Perceptions Of Maternal Satisfaction Over the Course of a Child's Developmental

Stages

Kristen Cartwright Ross

Department of Community Care and Counseling, Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

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Approved by:

Jackie Thayer Craft, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Albert J. Sarno, Ph.D., Committee Member

Abstract

Every motherhood experience comes with its own set of difficulties and experiences that might impact the level of life happiness for the women who inhabit it. Life satisfaction falls under the general heading of subjective well-being as it draws on comparison processes in which people assess how their present circumstances measure up to social norms and cultural ideals. This study aims to understand the changes in maternal satisfaction throughout the children's developmental years to understand potential avenues for improvement in the maternal experience, as well as provide clinical providers with the knowledge they need to help women experiencing either extreme highs or extreme lows in their motherhood satisfaction. Using a qualitative heuristic phenomenological design, this study used semi-structured open-ended interviewing to understand the experiences of the co-researchers. NVivo will be used to create thematic narrative data, and the findings illustrate the common perspectives that provide a deeper understanding and appreciation of the defining attributes of satisfaction. The co-researchers elucidated the factors that contributed to their satisfaction across the developmental stages of their children. The co-researchers also discussed the challenges associated with motherhood. They discussed how their identities were formed and solidified through motherhood, and how their identities were changing since their children had become adults. The co-researchers expressed gratitude and pride when speaking about their children becoming productive citizens. Understanding the benefits and challenges of motherhood and understanding how mothers' identities change over time could be useful for mental health practitioners counseling mothers during inevitable changes in their lives.

Keywords: Motherhood, maternal satisfaction, maternal identity

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my daughter, Krysta, and my parents, Ann and Willie. Without Krysta, I would have no story to tell and no understanding of life. In becoming a mother, I have learned more about who I am with greater acceptance and appreciation for who I am not. Luckily for me, you love me all the same. I am proud to call myself your mother, and hope that you will read this and be proud as well. My father was my greatest cheerleader and supporter, especially when it came to great life adventures. He never spoke much about being a parent, but I understand him more now than I did when he was here with me. My mother has been a great inspiration for this study, and I hope that she knows that I tried to understand her the best way I knew how. This project is the embodiment of the answers to the questions that I did not know to ask.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who have supported me. I am forever grateful to Liberty University for giving me hope and a second chance at completing my degree. A special thanks to my dissertation chair for giving me the space to pursue my passion and believing in me when I did not believe in myself. It has been a long journey, but I will be forever thankful for your support.

I would also like to thank the mothers who participated in this research study. Thank you for your bravery, candidness, and your desire to share your motherhood stories. You are an inspiration to me and anyone else who reads this study. I am so honored that you chose to share a piece of yourselves with me.

Thank you to my family for all the support for the last decade. The early mornings and late nights listening to me talk about research that only made sense to me were priceless moments. My husband and daughter deserve a special thank you for the sacrifice of time and resources given to completing this journey. I recognize that my pursuits took a toll on us, but I am thankful you stuck it out with me. Though you may not have understood the value of what I am trying to do, I am thankful that you see the value in me. It means a great deal.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize the support from my tribe of sisters. The small core of ladies who have carried me for almost twenty years, even before this terminal degree. I have lived vicariously through each of you, especially those who have completed their own dissertation journey. I am thankful to call you my friends, and I appreciate you climbing this mountain with me.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Chapter One presents the historical framework for the study of maternal satisfaction, which is often compartmentalized to the time after childbirth, known as the postpartum period. The problem and purpose statements central to the investigation are made explicit, and the significance of the study is postured as a key contribution to the field of human services and counseling. The research questions that guide the study are presented. The chapter concludes with definitions of key concepts that are operationalized as working contributions to the review of the literature and the methodology.

Background

Maternal satisfaction throughout a child's developmental stages is a topic lacking sufficient empirical clarity. However, maternal satisfaction is crucial not only to her well-being but also to her children's well-being. The literature states that mothers who experience multiple persistent stressors, such as an excessive workload, unanticipated events, little to no control throughout events, a lack of support, and negative attributions of their accomplishments, show strong similarities to those seen in the manifestation of professional burnout (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). On the other hand, Stahnke et al. (2020) explained that some respondents showed joy at becoming mothers in the most direct way possible, and Séjourné et al. (2018) stated that most mothers stated that becoming a mother enhanced overall life satisfaction, despite difficulties.

According to the literature, multiple aspects of motherhood contribute to satisfaction. Women develop their new identity as mothers during pregnancy and the early stages of motherhood. This identity concerns expectations, concerns, and objectives for how they want to

act. Additional identity development is transformative across motherhood and is implicitly shaped by experiences from pregnancy through the many stages; maternal satisfaction is a crucial factor in whole-life satisfaction (McNamara et al., 2019; Talmon et al., 2021). The lifelong burden of caring for a child or multiple children alone transforms maternal satisfaction (Séjourné et al., 2018). The age and number of children and the quality of the relationship between mother and child are also important implications to consider (Gottschalk, 1988; Talmon et al., 2021). Financial stability and how time is used and valued influence satisfaction across the lifespan (Pollmann-Schult, 2018; Preisner et al., 2020).

Empirical evidence suggests that early maternal stressors include the adjustment to the dramatic physical changes that occur during pregnancy and early motherhood, establishing relationships with the fetus and baby, and forging a new maternal identity (Raphael-Leff, 2018; Stern & Bruschweiler-Stern, 1998). Additionally, research illustrates that mothers experience increased stress when their child is in middle school, which coincides with the increased stress that children have during this development stage (Eccles et al., 1993; Luthar & Ciciolla, 2016). Studying maternal satisfaction and capturing its fluidity as she navigates motherhood using the lens of childhood development illuminated the nuances of this experience (Webb et al., 2017).

Situation to Self

As a mother who has experienced challenges throughout the different developmental stages of her children, not just in the post-partum period, the researcher was initially motivated to pursue this study to determine whether her experiences were similar or different from those of other mothers. Thus, the motivation behind this study was not only the lack of research on maternal satisfaction but the failure of researchers to focus on motherhood satisfaction and mental well-being over time and not just in the postpartum phases.

The philosophical assumptions behind the motivation for this study were both ontological in the quest for the study of the being of a mother and epistemological in the endeavor of adding understanding to longstanding concepts of motherhood (see Creswell et al., 2007). Furthermore, the researcher of this study brought the paradigms of pragmatism and constructivism. Pragmatism arose from seeking the intended and unintended consequences of motherhood and constructivism to challenge the social norms and understand motherhood more in-depth (Ponterotto, 2005).

Problem Statement

Maternal satisfaction is understood through the happiness, pain, and well-being of a mother and how these attributes change over time, in relation to the birth of a child, or children, the age and stage of her children, and the changing role of motherhood as children navigate periods of developmental growth and environmental consequences (Berzoff et al., 2016; Luthar & Ciciolla, 2016). How satisfaction is modified and altered over the lifespan of motherhood needs to be conceptualized more holistically. Current research lacks the scope of insight into the fluid nature of satisfaction and the plethora of implications that impact the experience of mothers (Séjourné et al., 2018).

