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Educated mothers at home: Motivation, expectations, and experiences

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This research is a product of the graduate program in Family and Consumer Sciences at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

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EDUCATED MOTHERS AT HOME:

MOTIVATION, EXPECTATIONS, AND EXPERIENCES

RIEGLE

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Educated Mothers at Home: Motivation, Expectations, and Experiences

(TITLE)

BY

Adrienne Lynn Riegle

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the motivation for educated stay-at-home mothers (SAHMs) to stay

at home with their children and examined expectations and experiences regarding their

decision. Twenty-two participants earned the minimum of a bachelor's degree or higher

prior to staying at home with their own children for a period of at least 1 year and

responded to an online survey of demographic information and open-ended questions.

Qualitative data analysis led to a theoretical model of the SAHM experience. The model

included 3 specific concepts: 1) individual interests as motivation; 2) commitment to and

identity associated with the SAHM; and 3) the impact of interaction with children,

significant others, and external support. The model also illustrated the interplay of these

3 concepts regarding the SAHM experience.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated with appreciation and love to my educated stay-at-home mom

and my dad, for making it possible for our family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Educated Mothers at Home: Motivation, Expectations, and Experiences

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Discussions regarding a woman's decision of whether to stay at home with children or work outside of the home are not new to the twenty-first century. As Rosalind Chait Barnett (2004) recounted in her study of women and work, women's conflict between family and career finds some of its earliest roots in the teaching profession. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, teaching was described as particularly limiting to women starting families. In fact, many communities formally banned teachers from marrying at all, in fear the start of a family would follow. Subsequently, it was not until the 1950s and then 1960s that some communities lifted bans on marriage, and then bans on pregnancy, respectively.

A distinct change since this account is the fact that many of today's women now have a choice about whether or not they remain in the workforce after starting a family. A recent trend is that educated, professional women decide to stay at home after having children (Rubin and Wooten, 2007; Shellenbarger, 2006; Story, 2005; Taylor, Funk, and Clark, 2007; Vejar, Madison-Colmore, and Ter Maat, 2006). Though this movement has primarily been covered in the media as a White, upper class phenomenon, it is not only those professionals that are making these work and family choices. A growing number of working-class women find they can sometimes decide to stay at home (Crosby, 1991).

There has been extensive media coverage in the past decade regarding women's work and family choices, with particular focus on the movement of well-educated mothers staying at home with their children (Armas, 2003; Pollitt, 2006; Sawyer, 2006; Stahl, 2004; Story, 2005; Woosley, 2005) however, concrete data regarding the subject

are scant. Only a few academic studies have attempted to present insight on highly educated, professional women choosing to become stay-at-home mothers (DeSimone, 2001; Rubin and Wooten, 2007; Stone, 1987). This previous research has examined educated SAHMs from various perspectives such as commitment, role conflict, guilt, spousal support, however none of these studies particularly investigated the reasons why educated mothers find themselves in the role of SAHM. Furthermore, the current study has attempted to examine educated SAHMs experiences in that role.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to explore the motivation for mothers with higher educations to stay at home with their children and to examine their expectations and experiences regarding their decision.

Objectives

The following describes the objectives that have been addressed in this study. The researcher aimed to:

1) Explore types of plans mothers had while they were earning their degrees;

2) Determine what type of work and familial arrangements are associated with educated mothers who choose to stay at home with children;

3) Identify what motivates educated mothers to stay at home with children;

4) Examine the daily experiences of educated mothers that chose to stay at home with children;

5) Explore what contributions mothers' spouses or significant others have had on their experiences;

6) Explore what expectations educated mothers have about staying home with children and how these expectations are similar to, and/or different from, their experiences; and

7) Identify future plans educated mothers have regarding employment outside the home.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were operationally defined for this research study:

1) educated mothers – For the purpose of this study, educated mothers are women with children who have earned at least a bachelor's degree before becoming a stay-at-home mother

2) employment outside of the home – paid, full-time or part-time work at a location other than the educated mother's home

3) stay-at-home mother – a woman in a heterosexual marriage who stays at home with her own child(ren) who does not participate in paid, full or part-time work outside of the home

4) children of stay-at-home mothers – biological or legally adopted children who reside full time in the home of their stay-at-home mother who does not participate in paid work outside of the home

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following paragraphs review existing literature regarding the current state of both mothers working outside of the home and those who have decided to stay home with children. Examples of various mothers and their chosen paths are provided, and the review relies on past research to present information about the educated mothers who actively make a choice to stay at home with children.

Current State of Mothers at Work and Home

At the present time, there are several studies that have addressed the societal perceptions of mothers who choose to stay at home with their children or that work outside of the home (Taylor et al., 2007; Sawyer, 2006; Cuddy, 2004). The following section introduces prevalent themes of women's work and family choices and examines current statistics related to mothers working in and out of the home.

Discussion of Opposing Sides of the Work/Home Debate

The Wall: The Conflict between Stay-at-Home and Employed Mothers (Brykman, 2006) drew renewed attention to women's choices regarding work and family. With the trend of dissecting the pros and cons of women's choices, has come a divergence between women who have made the choice to forgo their career for a period of time to stay at home with children and those who have decided to remain in the workplace while raising a family. This controversy has touched upon all realms of society, from academia to popular media (Steiner, 2006). For example, *Good Morning America* aired a series examining the more recent tendency for mothers to consider postponing career advancement to raise a family (Saywer, 2006) while those in academics have published

research on the similar topics (Armas, 2003; Barnett, 2004; Deutsch, Kokot, and Binder, 2007; Pollitt, 2006; Stahl, 2004; Story, 2005; Woosley, 2005).

Katha Pollitt appropriately designated her 2006 article, "Mommy Wars, Round 587" to address the back-and-forth nature of the discussion about whether or not educated women should pursue continuous career development or take time out of the workplace for motherhood. Linda Hirshman, renowned for her stance on women's rightful place in the professional world, and Caitlin Flanagan, an advocate of full-time motherhood, have extensively debated the issue. Despite the dichotomy between Hirshman and Flanagan's views, Politt noted each of their ties to feminism and described "choice" feminism as the means by which women display equality. Therefore, feminism has described both the opportunity women have to work outside of the home while raising a family and the choice to stay at home with children. To establish the current conditions of women's work and family choices, impacted by the tendency for educated women to make the choice to stay at home with children, it is beneficial to review the most current data about this trend.

Current Statistics of Stay-at-Home Mothers

According to the United States Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006), about 5.6 million mothers (7% of U.S. mothers) stay at home with their children. In 2004, the U.S. Census Bureau showed a 15% increase from the previous 10 years in the number of women who stayed at home with their children (Stahl, 2004). This same year was the Census Bureau's first-ever analysis of stay-at-home parents. Of the reported 5.5 million at-home parents that year, 5.4 million were mothers and 98,000 were fathers. Biological children under the age of 3 lived with 42% of these mothers and

29% of fathers. Additionally, only 39% and 30% of these mothers and fathers respectively were under the age of 35 themselves (Bernstein, 2004). Armas (2003) reported that shortly after the turn of the new millennium, roughly 10.6 million children were living in homes with stay-at-home mothers. An additional Census Bureau report demonstrated that a corresponding number (about 25% of the 41.8 million) of children under 15 lived in two-parent homes with mothers who did not work outside the home. One possible catalyst for this movement may be cultural influences of the growing Hispanic population in the United States, due partially to its traditional gender role values and higher birth rates (Armas, 2003). Another movement influencing parental choices is the growing number of women obtaining advanced educations, with a number of these women choosing to stay at home.

Current Statistics of Mothers Employed Outside the Home

Although an increasing amount of educated women are choosing to stay at home, recent data revealed that about three-quarters of women between the ages of 25 and 54 are active in the labor force (Taylor, et al., 2007). This figure has remained mostly stagnant for the past decade, after rising steadily for the previous 4 decades. However, there has been a slight decline in the number of mothers with children under 3 years old who actively participate in the work force (62% in 1998; 59% in 2005). In Hattery's (2001) book regarding women, work and family, the author stated that about two out of three (67%) mothers of children under age 6 participate in the work force at any given time. The former study (Taylor et al., 2007) noted that both African American and unmarried mothers work outside the home at higher rates than women in corresponding groups, sometimes due to economic necessity. However, for many women, the increased

likelihood of working outside the home is often related to the increase in education. Higher education is likely to influence women's decisions about work and family choices.

Current Statistics of Women Earning Higher-Level Degrees

Women's involvement in higher education is coupled with women's higher rate of participation in professional positions. Barnett (2004) reported that women now are receiving undergraduate and graduate degrees at a higher rate than men and are quickly approaching the same level at which men receive doctor's degrees (medical, doctoral, and similar advanced degrees). Projections from the National Center for Education Statistics (2006) have estimated that in the 2007-2008 academic year, 894,000 women will have earned bachelor's degrees and nearly 400,000 will have earned master's degrees. At this rate, women would earn 59% and 61% of all bachelor's and master's degrees, respectively. Furthermore, statistics have indicated that women will earn 52% of first-professional degrees, including medicine and law. In addition, the percentage of women 25 years and older who have earned bachelor's degrees has almost doubled to 26.8 million (27%) in the last 20 years (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2007). Clearly, women are more educated than at any other period in history. Therefore, it is imperative that the relationship between education attained and the work-family balance be explored.

Educated Women and Motherhood

As women have become more educated, studies have investigated how they are navigating parenthood. It has been found that high-achieving women continue to struggle with work-family balance though they have attained prominent positions through educational means (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick, 2004; Rubin and Wooten, 2007). Several

studies have addressed how educated women view their experiences as mothers (DeSimone, 2001; Kitterod, 2002; Taylor, et al., 2007). Pew Research Center conducted a national, longitudinal study in 1997 and again in 2007 in which they asked mothers to rate their performance as parents. Responses revealed that only 28% of mothers with higher levels of education (those with college degrees) gave themselves a 9 or 10 (on a scale of 0 = *low* to 10 = *high*) when asked, "How good a job do you feel you've done so far as a parent?" (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 2). Therefore, higher levels of education did not necessarily lead to confidence in the ability to parent effectively.

A Norwegian study investigated how education levels impact mothers' priorities about childcare and housework over time. These studies, conducted in 1970, 1980, and 1990, revealed that mothers with more education were not only more likely to be employed, but they also spent less time on housework and more time in active child care (Kitterod, 2002). These findings indicated that well-educated mothers might fashion their motherhood with a more hands-on method to their child rearing than mothers who have less education. This active approach to child rearing is observed in stay-at-home mothers, as well as those who work outside the home.

Educated Mothers Employed Outside of the Home

As previously stated, the notion of women deciding to remain in the workforce after they have become mothers is not a new concept (Barnett, 2004). Studies on the effects of working mothers seem endless, reaching topics from the impact on children's cognitive development (Harvey, 1999), to the perceptions of women's personalities and habits in and out of the workplace (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick, 2004; Eptsein, 2004), and the overall impact of working mothers on the well-being of society (Taylor et al., 2007).

