millennial mothers in the workforce.

Interview Procedures

The selection process for the participants began with an Eligibility Screening Questionnaire (Appendix C) in August 2015. Following selection, two interviews were conducted. The first interview (Appendix D) was carried out in August 2015 and then followed by a second interview in September 2015 (Appendix E). The second interview allowed the participants to elaborate and expand on information gained during the first interview. A follow-up questionnaire (Appendix E) was used for member checking and

verification of information gained from both interviews. The interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed by a paid transcriptionist. While this type of study allows participants to provide their own lived experience, three primary research questions guided the framework for the direction of the interview questions:

- What are the lived experiences of mothers as they choose initial childcare for their children?

- What are important decision elements the mothers identify?

- How do the mothers experience the first 5 months of childcare participation?

In the following sections, I describe the data collection process including the setting of the study, demographics of the participants, and data collection and analysis and conclude with the results section, addressing each research question and presenting themes or patterns that emerged from the study with supporting data from the transcribed interviews.

Setting

This study was conducted at convenient settings for the participants such as a library, coffee shop, or their home. I did not manipulate the environment in any way and met with the participants at a location that was quiet and not distracting. The local library was the most convenient location and close to the participants' homes.

Participants

The demographics in this study were verified using an Eligibility Screening Questionnaire (Appendix C) prior to the interview to be sure the participants met all the criteria needed for this study. The demographics used for this study consisted of the

following criteria: Each participant was a millennial mother born between 1980 and 1997

to disqualify anyone who was under the age of 18 to eliminate minors, a vulnerable

population. All participants lived in the Northeastern United States. The study consisted

of participants from various ethnicities, but race was not a delimiting factor in this study.

This included seven Caucasian participants, three African-American participants, one

European participant, three Hispanic participants, and one American Indian participant.

The participants were all currently full-time employees in the workforce and married at

the time of the study. Ten out of the 15 participants were employed in the corporate

setting. Five of the participants were employed in the education field or a school setting.

One of the five participants worked in a childcare setting. All of the participants had

their infant or toddler in a childcare setting for at least 5 months: Eight of the participants

had their infants/toddlers in a group-home care, seven participants had their

infants/toddlers in center-based care, and none of the participants had their child with a

nanny or with FFN. Four families used FFN care as supplemental care only if their

childcare choice did not have extended hours or they were running late from work that

day. This amount of time would be considered less than 3 hours and no more than 2 days

a week. All participants had their child in some form of NMC.

Based on the literature and research obtained in Chapters 2 and 3, the household

middle class income criteria ranged from $94,000 per year to $200,000 (Belsky & Pleuss,

2013). Each participant met the household income bracket. The level of education for

the participants was as follows: 80% received a Master's degree, 15% earned a

Bachelor's degree, and 5% held associate degree. Twelve out of the 15 participants had

attained a higher degree or education level than their mothers. Table 1 displays the

participants' profiles along with a brief description of each participant.

Table 1

Participant Profiles of Experiences and Background Information

Participant pseudonym	Age	Age of child when care began	Type of care	35-40hrs per week	Work setting	Level of Education	higher degree than mother
MaryLou Caro	31	4 m	Center	Yes	Corporate	Masters	Yes
Melissa Crisara	28	3 m	Center	Yes	School-Calendar	Masters	Yes
Alice Evans	30	3m	Group in-home	Yes	Corporate	Bachelors	Yes
Liliana Fierro	32	3m	Center	Yes	Corporate	Masters	Yes
Elizabeth Incognoli	34	3m	Group in-home	Yes	Corporate	Masters	Yes
Maria Jones	26	4m	Center	Yes	Corporate	Bachelors	Yes
Marissa Lee	28	4m	Group in-home	Yes	School-Calendar	Masters	Yes
Sarah Marshall	30	3m	Group in-home	Yes	Corporate	Masters	Yes
Sabrina Middleton	31	6m	Group in-home	Yes	School-Calendar	Masters	Yes
Barbara Miller	35	3m	Center	Yes	School-Calendar	Masters	Yes
Nicole Parker	25	3m	Group in-home	Yes	Corporate	Masters	Yes
Molly Reid	28	2m	Center	Yes	Corporate	Associate	No
Ashley Smith	29	4m	Group in-home	Yes	Corporate	Bachelors	Yes
Christine Thomas	31	3m	Center	No	Corporate	Masters	No

MaryLou Caro is a corporate account manager for a large company. She has her MBA in accounting. MaryLou has been working in the corporate setting for the past 12 years and had two children. Her daughter currently in care is 10 months old and is in a center-based care. MaryLou chose center-based care. This type of care benefitted her needs with extended hours and followed the corporate calendar. She was comfortable throughout the interview and opened up about her experiences with being able to balance a career and a family. She added the benefits of having social networks as a support system that has supported in raising her family and healthy happy children.

Melissa Crisara is an early childhood educator. She works as a 3-year-old classroom teacher. She had the privilege of having her son in the same center-based school as her. She added to the interview that having her child at the same school as her was good, but she still struggled with the separation of mom and teacher when she came to work. Melissa enjoys working and aspires to open her own group-home care so she can implement the important elements of a program. She speaks fluent French. She enjoys being an educator, and even though she does not have most of the holidays off, she enjoys educating the early childhood population.

Alice Evans works in a corporate setting. She is an educated mother with a Bachelor's degree. She has an 11-month-old child in a group-home care setting. She preferred a smaller childcare setting since she felt the security and safety was more manageable compared to a larger setting. Since Alice works in a corporate setting, the hours of the childcare are of importance since she leaves early in the morning and arrives home late. Alice shared through her interviews the pressure of the middle class having to

work in order to sustain a certain lifestyle. The thought of Alice not working and staying home was not an option for her.

Liliana Fierro is a recreation coordinator for an assisted living home. Her work schedule follows a corporate calendar. Her child is in a center-based setting and has been in care since 3 months old. Her child is currently 18 months old. Liliana shared her experiences during the interview of her challenges and successes with the childcare experience. She felt strongly about the importance of socialization with other children and expressed that importance through her interviews. Liliana had many questions during the interview and spoke freely about her thoughts. She welcomed the opportunity to participate in the study and was happy to provide any other information if needed.

Elizabeth Incognoli is an editor for a popular newspaper. She works in the corporate setting. Her son is in group-home care and has been in care since her child was 3 months old. At the time of the study, her child was 15 months old. Elizabeth felt strongly about the societal pressures social media places on mothers today. She struggled with the perfectionist aspect of being a mother and wanting her child to be perfect. She shared emotional and supportive information that can be useful to mothers experiencing the corporate work environment as well as being a mother. Elizabeth was interested in the results of the study and was excited to provide information for all mothers in today's society.

Maria Jones is a very reserved woman when the interviews began. She was quiet for the first portion of the interview and opened up as the interview went on. She works in the corporate setting as an assistant to the chief financial officer. Her child has been in

care since 4 months of age and is currently approaching her first birthday. Maria presented herself as a happy and hard-working mother. She wants the best for her child and was excited to share her experiences with the childcare experience. Maria was comfortable throughout the interview.

Marissa Lee is a full-time elementary school teacher. She has attained a Master's degree in Elementary Education. She chose a teacher as a profession so she could enjoy most holidays off and her summer with her child. She chose a group-home care setting. Her child started school at 3 months old. At the time of the study, her child was approaching his first birthday. When looking for childcare, she expressed during the interview that she visited at least five centers before making a decision. Her child attending school at 3 months old. She was able to extend her maternity leave another month through FMLA.

Sarah Marshall is a freelance writer for a publishing company in the corporate setting for over 10 years. Sarah has an 18 month old in a group-home care setting. She expressed through her interviews the struggles she encountered through the decision process and shared openly about her feelings placing her child in a group-home care. Sarah felt communication was an important part of the transition process for a mother when she goes back to work.

Sabrina Middletown is a high school teacher. She has been a teacher for 12 years. Sabrina's son was 18 months at the time of study and she was expecting her second child in a few months. Sabrina enjoyed her teaching schedule of having her summers off as well as holidays. She chose a group-home care setting. Most of her colleagues sent their

children to the same school, which she felt was nice that most of her colleagues attended the same school. There was a level trust there. At the time of the interview, it was during the summer months. She was enjoying her summer but was ready to go back to work in September. She freely shared her thoughts and experiences of being a mother and working full-time.

Barbara Miller is a third-grade teacher. She has a 14-month-old child who was in a center-based setting. Barbara went back to work after her maternity leave lapsed at 12 weeks with an FMLA 30-day extension. Her child has been in care since 3 months old. Since Barbara is a teacher, she enjoys many holidays off as well as summers. She felt this was an advantage instead of being in a corporate setting. Barbara also had just moved to a new

Nicole Parker is a full-time sales representative in the corporate setting. She had a 9-month-old child in a group-home care setting. Even though Nicole is currently in a sales position, she received a Master's degree in Early Childhood. Due to her background, she had to carefully review each location and determine which type of care was the best fit for her and her child. The interview was held at a convenient location, and Nicole was interested to learn more about my dissertation and could not wait to read the published study.

Molly Reid is an assistant designer for a shoe company. She has an Associate's Degree in fashion design and hopes to go back to school after she raises her family. Her child is currently 17 months old and her child has been in care since 8 weeks old. She expressed the stress of her job and long hours. She did not want to put her child in care so

early but due to her need to work, she had to put her in at 8 weeks when her maternity leave lapsed. Molly breastfed her child throughout the first 6 months. She shared during her interview the struggles of breastfeeding and pumping when going back to work. She felt her environment was not conducive to mother's breastfeeding or pumping. Her feelings were shared during the interview.

Ashley Smith is a full-time loan officer in the corporate setting. She was very willing to participate in the setting. She also added to her interview that she exceeds her husband's income and is the main earner of the family. Ashley went back to work after her maternity leave of 8 weeks lapsed, while her husband helped for a few weeks until her child was 3months old. Ashley chose a group-home care center that was close to her home and the train. This helped her get to work on time and she enjoys the extended hours. Ashley appeared to be a confident and assertive woman.

Christine Thomas is a full-time financial analyst in the city. She has worked in the corporate setting. During her interviews, she expressed her struggle with the adjustment to motherhood. Her child was 13 months old and was in a center-based setting. She presented herself as a career-driven mother. She was adjusting to the demands of motherhood. Christine enjoys being a part of the corporate work setting, expressing that it made her feel alive again after being home on maternity leave. She was interested in the study's findings and was eager to read the results.

Rosanna Weiss is a speech pathologist in an elementary school setting. She enjoyed her summers off with her child but felt it was enjoyable during the school year to have consistency of her child's routine. She expressed during her interview that she

looked forward to going back to work as summer was ending even though she enjoyed the time off. Rosanna felt she was at an advantage over other mothers since she had the privilege of enjoying time off, being a working mom her child began care at about five months after her maternity leave, and sick days were used. Rosanna did breastfeed her child for the first five months until she went back to work.

Data Collection

Interview Data Collection Procedures

This study used phenomenological inquiries through interviews and field notes to obtain the lived experiences of 15 millennial middle class mothers who have faced childcare decisions and explored the meaning behind their choices of those experiences. The participants who met the requirements listed on Appendix C were then sent the consent form via email individually to ensure confidentiality with potential site locations near the participants' home and date and time of the first interview to allow ample time to make childcare arrangements. After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, a second phone interview was made, and the questions were formulated from the statements made by the participants in the first round of interviews for deeper understanding and using Appendix E as a guide. I used varied questions for each participant to probe further into any responses that needed a more in-depth explanation of processes or missing information. The participants were aware that I would contact them via email or phone for verification of all the transcribed information obtained from both interviews via email or phone.

After I transcribed each of the phone interviews, I used the follow-up

questionnaire in Appendix E to allow the participants to review the transcribed

information from both interviews and the categories used to organize the information

gained from the interviews and to add or remove any information from both interviews.

The follow-up questionnaire was a guide to verify all the information from the

participants and allowed the participants to provide any feedback or further information

that may have been missed during the interviews.

Duration of Data Collection and Recording

The audiotaped face-to-face interviews were scheduled during a 3-week period in

August and September 2015. At the chosen location, the participants were told they may

withdraw at any time, both interviews would be audio recorded, and I would be taking

field notes throughout. Confidentiality was reviewed before the study began, and no

names were used. Each participant was given a pseudonym name protect each

participant's identity and assure confidentiality. Prior to engagement, all participants

were aware the interviewing process would include a face-to face interview, a second

phone interview, and member checking either by phone or by email for verification. The

overall process of obtaining two interviews from 15 participants located in different

counties required flexibility on the part of the researcher and participants.

<center>**Data Analysis Measures**</center>

Once the interviews were transcribed and the field notes reviewed, I began the

data analysis procedure. Data analysis in qualitative studies is inductive. I had to look

for patterns that emerged from the data collected from both interviews. The variables

used for interpretation were identified through the review of the data, hand coding, and NVivo software used at a later point in the researcher's analysis.

I created a systematic way of sifting through and analyzing the information. Data analysis consisted of preparing and organizing the data through text data in the transcripts and then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing codes, finally representing the codes in tables and figures (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative data consists primarily of verbal descriptions that need to be analyzed for themes and patterns that I then describe and illustrate with examples from the transcripts (Patton, 2002). The first step in analyzing the data was to read the transcripts and field notes to grasp what the participants were telling me about their individual experiences. After I read the interviews, I then began to underline and pull out important repetitive or key words that were emerging in my mind after the first read. Those words were handwritten and placed in the margin of each interview.

Once I hand-coded each interview with repetitive or theme words, I then organized recurrent subjects throughout my interviews to eventually decide on topics to be hand-coded to represent the nodes for NVivo. In order to do this, I then took the six interview questions and placed them on large pieces of paper so that I could visually organize all the repetitive words that surfaced from each interview relative to individual questions. I then read the interviews again and charted the words I placed into the margins that correlated with each question. I repeated this process through all 15 participants. If a word was repeated from a previous interview, I simply placed the interview next to the word that represented where it came from. This allowed me to see

The definition of emotions may have various meanings but in this study, emotions are described as discrete and consistent responses to internal or external events, having a particular significance for the person. This includes emotions such as guilt, jealousy, frustration, etc. (Sieb, 2013). The subthemes found to elaborate on emotions were stressful, trust, guilt and internal "gut" feeling.

Theme 2: Contributions of choice. When asking each research question, there were several contributing factors to a mother's reason for choosing a particular type of care and varied among all 15 participants. The theme was used to identify the factors that ultimately would contribute to the mother's final decision. This theme was represented by subthemes that contributed to their choice such as comfort level, location, cost, and referrals from other family, friends or neighbors.

Theme 3: Millennial characteristics. Based on the research in Chapter 2 on millennial characteristics, this theme emerged based on the characteristics derived from the literature and the interview responses. Participant responses that reflected millennial characteristics consisted of subthemes such as societal pressures, self-efficacy, and technology driven. Millennials were described as having a propensity to multi-task and "wanting it all" (Holt et al., 2012; Ng et al., 2010; Ray, 2013). If any of the characteristics listed above were evident in their responses, this theme was used. This theme and its subthemes are supported by concrete examples by the participants under Research Question #1.

Theme 4: Benefits of care. The benefits of having an infant or toddler in some form of care was evident in many of the participants' responses. However, not all the

participants' responses reflected the same definition of what was considered beneficial. Benefits of care consisted of subthemes including socialization with other children, educational aspects of care, and developmentally appropriate learning for each age group. The benefits of having their infant and toddlers in a group or home care were evident in each of their interview responses.

Theme 5: Importance of career. Most participants did not want to give up or sacrifice their positions and felt strongly to maintain their careers despite having a family. This theme can be defined as the work/family balance that was apparent with each participant and the societal norm of having both parents working. Many of the participants worked in the corporate setting, which consisted of full-time hours or possible extended hours. Career was a very important aspect to each of the participants, and their interview responses reflected on the expectations they felt at work of extended hours and higher expectations. This theme had two subthemes: corporate setting and FMLA policy struggles for mother.

Theme 6: Conflicts during childcare experience: There were several conflicts expressed throughout the interviews despite the benefits and positive aspects of group or center-based care. This theme emerged in response to interview question #6 of Appendix D. The participants expressed several items that could be changed or improved. The subthemes were communication, transitions, and food choices. The subthemes supported conflicts the participants faced while in childcare. Examples of this was the of lack of communication between administration, teachers and parents of the infant and toddlers,

transitions to different classrooms, and lack of documentation for incidences with other children including bumps, bruises, or bites.

Theme 7: Positive childcare experience. The participants in this study did have a positive childcare experience and felt the experience led to healthy caregiver relationships and build friendships with other mothers' experiencing the same scenario as themselves with the work/family balance. The subthemes used to clarify were parent/teacher conferences, socialization, and community feeling. The socialization of the infant or toddler in care was the most common responses to the overall experience along with the community feel of being a part of their infants' and toddlers' day to day. This theme correlated with interview questions #1 and #2 of Appendix D and Research Question #3.

Coding Themes

Once I established the themes/nodes for the interview questions from the participants, I went back to the transcripts and used a color-coded system in accordance to each theme/node that was established from the participants' responses. I then tallied the most common theme/node and labeled each interview with the top three recurring theme/nodes. Once I labeled the seven themes, I then broke down each theme to subthemes to organize my data. This hand-coding process and along with my field notes allowed me to see how the participants viewed themselves, as Moustakas (1994) felt phenomenological approach was used to focus on participants' described experience more than the interpretation of the researcher.