Purpose Statement

This study illuminated the perceptions of mothers regarding satisfaction and the influences on satisfaction across the lifespan of motherhood. Satisfaction involves many attributes that are represented in theoretical frameworks but are not specific enough to capture the essence of motherhood. Theories of satisfaction and identity theories informed the study to secure focus on the intrinsic nature of the mothering experience. The intention was to provide transparency to how mothers' identities are anchored in the construct of a family that creates a

unique collaboration between personal satisfaction while considering the developmental and environmental implications of her children (Burke & Stets, 2009; Feldman, 2019; Séjourné et al., 2018; Stahnke et al., 2020).

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

Maternal satisfaction is a crucial aspect of family well-being and impacts the health of the family system (Holte et al., 2014; Newland, 2014; Richter et al., 2018). According to Wills and Petrakis (2019), as mothers adjust to their new role, the transition can occasionally negatively impact their mental health and general welfare. On the other hand, Séjourné et al. (2018) described that most mothers stated that becoming a mother boosted overall life satisfaction, despite difficulties. Although parental difficulties can affect children and are considered a public health issue, this study revealed a lack of empirical information on general maternal burnout and its related characteristics (Séjourné et al., 2018). According to research, mothers satisfied with their mothering roles are likelier to have better physical and mental health and healthier connections with their children and partners (Oyarzún-Farías et al., 2021; Richter et al., 2018). In the context of counseling, human services, and other family support systems, understanding the phenomenology of maternal satisfaction over time can help mothers and families point out potential areas for intervention and support (McNamara et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the present study is significant because understanding maternal satisfaction in the context of human services can assist in informing policy choices to enhance the health and welfare of mothers and families. For example, Sihto and Mustosmäki (2021) explain that further research on maternal satisfaction or dissatisfaction may open the narrative for development on the taboo topic, leading to advances in therapeutic methods and mothers feeling more comfortable seeking professional help. The results of this study aimed to fill the gap in the

literature on maternal satisfaction throughout a child's developmental stages may contribute to developing intervention and support methods and, ultimately, enhance the health and well-being of women and their families.

Research Questions

The research questions create a meaningful focus on the lived experience of motherhood and the opportunity to fully appreciate the fluid nature of maternal satisfaction across the lifespan. Satisfaction as a modifier of identity and satisfaction as an object of the development and environment experiences of children are important factors. Therefore, the research questions carefully consider these implications. The research questions were:

RQ1: How is maternal satisfaction modified over the lifespan of motherhood?

RQ2: How do mothers describe the relationship between maternal satisfaction and their identities as mothers?

RQ3: How do the development and environmental implications of childhood influence maternal satisfaction?

Definitions

1. *Burnout* is the outcome of accumulating recurrent stresses of different strengths, from mild to intense, without having established effective coping mechanisms. Maslach's model describes burnout as a multifaceted condition comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization sentiments, and a dwindling sense of personal success (Maslach et al., 2001).

2. *Maternal bonding* is the development of a relationship between a mother and her unborn child, which begins to take shape during pregnancy (Göbel et al., 2018). A sense of connection and engagement with the fetus or newborn is represented by bonding,

which is reflected in various emotional and behavioral expressions. This bonding's characteristics might range from emotional attachment to hate, anxiety, and rejection (Talmon et al., 2021).

3. *Maternal identity* is the feeling of self that emerges from motherhood's emotional, social, and physical experiences. It is how a woman constructs her identity as a mother and her life around that identity (Seo et al., 2020).

4. *Maternal Satisfaction* is the degree to which a mother experiences life as satisfying, meaningful, complete, or of a high quality (Nikolaou, 2017; Richter et al., 2018).

5. *Regret,* according to van Dijk and Zeelenberg (2005), is a negative feeling people feel when they recognize or believe that their current circumstances would be better if they made a different choice.

6. *Well-being* can be defined as the state of feeling well and doing well; the presence of happy and contented feelings as well as the growth of one's potential, having some degree of control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and having positive connections (Huppert, 2009; Ruggeri et al., 2020).

Summary

Much research has examined how mothers affect their children's development, especially in books written about parenting. However, the problem is that there is scarce research on motherhood satisfaction throughout a child's developmental stages, hindering societal and clinical understanding of motherhood satisfaction and subsequent outcomes (Berzoff et al., 2016). Therefore, this study aimed to understand the changes in maternal satisfaction throughout the children's developmental years by first examining the theoretical framework of identity theory, identity shift theory, and whole life satisfaction theory and reviewing background literature.

This topic is of vital importance, as parental issues are thought to be a public health issue and can affect the well-being of children (Séjourné et al., 2018). In Chapter 2, the researcher reviews the relevant literature important for this study, including a discussion of what is known and unknown about maternal satisfaction, and Chapter 3 details the methodology for this qualitative study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding the notion of mothers' satisfaction throughout the various stages of their child's development. The study aimed to understand the changes in maternal satisfaction throughout the developmental years of children and to identify potential avenues for improving and equipping clinical providers with the knowledge necessary to assist women experiencing extreme highs or extreme lows in their motherhood satisfaction through the theoretical frameworks that will inform the investigation. In the section on relevant literature, the following subtopics are discussed: maternal satisfaction, motherhood stresses, motherhood regret, and motherhood idealization. The chapter concludes with a summary that provides an overview of the material delivered in the chapter.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks that guide this study include (a) identity theory, (b) identity shift theory, and (c) whole life satisfaction theory. Together, these frameworks will underpin the rest of the study and offer a base for motherhood satisfaction over a child's developmental stages.

Identity Theory

Identity theory can be defined as a shared set of meanings that designate individuals in particular social roles, as members of specific social groups, and as individuals with characteristics that distinguish them from others (Davis et al., 2019). People, therefore, have multiple identities across an even broad range of identities (Burke & Stets, 2009). Specifically, according to Stryker (2004), individuals' social positions, the groups they identify with and belong to, and how they view themselves all have meanings (Burke & Stets, 2009). These

meanings are people's reactions when they consider who they are in a role, a social identity, or as a person (Burke & Stets, 2009; Davis et al., 2019).

There are a few theorized effects of identity theory and having numerous 'identities' whether they may be personal or societal. For example, having innumerable identities can result in conflict and misery since there are various ways in which people might be connected to their social structure (Davis et al., 2019). However, according to Thoits (1986), having several identities does not necessarily lead to issues or stress; instead, it gives people's lives purpose and direction, which lowers anxiety, sadness, and nonconforming behavior. This also argued that having several identities encouraged healthy self-beliefs and well-being, including high self-esteem. Furthermore, high levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and good mental health can be viewed more generally as personal resources that support the maintenance of multiple identities (Thoits, 2003). As stress research shows, they may even reduce the stress of doing so. Thoits (2003) maintained that having several role identities caused conflict because people claimed mandatory rather than optional roles (Davis et al., 2019).

Identity Theory & Motherhood

Identity theory posits that motherhood is central to a woman's identity and can shape how she views herself and the world around her (Stryker & Burke, 2000). It suggests that motherhood is a fundamental portion of a woman's self-concept and that it is a form of identity that is both internal and external. This means that motherhood can shape how a woman views her role in society, interacts with her children, and experiences her relationships with other people. Identity theory also suggests that motherhood is a valuable source of strength and support for a woman and can give her a sense of purpose and meaning in life. According to Nuttbrock and Freudiger (1991), the salience of the mother identity among first-time moms somewhat predicts whether or

not they are willing to take on the responsibilities of parenthood and make sacrifices for their

kids. They discovered that women with fewer resources—less education or income—or who are

single—had less established higher-level identification requirements. Additionally, moms who

did not hold themselves to higher standards experienced more control issues, conflict with their

kids, and decreased emotional efficacy and self-worth (Nuttbrock & Freudiger, 1991).

