FIERCE MAMAS: NEW MATERNALISM, SOCIAL SURVEILLANCE, AND THE
POLITICS OF SOLIDARITY

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ABSTRACT

Ashley A. Mattheis: Fierce Mamas: New Maternalism, Social
Surveillance, and the Politics of Solidarity
(Under the Direction of Kumarini Silva)

This dissertation elucidates how motherhood functions as a site for both women's agency

and as a barrier to women's solidarity within patriarchal culture. This research demonstrates that

motherhood—as a set of discourses and practices—provides a mechanism for maintaining

cultural hegemony and clarifies the processes through which dominant culture manufactures the

consent of mothers via their quotidian experience. Constructions of motherhood, as mechanisms

of cultural hegemony, work to hold tension between 'traditional' gendered norms and the

seeming enablement of women's 'progress.' It is a tension that is essential to the adaptability of

systems of dominance in response to shifting socio-cultural norms and discourses because it

allows for the recuperation of social hierarchies across time in new configurations. To illustrate

these processes, this dissertation defines and explores the development, practice, and effects of a

contemporary communicative strategy that I describe as "fierce mothering." Fierce mothering is

a gendered communicative practice whereby mothers articulate their subjectivity—speaking

selves—by using fierce imagery either animal figures or as warriors (e.g., Mama Grizzlies,

Moms Rising, Tiger Mothers) on behalf of their children. Fierceness, in this strategy, is used to

frame a maternalist ethos such that the authority of the speaker is invoked through references to

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the instinctual, inborn expertise and knowledge that only mothers possess. This research shows that the practice of fierce mothering works as an agentic strategy enabling some mothers to negotiate for and with power, so long as they reproduce culturally hegemonic—white, Western, Christian, hetero-patriarchal—social structures.

The project begins with my theoretical development of "cultural infrastructure" as a lens for exploring the longstanding, but historically contingent, utility of motherhood—as a set of social, cultural, political, and economic discourses and practices—for enabling specific groups of mothers to better navigate daily living. Following this I provide a history of the fierce mothering phenomenon and situate fierce mothering as a US political ideal. I then conduct three analyses exploring fierce mothering practices—as a strategic form of gendered communication, as an online mediated phenomenon, and through representative portrayals in popular televisual media—to critically assess their effects. Crucially, I show that utilizing fierce mothering as a strategy requires women's assent to patriarchal structures thus also constraining the scope and effectiveness of such 'mother power' in line with dominant norms. The project concludes with a brief mapping of the worst implications and effects of fierce mothering, as it is currently developing, which are showcased through its adaptation for use by mothers engaged in the growing and interrelated extremist cultures of #TradWives, the Alt-Right, and the QAnon conspiracy online to promote white supremacy and racial hate. This mapping is followed by a discussion of how fierce mothering's problematic features and role in manufacturing consent to cultural hegemony can be resisted.

To my mom, Terry Whitfield-Mattheis, who taught me that to make change, first I must

accept my part

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And, this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.

Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider

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PREFACE

In the summer of 2003, I don't remember the exact date, I got a phone call from my mom. She sounded distraught. She blurted out, "Your eggs are getting old!" Now I can be a bit naïve sometimes, and at this moment her meaning was opaque to me. Confused as to her concern, I responded, "Mom, how do you know when I bought my eggs?" Exasperated, she said, "No I just saw the news and your eggs are getting old!" It finally dawned on me what she actually meant. My ova, as in human eggs, were aging out; I was twenty-six at the time. Bemused, I said "Mom, I think I have a good ten years left in me at least. I love you. I will talk to you later" and ended the call. I could relate many more vignettes about discussions of my status as 'not-a-mother,' particularly ones including my mother. But suffice it to say, this conversation and the many other comments, discussions, and arguments about my becoming a mother left a mark particularly as I remain a 'not-mother' whose eggs are now definitely 'old.'

This moment, however, is foundational to my interest in studying how and to what extent women use motherhood as a framework for negotiating with and for power. It seemed to me then, and still seems to me now, that whether my mother ever realized it, there had to be deeper reasons than having a grand baby that led her to want me to be a mother. Was it to validate her life choices? Was it a way to connect specifically through an experience 'only women' can share? Was it to prove that she had done a good job; raised her daughter right? Was it a way to stay in the game of women's hierarchy, especially given that her older sister was a grandmother twice over and she was lagging behind? Certainly, she wanted me to experience what she saw as the full range of life and love that comes with having children; with being a mother. Of that, I

have no doubt. But it was also more complex than that, and the stuff of that complexity is something we as a society, and as women rarely talk about unless it is to point out how mean women are to one another. This is a situation that confounds me. Why can't we talk about the power embedded in being a mother among women?

My concern with motherhood, then, is with its functional role in reproducing systems of power. How motherhood acts as a site through which women negotiate with and for power and through which they come to support and reproduce systems of dominance. This concern stems from my personal experiences with not-mothering and the effect of that choice on my interactions with other women: on my mother's identity and as a basis for the feedback I receive from friends—usually mothers themselves—about that choice. Such feedback, often emotionally charged, has been a regular facet of my relationships with so many women that I love and care about and who love and care about me. It peaked from my late-twenties through my mid-thirties, although it still happens now in my early forties. Frustrated by the disciplinary function of these messages even when offered lovingly, I want to understand why it is so important that I make the choice these women made; that I too enter the world of motherhood. Why does my rejection of a social role seem to also be a felt as a rejection to them? Moreover, what is the relationship between my rejection of this social role and the social location I occupy as a white woman raised in a middle class family? Would I receive the same set or a different set of disciplinary messages if I occupied a different social location? How are such messages representative of attempts to ensure the 'proper' social order?

From a historical standpoint, political claims rooted in (white, middle-upper class) motherhood—maternalist claims—have been the most successful political claims US women have made. This includes maternalist political approaches used in both anti-feminist and feminist

agitation. Why are they successful? And what is the tradeoff women must make for that success? Power works best when it is hidden. What happens when it is exposed? In this project, I seek to explore the workings of power within and around motherhood as a construct, in discourse, and through practices. I do this not to censure women who have found and taken power through motherhood, but rather to ask what do women give up in using that power and how does that shape their relationships with other women?

INTRODUCTION: FIERCE MAMAS

"As women came to be seen as the primary childrearers, motherhood often came to be viewed as a powerful vehicle through which women wielded broad social influence"

Ruth H. Bloch

Motherhood has been and is variously described and studied as a social institution, as a kinship relation, as a form of gendered labor, as a form of intimate gendered experience, and as a touchstone of popular culture in media across a broad range of disciplinary areas (Kawash 1-36). The very range of approaches to thinking about motherhood indicates that it is an important social position enmeshed within a broad range of social functions. At its root, motherhood as a construct relies on a supposedly homogeneous social imaginary of mothering and its associated practices as if they are uniformly knowable facets of human living. This means that the notion of motherhood offers a pretense of shared meaning when, in reality, its meaning is diffuse, nebulous, and widely variable. This conceptual character of motherhood—as seemingly consistent while actually nebulous—allows it to be deployed as both a problem and solution to many of the most important and contentious issues in political, social, economic, and cultural discussions. This same character also often positions the normalized assumptions which give the construct of motherhood power—such as its naturalness, women's desire for mothering, a mother's love, care, and concern—as beyond the scope of criticism. This is problematic given the utility of the construct for society and women themselves in negotiating power within US culture.

I focus in this project on how motherhood acts as a site where structures of dominance linked to identity—whiteness, patriarchy, heterosexuality, Christianity, and citizenship—are reproduced. From this vantage point, motherhood as a set of ideals, discourses, and practices is a site through which women can be—and historically have been—divided along axes of difference (such as race and class) which are then used to mobilize and persuade mothers to support and participate in the reproduction of structures of dominance. In practice, this includes mothers' transmission of norms about race, class, and gender to their children as a primary vector of socialization. Importantly, but perhaps overlooked, this also includes women's own behaviors and practices as they enact the social role of "mother" in society and with other women. Key to the way such participation reproduces structures of dominance is unmarked whiteness, embedded in the concepts of motherhood, mothering, and mother. This unmarked whiteness can be understood as a gendered, white epistemology—way of knowing the world—that permeates ideal constructions of motherhood, mothering, and mothers.

To a certain extent, then, this project seeks to explore how motherhood functions to maintain cultural hegemony, "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Gramsci 145), to better understand the processes through which dominant culture manufactures the consent of women via their quotidian experience. When viewed this way, it becomes clear that the multiform of motherhood—its simultaneous formation as an institution, a geo-spatial organizing method, a patriarchal bargaining tool, as sets of discourses, as well as individual practices—provides a mechanism to address the socio-cultural need for women to support dominant social hierarchies to ensure their continued existence. Moreover, motherhood as a mechanism of cultural hegemony works to hold tension between 'traditional' gendered norms

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and the seeming enablement of women's 'progress.' It is a tension that is essential to the adaptability of systems of dominance in response to shifting socio-cultural norms and discourses because it allows for the recuperation of social hierarchies across time in new configurations.

In the contemporary moment, motherhood—as a site for such recuperation—manufactures consent through a cooptation of seemingly 'feminist' discourses including notions of 'women's empowerment' bound up in "new maternalist" framing that positions women's social authority as stemming from their capacity to bear and rear children (Mezzy and Pillard 242). Here 'women's empowerment' is tied to women's ability to reassume 'traditional' gendered roles which are predicated on inherently white, middle-upper class, Christian hetero-patriarchal norms. Moreover, it is presented within neoliberal frames which pose such a return through the notion of individual choices predicated on 'love' and 'care' that correspond with specific tenets of "Intensive Mothering" norms (Hays 8). This repackaging of women's empowerment through 'traditional' motherhood, ultimately, works against notions of gender equality and the aims of feminism (Mezzy and Pillard 242).

A recent example of how mothers' consent to structures of dominance is manufactured practically, even as it may seem instead to be 'disrupting' dominant norms including white supremacy, is provided by the emergence of the 'Wall of Moms,' a group of mothers who began taking part in Black Lives Matter protests in Portland, OR. The protests that the Wall of Moms engaged in were a response to the murder of George Floyd by police in Minnesota, MN on May 25, 2020. The Wall of Moms protesters did not join the protests for more than 50 days but felt compelled to participate after federal agents were shown on television and social media using 'undemocratic' and violent, 'black ops' style intimidation tactics against protesters (Blaec).

On July 17, 2020, the group of moms came together through a *Facebook* post to a

working moms' group by the founder (who identifies as Mexican American), calling for moms

to show up to the protest "dressed in white, 'to help build the wall of protection for the

protesters'" (as qtd in Blaec). There were initial discussions by some members of the group of

mostly white women about following the leadership of two person of color let groups—Back

Lives Matter and Don't Shoot—who had organized the protests and already been on the 'front

lines.' And, although the Wall of Moms founder said she had forged connections with those

groups, the issue remained contentious. The 'Moms' ended up donning yellow and labelled

themselves clearly as 'moms' to be easily visible to both protestors and law enforcement in their

effort to provide a protective force. The moms mobilized their 'protection' by standing in the

breach between the protesters and federal and local law enforcement who were regularly using

tear gas, 'non-lethal' weapons, and other methods of attempting to quell the protests (Dickinson,

Lang). It is important to note, whether the moms planned it or not (this is unclear), the choice to

wear yellow and label themselves as mothers on their clothing, ostensibly to be easily visible,

created a public performance of maternal care that could be leveraged if, and when, law

enforcement used harsh tactics against the 'Moms.'

The Wall of Moms made the national news as did their counterparts the (also

predominantly white) "leaf blower Dads," who used high-powered garden equipment to help

resist gassing (Donato). The 'Moms' went viral and rapidly (the Dads were paid less attention by

and large) and more Wall of Moms groups began to form across the United States via *Facebook*

and other social media platforms. However, solidarity with the original protest organizers

continued to be a problem. Soon, "it imploded, very publicly, amid accusations of anti-Blackness

and that the original Black Lives Matter message had been abandoned by its founders" (Blaec).

A primary issue, out of many, with the group was anti-Blackness among some of the white

mothers and non-black founders. This included the centering of white moms' bodies in the

protests and in media interviews in spite of black moms' long-term participation in the prior 60

days of the protests, a lack of historical understanding of black moms' community organizing, as

well as disputes over fundraising and developing Wall of Moms into a 501c3 non-profit (Blaec).

The larger point is that a group of mostly white, middle class moms wanted to help with a

progressive campaign, but many felt they could (and should) step into an ongoing socio-cultural,

economic, and political movement with a several hundred years-long history without knowing

anything about that history or anything about the movement's practices. Even in cases where

white moms were more aware of and vocal about this history, the potential for media to focus on

white women was broadly overlooked. This can be seen in one white woman's sign claiming,

"All mothers were summoned when George Floyd called out for his Mama" (as qtd in Spalding).

While the woman meant to show solidarity and self-identified as an 'ally,' the sign whitewashes

the long history of white women (including mothers) as a primary foil for and as participants in

the lynching of black men, women, and children (Wells 70-76). As one black woman on *Twitter*

using the handle @ztsamudzi, noted: "The affective power of the mothers' group singing

lullabies and standing before the police relies on white women's innocence and the [sanctity] of

white motherhood as its driving force. It's like, appropriating the discursive/social/political

potency of the 14 Words for good" (as qtd in Blaec).[1] This is a set of power relations that white

women participate in as mothers, which they are specifically socialized to both accept and ignore

(Lorde 118). Thus, in leveraging their mother-power, even in support of a progressive cause,

white mothers reproduced a historical structure of racialized and classed dominance, even as they

were not uniformly aware that it existed.

The history of motherhood debates in the US similarly shows a pattern of using motherhood discourses as a specific framework for culturally hegemonic processes that rework and constrain progressive ideas and rhetorics with the effect of recuperating structures of dominance through gender. This pattern is characterized by notions of progress and return where dynamic change is held in tension with the stability of tradition (Hemmings 2-5). This pattern is not immutable but takes up historically specific forms over time. Two examples of this pattern include discourses of motherhood used in debates over Woman Suffrage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and in debates over breastfeeding in the late 1950s through the 1970s.

Woman Suffrage was a primary factor in the late 19th - early 20th century iteration of this pattern. One inflammatory set of discourses in the debate over Woman Suffrage was about potential negative impacts on the family. These arguments were presented in a series of popular anti-suffrage postcards disclosing the emasculation of husbands forced to care for their own children, often figured doing the washing, as mothers selfishly went out into the public sphere to vote (Addams). Perhaps the most well recognized anti-suffrage postcard, known as the "Male Madonna," (actually titled "Suffragette Madonna") figures a father holding up and bottle feeding an infant in swaddling clothes with a laurel leaf halo (Palczewski 367). Here we can see a similar, albeit reversed, framing of 'love' and 'care' as maternal roles which women seeking the vote were supposedly rejecting. In parallel with this argument about emasculation, opponents of Woman Suffrage, particularly conservative women, utilized narratives of maternalism—women's elevation through their specialized roles as mothers—as their framework for rejecting the vote (Beecher 44-46). Moreover, to secure the 19th amendment's passage, white suffragists agreed to racist limitations on non-white women's suffrage, consequently undercutting many black, indigenous, and Asian suffragists who fought with them (Oppenheimer). Ultimately, black

women's suffrage was not fully secured until the Civil Rights Movement and the passage of the 1964 Voting Rights Act.

In the second example, debates over breastfeeding babies in the late mid-century through the 1970s were characterized by women's rejection of the ideals of Scientific Motherhood (a belief that good mothers listened to doctors and experts) in favor of what Jessica Martucci has called the "ideology of natural mothering" (116). As far back as the turn of the century, and through World War II, doctors and public health officials had rejected breastfeeding in favor of 'scientifically' produced infant formula as the best model of infant nutrition (113). This scientific framing developed in relation to changing lifestyles including increased urbanization during the industrial revolution which coincided with a large wave of immigration to the US. While the interacting factors are complex, the shift to bottle over breast was seen as scientifically supportive of public health primarily among immigrant, poor, and non-white mothers (113). By the late 1920s and 1930s, this shift to bottle feeding was particularly supported in relation to psychology, which proscribed a move away from maternal sentimentalism common to the prior era because it was viewed as harmful to a child's developing psyche. In the Post-War period (1943-1965) a grass roots network of mostly Catholic, white, middle-upper class women began sharing information on 'natural' mothering and breastfeeding (117). They specifically developed maternalist arguments that incorporated the developing scientific frameworks supporting 'natural' health but paired these with a redevelopment of "moral" mothering frameworks (121-22). Thus, the natural mothering movement straddled a frame of return in its uptake of instinctual maternal expertise as part of their argument. Scientific frames of good mothering, however, were not fully challenged outside this enduring grassroots perspective until the 'natural mothering'

movement and feminist agitation intersected through their interests in promoting anti-medicalization framing that was part of The Women's Movement in the 1970s.

These two examples provide insight into a historical pattern of using motherhood discourses to manufacture women's consent to culturally hegemonic norms, structures of dominance, and their related institutions. The effects of this consent, however, do not solely reproduce gendered hegemony. Instead, the effects are multiple across a variety of structures of dominance—race, class, sexuality, citizenship, etc.—given that these structures are mutually constitutive and reinforcing. This overlapping nature of structures of dominance is what Kimberlé Crenshaw coined as "intersectionality" ("Demarginalizing" 139-140) and Patricia Hill Collins described as the "matrix of domination" (34). Intersectionality as a paradigm of inquiry helps point to the simultaneity of structural and individual relations bound together in the application of culturally hegemonic forces. Patricia Hill Collins describes the simultaneity of multiple, intersecting relations via their 'domain' of action saying:

> Individual biographies are situated within all domains of power and reflect these interconnections and contradictions. Whereas the structural domain of power organizes the macro-level of social organization with the disciplinary domain managing its operations, the interpersonal domain functions through routinized, day-to-day practices of how people treat one another (e.g., micro level of social organization). Such practices are systemic, recurrent, and so familiar they often go unnoticed. Because the interpersonal domain stresses the everyday, resistance strategies within this domain can take as many forms as there are individuals (287-88)

When viewed from an intersectional lens, motherhood works to recuperate structures of domination through individual mothers' practices because it is a mechanism which can also be used to manufacture women's consent to and promotion of macro structures of dominance.

This project takes an intersectional paradigm as its grounding by asking how women's use of motherhood discourses works to provide agency to some women, exclude some women,

prevent solidarity between women, and help to recuperate multiple structures of domination

through gendered discourses and practices. To address these questions, I bring together several

literatures including those from Gender, Feminist, and Black Feminist Theory, Media and

Cultural Studies, Rhetorical Criticism, Feminist Informatics in Science and Technology Studies

(STS) and Motherhood Studies.

Situating 'Fierce Mamas' within Multiple Literatures

Research on motherhood, mothering, and mothers comprises a vast body of scholarship

across a wide variety of disciplines. This project can be situated within a body of feminist

research exploring motherhood's functions within patriarchal social structures. This includes

Adrienne Rich's book *Of Woman Born* (1976), an exploration of motherhood as a patriarchal

institution and its impacts on gendered roles and experience. Rich works to disentangle what she

describes as the dual nature of motherhood encompassing the relationship between the individual

experience and the institutional function. Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* (translated

to English 1953), includes her discussion of how marriage and motherhood guide socio-spatial

organization in ways that prevent women's ability to access equality and solidarity. Connected to

this discussion is Deniz Kandyoti's (1988) work on "patriarchal bargains" which explicates how

women enact agency within different forms of patriarchal structures (275).

Along with work exploring motherhood's function in patriarchal systems, is work

detailing the historical development of women's roles in the US, particularly through their

capacity as mothers. Such work includes Lori Merish's book *Sentimental Materialism* (2000)

which explicates the development of US women's liberal democratic subjectivity as it was

constructed through 19th century commodity culture and sentimental literature. This work

provides historical grounding and context for understanding how gender (and motherhood) are

used to manufacture consent, recuperate structures of dominance, and provide hegemonic cultural ideas that have historical legibility in the US. Ruth Feldstein's *Motherhood in Black and White* (2000) also explores the development of US liberalism through representations of motherhood from the Great Depression era through the mid-1960s. Here Feldstein traces discussions of race and gender in the US during the post-war years through depictions of good and bad motherhood. Hence, research exploring histories of US mothering ideals—how 'correct' motherhood is figured in discourse during different eras—is essential as a counterpart to the study of liberalism as it is constructed through gender.

Foundational research in this area includes the work of Linda Kerber (1976) and Rachel H. Bloch (1978). They explore Republican era Moral Motherhood arguing that the development of motherhood ideals assists in women's political socialization and early maternalism provides mothers with a mechanism of social influence in the US. Barbara Welter's (1996) work on "True Womanhood" provides insight into how "Moral Mothering" frames developed further after the period characterized by the of the patriotic maternal responsibilities of the Republican Mother. Welter specifies the tenets of later "Moral" approaches to gendered roles and maternalism embedded in "Cult of Domesticity" logics (1966). Research by Ann Braude (1997) and Tracy Fessenden (2002) explores how discourses about women's morality in American religious milieus shaped gender role debates and were used by women as a framework for engaging in the public sphere. Rima D. Apple (1995) who outlined the tenets of "Scientific Motherhood" in her research on how constructions of good mothering were shaped by increasing medicalization. The most recent foundational research comes from Sharon Hays (1996), who poses the concept of "Intensive Mothering" to characterize contemporary idealizations of mothering practice, and the

Intensive ideal figure of the mother, as a framework responsive to women's mass movement into the labor force (8).

This project also sits alongside literature about maternalisms, that not only discusses maternalism as a concept, but also engages with mothers' uses of maternalism—primarily in social movements—throughout US history. In their seminal text on maternalism, "Against the New Maternalism," Naomi Mezzy and Cornelia T. L. Pillard (2011) provides a feminist legal analysis of the negative impacts of maternalism, as used by mothers and mothers' groups that I have identified as participating in the gendered communicative phenomenon of 'fierce mothering' where fierce motherhood subjectivities (e.g., Mama Dragons, Moms Rising, Tiger Mothers) are used to frame a maternalist ethos by referencing to the instinctual, inborn expertise and knowledge that only mothers possess. Due to fierce mothering's reliance on maternalist framing, this project engages with authors exploring the history of maternalism as a concept including Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (2013) in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States.* In a specifically US based exploration, through *Mom*, Rebecca Jo Plant (2010) explores the demise of 'Moral Mothering' through anti-maternalist sentiments that enabled the rise of new maternal ideals that developed from the late 1920s through mid-century. And *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* through which Elizabeth Gillespie McRae (2018) shows how white mothers' utilization of conservative maternalism in the Jim Crow South promoted "Lost Cause" mythologies and reinforced the political and material effects of white supremacy.

As with Gillespie McRae's approach, this project also draws from scholarly work on race, and critically assesses how whiteness is reproduced through motherhood. Moreover, the project draws from black feminist work on intersectionality, women's agency within structures

of dominance, and white women's role in reproducing structures of dominance. Of particular import are explorations of the differential experience of women and its effects on the development of solidarity between groups of women such as Audre Lorde's work in *Sister Outsider* (1979), which explores the ways that differences between women are exploited by patriarchal systems to maintain dominance. Moreover, Lorde's work explicates how such systems seduce women into complicity by promoting identity-based antagonisms grounded in race, class, sex, ability, religion, and citizenship. bell hooks work in *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) and *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984). I draw particularly from hooks' discussions of the need for understanding women as agentic actors within systems of dominance and the role of white women in maintaining racial hierarchies in the US. Most recently in this literature, Stephanie Jones-Rogers (2019) scholarship in *They Were Her Property,* which addresses long standing historical gaps and erasures of white women's direct participation in the practice of slavery and cultures of white supremacy.

This project is situated within works exploring intersectionality through a focus on explicating the differential effects of structures of dominance as they are (re)produced systemically and experienced individually. Moreover, this project attends to and seeks out that which is erased through dominant narratives, i.e., which women's histories, knowledges, experiences must be displaced for dominant narratives, knowledges, and experiences to retain their power. Following from multiple scholars including Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991, 1996), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Nira Yuval Davis (1997, 2011), Leslie McCall (2005), Ange Marie Hancock (2007, 2014), Michele Tracy Berger and Kathleen Guidroz (2010), and Vivian May (2012, 2015), this project attempts to present the complexity of motherhood as a culturally hegemonic socio-cultural mechanism for reproducing the matrix of domination (Collins 18). I

draw specifically from McCall's and Hancock's discussions of how researchers can utilize intersectionality in my methodological approach.

Other important black feminist topics for this work include research on how race, racialization, and racism structure daily life and practice. Patricia Hill Collins' (1996) discussion of black motherhood in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, is an important context for this project as it draws from research on race as a structuring frame for maternal experience and epistemology. This also includes work such as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's (1992) explication of race as a meta-language, Jessie Daniels (2008) work critically exploring how whiteness is reproduced through mainstream feminism online, and Inderpal Grewal's (2012) work on the racial structures linking security and motherhood discourses.

This project is also situated among literatures within Cultural Studies and Sociology on the formation of subjectivity and identity as relations of power. Within this literature Foucauldian and Gramscian frames are most closely related. Importantly, my project aligns with conceptualizations of identity and subjectivity as unstable and formed through discourse. Stuart Hall (1996) takes up the discursive formation of identity and specifically ties this construction to historical representations for production of identity in the present where subjectivities are "temporary attachments" or articulations of the subject into the flow of discourse (4). Chris Weedon's (2009) work on the relationship between subjectivity and identity similarly grounds them in discourse but sees subjectivity and identity as modes of performance people enact until they are experienced as natural. Also important within this literature is Kumarini Silva's (2016) development of the concept of "identification" as a framework for understanding how structures

code individuals and groups in ways that allow power to be applied through protective national discourses.

Narrowing in on the subjective development of femininity, and feminism's impacts on identity culturally, this project draws from theorizations of "post feminism" from Angela McRobbie (2009, 2014), the related "enlightened sexism" from Susan Douglas (2010), and "intimate publicity" from Laurent Berlant (2008). I draw from McRobbie and Douglas' discussions on changing attitudes toward feminism and femininity to understand how feminist languages become coopted in frameworks aimed at undoing feminism itself. To this, I add Berlant's discussion of "intimate publicity," and its focus on sentimental women's culture and the female complaint to describe 'fierce mothering' as a form of women's culture online that recuperates a traditional, culturally hegemonic form of maternal femininity as women's proper civic role.

Along with these literatures I also draw from feminist Science and Technology Studies (STS) and feminist Media Studies scholarship. From research on STS, I focus on the literature on infrastructure to explore my development of the concept of cultural infrastructure as a framework for analyzing motherhood in patriarchal societies. This exploration is indebted to the work of Nicole Starosielski (2015) in, *The Undersea Network,* specifically her discussion of the relationship between telecommunication technologies as dynamic, and infrastructures as traditional, which I draw from to discuss the relationship between motherhood ideals and women's navigation of quotidian (everyday) life (10-22). I also draw from Ara Wilson's (2016), "The Infrastructure of Intimacy, which conjoins scholarship on infrastructure and intimacy as a framework for understanding and analyzing social and cultural organization. I also draw from Brian Larkin's definition of infrastructure in *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban*

Culture in Nigeria (2010), as a model for thinking about how infrastructures move ideas as well as material goods. Additional work in this literature that applies to the conversation are discussions of categorization, systems, and stabilization from Susan Leigh Star (1990) as well as the utility of infrastructural breakdown and its visibility in Lilly Nguyen's (2016) discussion of techno-politics in Vietnam for thinking through cultural infrastructure in relation to differential experiences of motherhood and access to maternalism.

Because public debates over motherhood, mothering, and mothers, are primarily waged through popular cultural media, this project also draws from Feminist Media Studies literature on motherhood, particularly in film and television as well as mothers' use of online media. Much of this work focuses on how media shape discussions of and beliefs about contemporary motherhood, mothering, and mothers. This includes works such as Ann C. Hall and Mardia J. Bishop's edited collection, *Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture* (2009), and Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels review of mediated representations of motherhood since the 1970s in describing what they coin as "the new momism" in their book *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it Undermined Women* (2004). Rebecca Feasey's research in "Good, Bad or Just Good Enough: Representations of Motherhood and the Maternal Role on the Small Screen" (2017) and *From Happy Homemaker to Desperate Housewives: Motherhood and Popular Television* (2012), provide a 'deep dive' into how situation comedy, as a televisual genre, impacts popular beliefs and ideals about mothers. This project is also situated in relation to literature exploring women's and mothers' online engagements, such as work in the anthology *Cupcakes Pinterest and Lady Porn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century* (2015) edited by Elana Levine explores how femininity works as a niche market in contemporary digital media environments, a discussion

that overlaps with fierce mothering's incorporation of femininity and post-feminist logics. Furthermore, this project can be situated within a new but developing literature that critically explores the reproduction of whiteness through gender online including Jessie Daniels' *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights* (2008). A prime example of such work in relation to motherhood specifically is Charity L. Gibson's research in "Enacting Motherhood Online: How Facebook and Mommy Blogs Reinforce White Ideologies of the New Momism" (2019) which explores how whiteness and intensive mothering are embedded in and shape moms' online communication.

On Methods and Terminology in this Project

This project is guided by intersectional theory as a feminist paradigm of inquiry to describe fierce mothering. While fierce mothers' areas of interest are different on the surface, this phenomenon has a defined set of characteristics which are consistent across the various articulations of motherhood subjectivity: 1) the use of fierce imagery—either animal figures or figurations of mothers as warriors on behalf of their children—to suggest maternal care as a basis for women's public dissent; 2) each is associated with a political issue, but the strategy itself is used across the political spectrum; and 3) they are embedded within a contemporary framework of maternalist ideology—a new form of US maternalism incorporates both the rhetorics of traditional maternalism, morality and sentimentality—with feminist languages of women's empowerment. Importantly, from an intersectional perspective, fierce mothering as a new maternalist practice and a gendered communicative strategy is often politically useful, but ultimately works against the goals of gender equality (Mezzy and Pillard 232-35).

Using an intersectional paradigm of inquiry necessitates attention to how fierce mothering, as a communicative strategy, leverages dominant structures enabling some mothers'

agency while also reproducing multiple, intersecting axes of difference with both structural and individual effects. My methodological approach is rooted in feminist cultural criticism to conduct textual analyses of discourses of motherhood as they are used in relation to fierce mothering practices.

I begin my study with my theoretical development of cultural infrastructure as an analytic frame and a description of the development of fierce mothering subjectivities. I follow this by analyzing fierce mothering from three different positions to provide a robust study of its communicative effects. To complete these analyses, I employ methods drawn from cultural-rhetorical criticism and feminist media criticism depending on the aspect of fierce mothering being studied (methods for each analysis are specified in the detailed chapter descriptions below). Cultural-rhetorical criticism incorporates aspects of both critical cultural analysis and rhetorical criticism to assess how the cultural context and rhetorics of a phenomenon interact to produce specific material effects (Scott 349-50). I use a critical cultural-rhetorical approach in chapter three of the project to show that fierce mothering is a strategic response by mothers to contemporary demands and expectations of mothers. As a strategic response, it tactically deploys subjectivity paired with fierceness to generate a new mode of gendered communication. The analyses in the chapter combine a critical cultural analysis of the shift to subjectivity with an analysis of how this shift to subjectivity utilizes constitutive rhetorics to produce fierce mothers as a public within the digital sphere.

Feminist media criticism comprises critical approaches to the analysis of media, technologies, and gendered mediated effects, particularly of popular cultural forms (television, the Internet, popular music, etc.). In chapter four I perform critical feminist media analysis of how mothers practice fierce mothering in online contexts and its effects both positive and

negative. And, in chapter five I perform a critical feminist media analysis of how televisual

media have incorporated the fierce mothering phenomenon into programming in the situation

comedy genre in ways that not only reflect it as a trend, but also in ways that reinforce the 'right'

response by mothers.

All of these analyses incorporate close readings of primary texts, including blog posts,

tweets, memes, websites, videos, and television episodes, as well as critical theoretical analyses

of their effects. Particular fierce mothering subjectivities—mothers' assertions of themselves as

specific types of mothers (e.g., Security, Grizzly, Tiger, Eco, Anti-Vaxxer, Angel, Dragon,

MAGA, etc.,) based on their preferred concerns—that have been taken up and used broadly by

mothers as a basis for articulating their own opinions, concerns, and beliefs online, were selected

for inclusion based on their status as 'nationally recognized' fierce mothering subjectivities. This

status was determined through the number of mothers utilizing the subjectivity, combined with

the subjectivity's inclusion in national (even international) media reports and discussions about

mothers' fierce articulations. Many other 'lesser known' motherhood subjectivities often using

animal figures (e.g., dolphins, elephants, llamas, etc.) are discussed on mom-specific forums and

websites. Such localized subjectivities often develop in response to nationally recognized

subjectivities. For example, a spate of animal themed parenting styles erupted in resistance to the

constitution of the Tiger Mother subjectivity by taking up 'gentle' imagery as indicative of

mothers' preferred emotive and relational frames. In total, eleven subjectivities are included in

the project and their media assessed.

The plurality of textual forms used by fierce mothers necessitated reading across a variety

of media to capture the sentiments of the various subjectivities. While certain subjectivities show

clear preferences, for example, Eco Moms often prefer blogs and use social media to support

them. Other subjectivities, like the Mama Dragons and Moms Rising, engage primarily with a centrally organized website and coordinated social media group structure through *Facebook.* Still others—Security Moms and Mama Grizzlies—started with blogging but have moved primarily to social media forms like *Twitter* and *Instagram* through hashtag sharing. As such, hundreds of textual pieces from 140 character tweets to multi-page blogs, and image-based posts make up the basis for this project. To provide coherence from this volume of different textual forms, I draw exemplar cases from specific subjectivities' texts to provide as discussion of themes, practices, and rhetorics used by fierce mothers.

Using several analytical perspectives guided by a paradigm of intersectionality and methodologically focused through feminist cultural critique allows for a multi-faceted examination of the discursive practices, both rhetorical and mediated, at play in fierce mothering. To support this multi-faced examination, I have developed certain terminology to explicate my framework of cultural infrastructure and the phenomenon of 'fierce mothering.' In particular, the language needed to discuss cultural infrastructure moves between technical and critical languages in ways that can sometimes be complicated to parse. This slipperiness, in my view, highlights the efficacy of a cultural infrastructural approach because it is shows that the structures identified are obscured, and even mystified by language; something integral to the power of the structures themselves. In this section, I provide a brief guide to my use of terminology throughout this text.

I use the concept of *fierceness* to describe the communicative practice that I outline as the phenomenon of "fierce mothering." My usage relies on the way mothers articulate their own subjectivities—or speaking selves—through a constellation of imagery inclusive of fierce animal figures (e.g., Grizzlies, Tigers, Dragons) or as fighters protecting their children and by extension

protecting the whole of society (e.g., Security, Rising, Eco, Anti-Vaxxer, MAGA). I do not

suggest this practice takes up the resistive frame of 'fierce' or 'fierceness' used among LGBTQ+

or Black communities as expressions of resistance and self-love. Rather, the fierceness here is

used as a maternalist framing where ethos—the authority of the speaker—is invoked through

references to the instinctual, inborn expertise and knowledge that only mothers possess.

A reliance on 'instinctual' fierceness, particularly the use of animal figures, highlights the

implicit whiteness and heteronormativity built-in to the use of motherhood subjectivities as a

predicate for women's public and political speech. Such framing is a difficult, often inaccessible

communicative strategy for non-white and queer women who have long been marginalized

specifically through discourses of 'animality' used to position them as subhuman (Collins 172-

190). Tacit acknowledgement of this difficulty can best be seen in the lack of animal figures used

by the 'fierce' mothering subjectivities which explicitly seek a more coalitional base—i.e.,

Moms Rising and Eco Moms—although they remain dominated and led by white mothers.

I use the term '*motherhood subjectivity*' to frame how women enact the communicative

practices of fierce mothering by articulating themselves as speaking subjects through their

identification with issues of concern (e.g., national security, environmental / ecological health,

vaccine safety, successful parenting, political oversight, etc.). Here my use of the concept of

subjectivity follows the descriptions of scholars such as Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, and Chris

Weedon as outlined in the preceding section.

In order to discuss women's communicative practices and their political impacts, the

dissertation takes up women's practices of maternalism which has a broad range of definitions

(Michael 22-34). I use the broader term *maternalism* to describe the socio-political practice of

grounding women's speech and action in their specialized roles and expertise as mothers, where

'care' for their children and families acts as a guiding principle for their participation. Maternalism is also historically specific in its presentations and concerns. As such, I utilize the concept of '*new maternalism*' as developed by Naomi Mezzy and Cornelia Pillard to describe women's contemporary expressions of maternalism which imbricate traditional notions of gender roles with feminist languages of empowerment and liberation (240-242). And, lastly, I refer to extreme versions of this new maternalism—specifically white supremacist and Far—Right extremist notions of motherhood as (white) women's purpose—as '*alt-maternalism*' given its dominant expression online in the domain of the Alt-Right (Mattheis 143-147).

I use the terms '*motherhood ideals*' and '*ideal forms of motherhood*' to describe historical figurations of mothering including "Republican Mothering," "Moral Mothering," "Scientific Mothering," and "Intensive Mothering," as described by a variety of historians and scholars of US motherhood including Linda Kerber, Barbara Welter, Rima D. Apple, and Sharon Hays (respectively). Each figuration incorporates a specific set of historically contingent characteristics that are dominant in the framing of "ideal" mothers. As such they provide a discursive frame and set of practices mothers can use to perform 'good' mothering and adhere to dominant social norms, what Foucault describes as *"technologies of the self"* (*TOS* 18). As, technologies of the self, these ideals and forms assist women in developing their subjectivity as mothers. In relation to fierce mothering as a practice, each fierce motherhood subjectivity—e.g., Mama Grizzly, Tiger Mother, Mama Dragons, etc.—similarly relies on admixtures of ideal forms as a basis for mothers' articulations and performances of 'good' mothering through the specific frame of the subjectivity.

I also refer to motherhood ideals and ideal forms of motherhood as '*cultural technologies*' in a technical sense, as tools or software programs, mothers can use to navigate

daily living. I use technologies in this sense as part of the analytical framework of cultural infrastructure I have developed for this project. Here, '*cultural infrastructure*' describes how motherhood, as a socio-culturally established role, functions like an infrastructure through culturally organized pathways, rhetorics, and mechanisms that create and reinforce linkages between material structures, institutions, and practices of both state and private actors with concrete effects on daily life. Mothers' ability to use of ideals/forms as discursive and performative '*cultural technologies*' enables their navigation of the motherhood infrastructure.

This terminology is used throughout the following chapters which explore fierce mothering from a variety of communicative perspectives. The terminology derives from my development of a cultural infrastructural view of motherhood (described in chapter one) which provides an analytic frame for thinking about how fierce mothering works within the larger socio-cultural, political, economic, and historical function of US motherhood and how it is interlinked with other institutions, structures, and practices in ways that produce socio-cultural, political, economic, and material effects. The remaining sections of the introduction provide detailed descriptions of the project by primary area of focus—cultural infrastructure (function), fierce mothering (phenomenon), and popular cultural forms (mediation)—inclusive of specific chapter descriptions that provide an overview of the project.

A Cultural-Infrastructural Approach to Motherhood

In the introduction to *The Second* Sex, Simone De Beauvoir marks out the contours of how motherhood in patriarchal societies can be viewed through what I describe in chapter one as cultural infrastructure. She argues that women struggle to come together to effect change in patriarchal systems because they are spatially dispersed throughout society by being tied to men in familial relationships. Moreover, because women are the only marginalized group that is

taught, raised in fact, to love their oppressor and bear his children, women have more reason to be in solidarity with the men in their families than with other women (28-29). Mothers then become a primary component of the system of teaching children patriarchal values that reproduce the structures of patriarchy itself (Trebilcot 1). Indeed, Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* marked out this structuration of motherhood as "institutionalized…through heterosexual marriage, family arrangements, kinship practices, education, law, policy, religion, literature, film, popular culture, medicine, science, and psychiatry" (Green 839). Both authors seek to highlight a broader socio-cultural function of motherhood.

In chapter one, I theoretically develop my conceptualization of this broader socio-cultural function of motherhood through a framework of infrastructure. From this view, motherhood serves as a cultural infrastructure in patriarchal cultures where the management and spatial organization of social relations (heterosexual marriage and cohabitation), and the generational assimilation of children into patriarchal norms by mothers, are foundational aspects of mothering. This spatial structuration and cultural infrastructural capacity are then rendered invisible in dominant (white, middle-upper class, heterosexual) culture because they are naturalized through religious doctrine, scientific and educational discourses, and other dehistoricizing narratives which work to universalize dominant constructions of 'normative' (white, heterosexual) femininity and mothering. Infrastructural 'breakdown'—the visibility of 'failed' mothering in this context—also provides an important framework for social, spatial organization. Here, identifications of failed motherhood, often construed as deviance from norms and ideals, is a mechanism for policing access to and use of the motherhood infrastructure by marginalized mothers and reinforces the spatial organization of social relations along other vectors of difference such as race, class, citizenship, and ability. The infamous Moynihan Report

produced in 1965, provides a clear example of how 'scientific' designations of black maternal deviance provide a basis for posing black motherhood as a 'broken' infrastructure which severely limits black women's access to benefits of maternal privilege (i.e., their ability to navigate the motherhood infrastructure) in US culture.

One of the primary mechanisms through which motherhood functions effectively as a cultural infrastructure is through what Deniz Kandiyoti termed "patriarchal bargains," which are "women's strategies" for living that work through "implicit scripts that define, limit, and inflect their [women's] market and domestic options" (275). A crucially important aspect of patriarchal bargains is that they require women to become complicit with power and to become entrenched in patriarchal systems of violence against themselves and other women. This aspect of patriarchal bargains links to ideal constructions of mothering precisely because it seems as though "[w]omen who follow the parameters of institutional motherhood can be considered good mothers and receive social approval, while women who go in the opposite direction can be labeled bad mothers" (Coulter 572). But access to being a 'good mother' is further complicated by motherhood's intersections with race, religion, sexuality, citizenship (or immigration status), and class. This is because not all mothers have the same ability to follow institutional parameters. Or, even if they do, their adherence to such norms can be undercut by stereotypes of racial, religious, or sexual deviance as well as flawed citizenship (read immigrant) or class (read poverty) status (hooks "Margin" 43-65). This differential access is often managed by processes of institutional and social surveillance and disciplining of women-as-mothers.

The surveillance of mothers and families is and always has been an essential modality used to maintain linkages between patriarchal bargains, 'good mothering,' and the cultural infrastructure of motherhood. Surveillance of mothers includes institutional and social forms of

oversight and discipline, as well as self-surveillance by other mothers. What makes surveillance possible, are ideal figurations of mothers against which women-as-mothers can be measured. In this way motherhood ideals act as technologies that agents of surveillance, and mothers themselves, can use to navigate the cultural infrastructural pathways of motherhood. Surveillance—institutional, social, and self-surveillance—have become further entrenched through the affordances and use of digital technologies, particularly by domesticated security technologies and social media, in the post Web 2.0 media environment (Wrennall 312). As such, the various ideological and material nodes connected by motherhood as a cultural infrastructure have become increasingly interactive.

My development of cultural infrastructure in this chapter brings together literatures from Women's and Gender studies, feminist Science and Technology Studies, and critical theory to develop cultural infrastructure as an analytical frame to explore the longstanding utility of motherhood in social, cultural, political, and economic discourse. This utility works both for and against women in important ways by providing some women with access to power while simultaneously limiting the scope and effectiveness of 'mother power' in line with dominant cultural hegemonic norms.

The 'Fierce Mothering' Phenomenon

The specific phenomenon I explore in this dissertation is an online communicative practice that I have called "fierce mothering." As noted above, this encompasses a range of women's online articulations of their own subjectivity as mothers tied to fierce imagery—such as animal figures and warriors on behalf of their children—in a variety of contexts that interweave socio-cultural, political, and economic concerns. In chapter two, I offer a detailed description and historical overview of the fierce mothering phenomenon drawn from fierce mothers' own online

articulations. I analyze the development of the phenomenon using a critical feminist approach to show how it is situated within a cultural sensibility of post feminism and corresponds with Intensive mothering norms.

Perhaps the most recognizable of these "motherhood subjectivities" is Sarah Palin's "Mama Grizzly" figure. However, there are at least two 'fierce' motherhood subjectivities that predate Palin's articulation and multiple others that follow it. This movement to articulate motherhood as a specific type of subjectivity began during the 1996 Presidential election cycle with the manufactured subjectivity of the "Soccer Mom" espoused by Republican political operatives in an effort to engage middle-class, suburban (white) women.

The Soccer Mom subjectivity grew to national recognition and surpassed identification with either right or left politics. Since the inception of this first nationally recognizable motherhood subjectivity, many more subjectivities for mothers have risen to broad socio-political, economic, or cultural attention, with at least sixteen current nationally recognizable subjectivities. Thus, while Palin certainly made these particular motherhood subjectivities more visible in both politics and popular culture, motherhood subjectivities have a longer history that is worth exploring. Preceding Palin's articulation there were two explicitly politically focused fierce motherhood subjectivities that rose to national cultural awareness: the "Security Mom" and "Moms Rising."

The "Security Mom" is a fierce motherhood subjectivity that was brought into the national consciousness by conservative political pundit Michelle Malkin in 2004. Malkin claimed the Security Mom subjectivity in an online blog post titled, "The Security Mom Manifesto," in which she explained hers (and other Security Moms) concerns linking family security and national security in the years directly following the 9/11 terror attacks. Her post

claimed direct descendance from the first motherhood subjectivity—the "Soccer Mom" which

will be described later in this chapter—and articulated Security Moms' displeasure with then

President George W. Bush's policies. Mom's Rising, as a fierce motherhood subjectivity came to

the national consciousness in 2006 with the release of the documentary film "Motherhood

Manifesto," which describes the need for Mom's Rising. The Mom's Rising organization and

Web community were created by the founders of the left-leaning, progressive political action and

organizing Website *Moveon.org*. Mom's Rising shares similar types of features but is focused on

engaging mothers in political action. Mom's Rising mothers utilize the site to connect with

likeminded mothers, learn how to create grass-roots political campaigns and lobbying, and

participate in direct political action predominantly at the state and national levels.

Along with Palin's articulation of the Mama Grizzly subjectivity in 2010, another

motherhood subjectivity using a fierce animal figure was articulated by Amy Chua in 2011.

Chua's articulation was of the "Tiger Mother" in her book, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*,

in which she describes how she mothers her children to be truly exceptional. Chua's articulation

is unique as it derives from the parenting self-help genre of writing unlike the other

subjectivities. However, it is political in the sense that it is highly critical of mainstream US

parenting culture. Chua's articulation is racialized and argues the cultural superiority of

'Chinese' mothering in relation to producing excellence. The ability to forward such a claim

within the context of US race history derives from the model minority status of Asian

immigrants; it is not a type of claim black and brown mothers can leverage.

Two of the fierce mothering subjectivities framed through a focus on 'conscientious'

consumerism are the "Anti-Vaxxer" and "Eco" moms. "Anti-Vaxxer" moms—a moniker

assigned to these mothers by the media—are mothers who fight against vaccines that they view

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as toxic for their children and who are often portrayed as crazy (Rinkunas). "Eco Moms" pose green living, natural mothering, and eco-friendly consumption as a way for women to affect politics and improve global conditions for their children (Palmer).

A unique pair of fierce motherhood subjectivities focused on concerns with violence are derived from a broader motherhood subjectivity of "Angel Moms" who have suffered the loss of a child.[2] From this broader group, two fierce mothering subjectivities that speak publicly about their concerns with violence are the pro-border control "Angel Moms" and the "Mothers of the Movement." The pro-border control Angel Moms are mothers whose (often adult) children have been killed in interactions with 'undocumented' immigrants. These Angel Moms are often engaged primarily in conservative lobbying, blogging, and agitation for border security, criminal prosecution of 'illegal aliens' and strict immigration policies. The second related fierce motherhood subjectivity linked to the broader figure of the "Angel Mom," articulated in left leaning circles, is that of Black Lives Matter's "Mothers of the Movement." The Mothers of the Movement are black women whose children have been killed by police (Sebastian). Of all of these subjectivities, Mothers of the Movement do not articulate their subjectivity broadly in online spaces. More often, they participate in community events and speak in live forums about their experience and concerns.