For example, many employed women experience strong feelings of guilt due to the many hours they are away from their families because of job commitments (Barnett, 2004). Other women with top-level positions have received criticism about hiring other women to help with their duties at home (Epstein, 2004).

　　Children of employed mothers. As mothers' family and employment choices impact their children, it is essential to review the effects of maternal employment on children of mothers who work outside of the home. In the book *Juggling* (1991), Crosby cited a study completed in 1974 examining five points related to the effect a mother working outside the home had on her children. These five ideas included: 1) the mother serving as role model for daughters; 2) effect of employment on mothers' emotional health and subsequent effects on children; 3) differences in practices in raising children in families where mothers did not work outside the home and in families where they did work outside the home; 4) the supervision of children of working mothers; and 5) the feasibility of Freudian mourning by children of working mothers. Crosby's research unveiled unexpectedly positive effects on children of working mothers. Although some differences between the home atmospheres of both family types were detected, no drastic problems were discovered in the homes of the mothers that worked. In fact, the only slightly negative data resulted from mothers' reports of attachment difficulties and a question of a small number of children receiving adequate amounts of interaction with positive adult role models (Crosby, 1991).

　　Crosby (1991) also suggested several other effects on children who have a mother working outside the home. These ideas appear to have a more positive connotation and are considered benefits to the children of working mothers. Having a mother who is

employed outside the home initiates more intimate contact with other family members due to the fact that fathers and other kin often watch the children since the mother is at her workplace. Children of working mothers are also exposed to the world of work through their mother's perspective, which often sheds light on aspects of the workplace that children may not receive from their fathers. The employment of mothers typically leads to children receiving care outside the home, which provides opportunities for children to interact with peers. Finally, contact with new ideas and attitudes, positive self-regard and initiative, and, perhaps the most basic of benefits to the children, economic support, are each cited as additional advantages of children with working mothers.

A more recent study examined the reverse of the typical relationship patterns between working mother and child; specifically the effects of child temperament and behavior on mothers' workplace performance (Hyde, Else-Quest, Goldsmith, and Biesanz, 2004). Most commonly, the impact of mothers working outside the home has been investigated to determine what positive and negative impact the children experience. However, this study used two variables; parenting competence and maternal depressed affect. The researchers hypothesized children's positive and negative temperament to have positive and negative impacts on the mothers' work outcomes, respectively. For example, a relatively content child can lead to a mother's confidence in her parenting skills, which in turn corresponds with better productivity in the workplace. Results indicated that difficult temperaments in infants led to less productive work outcomes by the mothers. Few other studies have been published regarding the impact of children of employed mothers on the mother's workplace productivity. Another consideration is the influence of working mothers on daughters' future employment choices.

Effects of maternal employment on grown daughters' choices. Research has suggested that many young women are motivated by the employment experiences of their own mothers when making professional and familial decisions of their own (Dunstan, 2006; Przybys, 2005; Story, 2005). Leslie Morgan Steiner (2006) is an author and employed mother who has examined the conflict between employed mothers and stay-at-home mothers. A successful career woman herself, Steiner recollected pangs of leaving her children upon returning to work from maternity leave. However, Steiner declared strong feelings about employment outside of the home and the manner in which it allows women to be themselves, provides feelings of importance, and contributes to success and the ability to be a happy mother to their children.

These ideas are also addressed in Hakim's theory of the heterogeneity of women, which stems from the sociology-driven core that, based on their commitments to family or careers, women choose between the two priorities (Procter and Padfield, 1999). Yet many authors concur that most career-oriented mothers still have a desire to play an integral role in the shaping of their children's lives, perhaps risking a mother stereotype in the workplace (Cuddy and Fiske, 2004; Barnett, 2004; Taylor et al., 2007).

A multitude of sources have investigated the benefits and consequences of mothers working outside the home. The impact on children has been studied from many angles, with more recent theories focusing on the benefits to children of working mothers (Crosby, 1991). The effects on employed mothers have also been examined. Some of the most poignant examples and accounts have come first-hand from the mothers themselves (Steiner, 2006; Sawyer, 2006). In other studies, the impact of employed mothers on society as a whole has been addressed (Taylor et al., 2007). The following section

presents literature that pertains to educated women who have taken time away from their employment outside of the home be with their children full-time.

Educated Women as Stay-at-Home Mothers

It is commonly assumed that the more education a woman earns, the more likely she is to be employed outside the home (Brykman, 2006). However, the recent research has demonstrated the tendency for highly educated mothers to make the choice to stay at home. In her recent book about the conflict between stay-at-home and employed mothers, Brykman (2006) noted that while some first-time expectant mothers are employed and initially make the choice to continue in the workplace after the birth of their first child, other mothers readily decide to put a hold on their careers to stay in the home and raise a family.

In 2005, Louise Story reported on elite college women who were planning to choose to stay at home with children over their "glamorous" careers. Story addressed the great strides universities such as Harvard and Yale have made to create equal academic opportunities for women, and the hesitant feelings of administrative personnel at these schools when they hear that promising young women plan to stay at home with children. Yet, the students she referenced felt their potential as great leaders in the worlds of law, business, medicine, or education was not broad enough in scope to encompass their full leadership ability. These young women saw themselves as great leaders making an influential difference in the community as stay-at-home mothers. The Dean of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Arts and Sciences, Rebecca W. Bushnell, articulated a difference between her generation and contemporary university students. Bushnell recollected that she had more of a one-step-at-a-time approach to balancing her

professional and family life, whereas many of the young women she currently sees appear more cognizant of finding flexible work-life options and setting their minds to a chosen path earlier in their academic careers.

The aforementioned series of discussions on *Good Morning America* referenced "the furious debate about the trend of college-educated mothers opting out of the workplace" (Sawyer, 2006). In this series, Linda Hirshman, a mother and law professor, vividly argued the negative effects of educated women's decisions to stay at home. Several studies have reported a higher rate of depression and loneliness among at-home mothers as opposed to those in the workplace either full-time or part-time (Bruggink, 2007; Gardner, 2006; Graff, 2007; and Rubin and Wooten, 2007). In Rubin and Wooten's 2007 study of the experiences of stay-at-home mothers, participants reported feeling "vulnerable," "dependent," and "unmarketable" (p. 343). In spite of this, a *The New York Times* article (Story, 2005), published just months before Sawyer's interview of Hirshman, discussed a recent trend of female students receiving degrees from ivy-league colleges who planned to pursue full time motherhood instead of spotlights in the executive world. Some professional women have described their decision to leave their careers as a "choice." Graff (2007) accused these intelligent, educated women of attempting to justify their decision in order to give themselves as sense of control. Many sources have charged that educated mothers who choose to stay at home with their children are abandoning a responsibility to other educated professional women in the movement to further women's stature in high-ranking professions (Bruggink, 2007; Graff, 2007; and Steiner, 2006). Yet many mothers who have decided on this path have found ways of combating the external attacks.

Daily lives of educated stay-at-home mothers. Tulsa, Oklahoma has an official MOMS Club for women who find themselves in the position of transferring out of professional positions to be stay-at-home mothers (Woosley, 2005). The group, comprised of former lawyers, doctors, engineers and other professionals who left high-paying positions to work full time at raising their children, has served as a social support network for women as they are challenged by outside doubt that being a stay-at-home mother is full time work, and the idea that it is more like a vacation than a job. A Tulsa MOMS Club member, Debbie Klett, left her full-time marketing career to care for twins at home. While thankful for her ability to stay home, this transition left Klett yearning to use her professional abilities. Klett was empowered to create and publish Total 180!, a magazine dedicated to the stories, challenges, and support of stay-at-home mothers. This endeavor allowed for the at-home mothering role to continue, provided a creative outlet, and supported other stay-at-home mothers as well.

Women's choices or workplace force. Many women report that they could not maintain the type of family life that they feel to be important while fulfilling the expectations of a demanding profession. Women are dropping out of the work force, at least temporarily, for several reasons, including the poor quality and high cost of acceptable child care, lack of workplace options, a decision to switch to a more family-friendly career, and a strong desire to nurture children, particularly within the first year of their lives (Shellenbarger, 2006).

While the decision to remain home with children instead of pursuing, or continuing, employment would seem to be a personal matter, societal debate rages regarding this decision. Some scoff at the idea that women can really "choose" to stay at

home with children and state that the increase in stay-at-home mothers is perhaps due to the lack of provisions made by employers to accommodate family needs. In addition, class issues abound in the discussion. Finally, entrance back into the workplace after taking the time to stay at home with children is also seen as a point of discussion.

Joan C. Williams, author of *'Opt Out' or Pushed Out?*, implied that deciding to stay at home is a choice only affecting upper-class women, while most other women are "pushed" from their careers by a lag in policymakers' workplace reform to accommodate the work-life balance of mothers at all economic and education levels. However, Belkin (2006) asserted that she has encountered "parents in all strata of society struggling with the life-work balance" (p. 6). It is a common argument that only Caucasian, upper echelon mothers are highlighted in work and family writings and within the media (Graff, 2007). In direct contrast, though perhaps an anomaly, African-American journalist Denene Millner (2007), writes fervently about her choice to stay at home with her children despite finger-pointing and judgment from others. She acknowledged sacrifices her family makes to make their choice possible, including facing stereotypical accusations of being lazy and catering to every one of her family's whims. Admitting they are not wealthy, Millner explained that they are happy having what they need financially, physically, and emotionally. However, she remained careful not to assume that her choice is the best for every family.

Workforce re-entry. Women like Millner (2007) may face challenges if they ever find themselves wanting to again pursue full-time paid employment outside of the home. The idea that re-entry into the work force will be much more difficult for most mothers than they realize has been addressed (Gardner, 2006; Mannes, 2006), however little

empirical research has been conducted in this regard. Some women that have walked

away from high-profile professions have used the time at home with children to devise a

plan for re-entry into the field (Schachner Chanen, 2007). For instance, one mother

dedicated herself to staying home in the midst of her full-time law practice. This

attorney-turned stay-at-home mother planned to make the most of her time at home by

devising a plan for re-entry into the field with her jurist doctorate degree, while

remaining committed to being a full-time mother for her two children. It is recommended

that mothers planning to re-enter full-time employment outside the home maintain or

rebuild a professional network and brush up on industry related skills before attempting

the move. Another consideration is that the more time one remains out of the work force,

the more difficult it may be to regain employment outside the home (Mannes, 2006).

Economic considerations. Several writings have spoken to the economic

detriment women may experience when deciding to stay at home with children

(Bruggink, 2007; Graff, 2007). Leslie Bennetts, author of The Feminine Mistake (2007),

expressed fear that women were placing themselves in grave danger by becoming

financially dependent on spouses. Another issue is the impact the high divorce rate (at or

above 50%) may have on mothers who chose this option. Mothers should be careful

when risking not only their careers and economic viability, but also increased chances for

depression and an overall disconnect from society (Graff, 2007).