Additionally, these moms frequently employed methods of child-rearing that prevented their

offspring from acquiring higher identification standards (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Identity Shift Theory

Identity Shift Theory describes the self-transformation process that results from

deliberate self-presentation in a mediated situation (Carr et al., 2021). Since its introduction in

2008, the idea of identity shift has drawn more direct and indirect attention and empirical

evaluation (Carr et al., 2021). Early theory on self-construction is the foundation for research on

self-presentation. In his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Goffman (1959)

highlighted the need to understand self-presentation behavior from a social sciences perspective.

Goffman (1959) likened the social interaction research process to theatrical performances, with

each co-researcher playing their part (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008). More recently, social

psychology research has demonstrated a strong relationship between self-presentation and

identity (Kelly & Rodriguez, 2006). Various sorts of self-knowledge, including the self-concept

(Tice, 1992), self-appraisals (Schlenker & Trudeau, 1990), and a sense of personal autonomy,

have all been connected to changes in self-presentation (Schlenker & Weigold, 1990).

Furthermore, researchers discovered that they could influence how people came to

consider themselves in a particular domain by asking them to display a specific component of

themselves, such as introversion or extroversion (Fazio et al., 1981; Rhodewalt & Agustsdottir,

1986). The public aspect of self-presentation is a crucial element in defining self-construction. According to several researchers (Tice, 1992), the impact of self-presentation on identity is enhanced by one's knowledge of an audience or sense of "publicness." For instance, tripping in front of a large group of people could make someone feel self-conscious, whereas tripping on a deserted sidewalk might make someone curse the sidewalk.

Identity Shift Theory & Motherhood

Women's identities can be profoundly impacted by motherhood, which is often an intense and lifelong relationship (Smith, 1999). Women undergo significant personal, social, and biological changes while becoming mothers (Laney et al., 2015). The lack of research on how women's identities change after becoming mothers based on first-hand accounts has been disappointing since some research suggests that women change their identities in different ways when they become mothers (Laney et al., 2015).

In order to dispel myths about motherhood, mothers' subjective experiences must be considered because no theory can fully convey what parenting or being a mother is like (Bassin et al., 1994). When women become mothers, their autonomy, attractiveness, sexuality, and vocation must be reconsidered (Laney et al., 2015). As a result, they change how they perceive themselves and their relationships with others (Steinberg, 2005). The first-time mother undergoes self-evaluation and self-reconstruction during the prenatal months, as Gloger-Tippelt (1983) suggested. Several perspectives have been offered on motherhood due to the numerous changes that women undergo when they become mothers. Due to its difficulties and adjustments, Benedek (1959) suggested that parenting is a developmental stage for parents. During parenthood, women must navigate a maze of conflicts, according to Oberman and Josselson (1996).

Based on a grounded theory of motherhood, Laney et al. (2015) stated that most women experience self-loss while changing from woman to mother. As a result of self-loss, women perceive parenthood as defining their identity (Laney et al., 2015). Having children changes women in many ways. Despite this, they also demonstrate continuity in their identities after they pass through the infant stage because they retain a sense of who they were before becoming mothers. In this way, women's identities are temporarily fractured due to the process of integrating motherhood into them.

Whole Life Satisfaction Theory

Whole life satisfaction theory hypothesizes that individuals are satisfied with their lives when they perceive that they have achieved their intended life goals (Rosengren et al., 2021). According to Feldman (2019), such viewpoints do not account for the satisfaction of a focused or spontaneous individual who disregards their life development. In contrast, Kainulainen et al. (2018) explain that a person is happy when their more reasonable and knowledgeable hypothetical self believes their real life is by their planned life plan. Therefore, the whole life satisfaction theory is a flexible and secure alternative to existing happiness theories that have encountered different problems (Naseem, 2018). Furthermore, the notion that happiness might be defined as "content with life as a whole" has captured the attention of philosophers and others.This theory holds that to be happy, a person must be content with their life (Feldman, 2019). The viewpoint has evolved in many ways, but each version has faced significant opposition (Feldman, 2019).

The central tenet of this theory is that everyone has goals to achieve in life, and those goals must be relatively stable, even if some of them change at different stages of their lives (Naseem, 2018). People have accomplished or desired to obtain some of their life goals in the

past and even in the present, while they still intend to achieve others in the future (Blasco-Belled et al., 2020). The plans leading to achieving these objectives at various stages of a person's life constitute their ideal life plans (Blasco-Belled et al., 2020). Moreover, individuals have preconceived notions of some of the events that have transpired in their lives and hopes for what may occur in the future (Trzebiński et al., 2020). Rosengren et al. (2021) assert that in such circumstances, a person can evaluate whether their lives align with their actual life plans, and such evaluations are necessitated.

Whole Life Satisfaction & Motherhood

The whole life satisfaction theory states that individuals strive to achieve and maintain satisfaction in all areas to experience a sense of well-being. Motherhood is one area in which this theory can be applied, as mothers strive to find a balance between their own needs and those of their children (Preisner et al., 2018). This often means making sacrifices and prioritizing the needs of the family, but it also means finding ways to take care of themselves and maintain their levels of satisfaction. For example, a mother can find satisfaction in her role by participating in activities that bring her joy, connecting with her children, and finding time to relax and practice self-care. Ultimately, mothers must recognize that their well-being is essential to providing their children with the best care (Preisner et al., 2018).

Maternal Satisfaction and Well-Being

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental wellness or health as a state of well-being in which each individual realizes their potential, is capable of overcoming obstacles in daily life, can work effectively and productively, and can contribute to their community (Ozorio, 2011; World Health Organization, 2019). Similarly, Cilar et al. (2020) define mental well-being as a state of good psychological and emotional health that is dynamic and constantly

changing, incorporating people's feelings and beliefs about their present circumstances and well-being. The study also underlines that mental health is not universal because it depends on an individual's sociocultural environment (Cilar et al., 2020). Moreover, motherhood and well-being are intricately linked. A mother's self-perception changes as she adjusts to parenthood, and this adjustment can occasionally have a detrimental effect on her mental health and general well-being (Wills & Petrakis, 2019).

Some studies have looked at maternal satisfaction in general. For example, in a survey by Stahnke et al. (2020), some individuals expressed their happiness with being a mother outright, while others did so using terms like "grateful." In the Séjourné et al. (2018) study, most participants said motherhood increased overall life pleasure, even when facing challenges. This same study highlighted a dearth of empirical evidence on general maternal burnout and its associated variables, even though parental issues can influence children and are thought to be a public health issue (Séjourné et al., 2018).

Well-Being

The human condition seeks happiness, and a fulfilling life includes feeling good and performing well (Huppert, 2014). It would minimize the significance of unpleasant or painful emotions, which, when experienced in the right situations, such as melancholy after tragedy and misery or even wrath after injustice, play a significant role in one's life (Huppert, 2014). Some experts define happiness as the ratio of positive to negative emotions or just pleasant sentiments (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). The three distinguishing aspects of subjective well-being, according to Steptoe et al. (2015), are evaluative, hedonic, and general.