Drawing on the political creation of motherhood subjectivities during political campaigns, the "Trump Mom" and the related "MAGA Mom" is a motherhood subjectivity articulated by women who supported Donald J. Trump, first in the 2016 and again in the 2020 US presidential campaigns. As is suggested by the focus, the primary articulation of the "Trump" / MAGA Moms is support for Trump's political ambitions, goals, and policies (Melendez).

The most recent articulation of motherhood subjectivity, the "Mama Dragons" is claimed by mothers of LGBTQ+ children. Originating with a group of Mormon mothers in a private messaging group in 2013, by 2017 information about this group had reached national news publications ("Our Origins"). Mama Dragons exist both to support other mothers experiencing the difficulty of raising LGBTQ children—particularly in religious settings—to support their desired outcome: "A world where all mothers fiercely love and advocate for their LGBTQ children" ("Mission"). Interestingly, Mama Dragons travel around to various Pride events and offer love, support, and hugs to LGBT youth and adults offering a mom's "unconditional love" to all LGBTQ children.

This overview shows a developmental pattern of expansion among 'fierce mothering' subjectivities which indicates that mothers find the articulation of subjectivity as useful communicative practice. Here the utility derives from fierce mothering's use of maternalism which enables mothers' civic participation through their presentation of themselves as experts—as authoritative subjects—who should be listened to when they speak. In addition, the expansion and development of fierce mothering also suggests that the articulation of motherhood subjectivity works as a strategic practice and rhetorical form (discussed further in chapter three).

While fierce mothers' areas of interest are different on the surface, this phenomenon has a defined set of characteristics which are consistent across the various articulations of motherhood subjectivity:

1) the use of fierce imagery—either animal figures or figurations of mothers as warriors on behalf of their children—to suggest maternal care as a basis for women's public dissent,

2) each is associated with a political issue, but the strategy itself is used across the political spectrum, and

3) they are embedded within a contemporary framework of maternalist ideology—a new

    form of US maternalism incorporates both the rhetorics of traditional maternalism,

    morality and sentimentality—with feminist languages of women's empowerment.

It is important to note that fierce mothering as a practice that uses new maternalism, and a

gendered communicative strategy is often politically useful, but ultimately works against the

goals of gender equality (Mezzy and Pillard 232-35).

The blend of traditionalist and feminist rhetorics embedded in new maternalism and

fierce mothering has led to public debates around *faux*-feminism and tapped into broader

'backlash' narratives common in US popular culture that pose feminist insistence on gender

equality is hostile to mothers and families. The ultimate effect of this absorption of feminist

languages into discourses of maternalism has generated a culture that forwards mothers' social

power by aligning it with patriarchal norms rather than on women's own terms (Mezzy and

Pillard 240-242). To this, I would add, that this new maternalist culture obscures its alignment

with patriarchal norms in identity-based terms, like fierce mothering's use of subjectivity, that

make it feel as if it stems from an individual woman's preferences and desires (McRobbie 20). In

this way new maternalism and fierce mothering are mechanisms that mystify structural

limitations on mothers enforced through adherence to culturally hegemonic norms.

In chapter three, I use a combined critical cultural and rhetorical approach to analyze how

fierce mothering works as a strategic response by mothers who employ a tactical use of

subjectivity to negotiate the demands and expectations of post feminism and intensive

mothering. To further clarify its tactical qualities as a specifically gendered strategic response, I

explicate how fierce mothering works as a "technology of the self" that mothers use to produce

themselves as subjects within the discursive context of new maternalism. I also differentiate

between fierce mothering as a technology of the self and fierce mothering as a cultural technology within the motherhood infrastructure, to highlight how fierce mothering has both individual (technology of the self) and structural (cultural technology) components for the mothers' able to wield it. I finish chapter three with an exploration of the rhetorical processes and effects that enable fierce mothering. Fierce mothering is a Web-based practice that connects mothers across time and space in relatively new and unique ways that importantly can be fit around work and child/family care. Fierce mothering then is also an online communicative strategy which shares rhetorical features common to both digital and gendered forms of communication. To better understand this confluence, I examine fierce mothering through the concepts of constitutive rhetoric (see Maurice Charland), discursively constituted publics (see Michael Warner), and intimate publicity (see Lauren Berlant) to show how fierce mothering constructs a specific form of gendered, digital sociality engaged through popular mediated forms.

Like its historical precursors, fierce mothering is a popular cultural phenomenon as well as a strategic communicative practice. This twinned nature as popular culture and strategic gendered communicative practice follows a long history in the Anglo tradition of women's movement, from the domestic sphere into the public sphere, through popular culture, specifically via consumer practice (Merish 13-16). Within this tradition, women's political consciousness and agitation is tied to larger cultural frames which pose economic, consumer, and relational connections to women's and particularly mothers' political speech. Fierce mothering practices retain this tension between popular concerns and politics. This entanglement becomes clear when political campaigns attempt to 'deploy' fierce motherhood subjectivities—Security Moms, Angel Moms, Mothers of the Movement—as a regularized components of campaign strategies. Crucially, this twinned nature—as popular and political—does important work in that it makes

room for women to participate in politics, while also allowing politics to discount women's concerns as non-political on an as-needed basis to suit the structures of public debates.

Motherhood and Popular Cultural Forms

This project focuses on mothers' use of and representation in media that are categorized as technological purveyors of popular culture. Analyses of discourses of motherhood parlayed in popular media is essential given that the modern history of the deployment of ideologies about mothering and motherhood, as well as socio-political, economic, and cultural negotiations of motherhood, have been entwined with popular (as opposed to 'high' culture) forms of media. This is also an important site for the study of cultural hegemony as Hall notes: "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where the hegemony arises, and where it is secured" ("Deconstructing" 192).

Historians of pre and early modern 'Anglo' gender histories—the roots of US gender histories—indicate that (white, middle-upper class) women's movement from the private, domestic sphere, into the public sphere is enmeshed in histories of industrialization and the rise of capitalism. In this history, new practices of household consumption and production, and therefore gendered roles, were necessitated by changing world and technological structures (Bloch 108-112). As households produced fewer of the material goods families required and began to purchase and consume manufactured goods, mothers became primary consumers of domestic goods related to raising children and managing households which is clear from histories of the advertising and marketing of such products (Peiss).

Concurrently with these changes, technological developments (i.e., improvements in and lowered costs of the mass production of writing) allowed Anglo women a forum to agitate for

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more equality and women's rights, specifically using discussions of morality and motherhood as their foundation. This proto-feminist movement was tied to larger discussions of individual rights about the French and American Revolutions and what would become norms of western democratic governance. Mary Wollstonecraft's primary text, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, forwards maternalism as a strategy for women's equality with men (chp IV. 55-56). Wollstonecraft's arguments are part of conversations in which Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine were also involved about the role of individual rights versus monarchical power (Khol 68-75). The debate was initiated by a public (read popular) sermon given by Richard Price in 1789 and which was debated through the popular 'news' media of the time: broadsheets (Drucker).

Other popular media forms, such as novels, were devoted to narrations of women's 'proper' rights and roles in this period of cultural shift as well. A broad range of novels—many of which are now women's literary classics and as such represent high culture—worked as disciplinary treatises including character-based portrayals expositing the gamut of feminine failure and success particularly in relation to changing class relations. These texts include books such as Daniel DaFoe's *Moll Flanders* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *House and Home Papers* and Harriet Jacob's, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* along with the corpuses of the Bronte Sisters and Jane Austen among many others. These novels, a popular media of their time, offer a range of cautionary and moral tales which instructed society, and more specifically women, on 'correct behavior' (Bloch 109-10, Merish 3). And these texts portrayed correct feminine behavior as white and middle class and as characterized by being morally pure, sentimental, passive, and domestic. Not incidentally, these same characteristics were hallmarks of the ideal figuration of motherhood of the time, though it was an ideal figure that women both emulated and resisted to achieve their various aims and

negotiate their daily lives. Importantly, women who did not fit within the primary assumptions of this ideal—such as women of color and poor women—often publicly employed a strategy of emulating the discourse and characteristics of the ideal in order to generate the socio-cultural, political, and economic mobility needed to survive and thrive (see Harriet Jacobs 1861, Maria Miller Stewart 1832, and Anna Julia Cooper 1892).

This early history of women's use of popular media to make claims for equality as well as socio-political and economic participation continued into the formal 'waves' of feminist agitation. During the century following Wollstonecraft's shot across the bow of structural male dominance, women's and specifically mothers' roles and rights were hotly contested through popular media forms as women agitated for the vote and wider roles in public participation (Lange). Importantly, black women also participated in this literary discussion including Harriet Jacobs and Sojourner Truth whose writing as former slaves both leveraged and disrupted these discourses through motherhood, along with thinkers and scholars from the mid-late eighteenth century including Anna Julia Cooper and Maria Stewart Miller who used the terms of sentimentalism and women's morality to extend claims of full liberal democratic subjectivity (Guy-Sheftall 23-50).

In addition, the rise to prominence of 'Ladies Journals' in the Victorian era (1837-1901) further enmeshed popular culture and motherhood discourses as the of-the-time version of the earlier century's disciplinary novels providing treatises on proper feminine behavior and mixing them with household management tips and product advertisements. This created generic conventions which still characterize 'women's magazines' in both print and online media as well as lifestyle and influencer culture and media aimed at women today. During the fight for woman suffrage, this use of popular culture to negotiate gender politics can also be seen in famous series

of political cartoons and news articles about political debates from the abolition of slavery and woman suffrage including the iconic image of the "Male Madonna" which encapsulated anxieties over men's emasculation should women receive the vote (Palczewski 365-74).

Magazines and other print media such as newspapers and advertisements continued versions of these debates throughout the early and mid-20th century along with 'new' media forms such as film and television. With these new 'moving' popular media forms, the ideals and behavior of mothers became further entrenched in popular imaginaries in easily digestible comedies and dramas eventually transmitted directly into homes. As iconic representative portrayals of mothers both good and bad—exemplars include Donna Reed and Lucy Ricardo respectively—transformed earlier disciplinary treatises into comforting visions and jokes shared by the masses alongside attendant and eventually co-branded product placements and marketing for continued consumption (Feasey 29-30).

As television and film have become 'older' media forms with the rise of the Internet and especially easily accessible online design and management technologies post-Web 2.0, motherhood and mothering, and discourses about them have become ubiquitous in online environments, with the rise of mommy blogging and 'mompreneurship' (mom run online business ventures), as practices that moms can employ to engage with other mothers, the public, and to earn money, all in accordance with their domestic labor and any outside-the-home work duties they may have (Jezzer-Morton). Along with the business and engagement affordances of the Internet, the genres of writing about mothering that include household management tips and best practices have been firmly entrenched as part of the development of online 'mommy culture' keeping the linkages between popular culture, consumption, and motherhood tightly bound. Importantly, in this environment, women have continued their engagement with popular

media to negotiate for and with power and to manage daily living. This project addresses the relationship between women's political participation and popular culture in two ways. First, it approaches the use of popular cultural forms by fierce mothers themselves using online media. Second, it takes up the reflection of the fierce mothering phenomenon in televisual media arguing that such reflective programming also serves reinforce dominant hierarchies of "appropriate" maternal identity, subjectivity, and practice.

In chapter four, I undertake a critical feminist media analysis of fierce mothering practices to outline how their enactment through online media works as a site of politics through a popular cultural form. I situate fierce mothering practices within the online culture of the 'momosphere'—an extensive online community for mothers—and its relationship with trends such as 'mompreneurship' (moms as online entrepreneurs) and 'momfluencer' (mom influencers online) culture. Following this contextual explication, I provide two analyses of fierce mothering practices online, utilizing case studies of Eco Mom and Anti-Vaxxer Mom subjectivities as seemingly disparate approaches that both act as exemplars of these practices. The first analysis explores how fierce mothering practices work to enhance mothers' socio-political speech, by extending and repackaging a long standing historical framework for US women's appropriate civic role in liberal democratic society, inclusive of how fierce mothers' articulations utilize motherhood ideals—Moral, Scientific, and Intensive mothering—as frames for their articulations. The second analysis explores how fierce mothering practices also work to constrain mothers by making them more visible and therefore subject to increased surveillance and disciplining. This analysis shows how surveillance impacts fierce mothering articulations and practices as well as which mothers can effectively utilize fierce mothering as a communicative strategy based on ways that surveillance and motherhood ideals interact.

In chapter five, I continue my application of critical feminist media methods by applying them to the media industry, specifically television programs in the situation comedy genre, to show how popular cultural media forms incorporate fierce mothering as an emergent trend in cultural debates about motherhood, mothering, and mothers. This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the television shows *American Housewife* and the 'reboot' of *One Day at a Time* to explore how contemporary motherhood, mothering, and mothers are represented. Importantly, *American Housewife* uses characters which represent the most stereotypical of the fierce motherhood subjectivities, which allows a discussion of how the media industry not only reflects contemporary cultural discussions of motherhood, mothering, and mothers, but also works to reinforce women's 'correct' behavior as mothers within this context. In comparison to *One Day at a Time*, which offers a very different representation of contemporary mothering and family relations, this chapter also highlights how the motherhood infrastructure connects to industries— such as the media—to circulate ideas and practices.

I conclude the project with a discussion of the adaptation of fierce mothering practices within three online cultures—#Trad, Alt-Right, and QAnon—as exemplars of new maternalism taken to extreme ends. Taking a cultural infrastructural approach to motherhood allows these various extreme frameworks for mothering and maternalism to be understood not as one-off or spectacular phenomena, but as foreseeable outcomes of the same relations through which fierce mothering strategies developed. They provide clear examples of my discussion of motherhood as a relation and site of (limited) power that works as a culturally hegemonic mechanism for manufacturing women's consent to and participation in structures of dominance.

INFRASTRUCTURES OF FEELING:

THEORIZING MOTHERHOOD AS A CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

> *"Infrastructures drive and maintain standardization, reflect and embody historical concentrations of power and control, and are instruments through which access is managed."*
>
> *Paul Dourish and Genevieve Bell*

Motherhood, mothering, and mothers preoccupy contemporary western culture. From religious beliefs to scientific study and from politics to popular culture, discussions, representations, and critiques of motherhood, mothering, and mothers are ubiquitous and ever increasing. These discussions, representations, and critiques also occur across nearly all media forms for information sharing and entertainment. In the last several years, there have been high volume increases in news articles, television shows, films, and books focused on motherhood and mothering as well as specifically on mothers. Over the last decade, social media and online platforms have become a mainstay for these discussions in online magazines, as a focus of consumer marketing, and particularly through contributions by mothers themselves. Such contributions are seen in the exponential increase in mothers authoring mommy blogs, starting 'mompreneur' sites, and participating in a wide range of mothering affinity groups. This broad fascination with a concept that is generally considered to be 'known' and 'understood' by everyone points to the need for further analysis. Why is there a cultural absorption with

motherhood when its meaning is supposedly 'agreed upon,' its associated practices supposedly 'quotidian,' and its assigned functions considered 'natural?

To explore why motherhood—a supposedly niche and mundane topic—so preoccupies our culture, this chapter develops a cultural-technological theoretical framework that blends theories of infrastructure and technology with feminist theories of motherhood as a patriarchal institution. In this framework, motherhood functions as a cultural infrastructure in patriarchal societies. I define cultural infrastructures as sets of culturally organized pathways, rhetorics, mechanisms of power, and material practices embedded in socio-culturally 'established' roles such as 'mother' through which patriarchal systems attempt to stabilize, situate, and constrain gender—particularly femininity—within flows of power.[3] Like other infrastructures, these cultural pathways, rhetorics, mechanisms of power, and material practices establish and reinforce linkages between material structures, institutions, and both state and private actors that have concrete effects on daily life. An infrastructural view of the cultural function of motherhood allows for research that maintains a simultaneous focus on the material effects and discursive practices embedded in structural and individual relations connected through motherhood attending to both historical contingency and local specificity. Importantly, such a view allows women to be understood as agentic actors while also being constrained within patriarchal systems of dominance. This offers an enhanced capacity for generating research questions, performing nuanced analyses, and developing theory with complexity. All of which are vitally important to understanding gendered phenomena from an intersectional feminist perspective.

Important to a cultural-technological view and an intersectional perspective is the issue of spatial organization. This includes both physical distributions of people, institutions, and things as well as locating socio-cultural phenomena contextually. Simone de Beauvoir addresses the

particular spatial organization of women in western society in the introduction to *The Second* Sex where she specifically outlines how motherhood works in support of patriarchal societies. She argues that women—unlike other minority groups—are structurally positioned to be complicit with patriarchal culture through marriage and motherhood. Because of women's distribution in society through marriage—their "dispersal among the males"—they struggle to come together to effect change in patriarchal systems (26-28). This barrier to women's solidarity is reinforced by marriage and motherhood because women are the only oppressed group that is taught, raised in fact, to love their oppressor and bear his children (28-29).

Women's dispersal throughout society via the institution of marriage is one of the primary spatial organizations of social relations through which I argue that motherhood works as a cultural infrastructure. By spatial organizations of social relations, I refer to the physical and cultural borders that govern social relations, including geographical locations such as nations, regions, or neighborhoods, and cultural boundaries such as those derived from economic class, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, or citizenship status. Importantly, marriage and class are also closely connected such that geospatial organization of mothers (and families) through the motherhood infrastructure works as a form of stabilizing structural control over access to education, childcare, healthcare, jobs, safety, and even food. This linkage between spatial organization and social relations is essential to my thinking about how motherhood works as a cultural infrastructure. Moreover, such spatial organization of social relations is the primary base from which motherhood—as a cultural infrastructure—establishes and reinforces linkages between material structures, institutions, and practices of both state and private actors with concrete effects on daily life.

One of the most direct ways that motherhood works as a cultural infrastructure is via the social mechanism that Deniz Kandiyoti termed "patriarchal bargains" to denote women's strategies" for living, that work through "implicit scripts that define, limit, and inflect their [women's] market and domestic options" (275). These implicit scripts come from a variety of institutional knowledges that shape mothering ideals and in so doing produce the linkages between institutions, practices, and mothers that make up the pathways of the motherhood infrastructure. Mothers thus become a primary, even essential, component of the system of upholding patriarchal values—especially through rearing children—that reproduce and maintain the structures of patriarchy itself. Indeed, this structuration of motherhood is, as Adrienne Rich marks out in *Of Woman Born,* "institutionalized…through heterosexual marriage, family arrangements, kinship practices, education, law, policy, religion, literature, film, popular culture, medicine, science, and psychiatry" (Green 839). As links between motherhood, institutions, practices, and people, these scripts provide a normalizing function which obscures the motherhood infrastructure by connecting mothering with wider discourses and narratives such as religious beliefs or scientifically derived 'best practices.' Such alignments work to obscure motherhood's infrastructural function until it disappears from people's view. Motherhood, then emerges as 'natural': the way human experiences of mothering have always been. A fundamental consequence of naturalizing motherhood through patriarchal bargaining is that women are encouraged to identify with 'their' men rather than with other women. A crucially important aspect of patriarchal bargains, then, is that they require women to become complicit with dominant power by becoming entrenched in patriarchal systems of violence against themselves and other women.

This coercive aspect of patriarchal bargains is mobilized through motherhood discourses which foreground 'ideal' mothering practices. Mothering ideals promote women's complicity in enacting patriarchal violence and reproducing patriarchal structures precisely because it seems as though "[w]omen who follow the parameters of institutional motherhood can be considered good mothers and receive social approval, while women who go in the opposite direction can be labeled bad mothers" (Coulter 572). But access to 'being a good mother' is further complicated by motherhood's intersections with race, religion, sexuality, citizenship (or immigration status), and class. This is because all mothers do not have the same ability to follow institutional parameters. Or, even if they can follow institutional parameters, their adherence to such norms can be undercut by stereotypes of racial, religious, or sexual deviance as well as flawed citizenship or class status (hooks 43-65). The material implications of being deemed 'deviant'— of not meeting these 'standards' of the infrastructure—are more than simply social as the threat of state intervention and the possibility of having one's children removed from their care are ever present. Importantly, determining deviance and managing adherence to institutional norms and parameters is achieved through disciplinary practices—institutional, social, and individual— which regulate mothers' articulations, behaviors, and practices in relation to mothering ideals.

An important form of discipline used to maintain the linkages between patriarchal bargains, 'good mothering,' and the motherhood infrastructure is surveillance in both institutional and social forms. Here surveillance acts as a material mechanism of power over and between mothers from a cultural infrastructural perspective. Institutional forms of surveillance include the policing of mothers via scientific and technological frameworks transmitted through discourses and the practices of agencies such as Child Protective Services (Wrennall 306). Alternately, social forms of surveillance and policing take place primarily in interpersonal

interactions and via self-surveillance and discipline (Marwick 378-79). The motherhood infrastructure connects with social surveillance via the public policing of mothers online or on social media and privately when relations, coworkers, friends, and even strangers on the street—both male and female—judge, critique, or offer 'feedback' to mothers about their mothering or life choices. Social policing is often performed by other mothers, further reinforcing competition between women and isolating them from each other out of fear of judgement. Social policing of mothers can also enable institutional surveillance of mothers through anonymous reporting structures developed to prevent child harm. Surveillance, particularly social surveillance as an isolating practice between mothers reciprocally, assists in maintaining the spatial organization of women's dispersal that undergirds patriarchal bargaining and women's complicity with patriarchal norms. Thus, the motherhood infrastructure is further reinforced as a central node of patriarchy.

Ultimately, motherhood as a cultural infrastructure, acts as a conduit for the flows of power and intricacies of social, political, and economic relations formed through social imaginaries and cultural expectations of mothers and mothering. These expectations are interlinked with other social imaginaries and cultural expectations of race, religion, class, citizenship status, ability, and sexual orientation which are then manifested materially through institutional frames of education, law, policy, and religion (among others). Discourses about mothering produced by these connected social imaginaries offer a framework to regulate mothering practices in public and private life. Such regulation occurs through a combination of disciplinary practices including self-regimentation, along with institutional and social surveillance as material mechanisms of power over mothers. Thus, 'motherhood' is a culturally-built environment inclusive of both an institutionalized role, and an individually experienced

identity, that work reciprocally to enable and constrain mothers' power within patriarchal systems in ways that divide women and compel women's support of patriarchal aims.

Using Infrastructures to Understand Cultural Phenomena

My development of a cultural-technological view of motherhood relies on Feminist Informatics theory within Science and Technology Studies (STS). Building on their theorization of material qualities and cultural logics of technology, this work also turns to scholars like Susan Leigh Star, Lucy Suchman, and Nicole Starosielski who show how technological constructions themselves are materializations of cultural imaginaries, and relations through their research on the developmental/design logics of technologies, infrastructures, networks, and systems. Also significant to this study is the work of Brian Larkin and Ara Wilson, who also engage with issues of social control and infrastructure. For both Larkin and Wilson, infrastructure is a technological construction that bridges material and cultural life. They pose a view of infrastructure that maintains a focus on infrastructure's functional capacity to shape daily living, and link infrastructure to the development of social hierarchies through its generation in and of the human imaginary (Larkin 6, Wilson 274). Additionally, Wilson's work, using infrastructure in critical-cultural research, is useful here because, as she notes "[c]ritical studies of infrastructure take material substances seriously not to reduce social life down to a more real substrate but rather to perceive it as a way to open up received categories" (274). Thus, thinking with infrastructure or 'infrastructural thinking' in critical-cultural research allows for attention to the workings of power while retaining the capacity to see human agency as actions held in tension between structural and individual practices.

My conceptualization of cultural infrastructure is predicated on the nature of infrastructures as material manifestations of social imaginaries. By arguing that motherhood is a

cultural infrastructure I am also arguing that motherhood is a cultural materialization of our gendered social imaginary that connects with material structures in daily life. Infrastructures, as Star notes, are built to realize visions, dreams, and possibilities ("Ethnography" 379-80). It is through the realization imaginaries, then, that infrastructures come to embody instantiations of social organization. Importantly, infrastructural embodiments of social organization are outcomes—rather than instigators—of social relations. Thinking about social relations and cultural formations through a framework of infrastructure is useful precisely because infrastructures are manifestations of ideological organizing principles. This means infrastructures show how seemingly natural social relations and cultural formations are constructed, maintained, produced, and reproduced. As Ara Wilson notes, "while the rubric of infrastructure offers a material manifestation of class, race, and regional inequalities, it also explains how they are created" (273). Thus, infrastructures can show the differential ways social and cultural organizing structures generate material impacts in concert with identity.

As embodiments of specific constellations of socio-cultural and economic relations, infrastructures are historically contingent. They come to embody particular sets of relations from the moment of their initial development and across moments of change, repurpose, and contestation (Suchman 92-100, Wilson 274). This embodiment occurs as infrastructures are designed, built, and implemented. In their movement from imaginary (design) to materiality (build and implementation), a concurrent process of negotiating ideologies occurs. These negotiations include making selections between competing social norms, addressing fears of and desires for new capabilities, as well as determining a structure for the way resources (things, people, and wealth) are distributed and managed. As such, cultural-infrastructural thinking presents an opportunity to map backward, from infrastructure as the manifestation of particularly

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defined sets of socio-political and spatial organization, to cultural formations as the entrenched guiding principles that provide the rubric for and controls over societal arrangements and relations.

As a conceptual tool, infrastructure highlights human relationships with technologies. Infrastructure is the substrate of technologies that allows them to circulate goods, services, and ideologies (Larkin 6). Technologies, therefore, rely on infrastructures to work and are created based on the rules, limitations, and affordances of their associated infrastructures. Although there are many varying definitions of technology(ies) ranging broadly from physical devices to the notion of human ingenuity itself, here technology can be understood as a humanly constructed tool for negotiating living in the world. Lucy Suchman notes that "…technologies comprise the objectification of knowledges and practices in new material forms" (92). This is a useful understanding of technology(ies) for a cultural-technological view as it highlights how technologies are imbricated with social relations and material practices. In this way, technologies as humanly constructed tools for negotiating living in the world include culturally theorized practices such as discourse-based "technologies of the self" (Foucault *TOS* 18), "distributions of the sensible" (Rancière 36), performative acts (Butler 1-20), and socio-cultural erasures of minority groups (Crenshaw "Mapping" 1241-1299, Collins 164). Thus, technologies from a cultural-technological view encompass discursive and cultural modes of production and interaction as well as devices, soft/hardware, and other material tech. I discuss each of these critical-cultural theorizations in detail later in the chapter.

To explore my arguments for a cultural-technological view and cultural infrastructures in more depth, I first develop a framework for viewing motherhood from a cultural-technological perspective. Next, I provide a brief sketch of how motherhood works as a cultural infrastructure.

After this brief sketch, I show how critical-cultural theorizing is related to my cultural-technological framework by mapping between a set of critical-cultural theorizations and STS frameworks to suggest the utility of a cultural-technological view for analyzing cultural phenomena. I close with a brief cultural-technological analysis of one way that women are currently using the motherhood infrastructure through social and online media as a way of navigating the complexities and constraints of embodying the socio-culturally established role of 'mother'.

Developing a Cultural-Technological View of Motherhood

To see motherhood as a cultural infrastructure from a cultural-technological standpoint, it is necessary to map connections between cultural phenomena and technological frameworks of analysis. To this end, I start with the broadest construction of motherhood: its deployment across multiple discourses, and its entrenchment in social, political, economic, and cultural processes. 'Mother,' 'mothering,' and 'motherhood' are entwined constructs that seem to be clearly defined but work as empty signifiers. Individual definitions of the terms are not fixed but rather vary considerably and may contradict each other, even though the construct itself seemingly carries a culturally shared meaning. This supposed culturally shared meaning is produced through discourses of ideal mothering behaviors and practices which coalesce into abstract figurations of the ideal mother. Because ideals are socio-culturally constructed notions, figurations of motherhood differ across historical periods, as well as across social, economic, political, and cultural contexts. The slippage between individual definitions and culturally shared meanings makes constructions of motherhood malleable, allowing women to use them as well as to be constrained by them.

Women's use of ideal forms to negotiate daily living in a variety of ways is illuminated by approaching 'ideal' forms of motherhood as technologies of a motherhood infrastructure. Important to this approach is an understanding that each ideal form of mothering constitutes a set of 'expert' knowledges and demands revisions to the material practices that constitute appropriate mothering in accordance with laws, policies, social behavioral norms, medical practices, and other nodes the motherhood infrastructure connects. Therefore, women's use of ideal forms (technologies) requires fluency with the discourses and practices associated with that form's characteristics. Thus, ideal forms work as technologies similar to software applications, providing 'programs' that offer ways for women to interact with and negotiate the world as mothers. In this way, ideal forms of motherhood make up the variety and limits of technologies that are available for use in the motherhood infrastructure, particularly by marking the acceptable roles and responsibilities of women in multi-variable ways.

The development of a new ideal form (technology) does not entirely supplant prior ideal forms, rather they layer on top of one another, overlapping but also reliant on each other to be 'knowable' to society and culture.[4] Infrastructures, then, are layered with technologies in a laminary fashion (Larkin 5). Technological layers are sedimented, accreting meaning over time and distinct from each other. These layers are also palimpsestic, by which I mean, sub-layers— older technologies—are still accessible if new ones fail or breakdown. The laminary and palimpsestic qualities of technologies are intertwined with the physical, social, economic, and cultural contexts of their paired infrastructure. Here, geography (rural vs urban), politics (conservative vs progressive), funding (public vs private), or ideologies (religious vs secular), among other factors, influence how technologies are deployed across their infrastructure often in discontinuous ways (Larkin 5). Thus, the specific technological layer being used may not be

consistent across the system on national or global levels. In the context of ideal forms of motherhood as technologies, these qualities allow each historical mothering ideal (technology) to reemerge within the framework of the current ideal form particularly when it benefits the stability of the system (infrastructure + technology). This potentiality for the reemergence of ideal forms means that analysis of older, historical mothering ideals (technologies) can provide insight in the present moment.

From a cultural-technological view, this layering functions to generate stability in the same way that we use, reuse, and repurpose physical infrastructures as we develop and use different technologies.[5] Redundancy is essential for ensuring the stability of systems. And, as Nicole Starosielski notes, is a primary feature of infrastructures born out of a desire for risk mitigation. Alternately, technologies that run on infrastructures tend to be seen as innovative and therefore higher levels of risk (instability) are tolerable (8-15). Thus, ideal forms of mothering can be variable (unstable) in terms of their specific use, while the culturally shared meaning of motherhood remains relatively constant (stable) over time. This tension between variation and constancy can exist because infrastructures include built-in mechanisms to manage the variability of technologies to ensure stability across the system.

Mothering ideals (technologies) develop and rise to cultural stature in part because they generate sets of affordances for women-as-mothers, and for society, that simultaneously enable and constrain women-as-mothers in relation to the tenets of the ideal form. These affordances therefore generate a mechanism for women's agency through motherhood, if mothers act within the form's proscribed limits. Mothering ideals (technologies) also provide mechanisms through which women and their children can be socially, politically, and economically controlled. Control via mothering ideals (technologies) is enacted through a woman's elevation or

marginalization—socially or institutionally—based on her 'capacities' as a mother. Thus, mild forms of control may include social rejection while stringent forms of control include institutional, particularly governmental, intervention into mothers' and family life. Concurrently, systemic barriers and material hurdles to a mother's ability to access and portray ideal forms are downplayed through a focus on individual capacity. This means that women can be classified in positive or negative terms in relation to mothering ideals but cannot necessarily control or combat those classifications. If specific class, race, marital or citizenship status, religious adherence, or education levels are implicit features of an ideal form, women who do not have the 'characteristics' implied by the ideal form can never access all of the affordances of that ideal form and are more likely to be subject to forms of control.

A vital perspective gained from an infrastructural approach to motherhood is a focus on agency as held in tension between structural power and individual action. Viewing ideal forms of motherhood, as technologies of a motherhood infrastructure, shows that they can be used by women as well as by institutions and cultural apparatuses. Mothers, then, are both subject to and the subjects of ideal forms (as technologies). But as Brian Larkin notes of infrastructural technologies, "as they get taken up and used in everyday life, they spin off in wholly unexpected directions, generating intended and unintended consequences" (3). Thus, women can use these ideal forms as technologies to navigate patriarchal structures in daily living but must adhere to the form of the ideal to do so. To successfully use an ideal form as a technology, women must learn the 'appropriate' rhetorics, embodiments, and material practices of that form. In this way, viewing ideal forms of motherhood as technologies has two functions: 1) as a practical technology that women use to navigate living in a patriarchal system and 2) as a method of self-disciplinary practice—a "technology of the self"—that women use to modify their beliefs,

behaviors, and bodies in order to 'become' mothers (Foucault *TOS* 18). In the first case, as a practical technology, this technological use can be seen in social movement organizing rooted in maternalist frames where women use ideal forms to make political claims and take public action. In the second case, as a method of self-discipline, this technological use can be seen in the ways individual mothers portray and represent themselves (particularly in popular media).

It is important to note that no woman can ever fully inhabit or portray an ideal form even if she holds the implied identity characteristics since the ideal form works ultimately as a patriarchal constraint to ensure all women can be held to account for their 'failures' at any time. However, women who hold the implied identity characteristics, can utilize the ideals (as technologies) in ways other women cannot. Here too, adherence to some aspects of an ideal form allows for departures from other aspects. So, fluency in the ideal forms (facility with them as technologies) becomes a way that women can achieve their own goals within systemic constraints. Ultimately, however, these ideals work as technologies of the motherhood infrastructure that allow women to be grouped, separated, and maneuvered against each other particularly through various constellations of intersecting vectors of difference such as race, class, religion, and immigration (or citizenship) status. This control function of ideal forms (technologies) is what ensures the stability of the motherhood infrastructure over time and as mothering ideals shift.

A Brief Sketch of US Motherhood from a Cultural-Technological Perspective

Using an infrastructural approach to develop a cultural-technological view of motherhood offers a way to interrogate the social, political, economic, and cultural relationships between abstract discourses, institutional policies, and concrete daily practices rooted in a view of women's agency that is also attentive to structural forms of discipline and discrimination. To

suggest how this type of analysis could work, I sketch a brief history and map the relationships between various US mothering ideals. In the US context ideal forms of motherhood are grouped into three primary historical frameworks: Moral Mothering, Scientific Mothering, and Intensive Mothering (Plant 808-816).

As a mothering ideal (technology), "Moral Mothering" held sway during the first one-hundred-and-thirty-year period of US national history, roughly the period from 1750 through 1880. It is inclusive of at least two ideal constructions of mothering: the "Republican Mother," whose focus was on raising the next generations of citizens and patriots for the new American nation, and the Victorian mother—better known as the "True Woman"—an ideal which framed white, middle class mothers as morally pure, pious, domestic, and submissive (Welter 152).[6] This era saw a rise in maternalist attitudes imbricated with contention over the correct socio-political place of women and people of color. The first half of the period was framed through Republican motherhood ideals which asserted raising future patriots—particularly sons—was the correct form of women's civic participation because it occurred in the domestic sphere rather than in the public sphere. The latter half of this period was framed through True Womanhood ideals which continued and expanded the focus on the domestic sphere as the proper locus of women's, and particularly mothers', belonging and action. Moral mothering ideals, as a cultural infrastructural technology, shaped women's daily living particularly by confining their practices of civic engagement, consumption, and importantly their interactions with institutions in ways that supported and maintained existing structures of power such as slavery and early capitalism (Merish 32-26).

This development, importantly, arose in part as a response to the Abolition and Woman Suffrage Movements which bracketed the ideal of True Womanhood's rise to and fall from

prominence. In relation to these two social movements, the motherhood infrastructure was used to deploy the ideology of the cult of True Womanhood to stabilize the motherhood infrastructure by reasserting the 'proper' role for women as limited to the domestic sphere. Moreover, True Womanhood discourses of domesticity, purity, submissiveness, and piety implied a white, Protestant and middle to upper class woman as its subject. Thus, access to inhabiting True Womanhood as an ideal form (technology) was inherently denied, partially, or in full, to women not considered white, including Southern and Eastern European women, Irish women, women of color, non-Christian and Catholic women, poor women who often labored outside the home to sustain their families, and single mothers whether widowed, divorced, or unmarried. This barrier to accessing True Womanhood ideals thus fell disproportionately on women of color, Catholic women, and/or immigrant women (Fessenden 164-65).

The transition between Moral Mothering and its successor "Scientific Mothering" was marked by increasingly political and public roles for middle-class, white women with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. Simultaneously, this period, from the 1870s through the 1910s, was characterized by racial, ethnic, religious, and class tensions predicated on large-scale demographic shifts encompassing the all-time peak of US immigration and the Great Migration—the movement of free black people from the South to the North (Bederman 5-12). Demographic changes on such a massive scale impacted the motherhood infrastructure such that the True Womanhood ideal (technology), with its implicit white, middle class domesticity, became a less functional framework as non-white, non-Protestant, poor, and immigrant populations increased. Simultaneously, patriarchal governmental institutions also sought to manage these same tensions by turning to the new, 'modern' sciences for solutions.

Scientific Mothering, then, arose as an ideal—as a technology of the motherhood infrastructure—which enabled institutional actors, often on behalf of the government, to perform interventions into the 'private' realm of the domestic sphere in response to increasing foreign immigration, the Great Migration's redistribution of black populations, and women's increasing incursion into the political sphere. It held sway as a mothering ideal (technology) for approximately the seventy-five years following Moral Motherhood, roughly the period from the 1880s through the mid-1940s.[7] During this time, the rise of science and medical expertise displaced mothers as the primary experts in their children's care which from an infrastructural perspective limited mothers' agency and power in the domestic sphere and in relation to the state. Now the 'ideal' mother paid attention to and relied on scientific or medical expertise in child rearing, particularly around issues of public health and developmental education, as well as pregnancy and breast feeding (Plant 812-13, Lewis 1075).

In the early part of this period, the socio-political and economic concerns with poverty and the immigration and migration of 'non-whites' led to a scientific focus on public health, hygiene, and education that was incorporated into the motherhood infrastructure through medicalization and institutional controls of children. For example, "protecting children from harm by their caregivers, or removing them from 'undesirable' communities, were the foci of the late-19th century child savers" (Courtney 4). Non-governmental 'charitable' groups preceded institutionalized government welfare agencies. These groups routinely targeted poor, single-parent, immigrant, and non-white communities as 'undesirable' (Courtney 1-3). Among these marginalized groups, indigenous children were specifically targeted for 'civilization' through the destruction of their cultural and ethnic identity in politically devised and state sponsored Indian boarding schools as the US encroached on native lands (Booth 47). Such 'scientific' practices

were seen as ways to maintain social order and a civil society through changing mothering behaviors. On the extreme end of these social controls were the rise of Malthusianism and the development of eugenics policies aimed at poor and immigrant women and women of color. Eugenics policies included the practice of forced sterilization of poor women, women deemed as 'criminals', as well as women deemed as having low intelligence, as poverty, criminality, and intelligence were believed to be 'blood borne' or hereditary traits. Often, Malthusian discourses were used to target immigrant women and women of color in particular because of cross-linkages between structural racist discourses about non-white women's deviance, criminality, and non-white sub intelligence. Such pseudo-science allowed the implementation of highly damaging and cruel policies of sterilization that continued in some states until the 1960s. Moreover, these policies and practices were implemented concurrently with public messaging about companionate marriage and the promotion of pregnancy among white middle and upper-class women (Schoen 80-110). These twinned approaches to motherhood and mothering literally manifested 'scientific' mothering ideals in policy and let the state determine who could and could not mother with life-long material effects for many women. In this way, the motherhood infrastructure and its technologies (ideals of motherhood) were deployed to mobilize racialized and classed hierarchies that supported white, middle and upper-class centric policies.

The transition between Scientific Mothering and the following motherhood ideal (technology), "Intensive Mothering," was in part a function of women's eventual refusal of scientism and re-centering of maternalist expertise (Green 573). At the vanguard of this change was activism by groups like the La Leche League, whose focus on breast feeding contradicted the predominantly male expertise of the medical community (Weiner 97). This contestation between scientism and maternalist expertise occurred over a twenty-five-year period that

encompassed radical shifts in social norms, politics, and economics linked to the Civil Rights and Women's Movements and the rise of late capitalism (Arid 247-51). In this period mothers themselves began overtly using the motherhood infrastructure and motherhood ideals as technologies to forward their social, political, economic, and cultural concerns.

Intensive Mothering remains the current motherhood ideal (technology).[8] The ideal figure of the Intensive Mother is comprised of at least four core beliefs:

> (1) children need and require constant and ongoing nurturing by their biological mothers, who are primarily responsible for meeting these needs; (2) mothers must rely on experts to guide them in meeting their children's needs; (3) mothers must spend large amounts of time and energy on their children; and (4) mothers must regard mothering as more important than paid work (Green 573)

The primary focus of this mothering ideal (technology) is that the child's wellbeing is a mother's responsibility regardless of her circumstances or other competing interests, such as her need to work or marital status. Since the mid-1990s, Intensive Mothering ideals—which reassert maternal expertise over scientific expertise in rearing children—have begun to dovetail with the growth of a specific new maternalist ideology in the US, particularly in political and economic milieus. This contemporary strand of maternalist ideology draws on characteristics of Moral Mothering and blends them into the frame of Intensive Mothering as a technology of the motherhood infrastructure to reconfigure it in ways that are more useful for mothers themselves. This variation in the ideal form exemplifies what Angela McRobbie has discussed as a post-feminist sensibility (1-24) as it blends the language of women's 'empowerment' and 'personal choice' with notions of women's 'natural' desire for marriage and children. This tension between feminist ideas and traditional desires is then enshrined in discourses about women's specialized role as mothers, working ultimately to reinforce traditional, hetero-patriarchal gender and

familial roles and to reassert racialized and classed hierarchies between women (Mezzy and Pillard 240-42).

Another unique facet of this contemporary mothering ideal (technology) is that it provides multiple mechanisms for surveilling mothers. Intensive Mothering has been critiqued as "the decisive female Olympic competition," putting mothers in opposition with other mothers in a battle, not only to be seen as "good" or successful mothers but to be the 'best' mother of all, setting all mothers up to fail (Green 573). Here again we see that Intensive Mothering also works as a "technology of the self" promoting women's intentional use of the discourses and practices of the 'ideal' in public (Foucault *TOS* 18). Furthermore, as a 'competitive' practice, Intensive Mothering promotes self-surveillance by mothers as well as the surveillance of mothers in public by strangers—particularly other mothers—and in private by friends and family.

To explicate how women's options within the motherhood infrastructure are limited and how using ideal forms as technologies divides and hurts women, a brief example of the ways motherhood ideals (technologies) are differentially deployed around the same socio-political, cultural and economic concerns is useful. As noted previously, technologies deployed across infrastructures are not uniform. In the case of the motherhood infrastructure, different motherhood ideals (technologies) do not have clean starting and ending dates. Rather, the different ideals overlap in various ways as social organization shifts between the ideal forms (technologies) of Moral, Scientific, and Intensive mothering in various geographic and cultural contexts. This is what produces the interrelation of the infrastructures' laminary and palimpsestic qualities (Larkin 5). So, contestations between ideal forms (technologies) happen because of institutional and geographical differences like the differential deployment of medical 'knowledges' in urban and rural areas that have different relationships and access to 'the best

medicine.' Thus, looking at the differential deployment of motherhood ideals as competing

technologies in the motherhood infrastructure during a single period offers a productive site to

see how particular nodes of the infrastructure (e.g., institutions) and various relays, routes, and

circuits (e.g., policies or practices) were—and are—formed in relation to sets of social,

economic, and political relations and historical events. This type of analysis also shows how the

motherhood infrastructure uses redundancies—the recursion of older ideal forms

(technologies)—to stabilize the system (infrastructure + technology). Here, new maternalism is a

prime example of the way older ideal forms (technologies) are redeployed and repackaged within

and alongside modernized ideal forms (technologies). Such redeployments are often framed as

required by an increasing potential for systemic breakdowns. For the motherhood infrastructure,

new maternalist logics often pose a response to the imagined breakdown of the US family.

The following example of the differential deployment of motherhood ideals shows the re-

deployment of Moral Mothering (characterized by mothers' domesticity, purity, submissiveness,

and piety) and Scientific Mothering (characterized by mothers' adherence to scientific and

medical expertise in child rearing) within the framework of Intensive Mothering (characterized

by mothers' constant nurture and use of expert guidance, large expenditures of time and money

on children, and prioritization of child rearing over paid work) in response to a linked series of

'social problems.' Between the early 1980s through the early 1990s three linked 'social

problems' were identified as needing national response. These included: 1) rising drug use as the

basis for the 'War on Drugs,' 2) a teen 'pregnancy crisis', and 3) the problematic of 'latchkey'

kids whose working parents left them home alone after school (Blakemore). Through this brief

example, viewing motherhood as a cultural infrastructure allows us to see how different

constellations of race, geography, and middle-class women's broadening participation in the

work force combine in different ways such that institutional and state responses to perceived moral, medical, and child welfare concerns impact populations of women as mothers in very different ways.

Under a framework of Intensive Mothering technologies—where mothers must perform constant nurturing, expend huge amounts of time and money, and incorporate expert parenting advice over and above career or domestic labor (Green 573)—having 'troubled' children implicates socially imagined maternal 'failure' to a greater or lesser extent. The extent of maternal failure is connected to other socially imagined 'moral' failings in US culture, including poverty, non-whiteness, non-Christian religious beliefs, or immigration status. How such perceived 'maternal failure' is socially, economically, and politically addressed is dependent on the combination of these factors built-into a mother's social location.

In situations where mothers have a combination of perceived 'moral failings,' Scientific Mothering technologies—where scientific and medical 'authority' are deemed more important than a mother's experiential expertise—are deployed by institutional actors which posit these women as incapable of being 'good' mothers. Here, the social, political, and economic concerns of latch key kids, drug use, and teen pregnancy were identified as 'public' problems in need of redress by the state and other institutional actors. Thus, non-white mothers, especially black mothers, and poor mothers—often in urban environments labeled 'inner cities' to demarcate class—are routinely required to meet state specified scientific and medical standards to be deemed successful mothers. Their ability to achieve this success as mothers was/is judged and limited by other institutions such as schools, departments of health and human services that control welfare and food stamp payments, child protective services offices as well as legal institutions such as the police and the courts. For these women, the perception of drug use or

sales, a teen pregnancy, or lack of childcare while working could precipitate the state stepping into family life at any time and abrogating parenting rights in favor of child welfare (Gustafson 9).[9]

Simultaneously for middle and upper class, predominantly white mothers, these same concerns—drug use and sales, teen pregnancy, and latch-key childcare—were considered private rather than public affairs. Here "Moral Mothering" technologies—notions of domesticity, the private sphere, and mothers' moral purity—were used within the framework of Intensive Mothering technologies as a corrective to perceived social, political, and economic problems. It is because of classed and racialized narratives of women's morality and nurturing capacities linked to Moral Mothering—as a technology of the motherhood infrastructure—that predominantly white, middle-and upper-class mothers are perceived socially and by the state as capable. Here the concurrent rise of self-help literature and the promotion of family counselling along with financial access to private rehabilitation programs, abortions, and quality childcare ensure that these mothers were (and continue to be) seen as 'successful' mothers. Thus, white, middle-and upper-class mothers are allowed (even encouraged) to resolve child-wellbeing 'problems' by providing large time and financial expenditures in support of their children. They are also assumed to have competence with adhering to the instructions of child rearing experts. And they are viewed as able to afford choices such as potentially leaving paid work to focus on and care for 'troubled' children.