NVivo Coding

After I had partial results through a hand coding system, I then began to code the data using the software, NVivo. For validity and reliability, I wanted to be sure I hand-coded the data first and then used the software to compare the results for accuracy. The use of NVivo was used to provide me with a set of tools that assisted me in the undertaking and the analysis of the qualitative data but allowed me to create and display the effectiveness and efficiency of the data gained from the interviews through tables and figures (Young & Hinsley, 2012). I uploaded the transcripts to the program so I was able to code the information. I then coded each interview with the themes/nodes that were established through the hand coding I conducted first. Once all the information was in, I used several features of the NVivo software to correlate and create tables/charts of the recurring themes, words, etc. The last step of my data analysis was then reverting to the three research questions that were established in Chapter 3 of the study. I charted the three research questions creating a hierarchy of the information gained through the data. I placed each interview question under the research question it related to followed by the seven themes/nodes. I then listed all the common or related words that were significant for each theme from each interview.

For the second interviews, I reviewed the first interview transcriptions and highlighted areas that needed for clarification or nuances. I then created questions specifically for each participant that would be used for their second interview. After transcribing their second interview, I pulled specific statements that provided clarifications needed and applied the responses to the statements and themes transcribed from the first interviews. This information will be discussed further in the Results

section of this chapter. The bottom of the hierarchy represents the theories that are related to each theme that will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Discrepant Cases

The analysis of qualitative data involved organization, classification, categorization, a search of patterns, and synthesis. No guidelines were used for determining how much data or analysis is needed to support the conclusions. I used constant comparison and took into account any discrepant qualities that may have emerged from the data. Although there were no discrepant cases, one may have emerged from the interviews and factored into the interpretation when being coded and placed into a theme. Melissa Crisara worked in the childcare setting where her child was attending, so although she was a working mom, she was the only one that worked in a childcare setting almost deviating from a working model since she practically took her child to work with her. However, Melissa Crisara's infant or toddler did not stay in the same room with her while she was teaching. I did not label this as a discrepant case since the participant still experienced her child in care and felt the same emotions through this experience despite her being on site. Her anxieties and experiences were more than a mother having to drop her child at care and then report to another location for work. This was the only case that may have represented a discrepant case, but I felt it should not be discarded. However, I did factor it into my analysis when discussing the occupations of the participants. I did mention her when I described the breakdown of occupations of participants.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

For credibility, I used a member checking system and peer debriefer to review the interview and phone transcripts for clarity, accuracy, and the ability to add information that may not have been relevant to the study or areas of responses that were not portrayed correctly. A follow-up questionnaire (Appendix E) via email or telephone allowed the participants to add or remove any information from the transcribed from both interviews. The participants were happy to elaborate on any statements they provided. I had the participants choose between the follow-up interview by phone or email. It was easier to obtain the verification for Appendix E via phone than email. The participants expressed they saw the email but forgot or did not have time to do it but thanked me for calling them to follow up. The peer debriefer reviewed the transcripts after signing the consent form (Appendix G). Data triangulation was used by using multiple sources but using the same method of interviewing. I collected data at different times, on different days, in different locations, and with different people. I was able to meet a range of mothers from different counties, occupations, and races, but all met the same criteria as listed for this study.

Bias was reduced since I did not interview anyone who was an acquaintance or a colleague in the Early Childhood field. I used two forms of coding: hand coding and NVivo software; this added comparison and possible contrast to the validity of the results, comparing areas that were found the same improving the content validity of the information gained from the interviews. Since NVivo can only identify the themes I had

placed into the program, I felt it was crucial for me to hand-code first to understand the

experiences of the participants and review my field notes so I could reflect on what the

information was telling me about the mothers' experiences making childcare decisions

(Patton, 2002).

Transferability

The data collection procedures were discussed in this chapter in the Data

Collection section. The collection process was simple in following the few steps that

were needed to complete the study. After placing the ad to local media outlets and

receiving potential participants, each potential participant was given The Eligibility

Screening Questionnaire (Appendix C), which can be duplicated and used to ensure the

participants met the criteria before conducting the interviews. I provided contextual

completeness by providing in-depth information about the participants at the beginning of

the chapter including participant selection, a description of the context, information about

the participants, and methods of data collection. After consent was signed, I then met

with the participant and used the interview questions (Appendix D). In the Data Analysis

section, I sufficiently described the steps taken to analyze and interpret the information

gained in the study to allow the reader to assess and evaluate the transferability of the

data to another context (Moustakas, 1994).

Dependability

In qualitative studies, dependability refers to the stability or consistency of the

inquiry processes used over time. To check the dependability of a qualitative study, the

peer debriefer looked over the transcripts to see if any careless mistakes in

conceptualizing the study, collecting the data, interpreting the findings, and reporting the

results. The logic I used for selecting people and events to observe, interview, and

include in the study were clearly presented and screened. I was sure to be consistent in

the research process to provide validity in my results to replicate the study. I have also

used an expert panel of Early Childhood Educators and Administrators to assist in the

development and approval of the interview questions (van Manen, 1990). This technique

of using an expert panel and peer debriefer allowed for assessing dependability to see

how well the established steps taken for this study met the credibility and transferability

standards discussed in Chapter 3. I wanted to be sure that I maintained the dependability

so the trustworthiness of the study was not diminished. I used cross-examining of

sources, checking for consistency amongst participants over time and comparing the

perspectives of the participants from different points of view. Some participants included

points of view other than their own regarding decisions, which was interesting to see

throughout the 15 interviews. I was also sure to conduct the interviews under the most

natural conditions possible. I avoided any manipulation of the participants through

random assignment and location. The participants were treated ethically and were always

informed of their rights as a participant. They were given the opportunity to react to the

transcript data from both interviews and their oppositions, if any, were taken seriously

when for the follow-up telephone call or email (Appendix E) (Spinrad et al., 2012).

Confirmability

Confirmability is a strategy to ensure neutrality and avoid bias. The peer

debriefer was used to check my data to look for acceptability in terms of bias and

confirmability. Explicit details of how the participants were recruited and screened will help duplicate the study and give another researcher the same results. Patton (2002) associated "objectivity in science with the use of instruments that are not dependent on human skill and perception" (p.64). Patton (2002) recognizes, however, the difficulty of ensuring real objectivity, since, as even tests and questionnaires are designed by humans, the intrusion of the researcher's biases is inevitable". The notion of confirmability is my concern to uphold the objectivity of my research and participants. I took all the necessary steps to ensure that the data were the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than my personal characteristics, beliefs, and/or preferences. The role of triangulation in encouraging confirmability must again be emphasized, in this context to reduce the effect of me showing any bias in this study. References to literature and findings by other authors can confirm my interpretations and will strengthen confirmability of the study, which will be discussed in the results section of this chapter and in depth in Chapter 5.

Results

The research questions were addressed by using the coded data and emerging themes taken from the transcribed interviews. Based on the three research questions, I applied the seven themes that emerged from the data to the correlating research question. The findings as they relate to each research question will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Through the analysis of hand coding and NVivo, themes had emerged from the clustering of topics. Similar responses to interview questions from the participants

became the basis for themes. As stated in the Data Analysis section, I used large paper

with each interview question on it, carefully went through each transcribed interview, and

simply tallied the recurring words or themes that were emerging. If a word or theme was

duplicated, I simply placed the interview letter next to the word to keep a tallying system

of how many times a word or phrase was being used. After the themes were established, I

revisited my data and organized my themes into subthemes to identify the important

features of each theme. The specific experiences of the participants and their perceptions

emerged through their transcript and gave a fresh perspective of the phenomenon that

was being studied. The interviews allowed each mother to have a moment to express her

own views of being a mother and working in her own environment with no disruptions

and a chance to reflect on her experience and her feelings on making a childcare choice

as a millennial mother. The second interview probed further from the initial interviews to

provide vividness and further explanations. The majority of the participants were eager

to participate and have a chance to have a moment to themselves and have an adult

conversation without being interrupted. Moustakas (1994) described this as a

transcendental phenomenological approach that focuses on the experiences of the

participant and not only the interpretation of the researcher.

Research Questions and Supporting Themes

After the analysis process, seven themes and subthemes emerged from the

transcribed interview questions. Research Question 1 addressed the lived experiences of

mothers as they choose initial childcare for their children. The themes that emerged were

emotions, contribution of choice, and millennial characteristics.   Research Question 2

addressed the important decision elements the mothers identified. The themes that emerged were benefits of care and importance of career. Research Question 3 addressed the mothers' experience during the first 5 months of childcare participation. The themes that emerged were conflicts during childcare experience and positive childcare experiences. The themes that emerged from the data were identified through the coding process and the consistent usage of words or phrases. The subthemes are listed under each research question and will be supported with verbatim comments from the interviews to exemplify the ideas discussed further in the next sections.

Research Question 1: What Are the Lived Experiences of Mothers as They Choose Initial Childcare for Their Children?

I will present the themes identified under each research question. Then I will summarize all of the themes.

Theme #1: Emotions. This theme of emotions was the considered the most important to mothers based on their interview responses. There is no consensus on a definition for emotions. However, emotions are often intertwined with mood, temperament, personality, disposition, and motivation. In *What is emotions: How can they be measured,* Klaus Scherer (2005) stated, "Emotions involve different components, such as subjective experience, cognitive processes, expressive behavior, psychophysiological changes, and instrumental behavior" (p. 247). His definition of emotions included bodily symptoms: the physiological component of emotional experience. Action tendencies: a motivational component for the preparation and direction of motor responses. Expression: facial and vocal expression usually

accompanies an emotional state to communicate reaction and intention of actions.

Feelings: the subjective experience of emotional state once it has occurred. Scherer's

(2005) definition was used as a guide to for clarification of emotions. Some examples of

emotions were anger, guilt, jealousy, frustration, etc. Each of the participants expressed

emotions when it came to discussing their experience with childcare choice. Nine out of

the 15 participants used the word stressful as an indicator of making a decision followed

by trust and guilt.

> *Stressful.* The participants felt making a choice for their child was stressful since
>
> there were some unknown factors such as "What goes on when I am not there?" "Is this
>
> the best environment for my child?" and "Am I doing the right thing?" Many of the
>
> participants had to make a decision rather quickly, which made the process stressful. The
>
> participants reached out to friends, social media, and family for recommendations before
>
> seeking out their own information of a particular type of care. The participants felt
>
> between referrals and recommendations from others and their own feelings made the
>
> process harder, resulting in them questioning their decision of what type of care was best
>
> for their infant or toddler and working schedule. The participants expressed the need to
>
> make the decision quickly because they waited until after the child was born, not being
>
> aware of the demands of millennial mothers needing nonmaternal care.

Marissa Lee stated,

I didn't know there is such a thing as a waiting list. I learned from other moms

that you need to hold your child's spot months before she is born; otherwise, you

will end up in a school that you really didn't want.

This discovery was eye opening too many of the mothers in this study. Four of the

participants placed their child on a waiting list when only a few months pregnant. This

leaves the majority of participants not making any childcare plans prior to the birth of

their baby. The remaining participants either waited until 1 month before the infant

arrived or waited until after the baby was born. Most of the participants were asked by

coworkers and friends what their plan was after their maternity leave lapses. At that

point, the participants would begin thinking about how they were going to make childcare

arrangements. In several of the cases, as stated by Marissa Lee, there are waiting lists at

most locations. This need or urgency of not knowing that a mother needs to begin the

process of looking for NMC while still pregnant is still unheard of to some mothers and

made the process more stressful. Since most of the mothers knew they were going back

to work, there appeared to be a gap in the knowledge of the need to seek NMC before the

infant or toddler is born. If the mothers were educated on how they can prepare for their

child's arrival and making childcare choices, this can help minimize the internal

pressures mothers were feeling to make a decision quickly. The first step knows they are

going to need NMC at an early stage in their pregnancy. Then, mothers can begin looking

at their options, allowing themselves to make a decision over time versus the need to do it

right away as stated by the participants. Being properly educated about this decision

process and understanding how to go about may reduce the stress for mothers. One

Ashley Smith felt part of the pregnancy experience should now include a "how to," not

only on how to prepare for the child's arrival but also how to make childcare decisions

effectively and adjust back to work without the stress and guilt that mothers are currently feeling.

Nicole Parker felt there was stress just thinking about her daily schedule of work and arranging the drop-off and pick-ups. She stated,

It's a little ... It's crazy. You can't anticipate how it's gonna go; you can't anticipate what's going on with everything. I'm thinking about the fact that when I left work, I was working in Connecticut, so I was able to drive, and it was a little easier with the schedule to go. I'm thinking, if I have to go back to the city, how is it gonna change his schedule? When I get home, is it gonna be almost time to put him to bed? Am I gonna have to wake him up early so I can get him ready to go where I go? Which I dread, interrupting him from his routine.

This is an example of the pressures a millennial mother faces on a day-to-day basis, juggling all the tasks that need to be done in one day. It is just one example of the frustrations of getting through a typical workday. This mom said she uses checklists hour by hour to help her organize all her thoughts and errands throughout the day. She felt that without an organizer, she would be lost and would not be able to keep track of all she had to do. It seemed this pressure continued through many of the interviews with the participants. The planning of Nicole Parker's day was heavily related to other participants. Christine Thomas, Maria Jones, Rosanna Weiss, and Melissa Crisara all felt some form of stress whether it was not registering their infant for a childcare program or just figuring out the day-to-day of orchestrating everyone's schedule. Then, when the

infant or toddler becomes sick, the stress continues with one parent needing to take off to stay home.

Some of the mothers expressed that talking or venting to their friends was helpful and knowing there were other people like them. A good way to destress for most was to separate work and family. When they were at work, they would not think about NMC to avoid distractions and when with their family would not think about work. However, the participants did express some of their bosses expected them to answer work emails late at night or on the weekends, which the mothers felt was distracting and took away from their family time.

Trust. The participants described either type of NMC with a waiting list as "the best" or validated how well the NMC is operated based on reputation from other mothers. Ashley Smith, Rosanna Weiss, Elizabeth Incognoli, Molly Reid, and Sabrina Middleton gravitated towards a center with a waiting list, expressing "They have a waiting list for a reason; I trust them based on what other people think." The waiting list also made the participants trust that other mothers were content with the care being given at a particular type of center. Alice Evans needed to trust her center completely because they discouraged the parents from visiting throughout the day.

Alice Evans stated,

One of the things is where we ended up, they discouraged parents from visiting at all during the day. And that was a little off-putting at first because you want to be able to have, you're also like they're keeping something from you, right? Like what are they doing, that they don't want people to come in, but then, and they're

very upfront about that saying that they would never prevent me from going and

checking on him, but please don't. Because I guess it's really disruptive for him

and then it makes their life more difficult because of separation issues.

Despite feelings of guilt and being stressed, a few mothers did express in their interviews

that they trusted the caregiver and center completely. They trusted their decision.

Marissa Lee expressed, "You wanna make sure he's in the right situation. We felt

comfortable with the people there so I did not feel guilty about it. I felt strong in my

decision." This finding states that though this sentiment was not shared by all, some

mothers felt satisfied with the choices they had to make instead of feeling like they did

something wrong. This response and comfort level either came from the mothers who

had a Bachelor's/Master's degree or educators who had strong feelings for education and

structure for their child. The emotion of trust was elaborated upon in the second

interview with the participants.

Ashley Smith stated, I felt comfortable with the owner. She was always there and

was responsive to emails. The teachers were caring and genuine in what my child needed.

Sarah Marshall stated, I trusted my child would be in the best environment

possible. No matter when I picked up or dropped off all the children were engaged and

doing something fun.

Barbara Miller stated, The teachers would communicate any changes or issues

that would arise throughout the day. I knew my child was in the best care.

 The structure of the infant /toddler's schedule consisted of enjoying circle time,

participating in centers, and meeting milestones for that age group. The participants were

impressed by seeing the infant or toddler rooms following a schedule around their

feeding times but also having the infant or toddler complete projects, learn sign language,

music, and the teachers singing and reading books to them.

     Guilt. One Christine Thomas expressed how hard it was for her to drop her child

off, "dropping them off for a day and then not seeing them for 12 hours is pretty heart

wrenching" or "It's almost like it's the guilt or the trust factor," "I definitely felt the guilt

though. He's only 13 weeks old." These emotions were instinctual of not wanting to

leave their child in care of any other person but themselves but understanding they had to

make this decision. Nicole Parker, Ashley Smith, Maria Jones, Rosanna Weiss, Elizabeth

Incognoli, Liliana Fierro, and Molly Reid, the mothers expressed guilt for doing

something they perceived to be out of the norm. After probing further, it was found that

stay-at-home mothers raised 11 interviewees when they were young, which may have

been directly related to the guilt those participants felt leaving their infant and toddlers

with someone other than themselves. This made the participants feel guilty, doing

something out of their norm since they were raised having a mother at home, and they

may be viewed as not being there for their child or having someone else raise their infant

or toddler. The participants indicated this guilt came from their own perceptions, rather

than outside influences. They reported that their own mothers were not judgmental of

their decision to return to work; they were supportive of their daughters and felt their

grandchildren would be getting more stimulation and socialization than they would

receive at home with their daughters every day. The following excerpts from the

transcripts exude emotions related to making initial childcare decisions:

Sarah Marshall stated,

It's definitely the guilt factor because you don't wanna be away from your child, so there's the stressful part. You wanna make sure he's in the right situation and you can never know until you put him in there. Then you think, "should I be home with my child?" am I being a bad mother?" Then you look around at everyone else for reassurance. It's so crazy how your emotions get the best of you".