In terms of the mother and child relationship to maternal satisfaction and well-being, maternal satisfaction is key to a child's growth and development. The links between newborns

and their mothers are crucial (Albanese et al., 2019; Unternaehrer et al., 2019). This interaction is essential for the child's development and growth (Albanese et al., 2019). Several studies indicate that the connection should be maintained in excellent condition and never in danger (Albanese et al., 2019). Albanese et al. said that several factors contribute to parenting fulfillment. For instance, a mother's degree of motherhood satisfaction increases if she has a good house, supportive in-laws and spouse, and a solid marriage (Albanese et al., 2019). Unternaehrer et al. also said that a woman's profession or function in society might have positive and negative impacts because she must do many tasks. For instance, she must be a mother, wife, homemaker, and worker; however, the stress associated with these duties may make individuals miserable (Unternaehrer et al., 2019).

Mental Health

Mental health influences how people manage stress, relate with others, and make wise decisions, regardless of their financial situation (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health, 2021). Additionally, it can be claimed that mental well-being is crucial from infancy through adulthood (APA, 2022; National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health, 2021; NHS Website, 2022). Additionally, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental wellness or health as a state of well-being in which each individual realizes their potential, can manage life's obstacles, can work successfully and fruitfully, and can contribute to their community (Ozorio, 2011; World Health Organization, 2019). Similarly, Cilar et al. (2020) define mental well-being as a state of good psychological and emotional health that is dynamic and constantly changing, incorporating people's feelings and beliefs about their present circumstances and well-being. However, the study also underlines that mental health is not universal because it depends on an individual's sociocultural environment (Cilar et al., 2020).

Understanding the maternal mind is crucial for mothers and future generations because women have a vital role in promoting their children's long-term health outcomes and potential (Kim, 2021; Wills & Petrakis, 2019). For example, Richter et al. (2018) found a strong positive correlation between maternal life satisfaction, the frequency of shared daily experiences and activities, and children's prosocial conduct. The more the mother participated in joint parent-child activities, the happier she felt about life (Richter et al., 2018). Many people are concerned about their well-being, but moms, in particular, need a healthy mental outlook because of the rigors of parenthood and the numerous tasks they sometimes juggle (Wills & Petrakis, 2019). The weight of obligation, immediate certainty, identity shift, and development into advocacy were signs of the magnitude of motherhood and the importance of their new position when they became mothers (Daly et al., 2022). This is especially true for mothers as, according to several studies, men are happier and more satisfied with their lives than mothers, and they also feel less stress from being a parent (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019; Oyarzún-Farías et al., 2021).

Factors Negatively Affecting Satisfaction

Parental stress and satisfaction can also be affected by a conflict between work and home life (Oyarzún-Farías et al., 2021). A growing number of women are entering the workforce, which has increased interest in this topic. Researchers have focused on the effects of work pressures on various levels of family life, childcare stress, and life satisfaction (Caro et al., 2017; Kulik et al., 2015). According to Kossek and Lee (2017), the concept of work-life conflict "is an extension of work-family conflict reflecting the reality that the work role may interfere with individuals' other personal life roles and interests" (p. 2). As a result of work-life conflict, people report that their work role interferes with their family or personal relationships (Kossek & Lee, 2017).

Due to their jobs, parents report having insufficient time for their children or insufficient energy for essential people in their lives. According to Holmes et al. (2018), their work roles hamper their ability to perform home responsibilities (Holmes et al., 2018).

Kohler et al. (2005) discovered that using data on life satisfaction and a twin-study design, only the first-born child was related to increased happiness for women. Other researchers have similarly found that having further children decreases life satisfaction when compared to having only one child (Keldenich, 2022). Only having children who are 16 or older does not result in an improvement in affective well-being compared to having no children (Cools et al., 2017). When more age groups are taken into account for the youngest child under the age of 16, there is a trend for younger children being related to the mother having a higher emotional well-being. However, the differences were not found to be statistically significant (Keldenich, 2022). All coefficients on the interaction variables between motherhood and the youngest child's age group fall in magnitude, after accounting for labor market status controls. Most of them become statistically insignificant, supporting earlier findings (Keldenich, 2022).

Furthermore, rapid physiological, psychological, and social changes occur during pregnancy, and the adjustment to parenthood can be difficult and stressful for many women (McNamara et al., 2019; Otchet et al., 1999). An international study demonstrated that this result was ubiquitous among women in many countries and demonstrated that prenatal time can be linked to increased psychological discomfort and susceptibility, leaving women more prone to mental health issues or symptoms that significantly disrupt functioning (McNamara et al., 2019). Recent research has demonstrated the prevalence of comorbid mental health symptomatology and clinical indications of depression, anxiety, and stress during and after pregnancy (Figueiredo

& Conde, 2011; Giardinelli et al., 2012; McNamara et al., 2019). An individual's capacity to balance psychological, social, and physical resources with life's challenges and stressors—a concept known as "well-being"—may be impacted over time by these events (Dodge et al., 2012; McNamara et al., 2019).

Poor obstetric outcomes and cognitive, behavioral, and emotional difficulties in a child's development have also been linked to maternal distress (Keim et al., 2011). While some research suggests that distress is more prevalent during pregnancy than postpartum (Cole-Lewis et al., 2014; McNamara et al., 2019), other findings point to a consistent pattern of symptoms between the antenatal and postpartum periods (McNamara et al., 2019). Importantly, maternal distress during early childhood and adolescence predicted offspring depressive symptoms in middle school (Nilsen et al., 2018). These data suggest that maladaptive symptoms experienced by mothers impact their children, further underscoring the need to understand how mothers view their changing identities and cope with parental stressors throughout their lives.

Maternal Fetal Attachment

The emotional connection that develops between a mother and her unborn child during pregnancy is referred to as maternal-fetal attachment (MFA) (Cranley, 1992). MFA was first described by Cranley (1992) as "the degree to which mothers participate in actions that represent an affiliation and engagement with their unborn child" (p. 282) and emphasizes the development and maintenance of a special relationship. Muller stated that building on Cranley's conception, the definition of MFA should also consider the ideas and fantasies that expectant women experience concerning their unborn child and their pregnancy (Brandon et al., 2009; Muller, 1992). Theorists and researchers believe that MFA is a multidimensional construct that comprises maternal thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and attitudes despite the discrepancies in definitions

(McNamara et al., 2019). Although less studied than postpartum bonding, studies indicate that antenatal mental health issues may hinder a mother's capacity to develop a strong attachment to her unborn child (Rubertsson et al., 2015). Even though early attachment connections and the effects of maternal psychological health on this development period are relevant, there is still disagreement about the "optimal" approach to defining and classifying MFA. According to Bowlby (1992) and Ainsworth (1979) and other classic conceptualizations of attachment (Walsh, 2010), MFA's underlying processes do not fit these conceptualizations (McNamara et al., 2019).

Antenatal attachment (Condon & Corkindale, 1997), perinatal bonding (Ohara et al., 2017), and emotional involvement are some of the terminologies that have been used to define the idea because MFA is unidirectional, despite the reality that attachment is a dyadic and reciprocal connection (McNamara et al., 2019). Although the term "attachment" is ill-suited, other often-used terms like "bond" and "connection" are also inappropriate semantically (Walsh, 2010). This implies that academics should investigate prenatal and postnatal experiences using various theoretical frameworks and create new ideas for the pregnancy (McNamara et al., 2019). Although the MFA construct has been recognized as a significant contributor to mother and newborn health (Branjerdporn et al., 2017), postpartum mother-infant interactions have remained the main focus of the study (McNamara et al., 2019). Depression, anxiety, stress, coping mechanisms, social support, romantic relationships, and self-concept are just a few of the well-being and mental health-related factors that have been taken into account by MFA research (McNamara et al., 2019).