This brief example shows how a cultural-technological view and cultural-infrastructural thinking can provide more complex and nuanced ways of approaching motherhood, mothering, and mothers. The infrastructural nodes of medicine, education, policing, social work, religious belief, and labor interconnect through the practices of mothers as well as discourses and

imaginaries about mothering to enable those mothers most in compliance with patriarchal hierarchies to have some 'freedoms' (power) within the system while also ensuring that mothers who are 'out of compliance' with patriarchal structures—who are potentially 'dangerous'—are controlled. Such a view is particularly useful in managing the complexity of analyses using an intersectional approach because it can enable a view of how each node works differently but in coordination to (re)produce specific outcomes in support of dominant systems (Wilson 273). This type of nuance is urgently necessary for addressing power disparities and understanding contemporary uses of identity in social, economic, and political contexts.

Mapping a Cultural-Technological Analytic: Infrastructural Thinking and Critical Theory

In academic research critical-cultural theories are often referred to as 'tools in our research toolkit,' noting that different phenomena require the use of different theories and their analytical frameworks for effective analysis. This is a telling metaphor that shows an embedded, if unremarked, technological understanding within critical-cultural theory (at least) in practice. Infrastructural thinking poses a more explicit way to understand theorizations of cultural phenomena and processes through an STS framework. In this section, I map between feminist informatics theorization of systems and critical cultural theorizations by Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, and Kimberlé Crenshaw to show that infrastructural theory provides a way to understand critical cultural conceptions and, crucially, offers a purchase point to understand the interactivity of the material and the discursive as they are embedded in historically and locally specific cultural experience (Larkin 3-7, Wilson 253).[10]

Infrastructures, according to Star become—intentionally—invisible to people when they are working properly ("Ethnography" 379-80).[11] This is a primary feature of infrastructures, at

least in the US and other 'developed' societies. Because systems (infrastructures + technologies) are not isolated, they are relational, contextual, and interactive with other systems, they become most invisible (e.g., seamless) when they are well integrated with other systems. Crucial to the integration across systems is stability. This encompasses both a single system's internal stability as well as stability between multiple systems. And it is at this system level that we can begin to see how difference relates to power in social organizing. Importantly, processes of stabilization act as processes of inclusion and exclusion because there are "critical differences between those for whom networks are stable and those for whom they are not, where those are putatively the 'same' network" (Star "Onions" 92). Thus a "stabilized network is only stable for some," specifically members included in the group who "form/use/maintain it" (Star "Onions" 93). This produces embedded, system-wide hierarchies because the "public stability of a standardized network often involves the private suffering of those who are not standard—who must use the standard network, but who are also non-members of the community of practice" (Star "Onions" 93). From a cultural-technological perspective, then, systems stabilization is a mechanism that orders hierarchies to maintain existing structures.

Another important component of a cultural-technological framework is an understanding of the different orientations of technological constructions and the impact this has on applying a technological lens to cultural phenomena and processes. Orientation, in my use here, refers to the historically accreted logic of practice in how a technology should be developed, deployed, maintained, and used. Infrastructures, seen as stable and reliable, are oriented toward minimizing risk and maximizing redundancy to ensure ongoing functioning.[12] Technologies, however, seen as 'cutting edge' and dynamic, are oriented toward risk and reward, demanding a higher

tolerance for variable success and failure because they are generative of new capacities or capabilities.[13]

The two orientations of technological construction—traditional and dynamic—pose an important analytic for thinking about cultural phenomena and processes. However, this distinction between orientations of technological developments is often obscured by the ways in which technological development is narrated through notions of problem solving, transcendence, and progress mythology. Attending to orientations offers a useful model for thinking about processes of 'progress and return' along with new configurations of older discourses or practices. Thus, to be useful for analyzing socio-cultural phenomena, a cultural-technological framework must explore properties of infrastructures and technologies in relation to each other. Technologies and infrastructures are built to be interdependent, so an exploration of the one demands an exploration of the other.

The importance of this technological interdependency becomes apparent in Nicole Strarosielski's discussion of the fluidity of the "information sphere" predicated on the "fixity" of deep-sea cabling in telephony technologies (20). She highlights the traditionalism of infrastructure development, 'hidden' under the surface, that reuses known pathways to ensure reliability and security held in tension with the seemingly progressive and innovative diffusion and expansion of technologies that such infrastructures deploy above ground; in plain view (10-11). Starosielski argues "centralizing forces continue to permeate and underpin the extension of networks," which is important because infrastructures tend to be built conservatively, reusing existing pathways and installation techniques that have "already been tested and proven" (12). Thus, older infrastructural forms, at least in part, structure or bleed into newer forms maintaining continuities and legibility between the past and the present. Wilson notes this aspect of

infrastructure saying "[t]he design and use of infrastructure is not sui generis but involves preexisting conventions and materials—legacy infrastructures—that condition its operation" (263). For a cultural-technological framework, Strarosielski's work points to the ways that dominant principles of social organization can recolonize attempts to change and reconfigure existing structures of social organization and in doing so continuously re-stabilize the overall system.[14]

From this understanding of systems, there are several important theorizations of socio-cultural processes which lend themselves to being understood through a cultural-technological framework. The most directly linked, given the terminology used to explicate the theory, is Foucault's discussion of "technologies of the self" (18). Other theorizations that lend themselves easily to this view include Rancière's notion of "distributions of the sensible" (36), Bourdieu's theorization of "fields of relations" (30-38), Butler's theorization of "citationality" (1-15), as well as Crenshaw's and Collins' theorizations of intersectionality ("Mapping" 1241-1299; 164). Each of these theorists is trying to understand the processes by which culture informs social and relational interactions in the world. Thinking these frameworks through a systems approach—adding feminist infrastructural theory—helps to root such explorations in material practices and effects.

Importantly, these critical scholars are all theorizing cultural processes in (at least) three ways that map onto technological systems theorizations. First each cultural theorist is concerned with the ways cultural processes are naturalized and so recede from our general awareness. Naturalization, here, is what allows for socio-cultural hierarchies to thrive. Naturalization of infrastructures and technologies similarly works to define social organization through hierarchies and norms (Star "Ethnography" 379-80). Second, each of these cultural theorists approaches the

tension between norms and difference. This tension between norms and difference produces discourses of privilege and marginality in the cultural milieu. From a systems perspective this tension is conceived of as a tension between stability (norms) and risk (difference) where 'tolerable' risk constitutes acceptable difference and 'intolerable' risk constitutes deviance (Starr "Onions" 93). Third, each of these cultural theorists poses the co-occurring nature of norms and difference, where norms (stability) and difference (risk) are coconstitutive of each other. From a systems' view this coconstitutive nature can be posed as the interdependence of infrastructure (stable) and technology (risky). Moreover, this interdependence ensures that systems by nature will stay regulated by norms-guided functions (Starosielski 10-13).

Foucault's notion of technologies of the self includes those discursive and embodied processes "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (*TOS* 18). For Rancière, however, "partition[s] of the perceptible," (122) are tied to our sensate perceptions which we use in concert with a specific "distribution of the sensible" as the "generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed" (36). For Bourdieu, habitus "as systems of dispositions, are effectively realized only in relation to a determinate structure of positions socially marked by the social properties of their occupants, through which they manifest themselves" (71). Feminist scholars, Butler, Crenshaw, and Collins theorize how cultural processes work as systems that shape and use constructed identity categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality to impose differential abilities to negotiate social relations. Butler's theory of Performativity highlights the practices of "citationality" used by people to be legible to other

people and institutions within a heteronormative, binary gendered culture (15). While Crenshaw and Collins theorize intersectionality as an analytic tool for understanding how people are socially located within multiple, overlapping systems of oppression, in ways that reproduce systems of dominance and power ("Mapping" 1241-1299, 164). In these theorizations, identity categories themselves can work as technologies of the overarching socio-cultural system to organize the social hierarchy in ways that structure the distribution of resources, people, and things. From a cultural-technological view these critical theories show cultural technologies as simultaneously deployed by systems of power and used by individuals to negotiate living within such systems.

For each theorist it is a different object or experience of cultural technology—Foucault's focus is language, Rancière's focus is aesthetics, Bourdieu's focus is habitus, Butler's focus is legibility, and for Crenshaw and Collins, their focus is erasure—which enables or limits people's ability to navigate socio-cultural relations. If we ask how does language, aesthetics, position-taking, citationality, or erasure work as a technology? We can see that each of these cultural technologies works along its own infrastructure (as described in the theory). Foucault shows that language works as a technology within an infrastructure of discourse, what he calls a "discursive formation" (*PS* 331-334). Rancière shows that aesthetics work as a technology within an infrastructure of sensibility, what he calls the "distribution of the sensible" (36). Bourdieu shows that position-taking (disposition) works as a technology within an infrastructure of practice, what he calls "the field of relations" (30-38). Butler shows that legibility works within a system of citationality, what she calls "performativity" (1-15). While Crenshaw and Collins show that erasure (of black women) works as a technology within self-reinforcing systems of dominance predicated on constructed identity categories ("Mapping" 1241-1299, 164). From this point we

can begin to ask other questions about how these systems (infrastructure + technology) are organized, specifically through their functions in daily life.[15]

From a feminist informatics lens on infrastructure, approaching these various critical cultural frameworks as cultural-technological systems allows for a view of culture itself as a material thing that we build. It is a construction but one that is not simply social, or political, or economic, or material, but an apparatus that incorporates all these aspects. In this way, discursive formations, sensibility, fields of relations, performativity, and matrices of domination can be understood—like motherhood—as culturally-built environments (infrastructures) that enable language, aesthetics, position-taking, legibility, and erasure to function both structurally and in relation to human agency (Wilson 262). As such, it foregrounds a focus on how 'culture' manifests the social, political, economic, and material as interactive in shaping daily living (Larkin 5). Importantly a feminist informatics lens also shows that such interactivity of systems—here the interconnections, nodes, and pathways of the culturally-built environment— develops over time (often unevenly), is laden with power, and incorporates historical contingencies and local specificities (Larkin 5). Thus, it contributes a conceptual lens to critical cultural thinking capable of analyzing the non-linear development of phenomena over time, with local, historical specificity, rooted in material conditions and effects, and attentive to "structure and agency" (Wilson 262).

Below, I provide a brief outline of such an analysis using a cultural-technological view of motherhood to explicate a current strategy mothers are using to negotiate daily life in relation to mothering ideals (technologies) and the motherhood infrastructure. Such an analysis foregrounds the way women use ideal forms (technologies) of the motherhood infrastructure to assert agency,

as well as how the ideal forms constrain their agency limiting it to the proscribed norms of the socio-culturally established "role" of mother.

Using Popular Cultural Forms to Negotiate the Motherhood Infrastructure

Historically, motherhood has been discussed broadly in US society through interactions with popular cultural forms. The proper political, social, and economic role for women-as-mothers has been debated through popular criticism in political tracts, news publications, ladies' magazines, anti-suffrage postcards, scientific parenting books, and televisual media (Askit 1103, Lewis 1075, Thompson 747). Under "Intensive Mothering" ideals (technologies) media representations of mothering via television, film and news media are still highly present but have been augmented by online media as broad uptake of user-friendly Internet platforms has become ubiquitous. Today, moms utilize digital media to generate representative portrayals of themselves.[16] These portrayals interact with other popular culture representations of mothers in a multiplicity of ways that can ultimately be both enabling and constraining for mothers.

One way that women have taken up the affordances of digital media platforms is through negotiating their own subjectivity as mothers. As early as 2004, and expanding in the last decade, women began articulating specific 'motherhood subjectivities,' meaning that mothers articulate themselves to be a specific 'type' of mother that encapsulates their mothering practices in relation to their 'identity.' These include subjectivities such as: the 'Security Mom,' the 'Mama Grizzly,' and the 'Tiger Mother,' among others.[17] This pluralization of motherhood subjectivities, primarily linked to political and identarian frameworks, has emerged in relation to a variety of social, political, and economic issues alongside a rising expression of new maternalist attitudes that foreground women's specialized roles as mothers (Mezzy and Pillard

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242). Mothers have taken to Web-based media and social networking platforms as a primary way of engaging with and articulating these various motherhood subjectivities.

This use of 'popular' media to negotiate the 'established role' of motherhood, from an infrastructural perspective, shows that mothers become a "community of practice" who use the media available to them—currently the Internet, social media, and Web-based technologies—as a conduit for the circulation of particular narratives which come to make up the standards of the community (Star "Onions" 94). These standards are made up of a variety of arrangements including forms of practice as well as categorizations and labelling which are negotiated by the members of the community of practice in relation to the affordances and interconnections with outside structures and technologies, called "*externalities*" (Star "Onions" 92). In the framework of motherhood subjectivities, many externalities are variable and highly dependent on the linked discourses of a named subjectivity (security, eco, anti-vaxxer, for example). Other externalities are relatively stable, these include social structures as well as cultural frameworks of difference such as race, class, sexuality, age, and religion. As practitioners negotiate useful arrangements, practices become standardized and the network becomes stabilized (Star "Onions" 93). Once stabilization occurs standards in a community of practice may become impervious to change.

Within the community of practice of mothers who articulate motherhood subjectivity online, several important discourses provide the basis for the standards which are being negotiated within the system. These include new maternalism which attaches value to mothers' 'correct' presentation of behavior and emotion; Intensive Mothering which proscribes how mothers should relate to and interact with their children; and subjectivity-linked external discourses (anti-vaccine, ecological, and women's labor discourses for example) which outline how mothering practices should guide women's public commentary and action on behalf of

children and families. It is these same discourses which provide a basis for the social surveillance of women-as-mothers from both inside and outside the community of practice. And it is social surveillance of mothers which reinforces ideal forms (technologies) of mothering as a structure for ensuring mothers' behavior remains within proscribed limits. This circular reinforcement is the mechanism through which the motherhood infrastructure remains stable.

The current trend of women articulating 'motherhood subjectivities' as a technological practice within the motherhood infrastructure uses the trope of 'fierceness' to link to new maternalist logics specifically through mothers' specialized role in childcare. This use of 'fierce' imagery, what I call fierce mothering, in the articulations of subjectivity makes up the discussion and analysis in chapters two and three. In chapter two, I outline a history of 'fierce mothering' and situate it within motherhood as a historical political ideal, here we can see how fierce mothering represents a user adaptation of the cultural infrastructure of motherhood (Wilson 257-259). In chapter three, I analyze fierce mothering, and its tactic of using subjectivity, as a strategic form of gendered communication that generates a specific form of digital sociality and intimate publicity, showing why and how fierce mothers have adapted the motherhood infrastructure to their use. In chapter four, I analyze how fierce mothering works as an online practice with both benefits and harms for the mothers who use it, highlighting how the motherhood infrastructure remains stable and circulates power in relation to fierce mothers' adaptation. The chapter situates fierce mothering within the larger online community of the 'momosphere,' explicates how it repackages a historical model for (hetero, white, middle-upper class) women's liberal democratic subjectivity, and provides a basis for increased surveillance and disciplining of 'fierce' mothers. Chapter five takes up the connection between popular culture and 'fierce' mothering in more detail through an analysis of the television show,

American Housewife, which I argue reflects and reinforces the practice of 'fierce mothering' as an 'appropriate' technological mothering practice in the motherhood infrastructure.

Each of these analyses is grounded in a cultural-technological view of motherhood as a cultural infrastructure and ideal forms of mothering as technologies. This analytical through-line shows that motherhood discourses and mothering practices both delimit women's choices and enable women to negotiate patriarchal systems through the culturally-built environment of motherhood. Moreover, these discourses and practices are constituted through socio-political, economic, and cultural relations and interlinkages between the needs of the state, private institutions, and daily living. Analyzing historical changes in ideal forms and women's ability to inhabit and use these forms shows how cultural technologies operate in a twofold manner as both practical technologies for material interactions and "technologies of the self" which serve to convert individual women into being 'correct' mothers through self-regulation. Crucially, a cultural-technological view elucidates women's participation in mothering practices as an agentic response to patriarchal systems of control. As we will see in the following chapters, women do assert individual agency through motherhood, however motherhood as a basis for their agency presents a limited set of options for women. And, in choosing from this limited set of options, women often reinforce social hierarchies that are ultimately harmful to them.

CHAPTER 2

FIERCE MOTHERING: THE GROWTH OF MOTHERHOOD SUBJECTIVITIES FROM THE

"SOCCER MOM" TO THE "MAMA DRAGON"

> *It seems like it's kind of a mom awakening in the last year*
> *and a half where women are rising up and saying "No,*
> *we've had enough already" because mom's kinda just*
> *know when something's wrong. Here in Alaska, I always*
> *think of the mama grizzly bears that rise up on their hind*
> *legs when somebody's coming to attack their cubs; to do*
> *something adverse toward their cubs. You thought pit bulls*
> *were tough—well—you don't want to mess with the mama*
> *grizzlies.*
>
> <div align="right">Sarah Palin, July 2010</div>

Building on the previous chapter where I outlined the ideal practices of correct mothering

including "Moral Mothering," "Scientific Mothering," and the current framework of "Intensive

Mothering" as technologies which mothers can use to navigate their daily lives in US culture, in

this chapter, I explore how the phenomenon of 'fierce mothering' both fits within this longer

history and represents a shift in women's relationship to politics and the nation through their

development of subjectivity as a communicative frame. This shift is characterized by women's

identification with fierce motherhood subjectivities which enable fierce mothers to negotiate the

socio-political expectations and demands intensive mothering discourses along with

contemporary social and economic shifts. Fierce subjective identifications allow women to

rhetorically co-construct their own identities by linking their specific concerns through

motherhood constitutively with aspects of wider socio-political discourses.

The use of motherhood in this way as a basis for socio-political speech/action relies on women's assertion of their specialized roles and expertise as mothers. Such assertions make the articulation of motherhood subjectivity a new type of maternalist practice within a long history of maternalist claims used in US politics (Michael 23-34, Mezzy and Pillard 232-38). The hallmark of fierce mothering as a gendered communicative strategy grounding mothers' socio-political voice and action is the combined use of maternal subjectivity with fierce imagery—either animal figures or as warriors (e.g., Mama Grizzlies, Moms Rising, Tiger Mothers) on behalf of their children—to invoke a maternalist ethos through references to the instinctual, inborn expertise and knowledge that only mothers possess. Naomi Mezzy and Cornelia Pillard have noted this practice as part of what they deem "new maternalist" logics specifically identifying the Mama Grizzly and Mom's Rising followings (discussed in detail below) as foundational loci of expressions of new maternalism (232). I extend their work here in my discussion of fierce motherhood subjectivities exploring the increasing variety and development of new maternalist expressions that make up the fierce mothering phenomenon.

In this chapter, I outline eleven fierce mothering subjectivities that have emerged and risen to US national awareness—primarily via news and popular media—since the mid-1990s. The specific fierce mothering subjectivities—e.g., Security Moms, Mom's Rising, Mama Grizzlies, Tiger Mothers, Eco Moms, Anti-Vaxxer Moms, (pro-border control) Angel Moms, Mothers of the Movement, Mama Dragons, and MAGA Moms—included in this analysis have been taken up and used broadly by mothers as a basis for articulating their own opinions, concerns, and beliefs online. They were selected for inclusion based on their status as 'nationally recognized' fierce mothering subjectivities which was determined by a combination of broad uptake by mothers utilizing the subjectivity and the subjectivity's inclusion in national (and in

some cases international) media reports and discussions about mothers' fierce articulations. Many other 'lesser known' motherhood subjectivities often using animal figures (e.g., dolphins, elephants, llamas, etc.) are discussed on mom-specific forums and websites. Such localized subjectivities tend to develop in relation to nationally recognized subjectivities. For example, a spate of 'gentle' animal themed parenting styles erupted in response to the constitution of the Tiger Mother subjectivity which is indicative of a resistive response by mothers' who value different emotive experience and relational frames.

This tracing highlights the creativity and agency women employ in using this form of new maternalism as a mechanism for articulating their concerns. It also underscores the limitations of fierce mothering in dislodging dominant, patriarchal structures; a problematic that I explore in detail in successive chapters. I start by outlining the history and development of fierce mothering as a communicative practice. I follow this main aspect of the chapter by situating fierce mothering within the longer history of maternalism as a US political idea to underscore how it embeds specific structural relations even as it offers a new framework for mothers' public speech.

Fierce Mothering Subjectivities from the 'Soccer Mom' to the 'Mama Dragon'

In this section, I provide a history of the development and expansion of the phenomenon of fierce mothering. This contemporary historical overview shows mothers' varied ways of using subjectivity as a particular 'approach' for negotiating with and for power. Included within the history are fierce mothering subjectivities which have made their way into the national consciousness, although there are others asserted which have not reached the same level of socio-political, economic, and cultural saturation and relevance. These articulations of fierce mothering subjectivities utilize a new maternalist sensibility that incorporates useful aspects of

ideal forms of mothering as outlined in chapter one. The admixture of current and prior ideal forms of mothering with contemporary practices of mothers' subjectivation shapes new maternalism's "set of assumptions, fantasies, myths, and stock characters" (Mezzy and Pillard 232). Thus, fierce mothering subjectivities, like new maternalist characters, are "based on reality and influence reality, but should not be conflated with it" (Mezzy and Pillard 232). Surveying the development of fierce mothering as a new maternalist phenomenon, therefore, also outlines the ways mothers use ideal forms as technologies to navigate motherhood as a cultural infrastructure.

Fierce mothering subjectivities—mothers' assertions of themselves as specific types of mothers (e.g., Security, Grizzly, Tiger, Eco, Anti-Vaxxer, Angel, Dragon, MAGA, etc.,) based on their preferred concerns—are wide and varied but converge around politicized identities that denote mothers' chosen ethics. Starting with so-called "soccer moms" in the 1990s, to the more explicitly politicized subjectivities that exist today, fierce mothering has relied on both political and popular culture to become visible and vocal.

The Soccer Mom:

The female subject of the "soccer mom" created a media sensation when it first appeared in national discourses and popular media in July 1996, as part of that year's US presidential campaign (Carroll 9). As a descriptor, "soccer mom" was deployed by political operatives as a framing of what they believed would be the most crucial swing voting bloc: moderate to Republican suburban women (Carroll 10). From July to November 1996, the number of popular news media articles addressing the "soccer mom" phenomenon surged (Carroll 9). Thus, the "soccer mom," although originally a political fiction (Samuelsohn; Weisberg), became the stereotype for a generation complete with its own aesthetic that included haircuts and outfits

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which highlight casual "chic," practicality and ease of wear; visually marking a busy mom-on-the-go (Shane).

In the news media and the public imaginary, the primary characteristics of the "soccer mom," beyond the fact that she has children, were understood by the public as a woman who "lives in the suburbs (41.2% of the articles); is a swing voter (30.8%); is busy, harried, stressed out, or overburdened (28.4%); works outside the home (24.6%); drives a minivan, (usually Volvo) station wagon, or sports-utility vehicle (20.9%); is middle-class (17.1%); is married (13.7%); and is white (13.3%)" (Carroll 9). While the figure of the soccer mom was wildly popular and became representative of an entire generation of women in the 1990s, it obscured the socio-political and economic conditions of most US women. This larger population, who—either as mothers outside this privileged demographic or as childless women (by choice or circumstance)—did not have access to the corresponding, albeit limited and largely symbolic, power of the soccer mom subjectivity. As such, the "soccer mom" image represents an indirect appeal through 'lifestyle' (social and economic frames) for a specific group of women to identify with a political identity through the generation of a particularized subjectivity tied to motherhood.

"Soccer mom" subjectivity, whether or not women eventually identified with it, represented a gendered politics of the US normative, hegemonic order. Carroll argues that the political creation of the subject of the "soccer mom" presents an attempt to "disempower" the rising tide of women's political power and electoral gains in the 1994 mid-term election cycles (10). This is a hegemonic contraction that is crucially important because the framing of particularized motherhood subjectivities since 1996 continues to be asserted through social and economic frames while being used strategically in relation to politics. After the social

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phenomenon of the soccer mom subjectivity, nearly a decade passed before another articulation of a motherhood subjectivity—the Security Mom—entered the national consciousness.

The Security Mom:

The creation of the "security mom" subjectivity arises from mothers themselves rather than political operatives as a response to their fears and anxieties about the 'new' threat of terrorist violence and US border permeability after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, Washington D.C., and Somerset Pennsylvania. The origin story of the security mom subjectivity is claimed as a grass-roots response to women's heighted awareness of the need for national security and individual "family" security. However, broader public awareness of the subjectivity stems from its articulation in 2004, by Michele Malkin—a conservative political pundit—on her personal blog. In her "Security Mom Manifesto" blog post, Malkin claims that "security moms" are the direct descendants of the "soccer mom." The primary purpose of the manifesto is to put Republican candidates, specifically the incumbent President George W. Bush, on notice that she and other "security moms" will use their votes to punish conservatives who do not take national security concerns seriously in their political platform (Malkin). Throughout the post, Malkin's framing of "security mom" subjectivity carefully links together notions of domestic care and concern with notions of national care and concern through the framework of post-9/11 homeland security issues, ideas of protectionism, and the issues of undocumented immigration and border control.

Importantly, Malkin's claims are posed through her personal blog and not through her corporate work as a political pundit. Therefore, her articulation of motherhood subjectivity is supposed to be read as a personal, "authentic expression" of Malkin's identity rooted in her experience as a mother and her devotion to her family and children (Mezzy and Pillard 243).

This has two effects: downplaying the utility of "security mom" subjectivity for the conservative political establishment and highlighting maternal expertise as a pathway to women's political voice. Malkin effects this disarticulation of her concerns from her role as a political operator through her explicit maternalism by posing her concerns through personal maternal care and fierce protection of her children expanded to a national frame. So, as a "security mom," Malkin is speaking from her expertise as a mother, *not* as a political pundit. The effect of Malkin's polemical focus highlighting "security moms," however, ensured that the news media and Republican operators turned to them throughout the 2004 and subsequent election cycles. In the 2016 Presidential election cycle "security moms' were included in news segments and invited to the Republican National Convention. Thus, Malkin's use of her personal blog worked to obscure the political machinery she represents while simultaneously providing a new vector of engagement between it and potential women voters.

Malkin's articulation, while framed as personal, is also highly public given its permanency and its potential for global reach as a digital text online. This means that as Malkin and other "security moms" articulate themselves as subjects, their linkage of subjectivity with notions of national security also produces a mechanism of social surveillance and constraint over women identifying with this subjectivity opening them to scrutiny by other people and the state. Moreover, such a linkage works to position them infrastructurally as actors on behalf of the state. As Inderpal Grewal notes, "security mom" discourses "[make] the mother into both the subject and the agent of security" which allows "motherhood [to become] governmentalized" (201). However, this power of mothers is also constrained by "the increasing power of the religious right and the control of reproduction" which position mothers as a "target of sovereign and disciplinary power" (201). The effect of this reciprocal power relationship is the production of

"domestic subject citizens whose empowerment coincides with the needs of the nation and state"
(201). Since Malkin's 2004 claim to the position of "security mom," many other such
motherhood subjectivities have been articulated. After the ten years between the soccer mom and
the security mom, it took only two additional years for the next motherhood subjectivity to arise:
or, rather, they were Moms Rising.

The Moms Rising:

The subjectivity utilized by "Moms Rising," similarly to both predecessors is an overtly
politically oriented subjectivity. And, although it does not use a 'fierce' totem figure, "Rising"
here suggests mothers' rising up in protection of their young and themselves. These women are
warriors fighting the good fight on behalf of their families and children. Broadly speaking,
mothers' identifying personally with other fierce motherhood subjectivities, may also engage
with Moms Rising given its online media framework as a movement and group purpose as
outlined below.

In the 2006 mid-term political cycle, the online group Moms Rising was formed as a
"women focused" group related to *MoveOn.Org*, a leftist political organizing site for grassroots,
issues-based action coordination (Mezzy and Pillard 248-49). Using a similar format,
MomsRising.org, is a site that allows local and state level organizing around issues of importance
to mothers in relation to public policy, legislation, and elections. Moms Rising as a group is the
most traditionally 'politically active' subjectivity as the online forums, education, and
interactions are focused specifically on political action in support of identified causes. A primary
focus of the Moms Rising organization is the ongoing drive for women's—particularly
mothers'—equal pay, family leave, and childcare policies among other legislation ("Mission").
Mothers and their allies can meet on the site and use the rubrics, virtual space, and tools of the

Moms Rising site to organize direct political action on these issues and other related issues in their local communities, as well as at the state level and national level. The organization essentially assists individual mothers with building connections and becoming 'grass roots lobbyists' for mothers' and children's concerns in relation to policy and law.

Although Moms Rising positions itself as a 'progressive' organization, its use of maternalism has specific gendered effects on its practices. Naomi Mezzy and Caroline Pillard point to Moms Rising as an organization that exemplifies "new maternalist" practice (232). This is because its use of new maternalism is characterized by an "unwillingness to make the mother herself the object of advocacy" (249). Instead, like other forms of maternalism advocacy, Moms Rising locates the need for reform not in women's equal status, but in child wellbeing. So, Moms Rising advocacy poses "each of the rights and benefits [a mom] seeks, even in her own job, are to enable her better to care for her children" (249). Such arguments rest on a "cultural construction of maternal life [as] private, intensely focused on the home…" and it "studiously avoid[s] depicting mothers as radical" (249).

In this way, the supposedly progressive and feminist Moms Rising organization recuperates traditional frameworks of maternal care and comfort that work against their purported aims. By using a "maternalist identity to advocate for others while depoliticizing and even infantilizing how mothers themselves are portrayed" Moms Rising gives ground on the basic claim that women's rights must be equal rights (250). Further entrenching this traditional approach, Moms Rising advocacy foregrounds femininity and feminine behaviors, projected through a "palliative image: [where lobbying mothers are] gentle, comforting, conciliatory, flexible and accommodating," (250). Moms Rising thus relies on the longer US based history of maternalism predicated on white, middle class mothers as a basis to make reforms.

Problematically, this means its "new maternalist cultural assumptions reinforce the unequal consequences that flow from gendered family roles as they embrace and promote motherhood—and not parenthood or caregiving—as a value, an identity, an occupation, and a basis for political motivation" (233-34). Fierce mothering also continued to develop as a framework used by conservative mothers to engage in national political debates after the election of President Barack Obama in 2008. Conservative mothers, specifically, participated in and ensured the successful rise of the Tea Party, a reactionary grassroots conservative movement focused on reducing the size and scope of government (Deckman 4).

The Mama Grizzlies:

By 2010, this had led to the next broadly recognized motherhood subjectivity to come to the fore was Sarah Palin's "Mama Grizzlies." The Mama Grizzly subjectivity was first articulated in the epigraph that opens this chapter during a speech Palin gave to conservative women at a Susan B. Anthony Fund event in 2010. This subjectivity is the first to use a fierce animal figure, that of the "Mama Grizzly," who protects her children at all costs; especially from the government (Hunt). The Mama Grizzly is not the first fierce animal figure that Palin has referenced in relationship to her mothering. She also referenced her status as a 'hockey mom' and related them to fierceness saying, "...you know they say the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull: lipstick," in her 2008 Republican National Conventions speech as she articulated her maternal mandate for political action while accepting the Republican Vice Presidential nomination ("2008 RNC"). Interestingly, the Mama Grizzly subjectivity, then, is Palin's third articulation of motherhood subjectivity, the first referring to herself as a 'hockey mom,' as Alaska's version of the originating 'soccer mom' figure and the second likening hockey moms to pit bulls.

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The subjectivity of the Mama Grizzly is the one that 'stuck' for Palin and has since produced identification with her female supporters and conservative fan base. The Mama Grizzly subjectivity is closely linked to Tea Party politics as they are associated with Palin. A main component of the subjectivity is a distrust of traditional political actors and government (Deckman 154). In response, women—specifically mothers and grandmothers—as posed as the appropriate people to change government and provide oversight of candidates, parties, and elected officials whose policies Mama Grizzlies find incompatible with the futures they envision for their families and children. Mezzy and Pillard highlight the new maternalist aspects of Mama Grizzlies, noting that "[t]he Mama Grizzly approach exemplifies [new maternalist] hybridity by mixing populist, conservative anger and confrontation, traditional folksy charm, media sophistication, and a commitment to both mobilizing women and preserving traditional gender roles" (251). Moreover, this Mama Grizzly framework has specific resonances for conservative and evangelical mothers (252). By leveraging this resonance, the subjectivity taps into a long US tradition of conservative mothers' movements that have historically been tied to the preservation of Christian, white, middle-to-upper class power (Mattheis 130, McRae 9).

Between the ads' Palin's PAC launched in 2010 and through the 2012 election cycle, many mainstream news articles were written about the Mama Grizzly framing. These articles were published in outlets such as *Newsweek*, *Forbes*, and *The Washington Post* among others. Importantly, pundits applied the label to other conservative women candidates running across the nation during the election cycle including Nikki Haley, Carly Fiorina, and Susana Martinez (Miller "Really Mean"). And, eventually, Palin began citing other female candidates, such as Cecile Bledsoe, as Mama Gizzlies in support of the aims and cause of the "movement" ("Really Mean"). In May 2010, Hanna Rosin argued in *Slate* that "the conservative mama bear has

become a fully operational, effective political archetype" ("Tea Party"). And, by late September 2010, Lisa Miller wrote in *Newsweek* that after the heavy media focus, "[c]andidates who want to identify themselves as a certain kind of woman with a certain set of values use ursine language on the stump and in interviews ("Really Mean").

The Mama Grizzly subjectivity became popularized predominantly through Palin's online ads, which can still be found on *YouTube.* As Mezzy and Pillard note, Mama Grizzlies are often tech savvy women who "post videos on Facebook and start mommy blogs" (252). As a function of its popularity, several of Palin's supporters started and continue to run a blog site tied to the online radio channel, "Mama Grizzly Radio." The blog site, online radio show, podcasts, and videos produced and shared via the site allow Palin's fans and supporters to follow her and get political 'hot takes' on social, political, economic, and cultural topics that the blog staff deem of interest to Mama Grizzlies. Although the blog site is run by a male Palin supporter, Mama Grizzly Radio regularly includes women speakers for videos, radio shows, and podcasts. These women are at least friendly to, if not self-identified with Mama Grizzly subjectivity. Even in the wake of Palin's waning political efficacy after the 2016 Presidential race, the blog, podcast series, and radio show remain active in 2020 and the staff have linked the blog site with other social media platforms such as *Twitter*.

The Tiger Mother:

Following Palin's articulation, another fierce mothering subjectivity using an animal figure but to very different ends was articulated by Amy Chua in 2011. Chua, like Michelle Malkin (the Security Mom), is Asian-American and conservative. However, unlike Malkin, Chua incorporates her "Asian-ness," specifically her Chinese heritage into her subjectivity. Her book, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, encapsulated and outlined her framing of her "Tiger

Mother" subjectivity and its attendant mothering practices and expertise. In the book, Chua describes how her 'tough love' mothering practices produce truly 'exceptional' children and highlighting by implication the ways 'laissez-faire' (leave things as they are) American parenting is failing children. Tiger mothering was received as a practice-based mothering philosophy although many other mothers took issue with its 'shaming' tone (Chang "Intensity"). In response to the backlash around mom-shaming, Chua claimed that readers and the media 'misunderstood' her book and that it should be read as a 'comic' memoir and a personal recounting of issues she had raising her own daughters ("From Author Amy Chua").

As a memoir / parenting guide, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, is representative of two developing trends—mompreneurship ventures and the 'mommy-lit' genre of women's writing—that have been developing, and in online contexts increasingly entwined, since 2005. Importantly, the book and surrounding furor, highlight the political nature of such maternalist trends even when they are not expressly political as with Malkin's Security Mom and Palin's Mama Grizzly. As Chua articulates the expertise and practice of Tiger Mother subjectivity, she also politicizes it through her regular assertions of its (and her) "American-ness" in discussions about the text. This is a rhetorical strategy that is necessary given the book's highly critical take on mainstream US parenting culture. It works to ensure that her readers (audience) and critics *know* that Chua does not pose a threat to Americanness (Silva 53-54). Thus, she repeatedly links pro-American maternalist rhetoric highlighting her identification as an American—even if specifically, Chinese American—mother.

Importantly, Chua uses both fierce imagery (tigers) and the metaphorical figure of being a warrior on behalf of her children (battle hymn), a rhetorical doubling that is limited to the Tiger Mother figure. This doubling similarly acts as a rhetorical strategy to mitigate the potential

harmful effects of racialization of the Tiger Mother subjectivity given its promotion of supposedly Chinese mothering techniques and implication that Tiger mothering is culturally superior to contemporary cultural 'American' mothering norms. Unlike Malkin's security mom, which relies squarely, even vociferously, on pro-American maternalism, Chua's identity-based framing is unusual and can be seen as potentially dangerous, especially to white American culture, so a doubling of fierce mothering metaphors used within an amplified, even extreme, framework of intensive mothering allows Chua some leeway. Crucial to her ability to make such claims to specialized maternal expertise and practice resting on non-white cultural superiority rests entirely on the model minority status of Asian immigrants. Such claims to excellence and expertise are inaccessible to immigrant mothers from other marginalized ethnicities and cultures as well as US-born mothers of color, who cannot leverage such claims. Ultimately, Chua uses these rhetorical strategies to mitigate potential backlash along racial lines, but these did not prevent backlash to her claims along gendered lines.

Chua's articulation of Tiger mother subjectivity received highly public criticism and censure. *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* was broadly taken up by the media as a manifesto on conservative, overbearing parenting (Hulbert, Murphy Paul). In addition, the book prompted a spate of academic research on Asian parenting styles including a special issue journal that looked at intra-group differences in parenting by Asian parents living in Asian countries, first generation immigrants, and "heritage" parents who like Chua are second generation immigrant parents managing two sets of cultural demands. (Juang, Qin, and Park 1-7). And, crucially, other mothers online wrote blog posts reasserting the rightness of their seemingly more "loving" practices using other animal figures such as dolphins, elephants, and llamas, although none of these rose to prominence as motherhood subjectivities. This response by other women online shows that those

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mothers understood and reacted to Chua's critiques of their practices with their own assertions of related subjectivity—i.e., within the terms of Chua's discourse of animal figures—rearticulating their practices within the rubric of intensive mothering, particularly via frameworks of maternal care. This highlights how using motherhood subjectivities presents mothers with a framework for public speech, but also opens them to critique and social surveillance specifically because of that speech (a topic discussed in detail in chapter three). Unlike the prior motherhood subjectivities—Soccer, Security, Mom's Rising, and Mama Grizzlies—the Tiger Mother subjectivity drew more public critique and quickly became a stereotype of Asian American motherhood as demanding and heartless (chapter four includes a deeper discussion of this issue).

Chua's Tiger Mother, along with its unique stance as an overtly racialized motherhood subjectivity, is also the first articulation of motherhood subjectivity that is not explicitly tied to or created for political engagement. Chua's articulation of the Tiger Mother, and the attendant public debate, begins a more rapid expansion of other motherhood subjectivities explicitly tied to maternalism and mothers' quotidian practices although they remain implicitly politicized. As Mezzy and Pillard note: "It is remarkable how few of the Web-based new maternalist groups engage in political advocacy" (246). Here newer subjectivities invert the politics-economics framework of the earlier subjectivities. As such, they are not tied to any particular political campaign, nor are they used as extensively by political operatives, instead they work through mother's daily practices and consumer choices.

Eco Moms and Anti-Vaxxer Moms:

Two motherhood subjectivities whose focus is explicitly related to 'lifestyle choices' and consumer practices are the "Eco" and "Anti-Vaxxer" moms. These subjectivities are overtly quotidian and yet remain implicitly political because they, as motherhood subjectivities, can be

called into service as mothers engage in politicized discourse. "Eco Moms" (2007) moniker was first used by Kimberly Pinkson who formed the consumer advocacy group, Eco Mom Alliance, that focused on getting moms concerned with green living. The Eco Mom Alliance used both local engagements and online connections and was eventually parlayed into an online business as mom's began identifying with "Eco Mom" subjectivity and the moniker gained prominence in 2012. In the case of the "Anti-Vaxxer Moms" (2013), this label derives from media representations of mothers who articulate public concerns over the effects of vaccination on their infant and toddler children as well as a distrust of established medical / scientific authority specifically because of its connection to industry.

"Eco Mom" subjectivity poses green living, natural mothering, and eco-friendly consumption as a way for women to improve global climate conditions for their children as well as to affect politics. Although focused on individual behaviors as something every mother can do, Eco Moms argue that such individual practice can have national and global environmental impacts if vast networks of eco-conscious moms can be built. Implied in this framing is a notion of "grassroots" activism similar to that of *Mom's Rising* but oriented toward consumer, rather than explicit political, change. One of the most prominent early organizations, Eco Mom Alliance, was founded by Kimberly Pinkson in 2006-2007. Pinkson's tag line "Sustain Your Self, Sustain Your Family, Sustain Our World" highlights the connection Eco Moms make between individual action and global impact as a quotidian rather than explicitly political act ("More You Know").

Originally started as a 501 C 3 tax exempt (i.e., non-profit) advocacy group that "taught" moms how to engage with green living, the initial work of the Alliance encompassed building membership and training "Eco Leaders" who then grew membership by hosting "parties"

introducing moms (and others) to Eco Mom Alliance's "10 Steps" program. This program design draws from both grassroots women's organizing principles as well as gendered direct sales and entrepreneurship practices developed by companies such as Mary Kay Cosmetics, Tupperware, Pampered Chef, and Party Lite to situates eco-consumerist practice as a particular province and duty of mothers in their home lives. Eventually, Eco Mom Alliance spun off an online company "Eco Mom," that curated and provided products for members and other green moms (Park). In early 2013, Pinkson was pushed out of the Eco Mom company and it was sold to "GreenCupboards" a green online retailer who subsequently changed their company name to "etailz" ("Acquires EcoMom"). This move put the Eco Mom company squarely under the header of "lifestyle brands" and ended the "Eco Mom Alliance" advocacy group (Business Wire).

Eco Mom Alliance was but one organization which was expanded through a combination of online presence and in-person organizing. Many other "Eco Mom" focused blogs, online magazines, and groups exist online and connect via social media platforms. The main "Eco Moms" Facebook group has nearly 5000 members and thousands of page likes. Other blogs include *Green and Clean Mom*, originally started by Summer Poquette who eventually sold the blog, which is "dedicated to sharing the most environmentally friendly and best information and products with our audience" ("About"), *Mindful Mama*, providing its community with "simple solutions for natural living" (Preston), as well as *The Crunchy Mama* for "practically green living" (Cole), and *The Green Mama* who focuses on "empowering parents and growing greener communities" (Gillespie "About"). What is striking about these sites are the many metaphors used to describe "eco" / environmental sensibilities including "green," "crunchy," "natural," "clean," "growing," and "mindfulness," among others. These metaphors allow for "sub-

orientations" within the Eco Mom subjectivity that help mothers connect to their interests within a broad range of eco/environmentalist concerns.

Eco Mom subjectivity is generally considered 'leftist' since environmental concerns are predominantly identified as left leaning. However, like Mom's Rising, Eco Mom subjectivity reasserts particularized roles and expertise in resolving global environmental damage as the specialized purview of mothers. As Mezzy and Pillard note, "[t]his grassroots activism specifically showcases the re-domestication of the mother" (246). Kimberly Pinkson makes this clear, noting that the environment and reproduction are metaphorically adjacent. She states, "we are part of the environment and our wombs are every child's first environment…. [t]here is no 'other' or 'out there'" ("More You Know"). Here, Pinkson roots her claims in mothers' literal embodied role acting as the first living environment for children. She clearly frames a specific and urgent role for women-as-mothers in childbearing, rearing, and by extension in saving the Earth from environmental destruction. Pinkson explicitly grounds maternal expertise in the capacity of women's bodies to bear children rather than in the roles, functions, or practices of mothering. While supposedly aimed "marketing" a consumer orientation, such rhetoric has striking implications for structuring hierarchies between mothers and for political issues aimed at women. This claim, rooted in a biologically deterministic gendered frame, excludes women who do not gestate children such as adoptive mothers or mothers who used surrogates to have children. Moreover, it positions women who "lack" the biological capacity or desire to be pregnant as lower in the maternal hierarchy than biological mothers. It also actively undercuts feminists claims about women's human rights to bodily autonomy in ways useful to political campaigns that restrict women's rights based on arguments about the "rights of the unborn" which have sought to criminalize even miscarriage as "murder" (Panetta).

In addition to its new maternalist framing, being an "Eco" mom is generally an expensive practice. It often implicitly assumes a dual parent, middle-upper class household as its base of change. And, based on the blogs, online magazines, and other imagery, it is clearly that the eco-mom is also based in a predominantly white subjectivity. This is not to say that mothers of color do not identify as Eco Moms or that they aren't interested in environmental issues. Instead, the Eco mom subjectivity is *marketed* through a visual rhetoric of white, middle-upper class aspirational belonging. Moreover, "green" products and concerns in US culture are often markers of racial and economic status given that green living focuses on organic products, non-GMO food consumption, and attendant 'slow living' practices often require financial wealth and geographic situatedness within communities where access to such a lifestyle exists in order to be regularized in mothers' quotidian lives (Stine).

Like Eco Mom subjectivity, Anti-Vaxxer Mom subjectivity explicitly focuses on changing consumer practices. Anti-Vaxxer Moms identify as part of the anti-vaccine community (including fathers and people who don't have children as well as mothers) and frame their discussion of child safety as a sensible consumer choice in relation to the greed of 'big pharma,' nefarious corporate practices, and the corruption of contemporary medical / scientific institutions. A primary focus of their concern is what they describe as an overly intensive vaccination schedule for infants and toddlers. Mothers identifying as Anti-Vaxxer Moms often select not to vaccinate their children as well as arguing for a spectrum of regulatory changes including lengthened vaccine schedules, highly limited vaccination, and even eliminating vaccines altogether. Thus, they use their maternal expertise to fight against a medical standard that they view as toxic for their children. Importantly, Anti-Vaxxer Mom subjectivity, unlike other motherhood subjectivities, takes an oppositional stance toward accepted medical and

scientific expertise and governmental institutions. This oppositional position substantially increases the public criticism and social surveillance Anti-Vaxxer Moms experience. This censure can be clearly seen in news and social media representations of Anti-Vaxxer Moms which often portray them as crazy (Rinkunas).

Anti-Vaxxer Moms and the entire anti-vaccine community are part of a long history in the US of antagonism to mainstream cultures of scientific and medical expertise inclusive of both religious and secular belief systems. Anti-vaccine logics range between anti-corporate stances and conspiracy theories which have in recent years blended into a specific distrust of "big pharma," large pharmaceutical companies who they believe are 'covering up the truth' about the potential dangers of vaccines in order to make money. Principally, this truth revolves around the supposed inclusion of toxic chemical preservatives in vaccines which can cause autism spectrum disorders in children. Perhaps the most well-known Anti-Vaxxer Mom is Jenny McCarthy, a celebrity and mother who has publicly questioned vaccine safety because she claims vaccines triggered her son's autism ("Gray Area"). McCarthy has become the public face of the anti-vaccine group Generation Rescue and written several books about the issue. She has asserted that her stance on vaccination—and her representation in the media as 'crazy'—was one factor that led to her leaving her co-hosting job on *The View* (Mazziotta).

Public online texts and blogs for Anti-Vaxxer Moms are rare, and although they do use social media platforms to connect between group members, they do not often make their "community" spaces public due to the condemnation they receive. At the same time, Anti-vaccine online tactics also include the use of this public condemnation as a tool in their campaign. Via online platforms and social media, anti-vaccine campaigners (some of them Anti-Vaxxer Moms) attack mothers online who advocate the use of vaccines for preventable diseases

(Cohen). This type of public attack online, known as "trolling," is a form of social surveillance used often against mothers regardless of their stances or ideologies to publicly police their speech and behavior. The social surveillance of mothers by other mothers works at both structural and individual levels to divide women against each other specifically through value assessments about women's mothering practices (see Chapter four for more on this topic).