Sarah Marshall felt the guilt of having to leave her child with someone other than herself and not knowing what was going on throughout the day that bothered her the most. She felt in her setting of a group-home care being with children of mixed ages was more of a babysitting setting.

Internal "gut" feeling. Participants described this emotion as their "gut" feeling about the entire process of making childcare choices. Some of the interview participants expressed these emotions in phrases of, "It's almost like it's the guilt or the trust factor," and the common response of, "So, I went with my gut," which is something that cannot be measured but only expressed when experienced. The "gut" feeling as heard from several participants was a feeling of comfort that was felt from the overall environment of the center and caregivers. Maria Jones and Melissa Crisara said they would feel the coldness of a caregiver who was dismissive or not nurturing upon initially meeting them. They attributed this to the caregiver not being happy with her job or not truly loving being at that center. There was no way to hide the displeasure of a caregiver upon meeting them, and that is what gave them the "gut feeling" of either being drawn to that

caregiver or not. Another contributing factor to the "gut" feeling was the caregiving style

after having their infant or toddler in the setting. The participants are constantly in the

classroom or interacting with the caregivers on a daily basis and can easily view actions

or mannerisms when caring for other infant or toddler that would perhaps make them

question if they did this to their child too. Do the caregivers let my child cry like that?

These were all questions that can contribute to the participants' "gut" feelings that might

cause them to think twice about a particular setting.

Theme #2: Contributions to choice. The theme of contributions of choice had

many different meanings to different interview participants. Contributions to choice

included the following subthemes of importance based on the responses from the

participants: type of setting, location, and comfort level with caregivers, professionalism,

cost, and referrals.

Type of setting. As stated in the participant section, eight participants chose a

group-home care setting, seven chose a center-based care, and no participants chose a

nanny. The participants chose a group-home setting because they felt the setting was

smaller, more nurturing, and more comforting versus a larger center where they felt there

was a lack of communication between teachers and administrations. The feeling of no

control mostly transpired from the center-based choice. Participants felt a lack of

communication between the administration and teachers in a larger setting not reporting

to one another of any incidences of biting, bumps, or bruises or even their infant or

toddler transitioning to another classroom. This was attributed to the larger size of a

center-based care with a capacity of over 100 children. The group-home care setting was

defined as a smaller building or home that can hold 12 or no more than 40 children depending on licensing regulations. Barbara Miller expressed, "the smaller settings felt like home and the attention to my child was evident." The feeling of home was important to this participant who believed this feeling was not evident in the larger setting when she toured it.

On the other hand, some participants felt comfortable in the center-based setting because more people were constantly in and out of the building. Six participants (Nicole Parker, Maria Jones, Rosanna Weiss, Elizabeth Incognoli, Molly Reid, and Sabrina Middleton) had their infant or toddler in a franchised childcare that had to follow stricter policies and licensing than a group-home care setting, which according to those participants made them feel more comfortable than a group-home care.

Rosanna Weiss stated,

I felt a larger setting like a franchised center followed stricter rules because someone was always coming in to evaluate the program. There were always guidelines the franchises had to follow.

Nicole Parker stated,

Sometimes the group-home cares are not updated or as clean as the larger centers based on the tours I went on.

Despite the participants feeling of stricter policies and licensing as a reason to choose one NMC over the other, this belief does not reflect the actual structure of regulation in the state. In the state in which the study was conducted, any NMC setting needs to be licensed by the state and department of health before any child can be

enrolled. The only programs in the state that can take infant and toddlers without a license are mommy and I programs, where a mother would stay with the child, or a nursery school setting, which is less than 3 hours of care. This does not apply to any of the participants but does show how millennial mothers in the study are unaware of the laws NMC settings must abide by in order to accept children.

As evident in Sarah Marshall and articulated by Alice Evans, Marissa Lee, Rosanna Weiss, Melissa Crisara, and Elizabeth Incognoli, most of the participants who currently have their child in a group-home care setting will be transitioning their child to a more structured and age equivalent program (center based) when the child turns 3. Although a benefit to the group-home care setting was more attentiveness to their infant or toddler and the comfort of a smaller setting, it was interesting to learn more to why the mothers felt when the child turned three it was time to transition to a "larger center-based structured program" as they described it. The participants reasoned that when their infant or toddler entered the group-home care, their child was the youngest. Their interpretation or reasoning was their child would learn more by being around older children versus being with other infant and toddlers developing at the same time or meeting at the same rate. However, when their infant and toddlers turned three, they were now plateauing at that location since they were the oldest not learning from anyone and would benefit from children of the same age or older. Christine Thomas felt "my child is so smart he repeats and does what the older children can do" or "my child learns best from older children like the 3s and 4s." In a center-based or more structured program was defined as a place where daily schedules were followed along with a curriculum including reading, math,

science, and social studies pertaining to the Common Core Pre-K Standards preparing their 3-year-old for kindergarten.

Sarah Marshall stated,

When I toured the center-based programs learning was evident everywhere. From structured schedules posted, tons of artwork and daily activity reports sent home daily.

Liliana Fierro stated,

The Pre-K classrooms had standards posted with each artwork display stating why the child did that piece and its relation to his/her development.

Sabrina Middleton stated,

I loved seeing charts and posters created by the teachers of past lessons on Science and Social Studies, which I didn't see at group-home based centers.

Location. The most consistent theme relating to contribution of choice among all participants was location. Each participant sought flexibility in drop-off and pickup times so rushing in the morning and afternoon would not add to their stressful day by having a center close to homemade drop-off easy.

Alice Evans stated,

Definitely, convenience of the location I guess. That is a big one. What was gonna work and be convenient? What was gonna be our normal as two working parents. Flexibility was important for us, with hours of care and location ... Like if I had a morning meeting we would be able to drop off when we needed to so having a location close to my home was more practical.

Nicole Parker added,

I mean it comes down to, cost is obviously huge. Location. Because we have

crazy schedules, where we do have to travel a little bit for work, that we're not

right in the area, so we have a little bit later pick up time, and not all places have

that. So, we have to make sure that we can pick them up by 5:45, and not get

charged 2 hours, or $2 per minute, something like that.

The location of the NMC was the factor that the millennials attributed as the most

important contributor to choice. Participants consistently expressed the stress of being on

a tight schedule and having to drop their infant or toddler off and head into work and

there was no time to deviate from that. The eight participants choosing center-based care

chose this center primarily because of the location, not necessarily paying attention to

continuity of care, cleanliness, or security. The easy drop-off location centralized close

to their home surpassed any other factor they expressed during the interviews. Only a

few of the participants chose a center close to work because they felt they spent more

time with their child with the drive in and they were closer to their infant or toddler if

they were sick or there was an emergency. Christine Thomas felt "it was easier for me to

have my child closer to work then my home. I was able to get there faster in an

emergency." Barbara Miller would visit the school unexpectedly to say hello on their

child, breastfeed on their lunch break, or be able to easily attend events at the school

during work hours and easily be able to leave work.

However, Nicole Parker felt having her infant or toddler closer to home was a

better option so the location was either central to their home or close to a relative that

someone could pick up their infant or toddler if they were sick. The location was also

important for the participants when it came to drop off time in the morning or pick up time. A convenient location allowed them not worry about making the closing time, especially if it was close to home.

   Comfort level with caregiver. The next most consistent reference was the comfort level of the caregiver and owner. Ashley Smith stated, "I mean, we went, we met with the people that we went with, and it's a woman and her husband, and we felt comfortable." Participants experienced an unpronounced comfort level with each caregiver and warm reception upon arriving to each facility, which was a contributing factor in their decision. Most of the participants expressed the idea that group-home rather than center-based care is a more comforting and nurturing environment until their infant or toddler turned 3 and needed a more structured and academic program. On the other hand, participants choosing group-home care based their decision on the anticipated level of attention their infant and toddlers would receive in a smaller setting. The participants choosing group-home care used phrases such as, "I felt a smaller setting was more comforting," "I felt a group-home care was more attentive since there were less children there," and "in a group-home care my infant can interact with children of different ages. In a group-home care setting, the children are not grouped by age like in a center-based facility, which some mothers felt was a disadvantage but wanted a place that was smaller and comforting.

   None of the participants used a nanny or Family, Friend or Neighbor (FFN). Alice Evans, Marissa Lee, Rosanna Weiss, MaryLou Caro, and Molly Reid described their own experiences with exploring the option of a nanny when looking for NMC.

They described a nanny as an inconvenience for working parents, expressing they needed

time off, could call out sick, and would be in their home providing no socialization for

their child. Marissa Lee expressed, "A nanny became an employee of ours, just another

headache and stress. I felt it added to someone else I had to take care of or worry about."

The nanny was more work for the mothers and felt the nanny would do nothing beneficial

for their child throughout the day and would tempt them to place a "nanny camera" to see

what exactly they were doing all day with their child (Alice Evans). This option of NMC

was unsettling to the mothers and was not an option. The other issue the participants

elaborated on was the cost of the nanny was higher per week than placing their child in a

group home care or center-based care. Even though cost was not an issue to most of the

participants, the quality of the care provided other than a nanny setting was worth the cost

they were paying, whereas in their interpretation nannies were not providing their child

with engaging activities of songs or projects along with socialization with other children.

With a nanny, this would include spending more money to send them both to mommy

and me programs and outings that would just be wasting and spending more money.

Professionalism of facility and teachers. Professionalism of the faculty was the

third   most common reason for contributing to choice. Participants expressed the

education of the teachers to be a high priority as well as the level of professionalism of

the building and the education being taught. Participants appreciated the teachers having

a bachelor or master's degree in education made a change in the dynamics of the

buildings they had toured stating, "Teachers are pursuing degrees in higher education, so

very highly skilled, trained, caring workforce, I guess, with like a personal touch." Some

of the ways professionalism was evident to the participants included the following: "It was obvious once talking to the teacher whether she was educated in early childhood" and "the activities and projects coming home were impressive." Most of the participants elaborated upon the caregivers educating them on when to take away the bottle or how to relieve gas. The mothers felt they had a support system at the setting to help them through a rough night or to put their child to sleep better almost like a team, which made them feel comfortable. None of the mothers ever felt they were being judged by their mistakes and frustrations of taking care of their child. It was the opposite; they always felt that if they had a question they could ask. For example, "I couldn't get him to sleep one night; I was up for hours;" the next day the mom spoke to one of the caregivers about this, and she gave the mom a strategy to get her child to sleep better, and it worked. The mother was so thankful for the help and assistance. The reason for the openness was contributed to her comfort level with the caregiver knowing she was not being judged but had someone she could look to for support and encouragement exactly what millennials are looking for.

Cost. Though cost was not the number one contributor to the participants' choice, it was actually referenced minimal times throughout the interview process. Cost was of least importance to the mothers' when choosing a childcare arrangement.

Referrals. Referrals and recommendations from Family, Friends, and Neighbors (FFN) were of high interest of each Barbara Miller but was not a deciding factor for all. In addition to FFN, many of the participants reached out to social media outlets such as mommy groups, Facebook, Google searches, or Yelp.

Melissa Crisara stated,

Facebook there is a mommy group, Tarrytown mommy group, and I just ask

around if anyone knew of daycares because we just moved here. We used to live

in Croton; we moved here when I got pregnant, and I knew nothing about

Tarrytown. We were only in Croton for 1 year, so we moved from the city to

Westchester, we knew nothing. So, it was a really new environment for us. So, I

just asked a bunch of the moms.

Alice Evans added,

Then started looking on Yelp reviews, and any sort of Google reviews, and there

is that Sittercity, and care.com, and all of that. And basically went off of who had

the most reviews that we could somewhat rely on within the past few years, even

some places had old reviews that we kinda dismissed, 'cause it didn't seem like it

was that up to date. But there's a lot of information online.

Theme #3: Millennial characteristics. The theme of millennial characteristics

was the second most important theme referenced throughout the interviews. I chose this

as a theme using the research gained from the literature of millennial characteristics in

Chapter 2 that was apparent throughout the interviews with the participants (Moro-Egido,

2012; Bianchi, 2011; Wiedmer, 2015; Meunier et al., 2012).

Societal pressures. When sifting through the transcribed interview characteristics

of millennials was evident throughout.

Maria Jones added,

Because being a millennial mom now, there's differences. There are some moms that have to work and there are some moms that are stay-at-home moms. My sister-in-law is a stay-at-home mom. And you feel that pressure that you kinda have to fit in and do all the things that they're doing and still have your full-time job. And you don't always get to do those things. You have to balance and it's... It is pressure and it's hard and you wanna be everything and you have to realize you can't be.

The references made to millennials began with the most consistent reference of societal pressures, "So, I feel a lot of pressure to be a good mom and bring home half of my household's income, but to also be still upholding those traditional roles too. Like I feel pressure to be a good spouse." The millennial participants are facing pressures in today's society such as balancing work/family, needing a dual-income, and always being the best at work. Interestingly, pressure also exists to be the best through social media outlets such as Mommy Groups, Pinterest, Facebook, and Etsy, each forcing mothers to be the "perfect mom" referred to as "mommy wars."

Marissa Lee stated,

That person works and is able to. At the same time, do crafts with their kid. And there's the idea of the Pinterest mom who makes all these perfect crafts and who has time to do those things and, in a lot of cases, money to afford them. So, I think there is... Because of the outflow of information and so much is shared, and it isn't as personal anymore. But there's a lot out there as well to digest and can make you feel overwhelmed.

MaryLou Caro added,

> I think we really still are trying to kind of be all, and I think social media has an
> even greater... Puts more pressure on us, with Pinterest, and like, who's doing
> what, and just all these things like, "What books are you reading?" "Oh, not that
> book, or this book," it just seems like there's always more you could be doing, and
> I just….Everybody's on Facebook and Twitter and everything, sharing their
> experiences and presenting the image of themselves that they want the world to
> see. For every perfect photo, there's five outtakes that aren't so great. There's the
> idea that you need to keep up with your peers. Yeah. Your peers that are putting
> out this perfect life. And then, "Oh, look. They went on vacation again." And,
> "Oh! Their child is doing X, Y, Z." And where that flow of information for
> people wasn't always there, especially a lot of strangers. So, people you may not
> have ever talked to.

Barbara Miller stated,

> This puts a lot of pressure, and people are, I think also very into, it's like, what I'm
> doing is what should be done and it kind of puts pressure on people who don't
> know but there's so many different approaches and ways.

Each of the interview responses expressed the constant pressure millennial mothers are facing with trying to keep up with their characteristic of accomplishing the "American Dream." According to millennials, the "American Dream" is to be successful in their career and family. Sarah Marshall expressed being successful at work and at home was her ultimate goal. Barbara Miller described it as "achieving it all! I worked hard at

climbing the corporate ladder and now I will be great at being a mother." It is evident from the excerpts that each mother is doing all she can to be the best mother, spouse, and coworker. The participants were asked further how they are coping with these pressures and what strategies help support or seek balance in their life. Many of the mothers felt they had no outlet to express their frustrations. One Ashley Smith felt, "We are all experiencing it; it is just how you handle it that makes some mothers look more frustrated then other." The questions remain or may be considered what type of mother each person is whether autonomous or dismissive which may directly reflect on how a mother balances her "to do list" on a day to day.

Self-efficacy. The mothers' sense of self is based on how well she handles it. The reason most of the participants did not choose to stay home is that they would feel lonely or depressed with no one to talk to throughout the day. The responses from the participants varied with what they do to handle the life pressures or to achieve balance; some expressed having time for themselves such as going to get their nails done, going to the gym, or having a girls' night out allowed them to de-stress and enjoy all aspects of their life that they are grateful for. They also made it clear that when they first had their infant or toddler, they lost their sense of self since they were always taking care of either their husband or baby, and they promised themselves they would take time for themselves at least once a week and have a weekly date night with their spouse. These were examples of how millennials attain life balance.

Christine Thomas said,

"I also had to let go of being perfect in all I did"—she said if the house was dirty

or there were dishes in the sink, she would tell herself not to care and let it go and

"I don't have to be perfect all the time."

The over-achieving of millennials is consistent in the participants. Even though each

mother handles her stress differently, having options of what works for each is beneficial

to give other mothers opportunities to regain their sense of self throughout the years of

raising her children and being a millennial mother.

Technology driven. Technology was also referenced as a typical characteristic of

a millennial since they are considered a technology-driven generation. Barbara Miller

explained, "Technology plays a huge role." The use of technology for helping them

adjust back to work was essential in easing their worries. This included the use of

technology applications for pictures and video of their child throughout the day, texting

from the owners of the facility of teachers on a status of their child throughout the day,

and nanny cams in childcare centers that allowed mothers to log in whenever they wanted

to see their child. Marissa Lee, Melissa Crisara, Liliana Fierro, Molly Reid, and Sabrina

Middleton attended centers that used an application for their phones that would send

those pictures, videos, and daily updates on feedings.