Maternal Experiences with Healthcare

According to Srivastava et al. (2015), around 287,000 women die annually from childbirth-related reasons. 99% of these fatalities occur in underdeveloped nations.

Due to significant service gaps, emerging nations prioritize expanding service availability and maintaining high-quality requirements (Srivastava et al., 2015). In this situation, it is essential to understand how mothers feel about the care and their satisfaction with services because perceived quality is a crucial determinant of how often individuals use services (Yiga et al., 2020). If consumers of a health facility believe the treatment is excellent, they are more likely to return, increasing the demand for the service (Wemakor et al., 2018; World Health Organization, 2020).

Service utilization and positive outcomes for mothers and infants may be significantly enhanced by improving the quality and desirability of hospital deliveries (Srivastava et al., 2015). User satisfaction can be defined as the patient's assessment of the quality and value of the medical service (Yang et al., 2018). Therefore, ensuring patient satisfaction is vital for enhancing the design and administration of healthcare systems (Soliman et al., 2021). Several theoretical models of patient satisfaction have been developed to define maternal satisfaction, but many researchers believe that patient satisfaction is a multifaceted term influenced by numerous factors (Srivastava et al., 2015). Importantly, maternal satisfaction with respect to the birthing process can be considered a positive appraisal of several aspects of childbirth (Wemakor et al., 2018).

When the world is working harder to reduce maternal mortality, it is essential to examine what makes mothers happy and why (Tariq et al., 2018). Evidence regarding how women perceive the quality of maternal care and how satisfied they are with maternal care helps determine what other aspects of care must be improved in developing countries to meet long-term demand, make significant changes in how women act when they need care, and identify barriers that can and should be removed (Wells et al., 2022).

Most research on the transition to motherhood examines whether happiness changes with the birth of children. Typically, researchers highlight distinctions between mothers (Brenning & Soenens, 2017); this is significant because seeing variations in pleasure and well-being in the everyday lives of mothers teaches us that people generally experience a great deal of daily fluctuation in their well-being (Brenning & Soenens, 2017). According to Brenning and Soenens (2017), the transition to motherhood is a particularly intense and emotional stage in a woman's life, with higher opportunities for stress and profound happiness; this indicates that a woman's postpartum health is likely to see daily fluctuations (Akpinar & Teneler, 2022).

According to Brenning and Soenens (2017), becoming a mother is one of the most fulfilling aspects of a woman's life. However, research on the relationship between parenting and happiness has shown varied findings. Some research indicates that motherhood is associated with greater pleasure (Brenning & Soenens, 2017). During the transition to motherhood, some circumstances are more likely to result in this kind of disparity in mothers' well-being. For example, sending a child to daycare may be difficult since it requires the child to spend time apart from the parent. Even if non-maternal care is becoming a statistical and cultural norm between three and six months postpartum (Brenning & Soenens, 2017), the top two reported concerns of mothers are apart from their child and the quality of daycare (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2017). In addition, putting a child in daycare allows women to pursue other interests, such as working or meeting new people (Amici, 2022); therefore, the child's first day at daycare may be both a danger and an opportunity for his or her health. Invariably, sending a child to daycare could be an ideal scenario to examine how mothers' health may fluctuate daily (Brenning & Soenens, 2017).

Mothers and Basic Psychological Needs

Whether or not a mother's fundamental psychological needs are addressed might have a daily impact on her level of happiness. Self-determination theory, which emphasizes motivation and psychosocial development, is predicated on psychological needs (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2017). The ideology asserts that everyone has three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, a sense of freedom to make decisions and ownership over one's actions; relatedness, a sense of closeness and connection with others; and competence, a feeling of being practical and skilled (Brenning & Soenens, 2017). People may be more susceptible to sickness and psychopathology when one or more needs are unmet. Signs that one or more needs are not being addressed include feelings of pressure and duty, isolation and loneliness, inferiority, and inadequacy (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

In addition to investigating the function of daily psychological requirements in the ups and downs of mothers' well-being during challenging events, including the transfer of children to daycare, the postnatal well-being of mothers is likely influenced by more permanent maternal features. For example, the connection between the mother's personality, the baby's temperament, the mother's need-based experiences, and the mother's daily psychological need-based experiences may be utilized to predict the mother's daily happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Those with a history of need frustration, which may be the case for women who are high in self-criticism and dependence, are likely to be more sensitive to new need-frustrating situations and, consequently, exhibit more significant levels of distress (Brenning & Soenens, 2017). Specifically, very self-critical women likely have a history of overprotective and controlling parenting approaches. On the other hand, high-dependency women have a history of overprotective and controlling mothering practices (Brenning & Soenens, 2017; van der Kaap-Deeder et al.,

2017). Such previous need-frustrating experiences may make women who are self-critical and reliant on others more susceptible to the harmful impacts of everyday need frustration. Those with a great deal of self-criticism and a need for care may not be as aware of the advantages of addressing everyday demands (Ekholuenetale et al., 2020)

Maternal Dissatisfaction and Regret

In order to communicate with others, many women who opt not to have children often feel the need to defend and negotiate their identities (Moore, 2014, 2018; Park, 2002; Rick & Meisenbach, 2017). According to Ashburn-Nardo (2017), cultural discourses of contempt and incredulity toward women's chosen childlessness and moral outrage over chosen childlessness are at least partially to blame for the stigma surrounding voluntary childlessness (Gillespie, 2000). Forgoing children is frequently viewed as selfish and immoral; hence being a childless "good woman" is maternally unselfish and other-focused (Hayden, 2010; Littler, 2020). While some childless by choice women accept the stigma of selfishness, others challenge the prevailing maternity rhetoric by claiming that parents are the ones who are self-centered (Moore, 2018).

These women occasionally contend that their lack of children shows a concern for the environment or fictitious children who would not have the resources they need to grow (Hayden, 2010). Other childless women enjoy the consumerist auntie act, which emphasizes nieces and nephews through gift-giving and reinforces women's intense emphasis on placing children first (Hayden, 2011; Littler, 2020). Therefore, it is not surprising that performing voluntary childlessness can occasionally result in identity threats from people who disagree with the decision never to have children (Martinez & Andreatta, 2015; Moore, 2018; Park, 2002).

Despite not sharing the same stigma as women who choose to forgo having children, moms nevertheless need to work on their identity within larger discourses about "good mothers"

and "bad mothers" (Collett, 2005). According to Hays (1998), Heisler and Ellis (2008), Moore and Abetz (2016), and others, the "good mother" is an ideology, a discourse, and a face that represents a woman who is capable/knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and who prioritizes her children above all else (Hays, 1998; Matley, 2020; Moore, 2018).