Anti-Vaxxer Mom subjectivity in the last several years has become associated with right-leaning and conservative politics. Over time, its anti-establishment framing has aligned with conservative reactionary politics leading to connections with Security Mom and Mama Grizzly subjectivity as well as topical concerns focused on anti-regulation like Second Amendment rights debates and the leveraging of Free Speech concerns embedded in anti-medicine/science discourses around the Coronavirus pandemic. This has led to interconnections and increased public online speech by Anti-Vaxxer Moms in relation to 'Anti-Masking' and 'Re-Open' protests across the US during the Covid-19 global pandemic, as well as connections to emergent conspiracy theories such as QAnon (Dickson).

Anti-Vaxxer Mom positions like Eco Mom positions, however, cover a wider political spectrum and the two subjectivities connect in certain arenas particularly those focused on natural health and wellness as lifestyle and consumer approaches. Embedded within natural living and wellness discourse is a nostalgia for pre-modern ways of living that characterize a form of white, middle-upper class 'drop out' from contemporary life (slow food, back to the land/nature, etc.,) as a politics which resonates beyond the assumed left/right spectrum. Natural living and wellness discourses are also embedded with the primacy of the individual as 'expert in their own experience.' So, narratives in this arena locate child safety and wellbeing within the direct control of mothers through their choices and practices establishing their expertise as

singular. This framing enables mothers' public articulations of expertise by dislodging medical/scientific expertise and institutions that have often been at best dismissive of and at worst hostile to women. Again, this admixture of progressive and traditionalist concerns in maternalist organizing fits within a history of such overlaps including the parallel rise of the conservative La Leche League and feminist movements in favor of breast feeding (Martucci 116).

Within this longer history, the seemingly consumerist focus of the "Eco" and "Anti-Vaxxer" mom subjectivities are new maternalist framings that individualize political concerns further underscoring the intensive mothering ideal as a post-feminist sensibility. Mezzy and Pillard also note this "depoliticizing" effect, saying "even the EcoMom Alliance, a group promoting environmentally friendly strategies that can be adopted in individual homes, embodies the orientation of many of these groups, away from conventional political advocacy and toward conscientious consumption" (246). And, although Mezzy and Pillard do not discuss Anti-Vaxxer Moms, their reading of individual choice and practice also applies to Anti-Vaxxer Mom subjectivity. They continue their discussion noting that even without an explicitly political focus, new maternalism still represents a "politics," but it is a politics of "conscientious consumerism" that does particularly gendered cultural work:

> Such atomized, consumerist advocacy is, admittedly, a nascent form of grassroots activism that can be characterized as its own form of politics. But in its maternalist version, conscientious consumerism also plays into mothers' isolation and the notion that mothers—not fathers or any other male caregivers, the community, or government—are the true nurturers and guardians of family life (247)

Thus, this inversion of political and economic frames to conscientious consumption as mothering practice points to ways that mothers themselves can use the framework of intensive mothering to their own ends. However, as with Chua's "Tiger Mother," and clearly seen in negative views

surrounding anti-vaccine stances, a move to utilize motherhood subjectivity in this way can and does come with negative impacts.

The (pro-border control) Angel Moms and the Mothers of the Movement:

Angel Moms—mothers who have suffered the loss of their children—are a very broad group of mothers whose concerns cover a wide range of issues related to their children's lives and passing. Within the broad "Angel Mom" subjectivity, mothers are often concerned with providing and receiving support, and building solidarity with other mothers and families experiencing the loss of a child. I do not analyze this broader group of "Angel Moms" because the predicating factor of identification with this subjectivity—the loss of a child—deserves a separate reading that fully attends to the contexts of loss and grief. There are however sub-groupings within the broader range of "Angel Moms." I include two of these sub-groups, the pro-border control "Angel Moms" and Black Lives Matter's "Mothers of the Movement," as "fierce" motherhood subjectivities because they were invited by the Republican and Democratic National Committees (respectively) to speak at their 2016 National Conventions. Mothers from each sub-group did speak at the conventions and as such received national media attention.

These mothers' speeches were slotted during prime-time convention hours on the night that the respective Republican and Democratic nominees spoke. This timing in the programming of the convention speeches is intrinsically important as it is the most likely part of the convention watched by US voting audiences. Giving these mothers coveted program time underscores the high value each campaign assigned to publicizing these women's claims of support for their candidates. While these groups were given supposed parity in their framing by the two national campaigns, public responses to their claims were and remain wildly different due in large part to how these mothers were able to embody US maternal ideals.

The pro-border control Angel Moms rose in prominence online by 2009, after the election of President Barrack Obama. Women identifying with this fierce mothering subjectivity articulate the loss of their adult children as related to interactions with 'undocumented' immigrants. In several cases, these mothers have lost a son who was killed while working as a border patrol agent (Goldberg). Active in primarily conservative circles, these mothers' discussions centered on immigration reform, particularly what they argue are lax border security policies. Thus, these "Angel Moms" blog about, lobby, and agitate for border security, criminal prosecution of 'illegal' immigrants, and strict immigration policies (Eggle, Espinoza). Their lobbying includes participation with several advocacy groups including The Remembrance Project and Advocates for Victims of Illegal Alien Crime (AVIAC) among others (Vogel, *splcenter.org*). A major goal of these mothers' public speech is using their loss to heighten public awareness about the urgent need to address the dangers of uncontrolled immigration and violence at the southern US border. This subjectivity shares interests in its concerns and focus with that of the "Security Mom" subjectivity. In fact, these border security focused moms are referenced in the Malkin's 2004 "Security Mom Manifesto," but did not come to national prominence until the 2016 Presidential Election cycle.

The Pro-border control "Angel Moms,' invited by the Trump Presidential campaign to the 2016 RNC Convention (and several other publicized events) were all linked to The Remembrance Project. The Remembrance Project is a conservative-leaning activist organization co-founded by Maria Espinoza in 2010, that advocates for stronger immigration laws and criminal sentencing for violations (Vogel). Spinoza, although not an "Angel Mom" herself, built her organization in support of these moms' concerns and performed outreach to get pro-border control Angel Moms engaged with her organization.

By 2013, through Espinoza's tour with what she called the "Stolen Lives Quilt," The Remembrance Project had become intertwined with conservative political actors and agendas (Vogel). The quilt—a set of banners with images of lost family members—may reference the homey, caring meaning of quilt, but more importantly draws on the successful grassroots advocacy of the Aids Quilt as the first family-built memorial to a population ignored by government policy. Because of this connection, they received news coverage and participated in news interviews throughout the campaign cycle (Arellano, Golshan, Vogel).

A similar type of motherhood subjectivity articulated in left leaning circles, is "Mothers of the Movement," affiliated with Black Lives Matter activism. The "Mothers of the Movement," rose to national awareness in 2015 in relation to the killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown (among others). Mothers of the Movement are black women whose children (or siblings) have been killed by police (Sebastian) in what are often articulated as extra-judicial killings borne of systemic racism.[18] Importantly, the Mothers of the Movement are never referenced through the 'Angel,' moniker likely because of its historical association with white, middle-class motherhood from the Cults of True Womanhood and Domesticity where mothers were often referred to as "angels of the house" (Welter 157-63). Of all of the fierce mothering subjectivities, Mothers of the Movement do not articulate their subjectivity broadly in online spaces. More often, they attend public events and speak in live forums about their experiences and concerns (Branigin). In addition, these mothers are the most directly engaged in local and state-wide politics, campaigning against political disenfranchisement, and even running for offices including the US House of Representatives and Ferguson Missouri's city council (Branigin). The Mothers of the Movement were invited to the 2016 Democratic National Convention, some did not want to participate, but several chose to attend. The members who attended, took the stage at

the 2016 DNC during the main evening event leading up to Hillary Clinton's speech accepting the party nomination as a feature group supporting Clinton.

Unlike any of the other motherhood subjectivities, the Mothers of the Movement do not have a Website, blog, online radio show, or other dedicated media platform. There is no coordinated *Facebook* page or other social media group for these mothers. Their limited online presence and direct engagement in politics as individuals is suggestive of a different orientation to maternalist practice among black women. While this may stem from individual relationships to activism and the Black Lives Matter movement, religious identification, or other facets of individuated identity, it more likely highlights the inaccessibility of (white) maternalist politics and strategies for black women and women of color. It also suggests a respect for the desire for private grieving (within a local community) by mothers whose children's deaths have been publicized and politicized in hostile ways by the normative culture.

As the only exclusively black mothers' subjectivity, limited engagement from white mothers with the Mothers of the Movement has been common. Even recently, when (predominantly) white mothers became more engaged with BLM activism in response to the government's attempted suppression of protests in response death of George Floyd, they did so largely by creating "the Wall of Moms" to protect protesters, rather than work in collaboration with the Mothers of the Movement and BLM. This is not to say that black women in the US do not engage in maternalism. There is a long history of US black women's political discourses narrated within the frames of maternalism and ideals associated with mothering (Guy-Sheftall 25-30). Problematically, this works to limited effect outside their own communities precisely because "good mother" is not a subject position black mothers are often allowed to occupy.

This barrier to black mothers utilizing maternalism in politics rests in a racialized and classed, hierarchy among US women that is governed by controlling access to feminine and maternal ideals. Here the unmarked whiteness of the US maternal and feminine ideals preempts black women and women of color's access. Such control works through historical stereotypes of the "black matriarch," "welfare queen," the "Jezebel," and the "Mammie," which as Patricia Hill Collins has argued, are "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of [structural] social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (69). Moreover, these stereotypes have led to black mothers' designation as less caring and unfit enabling increased institutional and social surveillance of black mothers and their parenting (79-80). A specific example of this inaccessibility to maternalist politics and strategy in relation to The Mothers of the Movement, comes from a column written by Ron Hosko about their inclusion in the 2016 DNC convention.

Hosko published, "Mothers of the Movement bear responsibility for black lives lost: Column" in both print and online through the national daily news outlet *USA Today*. In this column, Hosko asserts that, "McSpadden and her Mothers of the Movement associates are at once victims who deserve compassion and misguided tools in a political calculation that too willingly blame others, particularly the police, while ignoring the failings of the fathers and mothers who raise young men like Michael Brown" ("Lives Lost"). Crucially, "McSpadden" refers to Lesly McSpadden, Michael Brown's mother (Drabold). Hosko's demand here is that the black mothers of black children killed by police, take responsibility themselves for police violence rather than call for accountability from institutions shielding the people who killed their children. Such a claim in relation to white, middle-upper class mothers in the US—that they are responsible for their children's deaths at the hands of a government agent because they did not

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raise them right (i.e., they were 'criminals')—is nearly unthinkable. Instead, newspapers would, and have, asked where did society let down their white, middle-upper class sons or daughters? How did they go wrong? Are they suffering from mental illness? Such ameliorative approaches are related by media all the time in relation to white middle-upper class youth—young white men in particular—in relation to their perpetration of violence (i.e., mass attacks, rape and sexual assault, bullying, or drug crime as examples).

Hosko's brief column blaming the Mothers' of the Movement also accuses them of lacking the intelligence to see that the DNC is operationalizing their grief for political ends, and it denies the mothers' agency to use political campaigns to their own ends in highlighting the systemic racism they believe is a primary factor in their children's deaths. This type of argument blaming black mothers for problems stemming from structural racism has a long history in US political discussions at least since the publication of the Moynihan Report in 1965.[19] Tiffany Lethabo King argues that "Moynihan's anxiety about the crumbling fabric of the negro family headed by the Black matriarch inspired his characterization of the black family as a 'tangle of pathology'" (68). Lethabo King is not alone in her critique, many scholars have condemned this report for its vilification of the black family and specifically black mothers. Moreover, they have noted its impact on the continued pathologizing and criminalizing of black mothers (Collins 73-75, Spillars 65-66). While white mothers, particularly lower class, poor, and single white mothers, may suffer social critique for their mothering choices, in a case like this they would largely be given the benefit of at least some consideration of factors other than their parenting in such an analysis.

A prime example of this racialized difference is a column critiquing the inclusion of "Angel Families" (although predominantly mothers, there were some fathers from The

Remembrance Project included in the campaign as well) in the Trump campaign. In "Column: Trump's 'Angel Families' weaponize their grief to demonize immigrants," Gustavo Arellano, argues similarly to Hosko that the campaign is using the families. He says: "Trump has claimed these Angel Families as his own. He has paraded them out in front of rallies since his candidacy. It's a caravan of causticity that passes itself off as a living, breathing Pietà" ("Angel Families"). However, as he continues: "I have sympathy for their loss—no one should lose a loved one to homicide. But any goodwill dissolves when such families weaponize their grief. These parents don't appear at political rallies to inveigh against murder investigations gone cold or lax gun laws. They're there to demonize immigrants. Period" ("Angel Families"). Here, unlike Hosko, Arellano asserts the agency of these mothers (families and parents) in their participation in the campaign. These mothers have the intelligence and agency to weaponize their grief to their own ends: demonizing immigrants. This framing of the failure of "Angel" families and parents is not a failure of the family or parenting itself (as in Hosko's assertions against the Mothers of the Movement), but rather one of a desire for vengeance run amok. While Arellano rightly critiques the "weaponization of grief" against immigrants as xenophobic and too broad, the implicit cultural narrative of racialized, specifically black and brown deviance and pathologized families—here the pathology and failure of predominantly brown undocumented immigrants— goes largely unchallenged. Moreover, no critique of white mothers—as with Hosko's critique of black mothers—is present in the entire column. While Arellano asks the question: "Is murder committed by a legal resident or citizen somehow more acceptable" ("Angel Families")? He does not compare nationwide responses to another similar campaign issue, gun control, an issue focused on mass murders committed by predominantly young white men.

The vitriol of critiques of black and brown mothers compared to the neutrality toward white mothers specifically in terms of their "failure" to raise good citizens and non-deviant children is very likely a primary reason why there is only one nationally identifiable black mother's group using maternalism as its public frame. It is also likely a reason that the Mothers of the Movement have a circumspect online presence and instead focus their speech and action in local and community frameworks. Moreover, their local and community strategies of mothering are a black US cultural norm which stems in large part from building resilience in the face of white racism and exclusion from white society (Collins 272-74).

Successful use of motherhood ideals is limited for mothers of color by motherhood ideals as described in the previous chapter. This limitation stems from the implicit whiteness embedded in "Moral Mothering's" Victorian, middle-upper class Cult of True Womanhood; "Scientific Mothering's" focus on following scientific expertise—an ability exposed as implicitly the domain of white, middle class mothers in the Moynihan Report—as ideal mothering; and "Intensive Mothering's" focus on free time and expendable income which allow for constant nurturing of children. Mezzy and Pillard also note that racialization and class are embedded in new maternalist movements saying, "[t]oday's maternalist social and legal reform efforts are again mobilizing white middle class mothers as a force for change" (234). Thus, black and brown mothers' ability to access and use maternalist discourses is, and has historically been, limited given the racialized and classed history of US maternalist agitation, political power, and policy making along with the implicitly racialized and classed figuration of motherhood ideals.

The MAGA Moms / Trump Moms:

Following the trend of the creation of motherhood subjectivities during political campaigns, the "Trump Mom" (2016) is a motherhood subjectivity supposedly articulated by

women who offered their support for Donald J. Trump in the 2016 US presidential election ("Welcome"). It is, however, unclear if this motherhood subjectivity was defined by actual mothers who supported Trump or if it was manufactured by his campaign as a way to connect with women voters. The primary blogging and discussion of this motherhood subjectivity is linked to Trump's campaign blog. As is suggested by the focus, the primary articulation of the "Trump Moms" is support for Trump's political ambitions, goals, and policies. The "Moms for Trump" Website linked to the 2016 Trump campaign page is no longer active. However, there is a "Moms for Trump" *Facebook* group and *Twitter* handle (see: facebook.com/momsfortrump). By 2017, the Moms 4 Trump blog pages were down, currently the "Moms for Trump" tagline is being used by a conservative mother's group, Moms for America (founded in 2004) which highlights their support for Trump on their self-titled website ("Trump Rally"). And, by 2017, a group of women formed online calling themselves "MAGA Moms" and planned the MAGA March—a response to the Women's March—which occurred with about 100 marchers in Washington D.C. on March 25, 2017 (Monday).[20] While no *Facebook* group or *Twitter* handle exists explicitly for MAGA Moms as a group, there is a #MAGAMoms hashtag circulating on *Twitter*.

Whether using the explicit term "Trump Moms" or "MAGA Moms," mothers identifying with this motherhood subjectivity publicly seem to be a smaller group than other conservative motherhood subjectivities. This may be related to the subjectivity's relative recency. It may also be due to the association of Trump and his politics with racism, xenophobia, and sexism as compared to the relative abstractions posed by 'security' or 'grizzly' as subjective anchors. This is not to say mothers don't identify with the subjectivity—as the Trump voting data shows that 53% of white women who voted (the number rises to 62% among those white women without

college educations) voted for Trump—it is to say that some women may find it difficult to publicly articulate their support (Edsall "Don't Want to Admit It"). Although there may be reluctance to publicly identify with this motherhood subjectivity due to concerns about being "outed" as Trump supporters, women may still participate and identify with this subjectivity it a variety of ways.

Public online articulation of this motherhood subjectivity may be more prominent on smaller, right-wing platforms such as *Gab* and *Parler*. Moreover, because support for Trump crosses into Far/Alt-Right groups, mothers who are part of these ideologies and groups may also eschew mainstream expressions online. Instead, they may prefer closed platforms and sites run by specific groups within the Far/Alt-Right online space as their locus of engagement. In addition, mothers who support Trump may also identify more directly with other motherhood subjectivities including the "Security Moms," "Mama Grizzlies," or the border control focused "Angel Moms," who will ultimately support a conservative political agenda, but may not have fully incorporated Trump's MAGA vision.

The Mama Dragons:

The most recent articulation of motherhood subjectivity to rise in national awareness, the "Mama Dragon" (2013), is claimed by mothers of LGBT children. Originally this subjectivity was articulated by Mormon women whose LGBT children had struggled with acceptance by the Mormon Church ("Our Origins").[21] The need to use the dragon as a totemic figure characterized by ferocity of mythical proportions is articulated by Mama Dragon Meg Abhau who posted:

> I have always been a mother bear. Once I found out about Jon, that didn't seem a fierce enough title. There is a whole new level of protection that has come over me. I now call myself a Mama Dragon. I could literally breathe fire if someone hurt my son. Dragons have talons, scales, claws, fangs and they can fly. I will use all of these resources if someone were to hurt Jon. So, we are circling our wagons around him, but I know we can't protect him from everything. And as a Mama

Dragon, that is the hardest part of this. I don't know what the future holds. I just know that there will be love ("Origins")

Mama Dragon's primary mission and work is to support and educate other mothers navigating the experience of a child 'coming out.' The group which started as a support group for Mormon mothers has now opened its membership and advocacy to be inclusive of all faiths and orientations and boasts 3,000 members ("Our Origins").[22]

While the Mama Dragon subjectivity deals directly with a politicized topic—the inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQ+ children—they are not overtly politically active. Mama Dragons do, however, perform direct action aimed at helping LGBTQ+ folks experience a mother's love and acceptance. To do this Mama Dragons travel around to various events and set up hugging stations and booths (Duberman). Through this event participation, they offer love and support to LGBTQ+ youth and adults in an effort to disrupt narratives that promote negative self-image among LGBTQ+ people. This practice is interesting for several reasons in relation to the tenets of intensive mothering. First, it works to amplify the notion of total maternal care beyond a mother's blood children and extend it out widely to an entire social group. Given the origin story of the subjectivity, this seems to suggest that the mythical fierceness of Mama Dragon love and protection is so all consuming that it must be widely shared with all children in need. Second, it works, whether intended or not, as a public shaming of mothers who do not provide such acceptance for their LGBTQ children inclusive of emotional and physical care. Taken together, this may represent the Mama Dragons' resistance to claims that they failed in their maternal role by raising non-normative children as well as claims that they remain 'risky' mothers by tolerating social deviance in the context of religious and conservative belief.

The motherhood subjectivities outlined above are likely not an exhaustive list of all currently articulated subjectivities used in fierce mothering, but rather encapsulate the

subjectivities which have become visible on the national stage. What is of significance is that women, both progressive and conservative, have used and repurposed these motherhood subjectivities to articulate their maternal expertise and ferocious care for their children—and by extension the larger social body—as a basis for expressing their social, political, and economic concerns publicly. This practice of fierce mothering in its online context, must then be seen as situated within a longer history of maternalism as a mainstay of US mothers' socio-political practice used to forward their claims, express their concerns, and to agitate for change.

Situating Fierce Mothering within the History of US Motherhood as a Political Ideal

Fierce mothering extends from a long history of maternalist practice and political agitation in the United States. From the founding of the nation to the present day, ideals about motherhood, mothering, and mothers have shaped women's relationship to the nation and the nation's relationship with women. During and after the Revolutionary War, the ideal relationship for women to the nation and to politics was Republican Motherhood, which was characterized by the belief that for women to be good citizens they must become mothers and raise good (male) citizens for the future benefit of the nation (Lewis 1075). This 'Republican' framing of motherhood developed from a social discussion about the proper role of women, their value to the nation, and their moral character stemming from early, proto-feminist claims about women's rights. This means that notions of Republican Motherhood were shaped by both early modern theories of liberalism which grounded early proto-feminist claims and by the patriarchal western belief in women's proper sphere of domesticity.

Republican Motherhood ideals were, in fact, directly connected to Mary Wollstonecraft's treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Women,* a text cited as, one of, if not the first proto-feminist treatise in the US/Anglo feminist tradition (Monroe 143). In the treatise, Wollstonecraft

includes maternalist arguments as a strategy for claiming women's rights. Within the larger

rights focused context of the treatise, she includes the claim that women should have access to

education to ensure the proper development of their moral character and that developing their

moral character is crucially important because women bear and raise the future (male) leaders of

society (Wollstonecraft chp IV. 55-56). This specific argument and strategy were taken up while

other aspects of Wollstonecraft's arguments were not. Wollstonecraft's connection of moral

capacity to childrearing (a common narrative of the era in regard to women) meant that

discussions about the political role of women in the US were held in tension between

traditionalist, Christian rhetorics of the male-headed family and progressive rhetorics about

women's intellectual capability developing at the time (Monroe 143-46). The focus on and

success of this particular maternalist strategy is therefore indicative of how maternalist claims

simultaneously work toward the limited expansion of women's rights without substantially

shifting the white, Christian, hetero-patriarchal constraints (intersecting matrices of race, class,

sexuality, religion, and citizenship, etc.,) of dominant socio-political structures.

Thus, the ideal of Republican motherhood developed out of patriarchal societal needs to

engage specific women as good citizens without disturbing prevailing gendered, racialized, and

classed norms of behavior. As Lewis notes, "[t]he result was a gendered vision of citizenship that

highlighted women's domesticity. Instead of voting or holding public office, the primary role for

women became that of mother, as they materially and ideologically reproduced the state" (1075).

Importantly, this means that the first successful proto-feminist claims in the US/Anglo culture

ground women's social, economic, and political progress (the necessity of educating women) in

women's childbearing and rearing functions importance to patriarchal society as the mothers of

future men (Wollstonecraft chp IV. 55-56). While Republican Motherhood and the women that

supported it were not agitating in the feminist cause of gender equality, "[b]y casting themselves as the protectors of republican virtue, women espousing this ideology did not expand their roles in society; instead, they redefined the meaning of their actions as wives and mothers" by giving "a political meaning to their everyday experiences" (Lewis 1075).

This pattern of tying women's political voices to motherhood particularly through notions of an essentialist womanly (wifely, motherly) virtue and morality remained a primary framework through which women successfully engaged with US politics and legislation. Even women's movements that were considered radical—like the Suffrage and Women's Movement of the 1800s —framed women's agitation within motherhood in attempts to generate legislative changes. Ann Lewis of the National Women's Party notes "[o]ur Suffrage Foremothers had a brilliant solution; they turned the image of women as mothers from a reason to keep women out of politics—to a big reason why they deserved to be in it. And they used both words and images to deliver this message in popular culture" ("When Motherhood is the Message").[23]

While some movements used the notion of motherhood to gain political power for women, motherhood movements in US history have often been less politically progressive. Conservative mothers have agitated throughout the nation's history, sometimes in response to progressive women's political action and sometimes in response to specific political events, policies, or legislation (Deckman 98-117). For example, conservative, Southern white mothers participated in Massive Resistance to racial integration policies and Civil Rights legislation from the 1920s through the era of the Civil Rights movement (McRae 9) and 6 million conservative anti-war mothers protested US participation in World War II through rhetorics of care and love for their sons (Jeansonne 1). Movements like these mobilized conservative, predominantly white mother-power to agitate against political changes by rooting their arguments in specifically

maternalist claims about mothers' specialized role in the care and rearing of children. These claims expanded upon the Republican Motherhood logic of raising good citizens by transposing individual care for one's child (children) into a specialized concern for the nation. This, by extension, expanded women's claims to expertise through motherhood—their specialized role— from the domestic sphere of the home to the broader sphere of the nation, and even to the broadest sphere: the globe. This expansion is most fully expressed in recent conservative mothers' political activism through the development of the Tea Party—which included participation from Mama Grizzlies and Security Moms—as 'grassroots' movement with strong maternalist overtones and the incorporation of women as national conservative political leaders (Deckman 1-4). Importantly conservative women's transpositions of motherly care into national (and global) concern, have most often argued to preserve existing social structures including white, Christian hetero-patriarchal hierarchies of gender, class, race, sexuality, and citizenship as *the* "American" way of life.

Maternalist agitation as a central theme dividing US women along conservative and progressive lines continued through the Civil Rights era and beyond. Most notably, during the Women's Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, motherhood as 'the message' was used to stop the progress of feminism culturally and legislatively by traditionalist women who organized to defeat the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Phyllis Schlafly, the public face of organizing women against the ERA, positioned US motherhood as women's special place on a pedestal in society arguing that "equal rights" was in effect lowering women's social status (Deckman 109-114). This position, given the requirement for black and women of color as well as lower class women to work outside the home, assumed a white, middle-upper class, heterosexual, Christian woman as its public and engaged primarily those women in their

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organizing. Thus, arguments about motherhood continued to shape the national discourse on women's proper relationship to politics and the nation itself. As this history continues from the 1970s, the development of feminist backlash in the 1980s followed by discussions of 'third wave' feminist progress including feminist political gains and 'grrl power' in the 1990s are woven into a reformulation of the relationship between women, feminism, and politics.

Conclusion

Angela McRobbie has noted this retriangulation of gendered relations in her discussion of post feminism which she describes as a recalcitrant cultural sensibility that reframes feminism as the "problem" (10-12). Here she articulates post feminism as a reemergence of traditional gendered ideals of femininity paired with notions of women's empowerment in ways that allow for feminism itself to be seen as a vestige of the past. This pairing is enabled by notions of individual responsibility and choice. McRobbie says, "…post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force. (12) Thus, 'femininity' that was displaced by feminist politics in the past can now be taken up by women who 'know' what it is that they are doing; feminism has already eradicated the potential danger of femininity for women. Moreover, not to take up femininity is to align oneself with feminism as an outdated mode of womanhood. McRobbie also describes this new relationship to post-feminist womanhood as characterized by individual 'choice' because women have already—according to narratives of post-feminism—achieved equality in the realms of economics and employment. Here, 'modern' women can choose to be sexualized and even enjoy such sexualization as proper to femininity precisely because of the notion that women are no longer 'exploited' as feminism has already made women equal (15).

McRobbie looks to popular media to tease apart the relationship between pop culture and post feminism because "[m]edia has become the key site for defining codes of sexual conduct. It casts judgements and determines the rules of play" (McRobbie 15). She offers the film *Bridget Jones' Diary* and the television shows "Sex and the City" and "Ally McBeal" as exemplars of mediated purveyors of post-feminism. Through these examples it becomes clear that the post-feminist reworking of women's relationship to politics and the nation remains intimately entangled with motherhood as a definitional part of contemporary 'feminine' identification. So, for women—as for Bridget Jones—it is clear that "[d]espite the choices she has, there are also any number of risks of which she is regularly reminded" (McRobbie 20). These risks include, "not catching a man at the right time [which] might mean she misses the chance of having children (her biological clock is ticking)" and that "without a partner she will be isolated, marginalised from the world of happy couples" (McRobbie 20). Not attending to such risks is posed as individual failure within the framework of what McRobbie terms as "lifestyle culture" in which "[c]hoice is surely… a modality of constraint" (19). Thus (emphasis added), "[t]he individual is compelled *to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices*. By these means new lines and demarcations are drawn between those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime of personal responsibility, and those who fail miserably" (McRobbie 19). Tensions in post-feminist culture shift from a split between traditionalist and progressive views of womanhood to debates over 'correct femininity' across the spectrum of views. Moreover, as McRobbie shows in these examples, 'correct' femininity for now 'liberated women' derives from a woman's capacity to use her 'individual freedom' to make the 'right' choices which are proven to be 'right' when they lead to marriage and becoming a mother.

This has implications for how women understand their own relationship to motherhood and their worth as individuals as well as how they are judged by others. Properly feminine womanhood is tied to properly feminine motherhood just as 'woman' is tied to 'mother' because, from birth, 'mother' *is* a woman's presumptive future identity until she proves unable or unwilling to have children. Moreover, proper femininity, womanhood, and motherhood differ in relation to race, class, sexuality, religion, and citizenship. Thus, the way women relate to motherhood and portray that in respect to their social positioning becomes a framework for how their social worth is judged.

Judgments of mothers' social worth rest on cultural definitions of properly feminine motherhood which are, importantly, governed by the ideal forms of mothering laid out in the previous chapter. These ideal forms—Republican, Moral, Scientific, and Intensive Motherhood—have been identified by scholars as specific historical constructions that shape discourses and practices of mothering in the US. They also supply the citational attributes (imagined characteristics) women must express and perform to legitimize their status through motherhood in US society. Although these historical ideal forms are distinct, they are also culturally hegemonic. As such newer ideal forms incorporate aspects of earlier forms as a means of providing legibility across time. For example, the current ideal, Intensive Motherhood, has these earlier forms at least partially embedded within it already given its demands for following expertise and prioritizing the domestic sphere above the public (work) sphere. Thus, the citational markers of older ideal forms remain accessible for contemporary use, particularly as nostalgic renderings.

Intensive mothering as the current mothering ideal, and as a technology of the motherhood infrastructure (described in chapter one) represents a post-feminist self-regulatory

and surveillance framework for mothers. Intensive mothering, like post feminism, provides a

mechanism through which structures of dominance—white, hetero-patriarchal, Christian

structures—have coopted the language and practices of feminism in order to neutralize them.

Here the language of women's empowerment including notions of 'choosing' motherhood and

domesticity are redeployed to signal that feminism has done its work, women are equal, and now

we can all just *get back to* what's really important. I elaborate on how this connection between

cultural post feminism and intensive mothering can be understood as such a mechanism further

in the next chapter by exploring how fierce mothering works as a technology of the self

(Foucault *TOS* 18), as a cultural technology (as outlined in chapter one), and how it generates

digital sociality between women through both constitutive rhetorics and the development of

intimate publicity.

CHAPTER 3

FIERCE MOTHERING AS A GENDERED COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY: TACTICAL

SUBJECTIVITY AND CONSTITUTING DIGITAL SOCIALITY

> *Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for*
> *and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also*
> *the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of*
> *consent and resistance. It is partly where the hegemony*
> *arises, and where it is secured.*

> Stuart Hall "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'"

In the previous chapter, I outlined fierce mothering as a gendered communicative

phenomenon showing its development over time since the mid-1990s in the US and situating it

within a long history of maternalism as gendered political idea in the US. While initially started

by conservative political campaign operatives in an effort to increase support among suburban

white mothers, women-as-mothers ultimately took up the subjective form and developed it to be

socio-politically efficacious for asserting their own concerns. In this maneuver, fierce mothers

converted the neutral image of 'soccer mom' by using fierce animal and warrior figures to for a

basis for their own social-cultural, economic, and political advocacy.

This repurposing of political pandering shows the creative agency mothers employ to

participate in public speech. However, it also shows the complex effects that flow from the use

of maternalism as a strategy for women's negotiation of patriarchal culture. Such use effects a

form of what Deniz Kandyoti called the "patriarchal bargain" which allows some women to benefit in limited ways but also requires that bargainers implicitly reinforce divisions between women along multiple axes of identity—race, class, citizenship, religion, etc.—ultimately reinforcing patriarchal structures that harm women (275). As a particular type of patriarchal bargain, rooted in maternal expertise, fierce mothering has flourished as a gendered communicative strategy across the spectrum of US political belief. Crucially, its use even in progressive and feminist causes such as women's pay, as Naomi Mezzy and Cornelia Pillard have argued, might enable short-term socio-political gains but ultimately works against gendered equity in policy and practice because it leverages a 'special role and expertise' of mothers rooted in their biological capacities as women rather than relying on women's right to equity as people (232-245).

Fierce mothering as a pan-political phenomenon developing in the context of regressive cultural sensibilities about gender and a period of intense anti-feminist backlash provides a unique site to interrogate how consent to cultural hegemony is manufactured. In this frame it is essential to explore how fierce mothering enables some mothers to negotiate with and for power in their quotidian lives and on socio-political terms. It is also essential to examine how this form of power negotiation, problematically, only works to a limited extent because it leverages normative constructions of gender and its intersections with race, class, sexuality, religion, and citizenship, etc., as a basis for legitimacy. To explore this tension between this seemingly 'empowered' form of women's public speech and its containment within white, Christian, hetero-patriarchal structures I interrogate how fierce mothering works as a strategic response, as a technology of the self, and as a cultural technology, as well as how its rhetoric constitutes its own public as a form of digital sociality through the development of intimate publicity.

Ultimately, this exploration shows that fierce mothering—like its maternalist predecessors—only works in so far as it ultimately does not disrupt too many existing practices or dislodge dominant socio-political power structures.

Fierce Mothering as a Strategic Response

Articulations of 'fierce mothering' subjectivities are strategic rather than coincidental because they leverage connections to other socially, economically, culturally, or politically 'important' discourses such as national security, ecology, or vaccination. This linkage of motherhood to other socially resonant discourses does three important things: 1) it works to position the imagined mother-subject within the terms applicable to its linked discourse; 2) it thereby mobilizes discourse-specific citational markers necessary for policing access to the subjectivity; and 3) it adds legitimacy to the mother's subjective claim of expertise by tying her claim to concerns of notable importance in the larger social order.

Mothers have clearly found utility in articulating their subjectivity by linking it to such larger discourses. This communicative practice assists mothers in transposing their individual concerns through national issues into national and even global concerns. A maneuver which magnifies the power and efficacy of their public speech and arguments for change. Fierce mothering is a new framework for making this transposition that aligns with contemporary neoliberal, marketized socio-political, economic, and cultural narratives. The effect of fierce mothering—the transposition of individual concerns into national and global frames as a way to elevate mothers' articulatory power—follows a long tradition in US history of mothers' claims that their social and political agitation derives from care for their own children and families which they extend to the nation's and the world's children and families (Deckman 109-112). It is, in its way, a maternalist version of the feminist adage that "the personal is political,' enabled

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by women's roles as mothers and primarily effective for mothers fitting into frames of ideal figurations of motherhood: white, hetero, middle-upper class, Christian (primarily Protestant), and able-bodied.

Fierce mothering and the articulation of motherhood subjectivities do enable some mothers to leverage power and elevate their concerns. However, their use of fierce mothering as a communicative strategy requires a trade-off: reinforcing existing socio-political structures. As Inderpal Grewal argues, such linkages also proscribe the possibilities for mothers' articulations and actions within the scope and framing of the co-linked discourses such that mothers become a site of replication of the governmentalized state power and discipline (201). While it may seem contradictory for mothers to articulate power by using discourses that ultimately limit their power to a narrow realm of expertise, this type of limitation is present in all such uses of discourse (Foucault *TOS* 16-19). Moreover, as Mezzy and Pillard note this trade-off is an inherent part of new maternalist claims: "The mothers of new maternalism, like their earlier counterparts, tend to present themselves as domestic and altruistic. They implicitly offer a maternal selflessness and commitment to preserving the gendered status of the home as their concession for entering the public sphere to challenge the status quo and seek political change" (237). While mothers' use of subjectivity in this way highlights their creative agency employed to negotiate power structures in contemporary socio-political, economic, and cultural milieus, problematically it also works to reinscribe hegemonic norms of gender, race, class, religion, and citizenship.

Since the mid-1990s, in the same periodization marked by post-feminist culture, the ideal form of intensive mothering has shaped women's relationship to politics and daily life as mothers. The primary focus of the intensive mothering ideal is that a child's wellbeing is the

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mother's responsibility, regardless of their economic or marital circumstances, and that other competing interests such as marriage, work, extended family, or friends must take second place. This ideal promotes the choice-as-constraint aspect of lifestyle culture, particularly through notions of risk and failure. Risk and failures associated with intensive mothering as an ideal are inclusive of any action on the part of a mother that does not "optimize their children's health and development" (Frederick 76). As Angela Frederick notes: "Hardships including illness, disability, accident—and almost any imperfections in mother or child—are viewed as the product of mothers' individual choices, and mothers who are perceived to fail at the neoliberal project of self-discipline are subject to both state and social policing" (76). This is also the case in respect to broader notions of successful development including mothers' responsibility for optimizing all of their children's opportunities for success and growth as well-rounded, contributing members of society. Mothers unable to achieve such optimization are perceived as "risky" by institutions and therefore subject to high levels of surveillance which most often impacts "non-normative mothers" in particular "women of color, poor mothers, queer mothers, and women with disabilities" (Frederick 75).

Mothers' feeling of failure in relationship to the intensive motherhood ideal is so common that it has been critiqued as "the decisive female Olympic competition," putting mothers in opposition with other mothers in a battle, not only to be seen as 'good' or successful mothers but to be the 'best' mother of all—setting all mothers up to fail" (Green 573). Because Intensive Mothering demands that 'mother' becomes women's primary identity it is easy to see how the choices mothers make in taking care of their children translate into a means for women's self-articulation of differentiation within such a broad maternal identity. Thus, the phenomenon of fierce mothering as both subjectivity and practice represents a strategic new maternalist

response relative to the demands of intensive mothering. But this move to subjectivity, as a responsive strategy, has limitations when connected to motherhood stemming from the processes of interpellation through which people construct themselves as subjects within ideological regimes of culture and identity (Althusser 84-86). In the next section, I discuss how processes of subjectivation (the making of one-self into a subject) work and highlight how they can (re)produce structures of dominance and maintain culturally hegemonic norms.

Fierce Motherhood Subjectivities as Technologies of the Self

New maternalist paradigms link mothers' specialized roles to notions of post-feminism through a focus on the femininity of motherly care and domesticity as intrinsic aspects of intensive mothering. In the context of post-feminism and intensive mothering, adopting fierce motherhood subjectivities as a new maternalist strategy represents a tactical shift employed by women themselves to negotiate broad socio-political demands. Articulating fierce mothering subjectivity responds to both post-feminism's atomization of women's systemic experiences, and its depoliticization of their concerns as simple 'lifestyle' choices and 'personal' consumption practices. These capacities of post-feminism—individualization and depoliticization—function to regulate women's public speech and political efficacy. Such gendered regulation, as Lisa Baraitser notes, in a discussion of maternal subjectivity, is also political:

> Subjectivity...captures the way experiences can be simultaneously felt as deeply personal, singular, and embodied, and at the same time, operate as a site for intense regulation by both internal (unconscious) and external (ideological) forces. In this sense, while subjectivity alludes to felt or emotional experiences or states of mind (themselves linked to material practices of everyday life), it cannot be thought of outside the rubric of political discourse (724)

In this context, fierce mothering is, in effect, a tactical deployment of subjective identification that mothers can use to project post-feminist/intensive individualization while simultaneously applying maternalism to resist its regulatory and privatizing effects. In this way, fierce mothers'

articulations of subjectivity create agency for them in choosing how to assert their interests while navigating the omnipresent, and often unattainable socio-political expectations of mothers.

There are, however, drawbacks to such a strategy. First, uptake of the individualized subjectivity prevents effective coalition building as each mother identifying with a fierce subjectivity position is still seen as separate: an individual making *her* choice for *her* family. Second, the proscribed political efficacy of maternalist legitimation and the potential agency it provides mothers is further limited by the devaluing function of its pairing with the term 'mom.' While the use of 'mom' and 'mama' may work to express approachability and personal identity, the use of a colloquial, domestic moniker publicly provides a mechanism for limiting the scope and impact of mothers' claims. In this way, fierce motherhood subjectivity works as one site through which hegemonic, socio-organizational structures are mystified. This is achieved as mothers' self and social regulation to normative culture (Baraitser's internal and external forces) are portrayed as individual, subjective responses to personal experience. Thus, the structural governance of mothers 'choices'—predicated on social difference (race, class, citizenship, religion, sexuality, etc.) and embedded within fierce mothering discourses and imagery—is both rendered invisible and reinforced through nostalgic, universal, and idealized depictions of mothers and mothering.

Scholarly research into US histories of motherhood have asserted that the historically contingent and discursively constituted representative ideal figures of motherhood—Moral, Scientific, and Intensive—have acted to discipline and regulate women's behavior in different eras (see Rima D. Apple 1995, Ruth H. Bloch 1978, Linda Kerber 1976, Barbra Welter 1966, and Susan Hays 1996). For example, Moral mothering, evidenced by 19th century women's magazines, gift annuals, and other literature was based on the ideology of the Cults of True

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Womanhood and Domesticity which characterized proper female and mothering behavior as pious and pure (hence moral), submissive, and domestic (Welter 152). As Barbara Welter notes, these were attributes "by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society" (152). In this way ideal forms of mothering in the US including Republican, Moral, Scientific, and Intensive Mothering, provide a rubric for mothers and society to identify maternal worth. Fierce mothering and the ability to publicly articulate subjectivity through motherhood, then, depends on a mother's ability to embody and project the attributes of ideal forms. As such, fierce mothers must incorporate the attributes and modalities of motherhood ideals into their regulatory repertoire in language and behavior.

Foucault's explication of the dual function of subjectivity in *Technologies of the Self*, shows that for a person to speak as the subject "of" a discourse (asserting subjectivity), they must also become subject "to" that discourse (be disciplined by them) as a regulatory function of the discursive relations (18). This means that to enact subjectivity through discourse, one must also then speak, behave, and act within the accepted framework of that same discourse. In the case of fierce mothering, women's use of maternalism as a substrate for subjectivity offers them access to socio-political legitimization, but also limits their socio-political speech and action to a range of acceptable speech and behaviors that correspond to normative discourses about motherhood, mothering, and mothers such as the ideal forms.

These twinned effects of using subjectivity—their legitimating and regulating capacities—require women's articulation of fierce motherhood subjectivity as a type of performative enactment in which she demonstrates her self-regulation to ideals and norms of US mothering. Inderpal Grewal discusses this in her analysis of Security Mom subjectivity saying that discourses stemming the use of maternal subjectivity make "the mother into both the subject

and the agent" of their co-linked concern (in this case security). She is legitimized as the 'subject' and regulated as the 'agent' which allows "motherhood [to become] governmentalized" (201). Thus, the power of motherhood subjectivity is also constrained by discourses related to women's proper behavior ultimately positioning mothers as a "target of sovereign and disciplinary power" (201). Fierce mothering subjectivities—like the Security Mom—are, therefore, enabled by maternalism to engage with public concerns (security, eco-consciousness, mothers' wages, etc.) but maternalism is, itself, constrained by traditionalist gendered discourses of both post feminism as a pan-political cultural sensibility and reactionary gender politics promoted by "the increasing power of the religious right" (Grewal 201). Fierce mothering, to be effective within this context, generates a reciprocal power relationship with dominant structures where fierce mothers regulate themselves into "domestic subject citizens whose empowerment coincides with the needs of the nation and state" (201).

Subjectivity as a 'technology of the self' then works as a mechanism by which individuals discipline themselves to cultural norms that they internalize and can then express to negotiate daily living in the world. In everyday terms, subjectivity and identity are thought of as stable, 'authentic facts' of our experience. However, many scholars have noted (see Judith Butler 1999, Michel Foucault 1988, Stuart Hall 2012, Kumarini Silva 2016, and Chris Weedon 2009) that multiple processes of subjectivity and identity formation are at work in lived practice which underscores their complex, shifting, multiple, and multi-directional nature. As Stuart Hall notes: "The self is [now] conceptualized as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit, something with a history, 'produced,' in process." Therefore, "[t]he 'subject' is differently placed or positioned by different discourses and practices" ("Times" 226). This situational and unfixed character of

subjectivity and identity allows for alterations to self-narratives in relation to changing

discourses. Such alterations enable ongoing reconstitutions of the self-as-subject and the

reframing of identity over time as is the case with the strategy of fierce motherhood

subjectivities.

Chris Weedon similarly argues that "[a]s individuals inserted within specific discourses,

we repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity and identity until these are experienced as if they

were second nature" (7). These narratives can become our 'truths' because "[w]here they are

successfully internalized, they become part of lived subjectivity" (7). However, our self-

narratives sometimes fail to convince us or others as we perform them. Such 'unsuccessful'

internalization "may become the basis for dis-identification or counter-identifications which

involve a rejection of hegemonic identity norms" (Weedon 7). Thus, identity formation includes

multiple processes that encompass a range of articulations and responses shaped by an

individual's relation to multiple discourses.

Public enactments of subjectivity and identity, including speech and embodiment, can

thus be understood as performative practices through which individuals form and reinforce their

identities through subjectivity. Judith Butler's theorization of gender performativity is useful in

thinking about the processes involved in the public enactment of subjectivity and identity,

particularly in the frame of motherhood subjectivities which explicitly link them to culturally

constructed, gendered roles. Butler theorizes that it is our daily practices of being in the world—

including talking, moving, and dressing—that produce a series of effects which consolidate an

impression of our gender, rather than gender itself being an essential fact of our person which

determines our practices in the world. (*Trouble* xii-xv). These impressions are based on people

"doing" their gender which (re)creates the meaning of gender itself by reinforcing or

contradicting hegemonic, culturally constructed norms (*Trouble* xiv-xv). Therefore, public enactments of subjectivity and identity, understood as performative, are not solely individualized, experiential expressions of the self, but are also negotiations of the self in relation to other people's expectations and culturally dominant norms.

As cultural negotiations of identity, public enactments of subjectivity are relational, such that they can either be accepted as legitimate or rejected as illegitimate by other people and institutions. Butler addresses this relational facet of performativity in her discussion of "citationality," which she describes as a referential system through which people use physical markers (e.g., clothing, hair, jewelry, color), practices (e.g., gestures, utilization of physical space, e.g., 'manspreading'), and discourses (e.g., using cultural narratives), to "do" their gender (*Matter* 13-14). Importantly, the notion of performativity—rather than performance—is used to indicate that such citational practices are not solely selected by individuals (as if they were acting) but are compulsory (required socially). This means people are always "doing" their gender whether they see it as an 'act' or as 'real' (Hall's stable and authentic facts). And, that people do not have control over all the citational markers that other people 'read' in determining a particular enactment's legitimacy. This compulsory nature of subjective enactment is a mechanism through which social and physical regulation of norms occurs. Thus, enacting the "wrong" subjectivity—one that other people do not understand or accept—is dangerous to both our sense of self and our physical safety because failed subjective enactments, particularly of gender, can produce socially and physically violent reactions (Butler *Trouble* xix-xxvi).

In the context of motherhood as a gendered role, "doing" motherhood relies on women's ability to use the correct citational markers drawn from discourses of motherhood (especially ideal forms) along with discourses of gender (specifically femininity) to produce legible

(successful) performative enactments. Fierce mothering practices which link discourses of motherhood and gender to wider socially resonant discourses (e.g., climate change, vaccine safety, eco consciousness, etc.) work to expand the sets of discourses that mothers can incorporate into their citational repertoires. While the broadening of accessible citational markers offers some potential for changing 'what counts' as a successful enactment, the linkage to motherhood constrains this potential by proscribing a specific form of compulsory enactment as legible. For example, members of Moms Rising performatively enact maternal femininity by lobbying members of congress through baking campaigns. In these campaigns, the Moms deliver both petitions and home-baked treats decorated with 'messages' promoting their concerns (Burnett). Thus, a typically unfeminine citational marker (political agitation) is enabled, but also constrained by citational markers of femininity (cupcakes). This public enactment can be successful precisely because it foregrounds maternal care, even using the baking metaphor in the messaging to congressional members, and highlights mothers' domestic skills.