Sarah Marshall elaborated further,

The teachers would text me daily about updates or send pictures that my infant was

having a great day! The use of pictures and videos made me get through the day knowing

she was enjoying her day at school.

Societal changes. The majority of participants expressed not wanting to stay home and enjoyed being in a career and having their own identity and successes. Alice Evans expressed, "I'm not cut out for a stay-at-home mom. This summer has been very difficult for me. I am not cut out for it. I always knew that and we'd always said, we're gonna go with the daycare." Christine Thomas, Melissa Crisara, and Sabrina Middleton expressed the desire to want to work and not be at home seeking the stimulation of a work environment with tasks and adult interaction.

Christine Thomas stated,

And then the whole, you know, when a child is so small and helpless, there's constant need for something, either being fed, being burped, being changed, being bathed, being... Putting down to sleep that it didn't feel like I was... There was no end product, except an alive and okay child…

Rosanna Weiss added,

But it's hard, yeah maybe part of it is like rationalizing like, "This is what we do." But I guess if you said... If I could, if money was no object and I could stay home with her, would I? Maybe I would but I don't think so, I still don't think so.

Most felt that their child was benefitting from being in care and being stimulated all day versus being home with them all the time. Some participants felt they were at an advantage than their mothers were in being extremely educated as a millennial and know more than their mothers did when they were growing up. This is just one example of the participants discussing they are more educated then their mothers were when it came to providing for their child shifting from the traditional norm of depending on the maternal

grandmother for support in the early months of their infant or toddler life. They felt

empowered in making this decision, feeling they were more educated about what their

infant or toddler needed both developmentally and emotionally than their mother was in

past. Stay-at-home mothers raised three-quarters of the participants where it was

expected once married to have children, and the mother would stay home and raise them.

None of the participants felt the cycle of staying at home with their child was an option

today due to financial constraints as well as what is best for their child and, overall, the

millennials did not view staying at home as an enticing career choice after spending years

establishing their career and education. This was evident of social change and the non-use

of maternal grandmothers to care for their infant or toddler like their mother did.

Maria Jones stated,

A lot of it is being educated about development, about what's good for them,

maybe some of it is rationalizing, and justifying it. And so, you're like, "This is

our reality, make peace with it, and accept it." You just want to feel good about

your choices and tell yourself it's for the best that could be part of it. Maybe also,

as a millennial, right? Ourselves going through education and higher degrees and

then working towards our career to sort of maintain that. I think maybe my

particular work environment that school is very supportive of a lot of my ...

Almost all my colleagues have kids of different ages, as new

moms or whose kids are then going off to college and everybody seems to get that

balance and have sympathy for the stresses of ... It's not, I mean yes work is

stimulating for me, it sure is but then a part of it can be so incredibly stressful.

Maria Jones added,

You want to not drop out of the workforce, you want to exercise those other parts

of your brain. You want to be a productive, useful member of society, beyond just

your small family unit. Like working in education, like all the other students and

people we reach and teach and you know, to not take too long of a break from.

Marissa Lee said,

About 7 weeks in, I knew for sure that I would be a terrible stay-at-home mother

just because I don't have the patience, but then probably, 2 weeks before I went

back, I got very wistful and emotional and was trying to crunch numbers to figure

out how I could stay home, but at the end of the day, I think my experience was

much more... I knew I was going back because I wanna be outside of the home,

I wanted to show my child that I work and I contribute to the family in a way

that's similar to his father, but that was just how I was raised and it was normal for

me.

Despite all the societal changes facing millennials, millennial mothers, Ashley Smith felt

she was making the right decision in placing their infant or toddler in a nonmaternal care,

resulting in them being a better mother and the child receiving developmentally

appropriate practice and structure more than their maternal grandmother would be able to

do like past generations. The use of maternal grandmothers to care for their infant or

toddler was diminished and was evident with the participants of this study. None of the

participants felt having a nanny was beneficial to their infant and toddlers' development

or care. To conclude on the data from the participants, the middle class millennial

mothers in this study felt the use of nanny or maternal grandmother was out of the norm and placed the child at a disadvantage. In a nanny's care or maternal grandmother, the child would be missing socialization with other children and exposure to developmentally appropriate practice that group or center-based care is providing children in their care. Each millennial mother is experiencing the societal changes and pressures in today's society and question what should really be the societal norm and what is acceptable today. Although 12 out of the 15 participants were confident in their decisions, three of the participants desired to work part time to allow them to lose who they were before they had an infant or toddler.

> Christine Thomas stated,
>
> I think that there are a lot of benefits in the older generations where there were one parent stayed at home, most traditionally the mom. And I think there was greater balance in the household overall, so there was less pressure on women to do and be everything. I think a lot of families nowadays, can't afford for one parent to stay at home, depending on how many children you have or where you live. And I think there's a certain stigma to moms who stay home too. I think the "mommy wars" thing is real. And I don't know whether it was always like that. It feels like a very modern thing that we face now. But I think maybe it was easier then, but not as many opportunities for women as well.

 Millennial mothers are seeking any possible ways to help achieve life balance. The mothers provided insight on how they juggle all of life experiences by making sure they have time for themselves like getting their nails done or just having some quiet time

reading a book. Each participant was asked what helped him or her balance his or her responsibilities. The responses varied among personalities depending on what was of interest or of importance that they felt they could no longer do once they had a child they found a way to incorporate it back into their lives. Some participants felt, "I needed some space for the day-to-day as simple as getting a cup of coffee without someone calling my name," while another mom felt, "going to the gym was essential." She communicated this to her husband and made sure to fit it into the schedule.

Research Question 2: What Are Important Decision Elements the Mothers Identify?

The second research question addressed the important decision elements the mothers identified in making a childcare choice. From this question, two themes emerged from the data: benefits of care and working/career model. The themes that emerged for this question were the benefits of care middle class millennials felt emerged from their child being in a NMC setting and their need for being career-driven, which will be discussed further in detail in the sections below.

Theme #4: Benefits of care. This theme was of least importance throughout the interviews. The theme of benefits of care elaborated on the benefits of having their child in a NMC and what elements were important to the participants.

Continuity of care. One of the benefits of care was the continuity of care and an attachment to the caregiver supporting the infant or toddler internal working model of interpersonal relationships. While in the childcare experience, consistency of the caregiver was a reason why a mother chose to stay at a particular place, "There was definitely continuity of care. So, I've had the same teacher the entire time he been there."

This reference to caregiver attachment and continuity of care was one of the most beneficial aspects of having their child in care and represented how important it was to have the consistency for not only the participants but also for the child.

Melissa Crisara stated,

You get to know her and she's actually really warm and really nice. At the end of the year, she even like do an album for the babies, which people don't do anymore, so it was really nice. I loved her. She knew exactly what to do. She had a set schedule for the children even at early age, which I loved.

Socialization and development. Socialization was also important to each of the participants as one of the benefits of being in a childcare setting. This included the daily structure and routines the child had on a daily basis, and the curriculum, educational component, and vision of the school. Some participants felt "It gets them ready for kindergarten." The participants described the elements of a program to include areas of literacy, math, science, social studies, arts/crafts, and music. When looking at a curriculum, the participants would ask how the Prekindergarten Common Core standards were part of the planning process for the teachers. This factor mostly applied to older children, ages 3 to 5. As for the infant or toddler program, the participants appreciated the consistency with feeding schedules as well as napping as a structured program. They also wanted to be informed if the infant or toddler had deviated from his or her normal napping or eating schedule. If the mothers were not informed either at the end of the day or through the iPad application, they would be upset and get frustrated that their nightly

routines would be off schedule and lead to sleeping that not would result in a bad day for

them tomorrow (Marissa Lee, Melissa Crisara, and Molly Reid).

Alice Evans stated,

I've already received artwork. I go see him every day they tell me what books

they read, they tell me what games they played. Even if he was napping for part

of their daily activities, I know that he was doing something and he was in maybe

water playing, they take him out and he goes outside every day. And there's no

televisions there, so I know that he's not being exposed to screen time that I may

not want him to have.

Barbara Miller added,

It also has an accreditation with an NAEYC, which has a more, a higher standard

I guess. To tell you the truth I don't know much about it but I know about it

because I work there. But it follows a curriculum that pleased me when I, to work

there but I was also pleased   the fact that it would give a more stimulate

environment for my son.

Several mothers expressed that their child was surpassing their friends' children who are

stay-at-home mothers both socially and developmentally, due to the constant stimulation

and activities their child was presented with on a daily basis. When asking the mothers to

expand on stimulation and activities, they said, "helping the child achieve milestones like

rolling over, sitting up or crawling." Most of the participants received a "daily gram" or

"daily activity report" that gave a detailed outline of what their infant or toddler worked

on throughout the day, which was reassuring to the mothers of what their infant or toddler

was doing. The mothers felt the teachers knew the milestones that the child should reach

at their given age and would work towards meeting those goals. During parent/teacher

conferences, many of the centers provided the mothers with the goals of where their child

should be and what they were attaining. In describing their children's responses to the

curriculum, following are representative examples of what participants described: "She's

developing amazingly" and "(He) happens to be a really social kid but he does some

seem a little bit more social than some of the other kids that were stay at home."

Liliana Fierro stated,

I think daycare has a better stigma now, than it did 30 years ago ... The kids get so

much out of it, and I think that people see that, and so they respect it more, and

they respect the decision more for a mom to be working, than to stay home with

her kids.

Several participants also expressed that their child was more adaptable to change and

adjusting to new environments and had a more relaxed temperament when it came to

sharing and interacting with other children versus children who have not been in a

childcare experience. Ashley Smith responded, "Oh my gosh. I mean, the socialization.

They just learn so much. They're learning from other kids." Participants boasted about

their child stayed on a better eating and sleeping schedule compared to when they are at

home.

MaryLou Caro stated,

I noticed when it came to feeding themselves or certain nursing habits or even just

subtle self-reliant things that kids are taught in group care. Because they have to

be responsible for themselves in a way that kid who's at home who has

individualized attention doesn't have to do yet.

The participants felt they also learned many new tips or strategies from the caregivers at the center, to help their child eat or sleep better. They appreciated being educated by the caregivers on how to support their child better as they were reaching milestones. Although the participants had many positive reasons for the benefits for having their child in care, it was not the recurring theme during the interviews. Though the benefits were important to the participants their emotions, contributions to choice and millennial characteristics outweighed any of the other possible reasons for making a childcare choice.

Theme #5: Importance of career. This theme was separated from the millennial theme since I wanted to focus on the references to working and career, which necessarily may not be referring to a particular millennial characteristic even though feelings of societal norm may carry over to the millennial theme. I also wanted to distinguish the difference between what was purely non-characteristic qualities but themed-based responses for financial reasons or women career/workplace including longer hours, FMLA policies, job expectations, and inequality felt in the workplace.

Corporate setting. Several participants expressed the need for a dual income household in order to live in the area in which they reside, and working was purely for financial need. Several participants felt the pressure of having to do more at work and higher expectations because they were now mothers having to compensate for the lack of work time they can put in

Sarah Marshall stated,

More and more women are the sole providers, because they have to …. For

whatever reason, they do well their first couple of years, and then, they can kind

of, cannot sit back and work, but they can balance it may be better than men can.

Maria Jones added,

In some ways, it is similar because I think there is still a huge gender inequality in

the workplace. I think that I feel more emphasis on trying to make that balance

between work and home, and building an established career, maybe a little bit

more than my mom did; my mom was a working mom

Rosanna Weiss added,

Some ignore the fact a little bit that people come back to work and they may not

be able to give the 190% that they were giving before. They may not be able to

work the same hours. And I think that maybe previously that may not have been

the case. I think that there's a lot more... People are more replaceable, there's less

company loyalty, and you feel replaceable in some ways. As a mother, as a mom,

that they could easily just find someone else who maybe doesn't have a child or

doesn't have the requirements outside of the workplace.

Molly Reid stated,

And there's also, women who are in the workplace are much more reachable now,

outside of work hours. My company pays for my phone, so they feel that they can

reach me after business. And the expectation is that after my child goes to bed,

that I will check in on work, which was not the case previously. So yeah, I think

the pressure is a little bit more to keep up with coworkers without children and

male coworkers who don't have the same expectation because they're fathers and

not mothers.

This constant needed and immediate response resulted in participants feeling that they

have to answer emails late at night or on weekends and can never "shut off" from work to

prove they can do both versus a male employee who does not have the responsibility of a

child.

Barbara Miller stated,

We're lucky that we have a job. And we have to be on call 24/7, weekends. And

it's hard to have that work-life balance now. Whereas before, you didn't bring

your computer home, you didn't have your email hooked up to your phone. So,

it's very much different.

FMLA policy struggles for mothers. The inequality of treatment of mothers in the

workplace also appeared with current FMLA policies needing more time with their child

since 12 out of the 15 mothers went back to work after 8 weeks of non-paid leave.

Marylou Crisara took an extra 5 weeks unpaid just to extend her leave and have a little

more time with her infant or toddler. On the other hand, Maria Jones said:

My maternity leave was not the most exciting, pleasurable experience even though I love

my daughter, it was hard staying home and being in a whole different routine that I wasn't

used to. It's easy to get to work and have your coffee, and check your emails, and you

know that routine I've been doing that for almost at least 15 years."

The participants in the education field had 3 months of leave if they were able to apply for an extension. The other issue was the flexibility of breastfeeding mothers and employers being supportive of their needs. A few participants expressed the lack of sympathy employers or companies would have to provide accommodating places or time for the mother to pump for breastfeeding for her child, which in a normal setting can be challenging.

Liliana Fierro added,

My whole day is so structured around her, even though I only see her for two and a half hours a day because, for myself personally, I'm still breastfeeding. So, I plan throughout the day everything I bring to work to be ready for pumping, and then picking her up and scheduling when am I gonna feed her, and then I still have to pump before bed and then wake up in the middle of the night.

Christine Thomas stated,

I think pumping and breastfeeding and working is an area that women need way more support in. So, I had a terrible experience going back to work my first week. We had to share an office space with another company, and someone from that other company made inappropriate comments to me more than once while was trying to pump and juggle that aspect of being a working mom. And, I had no recourse because he wasn't my employer, and I was just sort of exposed to it without any recourse. And it was really frustrating and really disheartening. Luckily, now I'm in a situation where I have a lot of privacy, and a lot of autonomy, and I'm able to have the flexibility to pump whenever I need to

basically. But, I think the development of pumps in general needs a lot more work, and funding, and research. I think support for women in the workplace, and flexibility, and better maternity leave policies.

Many of the participants did struggle when returning to work with the expectations the employers placed upon them. Several participants (Christine Thomas, Marissa Lee and Molly Reid) did feel the pressure to compensate and be available at all times because they were not giving their job the full attention it needed. This contributed to not only the guilt mothers were feeling placing their child in care, but it seemed the mothers were putting more guilt on themselves that they were not good enough in the workplace because they had a child placing them at a disadvantage versus their coworkers. Due to the pressures at work, the millennial mothers would put in more work time around the clock adding to the pressures they were already feeling trying to be a "perfect" mother. The participants explained that the "perfect mother" might be different things to each of them. Some participants viewed the "perfect mother" as what their mother did being a stay-at-home mom, greeting their children after-school, baking every day, and having dinner on the table, and for them, working was out of the norm according to their mothers. However, the other half of the participants described the "perfect mother" as a person who provides their child with the best of everything, which includes education, stylish clothes, best toys and games, taking them on vacations, being crafty, baking the cutest treats for school, just to name a few things. Even though the image of a "perfect mother" varies among the participants, it is clear that every millennial mother has an image in her mind of what she should be placing her own pressures upon herself that

society may not necessarily are placing. It appears based on cultural transmission there

has been change over the past 20 years as to what is acceptable or defined as the "perfect

mom." Based on personalities or relationships with their mother, the participants may

have experienced more pressure from their mothers as to what is acceptable for being the

"perfect mom."

Research Question 3: How Do the Mothers Experience the First 5 Months of

Childcare Participation?

The third research question addresses the mothers' experience the first 5 months

of childcare participation. The two themes that emerged from the data with this research

question were conflicts during childcare experience and childcare experience.

Theme #6 conflicts during childcare experience. The theme of conflicts during

childcare experience was of least importance to the 15 participants. This is surprising

considering the analysis of having their child in care. I would have anticipated more

complaints from the participants. Overall, each participant was content with her choice

and did not make any changes to their childcare choice. Responses like "We're quite

happy and he's thriving there" and "I am happy, I am very happy where they are." The

only conflicts during childcare experience reported was how the childcare experience

could be improved. Below are excerpts from the mothers of conflicts during childcare

experience they felt were important in their experience.

Communication. The participants from the study looked forward to receiving a

daily report of their infant and toddlers' day was which included: diaper changing times,

whether wet or bowel movement; consumption of food for the day; and specifics about

the activities their child participated in for the day. The mothers felt when this daily

report was missing inf ormation or was inaccurate would result in a hiccup in their infant

or toddlers nightly schedule. If the child had a bad night, the mothers often found

themselves questioning the teachers to find out what they did differently, which resulted

in the infant or toddler's sleepless night.