A *Wall Street Journal* article (Shellenbarger, 2006) pointed to more new mothers

making the choice to remain at home, even in the light of economic strain, including

women of all income levels taking voluntary breaks from the workforce. One writer and

photographer saw her family's income to drop by two-thirds (to below $30,000) when

she chose to stay home with her three young children. It is reasonable to conclude that educated women that choose to stay at home with their children will face some sort of economic impact related to the decision. Considering the possible economic sacrifice, it is important to note how mothers view these choices, as well as how these decisions are reflected upon by society.

Views of Stay-at-Home Mothering

It has been established that mothers continually evaluate their own decisions about work and family choices. Reviewing these personal reflections, as well as how society as a whole views mothers' decisions to stay at home, can serve as a basis by which these perspectives can be studied. It is critical to note the dual impact of a mother's personal perspectives about her own choices combined with the external evaluation society places on these individual decisions about work and motherhood.

Personal reflections of staying at home. Exploring mothers' personal perspectives on the role of stay-at-home mother is necessary in examining mothers' decisions about work and family. Sibyl Niemann (2003) described a "mother" as a married woman with young children who then stays at home as "their primary companion, teacher, and nurturer, watching after them a large majority of the time" (p. 6). Admitting that the position is hard, with some loneliness, boredom, and other challenges, Niemann also stated that the motivation to make this choice centers on the position that the dedicated stay-at-home mother has the best opportunity to instill her family's beliefs and values directly in her children. Niemann declared that society currently fails to regard sole-breadwinner households and remarks that many are not willing to give up vacations, dining out, ideal homes, neighborhoods, and multiple vehicles in order to stay at home

with children. This makes it more difficult to make the decision to leave lucrative employment.

Societal views of stay-at-home mothers. A 2000 study mentioned that stay-at-home parenting is not validated by our society and therefore at-home parents must work harder to justify their choices (Rubin and Wooten, 2007). In the United States, many mothers are socialized such that they are valued for putting the needs of others before their own. Yet, this value is closely associated with the occupational or economic contributions parents can make to a family, with slight regard for the homemaking or child-rearing aspects of family life (Zimmerman, 2000). Thus, the already difficult choice of staying home with children is often compounded by a lack of validation by society.

Society's external evaluation of an educated mother's choices is one method of examining women's work and family choices. The use of self-reflection and decision making stories comprising qualitative data are some of the most common ways for researchers to explore why educated women choose to stay at home with their children.

Methods of Studying Women's Work and Family Choices

To provide a comprehensive overview of educated mothers at work and at home, it is useful to review the current trends in relation to the subject. It has been established that the decisions professional women face between staying at home or continuing their careers is nothing new, yet the pattern of women, work, and families has greatly evolved. In the mid to late twentieth century, more and more mothers were fully employed in the workforce while raising a family (Hattery, 2001). In the new millennium, a trend has advanced in which professionally trained mothers consider postponing the use of their education and career advancement in order to be stay-at-home mothers, active in their

children's development (Story, 2005; Sawyer, 2006). The few studies that have been conducted about women's work and family choices give insight into methodological choices for studying this issue.

Ideological Framework Regarding Motherhood

A vast array of ideologies about motherhood exist in current research literature. Hattery (2001) used subjects' motherhood ideology to categorize her qualitative research about women, work, and family. Another group of authors carefully examined and critiqued Hakim's theory of heterogeneity of women, which alleged that women either feel compelled to obtain a successful career or feel the necessity to stay at home with their families, and used the term "unlikelihood" to describe that anyone that could successfully manage both (Procter and Padfield, 1999). Although only an estimated 14% of U.S. households are "traditional" (with stay-at-home mothers and fathers who are the only source of income) an intense motherhood ideology had remained dominant in our culture, according to Hattery (2001). This ideology references a framework that is beyond an individual woman and her personal and familial choices. A woman makes these decisions within the social context that will reflect her choices. However, women experience conflict when they sense their choices may not be in alignment with the ideology of society as a whole.

Quantitative and Qualitative Methodologies

Granrose and Kaplan (1996) conducted a 10-year longitudinal study regarding work-family role choices of college women as students and followed them into motherhood. This approach used 30-minute telephone interviews to investigate specific areas of satisfaction, as well as challenges that educated women face as a result of their

work-family decisions. The researchers evaluated the choices of these women by identifying changes that occur in young adults. Plans during college were assessed and then compared to the influence of employment, relational, and motherhood on their post-college experiences. The consistency of women's plans in relation to their eventual decisions about career and family choices were evaluated in light of implications these choices have for women. In the early 1980s, 433 university women in their junior and senior year were interviewed about their work-family intentions and their beliefs about the work-family balance. About 10 years later, the second phase allowed mailed questionnaires to be matched to the first phase information. Two hundred twenty-two women responded to both parts of the study. The follow-up information 10 years later included details on the women's employment history, attitudes toward family experiences, and biographical information.

Analyses resulted in the formation of four categories of women. In both phases, *careerists* indicated a higher likelihood of returning to paid work after having children. *Homemakers* describe those who reported a greater probability of staying home in both phases. *Breadwinners* indicated plans to stay at home in the first phase and had a greater probability of returning to paid work in the second phase. Those who indicated a return to paid work in the first phase and then had a higher probability of staying home in the second phase were referred to as *nesters*. The researchers authored a book to elaborate on the employment, home, child, and self-concerns of each type of the women in the study. Consistency, change, and comparisons among the types allowed for the researchers to make implications about the future directions of career and family balance for women in the twenty-first century. Granrose and Kaplan (1996) concluded their writing by

mentioning the well-established fact that there is no social consensus on one single preferred, or more effective, method of incorporating both work and family concerns. By this, Granrose and Kaplan imply this is the reasoning that shifts in public policy to support any life pattern choices will be a long time in coming.

More recently, predictions of relationship and life satisfaction and psychological well-being among stay-at-home fathers were researched with a quantitative approach (Rochlen, McKelley, Suizzo, and Scaringi, 2008). These researchers contacted website discussion coordinators with a focus on stay-at-home fathers (SAHFs) to administer internet-based questionnaires. Demographic data included participants' age, ethnicity, gross annual household income, relationship and employment status, number of children at home, education level, and age at time of marriage and birth of children. Researchers used eight pre-existing inventories including self-assessment scales on parental self-efficacy, social support, life satisfaction, well being, and other dimensions. Great variability was found in the participants' responses, indicating a wide variety of characteristics and experiences of stay-at-home fathers.

In a recent study, Rubin and Wooten (2007) studied educated stay-at-home mothers in terms of their commitment to, and conflict with, their current status. The researchers in this qualitative approach recruited and interviewed ten highly educated mothers about their decision to stay home, challenges and benefits to their decision, and aspects regarding the necessity to care for themselves. To participate, respondents had to be married, stay-at-home mothers with at least one child under the age of 10, and have earned at least a graduate degree. One of the women was Hispanic, while the remaining nine were White. Each respondent lived with a household income of a $125, 000

minimum. Researchers used the snowball sampling technique to obtain the ten participants. Triangulation and bracketing techniques allowed the researchers to investigate the experiences of the participants with credibility.

Rubin and Wooten (2007) described their research as having an analytic stance extensive enough to allow for various dimensions in the participants' narrative accounts. Three subquestions emerged from their fundamental objective of exploring the lived experience of highly educated stay-at-home mothers. These questions included: 1) How did you decide to stay at home with your children?; 2) What are the benefits of staying home?; and 3) What are the challenges of staying home? The researchers read and analyzed the transcribed data using categorization and then made files with the groupings they formed, based on analogous concepts and themes using participants' beliefs, stories, and understandings. The researchers primarily extracted psychological themes, as counselors and similar professionals were the targeted audience for their results.

Rubin and Wooten (2007) found that the women in their study experienced a vast array of emotions and experiences in light of their stay-at-home status. The theme of the decision process emerged and included ideas of beliefs and circumstances surrounding the mothers' decision, the transition from their professional life to staying home, and succeeding self-questioning about their decisions. Benefits of staying home for the families and for the mothers themselves arose as the second theme. Women specifically addressed how they valued the actual *quantity* of time spent with the family, not just the quality of interaction during the time they had together. The theme of challenges to staying home included loss, guilt, shame, and conflict. In the last theme, that of self-care and personal growth, participants explained how activities such as continued education,

volunteerism, religious and spiritual involvement, and investing in one's health led to continued self-fulfillment about their decision to stay-at-home.

Another qualitative study was conducted to understand the transitional period from professional careers to full-time motherhood (Vejar, Madison-Colmore, and Ter Maat, 2006). On the basis that a majority of child-mother research has focused on the interplay between the mother and the child's development, these researchers set out to address the particular experience of the stay-at-home mothers (SAHM) with a spotlight on the mental, physical, and relational issues associated with the transition from the workplace to the SAHM role. Advertisements at local child-care centers and parenting groups recruited four participants. Participation requirements included the mothers' professional employment and investment in their careers prior to becoming a SAHM, and a minimum of a bachelor's degree. All of the women lived with their husbands, had at least one biological child at the time of the study, and were not employed outside the home. A questionnaire served as the tool for data collection, which included items of maternal sense of self, familial and societal influences, early childhood experiences, personality descriptions, support systems, benefits and challenges of both working and SAHMs, and their anticipated futures. Researchers conducted the interviews at the participants' homes and each meeting lasted about two hours.

Vejar, et al. (2006) analyzed the data using open, axial, selective, and process coding techniques. Researchers attempted to establish validity by relaying and summarizing the data with the participants to verify their responses. After reporting on the individual experiences of each of the four participants, the researchers presented a SAHM model they developed to explain three distinct stages of the SAHM encounter.

The first stage, *Pre-SAHM*, included the values and personalities of the women prior to being a SAHM. The second, entitled the *SAHM Experience*, examined and explained the sustaining and hindering factors to SAHM's level of contentment. The sustaining factors initiated a rewarding experience, while the hindering factors contributed to overall mental and physical stress. Stage three, *Post-SAHM*, consisted of two parts. The first part constructed positive, neutral, and negative placement reflected upon by the mother as she leaves her SAHM role. For instance, if the mother felt she had encountered mostly sustaining factors during her SAHM experience, she would enter the *Post-SAHM* stage with a positive outcome. The second part of the third *SAHM* stage permitted the mother to reposition herself along the continuum by her subjective recollections of her *SAHM Experience*. The analysis concluded with a presentation of two SAHM portraits. The first was the experience of the SAHM who did not abandon her professional self during her tenure as a SAHM, but effectively transferred her personal attributes to a different "job site" within her own family. The second portrait illustrated a woman who abandoned her professional identity while she is a SAHM, and consequently was likely to suffer mental and physical stressors.