Successful enactments, then, hinge on both internalization (the self's acceptance of an enactment) and on external acceptance or rejection of the enactment. This relational requirement is also discussed by Butler in her framing of "legibility" (*Matter* 234). Here a "legible" performative enactment is one that other people understand, while "illegible" means that a performative enactment does not fit within a readily understandable framework. Legible performative enactments which fit within culturally hegemonic norms are more likely to be accepted, while legible performative enactments that do not fit within hegemonic norms and illegible performative enactments are more likely to be rejected, often through negative, even violent, social regulation. Thus, external—particularly public—acceptance or rejection of

subjectivity / identity claims is crucially important to determining whether a person has access to subject positions.

Generally, people attempt to performatively enact legible subjectivities and identities. While some people may choose to enact ambiguous subjectivities and identities, others by virtue of their physical appearance, or in-born characteristics cannot meet the parameters of "legible" enactments. Weedon describes the impacts of these limitations saying:

> …the wide range of identities available in a society and the modes of subjectivity that go with them are not open to all people at all times. They are often restricted to specific groups…and policed by the groups in question. Non-recognition and non-identification leave the individual in an abject state of non-subjectivity and lack of agency. At best the individual concerned must fall back on subject positions other than the ones to which s/he is denied access (7)

The determination of access to subject positions is a specific way in which social hierarchies are regulated by people and institutions. In the case of motherhood subjectivities this regulatory mechanism is applied by people socially, often through 'shaming' mothers publicly for some supposed failure to performatively enact 'mother' properly. Such public 'shaming' includes public critique from strangers, friends, and family about parenting choices and can often start in early stages of pregnancy, especially as pregnancies become visible. This shaming is also routinely linked to institutional limitations of access to subject positions encoded in laws and policies that impact mothers and mothering specifically. For example, young mothers, particularly in their teens and early twenties, are more likely to be perceived as incapable of providing 'proper' maternal care by both people in public and by institutions (Breheny and Stephens 113-14). Critically important links between public shaming and institutional limitations are laws and policies regulating 'child safety,' many of which target neglect, abuse, and endangerment of children and, even in some states, of fetuses (colloquially referred to by advocates as the 'pre-born'). Such laws and policies are often disproportionately applied to poor,

immigrant, non-Christian, black and other mothers of color through government interventions, and even criminal charges (Hurley). As such, illegible public enactments of maternal subjectivity are used to regulate mothers and even mothers-to-be. While I take up both social and institutional shaming in more detail in chapter 4, when I discuss surveillance, it is important to note here that shaming and threats of institutional interventions act as regulating practices for all mothers.

Crucially important to this form of social and institutional regulation of motherhood subjectivities are cultural constructions of gender and mothering, the circulation of discourses about gender and mothering, and representative portrayals of 'good' or 'bad' mothering. Such constructions, discursive circulations, and representations of mothering have historically been negotiated in popular culture, rather than in political arenas given women's systemic exclusion from the political sphere.[24] Popular cultural media have been used to debate the proper roles and attributes of mothers, over decades, ranging from broadsheet newspapers representing "Republican" mothering, to ladies' journals, which spread the ideal of the Cult of True Womanhood, through anti-suffrage postcards depicting a concern with woman suffrage as a failure of mothering, to more recent televisual media, public and self-help literature, and now online mediated forms (Lewis 1075, Thompson 747, Welter 151). Moreover, depictions of good or bad mothering in the media are often tied to hegemonic values expressed in broader discourses of social difference. This makes race, class, sexuality, citizenship status, and other markers of social value, grounds for limiting mothers' access to public articulations of maternal subjectivity (Carby 216, Collins 174-192, Spillars 66-68). Citational markers develop through repetition of these mediated forms—cultural constructions of motherhood, circulating discourses about motherhood, and representative portrayals of 'good' and 'bad' mothers—and their historically accreted meaning. As such, the ideal forms of US mothering—Republican, Moral,

Scientific, and Intensive—provide a basis for portraying mothers and developing citation markers (I describe this process in detail in subsequent chapters).

Importantly, these ideal forms of motherhood are predicated on 'traditional' US norms which embed socio-political expectations for and the practices of white, Christian, heteronormative, middle-upper class women as citational markers. In this way, facets of difference become nodal sites where multiple discourses interact and affect the conditions of possibility for the constitution of identities and subjectivities. So, facets of difference also limit who can make identity claims through articulations or enactments of subjectivity which works to reproduce existing power structures defined by difference across cultural, social, economic, and political milieus. This mirrors other social, cultural, political, and economic milieus where difference is a primary framework for limiting access to subjective articulations and positions (Hall 435, Silva 49-51, Watts 171, Weedon 7).

What this means broadly for women's use of fierce motherhood subjectivities is that legitimacy can only be achieved when a mother can demonstrate her alignment with ideal forms of motherhood and thus her ability and willingness (even unknowingly) to uphold social hierarchies. This ability to demonstrate alignment is, however, limited by factors outside a woman's control such as her race, class, and/or sexual orientation. Simultaneously, women are regulated by the constellation of attributes figured in motherhood ideals such that their socio-political power is delimited by culturally hegemonic norms. The imbrication of fierce motherhood subjectivity with socio-political concerns (e.g., security, ecological, anti-vaccine, border patrol, etc.) refocuses the terms of mothering discourses to an extent, but this shift occurs not because of a fierce mother's individual concerns, but because her *maternal expertise* is deemed in alignment with, and therefore valuable to dominant structures. In this way the use of

fierce motherhood subjectivity can allow some women—predominantly white, middle-upper class, heterosexual, married women—to better negotiate the demands of mothering while retaining a measure of agency. It also ensures that mothers' resistance to power asserted via fierce motherhood subjectivities is bound to support existing social hierarchies. Moreover, that it supports, to a large extent, existing institutional structures. Thus, mothers are implicitly required to reproduce white, Christian, hetero-patriarchal norms if they are to successfully utilize fierce motherhood subjectivity.

Fierce Mothering as Cultural Technology

Fierce mothering, works as a specific gendered 'technology of the self' and, also represents a cultural-technological development within the analytic of motherhood as a cultural infrastructure discussed in chapter one. It is important to distinguish between these two descriptions of fierce mothering as 'technological.' As a technology of the self, fierce motherhood subjectivities require mothers to discipline, regulate, and socialize themselves in relation to the tenets of both post feminism and Intensive Mothering. In this sense, technology refers to how individuals shape themselves into subjects within a particular system which enables them to enact agency in daily living. It is their self-disciplining, regulation, and socialization—their shaping of themselves—which enables fierce mothers to enact their fierce motherhood subjectivities successfully.

Fierce mothering as a cultural-technological development refers to how it functions as a new practice that mothers can use to navigate the socio-cultural, political, economic, and institutional pathways of motherhood as a cultural infrastructure. Here, women's strategic use of fierce motherhood subjectivities enables them to access and use historic ideal forms of mothering to assert their interests and respond to socio-political expectations. Fierce motherhood

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subjectivities, then, act as a type of application (cultural tool) for using ideal forms of motherhood (cultural technologies) to maneuver within the social and institutional circulations, discourses, and pathways of motherhood (cultural infrastructure).

As a cultural-technological 'app,' each fierce motherhood subjectivity incorporates attributes from ideal forms of motherhood (cultural technologies) to project maternal competence and expertise which can ease their navigation of daily life as mothers. Although the initial motherhood subjectivity, the Soccer Mom, was created by political operatives as a gambit to gain suburban women's votes, women's own adoption and development of fierce motherhood subjectivities suggests that mothers experience benefits from using them in their public speech and daily practices. Crucially, a cultural infrastructural view understands motherhood as sets of cultural pathways, structures, and circulatory flows which interconnect immaterial (ideas, discourses, etc.) and material (people, practices, goods) things (for more detail refer to Chapter One). Fierce mothering can thus be understood as a type of user-developed 'app'—a cultural tool created by mothers—for navigating the pathways, structures, and circulatory flows within the motherhood infrastructure.

To understand fierce mothering from a cultural infrastructural view, it is important to explore which subset of pathways, structures, and circulatory flows it brings together. Fierce mothering, as described in the previous chapter, most explicitly uses maternalism and fierce imagery to position mothers as protectors, and warriors for their children, and the children of the nation and world. It also connects this fierce maternal frame to wider socio-political, economic, and cultural issues through vectors of consumerism (here construed broadly as both economic and cultural consumption related to domestic life). Maternalism, here, acts as a basis for civic participation (socio-political agitation). Fierce imagery rhetorically frames mothers' socio-

political agitation as a form of 'empowered' sentimentality (necessitated by a maternal duty of love and care). And consumerism presents an accessible and 'appropriate' locus of activity including 1) the development of maternal expertise (cultural consumption) and 2) as a mode socio-political action (economic consumption). Thus, the subset of cultural pathways, structures, and circulatory flows that fierce mothering links are civic participation (maternalism), sentimentality (fierce care), and consumerism (domestic consumption). The triangulation of these 'cultural infrastructural' elements, as they are used in fierce mothering articulations, are highly calibrated to align with contemporary debates over women's 'proper' role in US society. Fierce mothering, however, is not the first framing of women as liberal democratic subjects which triangulates these specific elements. And, from a cultural infrastructural view, the recuperation and reframing of cultural technological forms is crucially important to the stability and ongoing utility of motherhood as a cultural infrastructure.

In the book *Sentimental Materialism,* Merish outlines how 'appropriate' civic behavior for women developed alongside capitalist economics in the 19th century and how it was disseminated and circulated through popular media (books) at the time. Merish provides a detailed analysis of what I have called the cultural infrastructure of motherhood as it was constituted during that formative era. She describes how maternal duties-of-care to family and home commonly espoused through the sentimental logics of the cults of True Womanhood and Domesticity entangled with "new" liberal democratic political discourses and emerging economic discourses aimed at naturalizing and entrenching capitalism (15-18).

A crucially important problematic for the development of sentimental materialism was enumerating how democratic aims and the practice of slavery could be reconciled. This was achieved, according to Merish, through producing a new gendered category of political subjects

that offered limited power to previously unrecognized "persons" (white women) within and across society (20-25). However, that limited power was achieved only by separating the class of free (white) people from the class of non-free people: black slaves. In this way, the formation of white women as liberal democratic subjects (as persons within the law) was mobilized by the existence of and need for slavery itself.

Distinctions along lines of race, however, were not the only distinctions between classes. As a framework rooted in theories of capitalism, sentimental materialism also required distinguishing between classes of people who could be understood as able to freely consent to labor exchange. Working from notions of unfreedom and forced labor embedded in slavery, early capitalist logics of the 'free exchange of labor' were thus narrowly applied to marriage and domestic (reproductive) labor (35-38). This rendering of marriage as a free exchange of labor enabled the transition of white, middle-upper class women from non-persons to partial persons with specific liberal democratic responsibilities rooted in their natural role in the home. This population of women could become (partial) political subjects in the US because of their status as "free" to choose their husbands and marriages (as compared to "Old World" European practices of arranged marriage) which effected a free exchange of (reproductive) domestic labor.

Unlike white middle-upper class white women, black enslaved women, along with poor working and immigrant women, were perceived as having no choice or little choice (respectively) to freely exchange their labor. Enslaved women were understood to be unfree— unable to consent to marriage or labor exchange—and therefore the opposite of free (white) women (37-39). Similarly, poor and immigrant women were perceived as 'not free' to choose because it was assumed that women would only work outside the home if they had no other 'choice.' This differentiation in the treatment of women, their (limited) 'freedom,' was a primary

narrative in articulating the benefits of capitalist economic and democratic political models over monarchical models from Europe (60). Women's "choice" hinged on notions of "consent" in marriage, which for white middle-upper class women were wrapped in sentimental narratives of romantic love and the sanctity of the mother-child bond (60).

Fierce mothering links these same cultural infrastructural elements through Intensive Mothering frames (rather than Moral Mothering frames), which are adapted temporally and economically to incorporate socio-cultural changes to gender roles wrought through feminism and entrenched, late-capitalist economics. Intensive mothering also reanimates and repackages aspects of prior mothering ideals, particularly sentimentalism from Moral Mothering, and a prioritization of child health from Scientific Mothering. It refigures them within its own terms such that sentimentalism is characterized through 'choice' rather than 'duty' and child health is characterized through 'well-being' rather than 'haleness'. Intensive Mothering's incorporation of these prior aspects works to address feminist and capitalist demands for women's labor in the workforce, while still conditioning women to perform reproductive labor at home.[25]

This socio-political and economic movement away from prior discourses of domesticity which valorized a mother's literal "place in the home" dovetails with the post-feminist discursive elevation of femininity to ensure the continuation modern domesticity and the gendered division of labor. As such, the paradigm of Intensive Mothering, like post-feminist narratives, centers on mothers' individual choices to put their children first, before work and even marriage. Fierce mothering as a communicative strategy within the context of Intensive Mothering reanimates the 19th century focus on maternal sentimentality (a mother's duty of love and care for her children) in contemporary terms. So, although a mother may work during the day—either because she

wants to, or financially must—her 'most important job' is mothering and caring for her family because she *loves* them.

Fierce mothering's linkage of cultural infrastructural elements of civic participation, sentimentality, and consumerism provide an up-to-date, but culturally legible mechanism (app/cultural tool) for navigating the motherhood infrastructure. Its incorporation of prior forms produces a sense of continuity essential to the maintenance of culturally hegemonic socio-political structures. As such it provides the ability to incorporate the new modes of gendered action and technological methods of engagement and circulation without rupturing dominant structures. This is why fierce mothering can be posed as 'empowering,' even an outgrowth of feminist success, while also working to secure regressive forms of gender-role differentiation.

As a communicative practice, fierce mothering allows (some) mothers to articulate their concerns publicly and politically because it leverages both the gendered 'appropriateness' of sentimental materialism and the 'legibility' of mothering ideals. In this way, fierce mothering constitutes a contemporary type of women's 'appropriate' civic participation. And, while this is a form of civic action that mothers' themselves engage and develop, their participation comes with limitations dictated by the terms of their underlying—sentimental materialism and mothering ideals—constructions. This tension between prior forms and contemporary expressions allows for navigation of mothers' daily lives within the cultural infrastructure of motherhood but not the destruction of the system itself. Thus, fierce mothering relies on and responds to contemporary practices and modalities that pose barriers within the motherhood infrastructure in the present.

Fierce Mothering as Digital Sociality through Intimate Publicity

To understand what difficulties fierce mothering eases, exploring how it maintains its efficacy as a communicative strategy is essential. Fierce mothers engage primarily through

authoring digital texts, podcasts, videos, or via social media platforms. They engage across the political spectrum and subjectivities forward both progressive and conservative positions. Online engagement is particularly useful because online media are accessible from domestic space (the home) while children are playing or sleeping and from smart phones in public space while children are participating in other activities. But how do mothers' seemingly individualized concerns proffered often from private spaces generate a following or community?

Importantly, the Internet enables the circulation and consumption of texts as well as a source of community with which mothers engage. These factors are essential to the utility of fierce mothering for the women who use it as a communicative strategy. Applying Maurice Charland's concept of "constitutive rhetoric" provides a framework to understand how the articulation of motherhood subjectivity(ies) generates its own audience, its own community, and its own public (135). Charland's exploration of how rhetoric works to constitute its own audience relies on the construction of the subject in discourse as a necessary precedent to the actual appearance of the public of which the subject is a part. Speaking about national political constructions, he contends that "[p]olitical identity must be an ideological fiction, even though...this fiction becomes historically material and of consequence as persons live it" (137). Charland, in his discussion of the production of subjectivity and identity draws heavily on the work of Althusser regarding "interpellation," or how people encounter and internalize cultural values—ideology—through a process of socialization which naturalizes the ideological roots of our beliefs (85-87). He describes this relation in rhetorical processes saying:

> The ideological 'trick' of [constitutive] rhetoric is that it presents that which is most rhetorical, the existence...of a subject, as extrarhetorical. These members of the [public] whose supposed essence demands action do not exist in nature, but only within a discursively constituted history. Thus, this rhetoric paradoxically must constitute the identity [of the subject] as it simultaneously presumes it to be

pregiven and natural, existing outside of rhetoric and forming the basis for a
rhetorical address (137)

Fierce mothers articulate their interests publicly through a subject position that assumes the

existence of concerned mothers broadly speaking, and of some subset of those mothers who are

also concerned with their respective interests (Eco Moms, Mama Dragons) specifically. As other

mothers within the online sphere read and engage with texts, they may also identify or

disidentify with the concerns of that subjectivity. Their reaction, either positive or negative,

reinforces the existence of the subjectivity itself as part of a recognizable public. Thus, fierce

mothering articulations themselves constitute the publics who make up their audiences. In this

way, women cohere as an imagined community through their identification with a given

motherhood subjectivity's stated interests which they see as representative of their own interests.

These publics are, however, multi-layered and overlapping in ways that traditional

conceptions of publics do not consider. This effect comes from two 'non-traditional' actualities

posed by fierce mothering as an online phenomenon: 1) geographic distance between members

of these publics and 2) imagined identification rather than embodied identification with the

subject position. Thus, identification with these motherhood subjectivities derives from an

imagined inclusion in the group rather than from family connection, emplaced community

networks, morphological similarity, or other more traditional frames of identification. While

Charland's theory helps to understand how fierce mothering subjectivities generate their own

audiences, it does not clarify how virtual public spheres arising outside national contexts through

asynchronous, global modalities of communication cohere.

Michael Warner has done work on understanding how publics form and cohere both in

identification with and opposition to dominant socio-cultural and political norms. His

conception of publics—like Charland's conception of subjects—understand them to be

constituted in and through discourse. Warner articulates publics (and counter publics) as self-organized "space[s] of discourse," that function as a relation among strangers, mediated by cultural forms and contingent upon historical context, which come together through "mere attention," (not agreement) and are thus "the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (51-62). This provides a way to understand online relational structures as publics which are formed through discursive association (attention to circulating discourses including texts, images, etc.) and interactive (social), asynchronous participation (reflexive circulation).

The public constituted by Amy Chua's articulation of "Tiger Mother" subjectivity—quickly translated into "Tiger Moms" within online discussions—is an exemplar of Warner's articulation of discursive circulation as a mechanism for the formation of publics and counter publics. Articles in online parenting magazines, blog posts, and even print books began circulating in response, characterizing an array of 'animal' figures including "Elephant Moms" who "nurture, protect, and encourage" (Sharma-Sindhar), "Dolphin Moms," who are collaborative, authoritative parents, and "Jellyfish Moms," who are permissive—ostensibly squishy—parents (Shimi), "Dragon Moms," not to be confused with Mama Dragons, are moms of chronically and terminally ill children who are "fierce, loyal, and loving as hell" (Rapp). Notably, JozJozJoz a writer for the blog *8 Asians,* responded with a frustrated article in which she provides a sarcastic rendering of 'mothering' characteristics for all the animals of the Chinese zodiac who, no matter their attributes, "all suck" ("Mom Zodiac"). Although somewhat tongue-in-cheek, the short post highlights both the problematic racialization of the trend and mothers' scramble to label themselves as such. This public's circulating discourse also extends beyond mothers' identifying with animal figures, or fierce motherhood subjectivities into the broader range of mothering and parenting discourses as the discussion begins to position 'tiger,'

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'dragon,' 'elephant,' 'jellyfish,' and other animal depictions within the frame of common "parenting styles" such as helicopter, attachment, free-range, permissive, authoritative, etc., (Loop). While some of the mothers who make up the public that attends to the circulation of animal figure parenting styles may identify as fierce mothers, not all do and some reject it, even using other animal figures (e.g., elephant moms) to refocus on parenting experience rather than maternalist expression.

This pattern indicates that Warner's conception of publics can provide insight into how the online phenomenon of fierce mothering works as a socio-political and culturally generated rhetorical form. However, Warner specifically argues against the notion that publics are constituted through categorical group membership such as gender, race, or class (58-60). In the case of fierce mothering, its 'publics' are constituted and maintained as specifically gendered (and implicitly racialized, classed, etc.) affinities. While, as Warner's theory suggests, fierce mothers are not the only 'members' of the publics they constitute—rather many other people mothers and non-mothers attend to their discursive circulations—it remains important to distinguish between this broad conception of publics and how the fierce mothering phenomenon is rhetorically constructing mothers a gendered group with wider socio-cultural, political and economic effects.

To understand the type of digital sociality between mothers, developed through fierce mothering, a theorization which can account for how fierce mothers' rhetorical constitution of their own subjectivities is necessary. To account for categorical affiliation in publics, Lauren Berlant (2008) develops the notion of "intimate publicity" which describes how women form publicness *as women* in light of their historical exclusion from participation in the political public sphere (p. iv-xi). This frame is useful in thinking about how extremist publics focused on

white identity or male identity work as integrated offline / online practices by capitalizing on the capacities of social media to circulate grievances.

Fierce mothering cannot be understood as a public without exposition of its technological development out of 'mommy blogging' which shaped the generic conventions and forms for "fierce mothering" articulations. Aspects of these conventions include circulating advice, offering support, and providing product information through networks of 'personal' relations (even among people who have never met) with a focus on maternal experience and expertise. Moreover, the rapid expansion of motherhood subjectivities develops as a specifically mediated and gendered form of communication which must be understood in those terms. Thus, I turn to a theorization of publicity which provides an affective relationship to belonging, rather than more traditionally structured 'publics,' as a framework to best understand fierce mothering.

Lauren Berlant's theorization of intimate publicity in *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, is vital to understanding how fierce mothering forms publics online. The coherence of the momosphere, through intimate publicity, is also noted by Aimeé Morrison in her discussion of the affective character of earlier (2010s) mommy blogging communities. She says, "blogging texts circulate according to network rather than broadcast theories of transmission, and this distinction alters the relationships between members of this public, as well as their relations to the texts that frame their communities. Both of these characteristics foment an intimate public among the writers and readers who comprise personal mommy blogging communities" (Morrison 37). Overtime, such blogs have become monetized and their audiences commodified (Hunter 1307-1308) and influencer culture has become a mainstay of online mom culture (see Elaine Levine 2015). Berlant's formulation is essential because of its focus on both affective experience as a basis for circulation and how

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women's 'cultures' generate "intimate publicity"—a shared sense of belonging and identification with strangers—through gendered practices of consumption (5-7).

In this section, I show how fierce mothers develop their digital sociality through the mode of intimate publicity. I provide examples drawn from Mama Dragons' articulations as an exemplar of the ways intimate publicity is practiced in the context of fierce mothering. These modes and practices of intimate publicity are not limited to the Mama Dragons subjectivity, although they manifest in various ways specific to any particular fierce motherhood subjectivity's frames of interest. Importantly, fierce mothering subjectivities derive from broader histories and practices of the 'women's culture' that Berlant analyzes, and as such the features and effects she describes extend from the broader culture through the specific frames of both post feminism and intensive mothering into fierce mothering as a maternal communicative strategy.

Berlant describes intimate publics as a particular type of stranger sociality unbound by geography, language, or other typically localized factors associated with political publics. Among fierce mothers, this stranger sociality takes on additional features common to digital cultures including the consumption and sharing of multiple forms of texts—memes, blogs, photos, and videos—as well as consumption of products (online shopping). Moreover, as a form of digital sociality grounded in intimate publicity, fierce mothering includes the circulation and consumption of motherhood discourses and practices, as well as mothers' concerns about how to negotiate their experiences of suffering as mothers both personally and socially.

Berlant notes that women's intimate publicity is affectively charged making participants "feel as though it expresses" their commonality (5). This affective charge is deployed in both Berlant's analysis and in fierce mothering through sentimental narrations of women's (mothers')

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experience, often in implicitly racialized terms common the logics of gendered sentimental

discourse (Merish 191-94). This sentimentality, in fierce mothering articulations, is often framed

aggressively—what I have termed 'empowered' sentimentality—because of fierce mothering's

usage of feminist languages of 'empowerment' and liberation. An example of such empowered

sentimentality comes from one of the original Mama Dragons, Meg Abhau, whose post

constituted the Mama Dragon subjectivity, and its intimate public says (emphasis added):

> I have always been a mother bear. Once I found out about Jon, that didn't seem a fierce enough title. There is *a whole new level of protection* that has come over me. I now call myself a Mama Dragon. *I could literally breathe fire if someone hurt my son*. Dragons have talons, scales, claws, fangs and they can fly. I will use all of these resources if someone were to hurt Jon. So, *we are circling our wagons around him, but I know we can't protect him from everything*. And as a Mama Dragon*, that is the hardest part* of this. I don't know what the future holds. I just know that *there will be love* ("Our Origins")

This post highlights the mixture of ferocity and care which characterizes the 'empowered'

sentimentality of fierce mothering statements. Here, to capture the intensity of her sense of

maternal care as her 'sentimental duty,' Abhau relates her love in mythical, even magical

proportions through the figure of the dragon. This intensity is so great, and the threat of harm to

her LGBTQI+ Mormon son so likely, that she transcends her 'normal' sense of maternal

fierceness (the mother bear) and transforms into a beast capable of providing a now necessary

epic level of 'protection.' The Web page continues the Mama Dragons' origin story noting that

several other mothers began identifying with Abhau's post and eventually the group formed

starting with a private message feed and a secret *Facebook* group due to the sensitive nature of

the topic within the Mormon community ("Our Origins").

Abhau's original message was posted in 2012 and the group formed and grew over the

next several years and developed a formal Website by 2016. Now, according to their Web page,

the Mama Dragons number over 5,000 members worldwide, including Mormon mothers and

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mothers of other faith traditions (although religious involvement is not required). The Mama Dragons Website includes narrative blog posts and links to vlogs (video blog) posts from members, many of which have been developed for their "Stories" campaign which was run through their *Facebook* page. Narratives, particularly in the "Stories" genre, are built on this affective, sentimental frame. Mothers describe their emotional turmoil upon finding out their children are LGBTQI+ using terms like heartache, heartbroken, mental and emotional implosion to describe the combined sense of loss of their child's assumed future, fear for their children's safety, and anxiety for what the changes will mean. These frames are mixed many times with assertive, nearly pugnacious, statements of their drive to 'protect' their children from pain and harm.

Ruth Cobb, a Mama Dragon, also provides an example of this shared affective framing in her story of finding out one of her sons is gay. She says: "I knew, as I sat sobbing behind my bedroom door, that his life would be filled with so much turmoil and judgement from the outside world. My heart ached for him. I also knew, as his mother, that I would do everything in my power to not only protect him, but that I would also teach him to love himself" ("From Within"). Here we see the mix of sentimental and protective language which Cobb amplifies further several passages later, saying: "I walked out of my bedroom that day as a different mother. ...I was not playing anymore. The world better watch out because I was about to take this LGBTQ+ thing to a whole new level for a child that I loved more than life" ("From Within"). As Abhau and Cobb's narrative examples, along with many other fierce mothering articulations from Mama Dragons and other fierce mothers, show intimate publicity is generated from forms of affect linked to maternal love and sentimental 'duties' of care.

Importantly, the effect of intimate publicity's affective expression of commonality is to elide intra-categorical distinctions (race, class, sexuality, ability, citizenship, etc.) between women (mothers) and thereby (re)produce a homogeneous and monolithic notion of 'woman' as the norm. The "Mama Dragons Vision" video on *YouTube* provides an example of this effect. The video is structured with multiple Mama Dragons each saying a phrase of the message. Each is recorded in portrait style—sitting centered in the frame—in the same location. The "vision" is relayed personally by these women directly to the viewer generating a 'personal' sensibility. It is a structure that visually replicates a face to face conversation and invitation from other mothers who share the viewers experience (emphasis added):

> *We are moms*. Moms who believe in creating a safer world for our LGBTQ children. A world that doesn't exist now. A world that we inspire a new conversation. *A conversation that needs your story*. We would love to have you *join us*. *Be part of a group that is making a difference*. We are a community of support, empowerment, mothers, women, celebration, listening, fear, heartbreak, growth, and acceptance. *We will embrace, celebrate, and stand by you* as you walk this new road. This may be hard. You might feel lost. You might not have all the answers. *But you won't be alone*. Together, we can do this. Together, we are strong. *Together, we are one*. We are Mama Dragons ("Vision").

This vision presents a commonality of affective experience between the mothers presenting the message who are predominantly white, generally middle-aged, and who project a middle-class image (e.g., they appear as class neutral). And the message, rhetorically constructs the viewer as also sharing the same affective experience—difficulties, desires, and hopes—as the presenters. The presenters and viewer are unified through the repetitive use of 'together' in the last few lines constituting an implied us; a unified subject where 'we' become 'one.'

Such elision favors conventionality (whiteness, middle class status, heterosexuality, etc.) while also obscuring women's (mothers') differential experiences which prioritizes social blindness to inequalities and privileged perspectives as norms of the intimate public itself. As

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Berlant cautions "the market frames belonging to an intimate public as a condition of possibility [work] mainly for those who can pass as conventional within its limited terms" (13). 'Passing,' here, is a crucial distinction because it marks the ways in which intimate publics are constituted through discourse and shaped by hegemonic power relationships between individuals, consumption, culture, and politics.

As a market driven culture and considering the history of women's socio-political advances tied to market logics, intimate publics tend to operate outside and parallel to the public sphere. This parallel operation is what Berlant calls the "juxtapolitical" (10). The juxtapolitical is a form of collectivity in mass society that is "loosely organized and market structured," it is "a sphere of people attached to each other by the sense that there is a common emotional world available to those individuals who have been marked by the historical burden of being treated harshly but in a generic way" (10). Increasingly in the US, given the "denigration of the political sphere" that marks "mass politics," the juxtapolitical is being used as "resources for providing and maintaining the experience of collectivity, that also, sometimes, constitutes the body politic" (10-11).

Berlant explicates how the "female complaint" acts as a primary narrative genre for women's intimate publicity ("Complaint" 240). Here, the female complaint (as genre) "allows the woman who wants to maintain her alignment with men to speak oppositionally but without fear for her position within the heterosexual economy—because the mode of her discourse concedes the intractability of the (phallocentric) conditions of the complaint's production" (243). As such, fierce mothering and other communicative practices in mothers' communities online, also use the female complaint as a primary narrative genre. An example of this comes from a different founding Mama Dragon, Gina Crivello, as she describes the effect of setting up the first

'secret' *Facebook* page, saying: "Mama Dragons Council was born… each woman no longer alone and at the mercy of the whims of misguided leaders but now able to stand tall with her chin in the air and banded with her sisters to right the wrongs and protect LGBTQ+ kids, young and old" ("Our Origins"). Specifically, this articulation shows how fierce mothering articulations using the narrative genre of the female complaint are mobilized through a blending of 'empowered' sentimentality and maternal 'expertise' endemic to new maternalist framing. Here, the complaint—isolation, mercurial (male) leaders, lacking guidance (or worse incorrect guidance)—is implicit in the statement, moreover, it is resolved by the women's banding together and making their own way.

The range of fierce mothering subjectivities, including some that are overtly interested in politics, also follow this pattern of juxtapolitical engagement to a large extent. In the case example of the Mama Dragons, the "Vision" (video text above) presents this juxtapolitical frame through the rhetoric of 'creating a safer world,' 'starting a conversation,' and 'a group that is making a difference.' The Mama Dragons also engage in direct 'juxtapolitical' action in their hugging campaigns at pride events (Duberman). Furthermore, digital cultures such as fierce mothering, often enact juxtapolitical frames of participation including the use of online petitions, charitable donation platforms, and live streaming features which allow users (members of the intimate public) to engage with issues, events, and experiences that entangle public discourse, consumer culture, and performative modes of 'care' within a digital mode of civic practice.

Fierce mothering narratives share many characteristics of the gendered collective identification Berlant describes. Moreover, intimate publicity as a relation of power and social hierarchies engages the aspects of "sentimental materialism" foundational to US frames for appropriate maternal civic participation as it is structured through fierce mothering (Merish 35-

37). Berlant could be speaking about fierce mothering as she describes how participating in intimate publics (emphasis added):

> seems to confirm the sense that...there existed a world of strangers who would be emotionally literate in each other's experience of power, intimacy, desire, and discontent, with all that entails: varieties of suffering and fantasies of transcendence, longing for reciprocity with other humans and the world, irrational and rational attachments to the way things are; *special styles of ferocity and refusal;* and a creative will to survive that attends to everyday situations while imagining conditions of flourishing within and beyond them (5)

This similarity between fierce mothering and the women's culture (intimate publicity) that Berlant describes is especially recognizable for its use of the genre of "the complaint" which historically governed women's responses to injustice, victimization, and disappointment (1-4).

Conclusion

The generation of fierce motherhood subjectivities by women represents an important shift in the historical development of women's communicative relationship to politics and the nation. The expansion of possible fierce motherhood subjectivities indicates that mothers articulating them find utility in 'fierce' mothering strategies as a strategic response enabling them to negotiate with and for power within the context of their own social positions. Attending to the implications, capabilities, and limitations of leveraging 'expert parenting' and motherhood discourses through 'fierce' mothering subjectivities is essential because identity "is a matter of becoming as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture" instead, "[c]ultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation" (Hall "Meaning" 435).

Fierce mothering as a practice, then, highlights how subjectivity and identity work as modalities through which mothers actively seek to make space for themselves in social, political,

cultural, and economic contexts. As a technology of the self, and as a cultural technology, it marks the ways that motherhood as a cultural infrastructure functions to authorize (limited) power for women who act in support of patriarchal culture. Thus, it is a problematic mode of agency that not only "perpetuates deep and unnecessary inequalities between men and women and reinforces traditional understandings of the family" (Mezzy and Pillard 234), but it also promotes competition and division between women (Green 573).

As a strategic response, fierce mothering subjectivities allow a mechanism for mothers to articulate themselves as useful experts essential to the survival and wellbeing of their families and society at large. Such an avenue of expression is important because, as this chapter has shown, mothers are routinely constrained both by their femaleness and by their role as caregivers. Their labor both reproductive and in the workforce, as many scholars have argued (see Angela Davis 1981, bell hooks 1981, Arlie Hochschild 1989, Audre Lorde 2007, and Maria Mies 1986), is necessary to the continuation of white, Christian, hetero-patriarchy and capitalism, but is devalued, under and unpaid, and often used as a mechanism for controlling and punishing mothers socially and institutionally.

Motherhood as a cultural site remains the locus through which women's support of white, Christian, hetero-patriarchal society is engaged and mobilized, particularly through a mother's role in producing future citizens. Fierce mothering practices may, on occasion, push at the edges of this complicity, but they also work against the interests of mothers who are unable to successfully make those same claims to fierce subjectivity. As such, fierce mothering is one way that power negotiations between women manifest in the social, political, economic, and cultural milieus of the contemporary moment. Studying how the development of fierce subjectivities pushes against norms while recuperating patriarchal aims such that it (re)produces social

hierarchies can tell us more about how consent to cultural hegemony is manufactured through the granting of limited power to privileged subsets of marginalized groups.

To further explore fierce mothering, the next chapter situates fierce mothering within its mediated context, within the broader online community of mothers commonly referred to as the 'momosphere.' Using case examples drawn from specific fierce mothering subjectivities, this chapter shows how fierce mothering works as a form of sentimental materialism for the social media age, explicates the ways participating in fierce mothering poses benefits and drawbacks for mothers specifically through increased social and institutional surveillance, and attends to how fierce mothering's reproduction of culturally hegemonic norms prevents the successful development of solidarity between women.

CHAPTER 4

MOTHERHOOD IS THE MESSAGE:

TECHNOLOGY, SURVEILLANCE, AND 'GOOD' MOTHERING

> *"At the very same time that we witnessed the explosion of
> white celebrity moms, and the outpouring of advice to and
> surveillance of middle-class mothers, the welfare mother,
> trapped in a "cycle of dependency," became ubiquitous in
> our media landscape, and she came to represent everything
> wrong with America."*
>
> *Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels*

The history and political impacts of the 'fierce mothering' phenomenon described in the

previous chapter, highlights the ongoing utility for mothers in this strategic form of

communication. Fierce mothering—mothers' assertions of their subjectivity using fierce imagery

to assert their right to public speech as protectors of and warriors for their children—takes place

largely online. Importantly, online platforms and social media provide a space in which fierce

mothers can and do negotiate aspects of their generally accepted socio-cultural roles. However,

as I will show, such negotiations are limited in scope by their reliance on maternalism which as a

gendered socio-political position simultaneously legitimates mothers' speech and makes mothers

vulnerable to increased levels of surveillance and disciplining. This chapter explores the

technological relations of fierce mothering to show how it both enables and constrains the

mothers who articulate fierce subjectivities online as a frame for engaging with liberal democratic, socio-political culture in the United States.

The rhetorical constitution of narrowly focused subjectivities used in fierce mothering articulations are a relatively new phenomenon beginning in the late-middle 1990s and picking up steam during the late 2000s as outlined in chapter two. Fierce mothering's development as a communicative strategy coincides with the development of a larger set of online cultures that form and coalesce into a vast online community of mothers, referred to colloquially as the 'momosphere.' These coordinated developments in mothers' (and fierce mothers') online practices share a wide variety of platforms, aesthetics, and textual forms common to online contexts (i.e., blogs, vlogs, and social media). While fierce mothering is a relatively new strategy for framing mothers' political, consumer, and social interactions, it follows a historical pattern in the United States that sutures women's relationship to the nation and to politics to ideal framings of motherhood (Kerber 202, Welter 152, Apple 161, Hays 8, Mattheis 130). As such, fierce mothering recuperates and extends a maternalist framing for gendered civic participation in national culture, politics, and social life.

Fierce mothering subjectivities, as part of the larger context of the momosphere, reanimate a specific historical framework that Lori Merish describes as "sentimental materialism" (2). This framework characterizes women's appropriate liberal democratic subjectivity within a complex of domesticity, care, and consumption as appropriate avenues for women's (mothers') civic participation (2). Crucial to sentimental materialism is the development of (white) women's civic personhood (subjectivity) in the US, as derived through women's capacity to freely exchange their labor—reproductive, domestic, and consumptive on behalf of their family—through marriage and motherhood (Merish 35-37). This capacity to

exchange the self (one's labor) was less available to poor women, who had to exchange their labor in the vulgar industrial market, rather than give it fully to their husbands and families. Moreover, it was not seen as available to black women who were unable to exchange their labor given their status as slaves at the time (Merish 37-39).

As a framework for social organization, the blending of freedom, labor exchange, and sentimentalism posed familial hierarchies as constructed through consent and bound by benevolent care and protective ownership. For (white, middle-upper class, hetero) women, this structure posed a twinned relation of agency and submission. Agency was produced in the act of consent required to freely exchange reproductive labor and submission was produced in the act of accepting the benevolent protection of one's 'chosen' husband and through him patriarchy at large (Merish 40). This system posed men's labor as 'productive' and women's labor as 'consumptive' (the appointing and maintenance of a happy home) which provided a necessary division of labor for early capitalism to flourish as well as solidifying gendered spatial organization through notions of public and private (domestic) spheres. Because capitalist social ordering allowed for economic (class) movement, women's development of "taste" as consumers worked as an additional mechanism for maintaining social boundaries through acculturation to hegemonic norms (Merish 45-47).

Fierce mothering repackages this sentimental materialist complex making it responsive to the contemporary socio-cultural and political context. It extends the historical framing by linking discourses of sentimentalism (notions of the duties and rights posed by feelings of care and love) with maternalism (notions of mothers' special role and expertise) through a contemporary post-feminist framing of a return to domesticity as a form of women's empowerment. Mothers' development of taste and practices of consumption (inclusive of material goods and information)

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are tied to fierce mothers' socio-political concerns such that creating a happy, healthy home derives from forms of consumptive action. By consumptive action, I mean publicized online performances of consuming information and goods including posting opinion blogs, sharing media and tips, discussing products and companies, and promoting public awareness of their concerns. In this way, fierce mothers extend their domestic role of maternal care and consumption to community, national, or even global care as the foundation for their socio-political speech and civic participation.

This chapter explores how fierce mothering develops as an online practice mothers use as a vehicle to traverse motherhood's cultural infrastructural pathways (detailed in chapter one). This navigation is facilitated by mothers' ability to draw on discursive tenets of historical ideals to develop rhetorical framing around their issues of concern. To understand the relationship between fierce mothering and technology, I analyze three primary aspects. First, I locate fierce mothering within its larger technological context. Second, I analyze how fierce mothering provides access to socio-political speech through its reframing of sentimental materialism using rhetorical frameworks drawn from historically significant motherhood ideals (Moral, Scientific, and Intensive). Following this discussion, I examine how engaging in fierce mothering practices also has drawbacks for mothers, specifically in relation to increased surveillance and disciplining. Even with these drawbacks, fierce mothering remains useful for the mothers articulating these subjectivities and for our society and culture at large. This is because the primary purpose of fierce mothering (or sentimental materialism) is not women's socio-cultural, economic, or political participation. Ultimately, motherhood *is* the message.

Technological (Re)Configurations of Maternal Sentiment, Consumption, and Domesticity

The development of 'fierce mothering' as a communicative strategy is tied to the development of the Internet and its associated platform technologies (blogs, vlogs, social media etc.). The use of maternal identity as a basis for political speech is not new. However, fierce mothering represents a new rhetorical framing of maternalism that is particularly suited to online communication and Web-based media. Online platforms mix political speech and commentary with popular culture in a seemingly 'public' forum for individual and group expression. It is 'seemingly' public because the Internet, and platforms themselves, are broadly accessibly private spaces controlled by corporate interests, rather than public infrastructures or spaces. Moreover, internet technologies blend the public and private both physically and temporally, it can be accessed from private spaces such as the home—an integral affordance for mothers, whether stay-at-home or working—and that it allows 'public' engagement whenever and wherever it is convenient (Rakow and Navarro 143-45).

The development of 'fierce mothering' online also fits within several cultural trends that are interwoven by means of Internet technologies. These trends include online community building, online entrepreneurship, and influencer marketing. Within this context, one way that women have taken up the affordances of digital media platforms by negotiating their own subjectivity as mothers. The history of what is colloquially referred to as 'mommy blogging' (see Chen 2013, Gibson 2019, Hunter 2016, Morrison 2011), tracks with histories of the development of the Web as a medium for communication. Early blogs focused on mothering were text heavy and described, often in gritty detail, women's personal experiences of mothering with an emphasis on the difficult realities of being a mother. Regular features of this discussion included fatigue, frustration, worry, and resignation to feelings of failure and isolation (Bailey). Over

these two decades, the 'momosphere' expanded beyond this text-based mommy blogging to encompass platforms dedicated to sharing media and commentary among networks of users. These include social platforms like *Facebook* and *Twitter*, predominantly video and image-based platforms like *YouTube* and *Instagram*, as well as mixed platforms that include short blogging / vlogging with imagery and commentary like *Tumblr*. This growth was in large part due to a broad development in easy-to-use technologies (referred to as "Web 2.0") which made user-generated blog / Website development much simpler with improvements in graphic user interfaces (GUIs). Web 2.0 (the Web of the people) also enabled the rise of smart devices and social media technologies which offered greatly expanded access for users and a rapid increase in the variety of platforms for user expression (Jarrett).

Along with the 'social revolution' in online engagement, a movement toward online entrepreneurship linking Website, blogs, and social platforms and thus generating '360 degree, branded online presences' for users formed. The momosphere capitalized on this technological advance which could allow women to start businesses from their homes while mothering: seemingly the best of both worlds (Archer 47-48, Jezzer-Morton). "Mompreneurs," started developing online businesses with a primary business model of monetizing their blogs through advertising with the eventual hope of receiving corporate sponsorship for product reviews; a primary component of what has since been called "influencer" culture (Archer 48-49). These "momfluencers," like other online influencer ventures, project a sense of 'grassroots' and friend-approved, word-of-mouth marketing (Calfas). Top momfluencers, a highly-limited set of "mompreneurs," make large incomes for their opinions served up to other mothers on their blogs and social media sites (Calfas). The influencer market as a whole has shifted into an aspirational

frame in conjunction with the development and popularity of new platforms available for image-based media marketing like *Instagram* and *Pinterest*.

The 'momosphere' today is entwined with most (if not all) imaginable platforms and very few of the early blogs focused on the gritty realities of mothering still exist (Bailey). Today's momosphere has shifted aesthetically with the aspirational sensibility and highly curated imagery of influencer culture. Aesthetics include two prominent themes which I categorize as 1) the good life and 2) pedagogical. The first category, 'the good life,' includes imagery using warm lighting, soft, often muted colors, and neutral color palettes to portray ease and calm. The 'staged' use of uncluttered high-end furnishings mixed with the textures of leafy, green plants or other textural elements prominent in the imagery of the momosphere is a common frame of domestic catalogue and home goods aesthetics. This aspirational, domestic aesthetic is used in marketing and sales by well-known domestic wares companies (for example, Crate & Barrel and Laura Ashley) and has been copied over onto direct sales platforms such as *Etsy*. The addition of smiling babies or mothers beatifically corralling their brood of children—the constant visual projection of motherhood as joyous and easy—is what sets momosphere aspirational marketing apart from the others. The second category, "pedagogical," includes more intense colors in a primary color range often with an early childhood education sensibility (i.e., letter blocks, baby animals, etc.). This second aesthetic is often used in relation to tutorials, craft projects, or other 'teaching engagement' style posts. There are also many cases where these two broad categories overlap, such as cooking blogs that have a specific focus on having children assisting the at-home cook (very often "Mom") typically rendered in softer pastels effecting a mixture of the two primary schemes. These aesthetic frameworks ground a visual rhetoric which portrays a (predominantly

white, middle-upper class) love-filled, happy home where Mom is serenely managing it all: perfect homes, perfect kids, and perfect moms.

Many momosphere sites also position themselves as 'lifestyle brands' which allows them to mix blogging (often advice or informational), social media, and product reviews or direct sales within a framework of service to their 'mom' communities. These businesses are posing themselves as one-stop-shops which can support customers (community members) through pregnancy and motherhood in an all-encompassing way. Interestingly, many of these sites regularly include lists of 'top' mommy sites for their readers / shoppers. The volume of parenting sites focused on mothers and mothering is immense and such the aggregation of lists (regularly produced by mom-oriented sites) is a support service offered to their audience of busy, tired moms.

One such list posted on the Cadenshae site—a maternity activewear business with a motherhood blog—highlights the self-referential interconnections of the momosphere. The list author Nikki, one of the proprietors of Cadenshae, outlines her goal of helping her customers sort through the wide range of available sites and includes this note characterizing the sites:

> Bonus Tip: For this particular list, I found the US, Canadian and Australian sites to be quite 'corporate,' and 'professional,' with a focus on pop culture, and more research-based, scientifically quantified articles. They're big sites with big audiences, and are large scale business. The sites from the UK and NZ however I found to be more homely, cosy and friendly. More personal, like you're reading up on what your best friend has been doing. All are fantastic resources, and I'm not favouring any particular kind over the other, but if you're craving a certain kind of vibe, keep this in mind ("Top 25")

She then lists what she has found to be the top five sites for "quality information, advice, tips, or just something to simply entertain from each of several countries. The US site listings include:

> 24/7 Moms
> Facebook Fans: 738k / Instagram Followers: 6.5k / If you're after some ideas on…well almost anything mom related - look no further than 24/7 Moms. Run by

'Trisha,' a mom of five kids (whoa!). This blog is all about 'keeping it simple.' A total winner!

Rookie Moms
Facebook Fans: 22.5k / Instagram Followers: 23.4k / Just as the title suggests, this fabulous blog has loads of sound information for pregnant and first time moms. It has a plethora of good articles in regards to breastfeeding.

Working Mother
Facebook Fans: 278k / Instagram Followers: 34k / 'Working Mother' is a fantastic tool for our working mamas. This blog not only offers brilliant advice on how best to balance the two loads, but it also keeps tabs on the best companies to work for as a mom, could be worth checking out if you're not feeling the love at your place of work?