Sarah Marshall stated,

They'll tell you, I mean, they'll tell you certain things. I know if he didn't eat

much that day, they'll tell me, or if he was doing something, if he didn't seem

like... But you don't always get as much. Even if the fact if I got a thing that said,

"Had a diaper change there. He napped for this long," it's still just good to know

because especially since he's going back and forth between places, you try to keep

the consistency, and that's not always the case.

This lack of communication would lead to most of the mothers' main frustration with a

center and not getting the answers they wanted. Nicole Parker reported, "I just couldn't

stand when they (caregiver) said they don't know." She felt that after being with her

child for an 8-hour day, the provider should have an answer. When this type of issue,

arose the mother would often go to administration to complain and handle the matter in

hopes it did not happen again.

The participants did express the lack of communication among administration,

teachers and parents could be more consistent when it came to the day-to-day or when a

teacher was no longer going to be working at the facility. Some mothers felt the

childcare was hiding something when they were not informed about a teacher resigning or not coming back.

> Elizabeth Incognoli added,
>
> But there isn't a lot of communication with the parents, I feel like as a school, they could do more things. They've done random pajama days or whatever, but I'm like, "Do more!" I feel like that. And then I also feel like we're kept out of the loop a little bit, like what if my child's teacher was let go, but we know nothing, all of a sudden we just get a letter saying, "She's no longer here."

Overall, the mothers in this study did not feel that teacher turnover was a huge issue but did impact the communication and have to adjust to a new teacher in the room.

> ***Transitions.*** The same was experienced when their infant or toddler was transitioning to another classroom. This was another area that the participants felt they should be better informed about or prepared for. Below the participants of their infant or toddler transitioning to a new classroom, express some feelings.

> Marissa Lee said,
>
> He knows mostly everyone unless it's a new teacher, and this year it was a new teacher in his classroom, so it was a little bit difficult. He had a little issue adjusting just because they have transition time before they go into the new class but between the transition time and the new class, there was a new teacher and he didn't know her and he was really sad.

When their child transitioned, their routines would change, especially morning drop-offs, if it was in a new room or communicating to the teacher the likes and dislikes of their

child. I felt in their second interviews the frustration this would cause for the mothers and trying to get their infant or toddler acclimated to the new routines of a new room.

They felt as though their feelings or input were not considered when children changed rooms. As we have learned from this data thus far, the emotions of the participants are of great importance and should be handled carefully. For some participants, the location was a constant annoyance since they may be driving further or leaving their homes earlier in the morning to get to work on time. Convenience makes all the participants' experiences easier when handling the balance of work and family.

Food choices. The last phrase that appeared minimally in the interviews was the lack of nutritional food provided at locations. Not all the locations prepared food on premise, and some of the childcare centers had only parents provide food to avoid allergy issues or the complaints from parents of lack of nutrition. One childcare center was in a hospital and served the children hospital food.

Molly Reid stated,

I would change the food. Our daycare is part of [the hospital], and I don't know if it's because of the state, or because of their affiliation with the hospital, but they provide all of their own food, and it drives me crazy. And, I've fought it from the very beginning.

After many mothers complained, the school allowed parents to take turns preparing healthier and more nutritious food for their infant and toddlers. The inconstancies of the childcare clearly stemmed from a lack of communication and transitions to other rooms that the participants felt they were not involved in the decision-making. Some of the

participants expressed they wanted their child to have the caregivers' full attention all the time, which is obviously something a caregiver could not achieve with other children in the room. This was a hard concept for the participants to digest—their child not being number one priority all of the time.

Theme #7: Positive childcare experience. The theme of positive childcare experience related to the participants' overall assessment in their first 5 months of care and what would they change about it. As stated in the conflicts during childcare experience theme, most mothers were content with their choice, but I wanted to capture the importance of this experience and the important themes that meant the most to the participants in having their infant and toddlers in a childcare setting. I also did not combine this theme with *benefits of care* since I wanted to separate how they participants felt about the actual experience for their child than being at home (i.e., stimulation, educational, structure, etc.). The childcare experience theme was the mother's view of the experience overall and how she felt the overall experience had been for her with her child in care. This theme was the third most important theme out of seven. This theme included words/phrases that included the most important factors in this overall experience for the participants.

Positive experiences. The participants enjoyed the partnership that was established through the childcare experience overall, Maria Jones stated: "the fact that they're always so open to communicating and working with me, I think it's been nice that it's been able to be a partnership." The participants felt like they established a relationship with each of the caregivers and needed that partnership to develop the trust

and attachment most mothers were looking for when they toured a facility. Most of the

participants felt they needed to work as a team while they were at work and the caregiver

was taking care of their infant or toddler. Several participants felt the caregivers were

educating them on how to support their child's needs.

Liliana Fierro said,

There's almost like, guidance and coaching and like true like, there is always one

teacher you gravitate towards, that you can communicate with, you can have a

relationship with, and you have things in common. So to this day, I just text one

of his teacher, and she'll send me pictures. "Hey, I miss him; send me a picture.

Barbara Miller added,

Wow. So, I just felt like they were so willing to work with her, and teach us,

they're saying, "Oh, do you have one of your shirts you could leave with us that

has your scent, so that when she goes down for a nap, she knows that you're

there? Or we would say, "Oh, one thing we've been trying at home is to distract

her with a certain sunflower musical toy,

Several participants in the study expressed that they learned many new tips and strategies

to help their child eat, sleep, or develop on time and developmentally appropriate for their

age. Some mothers felt the caregivers exposed their child to things that they would have

never done until a later time, so in foresight, the caregivers were educating the mothers,

which many of them seemed to enjoy and never felt threatened by the caregiver taking

their role. The teachers that were educated seemed to know and want to do more with the

children as far as activities and meeting milestones. The participants using center-based

care chose that setting because of the lesson planning and documentation of milestones being met (i.e., sitting up, rolling over, first steps).

Parent-teacher conferences. The participants enjoyed going to parent/teacher conferences and receiving daily communication of their child's progress. The participants would receive a report card of the milestones their child was approaching. The participants felt the communication was beneficial and comforting that the caregiver was educated and was teaching their child beneficial components of development. Some of the home-group centers had formal lesson plans while others did not. The smaller group-home centers did not have conferences or formal lessons, which was a reason some of the participants wanted to move their child to a more structured program when they turned three.

Socialization. None of the participants was resentful for the experience of childcare; all of them felt the socialization and interactions with other children was the best possible learning environment for their child and would not change their decision. Rosanna Weiss commented, "I think it's so much better for her to have that stimulation and that just encouragement to grow, rather than just me and her." The mothers expressed in their follow-up interviews that their child's overall temperament and adaptability when interacting with other children or going to places (i.e., restaurant, friend's house, or playdates) was more enjoyable. The child knowing how to share with one another, putting toys back, and wanting to interact and role-play with the other children in the room, explained this. Barbara Miller explained it: "My infant or toddler was conditioned to playing with others since he was in care so he knew the boundaries

and listened throughout the play date making it an enjoyable and fun experience." Most of the participants felt if it was not for a NMC setting their infant or toddler may not act the same way, and they have been around children that have not been in care do not behave in the same manners as their own child. This made the participants proud of their decision to place their child in a NMC setting.

Community feeling. Another recurring word/phrase was the feeling of belonging to a community when in the childcare setting. The participants loved all the holiday celebrations, parties, performances, and the ability to discuss their experience with other mothers in the same setting and not having to look for "mommy friends" in the neighborhood. They had the opportunity to meet other mothers instantly from the childcare class. Some excerpts from the interviews elaborated on the sense of community building in a facility: "The school does mom's nights, for fundraising. So that's been something that's kind of all about community building."

Marissa Lee stated,

Easter party or Halloween party, or a multi-cultural dinner, like things on the weekends, so it's a real community sense. Some of the parents that even on a Saturday they'll go, "Oh, we're going to this picnic, wanna come?

Not only did the participants enjoy the being part of a community, but they also felt when they met up with other parents from the school they were able to talk to other parents experiencing the NMC and working. This experience made them feel like they had something in common and a way to compare notes and see how other mothers are balancing this experience. The mothers said on many occasions they would set up

playdates or go to the park after pick up with several mothers from the school. They

would discuss any issues occurring at the center that they were unhappy about (i.e.,

change of teachers, change in administration, or incident). They also would share how

they juggle work and family. Some mothers expressed they would "have a girls' night,"

"go to the gym," or have some "me time." All mothers expressed the need to have "me"

time consisting of some form of activity for themselves without having children or a

husband to care for.

Summary of Themes

The seven themes that emerged from the dated were coded and interpreted based

on the participants' responses to the three research questions. The participants' emotions

were of huge importance to them, displaying more than one emotion emerging from the

overall experience with childcare. Millennial characteristics consistently shown

throughout the interviews, supporting the characteristics learned in Chapter 2. This will

be discussed further in Chapter 5. Overall, each participant was content with her choice

of choosing a childcare arrangement for her child and was confident the choice she was

making would be beneficial for her child educationally and social/emotionally.

Discrepant Cases

Throughout the interview process with the participants, the mothers' responses

included "they had no choice" or "had to go back to work," and the researcher would

disregard the comment and ask specifically the question again and how the experience

has been for them. Once the question was repeated, the participant refocused on and

responded to her experience of the decision. Some of the participants responded of

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having a "gut" feeling when making their final childcare choice, which was difficult to interpret or measure since it was not something that could not be explained by the participants but was directly related to their comfort level in that given situation. I then placed this type of "feeling" in the emotion/feeling node since a "gut" feeling was unexplained but considered a type of feeling or emotion towards comfort. Melissa Crisara worked as a teacher in the school her child attended. I did not discard this interview because she still experienced the same emotions and decisions that any other mother would have to make. She experienced issues with communication and still having to drop her child off in a setting other than her own home or environment. I also found that certain responses could overlap at times but also important to document. Any reference made was coded correctly and placed in the corresponding theme. One interview specifically fixated on policy for mothers in the workforce and the FMLA. This was placed under the working/career model and will be referred to in Chapter 5. Only one interview referred to the policies, even though policies applying to childcare and policies put in place for working mothers, it was not ranked or referenced in more than one interview.

Throughout my analysis and reflection, I highlighted and organized the differences within themes/nodes and used them to highlight the important elements of what the caregivers experienced. I found that using similarities and differences among the responses and multiple ways of coding and interpreting the data results of the participants added a richness that helped me to understand their experiences.

Summary

This section included a detailed analysis of the lived experience of 15 middle class millennial mothers regarding their childcare choices and their experience the first 5 months of the infant or toddler lives, 6 months to 18 months. The 15 mothers who participated in the study were interviewed twice and were able to answer all the interview questions and probes without hesitation or uneasiness and concluding with a follow-up phone interview. Additionally, many of the participants provided great insight of their struggles to conform to society's needs. Many of the direct quotes and/or excerpts from their interviews were included throughout the discussion of each of the themes and subthemes pertaining to the three research questions driving this study. The following themes/nodes emerged from the data and related to the three research questions: emotions, contributions to choice, millennial characteristics, benefits of care, importance of career, conflicts during childcare experience, and positive childcare experience. The themes were derived from clustering and similar patterns that were highlighted in the data. In Chapter 5, the purpose of the study and implications of the findings are organized within the conceptual framework of the theorists discussed in Chapter 2. This is followed by a comparison and contrast of findings from this study and current research, which was reviewed in Chapter 2. Finally, recommendations for further research and implications for social change will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The need for a better understanding of the lived experiences of mothers from the middle class millennial generation in deciding the best possible care arrangement for their infants/toddlers was the motivating factor that guided this study. Specifically, in this phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences and perceptions of middle class millennial mothers in Northeastern United States to understand their perceptions and feelings of NMC or FFN care. The extensive literature review showed an existing gap regarding this population and raised concerns on the type of care available to working middle class millennial mothers. The two types of care available to working millennial mothers was NMC and FFN care, which raises concerns about the quality and adequate monitoring of the children while in someone else's care (Liu, 2015). There are a few options of NMC, which are group-home care and center-based care. FFN usually consists of a family member, friend, or neighbor. I was able to analyze this experience through two interviews for each of the 15 participants, who were middle class millennial mothers. The following research questions guided this study:

- What are the lived experiences of mothers as they choose initial childcare for their children?

- What are important decision elements mothers identify?

- How do the mothers experience the first 5 months of childcare participation?

The qualitative research design and the phenomenology tradition were used for this study. Fifteen middle class millennial mothers, who were from the Northeastern United States, born between 1980 and 1997, in the middle class income bracket, and met all the

eligibility screening questionnaire criteria listed in Appendix C were considered for this study. Each mother was interviewed one-on-one and in person by using the interview questions in Appendix D. The initial interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for potential themes by hand coding and NVivo software. A second interview was done by phone for additional information to provide vividness and mothers' feelings towards decisions and statements made. Follow-up interviews by phone or email verified the data collected in Appendix E. Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for action and further study, implications for social change, and a conclusion and a reflection.

Interpretation of the Findings

This qualitative, phenomenological study was based on the conceptual framework relating to childcare choices for middle class millennial mothers with infants and toddlers, and included theories of Bowlby (1988), Bronfenbrenner (1981), and Bandura (1986), which embraced the lived experiences and phenomenon of the choices and challenges middle class millennial mothers face in today is changing society. Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory refers to the different types of attachment styles exhibited by mothers and caregivers and the emotional availability of mothers when making this decision. The literature supported the importance of the attachment between the caregiver and mother, which help support the emotional needs of a mother when making childcare choices (Huston et al., 2015; Landry et al., 2014; Vuillez-Coady, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological theory, consisting of four systems, which a middle class millennial mother directly participates in, is important throughout the literature and

the findings in the interview responses. The four interacting environments are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The environments can be defined as the environment in which the child interacts (microsystem), the connections between home and the childcare center (mesosystem), the parents' workplace (exosystem), and lastly, the tradition and values of the family (macrosystem). The literature along with interviews divulged the need to have continuity amongst environments and expectations from each system to achieve a healthy balance between home, work, and family relationships. Bandura (1997) developed the last conceptual framework. The theory of self-efficacy was evident throughout the interviews as well as the literature showing the importance of a mother needing self-gratification through another outlet other than tending to her motherly duties. The mothers' need to improve her own self-efficacy was evident throughout social behaviors, the need to strengthen her perception of herself, and the ability to self-regulate (Bandura, 1997). A mother's ability to have this strengthened sense of self allowed her to feel comfortable and important to her family and herself. The purpose of this study was to explore middle class millennial mothers' experiences in choosing the type of care for their infant and toddlers, while experiencing the social implications of continuously changing roles of work and in the family. The interpretation of findings as they relate to each research question, conceptual framework, and literature is discussed in detail.

Research Question 1

- What are the lived experiences of mothers as they choose initial childcare for their children?

Research Question 1 focused on the themes that emerged through the interviews. The themes were emotions, contributions to choice, and millennial characteristics. The participants placed a large emphasis on their feelings and emotional adjustment to this choice. This theme was the most evident emerging from the data. The emotions of trust, stress, frustration, guilt, and comfort level were the main feelings a mother was experiencing when making this choice, which directly contributed to the participants' overall choice in a center. The emotions the mothers were feeling related to Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory and Bronfenbrenner's (2007) interacting systems between the infant or toddler, the mother, and caregiver to achieve balance.

Attachment. The theory of attachment is supported with the interview responses that each mother experiences attachment to her child and she is searching for a similar system to her own to provide her child with the care and affection when she is at work (Vicedo, 2011). These early relationships and forms of attachment other than just the mother allow the child to develop presentational models or working models of the self and teach the child how to build relationships with others (Bandura, 1997). More than half of the mothers expressed through the interviews that they never felt replaced by the caregiver. They felt comfortable and content when their child was happy to see their caregiver or the caregiver expressed affection to their child. Bowlby's theory (1993) along with Horst and Van de Veer (2010) and Huston et al. (2015) labeled several types of attachment that may be evident between a mother and child. They used the term *autonomous* in having a secure relationship with their child; despite other types such as dismissive or preoccupied, the participants only exhibited autonomous relationships,

contrary to the literature. However, the participants did express they saw a difference among children who did not attend any form of NMC as either overly attached to the mother or being labeled as insecure or anxious attachment or dismissive. The participants felt there was a clear difference between NMC and FFN care. They felt FFN care was not tuned in to the needs of their child developmentally and social-emotionally compared to a licensed facility like a group-home care and child-care center. None of the participants chose FFN care over a NMC setting. Overall, along with Huston et al., the mothers felt their children were developing secure attachments, developing above expectations for their age, and were exposed to more learning abilities better than they could ever provide if they were to stay home or with a FFN care.

EA is beneficial to the participants and would be effective as a way to predict the attachment of a mother and child. Brinigen, Altenhofen, Aberle, and Baker (2012) concluded that the emotional attachment of caregivers needed to be improved to help the mothers' transition and lessen the guilt or stress level of leaving their child. Landry et al. (2013) concluded from their study that caregivers could use a responsive curriculum to help them improve their communication and relationships with their infant/toddler. However, based on the participants' feedback, the initial reason a mother chose a type of center, whether center-based or group-home care, was based on the comfort the caregiver gave at the initial meeting and was instinctual, not something that could necessarily be trained or improved upon. The participants felt the owner/director of either type of care model creates an environment for mothers that is either comforting or not. The gut feeling as heard from several participants was a feeling of comfort that was felt from the

overall environment of the center and caregivers. Maria Jones and Melissa Crisara said

they would feel the coldness of a caregiver who was dismissive or not nurturing upon

initially meeting them. The mothers felt they knew when a teacher or caregiver was

unhappy or was having a bad day. There was no way to hide the displeasure of a

caregiver upon meeting them and that is what gave them the gut feeling of either being

drawn to that caregiver or not.