Descriptive and Correlational Research

DeSimone (2001) examined educated stay-at-home mothers with a descriptive approach. Guilt, support from the respondent's spouses, and role conflict were each examined in terms of their effect on the participants' well-being. Questionnaires were given to 72 married stay-at-home mothers with young children. Participants were recruited from a local preschool, volunteer organization, and the local Junior League. DeSimone used a theoretical model based on social role theory to identify linkages

between guilt, spousal support, role-conflict, and decreased psychological well-being. The correlational analysis did not reveal strong linkages between guilt, spousal support, role conflict, and psychological well-being.

An earlier study (Stone, 1987) aimed to determine particular characteristics of women in the midst of making choices about life and career. Stone set out to ascertain the distinct ways in which women with graduate educations decide upon their vocational and family life paths. Stone hypothesized that no difference existed in the personality traits of educated women who have chosen full-time mother hood and those who have decided to remain employed. Fliers that were sent home with area preschool children helped to recruit the participants. To participate in the study, the 33 career-oriented respondents had to meet several criteria. Participants had to have: 1) at least one child between the ages of one and five years old; 2) a graduate level education and employment after earning their degree; and 3) an intact two-parent family unit. Stone presumed that earning a graduate education and working in their field indicated a career-oriented outlook on the participants' part, as opposed to women who either had only received a bachelor's degree or did not have employment experience. Respondents were middle class and above, with a minimum income set at $20,000 (in 1987) to participate. Of the participants' husbands, 88% had at least a master's degree or above, while four (12%) had a bachelor's degree.

Stone (1987) used a questionnaire to obtain demographic data. The California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and the Bems Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) provided means of assessing the personalities and beliefs of each respondent. Finally, Stone conducted and tape-recorded structured, in-depth interviews with each participant. The analyzed data covered five themes including personality characteristics, decision making

processes, job satisfaction levels, peer and family relationships, and self-image. Stone reports that many of the women had planned to have children before they got married. Timing was indicated as a crucial factor as 91% ($N = 30$) reported beginning their families when they did because it was the "right time." Respondents cited factors such as age, finances, finishing educations, and starting their careers as contributing to their decisions to start a family.

In summary, the discussions, changes, and trends of mothers making choices to pursue careers or remain in the home are far from finished. This work has attempted to introduce some of the most recent ideas associated with the topic of professional mothers in the workplace and in the home. As the relationships between women, families, communities, and society are greatly influenced by this topic, the continued study of educated women as employed mothers and stay-at-home mothers remains indispensable and vital to the well being of these groups.

The Current Study

Contemporary research literature fails to present specific, in-depth studies of the motivations educated women have for leaving professional careers to be stay-at-home mothers. After reviewing the research techniques in the existing literature, it was decided that a qualitative approach would be used in the current study of stay-at-home mothers. The purpose of this study was to explore the motivation for mothers with higher educations who chose to stay at home with their children and to examine the expectations and experiences these mothers have regarding their decision. The study will explore what motivates women with higher educations to stay at home and examine their experiences while not working outside the home, and their future plans. The researcher will also

investigate the career goals of these women while they obtained their educations and assess how they feel about their choice to stay at home.

Qualitative research procedures include asking questions, making comparisons, and sampling based on existing and evolving theories. This type of study seeks to discover common concepts, often in as social context, and then address relationships between them (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This qualitative format allowed the researcher to be objective and give the respondents a chance to voice their particular experiences.

Chapter Three

METHOD

The purpose of the current study was to explore the motivation for mothers with higher educations to stay at home with their children and to examine their expectations and experiences regarding their decision. The researcher's objectives included the exploration of the plans of mothers while they were earning their degrees, identifying what motivates educated mothers to pursue full-time motherhood, exploring expectations educated mothers have about staying home and how these expectations are similar to and different from their experiences, and identifying future plans educated mothers have about family and work outside the home.

Design of Study

This was an exploratory, qualitative study, which included a nonexperimental survey about the experiences of educated stay-at-home mothers. The survey was used to collect descriptive data, as well as demographic information, about the participants. This format allowed the participants to elaborate upon their responses and give an in-depth answer to specific questions. Data were analyzed using axial coding, a methodology based on work by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Sample Selection

The sample for this study was one of convenience and participation was voluntary. The researcher used multiple sampling techniques, including the snowball approach of asking one person to recommend a suitable participant and then subsequently asking that volunteer to suggest additional persons that fit the study's criteria. The researcher also invited participants to complete the online questionnaire by contacting the

leader of an Internet discussion group for SAHMs (stay-at-home mothers) in a large Midwestern city. This group leader posted the study information and a link to the online survey on the SAHM group's discussion board. All participants met the criteria of earning a minimum of a bachelor's degree before staying home with their own children, and had not worked outside of the home for a period of at least 1 year.

Participants

Twenty-two individuals participated in this study. A majority of the women had earned a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education, while 5 of the women held master's degrees (see Table 1). Participants' ages also varied as illustrated in Table 2. The age group with the most participants ($n = 10$) was 36 to 40 years old.

Table 1

Participants' Education Level

Participants	Bachelor's	Master's	PhD	Post-Doctoral	Other	Total
Number	15	5	-	-	2[α]	22
Percentage	68.2	22.7	-	-	9.1	100

α Two participants specified other degrees: a PhD with a JD, and two years of veterinary training

Table 2

Age of Participants (in years)

Participants	20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	over 50	Total
Number	-	5	5	10	-	1	1	22
Percentage	-	22.7	22.7	45.5	-	4.55	4.55	100

Data Collection Instrument

Participants were invited to participate in the study by a letter in e-mail form introducing the purpose of the study (See Appendix A). If the participants agreed to complete the online questionnaire, they consented by clicking on a URL (uniform resource locator) at the bottom of the message, which led them to the survey (See Appendix B). The respondents indicated brief demographic information such as age, highest degree earned, marital status (and length of status), current household income, and other characteristics. In addition, individuals responded to items related to the objectives of the study by addressing questions regarding their career and family goals while obtaining their education, their motivation for choosing to stay at home, how they felt about their choice at the time of the study, and their future plans about family and working outside the home to pursue a career.

The validity of the questionnaire was established by having three professors in the area of family studies review the questionnaire for content and structure. The researcher also conducted a pilot study with a voluntary participant who met the criteria of earning a bachelor's degree and staying at home with her own children for at least a period of 1 year. This individual provided feedback to the researcher regarding the process of using the web-based data collection, the survey format, and similar items. No changes were made from the pilot study format to the final version of the questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was not easily tested due to the qualitative nature of the study. However, the questionnaire's basis on previous studies (DeSimone, 2001; Granrose and Kaplan, 1996; and Stone, 1987) allowed for increased reliability.

Procedure for Data Collection

Permission to conduct research with human subjects was obtained from Eastern

Illinois University's Institutional Review Board. Participants were told that their

responses would be kept confidential in the letter inviting them to participate in the study.

The researcher reassured the participants that they were free to discontinue their

participation at any time if they felt any discomfort. Once respondents consented to

participation by clicking on the survey link, they were able to directly type their

responses into the online questionnaire. The researcher was able to then download the

collected data onto a personal computer for analysis.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a qualitative approach based on the work of Strauss and

Corbin (1998) to analyze data. Data analysis began with a detailed line-by-line

investigation of the data to produce initial categories. This process, called microanalysis,

also helped to indicate relationships among the data. The open coding process was used

to systematically specify how reoccurring concepts were related to one another. The

researcher then continued with hand-coding recurring themes through the process of axial

coding. This involved "relating categories to their subcategories, termed "axial" because

coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties

and dimensions" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 123). The resulting themes were based on

concepts found by labeling specific words and phrasing participants used within the

context of their responses. The creation of these themes enabled the researcher to reduce

the number of units to be reviewed.

In using this form of data analysis, the researcher hoped to uncover common themes in the experiences of stay-at-home mothers. The researcher read and analyzed the participants' typed responses using categorization and proceeded to file the formed groupings, based on analogous concepts and themes found in participants' descriptions, experiences, and explanations. Additionally, it was expected that the results pointed to an array of motivations for mothers making the choice to stay at home with their children and that the data analysis revealed various categories of future plans regarding work and family. The researcher also anticipated some unexpected themes to be revealed in the data analysis, which were not directly identified in the questionnaire items.

Chapter Four

RESULTS

The current study's results yielded a demographic picture of the participants in addition to an in-depth look at the circumstances surrounding their motivation for becoming a SAHM as well as their expectations and experiences about their role.

Participants' Work Experience

Demographic data were gathered that allowed for a full picture of participants' work life before staying home with their children. Participants described their work life in a variety of ways. Twelve (54.6%) of the participants worked for 5 years or more in their career or field prior to staying home with children, while 36.4% worked between 1 and 4 years. One woman did not work prior to becoming a SAHM, and one woman worked less than 1 year. Half of the women earned less than $30,000 at their last job before becoming a SAHM. Nine participants (40.9%) earned between $30,000 and $60,000 prior to staying home. One respondent indicated earning between $60,001 and $90,000 and one participant earned between $90,001 and $120,000. Eight of the participants indicated working in the field of education. Other areas in which respondents worked included accounting, human services, marketing, nursing, natural resources, and neuroscience research. The woman who did not work in her field before becoming a SAHM had her daughter during her third year of law school. The time since the participants left their careers while being a SAHM varied between 1 to 2 years ($n = 9$, 40.9%), and 5 years or more ($n = 8$, 36.4%).

Children

Almost half (n = 10, 45.5%) of participants had two of their own children living in their home during their time as a SAHM. Five (22.7%) participants had one child during their SAHM experience, while the same number had three children. Two mothers (9.1%) indicated having four children during their SAHM experience. Nearly 60% (n = 13) of respondents were stay-at-home-mothers for children of both sexes. Three mothers indicated having only a girl or girls, and six mothers (27.3%) indicated having a boy or only boys. Only one participant indicated having two step-children in the home. Twelve participants (54.5%) indicated having children of various ages from birth to 5 years old during their time as a SAHM. Eight participants (31.82%) indicated having multiple children under 10 years old, and one respondent noted the ages of her three children as 11, 9, and 6 years old. One participant was currently a SAHM of a 7-year-old.

Household Characteristics

All participants indicated that they were in a heterosexual marriage at the time of the study. Fifteen (68.2%) of the participants designated their current status as a SAHM, while the remaining participants (n = 7; 31.8%) indicated that they were previously a SAHM. One participant indicated a current approximate annual household income less than $30,000, while four participants (18.2%) indicated an annual household income between $30,000 and $60,000. Eight (36.4%) of the respondents had annual household incomes between $60,001 and $90,000. Two participants indicated approximate household incomes higher than $90,001 and less than $120,000, and just under one third of participants (n = 7, 31.8%) indicated approximate annual household incomes greater than $120,000.