Café Mom
Facebook Fans: 410k / Instagram Followers: 20k / There's so much information on here for every stage of motherhood, but the thing I like the most about this blog, is it is more of a 'news site' focusing on stories that would most likely interest mothers and pregnant women.

Kelly Mom
Facebook Fans: 366k / If you like scientific based research and advice from the experts, then Kelly Mom is for you. This blog is full of informative articles, often written by industry professionals (selection from "Top 25")

Importantly, this list provides its ranking using a format that is inclusive of the site link, short descriptions written by the aggregator, and the site's *Facebook* and *Instagram* follower numbers. Such numbers indicate the large followings that momfluencer and mommy blogs have and the wide scope of the momosphere as an online culture. It also shows how moms can come to feel internationally connected to huge numbers of other women who share their experiences while also retaining a sensibility of word-of-mouth intimacy within this wide scope of online culture. This is especially important to the momfluencer business model as well as the lifestyle brand model in light of the entrenched consumer sales focus which has become a primary aspect of many sites.

Ultimately, the momosphere started as a space to share anxieties and concerns through a non-dominant framing of motherhood: that it isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Now the momosphere has been remade into a highly produced and marketable space of consumption. Websites now exist solely to help women become part of the momosphere as an industry. They encourage participation, but do not, address how difficult it is to become and maintain an influencer or lifestyle brand (which is true regardless of arena of influencer marketing). This model of online mompreneurship is predicated on numerous small entity businesses—some that are really hobbies rather than working businesses—and are portrayed as something any mom can supposedly do in her spare time. In many ways, this positions the momosphere as essentially a gendered, cottage industry on mass production steroids.

Despite the supposed meritocracy of the momosphere, where any mom can build her brand, the mommy blogger and momfluencer business models work predominantly at a specific intersection of gender, race, and class to repackage "sentimental materialism" for the current moment (Merish 2-5). Successful mompreneurs are often—although not exclusively—white, middle-upper class, college educated women who have elected to stay home or to leave industry to focus on their families (Burke-Garcia, Kreps, and Wright). As such, the momosphere effects an extension of the historical economic framing of (white) women's civic personhood (subjectivity) in the US as derived through their capacity to exchange reproductive, domestic, and consumptive labors on behalf of their family (Merish 35-39). This capacity to exchange the self (one's labor) was less available to poor women who had to exchange their labor in the vulgar industrial market rather than fully to their husbands and families and generally not available to black women who were unable to exchange their labor given their status as slaves (Merish 37-

39). Limitations by class, race, and immigration status which remain as structural barriers still today (Gibson 2).

To be successful 'mompreneurial' enterprises, like other startups, demand large time commitments, developing business and technical skills, as well as financial knowledge and personal networks that many mothers may not have. These online businesses are gender-bound by their framing of motherhood through 'feminine,' sentimental notions of love and care expressed visually from the 'heart' of the home itself. They are predominantly posed as "side hustles" that can be fit around women's other priorities. Such framing of adaptation to home making and child rearing duties, especially for mothers who also work outside the home, fits neatly into the tenets of Intensive Mothering and post-feminism (as described in chapters two and three). Finally, this 'home business' model is racialized through is common use of white, middle-upper class cultural and aesthetic norms to depict comfort and the good life (Gibson 2-4).

Maternal Care Writ Large: Sentimental Materialism and Motherhood 'Technologies'

Fierce mothering as a mediated practice works by retriangulating the arrangement of politics, consumption, and domesticity embedded within the historical construction of women's civic roles through sentimental materialism (Merish 2-5). Among the fierce mothering subjectivities, maternal care and expertise are rhetorically framed through one of the three constitutive aspects—a focus on consumption, a focus on politics, or a focus on domesticity— but all blend these three elements to narrate mothers' public speech and action. To effectively rearrange these constitutive aspects of sentimental materialism, women rely on the discursive features common to different historical mothering ideals which, as described in chapter one, allows women to maneuver through motherhood's cultural infrastructural pathways. In some cases, aspects of multiple historic motherhood ideals are used to engage with a variety of

discourses, institutions, and audiences. The point here is that mothers' facility with these ideal forms, gained through socio-cultural transmission rather than explicit learning, allows them to utilize the ideals as technologies within the infrastructure. Facility alone, however, is not enough because the ideals are implicitly constructed as white, middle-upper class, heterosexual, and 'American' (i.e., tied to citizenship and civic identity). So, ideal forms of mothering, as technologies within the infrastructure, are constructed in this way precisely because those implicit features are also embedded features of the cultural infrastructure. In this way, fierce mothering's reworking of sentimental materialism hearkens back to the original formulation of (white, middle-upper class, heterosexual) women as liberal democratic subjects in the US (Merish 2-5) while simultaneously modernizing it through contemporary concerns and discourses.

To understand how fierce mothering modernizes the ideal liberal democratic role for women's civic behavior through motherhood discourses and practices, this section provides case studies of Eco Mom and Anti-Vaxxer Mom subjectivity as exemplars of modernized sentimental materialism. Eco Mom subjectivity presents a particularly direct contemporary rendering of the original formulation, while Anti-Vaxxer Mom subjectivity presents a repackaged rendering of the formulation framed by a sensibility of civic antagonism. These case examples also provide a view of how motherhood works as a cultural infrastructure by showing how Moral Mothering, Scientific Mothering, and Intensive Mothering ideals are used as technologies by fierce mothers to align their modern, mothering sensibilities with sentimental materialist practices.

The recuperation of sentimental materialism—the mixture of practices of consumption, domesticity, and politics—as a modern framework for US women's civic identity is perhaps most clearly seen in the "Eco Mom" subjectivity and its broad range of material online. Eco

Mom subjectivity began developing in 2006 and took off alongside Web 2.0 technological developments which enabled the broad expansion of social media and sell-from-home platforms (like *Etsy*), the development of smart technologies, and increased the ease of non-professional Web development for end-users, like moms (Jarrett). Eco Mom culture online ranges across platforms from blogging and vlogging to glossy online magazines and to a broad range of social media platforms. Its strong orientation toward consumption and lifestyle changes as methods for making a better world, makes it unique among the various fierce mothering subjectivities. Eco Mom subjectivity also crosses the full spectrum of political frameworks and cultural trends. Eco Mom media therefore includes progressive 'green' discussions, conservative 'back to the land' discussions, and trendy discussions crossing political lines about 'homeschooling,' 'slow living,' and 'DIY making' (i.e., building, producing, and crafting). Eco Mom subjectivity draws this range of admissible orientations by foregrounding its domestic and consumption aspects over its political aspects.

The Eco Mom subjectivity has been recognized by industry as a successful frame to engage with momfluencers and to market their products and services to moms. Eco and 'green' mothering are also regular topics on large momosphere sites (often articulated as lifestyle brand hubs) where site owners act as content aggregators (like Cadenshae above) by curating news and content in addition to producing their own content. In this way, mothering sites as lifestyle brands offer services to their followers to help parse the broad amount of content on the Web. Thus, fierce mothering subjectivity as a communicative strategy and a disciplinary framework are extended and enmeshed beyond subjectivity-specific sites and circulate more broadly through motherhood culture on and offline.

Recently, "Motherly," one mom-focused lifestyle brand site, which sandwiches together

an online store, an advice blog, curated news pieces, and a pro-mother political campaign,

included a list of top "Eco Moms" to follow. This list, like other similar lists, includes mothers

who are founders of 'eco-friendly' businesses, eco-activist moms, along with health and wellness

focused life coaches. The rhetoric used to describe Eco Mom identity in Motherly's list, "25 Eco

Moms to Watch," provides a glimpse of the way sentimental materialism ties together

maternalist logics, consumer practice, and politics. This reasoning uses rhetoric and framing

common to the Eco Mom articulations used by individuals identifying with Eco Mom culture as

well as mompreneurs and momfluencers within this space. Motherly's description of their list

(emphasis added):

> *We've partnered with Joolz to recognize the moms that are changing the world for their babies, and ours. *No doubt about it, parenthood makes you think first and foremost with your heart.* From the moment your baby is born, *it feels as if you're suddenly walking around wearing your heart on your sleeve.* Which in turn makes you *hyper-aware of all that is around us and sensitive to issues you never quite paid attention to before (but should have).* As parents, it's our job to make the world a better place for the little ones we've brought into it. And the current state of affairs has made many of us even more proactive than ever before. Still, we know balancing life with kids can be all-consuming. *So when we learn about moms dedicating their days to creating a better world for not only their kids, but all of ours, we take notice* (Velez)

This description of Eco Mom identity highlights the sentimentalism of fierce mothering: mothers

take action because they care. A mother's care for her own children becomes transposed into

care for the wider world. As such, her labor should be directed at resolving the world's problems

as a vector for taking care of her own children. Interestingly, the maternal-centric focus of the

description is broken up when the description moves to describing taking action: "As parents, it's

our job to make the world a better place for the little ones we've brought into it" (Velez) The

focus however returns to maternal expertise and action two lines later. The shift from "mom" to

"parents" and back to "moms" highlights rather than detracts from the maternalism forwarded by this description of Eco Mom identity and practice. It subtly references fathers in its use of "parents," while maintaining a focus on a mom's responsibility to act.

The description continues by outlining the types of moms a reader will find on the list: "And we've partnered with Joolz, an eco-minded company focused on positive design, to help you take notice. From eco-activists, to sustainable designers, to green beauty experts and more, here are 25 eco-moms to watch. Be prepared to be inspired—and thankful—for all that they do" (Velez). The "Eco Moms" on the list are categorized into areas of expertise encompassing political, industrial, and social roles. In this way, motherhood becomes the primary frame of expertise enabling these women to use their training (learned skills) for the betterment of society and the planet. Moreover, these mothers' actions on behalf of their children and the world are framed as positive, inspiring, and gratitude inducing precisely because they transpose maternal care into global care. In this way maternal care comes to be the basis for women's correct civic action whether it is political (activism), economic (consumption / entrepreneurship), social (sharing expertise) or any combination of the three.

Eco Mom subjectivity, utilizing mothering technologies, circulates its specific framework of maternal care and practice (domesticity) through the motherhood infrastructure connecting to institutions (politics) and industry (consumption) via discourses of health, good living, home, and natural well-being. This circulation and its connections with the material capability required to live a 'green' life (Stine), implicitly reinforce white, middle-upper class motherhood as the ideal. Even though the Eco Mom rubric of care includes a range of practices seemingly available to any woman through the incorporation of 'do-it-yourself' and 'back-to-nature' frameworks, where consumption is not preferred, it also assumes that mothers have expendable money and

(most importantly) time to commit to projects with and for their children. This works to reinforce domestic responsibilities and child-care as primary preoccupations of mothers whether they work outside or inside the home.

Eco Mom subjectivity, in its various formulations of sentimental materialism, highlights mothers' use of all the various motherhood 'technologies'—Moral, Scientific, and Intensive mothering discourses—for traversing motherhood's cultural infrastructural pathways. Moral mothering discourses focus on piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Scientific mothering discourses focus on adherence to scientific and medical expertise in the rearing of children where 'good' mothers listen to doctors and scientists to produce and raise healthy, happy children. And Intensive Mothering discourses focus on the primacy of maternal care for children above all other concerns. In these discourses, mothering must be an all-consuming focus incorporating constant care and concern for the wellbeing and happiness of children.

The rhetorical construction of Eco Mom frames uses a blend of aspects drawn from moral and scientific mothering with a focus on child-wellbeing as a function of maternal care and responsibility for understanding and applying ecological and environmental scientific knowledge. This mix of mothering technologies (moral and scientific) as rhetorical frames can be seen in a discussion on toxic chemicals from a self-identified Eco Mom, Dominique Browning:

> When I read a recent blog post by Richard Denison, EDF's senior scientist, about a new study linking the chemical bisphenol-A to low sperm counts, the first thing I did was send the post to every young man I know, beginning with my sons and nephews. No mom wants her children to be used as guinea pigs by the chemical industry; we want regulations that ensure chemicals are safe before they get under our babies' skin. But make no mistake: right now, we're all guinea pigs ("Rising Power")

Browning's blog post, "The Rising Power of Eco Moms," was written in November 2010, and focused on articulating the concerns of and growing identification with "Eco Mom" subjectivity. This specific passage from the longer post highlights the admixture of moral and scientific mothering frames in her rhetoric. Browning begins by performing 'good' scientific mothering in her attention to scientific expertise: her reading of blog written by qualified scientists. This guides her performance of 'good' moral mothering as it directs her action toward domestic care: her protection of her sons' health because she does not want them to suffer as "guinea pigs." The passage also highlights how her maternal care becomes 'writ large' in two ways, first as a network-based extension and second, as a national, political extension. The networked extension occurs when she sends "the post to every young man" she knows. The national, political extension occurs when she relates her desire for chemical safety regulations because "right now, we are all guinea pigs." These two extensions are enabled by her conjoined use of moral and scientific mothering technologies as frames through which she converts her personal concerns into social and political claims.

More contemporary "green" mothering posts maintain this conjoined use of moral and scientific mothering as they take on contemporary and immediate topics such as the impacts of smart tech on child brain development (Williams "Smartphones"), participation in extinction rebellion activism as a response to climate disaster (Gillespie "Alchemy"), and responses to the Coronavirus pandemic (Cole). Collectively, such posts indicate engagement with multiple scientific literatures from fields like neuroscience, environmental science, anthropology, public health, zoology, and chemistry, among others. These engagements with scientific knowledge are then packaged through domesticating sentimental languages of maternal care. For example, this

head note preceding an Eco Mom's discussion of smartphones and childhood brain development (italics in original):

> *I have gone to great lengths (Waldorf school, third world living, remote island, no TV, no ipads) to create a culture for my children that isn't dictated by technology. Why? Because the science is very clear on the damage it does to a child's brains. And because I wanted a family culture that was about love, adventure, spirit, literature, nature, and to do that these days is hard enough, without adding on the myriad influences of media* (Gillespie as qtd by Williams "Smartphones").

In this note, it is easy to see this packaging of Scientific and Moral mothering frames in a sandwiched approach: domestic effort / scientific expertise / maternal care. Here the sentimental language of care is inflected with a contemporizing "Intensive" attitude indicated by notions of 'culture' rather than explicitly through notions of 'home.' The notion of culture remains domestic through its connection to family life. Thus, maternal care is expressed through the labor of developing family culture attentive to children's wellbeing through a mother's consumption and incorporation of scientific knowledge.

Integral to Eco Mom framings of maternal care is attention to rubrics of health and environment both at the individual level (is this product safe for my child? / is my home a healthy environment?) and at the systemic level (are my behaviors beneficial for the world's children? / do they make the world a better environment?). These discussions of safety engender a framework of maternal vigilance that draws on intensive mothering frames in its rhetorical construction. In both cases the subtext of such concerns is a requirement for mothers to perform care, as a maternal expertise and practice, in ways that provide the best future for their (and the world's) children.

This framework, while seemingly inclusive, works to exclude mothers who cannot participate in these practices for a variety of reasons including socio-economic status, a lack of time available due to working hours, and the limitations of geographic location, among others.

This is not to say that black and other mothers of color do not identify as 'Eco Moms.' It is to say, that the Eco Mom sensibility is portrayed as something that should be a universal concern of mothers. This is made clear in *Motherly's* note about becoming "sensitive to issues you never quite paid attention to before (but should have)" (Velez). This framing promotes Eco Mom subjectivity along with its implicitly racialized and classed behaviors and practices as an ideal form of mothering even as it also maintains barriers to access and excludes many mothers along multiple vectors of difference.

Anti-Vaxxer Mom subjectivity, like Eco Mom subjectivity, rearranges the tenets of sentimental materialism to forward a 'modern' version of women's civic position. This subjectivity, however, applies a different framing in public articulations about protecting theirs and the world's children. The Anti-Vaxxer subjectivity forwards a framing that rejects scientific expertise, medical establishment norms, and industrial pharmacological consumption. While consumption of science, vaccines, and 'big Pharma' products is rejected, an entirely new realm of 'domestic' consumption of non-normative information and 'holistic' products takes its place as the way to ensure domestic happiness, health, and stability. This non-normative consumption is then entangled with anti-vaccine politics and maternalist domesticity in the context of child-wellbeing as a mother's primary focus.

Anti-Vaxxer Mom rhetorics of maternal care and fierceness express an openly antagonistic, even hostile stance toward institutional medicine and the government. It is a difficult, if not impossible, stance to take if a mother is already a member of a group identified by the government as in 'need' of intervention such as poor or single mothers as well as black, indigenous, and other mothers of color. This is not to say that such mothers are all pro-vaxx or support institutional medicine and the government. Black mothers (black people), in particular,

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have reason to distrust the (white) medical establishment given its history of experimenting on and harming black people ranging from birth control trials and eugenic sterilization to the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment (Schoen 211-213). It is to say that the ability to openly articulate an antagonistic position to the government and medical experts through fierce motherhood subjectivity is delimited by a mother's identity and status in relation to class, citizenship, marriage and sexuality, and race (Lorde 118-119, Collins 287).

Anti-Vaxxer Moms use their fierce subjectivity to take an anti-establishment stance, push against scientific/medical expertise and governmental regulation, as well as to decry the industrial mass production of medicine (Jarry). Their online communication initially tended toward blogs and text-based sites, often specifically aimed at 'parents,' rather than solely mothers given the smaller pool of potential mothers willing to engage with conspiracy theories. These sites and blogs were also relatively difficult to locate because they were not typically linked to large momosphere communities. This tertiary status within the momosphere online developed in large part due to Anti-Vaxxer Moms' incorporation of debunked information and promotion of conspiratorial material. As such, anti-vaxx proponents—even mothers—have long been positioned as members of the 'fringe,' and as 'crazy,' especially within mainstream media discussions.

Interestingly, given its 'fringe' status, the majority of mothers publicly identifying with this subjectivity are celebrities. This public identification grew over time especially after the most famous proponent of Anti-Vaxxer subjectivity, actress Jenny McCarthy, became especially vocal about her concerns with vaccines in relation to her son was diagnosed on the Autism spectrum. Other celebrity mothers who have articulated anti-vaccine stances include, Alicia Silverstone, Lisa Bonet, Kristin Cavallari, and Kat Von D who are openly anti-vaxx, as well as

Jenna Elfman, Mayim Bialik, Selma Blair, and Jessica Beal who take a 'parent's choice' position and admit concerns over vaccination (Sakellariou).

Celebrity utilization of this subjectivity provides a new frame of normative consumption as well as a framework for normalizing conspiratorial thinking about science and medicine. This vaccine averse consumer market revolves around promoting 'natural' medicine, 'holistic' diets, and particular practices of living which overlap with 'wellness' business frameworks (influencer, fashion labels, diet and exercise programs, lifestyle brands) that have become common ventures for celebrity women. It is a 'lifestyle' that many Anti-Vaxxer moms can afford, and access given that they are predominantly white, well-educated, and fiscally well-off (Lubrano, Valenti)

Anti-Vaxxer Moms use predominantly Moral and Intensive mothering ideals to navigate the motherhood infrastructure. From Moral mothering as a technology, they draw primarily on the frames of piety, purity, and domesticity. And from Intensive mothering as a technology, they draw from the focus on child-wellbeing as their most urgent concern and foremost responsibility. They openly reject Scientific mothering as a technology, instead turning back to maternal expertise in a pietistic sense. A recent meme highlights this maternal piety. On the left side of the image is a blond, blue-eyed young white mother laying on a bed with her blue-eyed white infant. The right side of the image is colored in a 'Madonna' blue shade with the text (in large print) "The love I have for my children is not a matter for negotiation" above (in smaller print), "Asking questions about the safety of vaccines is not a crime" (@Crazymothers Dec 10, 2019).

The maternal piety of loving one's child gets transformed into a type of individualized maternal expertise as a framework for rejecting the science and medical establishment. For example, "[w]hen McCarthy appeared on Oprah Winfrey's show in 2007 and was asked about research and proof for her beliefs on vaccinations, for example, she replied, 'My science is Evan.

He's at home. That's my science'" (Valenti). In this quote, McCarthy reframes science into maternal knowledge about child-wellbeing based on the domestic context. McCarthy's argument hinges on her maternal expertise as superior to scientific expertise, such that her specific knowledge of her child provides her with insights that "scientists" either cannot gain or have chosen to hide.

Women are drawn to leading the anti-vaccine movement, according to Jessica Valenti, for two primary gendered reasons: 1) a mistrust of the medical establishment rooted in women's experience of misogynistic treatment including dismissal of women's concerns by doctors and 2) the chance to pose their maternal knowledge as expertise in a culture that devalues and discounts women ("Women Leading"). The benefits of this stance articulated by Valenti—a sense of empowerment, leadership, and expertise—are also counter-balanced by the public scorn Anti-Vaxxer moms are subjected to because of their claims. Negative responses to Anti-Vaxxer moms are common and generally refer to them as selfish, uneducated, stupid, and/or crazy.

Demeaning responses are, in fact, so common that one group of Anti-Vaxxer moms use the handle "CrazyMothers" on their Twitter, Instagram, and Website as an ironic and resistive mode of pushing back against their critics.[26] Importantly, negative responses that frame Anti-Vaxxer mothers as 'crazy,' or 'uneducated' use belittlement as a mechanism of social discipline—a way to silence Anti-Vaxxer moms—particularly given evidence that these moms are predominantly college-educated, white, middle-upper class women (Lubrano). However, the intensity of negative social discipline remains a constant experience for fierce mothers articulating anti-vaccine claims. Academic literature, news media, and popular media all include discussions of the flaws of Anti-Vaxxer Moms, a topic that will be discussed in detail in the next section on surveillance. This coverage intensifies in relation to viral events such as the 2014-

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2015 Measles outbreak in the US (Hussain et al., Martucci and Barnhill 1, Valenti), often with at least temporary silencing effects. One supposedly former Anti-Vaxxer mother claimed the aggressiveness of negative responses caused her to leave online space entirely. She noted that her "anti-vaccination beliefs put her at risk of online shame, abuse, and even legal action," although she did continue to privately counsel family against vaccines (Thoms).

In recent years, however, and particularly after 2017, non-celebrity Anti-Vaxxer Moms have made a larger public display on mainstream social media platforms such as *Twitter*. And, since the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic, Anti-Vaxxer Moms have become increasingly public online, and offline at anti-lockdown and anti-mask protests (Bogel-Burroughs). The overlap with anti-mask protests may seem strange given that both lockdowns and masks represent holistic approaches for virus disruption. However, many Anti-Vaxxers believe that the virus is a hoax, part of a grand conspiracy between medical experts and scientists who are in cahoots with the government and 'big Pharma' to intentionally make people sick so they can sell them vaccines. It is notable that the increase in public articulations of Anti-Vaxxer Mom subjectivity occurred after the 2016 US Presidential election, particularly because of Donald J. Trump's vaccine averse stance and promotion of conspiracy theories aimed at devaluing medical and scientific expertise. Accounts like that of @Crazymothers, mentioned above, has been at the forefront of this development.

While some Anti-Vaxxer moms are feeling empowered in the current context, negative responses may be a reason for the shift among celebrity proponents of "parent's choice" narratives because they have concerns that an open anti-vaxx stance will damage their "brand." The narratives of "parent's choice," may also indicate a new line of argument directing parents (mothers) to do "research for themselves" that draws on broader political framings of 'choice'

used in anti-masking and re-open campaigns and other current online conspiracy cultures—such as QAnon—which are starting to become entangled. Even though public uptake is in flux, Anti-Vaxxer Moms do discuss the negative responses they receive, particularly online (as noted above).

Importantly, it is the media technologies that enable fierce mothering—the Internet and social media—as a set of communicative practices which also encourage increased visibility and publicity, and therefore also increased surveillance and disciplining of mothers. Social surveillance occurs specifically within the context of online publicity as a replication of interpersonal forms of surveillance and disciplining via the Internet. Online cultures provide much broader, global networks of connection with strangers, friends, and family. As such the scale of social surveillance can be much larger than interpersonal surveillance in offline contexts which is generally limited to localized interactions. In addition, the potential for and scope of institutional surveillance and disciplining are also increased in specific ways through the affordances of these technologies. In all cases, online articulations require mothers to provide data—likes, links, posts, images, metadata—that other people and institutions can use to evaluate and critique mothers. Thus, mothers' shared data creates digital footprints that provide a source for judgement via social surveillance, and even intervention and prosecution in the case of institutional surveillance and discipline. In the remainder of this chapter, I outline how practices of surveillance and disciplining, common to contemporary mothering, are impacted by mothers' use of fierce mothering as a communicative strategy.

Caught Between Agency and Discipline: Fierce Mothering and Maternal Surveillance

Surveillance and discipline—the social, institutional, and self-policing of mothers—are primary practices within the motherhood infrastructure that make reliance on and facility with

motherhood ideals as technologies for navigating daily life important capacities for mothers. In the digital era, surveillance and discipline also present multiple avenues for commoditization via product sales and importantly through the spread and commoditization of information and data. As with mothers' engagement in the commodity market through their own online practices, companies and platforms can commoditize mothers' online behavior and target product marketing that specifically leverages mothers' guilt, fear of failure, and desires to pre-empt critique and to perform care for their children by consuming up-to-date knowledge and products which offer 'solutions' for their concerns. Thus, the threat of constant surveillance both socially and institutionally works alongside mothers' internalized self-surveillance and disciplining to produce an environment for easily manufacturing mothers' consent to dominant structures, participation in institutional practices, and engagement with industrial commoditization through their use of motherhood ideals as technologies along these various cultural infrastructural pathways.

The surveillance and disciplining of mothers are not limited only to fierce mothers. They are perhaps the most common relational experience of any mother in contemporary society. Surveillance and disciplining occur at both interpersonal and institutional levels in society. Interpersonal surveillance including in person and online surveillance—coined "social surveillance" by Alice E. Marwick (378-379)—is conducted by family, friends, acquaintances, and even complete strangers. It begins with pregnancy and continues throughout motherhood. Social surveillance and disciplining are often conducted by other women, but men also participate in publicly regulating mothers. These practices are routinely enacted as attempts to be 'helpful,' even if (or especially when) help was not solicited. The public practice of interpersonal and institutional surveillance and disciplining—even the expectation that it might occur—leads

mothers to practice self-surveillance and disciplining which effects their internalization of self-regulation toward dominant norms (Foucault *TOS* 18-20).

Mothers often articulate their relationship to such self-regulation through discussions of feelings of imperfection, failure, and the impossibility of meeting ideals (Brooks). And, in the context of Intensive mothering norms broadly speaking, feelings of inadequacy are weaponized especially between mothers resulting in intra-mother 'mom-shaming' by so-called "sanctimommies" (Anderson). Research findings indicate that many mothers who publicly 'shame' other mothers, do so to shore up their own sense of maternal competence (CS Mott "Poll"). Importantly, mothers' discussions of maternal imperfection provide framework for both performative and resistive responses to normative mothering discourses and practices. Performative responses are comprised of mothers' articulations of difficulty which show their attempts and labor in trying to conform. Resistive responses are comprised of mothers' public questioning of the discourses, practices, and structures which demand their (and other mothers') perfection. Ultimately, such discussions and resistance do not dislodge the Intensive mothering ideal and may only 'shift the needle' for individual mothers' relationship with the ideal.

Public surveillance, disciplining, and shaming are common forms of gendered regulation regularly experienced by women, but are perhaps most directed at mothers given the general belief that anyone has a right to interfere for the 'sake of children.' Beyond merely intrusive or annoying, interpersonal surveillance, and especially social surveillance, of mothers can often be abusive. From 'momsplaining' to 'mom shaming,' harassment includes public confrontations and even calls to the police about mothers' perceived harmful behaviors. The potential for negative interactions from hurtful comments to police interventions in turn feeds self-surveillance and self-discipline. Mothers often feel that they must, in this context, be constantly

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aware of how other people perceive their maternal behaviors and performance or risk the

consequences of public confrontation and even government interference. These effects are

intensified for black and other mothers of color as well as poor, immigrant, and single mothers

who have less ability to access the performative aspects of ideal forms of motherhood.

Institutional surveillance and discipline are always a potential consequence of maternal

'incompetence.' They are comprised of multiple mechanisms for oversight embedded into a

myriad of institutional structures. Direct government interference—i.e., police or social workers

checking on anonymous reports from 'concerned' parties—is one facet of institutional

surveillance aimed at mothers and children (Brooks). Other institutional forms of surveillance

aimed at mothers include oversight by Child Protective Services (CPS) ranging from interviews

to child removal and even revocation of parental rights. Importantly, such oversight is threaded

into coordinating institutional frames such as Public Health, Social Work, and Education where

institutional actors (public health officials, social workers, and teachers/school staff) are

mandated to report concerns over child health and well-being.

The 2018 *Child Maltreatment* report from the Children's Bureau of the Department of

Health and Human Services shows millions of reports made annually, with 67.3% of reports

made by institutional actors. Of the 4.3 million reports made, 2.4 million were "'screened' as

appropriate for CPS response" (2). Out of the 2.4 million referrals investigated, only "17% of

children were found to be victims of abuse or neglect" (2). This 83% gap between erroneous

referrals and cases of child maltreatment is highly problematic given the scope of governmental

power regarding child-wellbeing. CPS has relatively sweeping authority to interfere in

households when concerns over child safety are analyzed. In fact, CPS responses to referrals,

primarily investigations, are extremely invasive and take approximately two months to complete

(Hurley). During this time, techniques such as surprise visits, bodily searches of children, home searches, and interviews with teachers and neighbors (Hurley). Thus, millions of mothers are investigated each year based on anonymous allegations predominantly provided by institutional actors.

This far-reaching and intrusive institutional surveillance is most often aimed a low socio-economic status mothers particularly black, indigenous and other mothers of color, as well as immigrant mothers, single mothers, and mothers with health complications (Gengler 133-134, Ocen 1545-1546). This has real impacts on the lives of mothers and their families including increased possibilities for long-term institutional intervention and even job loss, due to chronic lateness from home checks. Family support practitioners have compared these tactics to "the aggressive policing of black and Latinx men, but for women, and in the most private of places: their own homes" (McMillan qtd. By Hurley). In this way, departures from normative ideals of mothers, mothering, and motherhood help define which groups are targeted most often for institutional surveillance which are often grounded on referrals produced from interpersonal and social surveillance. Ultimately, any mother is subject to government oversight of her children's wellbeing although penalties and extended interference are less likely if mothers can access and afford excellent legal services and institutionally acceptable family supports such as counselling or other therapeutic services.

At first glance, surveillance may not seem particularly amplified for Eco Moms given that framings of eco / green awareness among mothers are generally laudatory given that it is seen as a 'worthy cause' and mechanism for bettering the world. A deeper look into Eco Moms' articulations provides a different perspective. Eco Mom subjectivity covers a broad range of interests around green living and climate change. Incorporating eco-friendly practices and

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products is a mainstay of the subjectivity's focus, but other foci range across climate activism, holistic / natural living, homesteading, and preparedness broadly speaking. Each of these areas provides points of purchase for public judgment. Such judgement often comes from other mothers, even those who share similar interests, in the form of criticism of posted ideas or pictures. For example, climate change deniers may feel compelled to assert that Eco Moms are filling their children's heads with conspiracy theories. Or, in the case of mothers focused on holistic / natural living, their preference for natural remedies may trigger criticism by people who do not believe such remedies work.

Eco Moms often speak about how they surveil and discipline themselves. This topic is expressed through their sense of being unable to be 'perfect' or to 'do it all.' As Virginia Sole-Smith writes in *Parenting* magazine: "Many green practices involve simple, easy swaps, but trying to Do It All Naturally creates more work, costs us more money, and makes us feel like we've failed for not being some perfect paragon of natural parenting" ("My Own Terms"). This feeling of failure can often be compounded as mothers engage in their online communities. As Aaronica Cole, blogger at *The Crunchy Mommy* notes, "the flip side [of social media] is that everyone is sharing their highlight reels which can be hard to keep in perspective when you're struggling" ("Overwhelm"). Self-surveillance works in concert with self-discipline, which as Foucault argued, is a process through which individuals train themselves to act in alignment with dominant norms of behavior and practice (Foucault *TOS* 18). Such processes impact all mothers online to some extent, and in the case of fierce mothers online the dominant norms are shaped by both maternal ideals (Moral, Scientific, and Intensive mothering ideals) and ideals common to their chosen topical discourse. For Eco Moms, this falls along the lines of eco-friendly practices and consumption as is made clear in Sole-Smith's quote above.

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Anti-Vaxxer Moms also refer to self-surveillance and disciplining, however, it is primarily social surveillance and disciplining that Anti-Vaxxer Moms say they experience online. Moreover, as compared to Eco Moms, Anti-Vaxxer Moms risk increased institutional surveillance and disciplining because of their anti-vaccine stance and antagonism to normative scientific and medical expertise. The difference between Eco Moms' 'acceptable' beliefs about alternative health and Anti-Vaxxer Moms' 'dangerous' beliefs is a refusal to adhere, at least nominally, to Scientific Mothering norms. It is this anti-institutional stance, Antivaxxer Moms' vociferous denial of the scientific and medical establishment and promotion of conspiracy theories about 'big Pharma,' that poses the most risk for surveillance and disciplining. The potential for increased institutional surveillance, is likely an important reason that poor and non-white mothers rarely identify publicly as Anti-Vaxxer Moms. It is also likely a reason that Anti-Vaxxer moms previously limited their use of social media platforms.

The increased social surveillance experienced by Anti-Vaxxer moms is encapsulated in a recent *Twitter* 'event' where the @Crazymothers account tweeted to the 'media' about the use of the term anti-vaxx.[27] The tweet garnered articles in *HuffPost* and *Live Science* which discussed both the tweet and the response it garnered. The tweet included both as text and an attached image the admonishment: "Please retire the use of the term 'Anti-vaxxer.' It is derogatory, inflammatory, and marginalizes both women and their experiences. It is dismissively simplistic, highly offensive and largely false. We politely request that you refer to us as the Vaccine Risk Aware" (12/1/2019). The tweet received only 575 likes, but it received 3.3 thousand retweets and 8.6 thousand comments. The disproportionate relationship between the number of likes, retweets, and comments on the @CrazyMothers tweet is commonly referred to on *Twitter* as "getting ratioed" ("Know Your Meme"). While "getting ratioed" technically refers to a theory that such

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uneven reaction numbers indicate a 'bad' tweet, it also means taking a public trouncing for the post. The vast majority of responses to @Crazymothers tweet were derogatory including responses labeling Anti-Vaxxers as criminal and responsible for murder and infanticide (@Crazymothers "Responses"). This example provides a view to the type of social surveillance and disciplining that Anti-Vaxxer mothers experience online. In comparison, Eco Moms on *Twitter* use the platform mostly to share their blog links and rarely receive even dozens of likes, retweets, or comments even though many often have multiple thousands of followers.

Using fierce mothering as a communicative strategy can increase the prevalence of surveillance and disciplining because mothers' public articulations of their fierce subjectivity make them more 'visible' and provide content for critics to judge. Self-surveillance and disciplining (self-regulation to norms) seems to occur more frequently when the fierce mothering concerns ostensibly fit within acceptable 'normative' concerns, while the potential for institutional surveillance and disciplining seems most tied to fierce mothering concerns which fall outside socially acceptable norms. Social surveillance and disciplining are discussed as a problem that impacts fierce mothers regardless of whether their concerns are viewed as socially acceptable, but certainly increases with posts deemed socially unacceptable.

While no mother can deflect or prevent all surveillance and disciplining, some mothers have personal characteristics and capacities which offer some protection. Women who embody the ideal figure of the hetero, white, Christian, middle-upper class, and domestically-oriented mother in good health and with a good education are more likely to be able to navigate the material effects of surveillance and disciplining because they are more able to negotiate dominant power structures. Such characteristics provide as 'pass' in relation to many of the hurdles embedded in the motherhood infrastructure. But, because no mother can ever fully

embody the ideal, all mothers experience surveillance and discipline to some extent. In this way, identity is both obscured through the universalization of 'maternal experience' while simultaneously remaining a site through which mothers' can be goaded into internal disunity through performing surveillance, disciplining, and discrimination toward each other.

Contemporary media environments exacerbate and commoditize mothers' fears and practices of surveillance and disciplining to capitalize on mothers' guilt and anxieties. Stories of mothers' infighting and social media spats rack-up viewership numbers like bystanders gathering around a fight or 'rubber-necking' at an accident. A primary example of this is the news media's framing of a supposed 'crises' between women, the "Mommy Wars," which manufactures and promotes the supposed existence of a raging fight between working and stay-at-home mothers (Kelley). The mythology of the mommy wars has been ongoing since the mid-1990s and it continues to be a money-maker for news outlets. Circulation of this mythology has spread in online contexts as celebrity moms and other momfluencers offer aspirational advice and models for attempting to 'have it all' and to find 'work-life balance' to sell their products and other commodities to stressed-out mothers. The mythology of the 'Mommy Wars' presents a binary option of working or mothering, which like the aspirational and celebrity advice racket, distracts attention from the real difficulties facing mothers due to lacking structural support for mothers and families. This distraction is achieved through the mommy wars framing through maternal responsibility and choice—to work or to stay home—as the 'real' root of the problem.

The repetition of such stories—some positioning work outside the home as superior and other positioning stay-at-home, or at least a required domestic orientation, as superior—enhances an environment of reduced solidarity and increased distrust between mothers. In this way, gendered framings, like the "Mommy Wars," by the media and in popular culture work to

delegitimize and dismiss issues important to mothers. Furthermore, such framings position mothers' concerns within the realm of 'cat fights' as opposed to important socio-political issues that require resolutions in economic policy and law. Ultimately, this works materially to prevent mothers from organizing across their differences to make systemic changes to policy and law such as paid parental leave, affordable high-quality childcare, and equal pay.

Such dismissive narratives are one way media and popular cultural industries as well as specific consumer industries connect with the motherhood infrastructure by creating consumption driven feedback loops. The circulation of discourses such as 'the Mommy Wars' and maternal failure promotes fears of increased surveillance and disciplining which helps to promote mothers' and families' consumption of products and services to ameliorate mothers' guilt or increase their capacity to perform as 'good' mothers. This creates a situation where the performance and display of consumption through fierce mothering enables mothers to project their adherence to motherhood ideals but also reinforces increased surveillance creating a cyclical interaction.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the technological relations of fierce mothering to show how it both enables and constrains mothers as they use their fierce subjectivities to engage in the liberal democratic, socio-political culture of the United States online. These technological relations include mothers' use of online and social media as platforms for speech, and as sites which increase their experience of social, institutional, and self-surveillance and disciplining practices. They also include economic relations which position mothers both as producers and consumers of information, products, and services through their specialized role as mothers.

I have shown that this nexus of fierce mothering and technological relations works within a larger frame of motherhood-specific technological practice to recuperate sentimental materialism as a framework for women's civic participation as liberal democratic subjects within the contemporary mediated socio-political environment. This recuperation of sentimental materialism adapts to the current socio-political context by enfolding feminist languages such as 'empowerment' and 'choice' even as it constrains feminist progress toward gender equality through its promotion of mothers' specialized roles and expertise (maternalism). This may lead fierce mothering to seem disruptive, and more inclusive. However, the ultimate message of fierce mothering's 'empowered' sentimental materialism is that women's socio-political power rests motherhood itself. In this way, fierce mothering positions (white, Christian, middle-upper class, hetero motherhood) motherhood as the *proper* foundation for women's socio-cultural, economic, and political participation.

From this analysis of how online technology and media enable and constrain fierce mothers who use them to engage in public speech, I turn to an analysis in the next chapter of how industrial media take up and relate to the trend of mothers articulating fierce motherhood subjectivities. I approach the topic through an analysis of televisual media, specifically situation comedy portrayals of mothers in relation to fierce and ideal mothering. This analysis compares two shows, *American Housewife* which actually portrays fierce motherhood subjectivities in important ways and, the reboot of *One Day at a Time*, which presents motherhood differently by portraying mothers who disrupt the 'ideal' white, middle-upper class mother figure. This final analysis shows how industrial media not only reflects mothers' experiences and contemporary concerns, but also reinforces the 'right' ways that mothers should respond to those experiences and concerns. It does this both via specific content and through network's programming choices

further highlighting motherhood's cultural infrastructural pathways connecting between

discursive and material frames as well as between institutional nodes such as the media.

CHAPTER 5

'FIERCE MAMAS' ON T.V.:

REFLECTING AND REINFORCING MOTHERHOOD AS SUBJECTIVITY

*[M]edia representation of mothers not only reflect deep
cultural tensions about the 'proper' roles for women, but
also demonstrate the media's ability to undercut or bolster
a group's political power, and transmit values and
stereotypes to future generations.*

Katherine N Kinnick "Media Morality Tales and the
Politics of Motherhood"

Building from discussions in the previous chapters including the use of motherhood

ideals as technologies for daily living (described in chapter one and three) and the construction

and practices of fierce mothering subjectivities (outlined in chapters two, three, and four), this

chapter explores fierce mothering through an analysis of representations of motherhood,

mothering, and mothers in two contemporary situation comedies. While many analyses of

motherhood have been done on film, television, fiction, and advertising, this analysis differs due

to my underlying conceptual analytic of cultural infrastructure.

Viewing motherhood as a cultural infrastructure requires a focus on the multiple layers—

programming, content, and network—which shape viewer's access to media representations.

Episodic content along with show-specific programming and network choices work together to

shape what viewer's watch which has socio-cultural, political, and economic impacts. As

Katherine N. Kinnick makes clear: "what media choose to emphasize and valorize, as well as

what they leave out, [plays] a profoundly important role in constructing societal norms and expectations for women at all stages of their lives (2). This shows how televisual media (and other popular cultural) industry selections can materially reproduce dominant cultural ideals of motherhood. This is often achieved by marketing show portrayals as *the* 'appropriate' frame for American women's identity. While most analyses would focus on one of these three layers (programming, content, or network), a cultural-technological view takes up the interactivity between them as a framework for understanding how the media industry acts as a primary node in the cultural infrastructural pathways between people, institutions (e.g., religious, educational, etc.), and the state. Ultimately, this analysis explores this cultural-infrastructural functioning of televisual media specifically through its use of representations of motherhood, mothering, and mothers in relation to the fierce mothering phenomenon.

Since the early 2000s, US television programming has mirrored the wider social fascination with motherhood, mothering, and mothers (Hall and Bishop vii-xii). This proliferation of programming has expanded rapidly since 2005 in concert with the expansion of fierce motherhood subjectivities and new maternalist attitudes. That motherhood should be a focal point in two different mass-mediated forms—online platforms and television—during the same period underscores the importance of the relationship between mediated representations and socio-cultural dynamics in reproducing material living conditions. This relationality is, as Stuart Hall argues, an "arena of consent and resistance" ("Deconstructing" 190-192). Such relational tensions between gender, social concerns, and media—particularly televisual media— have been noted previously by many feminist media scholars (see Rebecca Feasey 2012, Katherine N. Kinnick 2009, Angela McRobbie 2013, Susan Douglas 2010, Susan Faludi 1992, Ann C. Hall and Mardia J. Bishop 2009).

Television programming, especially shows in the situation comedy genre, reflect socio-cultural norms, shifts, and negotiations related to the family and family dynamics (Kinnick 1-3). This reflection of socio-cultural negotiations is particularly apparent through depictions of mothers as Rebecca Feasey notes, "[t]he situation comedy is often singled out as a genre capable of reflecting social, sexual and attitudinal developments within society. These developments are nowhere more evident than in the fluctuating representations of family life and the changing depictions of the maternal role seen in the genre" ("Happy Homemaker" 32). Televisual media also showcase how motherhood works as a cultural infrastructure (defined in chapter one) as sitcoms and other entertainment programming can be understood to circulate motherhood discourses inclusive of "oppositional ideas" (Feasey "Happy Homemaker" 32) with material consequences in women's and family life and, with impacts on policy and politics (Kinnick 2).

To explore this relationship and its effects, this chapter provides a comparative study of two television comedy shows, *American Housewife* (2016-present), and *One Day at a Time* (2017-present). By comparing these shows, including their program marketing, their initial season episodic content, and their histories on their respective networks, provides a crucial view of how televisual media interact with and intervene in socio-cultural, political, and economic issues related to identity (e.g., race, citizenship, sexual orientation, class, etc.) through the gendered topic of and discourses about motherhood. Sitcoms, then, like other popular cultural media present spaces where power is negotiated.[28] Such negotiations occur specifically through a variety of competing representations of and imaginaries about people's lives (Hall "Deconstructing" 190-192; Collins 69-95; Silva 161-173).

The representations and imaginaries that survive popular cultural competitions—such as television shows that continue to air versus shows that are cancelled—provide insight about

which values, and norms will be stabilized within the dominant culture and which will be (or continue to be) marginalized (Kinnick 2). One way representations survive in popular cultural competitions is through the support they receive—how they are promoted, developed, and aired—from the media industry. Power over show purchasing and programming has long been directly controlled by media companies, in conjunction with advertisers, where executives make decisions over which shows to support, and which shows to cancel. While media companies generally retain power over programming, there can sometimes be disjuncture between companies, media producers, advertisers, and audiences about which representations make viable 'products.'

In the following sections of this chapter, I conduct a tripartite media analysis (programming, content, and network) using the cultural infrastructural analytic described in chapter one as the foundation to compare *American Housewife* and *One Day at a Time*. First, I analyze the shows' programmatic choices—both are marketed as 'progressive' and 'inclusive'—to assess whether their representative portrayals of motherhood, mothering, and mothers through 'difference' work to disrupt or reinforce normative social hierarchies. The second section analyzes these shows' episodic content to examine how maternal characters utilize motherhood ideals and discourses as cultural technologies to navigate their quotidian lives within the show context. The third section compares these two sitcoms' network histories to show how the media industry shapes and reinforces motherhood ideals by controlling access to representations of motherhood, mothering, and mothers. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the impacts of maternal representations in these situation comedies showing how the media industry and popular culture work as sites of power, agency, and negotiation between women as mothers. Importantly, these analyses show that televisual media not only reflect contemporary culture, but

also reinforce dominant structures by suggesting the 'right' responses and 'appropriate' behaviors for 'American' mothers.

Comparing 'More Realistic' Mothering in *American Housewife* and *One Day at a Time*

American Housewife and *One Day at a Time* showcase the ways popular television programming reflects contemporary socio-cultural contestations over the 'realities' of motherhood, mothering, and mothers. As such, these shows offer insight into how media productions' interpretations of contemporary mothering both reflect and reinforce specific mothers' strategies for navigating daily life. They also provide insight into how media imaginaries of gendered experience and practice work to shape the possible range of 'correct' responses, practices, and concerns for 'American' mothers as well as cultural, political, and economic expectations about 'American' mothers with material impacts on mothers' lives.

American Housewife, first aired in fall 2016, in the Tuesday night line-up on the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) network with streaming access to all seasons of the show on the Hulu service.[29] ABC presents the half-hour family show as a comedic take on the realities of current American mothering and family life. The ABC marketing materials position the show as a more 'authentic' portrait of American life specifically through its representation of a middle-class, white housewife's struggles to care for her family. The show is also framed as rebellious and as pushing back against normative media portrayals of women, class, ability, and maternal experience.

One Day at a Time first aired in the direct to streaming in the 2017 Spring line-up on Netflix. Like *American Housewife*, *One Day at a Time* is a half-hour family comedy that offers up a portrayal of contemporary 'real life' and was framed by the network through its different approach to sitcom norms. The show fits within the current 'reboot' culture by taking up the

premise of legendary television writer and producer Norman Lear's original program, of the same name, running from 1974-1985. In Lear's 1974 version, Ann Romano, is a single divorced mother of two, raising her two rebellious teen daughters, while attempting to navigate her relationship with her ex-husband Ed and her career while dealing with unhelpful advice from her apartment superintendent. Lear himself has championed and co-produced this new version that reimagines the original show through the experience of a multi-generational, Cuban American family (Jones 107-120, Lyons, Poniewozik)

I focus my analysis on the first season episodes of both shows as contemporaries that offer dominant (reinforcing) and non-dominant (disrupting) representations of contemporary motherhood, mothering, and mothers respectively (Dunn; Kellet, Riley, and Lear). *American Housewife*, a dominant representation, engages with the phenomenon of fierce mothering directly through characters who embody fierce motherhood subjectivities to portray contemporary gendered, racial, and classed experience in often superficial and stereotypical ways. *One Day at a Time*, a non-dominant representation, portrays a different contemporary mothering reality with less access to the strategies of fierce motherhood subjectivities, but which contends more deeply with gendered, raced, and classed socio-cultural, political, and economic realities. Both shows are marketed as progressive through the inclusion of 'feminist' frames and 'diverse' casts. This marketing tactic is an important site for analysis, given the post-feminist sensibility of fierce mothering (detailed in chapter two) which incorporates seemingly feminist languages such as women's empowerment and liberation to promote women's return to 'traditional' gender roles (McRobbie 135).