Numerous personal blogs have emerged where mothers confess to being "bad mothers" and expose details of their private lives and problems (Mäkinen, 2018; Morrison, 2011; Orton-Johnson, 2017). Women can challenge binary discourses of wonderful and terrible motherhood in online forums like Mumsnet Talk or Facebook groups, enact a maternal identity that accepts feelings of ambiguity, and eliminate the stigma associated with regret as a transitional experience to parenthood (Matley, 2020). Many of them express their desire to debunk maternal stereotypes and rant about what ideal parenthood should look like. However, most prior research has considered blogs and other media cultural representations of motherhood (Matley, 2020). It has been concluded that such expressions of unfavorable emotions and failures are frequently only permitted within certain limits that consistently reinforce middle-class ideals of responsible, good motherhood (Orton-Johnson, 2017; Sihto & Mustosmäki, 2021).

The emergence of biopolitics and the dissemination and reception of neoliberal conceptions of governmentality through public media platforms have been noted by poststructuralist feminist theory (Ehrstein et al., 2019; Jensen, 2013). Additionally, neoliberal culture seeks to control what people are permitted to feel and how their emotional states should (or should not) be revealed, in addition to requiring subjects to work on their bodies, characters, and private lives (Ehrstein et al., 2019). Therefore, rather than challenging or upsetting conventional ideas of motherhood, intimacy, and heterosexual nuclear family life, the intimate digital public serves to support them.

Motherhood Strain Factors

Hays (1998) made the case that mothers were under increasing pressure to invest emotionally, financially, and physically in their children more than 20 years ago. In addition, even when women perceive motherhood standards as particularly constricting, these standards are challenging to contradict (Smyth & Craig, 2017). In a world where risk management is prioritized and access to expert knowledge about psychological needs and child development has increased, the ideal of intensive, attentive mothering is becoming more constrained but still remains enticing (Lee et al., 2014; Sihto & Mustosmäki, 2021).

According to Tambellini (2022), the link between a mother and her child is the most loving and joyful bond in a parent's life, but it is also the most stressful since the mother must care for the child from birth to maturity. The stresses and obligations of motherhood seem to be the same for all mothers, although each may have her unique stresses. For example, even before a child is born, a woman might experience stress when she worries about the future and how she will pay the hospital expenses without health insurance (Hoseini et al., 2020). Some mothers mitigate maternal stress by creating comprehensive birth plans that may include hospital care or a midwife (Bell et al., 2022).

Furthermore, after the birth of a child, there are several more responsibilities to handle, which increase over time. These include taking excellent care of the children and balancing employment duties, such as daycare, school, a nanny, and other services to assist with childcare, particularly for working mothers (Hoseini et al., 2020). According to Mitchell (2022), a mother's stress may be caused by insufficient money, education, being a single mother with all the duties, and work hours. Additionally, depression is the most prevalent symptom associated with the pressures of motherhood and is often accompanied by other health issues. If mothers are

responsible for their children because the father is away or jobless, they must work, pay for, and

care for the children independently (Mitchell, 2022). Many mothers have reported having

difficulties, including but not limited to

- *Time Demands.* Children need a great deal of care and attention, which, combined

  with the requirements of other family members, leaves mothers feeling as if they

  never have enough time (Keefe et al., 2018). In this way, mothers may feel that there

  is never enough time to perform self-care, which can lead to increased stress

  (Raphael-Leff, 2018).

- *Finances*. Whether hiring a nanny, staying home from work, or sending the child to

  daycare, childcare is costly (Tambellini, 2022). As children develop, try new

  activities, purchase new clothing, and attend school, each child places a financial load

  on the family. Although children are always worth these expenses, parents often

  experience this burden (Welldon, 2018). According to Neppl et al. (2016), financial

  stress is associated with psychological suffering in parents, particularly in women

  (Newland, 2014). Due to the possibility that one couple would divorce, stepmothers

  and double mothers are more likely than biological mothers to experience financial

  pressure (Amato, 2010; Pritchard & Falci, 2020). Couples may experience financial

  stress even after remarriage if they must pay child support to an ex-spouse (Amato &

  Sobolewski, 2004; Pritchard & Falci, 2020). Being a parent instills sentiments of

  increased responsibility and purpose in life. However, being a parent also comes with

  several expenses (Pollmann-Schult, 2018). Having children raises household spending

  on food, clothing, housing, and utilities and frequently comes with opportunity costs,

  such as lost pay when parents quit their jobs or cut back on their working hours to take

care of their children (Pollmann-Schult, 2018). As a result, compared to non-parents, parents frequently suffer more significant financial stress (McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Umberson & Gove, 1989) and lower financial happiness (Stanca, 2012).

- *Relationship Requirements.* When a mother desires intimacy with her children, she suspends all other connections; this is crucial when the child is small and requires extra attention (Currie, 2018). Jiao (2019) asserts that it is difficult for mothers to address the requirements of their young children while still engaging in sexual activity, playing, and conversing with their partners.

- *Guardian Instincts.* According to Lupton (1999), women believe that life is suddenly riskier than it used to be since they must care for and nurture their children until they become adults. As a result, children confront several risks from the moment they begin to crawl until they enter college. This protective obligation can stress mothers and make each child's development stage more physically and psychologically challenging as the child becomes more autonomous (Hoseini et al., 2020).

Effects on Family

While many believe that children improve family bonds, they also can bring a great deal of stress that, particularly in the early years, may make it difficult for families to stay together (Tiemeyer et al., 2020). Specifically, both parents and subsequent stressors affect the family unit. Parenthood is first defined as the quasi-natural standard by pro-natalist solid standards. Consequently, some people may feel like they are being coerced into becoming parents against their will (Donath, 2017). Women, in particular, are concerned by this phenomenon because they have historically experienced more significant than average pressure from society to have

children (Hudde, 2018). Empirically, it has been demonstrated that childlessness is decreased in societies with strong and broadly consistent gender norms (Hudde, 2018). However, current German research shows that childfree lifestyles are becoming increasingly popular, especially among urban and highly educated individuals (Bernardi et al., 2015; Bujard, 2015). Second, normative expectations regarding men's and women's participation in various domains, such as housework, childcare, and employment, shape the relationship between parenthood and life satisfaction (Moore & Abetz, 2019; Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015).

As mentioned previously, when a child enters a household, money is among the most significant causes of stress (Jouriles et al., 2018). Children have several financial requirements from birth through adulthood, which is a significant concern for most families (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Before a child is born, most couples appear to have ample money and time to travel, purchase lovely things, and visit new places, but when a child is born, this tends to alter due to a substantial financial commitment (Raphael-Leff, 2018). According to Mitchell, unexpected shifts in affluence and economic freedom tend to make some families less tranquil and less cohesive (Mitchell, 2022).

A second stressor that may influence a family is relationship demand, which drives, pushes, and pulls both men and women with significant emotional and mental force (Jiao, 2019). Studies show that women devote most of their time, care, and affection to their young children rather than their spouses; this quick transformation is sometimes not understood by most males, which might lead to misunderstandings between spouses (Welldon, 2018). Moreover, mothers also feel relationship stress due to being employed or having a career. Many women have had to abandon their occupations and become full-time homemakers and parents to provide for their families, causing a rift in their personal and professional identities (Keefe et al., 2018).

Additionally, a shared parenting role strain in modern North America is time deficits, which relates to parents' assessments of not spending enough time with children. Parental time with children is prized in the age of intensive parenting and may even be required to promote solid parent-child bonds and healthy child development (Milkie et al., 2015). Parents appreciate spending time with their kids and say that being around them makes them happier than being alone (Musick et al., 2016).