Future Goals During Education

The study asked participants to think back to the time when they were completing their last degree and to describe the plans they had regarding family and their work outside the home (See Appendix B). Participants were prompted with questions such as, "Did you plan a time frame in which you wanted to start a family?" and "How would you describe your career goals at that time?" Data about timing, intentional career objectives, and specific plans to be SAHM emerged from these replies.

SAHM plans. Responses within this aspect of the study varied a great deal. Nine respondents stating specific plans or desires to be a SAHM. Four participants expressed either that they had never considered being a SAHM, or simply had intentions of working outside the home after having children. The remaining participants did not express specific plans about work and family life while obtaining their educations, however a majority of participants expressed plans for ideal time frames or ages in which they wanted to start a family.

Timing. Similar to Stone's 1987 study in which 91% of participants reported beginning their families when they did because it was the "right time," several women in the current study indicated specific plans about when they wanted to start having children. For instance, some participants named a specific age in which they expected to have children. Also comparable to Stone's study, respondents discussed financial readiness prior to having children, although one participant in the current study acknowledged that financial stability might never realistically happen for some families. Financial goals and career objectives gave some women specific intentions about working prior to becoming a mother. Many participants discussed plans to wait a general

length of time (at least a few years) before they started a family so they could work in their field.

Intentional work plans. Some participants expressed clear objectives about contributing to their professional field and their own work goals before starting a family. For instance, one woman stated the following:

> I did intentionally pursue various work and travel goals knowing that I would be choosing to stay home with my children. I was able to do many exciting things and did work a lot of years before having our first child so I am an older mom. My main goal was to apply my education and work experience and make a difference in my work settings. I also wanted to lead my own group or department. I kind of sought out leadership positions. I wanted to do as much as I could from workload to traveling personally and professionally as I could.

Typically, participants who named a specific time frame in which they desired to work as they anticipated contributing between three to five years to their careers prior to staying home with children. Although most of the participants expressed some type of career plans, each of them was able to describe the reasons behind their transition into stay-at-home motherhood. In addition to other objective questions about their expectations of stay-at-home parenting, their experiences while being a SAHM, their significant other's contribution to their experiences, and their future plans about work and family life, participants responded in various patterns to the motivation behind their SAHM stage of life.

Motivation

Three major themes arose from the participants' descriptions of their motivation for staying home with children. Specific parenting objectives, personal provisions (such as work preference and financial circumstances), and alternate care options emerged as the major divisions in the participants' choice to pursue stay-at-home motherhood.

Parenting Objectives

Three common categories were constructed from the data regarding parenting objectives in relation to the decision to pursue stay-at-home motherhood. These categories included parental role modeling, moral and religious values, and the importance of early childhood development.

Parental role modeling. Multiple participants explained that their own mothers had been a SAHM, and expressed the value they placed in having that experience. One woman had this to say about the choice she and her husband made for their own children:

> My mom and my husband's mom were both stay at home moms. J. and I had decided before we were ever married that that would also become my role once we had children. … It just seemed very natural for us for me to take on the role of being a stay-at-home mom.

Another participant shared this response about being the child of a SAHM, "Also, my mom stayed home with us and I have such special memories of that. She was a great role model for me although I have done some things very differently from her." While these women drew from their experiences of having a SAHM role model, others expressed a strong desire to be a role model to their own children as a SAHM.

Moral and religious values. Similar to the study by Vejar, Madison-Colmore, and Ter Maat (2006), many participants mentioned spiritual or religious motivation for their role as SAHM. Several participants expressed that they ideally would be the main spiritual teacher in their children's lives. Even if the participants did not express specific religious faiths or denominational beliefs, many respondents noted that both they and their husbands felt it was crucial that their children had their own parents as a moral example from which to learn. Two mothers expressed that they felt it was God's plan for them to be a mother and a wife. Others noted overcoming infertility challenges and attributed their life as a SAHM as a celebration of that miracle. Participants made mention of the specific quantity of time spent with their children, such as this mother who noted, "We want them to share our values and beliefs. The only way they can inherit those things is through spending time with us. You can have good conversations with your children, but they really learn more from watching us." Respondents frequently mentioned their children's ability to learn specific values from their parents, especially while young.

Early childhood development. Participants discussed the value that they and their spouses placed on the early stages of development in children, specifically of children under 5 years old. Many participants (and their spouses) felt that the early years of a child's life are the most impressionable and they expressed desire to be an integral part of those formative stages. In addition to being intimately involved with children's early development for the child's sake, multiple participants cited their own desires for closeness during this time.

Personal Provisions

Responses contained many similarities in the areas of the respondents' individual interests and ideas about family life. The categories of motherhood ideology and personal preference along with financial circumstances formed the theme of personal provisions.

Motherhood ideology. Some mothers expressed intense sentiments about the role of a mother. For instance, one mother noted, "I believe that motherhood is one of the most fulfilling things a woman can do with her life and I want to give my job as a mother as much of my energy as possible." Other mothers articulated similar feelings, however some came across slightly less strong. According to Hattery (2001), these mothers shared alternative motherhood ideology, yet those participants who communicated intensive motherhood ideology accordingly had less likelihood to participate in the maternal labor force. Therefore, it was fitting that the mothers who noted this strong sense of mothering had intentional plans to be a SAHM. One participant, who saw her husband overcome testicular cancer, expressed that, "life is too short to devote to work completely. I totally understand women who need that work ethic in their life, but in my life I found out way too quickly that anything can happen…" Other respondents discussed either being distracted at work by a desire to be at home with their children, or the inability to contribute wholeheartedly to their careers. One mother mentioned the inflexibility of her work to accommodate the time she needed to devote to her child.

The actual time that mothers spend with children was associated with this sense of mothering. Several participants described desires to be closely involved with activities such as observing a child's "firsts," volunteering in school classrooms, taking children to playgroups and other activities, and events that many mothers working outside the home

would be unable to attend during the day. A majority of women mentioned how family finances corresponded with the provision of these personal aspirations.

Financial circumstances. In terms of the motivation for mothers to stay at home, eight mothers mentioned that their arrangement had been well worth not working outside of the home. A few noted that the family was able to live off of one parent's salary alone, and some had even planned to do so. For instance, "We were at a point where we were able to live on just my husband's salary. Once we figured it all out with my income, we were only making about $5,000/year. We felt we could make a few sacrifices..." Many participants explained that it made the most financial sense for their families if they were SAHMs. In particular, some women who worked in the human services field noted that their incomes would hardly cover the costs associated with work, especially childcare.

Alternative Care Options

The third theme set forth by the data related to alternative childcare (not provided by the parents). Parents opposed to childcare outside of the home (not provided by a family member), and the lack of alternate care options, emerged from this theme regarding motivation to become a SAHM.

Opposed to childcare. Half of the participants discussed either direct concern with placing their children in a daycare setting or concerns with childcare that was provided outside of the home or by someone other than a family member. Two participants noted that external childcare was not an option for their children due to the child's special needs, or other circumstances, while the child was young. Two participants described their own direct experience working with daycare centers and discussed the low wages and occasionally low levels of education that contribute to poor quality care in some

childcare settings. Many mothers were apprehensive about finding both quality and affordable childcare. Multiple participants simply stated they did not want someone else "raising" their children, while others again discussed the financial strains that childcare would place on their family.

Lack of alternate care options. In addition to the difficulty of finding quality, affordable childcare, some mothers indicated that being a SAHM was their only viable option. A few mothers described living long distances from relatives or friends who could help to provide childcare. Motivations for educated mothers to stay at home encompassed a vast array of categories in the current study, from parenting goals to personal circumstances. Examining the actual experiences of educated SAHM in contrast with their expectations about their decision revealed a more in-depth picture of the lives of educated stay-at-home-mothers.

Expectations and Experiences

Overall, in-depth data analysis revealed that participants' experiences about their role as a SAHM related to their expectations in specific ways. A few individuals briefly replied without elaboration that their experiences as a SAHM had met their expectations. Most of the participants went into great detail about the particular ways in which their experiences have exceeded their expectations or proved challenging in unexpected ways. Data were analyzed to reveal repeated concepts that existed between the responses. Four themes developed including the concept of time and its relation to the role of SAHM, the role of SAHM as hard work, unanticipated benefits of being a SAHM, and the personal needs of the SAHM.

Time

The theme of time was repeated in various ways in both the participants'
descriptions of their SAHM experiences, and their responses regarding how their
experiences related to their expectations. Primarily, respondents described how busy they
felt during their daily lives. Additionally, individuals expressed various feelings about the
quantity of time spent with their children.

Busy SAHMs. Several individuals expressed the involvement of their daily lives.
Although some mothers described activities as mundane tasks (such as household chores
and diaper changing), many participants also depicted ways in which they found
themselves occupied that they had not anticipated, including time spent with their
children and time outside of the home. For instance, this participant expressed:

> The thing I didn't know is that when people hear you are a stay-at-home mom,
>
> they ask you to be on every committee there is. And it's hard to say "no" because
>
> on paper, you have all this free time. Since staying home, in addition to various
>
> ongoing commitments, I have been Vacation Bible School director two years and
>
> served on our school's PTA board for the last four years. One of my friends said
>
> 'we're not stay-at-home moms. We're professional volunteers!'

Several participants discussed participation in activities through which they could be
directly involved with their children, such as play groups, field trips, and similar
activities.

Quantity of time with children. Throughout their responses, participants described
varying thoughts about the amounts of time spent with their children. A majority of
individuals described the appreciation they felt for the actual quantity of one-on-one time

they were able to spend, especially during their children's early development. One participant did state that quantity did not necessarily translate into quality time. Participants experienced situations, such as illness and temperamental issues, that they identified as challenges. This mother pinpointed the concept of time devoted to the work of being a SAHM:

> I enjoy being able to interact with her on a daily basis. I love watching her develop, and I firmly believe that our close relationship has benefited her. Of course being home has been very challenging. My job is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If I'm sick, I still have to be her mother. I can't just take the day off.

A majority of respondents specifically described the fulfillment they received in their work as a SAHM.

Working as a SAHM

Data revealed several relationships between participants' expectations and experiences regarding work as a SAHM. As with the concept of time, individuals gave in-depth responses regarding the busyness of their daily lives because of their work as a SAHM. Additionally, several participants mentioned that their role was not only filled with work, but the fact that being a SAHM was *hard* work, as did this participant, "While staying at home is a blessing, it is also a job. I work hard to provide my son with educational and social activities, and manage our home without losing sight of my own personal development."

Contrast with previous employment. Some participants specifically noted that being a SAHM is not only the hardest work they have done, but made a point to contrast it with their previous employment outside of the home:

I personally found working outside the home to be much easier. I would leave our

son with my husband or my mother and not worry about him for the rest of the

day. I was able to network with other professionals, actually eat lunch, and wear

clothing free of spit-up.