<u>Realism, Race, and (Mis)Representation in *American Housewife* and *One Day at a Time*</u>:

American Housewife's supposedly 'more realistic' portrait of US mothering, brings together a nominally diverse cross section of mothers and utilizes these diverse characters to portray social difference. The program marketing information for *American Housewife*—including plot and character descriptions—describes characters that reflect fierce mothering sentiments, even explicitly portraying one character, Doris, through the subjectivity of the 'Tiger Mom' who is the consummate authoritarian constantly forcing her children to practice musical instruments and do schoolwork. The show also implicitly represents other fierce motherhood subjectivities such as the 'Eco Mom,' portrayed by the character Tara, a rabidly vegan (i.e., eco-conscious) mom. Thus, the show incorporates the trend of fierce mothering in its representation of the concerns and personalities of different mothers on the show.

One Day at a Time also markets itself as a realistic portrayal of American mothering, specifically one that represents Cuban American experience. The limited program marketing and plot from Netflix position motherhood generationally, inherently disrupting the competitive and divisive aspects of Intensive Mothering ideals that ground *American Housewife*. This situational setup—of mothers negotiating their daily lives generationally within one family—portrays the difficulties and struggles of motherhood as a shared experience where mothers learn from each other and overcome their disagreements. Thus, *One Day at a Time* offers a view of motherhood that pushes against trends in fierce mothering and mothers' use of motherhood subjectivities. Instead, it portrays motherhood as collective and supportive, rather than individualized and weaponized. One potential flaw in this alternate portrayal of motherhood is that *One Day at a Time*, uses both the familial and ethnic connection between its mothers to skirt divisive

interactions mothers experience when interacting with other mothers not related to them by blood or culture.

American Housewife: The 'Mean Girl' Mommies

American Housewife portrays the life of the Otto Family. The ensemble cast includes Katie Otto, her family and her two best "mom" friends—Doris and Angela—as the Otto clan adjusts to a new life in the ultra-wealthy town of Westport, Connecticut.[30] Central to the marketing of Katie's 'normalness,' is her average body size of a 12-14 (although Katie Mixon, the actor portraying Katie Otto, is actually several sizes smaller), her middle-class background, and the diversity of her friends. Katie's immediate family is made up of her husband, Greg Otto, and their three children Taylor, Oliver, and Anna Kat. Taylor, their teenaged daughter, a female version of the 'dumb jock' character, is athletic and popular. Oliver, their 'tween' son, a contemporary version of the 1980s 'yuppie' stereotype, is obsessed with becoming wealthy like his new Westport peers. And their youngest daughter, primary school-aged Anna Kat, is explicitly Katie's favorite child and the precocious 'baby' of the family. Katie's two best mom friends, Doris an Asian-American mother, and Angela a black, lesbian mother, are Westport locals and are the only other moms that are 'different.' The show's casting and framing reinforces dominant social hierarchies from the outset by posing the Otto family—a white, middle-class, educated, two-heteronormative-parent nuclear family—as the 'average American family.'

At the time we enter Otto Family life, the show marketing notes that the family has recently moved to the ultra-wealthy town of Westport, Connecticut to ensure that Anna Kat has access to the best schooling and care for her special needs stemming from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (which the show frames as a type of disability). Greg, a history professor at a local

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university, is the breadwinner and Katie is a stay-at-home mom. Ultimately, this setup situates the show's humor in Katie's experience of tension with other mothers, teachers, local institutions, as well as in stereotypical depictions of difference and her misconnections with her children. Her husband Greg is presented as supportive "in every way possible," but is also as responsible for reigning in Katie's worst impulses in what could be described as a modern, seemingly feminist portrayal of a 'father knows best' role ("Characters"). The overall sense of Katie's orientation to her family is that she is overworked and worn out by being a stay-at-home mom. In the end, however, Katie returns to the ideal frame that while being a mother is the hardest job there is, it is also the most rewarding job ("Characters").

Importantly, Katie's character profile lists her as a woman with an elite education (a marketing degree from Duke University) who has made the 'choice' to leave a job she loved to stay home and care for her family, most specifically for Anna Kat who has 'special needs.' This framing specifically draws on new maternalist notions of post-feminism (we are already liberated) and a return to 'femininity' as women's individual choice. This, then, positions Katie's transition from a 'working' mother to 'traditional' housewife as made by a liberated (educated, seemingly feminist) woman whose 'loving' choice is to 'focus on her family' and 'care for her child' even if it comes with financial and personal hardships. Moreover, the show's plot description also subtly references fierce mothering norms saying: "Despite her flaws and unconventional ways, Katie ultimately only wants the best for her kids and will fight tooth-and-nail to instill some good old-fashioned values in them, if it's the last thing she does" ("About the Show"). In describing Katie's willingness to 'fight tooth and nail' to raise her children the 'right' way, the show poses her as a 'warrior' on behalf of their moral and physical wellbeing.

The show's primary action revolves around Katie's frustrations in trying to get along with, or more often one-up, the 'perfect' moms in the community—the "mombots"—whose focus on conspicuous consumption, thinness, and 'sameness' alienates and annoys Katie. The official plot set up for *American Housewife* describes Katie as,

> …a confident, unapologetic wife and mother of three, raises her flawed family in the wealthy town of Westport, Connecticut, filled with "perfect" mommies and their "perfect" offspring. Katie's perfectly imperfect world is upended when her neighbor's decision to move notches her up from her ideal social standing and sets her on a path to ensure that doesn't happen, regardless of the consequences. ("About the Show")

Thus, regular show narratives include Katie's and the 'mombots' plots against each other and Katie's struggles to maintain her older children's values and identity. Angela and Doris often 'help' Katie navigate Westport culture by offering advice and engaging in gossip sessions where they all air their frustrations with their lives.

In terms of the racialization, overt distinctions are made between the obviously racialized mothers—Angela and Doris—while more implicit distinctions are made between Katie and the other white mothers.[31] Moreover, racialization on the show is also gendered and classed specifically through subtle, comparative framings femininity on the show. Angela embodies this in its most overt presentation. Angela, "tells it like it is" and "keeps it real," who according to her character profile is: "a hip, black lesbian going through a spectacularly messy divorce, and she's not afraid to tell you about it. … Artsy, ballsy, and brutally honest, Angela's going to miss having a wife, but she's not going to miss having her wife. Sas-SY!" ("Characters"). Her positioning as a black lesbian is framed through racial and gendered stereotypes in multiple ways that leverage hypersexuality as their citational marker. This framing poses her as more masculine than the other mothers tying into historical, racial stereotypes of the 'strong black woman' (Collins 175-77) and of black women's lacking femininity which have been publicly espoused

including black women from Sojourner Truth to Michele Obama. Moreover, it incorporates stereotypes of hypersexuality in racialized terms connecting both to the Jezebel stereotype and stereotypes of black men's sexual desire for white women given that Angela's sexualizing commentary if often directed at and her sexual/romantic partners are often white women. This also ties into stereotypes about non-heteronormative relationships—particularly those between gay men—as being rooted in hypersexual desire and deviance where again Angela's lack of access to white femininity mobilizes her gaze as a masculine one.

Doris, alternately, is stereotyped through her Asian-ness, specifically as a representation of the "Tiger Mother." Her character profile makes this clear: "Doris believes in tough, hands-on parenting, and is looking to help Katie discipline her children the Asian way: mostly through yelling and forcing them to consume strange meats" ("Characters").[32] Doris' characterization relies on stereotypes of Asians as "exceptional minorities" given her wealth and her exceptional inclusion in Westport (where Doris as exception proves Westport's 'rule' of white normativity). She is also simultaneously posed as overtly "Other" for maintaining supposedly Asian, rather than American, cultural norms related to food, mothering, and expressions of care. Here, laughs are drawn from Doris' "Tiger Mother" parenting style which specifically contravenes American mothering practices and cultural-behavioral norms. Doris is presented as a demanding and overbearing 'Asian' mother whose children are constantly working—practicing musical instruments or doing homework—with no time to relax, have fun, or 'just be' kids. Her children, often on screen only in 'flash' cuts indicating Doris is thinking about them, are portrayed as anxious, even neurotic, but perfectly clothed and meekly quiet in response to their mother's total control. Finally, Doris' controlling Asian mothering extends beyond her own family as is

portrayed on the show through her delight at being able to take Katie's children in hand and discipline them at any opportunity especially by offending their 'lazy' American sensibilities.

Racially, Katie is portrayed through an ambiguous sort of whiteness—a curvy figure, olive skin, brown hair, and dark eyes—in comparison to the first season's "mombot" characters who are thin, blonde, pale-skinned, and blue-eyed. This racialization is tied to Katie's 'lower' class status through her characterization on the show as a loud, sarcastic, often less feminine, and self-interested woman. Thus, we see a visual representation of class difference and the suggestion of a type of 'lower class' vulgarity portrayed through Katie's rebellious (unrefined) behavior tied to her racially ambiguous (less white) presentation. The ambiguousness of her whiteness is also underscored by her lacking presentation of femininity—specifically her loudness, aggressiveness, and anger—traits that are stereotypical associated with masculinity (and also regularly with black women). Finally, this presentation also serves to work subtly as a negative portrayal of her "feminist" orientation given that anger, outspokenness, lacking femininity, and selfishness are all also caricatures, and stereotypes of feminist women used by antifeminists and common in assertions of post-feminist discourses.

'Diversity' in both casting and show themes on *American Housewife* is a primary marketing element of the show's supposedly progressive take on 'real life'. However, the show's characterizations often conflate 'diversity' and 'difference' in ways that reinforce racial and class hierarchies along with other dominant cultural norms such as ableism and heterosexuality. 'Difference,' on the show is spread thinly across race, class, and sexuality in relation to the 'typical' Westport moms (wealthy, white, and married heterosexual women). Katie's primary 'difference' is presented through class because the Ottos are the 'poor' (i.e., middle class) family in the community. Doris and Angela, alternately, are ultra-wealthy like the other Westport

moms, but represent conspicuous 'difference' because they are not white. In addition to racial

difference, Angela also portrays difference as a lesbian who is in the process of getting divorced

from her wife.

Interestingly, both Doris and Angela get along with the Westport 'mombots' by hiding

their real feelings and opinions about the other women; something Katie can't manage to

achieve—she is 'uncontainable'. This relational difference is subtle, even seeming on the surface

as 'catty' because it is portrayed through 'spiteful' gossip sessions. It is, however, very important

because it implicitly reinforces a racialized, gendered hierarchy that ensures white mothers'

ability to publicly assert their self/subjectivity (i.e., not get along) while disallowing mothers of

color to do the same. Instead, mothers of color (and ostensibly lesbian mothers) must silence

themselves—hide their opinions and feelings—to get along and remain members of the

community.

Along with this reliance on classed, racialized, and sexualized stereotypes—a

shortcoming noted by multiple critics of the show—the show also relies on the good / bad mom

character dichotomy conventional to sitcoms and common to the 'mommy wars' narratives seen

elsewhere over the last two decades. The competition between the groups of mothers on the

show relies on Intensive Mothering norms which instigate their social surveillance and

judgement of each other. Although, the "bad mother" convention was used in critical ways in

two prominent sitcoms from the 1990s—*Roseanne* and *Married with Children*—which relied on

such portrayals to highlight structural social problems and the hypocrisy of "TV" moms

respectively (Feasy *Desperate* 39-40). These shows did not pit "good" mothers against "bad

mothers," but instead made strong critiques of their socio-cultural, political, and economic

context. *American Housewife* does not follow these earlier conventions, although one could

attempt to connect Katie Otto's portrayal of mothering with that of Roseanne Connor's portrayal of mothering in the 1990s in certain types of ways. This comparison falls apart upon close inspection as Katie Otto does not offer a sustained critique of structural hierarchies of dominance in relation to the experience of mothering and marriage. Rather, Katie's (and the show's) critiques are aimed at flawed mothers—the shallow and elitist mombots for whom looking good is better than 'being' good—which obscures structural forces impacting 'good' mothering and reinforces atomization inherent to post-feminist and intensive mothering norms.

American Housewife, then, does not seriously pose the challenge to past portrayals of women, mothers, or mothering that it claims to pose. Rather, *American Housewife* falls within a generic form started with *I Love Lucy* that portrays the antics of a 'misguided but loveable housewife,' who learns to properly value her family. Although it does incorporate some of the gendered family dynamics of post-Norman Lear sitcoms such as the supportive husband (Kutulas 138-40), it uses that form to take back-handed swipes at both 'feminist' and 'traditional' mothers. This is an odd configuration of generic conventions that has unfortunate effects as Katie Otto is generally not a loveable character, instead often coming across as a 'mean girl,' and the show's supposed portrayal of 'authentic' life regularly reasserts the dominant cultural norms it supposedly disrupts.

One Day at a Time: Mothering Across Generational Change

One Day at a Time portrays the life of the Alvarez family.[33] The ensemble cast includes the lead character, Penelope Alvarez, her family, their building superintendent, and her boss. The Alvarez family is a multi-generational, Cuban American family comprised of Lydia, the grandmother and matriarch, her daughter Penelope who is the primary breadwinner, and her two children; Elena, a precocious and social justice minded fifteen year old and Alex, a tween boy

focused on popularity in his peer group. The rest of the primary cast is made up of their building owner and on-site superintendent, Schneider, a young, unmarried, wealthy white man who has been given the building by his family and Dr. Berkowitz, Penelope's boss, an older white male doctor who becomes close with Lydia over the course of the show.

At the time we enter Alvarez family life, we find that the family is adjusting to being together again after Penelope has returned from military service in the Middle East. Part of this adjustment is Penelope's separation from her husband (who we later find out poses a threat to the family due to suicidal ideation and self-medication through drinking because of his Post Traumatic Stress from his service in the war). Penelope suffered a shoulder injury working as a nurse during her tour of duty and relies on precarious support from Veteran's Affairs and she is working as a Nurse in Dr. Berkowitz's practice. Her mother Lydia, who immigrated from Cuba to the US during Castro's regime, is the matriarch who helps with the household duties (cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc.) and watching the kids. Lydia and Penelope get help from Schneider who has embedded himself into the Alvarez family seeking a closeness is missing in his own family.

The extended cast includes the Alvarez's wider social and familial groups. Among them are Penelope's two problematic white coworkers (a woman and a man) and Elena's close school friend whose parents get deported and for several episodes is secretly living in the apartment. Over the course of the show this extends to include a new potential boyfriend for Penelope, her ex-husband who returns and tries to patch up the relationship, and a women veterans' therapy group Penelope joins which incorporates a diverse range of women highlighting various races, sexual orientations, and other types of identity.

The show's primary action revolves around the Alvarez family's struggles to find their 'new normal' and to forge a path forward. The 'more realistic' family life portrayed on the show is presented through its focus on a differently constituted 'average' American family that is headed by a single mother, multi-generational, and Latinx (rather than white). Along with its broader view of 'normal' American families, the show tackles some current trends that many in the US are dealing with in relation to shifting American identity. The show takes up the family dynamics of people who identify as middle class, but now live in a precarious economic reality. It also takes up family dynamics around military service through both Penelope's and her ex-husband's experiences as veterans and the damaging effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Through these frames, the show inherently positions 'real' and 'average' American families and mothers as imperfect and refocuses viewers on the relationships within families as the appropriate site of connection. Instead of relying on post-feminist, neoliberal framings of individual choice and responsibility, the show grounds family struggles in tensions between structural forces (social, economic, and political structures and systems) and individual relations with those forces. The lack of both post-feminist and new maternalist frames is less surprising given that the original series was developed by Norman Lear to address social and political issues relative to the socio-cultural sensibilities of the Women's and Civil Rights movements (Jones 107-120).

Racial and class difference are of course embedded into the premise of the show itself and the visual, linguistic, and culinary differences between the family and the rest of the primary cast foreground diversity in ways that make space for other forms of difference to be explored. Thus, the show's primary representation of difference in relation to motherhood, mothering and mothers is portrayed through the intergenerational experiences and beliefs of the women of the

Alvarez family: Lydia, Penelope, and Elena. In these characterizations, stereotypes are used to depict characters who then act against type in multiple ways. Here, these women's (familial) bonds enable the development of a collective sensibility where disagreement builds stronger, deeper connections because love undergirds an implicit commitment to resolve issues to the benefit of all. This structuration enables the show to engage with ideal forms of motherhood differently—especially the effects of Intensive Mothering—depicted through Penelope's feelings of maternal failure. Importantly, it tackles Penelope' experience without reproducing Intensive Mothering's competitive and atomizing effects.

To understand how *One Day at a Time* portrays differences, it is important to outline how these three characters are positioned. Lydia is an 'old school,' mother who embodies traditional femininity. As a former dancer and dance instructor, she has a lithe frame and always moves gracefully. She always wears make up, and even her grandchildren have never seen her without her face 'made up'. Lydia perceives herself as glamorous and has no qualms about using her feminine wiles to ease her way in the world and believes that this is *exactly* how she thinks women should wield power. She favors men in the show, particularly her grandson, and often takes a 'boys will be boys' stance on issues related to sex and dating. In comparison, she takes a very strict stance toward female chastity and purity especially in relation to her granddaughter. She foregrounds marriage and family as primary aspirations for women in line with her devout Catholic beliefs. Lydia is the keeper of cultural as well as familial customs and, often frustrates Penelope and Elena with her insistence on older, more traditionalist, approaches to mothering and being a woman.

Penelope, by contrast, is a contemporary woman and mother trying to do it all. As a newly single mother, she must work to support her family, which includes taking care of both her

kids *and* her mother, along with trying to live her own life. In addition to taking care of her family, she is working to manage the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and shoulder injury she sustained as a combat nurse. Penelope is positioned as more modern than her mother, but still moderate in terms of her own expectations as a mother and as a woman. Penelope believes that women should "kick butt," but also worries about her own presentation of femininity while heading back into the dating world as a middle-aged, mother. Although she certainly does not focus on using feminine wiles to get her way, and is more focused on self-reliance, Penelope also relies on using her mother's wisdoms and strategies in certain (often gendered) situations.

Penelope's daughter Elena is the 'progressive' young feminist who is concerned with social justice activism and changing the world. She is an excellent student and an artist who wants to be a creative writer. Elena is the character that routinely questions tradition, gendered norms, and refuses to subscribe to using femininity to achieve her aims. In episode two, she gives in to Lydia's guidance and attempts to use her femininity—wearing makeup, curling her hair, and swapping her glasses for contact lenses—to get people to take her composting campaign seriously. Ultimately she removes the makeup as she is frustrated that her looks receive more attention than the issue she is advocating for. She also overtly rejects her mother's and grandmother's traditional notions of marriage and family as she is uncertain that she desires these things for her future.

Elena's opposition to traditional notions poses a frame through which the three generations of Alvarez women are able to negotiate 'appropriate' mothering and womanhood on the show while making room for expressions of 'care' that fall outside of traditional white feminine and maternalist paradigms. For example, Elena comes out as gay, a turn of events that is difficult for Penelope who wants to be accepting but feels 'weird' about it (Episode 11 "Pride

and Prejudice"). When Elena comes out to her father, Victor, who has come for her quinceañera, he refuses believe Elena is gay and leaves town before the opening, 'Father-Daughter' dance (Episode 13 "Quinces"). In the midst of this tension (and without being aware of Elena's secret) Lydia is fitting Elena's quinceañera dress. While Elena says she thinks it is beautiful, Lydia sees that it does not give Elena 'joy' because it doesn't truly represent her. Lydia works secretly (with the help of Dr. Berkowitz) to remake the 'dress' into a feminine tuxedo. Before the quinceañera, she surprises Elena with her new formal wear which lets Elena know that even if Lydia wants her to be more feminine, she accepts and loves her as she is. At the party, because Victor is gone, Penelope steps in to dance with Elena showing her support publicly. In these episodes, Penelope and Lydia model acceptance and love without a resolution to their own struggles or Elena's acquiescence to heteronormative, gendered standards. Additionally, they maternal model care as *public*, active support (remaking the 'dress,' and performing the dance) of Elena, not by fighting her battles for her or as contingent on Elena's 'proper' behavior. In this way, love and acceptance are decoupled from maternal ideals of perfection. Instead, they are tied to relationship-specific needs and negotiations between the women, ultimately posing alternate frames for maternal care.

Through this variety of portrayals of mothers, mothering, and motherhood as well as intergenerational frameworks of femininity and gender, the competitive and devaluing aspects of "Intensive Mothering" norms are disrupted. The 'fierceness' here is a 'fierceness-with' between all of the family members (a shared duty of care), rather than a 'fierceness-on-behalf' rooted in the duties benevolent ownership implied by sentimentality (Merish 35-39). The portrayal of difference among family members who love and care for each other, even when they disagree, allows for this disruption to be rooted in a debate of values and acceptance of difference that would be difficult between women not similarly connected. However, this presentation of

difference between women combined with deep emotional ties offers representations of possible alternatives for maternal (non)identification, practice, and behavior which can be discussed and debated between women rather than strictly through hierarchies of 'good' and 'bad.'

One Day at a Time's approach to difference and diversity is not surprising given its historical connections to the original show. Here difference and diversity are topics portrayed in nuanced and inventive ways that allowing for stereotypes to be presented in order to disrupt and question them within the sitcom's generic forms. The show, therefore, approaches difference from multiple directions and across multiple perspectives. This includes difference and diversity as situated through topics such as race, language, gendered relations, citizenship status, sexuality, and religious belief. Largely, difference and diversity are portrayed thematically through depictions of workplace culture, discussions of tradition, and through the family members' non-familial relationships.

An example of how the show manages difference and diversity in productive ways comes from Episode 2, "Bobos and Mamitas." In the episode Penelope is frustrated with her male coworker who talks over her, steals her ideas, and expects her to do more work than him. In response to her mother's frustration, Elena brings up the topic of 'mansplaining.' Immediately, Schneider starts explaining 'mansplaining,' to the women and the audience watches him go through the realization of what he is doing and his subsequent attempt to correct his own mansplaining which devolves problematically along racial, classed, and gendered lines. Eventually Schneider stops talking as all the women are just staring at him. Each woman responds differently (according to her characterization). Lydia—as part of the older generation who eschews 'feminism' as 'annoying'—deflects the comments by coddling Schneider. Penelope, still frustrated about her work situation, lets out a string of Spanish invective. And,

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Elena, who could be obstreperous about it, arches an eyebrow and waits for him to finish, trying not to laugh in his face. Importantly, rather than having the women critique Schneider, the show simply lets this situation be uncomfortable. The audience gets to see him deal with the experience, but also gets to feel empathy for his struggle to correct his behavior once he realizes what he is doing. Importantly, Schneider's self-consciousness of his white, male privilege is exposed through his reaction which allows the audience to see both his discomfort and the types of responses women and people of color experience in dealing with marginalization.

This setup situates the show's humor in both the tensions between characters or character groups and the resolution of those tensions. As with the 'mansplaining' incident, the show explicitly takes up tensions between characters developed through cultural misalignments, race and racism, sexism, language difference, religion, sexual orientation, immigration, gender and sexism, and disability. Thus, the comedic action is often framed around difference and working through multiple viewpoints on issues as each generation or different character group expresses their own perspective.

The show does rely on traditional televisual tropes to counteract difficult maternal characterizations, particularly Penelope's status as a single mother (Kinnick 9-11, Silbergleid 98). Importantly, this lower status representation of mothering (the single mother) is offset because it is not "willful" on Penelope's part (Kinnick 9). She is reluctantly forced into her role as single parent in order to protect her children from their father's mental health issues even though she still, in large part, loves her soon to be ex-husband. In this way, the show maintains Penelope's status as a recognizably 'good mother' through its use of Intensive mothering ideals which place the mother-child relationship higher in priority than the marriage relationship. Ultimately, the overarching message is that the Alvarez family *is* a normal American family

dealing with normal American problems that are prevalent in the current moment. Moreover, it

situates issues such as divorce and single motherhood, mental health and healthcare, economic

stress and class status, citizenship, and immigration, as well as negotiating gender and LGBTQ+

identity as 'normal,' 'average' American family problems.

Using Motherhood Ideals as Technologies in *American Housewife* and *One Day at a Time:*

Televisual media has a history of portraying mothers, mothering, and motherhood within

a dualistic frame of 'good' and 'bad' mothers through a focus on mothers' relationship to

domesticity. Within this frame, ideal forms of motherhood—Moral, Scientific, and Intensive—

become touchstones for audiences as their implicit characteristics are recognizable as

representative of the 'good' mother. Televisual media also maintains continuities across these

ideal forms by rearticulating specific characteristics as trans-historically intrinsic to motherhood:

domesticity, marriage, and maternal care. Kinnick's research show that media portrayals range

across a specific hierarchy of mothers (catalogued from highest status to lowest status): 1) Stay

at home moms (preferably in a male-headed household); 2) Working moms (who remained

focused on family); 3) Single 'by choice' moms (women who choose to have children outside of

marriage); 4) Welfare mothers (single by fault and racialized); and 5) monster mothers (women

who hurt their children) (10). These categorizations become easy staples of representing mothers

in the media as they are easily recognizable and link to broader socio-political and economic

discourses. Importantly, such a hierarchy of 'good' mothers is predicated on notions of

traditional gendered roles within the family context. Therefore, the media's reliance on the

good/bad dichotomy and maternal hierarchies means that "[c]onforming to traditional gender

roles is central to the media construction of the good mother" (Kinnick 12). Thus, "media

representations of mothers," and I would add reliance on ideal forms of motherhood, "not only

reflect deep cultural tensions about the 'proper' roles for women, but also demonstrate the media's ability to undercut or bolster a group's political power, and transmit values and stereotypes to future generations" (Kinnick 22).

Unsurprisingly given this history, *American Housewife* and *One Day at a Time* both utilize ideal forms of motherhood to portray how different mothers on the shows navigate their quotidian lives. Such portrayals offer examples for women on how to interact using these ideals. They also reinforce ideas about which women can access and use these forms by implicitly reinforcing race, class, sexuality, and citizenship hierarchies between mothers. While some shows seem to offer 'opposition' to specific hegemonic social norms and televisual conventions, that opposition is also framed within the terms of the motherhood ideal as a point of reference so that it is legible to audiences. As such, analyzing how ideal forms are taken up within these two shows highlights how socio-cultural beliefs about difference portrayed through gendered ideals proscribe mothers' access to utilize ideal forms in their own lives. In the analyses below I notate specific episodes from the shows where individual events are referenced and as exemplars where recurring character behaviors are referenced.

"Perfectly Imperfect": Intensive Motherhood in American Housewife

American Housewife frames contemporary American motherhood using (im)perfection as a primary thematic through which Katie Otto and the other moms utilize Intensive Mothering as an ideal form to navigate their lives in Westport. (Im)perfection provides the central vehicle for the competitive interactions between the mothers who are pitted against each other in relation to their ability to performatively enact 'good' mothering (i.e., perfection). Mom life in Westport is all about looking good, acting well, and parenting 'right.' For the 'mombots,' this means being thin, dressing well, maintaining 'ladylike' manners, and providing their children with the 'best'

of everything without making them work for anything; it is a lifestyle only accessible through their wealth. Katie sees these Westport values as fake, shallow, and morally deficient. In fact, the only wealthy Westport mom whose mothering is posed as 'authentic' is Doris, whose performative enactment of Tiger mothering ensures that even with money and a staff, her primary focus is on ensuring that her children are exceptional (Episode 4 "Art Show").

Katie, alternately, is posed as 'real' by the Westport mombots, which is decidedly not a compliment (Episode 1 "Pilot"). As the only middle class stay-at-home mom on the show, she does all the domestic, reproductive labor in her house because she does not have some form of staff (nannies, housekeepers, or maids) which enable her to enact 'perfect' Westport style. For Katie, then, looking good and being 'well mannered' are secondary to raising her children to be 'good people'. This labor-based capacity to enact 'perfection' and the arrogance of the Westport mothers in relation to their relative ease is a major source of Katie's dislike of and disagreement with them (Episode 2 "The Nap"). A large part of her daily life on the show, then, revolves proving that her 'imperfection' is 'right,' and Westport 'perfection' is wrong. So, when Katie is not "doing laundry or the school drop off run," her schemes against the "mombots" of Westport tend to repeatedly supersede her family's needs and concerns ("American Housewife"). In this way, maternal competition over perfection is individualized and rooted in Katie's personal sensitivities and anxieties. This trivialization structural problematics (class/wealth) integral to meeting Intensive mothering ideals works to downplay real experiences of surveillance and judgment mothers' use against one another (outlined in the previous chapter), and it poses maternal competition as inappropriate because it focuses on mothers' experience instead of children's wellbeing.

The inappropriateness of this maternal competition is further grounded in Katie's own 'unfeminine' attitude (supposedly "confident and unapologetic"), which often comes across as uncaring and mean specifically because her focus seems to be more on herself, her feelings, and frustrations than on other members of her family or community ("About the Show"). To offset this presentation of maternal "un-care," Katie's husband, Greg, performs the (often neurotic) emotional care work for the family as he acts as his wife's and children's conscience (Episode 4 "Art Show"). This set up of gender roles within the Otto family subtly references anti-feminist narratives that position feminist women as overbearing and heartless, with little concern for families that intrude on their concerns. The subtle antifeminism is further reinforced by the presentation of Katie as a college-educated woman with 'progressive' views about women's bodies and sexuality paired with her seemingly reluctant choice to stay at home to care for her youngest child. Moreover, the show also positions feminist men, or any man with a feminist woman, as weak and overly emotional given Greg's positioning as the 'heart' of the show and Katie's conscience. As any particular episode's comedic hijinks ensue, Katie's husband consistently, and with great exasperation, reminds her of what is right.

Katie's 'perfectly imperfect' life is portrayed through three primary themes that mobilize the show plots, each theme is tied to one of her concerns about her children, a structure which highlights her use of Intensive mothering ideals to negotiate her struggles in Westport. The three themes—body image, wealth, and fitting in—are primary vectors of difference for the Ottos in Westport. As a theme, body image, is anchored to Katie's eldest child, Taylor, whom she fears is becoming ensconced in the looks-based culture of Westport women (Episode 3 "Westport Zombies"). Wealth, as a theme, is anchored to Katie's middle child, Oliver, a young die-hard capitalist whose obsession with wealth is exacerbated by his immersion into the social lives of

Westport's wealthy (Episode 5 "The Snub"). The third theme, 'fitting in,' is embodied by Katie's youngest (and favorite) child, Ana Kat, who has difficulty making friends due to a diagnosis of 'OCD,' or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (Episode 2 "The Nap"). Each of these themes undergirds a primary facet of Katie's struggles in Westport and her competitions with the mombots.

In keeping with the first theme, body image, the show portrays maternal (im)perfection by setting up weight as a primary source of competition between the mothers. Katie is cast as a size 12-14, which is the average body size for US women but larger than the 'skinnies' (Westport mothers) who work out and drink 'green health drinks' and who regularly fat shame Katie in a variety of backhanded ways (Episode 1 "Pilot"). While Katie is annoyed by their subtle aggressions, her primary concern is that Taylor is becoming assimilated to these Westport body image norms. Body size, in this context, works to create a pecking order between the mothers and thus acts as a visual marker of success (or failure) in Westport life. This becomes even more clear when we consider the original title of the show: "The Second Fattest Housewife in Westport (Andreeva). As such, Katie's weight simultaneously casts her as 'imperfect' because she is several sizes larger than the other mothers, but also as 'perfectly so,' because she resists changing herself (and her values) to 'fit in' in Westport. This refusal to conform is seen as 'revolutionary' by her friends, including Angela who calls Katie that for not submitting to Westport body norms (Episode 1 "Pilot").

The second theme, wealth, is used to portray the Otto family's 'perfectly imperfect' nature because of their middle class status, seen as a form of impoverishment in ultra-wealthy Westport. This 'class' strife (between a middle class white woman and ultrawealthy white women) pits Katie and the mombots against each other through their different attitudes toward

providing for their children's material desires (Episode 5 "The Snub"). Katie's primary class-based concerns revolve around her struggle to teach her son Oliver that there is more to life than accruing wealth. Because of her disinterest in wealth, and because of her solidly middle-class status, Katie actively works against financial competition with the mombots. Where she does compete is at an intellectual level. Here, Katie's physical attributes as an 'overweight' dark-haired woman is pitted against the slender blondness of her 'enemies' through the digs and 'smart' comments Katie makes that seem to fly over the mombot's heads. It riffs on the 'blond bimbo' stereotype and relies on the adage that "women can be smart, or they can be pretty." It also poses common sense as a function of 'difference' where the ultrawealthy, white women of Westport lack common sense, but Katie, Angela, and Doris have common sense because of their 'different' economic, racial, and sexuality knowledges, i.e., identity-based, experiences.

The third theme, 'fitting in,' portrays Katie's 'perfectly imperfect' life through the quirkiness of her youngest daughter, Ana Kat, whose display of repetitive behaviors and obsessive focus on mundane issues make her 'stick out' from the other children (Episode 2 "The Nap"). Katie's primary concern is not that Ann Kat, unlike her siblings, will assimilate and disappear into Westport life, but rather that she will remain different and thus excluded from it entirely (Episode 10 "The Play Date"). But, while Ana Kat's behaviors often lead to embarrassing and difficult moments for Katie, the larger impediment to Ana Kat's inclusion is Katie's own behavior and unwillingness or inability to 'fit in' with Westport moms (Episode 5 "The Snub"). As Angela and Doris explain to her, the other moms know that Katie does not like them so, they exclude Katie, and by extension they exclude Ana Kat from their children's events. So, along with trying to help Ana Kat work through her OCD, Katie must also learn to pretend to

get along with the other mothers, which is presented as the ultimate sacrifice and exemplary of a good mother.

It is through these three themes that Katie's enactment of Intensive Mothering ideals—as "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive" (Hays 8)—is most apparent. Her 'choices' to leave her career, to be a stay-at-home mom, to move her home in order to gain access the best schooling and care for Ana Kat, and ultimately to suffer in Westport 'mom' culture in order to raise her kids 'right,' highlight the precepts of maternal self-sacrifice and atomization inherent in the Intensive Mothering ideal. Along with this, the relational dichotomy of perfection and imperfection between the mothers of Westport portrays an omnipresent intra-maternal competition that is consistent with ways that mothers experience Intensive mothering. Importantly, the competition on the show is framed through mothers' personal frustrations and individual struggles which poses it as 'incorrectly' oriented toward the mothers' effecting their problematic distraction from an 'appropriate' focus on their children's wellbeing.

In the end, Katie always manages to refocus from her personal vendettas because she realizes what is *really* important: her children. In this way, what the show may frame as push-back against normative ideals of female bodies, mothering, and gender roles, ends up pointing to the selfishness of Katie's (a mother's) over-concern with her own needs and works, instead, to reinforce the child-centric ideals of Intensive Mothering. This framing also reinforces Intensive Mothering ideals as cultural technologies mothers can use to navigate daily life. In this way, Katie's 'perfectly imperfect' self and family are used to reify the norms of Intensive mothering through their repetition on the show as a 'normal' and 'average' American family.

This framing of the Otto family through the notion of 'imperfection' is integral to the shows' set up of the wealthy, white inhabitants of Westport as representatives of perfection (at least outwardly) which is a prime site of comedic action in the show. Katie's struggles with the tension between perfection and imperfection in raising her children to be what she considers "good human beings," is presented as a form of 'feminist' resistance to dominant Westport culture specifically in relation to body image, consumerism, and social difference ("American Housewife"). However, the struggle between (unattainable) perfection and imperfection, or certainly Katie's unhappiness with the struggle, is framed via a post-feminist sensibility.

As such, Katie's 'individual' choices—to eat and not exercise, to revel in her disdain for the "mombots" rather than get along with them, and to get distracted by her concerns rather than be absorbed by her children's / family's needs—constitute a warning about the dangers of (feminist) women's overconcern with themselves. The post-feminist warnings produce tension in the show (Katie's continual pushing against feminine norms) that is resolved in each episode as Katie overcomes her these flaws and makes the 'right' choice to put her family first. This resolution of Katie's struggles ultimately positions motherhood as the most rewarding job for Katie further cementing the Intensive Mothering paradigm as the appropriate framework for mothers' navigation of quotidian life.

Framing moms' interpersonal grievances as petty catfights which are the source of their competition enables the show to assert that a refocusing on children and family, i.e., Intensive mothering, is the solution to competitiveness between moms and, as the right maternal orientation for American mothers in daily life. Similarly, positioning Katie as 'different' from the other mothers on the show while simultaneously showing her learning to overcome her own 'petty' tendencies to focus on her family specifically recenters and circulates Intensive

Mothering ideals as 'appropriate' American mothering. Ultimately, by positioning the Ottos—a white, middle-class hetero-patriarchal family—as the 'different' family precisely because they are 'normal' in the context of a fantastical (white) ultra-wealthy community, the show specifically recenters and circulates white, middle-class, hetero-patriarchal norms—including Intensive mothering ideals and post feminism—as 'American values.

Tradition and Domesticity: Using and Disrupting Moral Motherhood in One Day at a Time

One Day at a Time utilizes ideal forms of motherhood as technologies for daily living in a very different way than *American Housewife*. Given the multi-generational living arrangement the maternal ideals of Moral Mothering can be portrayed by Lydia, the older and more traditional Cuban mother, while Penelope can portray more contemporary difficulties related to Intensive Mothering ideals. Lydia is able to express the characteristics of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness (to men). She demonstrates her piety through her adherence to and insistence on the family's participation in their Catholic faith (Episode 3 "No Mass"). From hanging pictures of the Pope around the house to a major fight with Penelope when she expresses a crisis of her own faith, Lydia's piety is shown a mainstay of her character's personality.

She also demonstrates purity in two ways: her continued relationship with her deceased husband through an active dream life where their romance continues (Episode 4 "A Snowman's Tale"), and her vocal rejection of sexual longing underlying a burgeoning "companionship" with Penelope's boss Dr. Berkowitz (Episode 8 "One Lie at a Time"). In both these instances, Lydia's purity as a woman is presented as part of her persona. She demonstrates her domesticity in her daily care for the family and house through cooking, cleaning, and other household duties. When this goes unappreciated by Penelope, Lydia goes on strike, leaving the family apartment and hiding out in Schneider's apartment, until her value is recognized more fully by her family

(Episode 3 "No Mass"). Once they do, she returns to home space as the homemaker and sets the family organization to rights.

Lastly, Lydia demonstrates her feminine submissiveness within the show through her relationships with male family figures (Episode 10 "Sex Talk,"). This includes her grandson whom she favors over everyone else in the family, through her continued relationship with her deceased husband, her flirtatious interactions with Schneider, and her strong contention that Penelope should resume her life with her former husband (i.e., show her own feminine submissiveness) in spite of Penelope's repeated inferences that her marriage was unhealthy and unhappy (Episode 12 "Hurricane Victor"). Lydia's power within and outside the family is rooted within the maternalist framing and ideal of Moral Motherhood.

Lydia's use of this motherhood technology to navigate her daily life is not surprising given the ways race, age, citizenship status, and class mediate her access to utilizing ideal forms of motherhood to negotiate her quotidian life. Moral motherhood is tied to the promotion of motherhood as a civic, democratic duty supported by love, care, and nurture in the private sphere. As a proud Cuban American immigrant, she sees herself as assimilated into American culture, often evidenced on the show by her reaction to any jokes about her accent by asserting that she doesn't have one (Episode 1 "This Is It"). Lydia wants her family to honor their Cuban heritage and culture, while also being patriotically American and attributing their very existence to the generosity of the United States (Episode 9 "Viva Cuba"). This creates a specifically civic, liberal democratic maternal framework through which she engages with her family and the world. Thus, as a woman of an older generation and as the 'home maker' of the show, she poses her labor—cooking, cleaning, and caretaking—through a specifically feminine, domestic, and 'traditional' frame of maternal care. This is a moral mothering trope of civic duty which centers

Lydia's nurturance of her daughter and grandchildren (as American citizens and the future of the nation) her primary form of civic participation.

Unlike Lydia, Penelope cannot access the characteristics of the ideal form of Moral Motherhood in the same way. Given her position as the breadwinner of the family, as a newly single parent, as a veteran, and as a woman open to new romantic relationships, using an ideal characterized by piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness is not possible (Episode 1 "This Is It). This also precludes Penelope from accessing other motherhood ideals, which can be seen through lacking portrayals of Scientific Mothering as an ideal on the show even though Penelope is cast as a medical professional. Intensive mothering makes minor appearances on the show as Penelope experiences 'mommy guilt' over time spent away from her children at work, concerns over her children's relationship with their father, and over upsetting her children with a new romantic relationship (Episode 3 "No Mass"). However, Penelope is not cast solely through the ideal of the Intensive mother given Lydia's role in care and nurturing the children in the domestic space. Instead, the show explicitly grounds Penelope's portrayal of child-focused mothering in her Cuban heritage (Episode 11 "Pride and Prejudice"). Because of this heritage, Penelope does not portray an explicitly idealized 'American' motherhood and can explore a variety of mothering frames without using ideal forms to negotiate her daily life. In this presentation, the fierceness of mothering is cast as a cultural family norm rather than a specific mothering strategy. Thus, the show offers a different approach to mothering: women cast as good mothers where mothering is a dominant theme, but not the sole focus of their lives.

Importantly, because Lydia is Penelope's mother, their 'shared' mothering responsibilities provoke tensions between them but do not devolve into competition. This is portrayed, for example, through their debates about Penelope's marital separation; a tension that

is resolved through Lydia's eventual affirmation of Penelope's decision to separate from her husband after her ex returns without having addressed his PTSD, or his subsequent addiction issues (Episode 12 "Hurricane Victor"). Thus, the resolutions of Penelope's concerns about her mothering and family are portrayed with love and empathy even when she and Lydia disagree. In this away the show takes critical stances toward the demands on mothers and shows differences between mothers, particularly through the frame of Lydia's traditionalist stance. But because they are also mother and daughter, the tensions between them as mothers demands a frame of response that includes empathy for both Penelope and Lydia.

Uniquely, this allows for a presentation of maternal relationships between the generations that can encompass a range of traditional through progressive ideas where Lydia is the most traditional, Penelope expresses a mixture of traditional and progressive ideas, and Elena is fully progressive. This narrative arc is about temporal progress which is explicitly depicted through the women's tensions rooted in differences of age, level of cultural assimilation, and their lived experiences. Within this spectrum, each woman navigates the world and negotiates for her interests in different ways—Lydia uses her feminine wiles; Penelope 'kicks butt,' and Elena uses activism—which are evaluated and judged by each other for their effectiveness, and also produce different effects in each of their lives (Episode 2 "Bobos and Mamitas"). Each also tries out the other's strategies over the course of the show, when their own strategy doesn't work well. In this way, the tensions between women's ways of negotiating for power are discussed and their capacity to hurt each other is portrayed. Any hurt is ultimately mitigated by their love for each other and their desire for the others' success which, leads to acceptance and support even through disagreement (Episode 13 "Quinces").

"The Very Difficult Decision": Controlling Available Representations of Motherhood:

Over the course of the series, *American Housewife* has been regularly criticized for its handling of a variety of topics by both audiences and critics (Framke, Goodman). For example, critics have noted the show's "mean spirited" (Schwartz) and "bullying" jokes (Gutierrez), while conservative audiences in particular have claimed the show has an anti-conservative political bias (Slusher). Critics and viewers who expected *American Housewife* to adhere to its marketing regularly note the failed portrayal of positive body image portrayed through regular "fat shaming" along with the use of stereotypes for cheap laughs (McFarland, Dennison, Genzlinger, Goodman). Alternately, conservative and religious-oriented responses accuse the show of presenting the various mothers as selfish and uncaring, saying the main character "drains all the joy from motherhood" and "[s]he goes as far as bashing her children and making them feel like a hindrance or catastrophe" (One Million Moms, Charisma).

Since its first airing, *American Housewife* has consistently garnered mixed critical and audience reviews and mediocre ratings scoring around 6 on a 10 point scale, and the show has not received nominations or awards to date ("Ratings"). Most recently, during its third season, *American Housewife* suffered a 23% drop in ratings in the 18-49 demographic, a sign of audience disinterest that typically acts as a primary indicator for cancellation on mainstream networks ("Ordered"). Despite the ongoing lack of positive critical response and large ratings loss, *American Housewife* has been re-purchased by ABC and remained in the weekly line-up although it has been moved between weekday programming slots ostensibly to maximize the network's audience for the show ("Ordered"). As of Sept. 21, 2020, Country Music Television (CMT) which runs multiple family-oriented and conservative family sitcoms, has acquired the rights to air reruns of *American Housewife*. It is an interesting choice given the conservative

critiques of the show. It also means that *American Housewife*—with low ratings and lacking

critical acclaim—will continue airing regularly even if ABC stops purchasing new seasons of the

series (@CMT, "CMT Acquires").

One Day at a Time has received highly positive critical responses since it began airing.

The show has been lauded for its inclusiveness and for its handling of difficult topics including

race, sexuality, addiction, and citizenship status (Bradley and Robinson, Lyon, Poniewozik). And

a robust 'fandom,' including socially networked 'fan wiki' pages, has been developed by

engaged audience members who share information about the show since Netflix does not provide

detailed marketing materials. This type of audience-generated community and support has been

more commonly associated with science fiction and fantasy programming (e.g., *Star Trek*, *Buffy

the Vampire Slayer,* and *Marvel's Agents of Shield* among others), but has more recently begun

to develop around other programming with the advent of streaming and Web-based television.

In addition to critical acclaim and audience response supportive of *One Day at a Time*'s

representative inclusion, cast and show producers have publicly committed to presenting

nuanced characters and non-dominant socio-cultural experiences as aspects of normal

'American' life. For example, Rita Moreno, the show's most recognized actor amongst the cast,

regularly discussed the actors' and producers' refusal to leverage stereotypical representations

for laughs in her interviews promoting the show (Castillo). This care in representation is intrinsic

to the development of the show's deeply committed fan-base and its critical success.

Critical ratings for the show average between 8.25 to 10 out of 10. Along with these

consistently high critical ratings, the show has been nominated for and won multiple awards each

year of its run. Despite this success, during the show's third season, Netflix announced via

Twitter that it was cancelling *One Day at a Time* from its network line-up due to lack of viewers

(@Netflix 3/14/2019). This announcement caused an uproar among the show's fan base which

supported by celebrities such as Lin Manuel Miranda produced a social media campaign—

#SaveODAAT—that ultimately supported producer efforts to move the show to the POP

Network for its fourth season, with an agreement for future streaming release (after several years

per the Netflix contract) on CBS All Access (Petski).