Responsibilities & Stressors During the Different Children's Developmental Stages

Every child's developmental stage comes with different responsibilities and stressors on parents, specifically mothers. This section reviews the child's developmental stages, including postpartum, infant, toddler, school age, adolescence, and early adulthood. Mothers have many responsibilities and stressors during their children's developmental stages, which may begin with postpartum depression (Mtongwa et al., 2021). Mothers are responsible for providing necessities, such as food, shelter, and clothing, during infancy and toddlerhood (Kim, 2021). They also have the critical task of providing their children with physical, emotional, and social care. In addition, mothers must be vigilant in ensuring their young children's safety and well-being and that they are developing appropriately. As their children get older, the responsibilities and stressors become more complex. Mothers must manage their children's physical, emotional, and educational needs while navigating social and peer pressures. Mothers may also feel overwhelmed and stressed as they juggle multiple roles and responsibilities, such as balancing work and family life. Ultimately, mothers play an essential role in their children's development, and managing the responsibilities and stressors that come with it can be a challenging but rewarding experience.

Consequences of Maternal Depression

According to (Gatica-Domínguez et al., 2019), maternal depression is a risk factor for

children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Specifically, around 13% of women

suffer from postpartum depression (UNICEF, WHO, and WORLD BANK, 2021); this is because

women of reproductive age are more prone to suffer from depression, and many have significant

levels of social morbidity and untreated depressive symptoms. Moreover, during the first few

months after childbirth, mothers at risk for depression are particularly susceptible (Nguyen et al.,

2021).

Postpartum psychiatric issues often fall into three categories: "baby blues," "postpartum

psychosis," and "postpartum depression" (Mtongwa et al., 2021). Common symptoms of

postpartum blues include sobbing, bewilderment, mood changes, worry, and feelings of

depression (Soliman et al., 2021). The symptoms appear during the first week after childbirth,

endure a few hours to a few days, and do not create too many complications. Postpartum

psychosis, on the other hand, is a severe illness that begins within four weeks after childbirth and

produces delusions, hallucinations, and severe difficulties with functioning. Finally, postpartum

depression begins or persists throughout the postpartum time frame. It is characterized by a

depressed mood, fatigue, anorexia, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, excessive guilt, and suicide

ideation (World Health Organization, 2020).

The impacts of postpartum depression on a child are not limited to infanthood. They may

occur whether the child is an infant, in preschool, or in school. A woman who develops

depression later in life might impair her school-aged and adolescent children's development. The

impacts of a mother's depression, from prenatal issues until puberty, are outlined in Table 1

(World Health Organization, 2020).

Table 1

The Impacts of a Mother's Depression on Children at Different Developmental Stages

Prenatal	Inadequate prenatal care, poor nutrition, pre-term delivery, low birth weight, pre-eclampsia, and spontaneous abortion are risk factors for maternal mortality and impact the mother's mental health.
Infant	Behavioral: Anger, defensive coping styles, apathy, withdrawal, self-regulatory behavior, and dysregulated attention and arousal
	Cognitive: Reduced cognitive function or development
Toddler	Behavioral: Passive disobedience, immature expression of autonomy, internalizing and externalizing issues, and diminished social interaction
	Cognitive: Reduced creative play and diminished cognitive performance.
School-age	Behavioral: Impaired adaptive functioning, internalizing and externalizing issues, affective disorders, anxiety disorders, and behavior challenges
	Academic: Attention deficit disorder, Hyperactivity disorder, lower Intelligence Quotient scores, decreased information retention
Adolescent	Behavioral: Affective disorders (depression), anxiety disorders, phobias, panic disorders, conduct disorders, substance abuse, and alcoholism.
	Academic: attention deficit disorder and learning disorders.

Note. Source information is derived from the World Health Organization (2020)

Postpartum

Postpartum is the period immediately after childbirth, and this is the time when women experience initial issues concerning being a mother (Cusinato et al., 2020). One of the most noticeable issues here is the experience of baby blues, whereby the mother starts to experience crying spells, mood swings, anxiety, and feeling empty or sad (Miranda et al., 2019). The feeling occurs naturally and is expected to disappear within two weeks (Moreira & Canavarro, 2018). However, Jeon et al. (2019) warn that should this feeling continue beyond two weeks, the mother could be experiencing postpartum depression and need a professional's assistance (Lau & Lee, 2021). Postpartum depression, general depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress (PODSAS) are the leading causes of disease among new mothers, their infants, and their families.

Unfortunately, these issues are often neglected (Redzuan et al., 2020). According to (Redzuan et al., 2020), postpartum depression (PPD) is a significant health issue that may damage both the mother and child. Postpartum depression may also impact the mother's connection with her spouse and her interaction with her newborn, which can harm the child's development. The incidence of postpartum depression in the first three months after delivery is between 10% and 15%, and the predicted duration is from the third to the twelfth month postpartum (Redzuan et al., 2020).

Even though the postpartum period begins immediately after delivery, hormone levels fluctuate, the uterus returns to its usual size, and the mother goes through several emotional phases. At this stage, a mother's primary responsibility is teaching the baby how to breastfeed and ensuring they are kept clean and warm (Kim, 2021). Kim further said that in most instances, these sensations go after three to five days, but in rare circumstances, the sense of grief or emptiness may linger more than two weeks, which indicates postpartum depression.

Infant

An infant refers to a child less than 12 months of age (Erfina et al., 2019). During this period, parents are responsible for teaching the children new skills, such as how to feed and take their first steps, and ensuring their safety by preventing them from putting filthy or harmful objects in their mouths or falling (Hoseini et al., 2020). At this moment, it is difficult for the mother to comprehend what the infant may be experiencing since the infant may not be able to express or communicate their emotions (Erfina et al., 2019). For example, it may be difficult for the mother to determine why the infant often cries or cannot sleep.

Though named *postpartum* depression, the illness can stretch across the developmental stages, especially in ages 0-3 of the child. The consequences of postpartum depression on children ages 0 to 3 vary across nations with rich and poor incomes (Erfina et al., 2019). For example, there was less correlation between a mother's postpartum depression and her child's total weight and height in high-income nations. Postpartum depression in the mother might potentially hinder the child's development by preventing the mother from providing enough care. The connection between a mother and her child highly depends on the mother's mental health; nevertheless, depressed women cannot form strong bonds with their infants. For example, suppose a baby is dissatisfied with his or her surroundings and connection with his or her mother. In that case, he or she may have difficulty communicating, a short fuse, and difficulty establishing friends. A hostile environment for a newborn should thus serve as a warning sign for his or her career since it indicates that the child will have a miserable life. In this instance, according to Sloman, early detection and prevention of postpartum depression in mothers may help the infant develop and assist the mother in caring for the child effectively.

Toddler

A toddler is considered a child between one and three years old; this is the first phase of physical growth (Currie, 2018). At this age, the parent's primary responsibility is to ensure the child's safety since he or she climbs walls and engages in other risky behaviors. Therefore, parents are responsible for ensuring their children's safety (Moreira & Canavarro, 2018). The Mayo Clinic explains that during the toddler years, the child should be held frequently to help the child feel safe, parents should respond quickly to crying and change the child's position while sleeping to ensure proper bone development and circulation (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2020). These developmental recommendations further put pressure on the parental requirements and attention required by the child and can be stressful for parents.