Again, this participant compared her work as SAHM to work outside the home:

I enjoyed my work outside the home before I had children tremendously, and I

enjoy my time at home with my kids even more. (I never got bear hugs and

snuggles at work, and although I had great reviews and enjoyed respect and praise

at work, I never had someone tell me, "You're a genius!" for showing them how

to make finger puppets.)

Making finances work. Several participants discussed the work they put in to

balancing finances during their time as a SAHM, just as Millner (2007) and

Shellenbarger (2006) discussed the financial strains that being a SAHM can place on a

family. Some participants described avoiding "frills" such as eating out, enhanced

television, and paying for multiple expensive camps or activities for children. Many

responses included making due with "hand-me-downs," thrift shop purchases, and

coordinating one vehicle to put off buying a new car. One woman described her work in

learning to become more resourceful since she had previously been the primary

contributor in terms of paychecks and benefits. Just as this participant had attributed the

advantage of her resourcefulness to her work as a SAHM, other participants described the

benefits they felt arose due to their SAHM experiences.

Unanticipated Benefits

Similar to Rubin and Wooten's (2007) study, data regarding the benefits of being a SAHM were found throughout the responses to the current study. Participants explained how their role as a parent had been enriched by their experiences and described how they felt they had experienced personal growth.

Parental benefits. Individuals discussed how their children benefited from the fact that they were SAHMs, such as this mother who identified that, "my children would not have been as academically ready if I had not stayed home." Yet many participants focused on benefits of being a SAHM that enhanced their parenting ability. A few responses indicated feelings that the role of SAHM actually allowed them to be less stressed than if they had tried to balance motherhood and work outside the home. Other individuals specified that they were more patient and felt greater resourcefulness for having been a SAHM.

Personal benefits. Some participants described a personal sense of achievement due to their role as a SAHM. For example, "I feel that being a full time mom has made me a stronger more resilient woman and I feel proud of having achieved my goal of breast-feeding the entire first year." A number of respondents expressed satisfaction of achievements due to thorough planning and stringent financial goals. Several women described growing more spiritual and closer in relationships to both God and their spouses. A few participants specifically mentioned how their SAHM experience contributed to their marriage, yet acknowledged that their work can be draining and present personal challenges.

Personal Needs of the SAHM

        Data analysis led to relationships in expectations and experiences relating to the personal needs of the SAHM. Many participants thoroughly described the need for connection, networking and social support to combat feelings of isolation, loneliness, and the desire to interact with other adults. Several of these individuals described joining play groups to benefit both their children and themselves. A number of responses described SAHM groups used to share experiences, and even to share childcare at times, as in this example:

        I joined a weekly playgroup. That has been wonderful - the moms chat and the kids play at the park or gym. The kids make friends and so the moms. Another challenge is getting to MY appointments - doctor, hair, dentist, etc. But some of us moms will watch the others' kids while we do these things.

Another participant expressed the importance of making connections with life outside of home:

        I think having a strong social network of both working and non-working peers helped greatly. Not only to make sense of what I was going through, but also to keep me connected to the "outside world". Sometimes as a stay at home parent it is easy to lose yourself in your role and suddenly realize you have not cultivated your identity outside of being a parent.

Several other participants mentioned searching out support groups with other educated SAHMs. Some individuals mentioned relying on support from family members and the majority of participants explained the support they receive from their spouses.

Contribution by Significant Others

All of the participants indicated that they were married at the time of the study. Each individual described how their husbands contributed to their experiences as a SAHM. A majority of the respondents depicted positive support from their spouse, while only a few discussed challenges.

Supportive Spouse

A majority of the participants in the current study not only discussed ways in which they felt their spouse contributed to their own role as a SAHM, but specifically described their husband as supportive. Many individuals described the decision to leave the workforce as mutual and explained that their spouse expressed the fact that they feel the situation benefits their children and family. A number of women noted husbands who took a very active role by sharing the household and childcare responsibilities when they were not working outside of the home. One woman described this egalitarian approach, "Our thoughts are this: he goes to work and works very hard all day with his job. I do the same with my job... in the evenings we try to share all of the responsibilities of the children together." A few participants described more gender-traditional roles, in which their spouses tended to tasks such as yard work, while they were mainly responsible for household chores and childcare. Still, a participant who described such a situation also explained this type of support from her husband:

> [He] encourages me to meet with my girlfriends for Bible study each week with my girlfriends, for "mom's night out" once a month, and for my book club once a month. When the kids were younger he was encouraging of my desire to join MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) and our group met twice a month.

Six individuals made particular note of the financial ways their husbands made it possible for them to be a SAHM, including taking on extra work responsibilities or working overtime. Whether or not individuals described traditional gender responsibilities, some did note a few challenges.

Spousal Challenges

Some women noted difficulties in their role as SAHM in relation to their spouse. Two women stated that their husbands felt pressure at being the sole breadwinner in the family. One participant mentioned that her spouse had difficulty understanding the needs of very young children and how that could prevent her from keeping their home orderly. Another individual stated that her husband was not very involved with their child during her first year as a SAHM, which contributed to her stress level. Another participant expressed that although her husband was supportive with the children and as a good provider, she would have benefited from his help with work around the house.

Future Plans

Analysis revealed a common theme in the data regarding SAHMs plans or stages of life after the period of being a stay-at-home mother. A majority of the participants described intentions to pursue some type of part time work, or a flexible work arrangement, while a few depicted other scenarios.

Flexibility and Part Time Work

Of the mothers who were SAHMs at the time of the current study, seven expressed plans to pursue part time work in the future. Most of these participants anticipated waiting until their children were school-aged to re-enter the workforce. Respondents also expressed a desire for flexible work arrangements that would

accommodate the importance they placed on at least knowing their children's whereabouts after school, if not being directly involved in their care and activities. Several participants reflected their desire for their work schedules to accommodate their children's school day. Four individuals had returned to part time work at the time of the study. One of these participants described this as, "the perfect situation."

Full-time Work and Other Plans

A few women had returned to full time work at the time of the study. One participant expressed that she was "thrilled to be back," but admitted that it was a difficult decision, due in part to the fact that her husband had incurred an illness that made it necessary for her to work outside of the home. Another participant, who was a mother of adult children, stated that she returned to work after her children were in college.

Three respondents expressed no specific plans about returning to work or continuing to be a SAHM. Three participants who had very young children at home expressed a desire to continue being a SAHM, especially if they had more children in the future. Two of these mothers noted they would consider at least part-time work when their children started school, if they did not have more children at the time. Only one participant expressed regret about her decision not to return to full time work, "Had I stayed in teaching I would be established there and I think that would be satisfying to me however I would make the same choice over again." A respondent who had earned a master's degree expressed her thankfulness at various options:

> I plan to continue my current course as part time work/part time stay at home mom until I feel the kids can stay by themselves or until an opportunity comes

along for more full time work that I just can't pass up. Until then I am content. I

feel fortunate that I have chosen a field that can allow me to be versatile.

Two participants mentioned the intent to pursue additional education or their plans to

keep their skills and certifications current if they did decide to engage in paid

employment.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION

Review of past and current literature has established that educated mothers'

decisions whether to stay at home with children or work outside of the home have been

discussed for decades. Today many women who have obtained higher educations feel

they have a choice about whether or not they remain in the workforce after starting a

family. Though these choices have primarily been covered in the media as a phenomenon

of highly educated and professional women (Armas, 2003; Pollitt, 2006; Sawyer, 2006;

Stahl, 2004; Story, 2005; and Woosley, 2005), data from the current study suggest that

educated mothers of varying demographics have chosen to be a SAHM (stay-at-home

mother) at some point in time.

Prior to the current study, scholarly research on the subject of educated mothers of

any socioeconomic level was scarce. Only a few academic studies attempted to present

insight on highly educated, professional women choosing to become SAHMs (DeSimone,

2001; Rubin and Wooten, 2007; Stone, 1987). In the current study, the researcher chose

to implement participant criteria that would not only be meaningful for the purpose of the

study, but also would allow for a reasonably obtainable sample within the researcher's

resources of time and qualitative methodology, similar to Vejar, Madison-Colmore, and

Ter Maat (2006). For instance, the minimum educational level for participants in the

current study was a bachelor's degree, as opposed to a graduate degree. The researcher

anticipated this condition would allow a larger percentage of the educated SAHM

population to participate in the study. In 1987, Stone's study required participants to have

a master's degree and have worked in their field, which the researcher presumed was an

indication of a career-oriented outlook. The current study did not make the same assumption.

In contrast to previous studies regarding highly educated SAHMs (DeSimone, 2001; Rubin and Wooten, 2007; Stone, 1987), a bachelor's degree was the highest level of education obtained by the majority of participants in the current study. Similarly, the professional work in which the participants were engaged before becoming SAHMs encompassed a variety of fields such as human services, teaching, and nursing, in contrast to other studies that have focused on educated women in the highly trained fields of law, medicine, and prestigious business professions.

This difference is significant because data analysis of the current study revealed that some participants pursued higher educations with the intent of becoming a SAHM (nine participants indicated as such). The current sample of educated mothers who indicated plans to be a SAHM included some women who had earned undergraduate level educations and a few who had earned master's degrees (the two individuals who indicated education higher than graduate level did not indicate plans to stay at home). Thus, the findings are noteworthy due to the fact that educated mothers at various levels of higher education and professional status are pursuing stay-at-home motherhood. Therefore, continued study that is inclusive of SAHMs from all backgrounds is pertinent and meaningful, including further investigation of the motivation educated mothers cite for staying home.