The actual verbiage of the notice cancelling a show was strange as it simultaneously

claimed lack of viewership, noted that *One Day at a Time* filled a gap in programming for Latinx

audiences, and expressed Netflix's commitment to diversity (selected portions of the Twitter

thread):

> We've made the very difficult decision not to renew One Day at a Time for a
> fourth season. The choice did not come easily - we spent several weeks trying to
> find a way to make another season work but in the end simply not enough people
> watched to justify another season. / … And to anyone who felt seen or
> represented - possibly for the first time - by ODAAT, please don't take this as an
> indication your story is not important. The outpouring of love for this show is a
> firm reminder to us that we must continue finding ways to tell these stories
> (@Netflix 3/14/2019)

This framing was strongly contested by fans and critics alike. One critical response poses the

problem with the show's cancellation this way:

> Aside from being a joy to watch, it is a rare example of a television show about
> the United States-born children and grandchildren of Latin American immigrants.
> That's why its cancellation is more than just the loss of a critical darling - it's an
> egregious erasure of Latinos at a time when anti-Latino rhetoric floods our
> political discourse, and it's a reminder of Netflix's tepid support for our stories,
> just when we need them the most (Erazo)

This tweet poses the cancellation not simply as a 'bad choice,' but as a reckless disavowal by

Netflix of Latinx Americans with wider socio-political implications rooted in the shows ability to

counteract negative portrayals of Latinx families in the US. This response underscores how

marginalized groups experience and understand the impact of the media industry on their daily experience and highlights the effects of racialized bias within the media industry.

Netflix's cancellation of the wildly popular *One Day at a Time* and ABC's retention of the poorly rated *American Housewife* raise interesting questions about both ratings and cultural norms. First, these events call into question the use of ratings information and critical success as determining factors for show longevity on a network. Second, the shows' network histories point us toward the structural, socio-cultural, and political implications of networks' programming choices. The first issue around 'data-driven' decision making by networks poses a site where decisions can be justified without transparency. A true comparison of both show's viewership data is impossible given that Netflix does not provide this data to the public and Nielsen ratings (publicly available for regular network shows) are not used for streaming platforms which determine what data they will share (Poniewozik). Thus, there is no way to verify Netflix's claims about viewership of *One Day at a Time* or to compare that data to the Nielsen data for *American Housewife*. The critical statistics and awards data, however, can be compared and indicates in this case that critical success was likely not a factor in network choices about show longevity.

Second, these two choices which defy supposed industry programming norms, indicate that cultural factors are at play with socio-political implications. Analysis of network programming choices offers a way to examine how popular cultural representations use common discourses in ways that shape and (re)assert hegemonic norms at a cultural infrastructural level. Netflix's cancellation of *One Day at a Time* has immediately apparent racialized socio-cultural and political impacts due to its effect of reducing the already small number of positive representations of Latinx American family life. Moreover, ABC's retention of *American*

Housewife also has racialized socio-cultural and political impacts. These are, perhaps, more subtle, but become clear in viewer debates that contest *American Housewife's* portrayal of mothering as vulgar, heartless, and not feminine. All terms which reference hegemonic (white, middle-upper class, hetero-patriarchal) ideals of mothering, mothers, and motherhood.

Importantly, networks' choices to cancel programs, even when they get picked up elsewhere, effects a 'deplatforming' of shows which can limit, and often reduce, viewer access. This is inherently political when access to non-dominant portrayals of American life, motherhood, and mothering as *normal*—in this case representations of Latinx-American mothers, working class motherhood, single-divorced mothers, and mothers with illness / ability issues, as well as multi-generational women-led households—is limited.

How Network, Program, and Content Interactivity Produce Cultural Infrastructural Effects

Industry controls over portrayals of motherhood, mothering, and mothers are thus enacted through decisions by networks to purchase, effectively market, and support specific shows in ways that shape how motherhood works as a cultural infrastructure. Here, media infrastructures and institutions work as nodes within the motherhood infrastructure with the ability to throttle access to the variety of portrayals and thus expand or limit the scope of 'acceptable' behaviors, practices, discourses, and embodiments available to mothers along with the socio-cultural, political, and economic expectation of mothers.

Choices to prioritize representations of hegemonic ideals and discourses about motherhood, particularly by framing shows in the language of 'authenticity,' average 'American' family life, and 'realism,' poses cultural infrastructural barriers that exclude mothers and mothering which do not meet the rubric of the hegemonic norm as it can be represented via visual media. In this way, specific groups of mothers' quotidian experience and practices shape

what types of programming are deemed *au courant* and likely to be successful. Simultaneously, the media industry's institutional and economic norms inclusive of socio-political biases shape access to the variety of representations of motherhood, mothering, and mothers. Network choices, then, often work to reinforce dominant, hegemonic structures.

Network choices work in concert with program marketing, and episodic content to shape how selected shows will be framed in order to appeal to audiences. These marketing appeals work to shape which socio-cultural, political, and economic frames can be used in relation to wider social issues. For example, *American Housewife's* portrayal of Intensive Mothering as a 'catfight' between mothers, diminishes the material and divisive effects of Intensive norms (large expenditures of time and money along with hyper competitiveness) on and between mothers. Such effects become apparent when analyzing both shows' episodic content which takes up a similar range of topics including LGBTQ+ identity, class struggle, mental health, and race, but portrays them in vastly different ways while simultaneously arguing they are more 'realistic' approaches.

American Housewife embeds these 'progressive' issues in the roles of mothers on the show to develop portrayals of individual mother-subjects characterized by difference. This approach relies on stereotypes that both reduces the complexity of each character's lived experience to a single facet and atomizes the mothers primarily along racialized and classed vectors of identity. Alternately, *One Day at a Time* embeds them in various roles including mothers, children, and non-family members to develop the cast as a relational and interconnected 'community.' This approach works to broaden the range of subjective experience and therefore the range of characters who are subjects.

Both shows also incorporate portrayals that leverage the tenets of various mothering ideals. *American Housewife* reinforces the atomization and competition engendered through Intensive Mothering frames as well as promoting its proscriptions that 'good' mothers are all-consumed by their maternal responsibilities and children's wellbeing. In conjunction with the use of stereotypes and representations of fierce mothering, this works to reinforce ideas about which women can access and use ideal forms by reinforcing racial, class, sexuality, and citizenship hierarchies between mothers. Alternately, *One Day at a Time* juxtaposes mothering ideals—specifically moral mothering and intensive mothering—in ways that disrupt their normative proscriptions. This sets up maternal and child relationships as ongoing and changing over time, and it portrays the difficulties women face in light of mothering ideals as complex avenues through which women build affinities. The downside to *One Day at a Time's* portrayal is that these relations and disruptions occur within existing familial relationships which to a great extent sidesteps addressing socio-cultural, economic, and identity-based differences between women.

In taking these differing approaches to representation, both framed as 'real' and as 'progressive' (implicitly feminist and diverse), the shows' producers, writers, and casts can expand or restrict access to which representations of motherhood, mothering, and mothers that audiences see, relate to, and incorporate as referential into their range of 'appropriate' maternal attitudes, behaviors, and material practices. These differences between the two shows' approaches—including production control over audiences' access to representations along with networks' control over programming—highlight how media companies' (inclusive of personnel) act as cultural infrastructural 'gate-keeping' nodes by determining which interpretations and imaginaries of motherhood, mothers, and mothering circulate within the motherhood infrastructure.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored popular cultural representations of fierce motherhood subjectivities and the ways motherhood ideals are reinforced as cultural technologies through an analysis of representations of motherhood, mothering, and mothers in two contemporary situation comedies. Building on the prior chapters' discussions of motherhood as a cultural infrastructure and the fierce mothering phenomenon, this analysis outlines the relational tensions between televisual media, mothers' online communicative practices, and broader sociocultural concerns to show how motherhood discourses, ideal forms, and strategies such as fierce mothering work together to (re)produce hierarchies between women.

Through a comparative, tripartite—program, content, and network—analysis of the first seasons of *American Housewife* (2016-present) and *One Day at a Time* (2017-present) this chapter presents a study of how the media industry acts as a primary node in the cultural infrastructure of motherhood by circulating representations that can promote or disrupt dominant ideals and hegemonic norms. Reinforcement of dominant and hegemonic norms occurs when networks, programs, and content limit access to the variety of representations of motherhood in line with hierarchical structures (e.g., race, class, religion, citizenship, etc.). This is particularly insidious when programs that claim to offer more 'realistic' portrayals of American mothers and families—like *American Housewife*—coopt progressive notions such as diversity and women's empowerment only to reify white, middle-class, heteronormative family and community structures. Such maneuvers rely on the use of stereotypes and align with other reassertions of traditionalism embedded in new maternalist socio-cultural, economic, and political attitudes described in earlier chapters. Importantly, analyses of these two shows' representations of motherhood, mothering, and mothers clarifies how maternal representations in the media

industry and popular culture can work as sites of power, agency, and negotiation between mothers and how mothers learn to use them as such.

As the preceding analyses show, the episodic content of the first seasons of *American Housewife* and *One Day at a Time* both incorporate portrayals that leverage the tenets of various mothering ideals. Whether shows reinforce or disrupt specific hegemonic social norms and televisual conventions, both dominant and non-dominant portrayals remain framed within the terms of motherhood ideals in order to be legible to audiences. This functions to highlight how mothering ideals both enable mothers' navigation of daily life and proscribe mothers' the scope of what 'appropriate' daily life entails. In this way episodic content shapes socio-cultural and political norms as well as economic practices when mothers internalize and reference these portrayals as modes for navigating their own lives. This is why network choices which control access to the variety of representative portrayals of motherhood, mothering, and mothers and program marketing which casts traditional and ideal frames of motherhood as 'progressive' are crucial mechanisms of how power is employed between people, institutions, and the state when motherhood is viewed as a cultural infrastructure.

The media's reinforcement of hegemonic norms has negative implications for mothers' strategic uses of media to forward their own political aims. In particular, "[t]he politics of motherhood in the media is not just about how media represent mothers. Sometimes, it is about how mothers use media to pursue their own political goals. Often, these mothers consciously or unconsciously draw on motherhood stereotypes to make their stories more compelling" (Kinnick 19). As the possible representations of motherhood, mothering, and mothers are limited to hegemonic norms and dominant ideals, so too are the possibilities for different mothers. Specifically, it is mothers that cannot properly leverage the characteristics of these norms and

ideals, who are limited in the realm of political legibility. This is because "[in] addition to invoking sympathy, motherhood provides credibility. Ironically, speaking as 'just a mother' often carries more weight than speaking as a policy expert, or a feminist leader, because it is viewed with less suspicion" (Kinnick 20). So, our socio-cultural image of who qualifies as 'just a mother' works to delimit whose speech is viewed as legitimate and whose is not (as with the case of the Mothers of the Movement described in chapter two).

The ultimate outcome of limiting representations of motherhood, mothering, and mothers whether it comes from women's use of media or the media industry and whether it occurs in the popular cultural realm or in policy realms is the reproduction of social difference where some mothers are seen as more legitimate than other mothers typically along vectors of identity such as race, class, citizenship status, sexual orientation (Collins 176-183). Because "[i]deologies of motherhood act as a hidden political force," when certain groups of women are afforded more legitimacy, and therefore more power to negotiate daily living, their alignment with hegemonic norms and dominant ideals is further solidified (Kinnick 22). This can be seen in the use of maternalism as an effective tool of radicalization into extreme political ideologies that forward white supremacy (Mattheis 130-134). This is increasingly true online in the momosphere (as I will detail in the next chapter) because Alt-Right women specifically use maternalism—what I refer to as "Alt-Maternalism"—to recruit women to their movement by leveraging discourses of (white) motherhood and traditionalism to articulate white mothers' specialized role within white supremacist movements (Mattheis 130).

CONCLUSION: NEW MATERNALISM TAKEN TO EXTREMES

> *"...it is easier once again for white women to believe the dangerous fantasy that if you are good enough, pretty enough, sweet enough, quiet enough, teach the children to behave, hate the right people, and marry the right men, then you will be allowed to coexist with patriarchy in relative peace..."*
>
> *Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider*

The preceding chapters provide an analysis of how consent to culturally hegemonic structures is derived from mothers' efforts to improve their quotidian lives by negotiating with and for power through maternalism. Chapter one explored my conception of cultural infrastructure as a framework for understanding motherhood's function within patriarchal societies. Taking a cultural infrastructural view offers a space of analysis that can account for mothers' agency in concert with the effects of structural power. It also shows how motherhood (and likely other specially socialized subject positions) work in multiple ways to support the ongoing reproduction of socio-cultural, political, and economic hierarchies over time. Chapter two provided a history of the recent phenomenon I have termed 'fierce mothering.' Through this history, it is clear that 'fierce mothering,' is a useful communicative strategy for the women able to successfully wield such maternal fierceness. Chapter three, showed how fierce mothering works through mothers' production of themselves as subjects, leverages ideal forms of motherhood as cultural technologies, and creates digital sociality as mothers constitute new

publics, or more properly new forms of intimate publicity with each other online. Problematically, chapter three also outlines how mothers' use of fierce motherhood subjectivities also circulates and reinforces hegemonic norms along with post-feminist sensibilities and new maternalist attitudes.

Chapter four explored the 'how' of fierce mothering as a practice that is enacted through popular cultural media as a primary venue where women negotiate for and with power. As a strategic response that recuperates a longstanding ideal of US women's 'proper' civic role, fierce mothering both enables women's public speech and constrains them to the use of sentimental forms and discourses. In this way, fierce mothering, situated within the momosphere, benefits women who can successfully utilize and properly perform its reformulation of sentimental materialism to project themselves as appropriate female liberal democratic subjects. It also highlights how such online publicity poses detriments for those same women by increasing fierce mothers' experiences of surveillance and disciplining both on and offline.

Chapter five explored the mediation of fierce mothering using a popular culture and popular industry lens by analyzing the role of televisual media and showing how it not only reflects the phenomenon of fierce mothering but also reinforces mothers' appropriate use of maternalism—a return to ideal forms of motherhood—as the 'right' response to mothers' contemporary problems. This analysis highlighted how the media industry works as a node within the motherhood infrastructure by exploring network programming choices as well as show content as a framework for circulating and reinforcing hegemonic norms of mothering by controlling access to alternate representations of motherhood, mothering, and mothers.

Why Does an Analysis of Motherhood Subjectivities Matter?

The sheer number and variety of fierce mothering subjectivities that have reached national awareness suggest that there is a utility for women in identifying with particularized of political, social, or economic concerns in and through their roles as mothers. Importantly, this utility for women is present irrespective of progressive or conservative political leanings; although these do temper the framings of new maternalist claims by women and the contours of different motherhood subjectivities. The question remains though whether fierce mothering subjectivities have a measurable political impact and whether any such impacts will sustain long-term change.

Returning to the "soccer mom" as the origin of the shift to politicizing and commoditizing maternal subjectivities, Susan J. Carroll argues that the result of the media and popular focus on this narrow group of women effected an erasure or "disempowerment" of other women and feminist concerns that had been building political efficacy through the prior 1994 midterm election cycle (9-11). This fits within the timeframe and response that Angela McRobbie has described as a cultural shift to post feminism, which as she argues is a sensibility that similarly works to undermine and neutralize feminist goals through its focus on a return to femininity, marriage, and motherhood (7-22). Similarly, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels argue that the "new momism" erases feminist histories and goals related to increasing structural support for mothers while simultaneously coercing women to focus narrowly on individual maternal experience by bombarding them with a "highly romanticized but demanding view of motherhood in which the standards of success are impossible to meet" (kindle loc 133-138). And, as Naomi Mezzy and Cornelia Pillard argue, "new maternalism," articulated by Moms Rising and by Mama Grizzlies reproduces a particularly traditional rendering of unequal

gendered divisions of labor by rooting women's power in mothers' specialized roles (232-245).

Thus, while fierce mothering presents a new and seemingly 'dynamic' maternal communicative

strategy, it is imbued with notions of women's progress that are constrained by the notion that

'real progress' can best be found in women's return to 'tradition.'

Fierce mothering as a communicative strategy does grant some women more access to

engage publicly. Ultimately, however, it works to maintain patriarchal socio-spatial organization,

socio-political and economic hierarchies, and detracts from work toward structural changes

which would benefit women. This is particularly true in relation to policies and practices that

benefit women in their role as mothers such as equal pay, paid parental and family leave, and

access to affordable, high quality childcare. Furthermore, fierce mothering reinforces existing

practices and policies that pose differential material impacts on women in ways that hinder the

development of solidarity between women of different backgrounds. Specifically, fierce

mothering's ubiquitous focus on individual maternal success which enables (and even promotes)

increased social and institutional surveillance and disciplining supports structural and

institutional policies and practices that maintain group based divisions between women along

multiple axes of difference, particularly race and class as well as citizenship and marital status.

Taking a cultural infrastructural approach to motherhood allows explorations of the

interrelationships between motherhood, institutions, maternalism, and other structures of

dominance that attend to women's agency. Fierce mothering from this view highlights how

mothers can and do choose to accept and wield power within patriarchal structures. It also

highlights how fierce mothers' use of that same power is limited by dominant norms. Thus,

fierce mothering as a phenomenon presents a unique opportunity to explore processes of cultural

hegemony, specifically how consent is manufactured within non-dominant populations in the

contemporary moment. It provides a view of how tightly woven whiteness and hetero-patriarchy are into the fabric of liberal democracy in the United States (and hence, has been exported to some extent globally) since its inception. Importantly, this exploration shows how multiple structures of dominance come to work as a complex that gains it strength from its flexibility making it difficult to dismantle.

Viewed as part of a longer historical context, fierce mothering as a communicative strategy prioritizes heterosexual femininity and women's domesticity as a framework for women's civic participation. As Lori Merish notes in her discussion of sentimental materialism, this type of framing of women's liberal democratic subjectivity is grounded in a specifically white, middle-upper class epistemological stance (33-39). As part of a historical patterning of US maternal civic participation, fierce mothering reformulates this racialized, classed, and gendered epistemology in the contemporary context. Moreover, this grounding also positions fierce mothering as a set of discourses that primarily interpolates hetero, white middle-class women which is clear in the demographics of fierce mothers who predominantly self-disclose as heterosexual, middle-upper class and often college-educated women. Racial identification is generally not self-disclosed except by non-white women. As such, unmarked whiteness is deeply entrenched in fierce mothering discourses which continue historical communicative practices of universalizing whiteness through its absence. In this way, fierce mothering reinforces white femininity as an implicit, yet intrinsic aspect of ideal motherhood.

Extreme Mamas: #TradWives, Alt-Maternalism, and QAnon

A cultural infrastructural approach to motherhood shows patterns of use and behavior over time which highlight the flexibility of hegemonic responses to structural change. The ability to analyze these patterns relationally shows interconnections between seemingly diffuse

expressions and practices. In this section, I highlight two such online maternalist subjectivities: #TradWife subjectivity and Alt-Right (white supremacist) maternal subjectivity. These extreme approaches to new maternalism highlight a penultimate expression of the internalization of white hetero-patriarchal hegemony through mother-power. Alongside them is an emerging and potentially dangerous trend of mothers becoming entrenched in support for the rapidly globalizing QAnon conspiracy theory. QAnon conspiracy culture is a Far-Right political phenomenon which has incorporated a rabidly anti-leftist framework through its manipulation and development of the #PizzaGate conspiracy theory that left-wing political elites (i.e., Hillary Clinton and the DNC) are involved in a child sex abuse plot that they use their governmental power to hide (La France). This is particularly important in the current online context which increasingly provides a platform for extreme ideologies of gender and race which are often built around discussions of women's proper roles, specifically their role as mothers. Women participating in these ideologies tend to ground their narratives in subjective frameworks that in many ways draw from new maternalist sensibilities in a similar, if extreme, version of fierce mothering as a communicative strategy.

#TradWife and Alt-Right Maternalism:

#Trad culture revolves around women participants' desires to participate in 'traditional' women's roles which pose marriage and stay-at-home mothering as the ultimate source of female happiness and fulfillment (Petitt "Darling", Stewart, *Trad Wife*). #Trad culture does not explicitly exclude non-white women, but the predominant influencers and participants online are white women even though some non-white women identify as #Trad wives. The #Trad wife ideal is represented by imagery of the (white) middle class housewife of the 1950s (Blin, Howard, Titkemeyer). Such imagery is common alongside narratives about the joys of

domesticity. Motherhood is an assumed role for #Trad wives which poses maternalism as part and parcel of the discussion. In this context, maternalism is aimed toward preserving 'traditional' society, religious values, and national cultures (Petitt "Darling").

Embedded in #Trad culture is a class lifestyle that affords the #TradWife to eschew work outside the home. In fact, many of the discussions on influencer blogs are about how to afford or work toward affording a #Trad lifestyle (Odom, Petitt "Darling", Stewart). #TradWife public narratives (often in interviews with media) rehash the 'Mommy Wars' arguments as a primary framing to describe how they 'oppressed' and 'silenced' in contemporary culture specifically by feminists and the media (Petitt "Hate"). As such, #Trad culture takes an overt anti-feminist stance, specifically portraying feminist women and the media as threats by using a 'choice for thee, but not for me' argument in regard to feminist and popular media critiques of their lifestyles.

#TradWife culture online, like fierce mothering strategies, is rooted in a white epistemological frame. Here, white—specifically white feminine—ways of knowing the world and experience are embedded into #TradWife subjectivity. This is visible in the idealization of the 1950s housewife which poses 'ideal motherhood' as heterosexual, white, and middle-upper class as well as properly located in the domestic sphere. Crucially, the 'traditional' in #Trad culture acts as a key discursive framing for dispersing this unmarked white feminine epistemology. It also provides one frame of connection through which Alt-Right actors, particularly white "Identitarian"—white identity adherents—engage with #TradWives who they see as a potential recruiting pool (Mattheis 153-155).

#TradWife and Alt-Right maternal subjectivities are interrelated although not entirely overlapping such that there are Alt-Right identified #TradWives, but not all #TradWives identify

as Alt-Right.[34] Alt-Right women's relationship to maternalism, like #TradWife maternalism, is rooted in motherhood as a 'natural' role for (white) women. Alt-Right maternalism, however, explicitly forwards a white feminine epistemology as a basis for spreading white 'identity' narrations of racist and anti-Semitic discourse with the goal of recruiting white women to the ideology. I coined the term "alt-maternalism" to describe the pairing of new maternalist logics "with anti-multiculturalism, white entho-nationalism, and hate frameworks" which underscores women's role in reproducing "white culture as the primary issue to which white-Euro 'mother-power' must attend" (Mattheis 143).

Alt-Right maternal subjectivity explicitly leverages US maternalism's relation to structures of dominance. Like #Trad narratives, Alt-maternalist narratives begin with framings of women's 'natural desires' for marriage and motherhood as a foundation for their specialized, gender role and proper social position in relation to male 'leadership' (read dominance). They diverge into explicit white supremacist narratives through the extension of such 'natural' maternal desire into specifically racialized framing of 'natural' sexual desire (Mattheis 145). Here, women's 'natural' sexual desire for men is asserted as part of a broader 'eugenic' process of Darwinian-style sex selection that ensures the 'integrity' of the races. Thus, for Alt-Right women, their desire to marry and have children with white men is both 'natural' (i.e., biological) and ensures the purity and superiority of the white race (Mattheis 145). Alt-maternalism allows Alt-Right women's access to gender-limited power within the Alt-Right community because it roots their speech in the proper gendered frame by specifically denying their desire to 'lead' which remains within men's purview.

Importantly, these extreme maternal subjectivities take the two priorities of new maternalism and fierce mothering—femininity and domesticity—and amplify them while

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simultaneously taking a vociferous anti-feminist stance. Both are extreme extensions of post-feminism which posit that not only has feminism achieved its goals, but that feminism's goals were a disaster for women. So, for women to achieve 'true' liberation feminism's work must be undone. #TradWife culture provides a view of how embedded white epistemologies work to reinforce structures of dominance through maternalism. And Alt-Right maternal discourse explicitly ties maternalism to the reproduction of structures of dominance, specifically white, hetero-patriarchal supremacy.

Mothers Engaging in QAnon Conspiracy Culture:

The most recent example of extreme maternalism, in fact so recent that any findings can only be considered preliminary, is the expansion of mothers participating in QAnon conspiracy culture online. The rise in participation of mothers—who currently appear to be predominantly white and middle-upper class—follows a QAnon campaign coopting the #SaveTheChildren hashtag. The cooptation campaign has been particularly successful on Instagram as momfluencers have shared material suggesting that the domestic/home goods site Wayfair has been sex trafficking children by shipping them inside cabinetry (Roose, Tiffany). An additional avenue for maternal support derives from QAnon's practice of incorporating other anti-government and anti-leftist topics within its culture. For example, some QAnon adherents forward anti-vaccine theories that the COVID-19 pandemic is a 'deep state' hoax (Breland).

What is important in the context of extreme fierce mothering is the mobilization of momfluencers and 'protect the children' framings that are spreading the conspiracy in the momosphere. This indicates that framings like #SaveTheChildren elicit responses from mothers online who then circulate the material broadly among their networks. Given the coopted slogan's imperative demand for a protective response, fierce mothers may be likely respondents who

share such materials. The developing linkages of QAnon with anti-vaccine proponents provides specific points of connection for Anti-Vaxxer Moms who may also circulate QAnon messaging through their networks. While it is likely that many of the moms who have shared such material are not deeply engaged with QAnon (at least not yet), maternal participation appears to rely on fierce mothering frames—mothers who see themselves as warriors on behalf of children—as its basis of circulation online.

These three cases provide clear examples of how power accessible via patriarchally approved maternalism ultimately requires mothers' complicity in reproducing dominant structures and prevents the development of solidarity between mothers across axes of difference. Importantly, utilization of such power is not limited to any single group of mothers, however these types of maternalist strategies have historically been used and continue to be leveraged primarily by hetero, white middle-upper class women across the political spectrum. These cases also point to an urgent need to move 'upstream' to understand how whiteness is embedded in and mobilized through gender in less spectacular, more normative usages of maternal power. This upstream movement is a primary goal of my research and this project. Ultimately, while these examples take new maternalism to extremes, such outcomes are, as I have shown, foreseeable outcomes of the historical patterns and contemporary deployments of idealized (hetero, able-bodied, white middle-upper class citizen) motherhood.

Refusing Consent to Cultural Hegemony: (white) Maternalism and "The Master's Tools"

Audre Lorde coined the term "the master's tools," in a short essay originally presented as comments at a feminist academic conference in 1979, and subsequently published in a book of her collected of essays, *Sister Outsider*. Lorde's insistence on structures of domination as mutually constitutive and overlapping precedes Kimberlé Crenshaw's development of

intersectional theory ("Demarginalizing" 139-40) and Patricia Hill Collins' articulation of the "matrix of domination" (34) but presages them in many ways. Her essays in *Sister Outsider*, and perhaps most famously, her metaphor of "the Master's Tools," critiques white feminists and the US feminist movement for its reproduction of a variety of forms of discrimination. At only three pages in length the piece is short, but it is packed with insights and truths about intra-gender power relations and barriers to solidarity between women. I turn to this text among the many applicable writings by Lorde because its call to action provides a way to think about getting outside of the dynamics discussed in this project. Crucially, as this work has shown, her call to action, made decades ago, still demands our attention and labor.

The most famous quote from the text is the sentence (emphasis in original): "*For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house* (112). This line is well known by feminists, but the rest of the passage is not often referenced which poses a problem for doing the work of Lorde's call. She continues (emphasis added): "They [the master's tools] may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And, this fact is *only threatening* to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support" (112). It is in the end of the passage that the real heart of the argument hits home and the women who are required to do the work are called to action.

But what are 'the master's tools' exactly? Earlier passages in the text provide clarity. Lorde says:

> It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians. And yet, I stand here as a Black lesbian feminist, having been invited to comment within the only panel at this conference where the input of Black feminists and lesbians is represented. What this says about the vision of this conference is sad, in a country where racism, sexism, and homophobia are inseparable (110)

This passage shows that Lorde's thinking incorporates a variety of identity categories—poor, Black, Third World, and lesbian—as well as 'isms'—racism, sexism, and homophobia—within 'the master's tools.' Lorde, however, is not referring only to overt discrimination, she continues after this passage with a discussion of supportive relationships between women saying, "it is only in the patriarchal model of nurturance that women 'who attempt to emancipate themselves pay perhaps too high a price for the results'" and that "our real power is rediscovered" in relationships with women (111) Moreover, "[i]t is this real connection [nurturing relationships between women] which is so feared by a patriarchal world" (111). Through this passage, it becomes clearer that Lorde is not just discussing identity or discrimination as 'the master's tools,' but she is also including processes of division between women where identity and discrimination are utilized to construct and reinforce barriers to women's solidarity.

The next sentence, the last in that passage, is crucial. Lorde says (emphasis added): "Only within a patriarchal structure is *maternity the only social power open to women*" (111). Here, Lorde positions motherhood as a primary white, hetero-patriarchal mechanism of dividing women which results in engaging white women's complicity with dominant structures. In Lorde's other essays in *Sister Outsider*, she explicitly refers to this process of building women's complicity to racial, sexual, class, and other forms of dominance as a type of seduction. Lorde notes that, "white women face the pitfall of being seduced into joining the oppressor under the pretense of sharing power. ...For white women there is a wider range of pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools (118-19). This is an apt description of the processes of manufacturing consent that I have worked to explicate in this project.

This seduction to complicity with white, heteropatriarchal dominance is one way through which 'the master's tools' are deployed by women against other women. The other primary way

is through women's internalization of their oppression. Lorde describes both saying: "As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression." (112).

For Lorde, the way out of this trap is value our differences, to expel our fear of and reliance on difference as a source of power so that "[i]n our world, divide and conquer [becomes] define and empower" (111). By define and empower, Lorde means "[d]ifference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening" (111). And, this must become our goal because, "[o]nly within that interdependency of [our] different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters" (111).

I offer this extended meditation on Lorde's discussion because I believe she speaks most directly to dealing with the hegemonic processes I have outlined in the preceding chapters. Her conceptualization of 'the master's tools,' provides a useful frame for thinking about how fierce mothering and other similar practices engage our consent to and participation in structures of dominance. And her solution, while difficult, roots resistance to structures of dominance in the development of an ethics of care between women that is built on recognition and respect which can disrupt the atomizing effects of 'sentimental duty.' As with the intergenerational familial bond between women portrayed on the show *One Day at a Time* (discussed in the previous chapter), an ethics of care rooted in recognition and respect allows women to manage their differences through compassion while also allowing disagreement and frustration between women to act as a source of deeper engagement and a substrate for change. Lorde, unlike *One*

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Day at a Time, imagines that such an ethics of care can be built between women when familial bonds of love are not the guiding source of recognition and respect.

To underscore how this may be possible, I highlight existing non-dominant modes of engaging motherhood as a "symbol of power" (Collins 190), rather than engaging with maternalism as a basis for civic participation. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins describes how black mothers have developed strategies and practices of survival and resistance through their experience with the social conditions of "slavery, Southern rural life, and class-stratified, racially segregated neighborhoods in earlier periods of urban Black migration" (177). Moreover, black mothers have had to develop these strategies and practices while experiencing the sexual and gendered politics of race where "[t]he controlling images of the mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother and the practices they justify are designed to oppress" and work to exclude them and their families' from accessing the normative (white) "traditional family ideal" (Collins 174-76).

In response to the enforced labor of slavery, and post-slavery survival necessitating black mothers' continued labor, primarily outside the home, "African and African-American communities have also recognized that vesting one person [a mother] with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible" (Collins 178). Strategically drawing from African cooperative child-rearing models, mothering responsibilities, while the province of biological mothers, were extended to wider networks of kin and fictive kin such that "[g]randmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins" and even close friends and neighbors "act as othermothers by taking on child-care responsibilities for another's children" (Collins 178). In this way, mothering becomes aimed at the survival of black children and the black community as a whole, which differs substantially from the white "traditional family ideal" which focuses on

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individual, nuclear families and privatization (Collins 182). Because of the extension of maternal

responsibility, black women "not only feel accountable to their own kin, they experience a bond

with all of the Black communities' children" which develops "a more generalized ethic of

caring" as the context in which black mothers' civic engagement through direct action and

political activism occurs (Collins 189). Moreover, it is through their community work (direct

action and political activism) and care for the most vulnerable in black communities, that black

women engage and earn the symbolic power of motherhood (192). Thus, hallmark characteristics

of black mothering that differentiate it from dominant (white) modes of motherhood are shared

responsibility, cooperation, community (rather than individual) focus, and direct action.

These characteristics and cultural sensibilities of black motherhood can be seen in the

'different' practices of the Mothers of the Movement in the context of fierce mothering. The

Mothers of the Movement, unlike other fierce motherhood subjectivities, includes sisters as well

as biological mothers (Collins' othermothers) and also do not follow typical fierce mothering

practices of online communication (as noted in chapter two). Instead of focusing on consumption

of products or even lobbying political officials—both of which some of the women do, but to a

limited extent as compared to other fierce mothers—a primary focus of their use of fierce

mothering is community work. The Mothers of the Movement have continuously engaged in

public talks about problem of police brutality and flawed policing (Wright, "Douglas"). They

have also engaged in campaigns to get out the vote, particularly in black communities where

voter suppression is highly targeted (Riley and Brewington, Sanchez, Zaru), and several of the

Mothers of the Movement have run for local office themselves ("McBath," Ali). In these

practices, we can see how, as Collins describes, "[c]ommunity othermothers have made

important contributions in building a different type of community in often hostile political and

economic surroundings" (190). Moreover, the Mothers' participation, as community othermothers, "in activist mothering demonstrates a clear rejection of separateness and individual interest as the basis of either community organization or individual self-actualization.... [as they] model a very different value system, one whereby ethics of caring and personal accountability move communities forward" (192).

Another example of how such community othermothering works is the recent development of Moms 4 Housing, a "collective of homeless and marginally housed mothers" who have come together to address "housing insecurity" (Charnock) by "uniting mothers, neighbors and friends to reclaim housing for the Oakland community from the big banks and real estate speculators" ("Home"). The Moms 4 Housing collective was started by two San Francisco Bay Area mothers—Dominique Walker and Sameerah Karim—who could not afford the prohibitively expensive housing in the region, even while working multiple jobs (Charnock). Walker and Karim responded to the situation by occupying a corporate-owned, vacant house as a protest to highlight the effects of residential housing speculation that was enabled by mass foreclosures starting during the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis (Martin). Eventually the Moms 4 Housing were able to make a deal to purchase the home at a reasonable price (one of their demands), but not until after they were forcibly evicted from the home in a public show of force by a militarized unit of the Oakland Sheriff's department (Kim).

The Moms 4 Housing fight against housing insecurity, like the Mothers of the Movement subjectivity, fits within the context of fierce mothering, but does not replicate its problematic features. It builds mother-power in non-hegemonic ways which work against dominant structures, as Collins explains:

> Black women's involvement in community work forms one important basis for power within Black civil society. ... Community othermothers work on behalf of

the Black community by expressing ethics of caring and personal accountability. Such power is transformative in that Black women's relationships with children and other vulnerable community members are not intended to dominate or control. Rather their purpose is to bring people along, to—in the words of late-nineteenth-century Black feminists—'uplift the race' so that vulnerable members of the community will be able to attain the self-reliance and independence essential for resistance (Collins 192-193)

Both the Mothers of the Movement and Moms 4 Housing strategically leverage broader social acceptance of maternalism, and specifically new maternalism, as a mechanism for mothers' public speech in US culture. However, they do not rely solely on maternalism as a basis for effecting change given their racially limited access to wielding (white) motherhood ideals (Carby 212-216, Collins 174, Lorde 111, Higginbotham 259-261). Such racialized limitations are clear in public responses to their work—the harsh critique of the Mothers' participation at the 2016 DNC National Convention and the militarized response to the Moms 4 Housing—which differ substantially in tenor (vitriolic deprecation) and form (physical intimidation) from critical responses to white mothers. Instead, these mothers use a community work model to develop resilience and improve localized conditions, understanding that developing their networks and communities can lead to broader political change.

Amplifying and learning about non-dominant modes of maternal action and civic engagement is important but does not address the barriers to solidarity between mothers (and women) posed by a history of white mothers' complicity with and reproduction of white, Christian, hetero-patriarchal power. Lorde's call for an ethics of care between women and rooted in recognition and respect not only allows for addressing this history but necessitates it as a condition of possibility. To imagine how this can be possible, I return to a case example from the introduction: The Wall of Moms. We left the example (in the introduction) at the implosion of the group due to inability to build solidarity with other groups and an unwillingness from the

founder and others to effectively address embedded anti-black racism. This, however, is not the end of the story; at least not for all the 'Moms.' After the breakdown of the group, many of the former members who were committed to the movement for black lives, created a different group. This group, "Mothers for Black Lives," consciously incorporated the leadership of black women organizers and the platform of BLM (Blaec "Complicated"). The breakdown and reformation of the group was messy, public, and—likely for many participants—painful. However, after the mess, the publicity, and the pain, a deeper, more honest engagement valuing difference— different histories, experience, knowledges—could be forged. It will likely remain difficult in some ways and it may not last, but these first steps toward an ethics of care rooted in recognition and respect may also generate new visions for and ways of being together in the world.

ENDNOTES

[1]The 14 words referenced in this post are: *We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children*. This is a white supremacist extremist rallying cry, commonly referred to as "the 14 words" or in the use of the number 1488, where 14 represents the slogan and 88 represents HH (H is the eight letter of the alphabet) for Heil Hitler.

[2]This broad group of women could be included within the framework of fierce mothering, but as a whole deserve a separate reading given the context of death and dying as part of their subjectivity.

[3]Here I draw from Wilson's discussion of 'invisibility' and infrastructure to better understand the symbolic-material-ideological interconnection which when applied to my framework of motherhood as a cultural infrastructure can be seen in the naturalization of motherhood and its interpellative function. Wilson notes (emphasis in original):
"This intention of invisibility, and its realizations in some places for some populations, allows us to think about infrastructure in relation to ideology, as metaphor or manifestation. Infrastructures are constructed and operated (behind the scenes) in order to achieve the status of taken-for-granted background to activities. In this way, infrastructure exhibits what science and technology fields mean by the term *construction*: not a fiction that pretends to reality but a fabrication from material and symbolic means that is real. A component of successfully operating infrastructure is thus ideological, by operating in ways that obscure the labor and politics involved in that functioning" (270)

[4]This is a similar function in technological terms to the way cultural hegemony maintains legibility between different forms of governance in Gramsci's conceptualization in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.

[5]For example, in telecommunications networks cable poles or trenches first carried coaxial (copper cable) until 'faster' internet cables were invented and reinforced with different materials that made it less likely that water incursion would interrupt services. After initial internet cables were invented, fiber optic cabling was developed that could provide more speed and many more possible connections through the same pathways and service areas.

[6]Linda Kerber in, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective," (1976) coined the term "Republican Motherhood." Barbara Welter in, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," (1966) coined the term True Womanhood.

[7]"Scientific Mothering" was coined by Rima D. Apple in 1995

[8]"Intensive Mothering" was coined by Sharon Hay in 1996

[9]It is during this time that the trope of the Welfare Queen, predicated on the supposed moral failure and financial apathy of black urban mothers became prominent socially and politically in this period (Thompson 749).

[10]A main aim of each of these theorizations is to interrogate how power and social difference move through each of their theorized systems. This is also a question that can be approached through a cultural-technological view.

[11]Ara Wilson links ideology to the 'invisibility' of infrastructure saying:
"This intention of invisibility, and its realizations in some places for some populations, allows us to think about infrastructure in relation to ideology, as metaphor or manifestation. Infrastructures are constructed and operated (behind the scenes) to achieve the status of taken-for-granted background to activities. In this way, infrastructure exhibits what science and technology fields mean by the term construction: not a fiction that pretends to reality but a fabrication from material and symbolic means that is real. A component of successfully operating infrastructure is thus ideological, by operating in ways that obscure the labor and politics involved in that functioning. Just as ideology can become more obvious during fraught times or in off-kilter (heterotopic) spaces, then so too is consciousness of infrastructure more apparent when not yet absorbed into the background: when it is being installed (e.g., Star 1999) or displayed as the 'colonial sublime' (Larkin 2008, 36)" (270)

[12]As noted earlier, this orientation is specifically framed around western, developed nations' needs. Infrastructural failure is often a key feature of technology in 'under-developed' countries / sites. This has several benefits as argued by Brian Larkin, Lilly Nguyen, and other scholars who see such failure as driven by a lack of attentiveness in development to frameworks outside the western, developed world. Moreover, breakdown as a hallmark feature here works to reify the hegemonic relationships between developed and under-developed nations or geographies (Larkin 3-15).

[13]This is especially true when technologies are newly developed and being refined in practice.

[14]An example of this effect would be Angela McRobbie's discussion of post-feminism, or the ways feminist language and ideals are subverted in popular culture through their subsumption into and reconfiguration through prior notions of gender (1-11). In the case of post-feminism notions of women's equality and independence are subsumed into the prior order of women's roles as wives and mothers with a resulting effect that supposedly modern feminist women believe they are equal and independent but still desire, even long for, marriage and motherhood as validation of their feminine identity (24-28).

[15]I am not arguing that a cultural-technological view supplants or encompasses any of the critical-cultural theorizations. Instead, I am suggesting that adding a cultural-technological view to other critical-cultural theoretical explorations and methods can assist researchers in questioning, seeking, and developing knowledge about cultural phenomena in new and useful ways.

[16]Mommy blogging, comprising individual blogs, group blogs, and large web communities with contributing bloggers, now makes up an entire genre of online writing. Youtube video channels and other streaming video blog sites are also used by mothers for similar engagements (Podnicks 1001).

[17]Figure 1: Primary Set of Identified 'Fierce' Mother Subjectivities with Inception Year
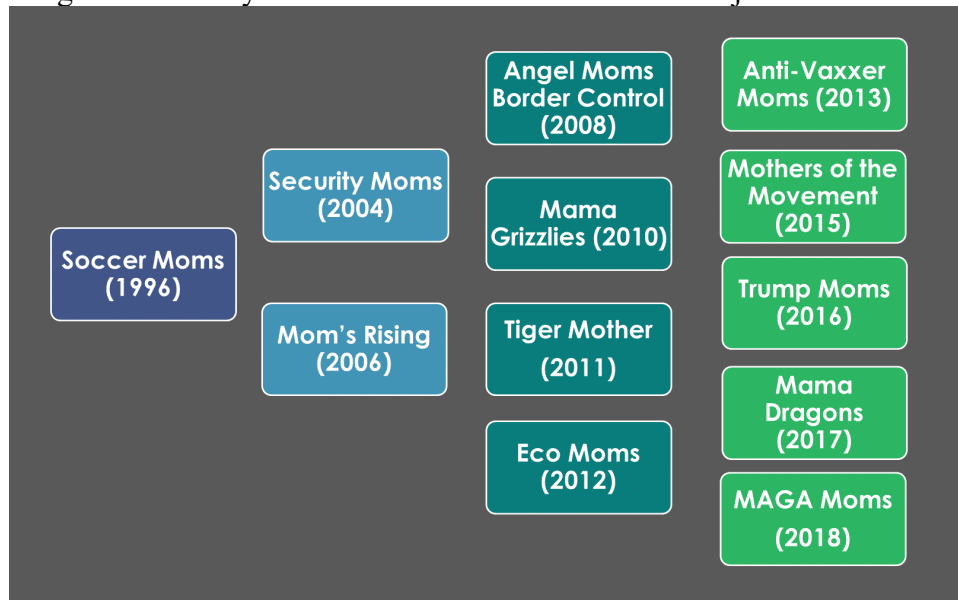
[18]In the majority of cases, the Mothers of the Movement have lost children to police violence. However, Alissa Findley and Tiffany Crutcher are the sisters of Botham Jean and Terence Crutcher (Branigin).

[19]The report titled, "The Negro Family: A Case for National Action," was produced for the Department of Labor.

[20]There are two other groups that use the term MAGA Mama and M.A.G.A Mom: 1) MAGA Mama is a wellness / lifestyle brand for new moms using the Brazilian term "MAGA" or sorceress to denote women's power (its ideology seems most related to Eco Mom sensibilities) and 2) M.A.G.A. stands for Mothers and Girls Alliance, a religious social support group. Neither of these groups are affiliated with political candidates.

[21]The Mama Dragons should not be confused with Dragon Mothers, mother's whose children suffer from terminal illnesses, as their focus of concern is care for precarious LGBT youth. An offshoot of the Dragon Mothers subjectivity is the Lion Mom subjectivity (mothers of children with chronic illnesses). Both of these subjectivities have some documentation, but relatively little public online material for inclusion in this analysis.

[22]Sharing similar concerns and a similar name, the band Imagine Dragons, whose bandmembers are also Mormons, produced the 2018 HBO documentary "Believer" about planning and hosting their first "LOVE LOUD" concert in Salt Lake City. Although the Mama Dragons site has only one blog post mentioning Imagine Dragons and LOVE LOUD, their *Facebook* community shares media including posts about Imagine Dragons' LGBT advocacy. It would be hard to imagine that people engaging with this issue, do not associate the two groups to some extent. And, since the documentary was released, there has been an increase of more than 100% in Mama Dragon membership (from around 2,000 to 5,000 members), a large figure given that the

membership growth to the 2018 number of 2,000 members took five years according to various articles about the group.

[23]Ms. Magazine also published an online post detailing the story of how Phoebe Ensminger Burn convinced her son to cast the deciding vote in the Tennessee state legislature to ratify the 19th amendment allowing woman suffrage to pass into law in the post "The Mother Who Secured Women's Suffrage" (Sherman and Dismore).

[24]It is important to note that the fight for woman suffrage in the US lasted for over one hundred and forty years starting approximately seventy-five years prior to the ratification of the 19th Amendment which guaranteed only white women the right vote. Indigenous women and Asian American women's rights to suffrage were granted between 1920 and 1940, but it was not until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that black women in the US had full access to the franchise.

[25]Arlie Hochschild described this doubling of labor experienced by mothers in *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (1989).

[26]The "CrazyMothers" were written about on the *Live Science* blog in December 2019, and since that article their website has been removed (https://www.livescience.com/anti-vaxxers-try-to-change-name.html).

[27]Crazymothers, founded by Hillary Simpson, utilizes multiple platforms to promote anti-vaccine ideas, conspiracy theories, and information (Lanse "CrazyMothers"). Along with Twitter, there is also an Instagram account, crazymotherscommunity, and both link to a website which has since been taken down, but its homepage is available to view from as recently as January 3, 2020 on Wayback Machine: The Internet Archive. The @Crazymothers Twitter account has 1,847 followers and 98 tweets since joining the platform in November 2018 which is relatively small. However, the Instagram account has 19.4 thousand followers and 414 posts.

[28]Televisual media were a primary frame of Angela McRobbie's theorization of "post feminism" and Susan Douglas' theorization of "enlightened sexism"; both of which seek to understand how media representations work as mechanisms through which feminist gains and notions of gender equality are undermined within dominant cultural frames.

[29]The show's original webpage included extensive materials providing detailed information about show's plot and full character biographies, while the Hulu episodes page is limited to short descriptions of the plot and episode details.

[30]The primary cast mothers are portrayed by Katie Mixon as Katie Otto; Ali Wong as Doris; and Carly Hughes as Angela.

[31]Recently Carly Hughes, the actress portraying the character of Angela, has left the show due to a "toxic" and discriminatory work environment (Thorne) which has coincided with substantial changes to the abc-go show pages, including the removal of the original Characters/Stars info pages. The original pages can be found via the Internet Archive: https://web.archive.org/web/20170104043130/http://abc.go.com/shows/american-housewife/cast

[32]The "Tiger Mom" is a subjectivity derived from the book *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, written by Amy Chua and published in 2011.

[33]Character biographies are not posted on the Netflix show page. The page includes only a two-sentence show premise, a trailer video, and individual episode briefs of a sentence or two. The only narrative character biography information for the show was created by fans of the show on the *One Day at a Time* Fandom Wiki page. As such, the biographies are based on fan interpretations of the show material itself rather than the producers' or network's marketing materials. To flesh out how the characters are presented, I combine a transcription of the information in the Netflix trailer and episode briefs as marketing material as the episode briefs give insight into how Netflix markets the characters. I also include selections of narratives from the fandom wiki to provide clues to how the characters are understood via their presentation on the show.

[34]Other Alt-Right connections to #Trad cultures online include deeply misogynist Reddit communities that connect through notions of women's responsibility for maintaining their "sexual market value" (SMV) to attract husbands (See: Julia Ebner "Tradwives: Joining the Female Anti-Feminists." In: *Going Dark: The Secret Social Lives of Extremists.* New York: Bloomsbury, 59-78. 2020).

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