Alice Evans compared it to meeting her husband,

When you instantly meet someone, you just know whether or not this relationship

will work. The same applied to the caregiver and environment. I knew right

away when I walked into the center whether it was going to work or not.

In order to conclude this inborn trait of a caregiver to provide comforting to the mothers,

it could also be applied to personality types and a person's willingness to want to be in a

specific setting. A more autonomous mother may be more willing to accept the caregiver

taking care of their infant or toddler versus a mother who is more dismissive or not

willing to want to put her child in care may be more difficult and cold, resulting in a

noncomforting environment for all those interacting in that system.

Several of the mothers felt a group-home care was a smaller and more comforting

environment despite the combining of all age groups, which made them choose that type

of setting. The mothers who enrolled their child in the smaller setting felt when their

infant or toddler was younger, it was beneficial for them to be around older children,

encouraging their child to reach milestones faster like walking or talking because they are

around older children. However, that statement will no longer be valid to them when

their child becomes the oldest in the classroom. The mothers then felt their child was not

being challenged by learning letters or numbers since they are around babies all day. The

participants also described the placement as more of a babysitter once their child reached

3. Liu (2015) found similar results as the child ages; parents increasingly choose family

childcare homes and centers, with center-care becoming dominant by the third year.

When asked why, the mothers felt there was a lack of exposure to letters, numbers,

alphabet, science experiments, or a print-rich environment that they had seen at a larger

setting. Less than half of the group-home center mothers disagreed with this statement

and said they were fine with the placement until their child was old enough to attend

Kindergarten. The other half of the participants felt center-based care was more

comforting since their security was more advanced and licensing requirements were

always met where as they felt the group-home care centers were not always up to date on

policies and procedures. As stated in Chapter 4, this is an assumption of all centers

currently enrolling children, whether group or center, have obtained a New York state

childcare license and visit from the Department of Health to be in compliance. Although

one environment may be desired or appear to look more structured and appealing, it has

nothing to do with being up to date with licensing. The nurturing environment that

supported the mother's infant or toddler development was described several ways. The

mothers described the classroom décor such as pictures, projects, and decorations that

gave the initial feeling of comfort and how involved the teacher was in providing an

educational environment for their child. The teachers' knowledge of specific age groups

and experiences was encouraging to the mothers in leaving their child in the care of those

teachers. Lastly, parent/teacher conferences were also reassuring to the participants by seeing the milestones that their child should be attaining while in that specific classroom or age group. The teachers would educate some of the mothers who were not too sure what milestones their infant or toddler should be meeting such as walking, crawling, or eating solid foods. Overall, the nurturing environment of the caregivers and administration have a direct impact on whether a mother chooses the type of care for her child in their initial meeting and tour of the facility, which allows a mother to transition comfortably and confidently back to work.

Contributions to choice. The participants in the study consisted of eight mothers choosing group-home care and seven choosing center-based care. Four mothers used both FFN and NMC to supplement. The use of only part-time care to compensate cost or extended hours FFN care was only used on an as-needed basis if the mothers had to attend a meeting after work or head in early for a meeting. The four mothers using the FFN expressed the FFN care was used minimally and never replaced a form of NMC. The FFN was a more convenient option for them to get to work early on a specific day, and the FFN would drop the child off when the center opened. Four families used FFN care as supplemental care only if their childcare choice did have extended hours or they were running late from work that day. This amount of time would be considered less than 3 hours and no more than 2 days a week. All participants had their child in some form of NMC. As for the other participants who did not need FFN for extended hours, they expressed that either themselves or their spouses were able to drop off or pick up their child at the correct times each day. It was apparent that the center-based

participants chose their particular center because their hours were longer opening at 6:30

a.m. and closing at 7:00 p.m. versus most of the group-home cares not opening until 7

a.m. There was an almost even split between the participants regarding the factors

contributing to the type of choice that was best for their child. However, despite the

mothers choosing a group-home care setting, they expressed once their child turned 3,

they would transition their child to a more structured developmentally appropriate and

educational center-based program where the children are group by age and not mixed.

When asked further, the participants said they looked for the infants or toddlers schedule

of routines, which was usually followed on a daily basis and was posted on the Parent

Board located in the classroom. The schedule consisted of participating in circle time

and centers and meeting milestones for that age group (Landry et al., 2014). The

participants expressed that how the information is displayed varied from center to center,

but that there were consistent elements listed throughout. The participants all felt the

caregiver or teacher in the classroom decorated her room differently, which they felt

described the teacher's personality and creativity resulting in the mother's interpretation

of possibly how that caregiver would interact with her child. Christine Thomas

expressed, "One room I visited was dark and dreary, no bright colors or pictures, made

me think my child would be sad all day." Another participant said she "was drawn to the

creativity of the teacher and felt that was a great room for her infant or toddler to be in."

It appeared the décor and inviting environment was what the mothers were looking for,

which led to their initial meeting and assumption about the teacher.

The participants were impressed by seeing the infant or toddler rooms following a schedule around their feeding times but also having the infants or toddlers complete projects, learn sign language, and be exposed to music, with the teachers singing and reading books to them. As evident in Sarah Marshall and articulated by Alice Evans, Marissa Lee, Rosanna Weiss, Melissa Crisara, and Elizabeth Incognoli, most of the participants who currently have their child in a group-home care setting will be transitioning their child to a more structured and age equivalent program (center-based) when the child turns 3. Although an advantage to the group-home care setting was more attentiveness to their infant or toddler and the comfort of a smaller setting, it was interesting to learn more to why the mothers felt when the child turned 3, it was time to transition to a "larger center based structured program" as they described it. Therefore, despite group-home care being the type of center of choice by the participants, center-based would eventually be the location of choice by a certain age. Chang (2013) and Im et al. (2014) both conducted quantitative studies using surveys to understand the important factors for choosing a childcare setting. The important factors were environment, education of faculty, and curriculum. However, the studies were limited in further describing the experience. My results found location and convenience to be the most important factor when choosing type of care, which was a more popular choice of a center-based setting, unlike the group-home care setting where the mothers felt a smaller setting was more comforting, attentive, and secure since the teachers and administration could manage better. Alice Evans stated, "Definitely, convenience I guess. That is a big one."

Maria Jones added,

I mean it comes down to location. Because we have crazy schedules, where we
do have to travel a little bit for work, that we're not right in the area, so we have a
little bit later pick up time.

Several of the participants when prompted further and asked if they would reject a
center even though the location was ideal. The majority of the participants expressed
though a center was not their first choice the location was a deal-breaker whether closer
to the train, their home, or work. There were mixed preferences when it came to the
mother choosing a center closer to work versus closer to home. Some of the mothers
liked the center being closer to home since it was easier and the child was in the car less.
They also felt their child would make friends with local children. The mothers who
commuted into the city preferred a center closer to the train and did not care about cost.
Some mothers felt having the child closer to them at work allowed them to be able to go
visit on their lunch break, breastfeed, or participate in school events.

Bouchard et al.'s (2010) survey found cost to be the most important factor in
choosing a childcare center; however, this study found cost to be the fourth most
common factor, topping out the top five reasons a mother chose a type of care through
their experience. They felt location was the most important followed by accommodating,
comfort level as the most influential reasons to choose a center and was worth the extra
cost since their child was getting the best care possible. Rose and Elicker (2010)
suggested that even though mothers wanted the best for their child, they had ultimately
make a decision based on cost constraints. The mothers in this study did consider cost

but ultimately would sacrifice what they had to in order to send their child to a convenient center, less than a third of the participants considered cost as final deciding factor. Garavuso (2009), Dunst and Trivete (2009), and Liu (2013) found contribution to choice was fueled by family, social networks, and culture. The participants in this study used social media (i.e., Facebook, mommy groups, and search engines) to begin their search and referrals from family, friends or coworkers, but almost all did not rely on family, friends, or media for their final decision. Every participant toured the facility to get the overall feeling of the environment, which was described as a "sense of comfort level" when you walked in or a "gut feeling." The participants described the gut feeling of either being drawn to that caregiver or not. Another contributing factor to the gut feeling was the caregiving style after having their infant or toddler in the setting. Several of the participants when asked what is the "gut" feeling was something felt when meeting someone. Sarah Marshall stated, "I guess it sounds judgmental, to make a statement like that once meeting someone you don't know." She expressed as well as others that words could not describe it, nor was their instinctual reasoning always accurate. Alice Evans said, "I completely judged one teacher upon meeting her; I felt she was cold and non-inviting, but once I got to know her, she was so nurturing and caring to my child." Even though it appeared to several mothers that their "gut" feeling was a true tale of determining how good of a teacher or caregiver will be, the mothers be in some cases did feel they were making an assumption upon an initial meeting that may not be always accurate.

Vincent et al. (2010) also found choice affected by initial meetings and "gut" instincts. After touring facilities chose a nanny since it was easier and less complicated for the family to make a decision. The participants in the study were the working middle class population. Vincent et al. (2010) did not focus on any other factors of choice even though the study was qualitative and included fathers in the decision process. Vincent et al.'s (2010) research did not state if the participants were drawn from an urban population where a nanny would be ideal and less traveling would be helpful to the participants in the study. The opposite was found in my study, where all the participants viewed a nanny as more of an inconvenience or as having an employee. The participants in my study did not even consider a nanny as an option since they felt the nanny was not providing a developmentally stimulating environment and would need time off or could call in sick based on their friends' experiences and when interviewing the nannies. The nannies were more demanding of their needs and required payment and time off, which the participants in my study looked upon as an inconvenience. As stated, accommodations such as long hours, constant availability, and no sick days were enticing and beneficial for millennial working mothers who need to be at work.

Unlike some literature found (Bouchard et al., 2010; Buehler & O'Brien, 2011; Giannini et al., 2011), open communication was important between the mother and caregiver, and lack of communication was reported overall as a major inconsistency of group-home care or a childcare center. Communication between the mothers and caregivers was described through the interviews as being connected to their child throughout the day and eased their concerns or feelings of guilt when not present. The

results were consistent with Whipple et al. (2009); mothers did report how the school communicated the day-to-day was a contributor to choice. Unlike this phenomenological study, Whipple et al. (2009) only retrieved their data from a survey lacking the reasons or ways communication made a mother feel connected throughout the day. Unlike Whipple et al.'s (2009) quantitative design of communication, this study was able to retrieve positive strategies from the 15 mothers on how they communicate to the caregiver, contributing to filling the gap in literature that communication between mothers and caregivers was important with specific ways to make the mothers feel involved through communication. The participants expressed the ways in which they felt their current NMC was communicating to them how their infant and toddler's day was going. The communication methods described by the participants were in the form of daily grams (which included bottle-feeding times and amounts, diaper changes, and food consumptions), open door policy, phone applications, pictures, videos, and texts. All of the forms of communication varied from center to center, but each center had at least one form of communication tool to support the mother and feel involved in their child's day-to-day life. One Ashley Smith felt, "even though I am at work for 8 hours, seeing a picture or text just made me get through my day." Only Barbara Miller reported that her school did not have an open-door policy and frowned upon mothers visiting the school to see their child throughout the day. This did raise concern for the mother, but she still chose to send her child there since location and convenience were more important.

Continuity of care among caregivers was another reason mothers chose a particular center. Mothers found that when the teachers were at a facility for many years,

it reassured them the care of their child was going to consistent and have a healthy environment to develop. They stated continuity of care as a reason to choose a type of center, minimizing any disruptions to the child's day-to-day. Bronfenbrenner's (2007) model of interacting systems need to be in balance in order for all systems to strive is evident through continuity of care. The need for continuity of care among the caregiver and mother when making this decision exists; the child's home, childcare facility, and culture (exosystem) all influence the infant or toddler microsystem (Barnett et al., 2014). The interaction of the environment may have effects across the systems. In particular, with a change of teacher, transition to a new room, new sleep patterns, and feeding patterns were all reasons a mother would be frustrated, creating a stressful experience both at home and work (Cooklin et al., 2014). The mothers' work environment (macrosystem) can cause frustration as stated by the mothers, which can cause chaos among one system, which then can overlap to the next. Bradley's (2011) research directly relates and supports the mothers of this study feeling the frustration at work being carried across systems and chaos in family life can be directly related to the childcare experiences. The author concluded environmental chaos produces significant stress reactions and exhibited in their NMC setting. Some of the participants felt they had to over compensate when at work with always being available after-hours or answering emails on the weekends. One Alice Evans conveyed, "We're lucky that we have a job. In addition, we have to be on call 24/7, weekends. Whereas before, you didn't bring your computer home, you didn't have your email hooked up to your phone."

The millennial mothers feel women who are in the workplace are much more reachable now, outside of work hours.

Nicole Parker stated,

My company pays for my phone, so they feel that they can reach me after business. And the expectation is that after my child goes to bed, that I will check in on work, which was not the case previously.

They also felt there was a sense of inequality when it came to gender and job performance. The participants in the corporate setting felt they were replaceable in the corporate setting by a male who did not have the extra obligations of raising a family and trying to "keep up with coworkers without children and male co-workers who don't have the same expectation because they're fathers and not mothers."

Cahusac and Kanji (2014) found in interviews of corporate mothers going back to work that they felt pressure to keep up with senior male employees and had to work longer days since issues may arise where the mother may have to leave early (i.e., child's doctor's appointment, sickness etc.). The results supported that there needs to be a balance of all the systems in order to have positive effects on the mother, child, and caregiver who are directly interacting on a daily basis, and the relationship between all systems is evident and can have a direct impact on the child.

There continues to be a correlation between past studies (Poms et al., 2009) and my study regarding a mother's satisfaction with her choice, caregiver attentiveness, attachment, and continuity of care. A large center-based childcare gave most of the mothers the feeling that there is not enough attention. Based on that feeling, they chose

not to use the stay-at-home model or nanny for that one-on-one attention, which directly

correlated with the research of Puckering (2011), discussed the lack of healthy

connections in the adult-child relationship because the center is so large and there are

more children than any other form of NMC. Despite the possible lack of attention in a

large center-based care, McNally et al. (2014) and the mothers of this study, felt their

child received more attention in a group-home care setting since this type of setting is not

as large as center-based care as their child would have if with a nanny or FFN care.

About half of the participants in this study preferred a smaller setting such as a group-

home care while their offspring were infants and toddlers but felt they needed to expose

their child to a larger more structured and academic program by the time their child was

three. The group-home care lacked the academics and structure the mothers were looking

for as their child was preparing for Pre-K or kindergarten.

      Millennial characteristics. Middle class millennial characteristics as defined by

the literature in Chapter 2 were evident throughout the interviews and were an evident

theme and contributing factor to choice. The literature (Wiedmer 2015) described

millennials as users of a multiplicity of communication devices, rapid information

procession, immediate reward and gratification, high self-esteem, self-centeredness,

"wanting it all," and propensity to multi-task. The results from this study showed

millennial mothers take on their child's emotional, social, and intellectual growth both

cognitively and emotionally despite social, work, and family pressures displayed through

the data of this study. In accordance with Moro-Egido's (2012) study of working

millennial mothers, both found mothers trying to increase the amount of productive time

they spend with their child versus parallel time, which they defined as the interaction time with their child if they were at home. Moro-Egido's (2012) study lacked the social class most affected by this trend, unlike the research found in my study, which focused on the middle class millennial mothers provided insight to the specific social class being pressured by society to keep up with the norms. Specifically, middle class millennial mothers through the results felt pressures from social media, family, and work.

Millennial mothers are constantly striving to be perfect mothers, spouses, and employees, trying to achieve in every category. As mothers, middle class millennials are trying to keep up with social media such as Facebook, Pinterest, mommy groups, and Instagram (Kwok, 2013; Sihto, 2015). Each of the social media outlets are postings of other mothers showing off what they do for their child (i.e., baking, projects, trips, or material items) or how smart their child is and meeting milestones before anyone else. These types of "mommy wars" place pressure on working mothers who feel when they are not working, they have to compete or overcompensate, and resulting in feeling, they are not being a good mother. Several participants in the current study felt social media postings of videos or pictures, which were found on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and Etsy, only painted a "happy picture" and did not depict the trials and tribulations of being a mother raising an infant or toddler, creating this sense of false competition. The participants felt they were pressured to do and see what other mothers where doing on a daily basis and felt pressured to keep up with what their child was doing.

Elizabeth Incognoli vented,

Pinterest mom who makes all these perfect crafts and who has time to do those things and, in many cases, money to afford them. Therefore, I think there is ... Because of the outflow of information and so, much is shared, and it isn't as personal anymore.