A theoretical approach was used as part of the researcher's qualitative data analysis for the current study. This comprehensive investigation of the motivations, expectations, and experiences of educated SAHMs led to a theoretical depiction of the
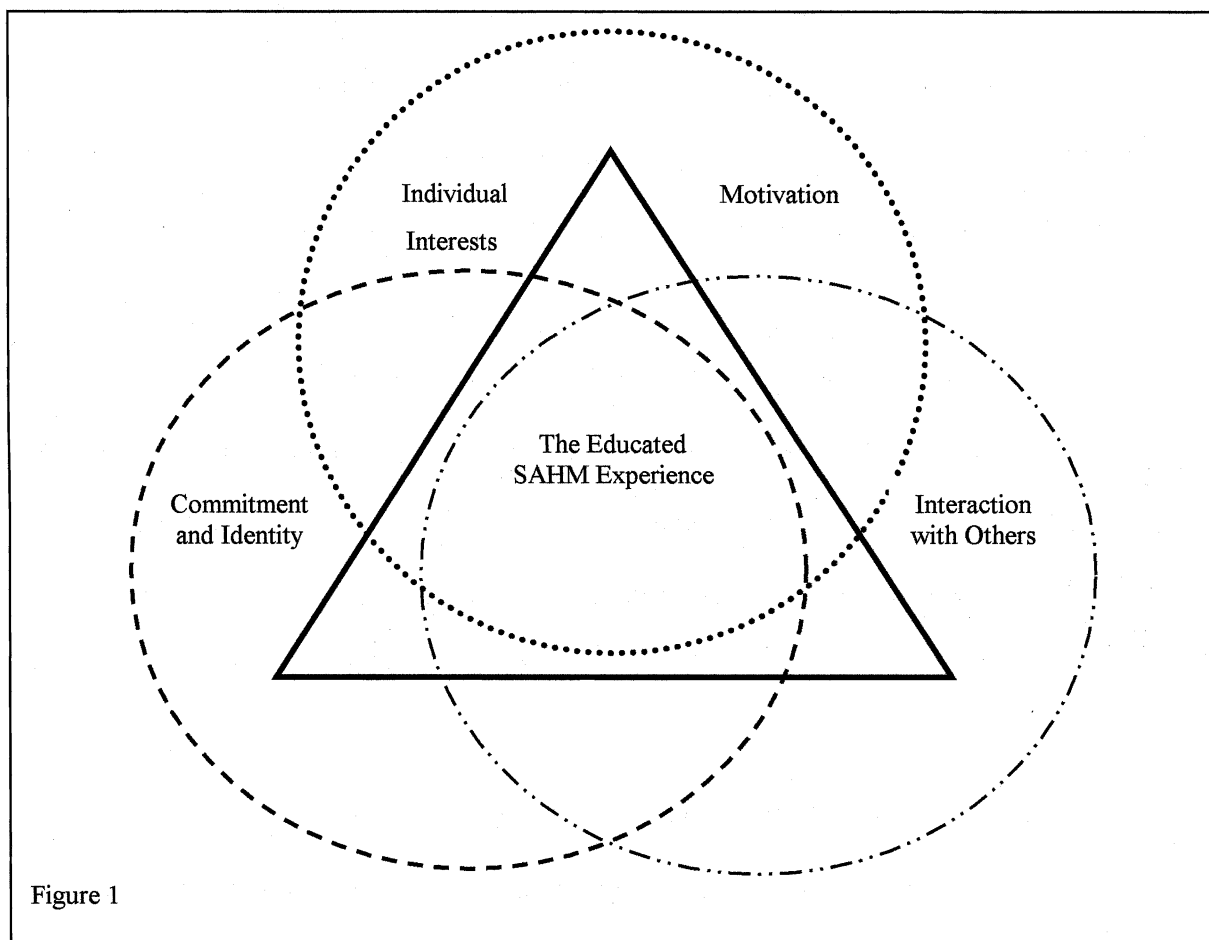
data, which may be applied to the future study of educated SAHMs. The resulting concepts were based on previous theories and how they relate specifically to families. These theories included symbolic interactionism and social conflict theories of the family (Boss, Doherty, La Rossa, Schumm, and Steinmetz, 1993). This family theory approach was distinctly different from DeSimone's (2001) previous study on educated full-time SAHMs, in which the researcher based a theoretical model on social role theory. DeSimone's analysis established relationships between the SAHM participant, their societal role, and how guilt and spousal support impacted role conflict. The current model depicts the decisions and experiences of the SAHM as a member of a family, and particularly, that family within society.

Vejar, Madison-Colmore, and Ter Maat (2006) also proposed a SAHM model, however the current model varies in two distinct ways. Primarily, the previous SAHM model was solely based on the data and experiences from participants in that particular study, as opposed to previous social or family theories. In addition to its theoretical basis, the current model also focuses on the particularly *educated* SAHM in the context of family and society and therefore does not apply to personal experiences of all SAHMs. So as not to express influences on the educated SAHM experience in terms of chronological time, the model extracted from the current study is depicted in overlapping spheres as opposed to a solely linear representation.

Educated SAHM Model

The researcher used a theoretical model developed with the data in the current study to present why educated mothers choose to stay at home and how their experiences and expectations impact their decision to stay at home (see Figure 1). The model has four

concepts including: 1) individual interests as a motivator for staying home; 2) the

relationship of commitment and identity as an educated SAHM; 3) the impact of

interaction with others on the SAHM experience; and 4) the interplay of the former three

concepts on the educated SAHM. The following section presents conceptual definitions

about each concept and assumptions that further define how they relate to the educated

SAHM.

Figure 1

Individual Interests

      The concept of individual interests that motivate educated mothers to stay home

relates to the fact that individuals have developed beliefs, feelings, and assessments based

on their interaction with others, and these beliefs affect behavior.

Assumption 1. An educated mother's interests and self-concept can be influenced by certain values and beliefs about parenting. This statement contributes to *why* educated mothers may choose to stay at home. For instance, several participants in the current study noted specific goals about their experience of staying home, especially during their child's early development. Furthermore, some of the participants who indicated plans to stay at home also had anticipated what their role as an educated SAHM would be like, including expectations that at-home parenting would be rewarding and fulfilling.

Assumption 2. Educated mothers from similar backgrounds may develop similar "individual" interests and ideas about motherhood. For example, several participants in the current study valued their own mother's role as a SAHM and wanted to emulate that experience.

Assumption 3. Educated SAHMs evaluate options and assess that it is best for both them and their families to stay at home. Though motivations to stay home in the current study varied from parental goals and personal interests to financial sense and lack of alternate care options, all participants concluded that it was best for them and their families to stay at home at the time of their decision.

Commitment and Identity

The concept of commitment and its relation to identity focuses on the fact that educated SAHMs invest in how they maintain their own self-meaning.

Assumption 4. Whether or not an educated mother planned to stay at home while obtaining her education, her identity as a SAHM becomes salient during her SAHM experience. Participants in the current study described the consuming nature of their SAHM experience and consequently identified themselves by their role as SAHM.

Assumption 5. Educated SAHMs are very committed to their role. Whether or not participants in the current study indicated plans to return to their career fields at some point in time (or if they already had), their descriptions of the hard work of a SAHM illustrated their dedication to the educated SAHM role. A majority of individuals described the hard work, busyness, and even some financial sacrifices that they endured during their time as a SAHM.

Interaction with Others

The SAHM's experience is significantly impacted by interaction with their children, support from a significant other, and reliance on social networking.

Assumption 6. The quantity of time spent with children is of great significance in the educated SAHM experience. Data from past research and the current study revealed that SAHMs express the importance of the amount of time they are able to spend with their own children. While participants indicated that quantity had not always translated into pleasant, effective, or quality time, most participants articulated the value of being with their children and giving their children the confidence that they are directly available to them.

Assumption 7. Contributions by the educated SAHM's significant other impact the SAHM experience. While most participants in the current study expressed financial, emotional, and task-oriented support by their spouses, some explained that lack of help from their husbands created challenging circumstances. In either type of situations, the interaction of the SAHM's significant other contributes to their experience.

Assumption 8. It is necessary for a SAHM to rely on some means of external social support. In the both current study and previous research, educated SAHMs have

continually expressed reliance upon networking with other SAHMs or social groups. This occurs for several reasons including the sharing of common experiences with those in similar situations and opportunities to maintain the SAHM's personal identity and interests.

Triangular Influence

The final concept depicted by the Educated SAHM model is encompasses the interplay of the three previous themes and illustrates the interaction of the motivation to stay at home based on individual interests, the SAHM's commitment to their role and the identity they associate with it, and the contribution that interaction with others makes to the SAHM experience.

Assumption 9. The reasons educated mothers enter into stay-at-home motherhood, and the experience of how they give meaning to that role is impacted in three major ways. These include how individual interests, beliefs, and assumptions contribute to the SAHM's identity and their commitment to and how the experience in their role is impacted by interaction with their children, significant others, and external social support.

This last assumption (that of the interplay between multiple influences on the motivation and experiences of the educated SAHM) hypothesizes the importance of the entire theoretical model because it identifies not only why the educated mother may make the choice to stay home, but also how her decision impacts her own identity the lives of others around her. Foremost, the educated SAHM's family and children are impacted by this decision. Additionally, the individual woman's course of life is also affected by her decision, as well as the society in which her family lives. This occurs not only by the

experiences she encounters in her role as SAHM, but also because of the impact she makes upon her children and her ability to share her experiences with others.

Theoretical Basis

To best gain insight about the basis for and significance of the model derived from the current study's data analysis, it is useful to examine how the researcher drew upon grand family theories to develop the educated SAHM model.

Role and Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism holds perspective that roles are in a constant state of dynamic development, not static place holdings that are determined by society. People form their own sense of roles through interaction with others and the "process of mutual interpretation" (Rosenblatt and Fischer, 1993, p. 168). Appropriate qualitative analysis of the current data continually returned to the meanings that educated SAHMs give to their own role. Examples of this included participants viewing their role as busy, hard work. For some mothers, this included an extraction of meaning from their own motherhood ideology as it applied to their daily experiences of raising their own children while staying home. Furthermore, symbolic interactionism posits that all interaction emerges from the meanings that people lend to events experiences in their own lives. Individuals are able to assemble various identities within their role (Boss, et al., 1993) such as the participants in the current study.

Commitment and Identity

Social interactionism identified commitment and identity as primary variables that impact roles and performances such as that of an educated SAHM in the current study (LaRossa and Reitzes, 1993). This interpretation differs from the notion that factors such

as efficiency, energy, and time are motivators for educated mothers to stay at home with their children. The latter understanding relates to data in the current study of the few mothers who identified lack of other care options and the fact that staying home made the most financial sense for their family. The former assumption that commitment and identity (related to specific parenting objectives and motherhood ideology) is also linked to the social conflict perspective in which individuals (SAHMs) are generally motivated to act on their own interests, whether or not these interests are in accordance with the larger social perspective or greater societal good (Farrington and Chertok, 1993).

Social conflict theories, as applied to families, have presented this latter belief. The idea that educated mothers may choose what is best for themselves and their families as a specific point in time supports data that whereas some mothers who have pursued higher educations choose to remain in the workforce and contribute to their professional fields during motherhood, participants in the current study were motivated to pursue stay-at-home motherhood. For example, these mothers found importance in being closely involved with their children's early development, imparting spiritual and religious values, and living out their concept of motherhood, especially during a child's early developmental years. This not only contributed to their identity as a mother, but also exemplified how their self-interests varied from other groups of educated mothers who had different desires, such as utilizing their education and training to contribute to their professional fields. This mirrors the idea in social conflict perspective on the family that explains how different individuals (educated mothers) and groups (families) may have very different, and even contradicting agendas, values, and interests (Farrington and Chertok, 1993).

Both symbolic interactionism and social conflict theory as applied to the family within society lend a theoretical basis for the current model. With this graphical representation the researcher has presented the relationships between multiple influences on the motivation and experiences of the educated SAHM which postulates why the educated mother may make the choice to stay home, but also how her decision impacts her own identity the society in which she lives.