She felt that there is a lot out there as well to digest and can make you feel overwhelmed or make you feel you are not doing enough with your child. Another mother felt she should ban herself from looking at social media throughout the day and weekends and only do what she feels is best for her child and not what "looks" the best to others. Another mom said, "I can describe it as mommy wars; we are all trying to outdo ourselves instead of just being the best mom we can be." The millennial generation is overexposed to technology today, whether good or bad, and affected millennial mothers to "think" they have to be a "perfect mother." A simple hug or interaction with their child is more beneficial than anything is. Millennials need to understand all their child needs for development is nurturing and engaging interactions as a family to receive the development needed socially and emotionally to begin the foundation of what children really need in their upbringing minus the materials and what millennials think they have to do. By educating millennial mothers of what their infant or toddler needs emotionally and developmentally may improve the pressures they are facing day to day. The competitive nature and perfectionism of millennials appears to be overlapping into the duties of being a mom. Millennials to attempt to separate work and home life to avoid the pressures that they seem to be placing upon themselves. In doing this, health care providers and human resource departments can learn how to support millennial mothers

through motherhood and the workforce by providing webinars on parenting strategies or how to make a knowledgeable decision on childcare, which in turn may help job retention throughout maternity leaves.

 Bandura's (1997) sense of self-efficacy and self-regulation applies to millennial overachievers, in that it has an impact on mothers' overall emotional development and coping with these pressures. Research by Much et al. (2014) supported the need for millennials to develop some form of strategies to handle daily pressures, but the authors never provided the coping strategies that would help to balance work and family to minimize stress. A lack of keeping up with other mothers makes the millennials doubt who they are as mothers and wonder whether they are doing a good job, depleting their feelings of self-efficacy, which were inflated for most before childbearing years (Ray, 2013). Not only are the pressures of being the perfect mother affecting millennials, but also the pressures at work are constantly rising. Nicole Parker, Marissa Lee, and MaryLou Caro felt when they returned to work, employers set the bar higher for them and expectations of availability were higher than ever. Mothers expressed they had to always be answering emails whether at night or weekends and fears of being replaced by a male employee was always on the back of their mind. Liliana Fierro expressed, "I think there's still a huge gender inequality in the workplace. I think that I feel more emphasis on trying to make that balance between work and home." Some participants felt corporations should be more accommodating to mothers regarding policies, childcare benefits, maternity leave, etc.

Rosanna Weiss added,

Some ignore the fact a little bit that people come back to work and they may not

be able to give the 190% that they were giving before. They may not be able to

work the same hours. In addition, I think that maybe previously that may not

have been the case. I think that there's a lot more ... People are more replaceable,

there's less company loyalty, and you feel replaceable in some ways. As a

mother, as a mom, that they could easily just find someone else who maybe

doesn't have a child or doesn't have the requirements outside of the workplace.

These results only applied to some of the participants; the others were in the education

field having some of the summer off and holidays, which made the transition back to

work easier. On the other hand, all the participants expressed the self-gratification of

working, having goals, accomplishing something for themselves made them a better

mother, and the time spent with their child was cherished and appreciated. The need of

constant brain stimulation, completion of a task, adult interaction and immediate

gratification was essential for millennials and is consistent with millennial characteristic

research (Bianchi, 2011; Ng et al., 2010; Ray, 2013) to strive and feel appreciated; unlike

the stay-at-home model, they felt would be boring and lack any form of stimulation.

Cooklin et al. (2014) found mothers felt being "superwoman" was overrated and wanted

a happy home life. However, two participants out of 15 in this study would rather stay

home and focus on a happy home life than work, showing most middle class millennial

mothers felt being stimulated with adult interaction and communication was ideal for

them achieving their "superwoman" status. They also felt being more educated than their

parents allowed them to want more for their child and be a good role model for their child

to show him or her that having goals, being educated or being successful was the best lesson to give. Most of the participants felt a NMC, whether group-home care or center-based care, other than FFN was beneficial towards their child's education, socialization, developmentally then being at home and since they were more educated than their parents were able to see the difference and benefits. Contradictory to Ray's (2013) research on millennials not valuing marriage, all 15 participants were married and placed a large importance on making sure their spouse was happy, making time for date nights or special time. Moreover, being married placed additional pressure as expressed by some participants, questioning if they were doing a good job of being in shape, cooking, and giving their spouse attention.

Rosanna Weiss described it as,

So, I feel a lot of pressure to be a good mom and bring home half of my household's income, but to also be still upholding those traditional roles too. Like I feel pressure to be a good spouse.

When asked further how to achieve this balance, the mothers would be sure to make time for their husbands, whether it be a date night or coffee together in the morning or if they worked near each other they would meet for lunch. The millennial mothers in this study valued their marriages and wanted to be sure despite children and work pressures that they always made time for their husbands. The mothers also added that if their home life was not in balance, the children would sense that and may ask, "Are you and daddy fighting?" which makes the mothers realize how being out of balance can directly affect their children.

Research Question 2

•   What are important decision elements mothers identify?

Research Question 2 focused on the themes that were identified through the

interviews. This included benefits of care and importance of career. The participants

each had their own perceptions of the benefits of care their infant or toddler would

receive from being in a NMC setting. The mothers felt their infant or toddler benefitted

from caregiver connections, socialization, development, and educational components.

The emerging themes and subthemes for this research question incorporated the

importance of Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory and Bronfenbrenner's (2007)

ecological theory. The theme of importance of career emerged as a contributor to their

decision about NMC because it was evident based on their responses middle class

millennials want to work, Bandura's (1997) need for self-efficacy was evident in this

population of working mothers to strive in the workforce. Societal norms of both parents

working in a middle class household supported Bronfenbrenner's (2007) theory of

balance among interacting systems and the need for all systems to be in balance for

optimal success minimizing stress.

Benefits of care. The benefits of care according to the participants' results were

driven by a caregiver relationship, and the connection to their child over time made them

feel their child was in the right placement. However, related with attachment, the mothers

wanted more within that connection with individualized attention, which was discussed in

Research Question 1 under millennial characteristics. The participants felt the benefits of

care were directly related to their child reaching developmental milestones earlier and

being more educationally prepared for kindergarten than if they were to stay home with them. Studies (Berry et al., 2014; Flynn, 2014; Murdock, 2012) have noted the relationship of maternal attachment and positive caregiver relationships, and children's cognitive performance were directly related through the results of this study (Chang, 2013; Shpancer et al., 2009). The NMC setting allowed the infant or toddler to develop their language skills through everyday learning. Several participants felt stay-at-home mothers' children were at a disadvantage when it came to development and education being hesitant to expose their child to certain milestones earlier than did the mothers of this study and their children in a group or center based care. The participants felt they also learned many new tips or strategies to help their child eat or sleep better, being educated by the caregivers of how to support their child better as they were reaching milestones. Rosanna Weiss, "noticed when it came to feeding themselves or certain nursing habits or even just subtle self-reliant things that kids are taught in group care." Because they have to be responsible for themselves in a way that kid who is at home, who has individualized attention does not have to do.

Liliana Fierro felt so confident about her caregiver/teacher, "She knew exactly what to do. She had a set schedule for the children even at early age, which I loved." The caregivers would take the bottles or pacifier away faster and coach several of the mothers of how to assist their child with these developmental milestones. The mothers in this study expanded on stimulation and activities as one explained, teachers were "helping the child achieve milestones like rolling over, sitting up or crawling." This helped the mother feel connected as a team to the caregiver actively participating in their day-to-day

despite being at work. This was comforting and reassuring to all the participants making them feel content of their choices and the benefits of being in some form of NMC setting. Socialization with other children was important to each of the participants, strengthening their social emotional development and learning how to balance their emotions through sharing with other children. Ashley Smith felt the exposure to new faces and experiences in a NMC setting helped to encourage and support the infants/toddlers to have secure attachments this directly relates to Bowlby's (1988) theory. Not only were the children building healthy relationships with caregivers but also with their friends, building nurturing positive experiences with other people other than their mother.

The participants expressed temperament and adaptability to different surroundings as a benefit to having to their children in a center-based care or group-home care setting. They felt their children were better listeners and were able to share with other children while in a NMC setting. Barbara Miller expressed, "when I bring him for a play date, he runs off and plays with others, he listens when it's time to clean up, and sings songs while doing it." Christine Thomas stated, "Since being in a group-home care setting she is more aware of infants and wants to be helper or tells her friends to be quiet the baby is sleeping. She will be a great big sister!" The children were able to balance the need for emotional security and competent exploration since they are used to being in another environment other than their home. Participants boasted about their child stayed on a better eating and sleeping schedule compared to when they are at home. Kim and Kochanska (2012) focused on the importance of infants or toddlers developing internal working models of attachment relationships (Bandura, 1997), and interpersonal relations

that would develop into a healthy image of the self as lovable, which was evident in the results of this study. Interaction with other children showed their ability to seek out, build healthy relationships with other children, and participate in play scenarios unlike parallel play, which could exist among children who are not use to a childcare setting. Nicole Parker felt, "Oh my gosh. I mean the socialization. They just learn so much. They're learning from other kids." Each of the mothers expressed that their infant's/toddler's interpersonal skills were very developed and continued to be evident compared to other children who were not in a NMC setting.

Importance of career. All participants used in this study were in the working-career model, and not working was not a choice. The data revealed 11 out of 15 participants reported they were career-driven and wanted to be successful in their occupation; only four mothers, if able to, would still work but would want to part time. The other four participants chose a career that would be conducive to raising a family but also contributed to the family's household income, which was very important to most participants. The participants also felt having both parents working in a household was the new societal norm, and staying home was almost non-existent if they wanted to live in the Northeastern United States and provide for their family. Much et al. (2014) and Wiedmer (2015) study validates that millennials do seem to have placed pressures on themselves to be over-achievers and want everything, which was evident through the interviews, but these pressures can directly affect their self-efficacy, which could be affecting their child as well.

Neal and Hammer (2009) added to the knowledge base of Bronfenbrenner's (2007) systems theory of balancing work (exosystem) and family (microsystem) can have overall negative outcomes by individuals within each system, which can include depression and balancing work/family. This is why a building a positive self-efficacy is important for millennial mothers to help with balancing all areas of work and family. Bandura's (1986) personal self-efficacy was evident through each of the mothers' interviews, placing accomplishments, experiences, and self-gratification as part of the components to make her feel healthy and happy with herself. In accordance with past quantitative research by Barnett et al. (2014), having the daily stimulation of tasks at work, finishing a work project, and feeling needed other than the attachment of a child was what each of the mothers in this study needed to achieve positive self-efficacy.

MaryLou Caro expressed,

My maternity leave was not the most exciting, pleasurable experience even though I love my daughter, it was hard staying home and being in a completely different routine that I wasn't used to. It's easy to get to work, and have your coffee, and check your emails, and you know that routine I've been doing that for almost at least 15 years.

The notion that self- efficacy is not a fixed trait but changes with the person's environment was supported by responses in this study (Bandura, 1986). One of the mothers felt they were not being contributing to the family financially after having a child made them feel unworthy or not contributing to her family. The participants in this study all went back to work within three months after having their child, and though the

transition was frustrating, none of the mothers reported any depression symptoms, which correlates with the findings in Shepherd-Bannigan-Bell (2014) study. He found that mothers returning to work within the first 12 months had exhibited fewer depression systems than mothers who stayed at home. In contrast to Baron's (2009) findings, the participants in this study did not experience poor self-image and fear of lack of attachment to their child. This may be a result of the importance of continuity of care perceived by the participants.

Im et al. (2014) conducted a phenomenological study on Korean-American working mothers to explore their lived experiences of being working mothers. The researchers found guilt towards their children for not being able to spend more time with them. This would result in overcompensating with consequences and letting the children do whatever they asked. This study only focused on Korean-American participants and did not focus on a social class or generation.

Huston et al. (2015) supported that participants felt more comfortable if their child was securely attached to the caregiver, feeling as if their child was still receiving the nurturing and caring when they were not around. As society is changing, so is women's self-worth regarding what makes them feel important. Millennials are career driven and highly educated and want more than just raising a child to make them feel they are receiving immediate gratification and rewarding experiences.

Research Question 3

• How do the mothers experience the first five months of childcare participation?

Research Question 3 focused on the last two themes that emerged from the interviews: conflicts during childcare experience and positive childcare experience. Overall, each of the mothers in this study were happy with their childcare choice, whether it be in a group-home care setting or center-based care setting. None of the mothers would change their choice but did express if they were in a group-home care setting, they would eventually transition their child to a center-based setting where children are placed in classes of the same age group. The participants felt a group-home care was not strong enough educationally to prepare their child for kindergarten. The participants elaborated on not seeing as much learning instruction as they did when they toured center-based facilities. The participants' comparisons were based on what they saw but felt strongly of being in a smaller setting for their infant or toddler. Marissa Lee stated, "I want my infant when she turns 3 in a setting that has a daily schedule with goals for each day meeting the standards that my child will need when they go to kindergarten." It seemed as though each mother had her own interpretation and beliefs of her deciding factor or age for her infant or toddler to transition to a different center based on his or her age. A few mothers were content with the choice and not going to move their child regardless of their age.

Conflicts during childcare experience. Caregiver attachment was extremely important to the mothers in this study, supporting the literature of Birigen et al. (2012), placing an importance on the emotional availability of the caregivers and the relationship that needs to be present between the caregiver/mother and child. The emotions of millennials were attributed to the comfort level of millennial mothers, which was a

deciding factor in choosing a center. Conflicts during childcare experience were only evident when there was a lapse of attentiveness by the caregiver to the infant or toddler or mother. The first relationship infant and toddlers ever experience is with their mother, so having an autonomous relationship allows the child to feel emotionally secure and approach the new relationship to the caregiver with comfort (Licata et al., 2014; Rholes et al., 2011). This can only be attained if the mother is securely comfortable with the caregiver. Along with the importance of comfort level and attachment, there are other reasons that emerged from the participants that placed a need for a healthy balance among all systems of home, work, and childcare (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Although they were satisfied overall with the childcare experience, there was occasional frustration with a lack of communication between the caregivers and mothers when not informed properly about an issue that may have arisen in the classroom with their child. If the mother was not informed via phone or text, the mothers expressed concern that the caregiver was hiding something from them. This included incidents (i.e., bumps, bites, bruises, lack of sleep, not eating, or transitions to a new room, change of teacher) that made the mothers feel disconnected from their child throughout the day and triggered any feelings of guilt and lack of control of their child's day-to-day. The mothers in this study expected immediate notification of any incidences or deviation from the infant or toddler's normal schedule, which at times was hard since there were other children in the room. When the immediate notification (through text, phone call, or application) was not upheld, this resulted in the mothers feeling uncomfortable and beginning to question the care of the center and the caregiver.

Positive childcare experience. As stated earlier, all participants felt they were happy with their decision to place their infant or toddler in a childcare setting, although there were feelings about what type of care was more beneficial such as group-home care or center-based. Each mother felt the childcare experience was a more beneficial and engaging environment for their infant or toddler than staying at home with them full time. They felt empowered in making this decision, feeling they were more educated about what their infant or toddler needed both developmentally and emotionally than their mother was in past. Socialization was important to the millennial participants, and they saw a difference in their infant or toddler interaction with others as a positive learning experience building interpersonal skills needed to be a confident independent child. The positive effects of any form of NMC other than FFN care build an infant or toddler social interaction and achievement of developmental milestones (Berry et al., 2014; Haavind, 2011).

The participants spoke highly of the community feel of NMC and the sense of family, which made them feel at home and secure. The participants enjoyed the events for holidays such as a Halloween parade, Christmas celebrations, mommy and me days, and parents' night out. The mothers were able to build relationships with other mothers and meet people who are experiencing the same work/family model, which made them feel not alone. Millennials seek mothers with similar situations or families for support. This is evident through mommy groups and the use of social media using Google or Yahoo search engines to find groups or search on Facebook or Meetup groups as a way to seek advice and guidance to be sure they are doing the best job possible as a mother (Liu,

2015). Despite the consistency among the data found in this study and Kwok's (2013) study, millennials need to research or use social media for information. In his grounded study on millennials in the workforce, Kwok (2013) found that the millennial mothers of this study reached out to social media but always used their own judgment before making a decision. Contradicting what Kwok (2013) had founded. Kwok's results showed mothers depended solely on social media to make a childcare decision, unlike my study. Another difference between Kwok's study and the present study was that it included males and females, rather than focusing primarily on mothers, as the present study does.

In the current study, some of the participants would create mommy groups if their town or community did not have one. Maria Jones reported, "You can find a group for anything and if you can't find it you can make own." These groups are created by mothers who feel there is need for a specific group of mothers with similar characteristics (i.e., breastfeeding groups, stay-at home mom groups, river town mothers). The groups would meet on weekends or at the park after school, which made them feel like part of their own community and part of their infant or toddler learning experience in childcare.

The conceptual framework used in the interpretation of this study was informed by Bandura's (1967) self-efficacy theory, Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological theory, and Bowlby's (1986) attachment theory. Childcare choices, whether NMC or FFN care for millennial middle class mothers were contingent upon their feelings of attachment and self-efficacy to make the transition back into the workforce. The importance of attachment and self-efficacy was evident throughout the systems in which the mother interacted to create balance, so they each felt they have achieved self-gratification

through being a good mother, wife, and employee, which was evident through the results of middle class millennials of this study.