Limitations

As with most qualitative studies, the current research is not generalizable to the entire population of SAHM, or even educated SAHM. However, data from the 22 participants provided an illustration of the complexity and richness of the experience of several educated SAHMs and allowed for the researcher to explore the data in terms of a SAHM model. Researcher bias is also of concern in qualitative analysis, so in the current study, it is possible that the researcher made inferences that did not reflect what the participants truly think and feel. A limitation that may have contributed to this was the online nature of the questionnaire, which prevented the researcher from probing for more in-depth responses or being able to ask for clarification to the participants' statements.

Implications for Further Research

Future studies regarding educated SAHMs should examine the role the participants' education played in their views of stay-at-home-parenting, with particular investigation of parents whose educational backgrounds are in fields such as child and human development, teaching, and social services. Additionally, the inclusion of data collected from the educated SAHM's significant other and children can only add to the richness of responses obtained from the participants in the current study. The assimilation

of other family members' perspectives would enhance the model of the educated SAHM and shed light on the SAHMs interpretations of their own experiences.

Conclusion

Finally, this exploratory study has led to the development of a theoretical model regarding the motivations, expectations, and experiences of educated SAHMs. Only a few academic studies have explored highly educated SAHMs, and these have mainly focused on aspects such as conflict, role, and guilt (DeSimone, 2001; Rubin and Wooten, 2007; Stone, 1987), whereas the current research focused on reasons why educated mothers choose to say home and how they view their experiences. In distinction from the SAHM model proposed by Vejar, Madison-Colmore, and Ter Maat (2006), the current data focused specifically on educated SAHMs and was developed by the amalgamation of grand family theories. Symbolic interactionism lent the ideas of commitment, identity, and interaction to the current model. Social conflict theory, as it has been applied to families, has noted the importance of individual interests. Three major concepts were developed that explain the reasons educated mothers enter into stay-at-home motherhood and the experience of how they give meaning to that role. These include how individual interests, beliefs, and assumptions contribute to the SAHM's identity and their commitment to and how the experience in their role is impacted by interaction with their children, significant others, and external social support. These concepts, combined with themes revealed in qualitative data analysis of the current study, led to the integrated picture of the SAHM experience.

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APPENDIX A

Subject: Graduate Study: Educated Mothers Staying At Home

Questionnaire: Educated Mothers Staying At Home

Dear Participant,

I am currently a graduate student in the School of Family and Consumer Sciences at Eastern Illinois University. I have received your name from a "snowball" technique, by asking a small group of people if they know mothers who might fit the criteria for my graduate study. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study about the motivation, expectations, and experiences of well educated stay-at-home mothers. This study linked on the bottom of the page should only be completed by women who meet the following criteria:

1) Earned a minimum of a bachelor's degree before staying home with children;
2) Stayed at home with their own child(ren) for a period of at least one year while not working outside of the home.

It is not necessary that participants are currently stay-at-home mothers, only that they have met the above criteria at some point in time.

Please be assured that all the information you share will be kept confidential. Without the thorough collection of this personal information, my graduate research would not be possible. However, please do not hesitate to halt participation if you should feel uncomfortable at any time. The questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes complete. Please let me know if you have any questions about the process. You may contact me via email at abeyersdorf@eiu.edu. Please submit your responses to this survey no later than Friday, June 27, 2008.

Contact Information:

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By clicking the link below you agree to participate and provide informed consent for this study.
http://www.eiu.edu/~cats/LCBAS/mlmeadows/abeyersdorf/survey.php

Appendix B

Questionnaire: Educated Mothers Staying At Home – Summer 2008

Dear Participant, I am currently a graduate student in the School of Family and Consumer Sciences at Eastern Illinois University. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study about the motivation, expectations, and experiences of well educated stay-at-home mothers. This study should only be completed by women who meet the following criteria: 1) Earned a minimum of a bachelor's degree before staying home with children; 2) Stayed at home with their own child(ren) for a period of at least one year while not working outside of the home. It is not necessary that participants are currently stay-at-home mothers, only that they have met the above criteria at some point in time. Please be assured that all the information you share will be kept confidential. Without the thorough collection of this personal information, my graduate research would not be possible. However, please do not hesitate to halt participation if you should feel uncomfortable at any time. The questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes complete. Please let me know if you have any questions about the process. You may contact me via email at abeyersdorf@eiu.edu. Please submit your responses to this survey no later than Friday, June 27, 2008. Contact Information: Adrienne L. Riegle - Graduate Student, Eastern Illinois University School of Family and Consumer Sciences: abeyersdorf@eiu.edu. OR: Dr. M. Meadows, Associate Professor: 217-581-6349, mlmeaodws@eiu.edu.

Section I: Demographic Data - Please choose the closest answer to the following questions:
Age

- ○ 20-25
- ○ 26-30
- ○ 31-35
- ○ 36-40
- ○ 41-45
- ○ 46-50
- ○ older than 50

Highest Degree Held
Please indicate the highest degree you obtained before being a stay-at-home mother.

- ○ Bachelor's
- ○ Masater's
- ○ PhD
- ○ Post Doctoral
- ○ Other (Please Specify)

Highest Degree Held
If you chose "Other" for the previous question, please specify here.

[   ]

Work History
Approximately how long did you work in your career/field prior to staying home with children?

○ I did not work outside the home prior to having children.

○ less than 1 year

○ 1-2 years

○ 3-4 years

○ 5 years or more

Work History
In sentence form, please briefly describe your work history since completing your most advanced degree in the space below, including 1)Your work experience prior to becoming a stay-at-home mother, and 2)When you stopped working outside of the home and (if currently employed)when you started again.

Work History
Please indicate the approximate salary of your last job prior to becoming a stay-at-home mother: (Please check one).

○ less than $30,000

○ $30,000 - $60,000

○ $60,001 - $90,000

○ $90,001 - $120,000

○ more than $120,000

Work History
If you have stayed or are currently staying home with children, how long has/had it been since you left your career/field?

○ less than 1 year

○ 1-2 years

○ 3-4 years

○ 5 years or more

Current Information
Are you presently a stay-at-home mother? (Please select one).

○ Yes

○ No, I was previously a stay-at-home mother

Current Information
Are you currently married?

- O   Yes
- O   No, I am divorced
- O   No, I am a widow
- O   Other (please specify)

Current Information
If you chose "Other" in the previous question, please specify here.

Current Information
What is your current approximate Annual Household Income?

- O   less than $30,000
- O $30,000 - $60,000
- O $60,001 - $90,000
- O $90,001 - $120,000
- O   more than $120,000

Children – Please indicate the appropriate responses for the present or for when you were a stay-at-home mother.
Number of own children presently living in the home (or how many lived in your home while you were a stay-at-home mother).

- O   1
- O   2
- O   3
- O   4
- O   5 or more

Children
Ages of children living in the home during your time as a stay-at-home mother.

- O   less than 1 year old
- O   between 1 and 3 years old
- O   between 3 and 5 years old
- O   5 years old and over
- O   multiple ages under 10 years old
- O   other (please specify)

Children
If you chose "Other" in the previous question, please specify here.

Children
Sex of children living in the home:

○ boy(s) only

○ girl(s) only

○ both girl(s) and boy(s)

Children
If any, number of step-children living in the home:

○ none

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4 or more

Section II: This study will examine why educated mothers stay at home with their children, experiences while not working outside the home, and their future plans when their children are older. In sentence form, please respond thoroughly to the following items, to the best of your ability. Please use as much space as you need to complete your responses.

Think back to the time when you were completing your last degree. Please describe the plans you had regarding family and your work outside the home. (i.e. Did you plan a time frame in which you wanted to start a family? How would you describe your career goals at that time?)

Please describe your motivation for staying home with your children. Include any factors you feel are relevant, such as personal, familial, etc.
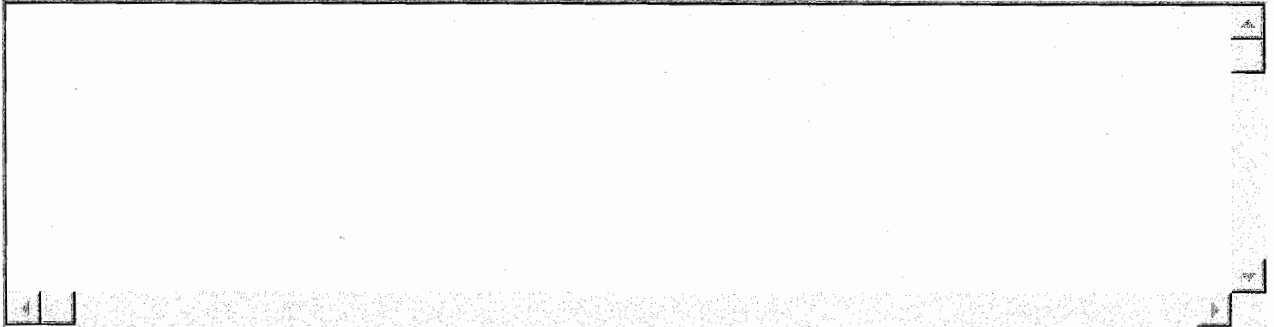
How would you describe your experience of being a stay-at-home mother? Please be as descriptive as possible, including any benefits and/or challenges you may have experienced.
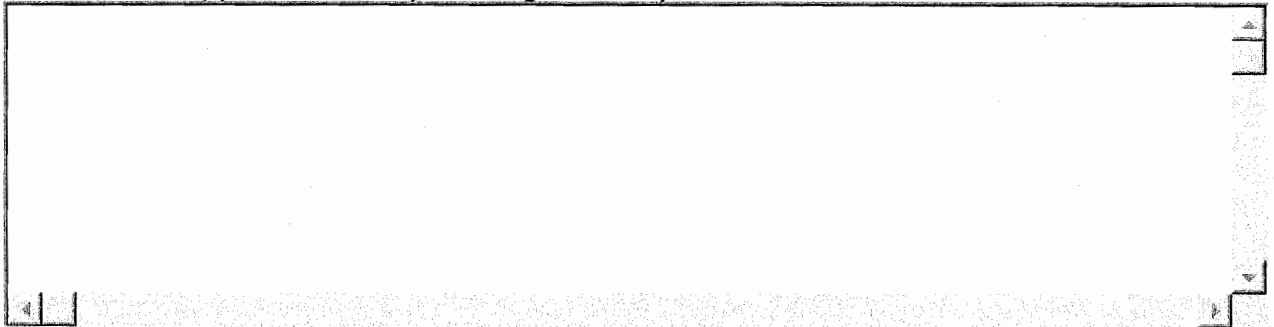
How have your experiences been similar to, or different from, your expectations about being a stay-at-home mother?

Please briefly describe how your spouse or significant other has contributed to your experience as a stay-at-home mother.

Please describe what future plans you have for yourself in terms of work and family life. If you were previously a stay-at-home mother and are now currently employed or no longer have children at home, please describe your thoughts about your current situation.

Again, thank you for your time and participation in this study. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential. If you would like to be notified of the study results as they become available, please notify the researcher via email at abeyersdorf@eiu.edu.