Limitations of the Study

The mothers who participated in this study were selected because they met all the criteria on the Eligibility Screening Questionnaire (Appendix C). Once the participants met all the criteria, I conducted open-ended interviews. Through those interviews, I did not react differently to the participants' personalities or responses to the research questions. During the data collection and analysis, I reported accurately the experience of my participants and made no judgments in cause and effect responses based on my own experiences and current work setting. Bracketing was used to help identify potential sources of bias based on by own experiences and education of early childhood. Although I used the bracketing strategy and wrote extensive notes throughout the interviews, there may have been feelings that I was unaware of throughout my analysis. The use of an expert panel to create the questions was used, along with a peer debriefer when the interviews were transcribed and reviewed by participants and the peer debriefer. The implementation of using a peer debriefer and expert panel for bracketing and member checking by the participants improved the validation of the participants improved credibility with the participants to minimize bias. The small sample size of participants limits the transferability to other contexts outside the confines of this study (Patton, 2002). Since it was my second time using NVivo software, I may have missed the identification of themes when I put them into the program. I first hand coded my data with the themes present followed by using the software. Using the two forms of coding

allowed me to compare my results for any inconsistencies. I used triangulation with initial and follow-up interviews, observation of the participants during the interviews, and reviewing the transcripts of interviews as forms of multiple data sources.

Recommendations

The literature review highlighted numerous factors regarding middle class millennial mothers regarding their childcare choices. Although the participants in this study were mainly concerned with the location and convenience of a facility, attachment and comfort level with the caregiver were deciding factors in choosing a childcare facility despite Bornstein et al.'s (2010) Liu (2015) studies resulting in social networks as the most influential factor along with cost. Maintaining a happy nurturing environment for their infants/toddlers was part of the process when choosing care making sure developmentally, social/emotionally, and academically, their infant or toddler was receiving the best care possible. There is need for more research on the policies for working mothers through the Family Medical Leave Act and possible extension for either a longer leave or more support in the corporate setting. The participants in this study felt they were at a disadvantage especially in the corporate setting not having the support of their bosses or employees with extended leaves, breastfeeding accommodations at work, and time off. They felt the pressure from employers was extremely stressful and something male employees did not have to deal with. However, unlike Ng et al. (2010) and Antecol (2015) who found women were less likely to stay at the same job after childbirth, all the participants in this study have been with the same employer for several years before and after childbirth, despite the work pressures they felt after starting a

family and placing their child in NMC. Cooklin et al. (2014) focused on mothers in dual-earner households and supported the pressures that working mothers felt. However, Cooklin et al. (2014) that work-family conflict was associated with reporting a poorer quality couple relationship, and frequent couple conflict. A further study could analyze this work-family conflict and the effects on millennial mothers' couple relationships.

I think there is also a need for a follow-up study of children of millennials in childcare to assess how effectively the time is spent as the child enters into elementary school. With Common Core Standards placing more pressures on children and their academic attainment, are the millennial mothers doing the right thing cognitively, developmentally, and social/emotionally to help their children strive in elementary school, or are they going to exhaust their child mentally and burn them out before they reach the end of elementary school? Based on the research in this study, none of the millennials expressed their child felt pressured to learn in any way. Nevertheless, are the pressures that millennial mothers feel going to be evident among their children when they reach elementary school? A longitudinal study can analyze the overall effectiveness of the childcare experience of a millennials' infant or toddler going through the elementary years.

Implications

The implications for positive social change of this study are informed by findings on millennial mothers' childcare choices. These choices were made with awareness of the different systems that influence child and family life. As described by Bronfenbrenner (1994), ecological theory frames and guides the importance of systems functionality.

This theory is relevant in discussing the connections in a mother's choice of care. This includes all the environments in which the child directly interacts (microsystem), the connection between the home and childcare center (mesosystem), the parents' workplace (exosystem) and traditions and values (macrosystem). The focus on middle class millennial mothers was needed due to societal changes in the economy and family context. These changes have resulted in both parents having to work, unlike prior generations of the participants in this study.

The results from this study support the balance of all the systems in order to have positive effects on the mother, child, and caregiver who are directly interacting on a daily basis an d the relationship between all systems is evident and can have a direct impact on the child. The findings of this study, along with Huston et al. (2015), validate the need for society and millennial mothers to understand the importance of high quality care in infancy and its larger effects it has on infants/toddlers than does care at later ages. The amount of time children spend in childcare has direct effects on a child's development and temperament. Working women across all occupations struggle with allocation of work time versus family time and are strongly influenced by family responsibilities. Yet, the results also demonstrated that millennial mothers are more academically advanced than their mothers and are motivated by their careers and raising a family despite all the pressures. These pressures include being the "perfect mother" and making sure they are keeping up with current trends and the coolest things to do with your child.

At the time of the study, middle class millennial mothers are educated in how they perceive their "American Dream" and how to attain it. The use of social media (i.e.,

Google, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and mommy groups) keeps them abreast of new

knowledge. The mothers in my study are sure to research any idea or concept when

making a decision whether for family, work, or enjoyment. Local social service agencies,

resource, and referral agencies and other community-based organizations can use social

media to increase awareness of identifying and selecting high quality childcare. By

making millennial mothers aware of quality care, we can set clear goals for child care

centers to fulfill the expectations of millennial mothers this include linking measurable

program outcomes, creating or strengthening quality rating and improvement systems,

and ensuring that all social classes have access to quality care.

The perceptions and shared experiences of the mothers in the current study may

provide other middle class millennial mothers a shared feeling of what they are currently

experiencing through social change in our society. Despite the pressures millennials may

be feeling, the mothers felt a strong connection to their children's caregivers, which eased

most of their concerns. These connections with caregivers made them were content with

their decision to return to work and send their child to NMC. Based on the research

found in Birigen et al. (2012) and Landry et al. (2014), caregivers and mothers may

benefit from some form of intervention sessions to improve caregiver attachment

providing the mother, child, and caregiver to get know one another and ease into the new

environment. None of the mothers expressed unhappiness with having to work and raise

a family. They felt they were empowering their infants/toddlers both mentally and

emotionally by exposing them to a different environment that was stimulating and fun,

more than what they could ever provide at home. The ability for millennials to know

what they need to gain self-efficacy shows their ability to be tuned into their needs, which is to work to attain the self-gratification and autonomy that makes them strive in all aspects of their millennial life in ways that are different from any previous generations. Examining factors that influence the childcare choices of middle class millennial mothers, therefore, will provide knowledge of the process and will identify ways for improving mothers' choices for making a child care decision. Outreach programs can utilize the findings and use it to educate mothers about the centers available in the areas, as well as the benefits of early childhood development that can be promoted in center care. Although there have been reviews found of research studies on the factors influencing mothers; choices of child care arrangements, they are now dated and do not include the changing beliefs, societal changes and characteristics of working mothers and the contextual factors that may contribute to the decision. Millennial mothers in this study described how they are able to gain the balance of home and work life in a changing society. This can contribute to social change by utilizing the feedback from the mothers in ways that can assist other millennial mothers facing the same challenges of balancing home and work. The insight gained from the mothers' lived experiences can inform childcare professionals, administrators and healthcare professionals to meet the needs of this population.

Recommendations for Action

Middle class millennial mothers who are faced with making a childcare choice need to be aware of the factors that mothers consider when making this choice. The results from this study will allow administrators, early practitioners, health care

providers, and other millennial mothers to gain insight of the perceptions about making

childcare decisions and strategies to go about making the decision. There is a need to

understand millennials in many aspects of who they are and characteristics that define

this generation. Literature (Ng et al., 2010; Ray, 2013; Bianchi, 2011) only supported

millennials in the workforce, establishing characteristics that define them. The results

provide the millennial workplaces with areas of compassion towards millennial mothers

and their needs in the workplace regarding support in policies and transitioning back into

the work, which can only improve their work performance. Human resource departments

can use the results found as a stepping-stone for implementation of policies for working

women to be supportive of their needs while at work. Early childhood facility personnel,

which include owners and directors, can utilize the information gained about mothers'

feelings and emotions when making a childcare choice, being more empathetic to what

they need to make the right decision. In addition, the factors that contribute to their

choice of a NMC were clearly determined in this study, identifying the most important

reason for deciding a particular setting was closely related to the caregiver relationship.

Owners/directors along with Early Childhood Associations (i.e., National Association of

Education of Young Children [NAEYC] and National Association of Early Childhood

Teacher Educators [NAECTE]) account the characteristics a mother may look for in a

caregiver and provide trainings to teachers, owners, and directors to enhance the

importance of being a compassionate and nurturing caregiver to young children.

Enlightening early practitioners and educators about the factors that may add to a

mother's decision will help understand the decision-making process from the mother's

standpoint and hope to create affective home-center networks building a sense of community. Millennial mothers from this study expressed the importance of a community (mesosystem) feel to them throughout the childcare experiences. The participants also found the education of the faculty to be important and was evident in a center when making their choice, which can support the need for ongoing trainings to support their faculty on up and coming trends that they should be aware of. Lastly, millennial mothers themselves can relate to the study and learn more about the decision process when choosing a type of care. The results in this study did show how mothers looked for support from other mothers through mommy groups and social media to relate to others in a similar situation so to read about the perceptions and experiences of other mothers makes they feel that they are not alone. Educating themselves about the factors that are important in making the decision or what factors they should consider may help ease the transition into work.

As research has supported, millennials are technology driven, so it was no surprise for millennials to reach out to social media outlets for advice to identify potential childcare settings.   However, though millennials reach out to social media for referrals, they are not educating themselves of early childhood programs and the benefits and regulations that go into looking at a facility they may be more important than just the comfort level of a setting. It appeared the participants reached out for recommendations through social media and friends but then made their final decision after touring the facility. Some of participants made their decisions based off feelings and not looking into each center or give it the attentiveness that the decision may need. Are millennials

rushing this decision because there is a lack of support or knowledge base of their generation since childcare choices were less prevalent among older generations? Middle class millennials would benefit from a support system or group, whether online via Skype or face-to-face that can give them advice and support of what components they should look for, which may help the decision process, be less stressful.

Since millennials are technology driven, providing resources or how-to information to other mommy groups of millennials making childcare decisions can provide strategies that worked for other mothers and allows mothers to talk and compare notes about their experience that will assist them as they go back to work. The positive aspect of millennial mothers and societal changes are simply defined, as millennial mothers are eager to learn and achieve. They will seek ways to be efficient in all they do so any information they can relate to they will seek out and find through search engines or social media. The information and strategies learned can be implemented to their direct experience in which they are experiencing now.

Conclusion

Women have made significant strides in the workplace, resulting in changes in family composition in the United States, as well as changes in women's concepts of their role in society and in family. This has led to substantive modifications in rearing practices of infants/toddlers for mothers of the middle class millennial generation. Childcare decisions and NMC are becoming the norm for this generation and the experiences of millennial mothers making this decision are essential to know as they transition back into the workforce. Middle class millennial mothers are experiencing the

pressures of work and family but felt content and positive about placing their infant or

toddler in either a group-home care setting or center-based setting. Despite their choice

of setting, the comfort level of the facility and caregiver was the most important

emotional decision that contributed to their choice, location, and flexibility were also

highly important. The emotions mothers exhibited through this experience were the

hardest part of overcoming as they transition to work. The mothers felt a sense of

comfort level with each center from the moment of arrival and felt a specific connection

with the caregiver. If the connection to the caregiver was not evident, the mother most

likely did not choose that facility. Millennial mothers' characteristics included the need

to go back to work to achieve a positive self-efficacy, self-gratification, and sense of

accomplishment, which they felt was not achieved by staying home with their child.

However, placing their child in a group-home setting or center-based setting was more

beneficial for their child cognitively, emotionally, and developmentally than being home

with a nanny or themselves full time. The insights and experiences from the mothers in

this study provided a starting point for further research of the knowledge base of early

childhood educators, administrators, and possible employers who directly work with

millennial mothers to support these mothers determine the best options for their infant

and toddlers as they adjust back to work. The results of my study can also provide the

millennial generation with lived experiences and reflections from other mothers and

provide childcare providers with insight on how to provide better continuity of care for

infant and toddlers and build partnerships that are more effective with millennial

generation mothers.

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Appendix A: Advertisement for Research Study

Walden University Doctoral Student Seeks Participants for:

A Phenomenological Study of Millennial Mothers' Decisions Regarding Childcare

Choices

Participants Wanted for a Research Study

Background Information:

The purpose of the study is to discover the lived experiences and processes of middle class mothers in the Millennial Generation undertake while determining the type of early childcare that is required and to shed light on their perceptions and childcare decisions. Millennial mothers who participate in the study must be born between 1980 and 1997, disqualifying any participant who is under the age of 18 to eliminate minors. Middle class mothers were determined based on combined household incomes of minimal $94,000 per year-$200,000. This population was chosen since middle class families make up at a least 45% of American Households. The researcher wants to learn more about a mother's experience when making childcare choices and use this information as a stepping stone to learn more about the decisions Millennial mothers face in today's society.

Eligibility Criteria:

• Located in the Northeastern United States

• Female participant born between 1980-1997, at least 18 years of age

• Currently employed in the work force

- Participant must have a child between the ages of 6 months and 18 months

enrolled in childcare

- Middle class combined household incomes of minimal $94,000 per year-$200,000

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Eligibility Screening via telephone (15 minutes)

- Face-to-face interview (about 45-60 minutes)

- Follow-up telephone interview via telephone for content verification (30 minutes)

If you meet the criteria above are you are interested in participating in this study, please call or email me for full description. This is a non-compensated study and will be audio recorded. Participants will be contacted for a follow-up interview via telephone to confirm information gain during the face-to-face interview.

Appendix B: Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study of Millennial mothers' decision

making processes regarding childcare choices. The researcher is inviting Millennial

mothers who have a child between the ages 6 months and 18 months and in childcare for

at least 5 months to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed

consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This

study is being conducted by a researcher named April Fatato, who is a doctoral student at

Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Millennial mothers

and their decision making process when deciding on the type of childcare. The researcher

wants to learn more about a mother's experience when making childcare choices and use

this information as a stepping stone to learn more about the decisions Millennial mothers

face in today's society.

Eligibility Criteria:

• Located in the Northeastern United States

• Female participant born between 1980-1997, at least 18 years of age

• Currently employed in the work force

• Participant must have a child between the ages of 6 months and 18 months

enrolled in childcare

• Middle class combined household incomes of minimal $94,000 per year-$200,000

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a(n):

•   Eligibility Screening via telephone (15 minutes)

•   Face-to-face interview (about 45-60 minutes)

•   Follow-up telephone interview via telephone for content verification (30 minutes)

Here are some sample questions:

•   Can you describe your experience as a mother making a childcare

decision?

•   Can you tell me about your perception of the childcare experience? What

contributed for you to a childcare choice?

•   Can you describe your feelings and thoughts about your childcare

placement?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. If you

decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind at a later date and you may

leave the study at any time. This is a non-compensated study and will be audio recorded.

Participants will be contacted for a follow-up interview via telephone to confirm

information gain during the face-to-face interview

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

As a participant in this study you may experience minor discomfort, such as being

upset or stressed by recalling details of the decision making process relating to childcare.

The results of this study will help the researcher understand the decision making

processes experienced by Millennial mothers transitioning into the workplace. The research found in this study will be use as a stepping stone to learn more about the decisions Millennial mothers face in today's society, in order to better support young mothers as they return to work.

Payment: There is no payment being provided for participation.

Privacy: Any information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Confidentiality will be maintained unless criminal activity or child/elder abuse is divulged in the interviews, and that by law this information must be revealed to legal authorities Data will be kept secured and in a locked filing cabinet for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university**.** The researcher may publish her study to journal sources and present the data learned to early childhood educators and corporate settings with Millennial mothers. Participant should keep a copy of this consent form. Participants will be notified of the results of the study in a summary format and any publications by email. Each participant will be blind carbon copied to reserve confidentiality. This study is not affiliated or sponsored by the local media outlets such as Facebook, Craig's List, and local newspapers in which this ad was placed. Confidentiality will be maintained unless criminal activity or child/elder abuse is divulged while in the interviews, and that by law this information must be revealed to legal authorities.

Contacts and Questions: You may ask any questions you have now. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210 (for US based participants). Walden University's approval number for is 08-13-15-0179990 and it expires on August 12, 2016.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing the consent form or by replying to this email with the words, "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant	
Date of consent	
Participant's Signature	
Researcher's Signature	

Appendix C: Eligibility Screening Questionnaire

Participant will be asked the following questions during the phone screening interview

for eligibility. (Anticipated time approximately 15 minutes).

Please answer the following questions:

Mother's DOB_____ (must be between 1980 and 1997 to qualify as an

adult Millennial over 18 years of age)

Ethnicity_____

Level of Education_____

Do you reside in the Northeastern United States?

Married_____ Divorced_____ Single_____

Number of Children_____

Employment Status_____

Yearly Income_____

Number of Hours worked per week_____

Household Income_____

What type of care is your child in while you are at work?

Has your child been in care for at least 5 months?

Is your child at least 6 months old?

How old is your child or children in care?

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Questions will be based on the information gained in Appendix C. The researcher will

reiterate the answers from Appendix B to help guide the questions below (About 45-60

minutes)

•   Describe your experience in making your childcare choice.

•   Has the experience choosing childcare for your infant or toddler been a difficult

one or an easy one? Why?

•   Do you feel your experiences as a Millennial mother are different from previous

generations of mothers and if so, how?

•   What factors do you feel have contributed to your childcare choices?

•   After having your child in care for at least 5 months, what is your assessment of

your choice?

•   If you could change anything about your childcare choice or arrangement what

might you change?