Regarding the mother during these years, maternal anxiety and postpartum depression may be very detrimental to both the mother and the child. It is essential to remember that postpartum mother anxiety and depression have long-lasting impacts on the child and that these issues are vastly understudied (Walker et al., 2020). As a mother's mental health changes after childbirth and early life, postpartum depression will likely produce emotional difficulties in toddlers (Currie, 2018). Walker et al.'s (2020) study demonstrates a correlation between a child's mental and behavioral issues at age 4, internalizing issues at age 8, and the mother's postpartum depression and other mental health issues. Children whose mothers suffered from postpartum depression and persistent anxiety and sadness were more likely to have internalizing issues (Moreira & Canavarro, 2018); this demonstrates that the two diseases exacerbate one another.

According to research by Asselmann et al. (2020), one in four women has severe depression symptoms in the three years after childbirth; this is very harmful to infants. Not only has it been seen that a mother's postpartum depression influences her toddler's behavior, but also

his or her frontal cortical electro encephalic activity (Currie, 2018). Due to higher levels of proper activation relative to left activation in search infants up to 17 months of age, a more significant frontal asymmetry has been seen in these toddlers (Currie, 2018). These ECG asymmetries emerged as non-dependent and disassociated behavior in toddlers (Baik et al., 2019), and the impact is not confined to interactions with the mother after 13–15 months; it also occurs while engaging with a stranger. This increases the likelihood that toddlers may exhibit behavior issues associated with poor social engagement and child empathy (Baik et al., 2019). These toddlers have been seen to perform poorly in various areas, including language acquisition, academic success, intelligence quotient, and skill acquisition.

School-Age

School-age is challenging and perplexing for developing children and their mothers (Zietlow et al., 2019). Due to their desire for the best for their children, mothers frequently fret over their health and education (Zietlow et al., 2019). However, the mother's behaviors also impact the child at all phases of his growth, perpetuating the cycle of poor parent-child connections (Amici, 2022). The school years are crucial for a child's intellectual and social development. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), a child's life undergoes numerous transformations during middle childhood or school-age. By this age, children can dress themselves, catch a ball with their hands, and tie their shoes (National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, 2021). Now, independence from family becomes increasingly crucial as events such as starting school introduce children of this age to the bigger world regularly. Friendships have become increasingly significant. Physical, social, and cognitive development accelerates at this age. Physical ability and independence might put children at risk for falls and other accidents. Furthermore, automobile collisions are the leading cause of

accidental fatality among children of this age (National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, 2021).

These developmental milestones and changes can provoke worry and stress in parents, specifically mothers. When parents are worried, it hinders the mental growth of their children (Amici, 2022). The emotional connection between a child and his mother is essential for his excellent development at school. Because they feel connected to their mother, some children see their mother as a secure haven (Currie, 2018). Even if the child may have behavioral issues, this may have a long-term impact on the child's life, and other factors might cause a mother worry (Currie, 2018). For example, during the school years, a lack of environmental facilities such as playgrounds might lessen mothers' stress levels (Amici, 2022).

Adolescence

Most parents believe adolescence to be the most challenging time since this is when their children begin to discover who they are (Zito, 2018); this may begin as early as age 9, and most children undergo several bodily changes, including the loss of their voices in males and the development of breasts in girls (Pawluski et al., 2019). At this age, the continual cause of stress is ensuring that the children behave properly, as most are prone to difficult-to-control behavioral changes (Currie, 2018). According to Matley, adolescents are usually inquisitive and like to imitate their friends, but they also develop a touch of defiance (Matley, 2020). At this age, parents are primarily responsible for dealing with behavioral issues and explaining the various bodily changes their children may be experiencing (Pawluski et al., 2019).

Adolescence is a period of maturation. During this stage, the body and intellect of a child change (Matley, 2020). This period is highly distinct since the child's surroundings significantly influence him or her. Formerly, the parent was the focal point of the child's existence, but that

has changed now that the child seeks attention from classmates and society. In addition to hormonal changes, early adolescence is when children start to push boundaries and try illegal activities like using drugs and drinking (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2016). During this time, the child is often affected by peers and other individuals and attempts to imitate them (Pawluski et al., 2019). According to Currie, most children do not prioritize their schooling at this age and often engage in delinquent behavior. Additionally, he asserts that conflicts between mother and child are becoming more severe and frequent (Currie, 2018).

The link of affection between mother and child fades throughout puberty due to the child's desire to take care of his or her own life. This worries the mother and jeopardizes her happiness and well-being (Branje, 2019). This strained interaction and heated fights between mother and child persist for an extended period, detrimental to the mother's health and the family unit (Branje, 2019). During this period, mother and child should be encouraged to develop positive interactions and establish a solid bond. Studies show that if the mother and child had a stronger emotional connection, there would be less conflict, and the child would grow more effectively in an emotionally supportive environment (Donker et al., 2021).

Early Adulthood

Early adulthood is when a child experiences the most significant changes, which may be positive or negative and last a lifetime. Because the mother never ceases caring for her child, he will always be a child to her even as he grows (Berniell et al., 2021). Early adulthood, based on societal expectations, is a critical period for a child's growth and is supposed to be a period of happiness and transition for both the child and the mother since this is when the majority of significant life events occur, such as selecting a college, taking chances, deciding to get married, and starting a family (Rodriguez et al., 2019).

Between the ages of 18 and 30, when most individuals enter early adulthood, parents *should* have the fewest issues and obligations (Berniell et al., 2021). According to Zito (2018), children grow more autonomous at this age, so the parents have fewer financial obligations. Also, children have a great deal of comprehension at this age, making it more straightforward for their parents to lead them effectively (Matley, 2020). Nevertheless, most parents worry when they see their children not maturing into the individuals they want (Rodriguez et al., 2019). On the other hand, Matley (2020) explained that when a child moves away and visits less often, the emotionally close link between the parents and child weakens, and they grow apart. Since they no longer live together and communicate often, the difficulties escalate (Matley, 2020). Spruit et al., on the other hand, said that sibling relationships vary as children mature, and if they do not get along and have poor connections, this causes the mother to be sad and anxious (Spruit et al., 2020).

Idealization of Motherhood

Women who have been mothers for a long time have considered parenting a prestigious occupation and a sensation that renders all other relationships insufficient (Jiao, 2019). Most women who claim this are less interested in careers and work, see motherhood as their most significant accomplishment, and focus their lives on their children (Güney-Frahm, 2020). A mother sacrifices much for her family, and mothers who believe in patriarchy educate their daughters to be prepared to sacrifice everything, at any moment, for their family (Jiao, 2019).

When a woman has children, she usually prioritizes their needs and ensures they are met before hers (Jeon et al., 2019). According to Jeon et al. (2019), there is a romanticized perspective of motherhood, which holds that a woman is not a genuine woman until she gives birth and that motherhood makes women feel whole. Nevertheless, the study indicates that

women demonstrate their femininity in ways that conform to conventional norms; thus, they want to be seen as faithful women by having children (Erfina et al., 2019; Lau & Lee, 2021).

Doyle noted that women who did not give birth due to infertility or other involuntary means had poorer self-esteem in their hobbies and work. In addition, because parenting is their primary source of identity and activity, they have fewer interests, hobbies, and education (Mitchell, 2022). In 2018, there was much discussion on whether or not it is acceptable for a woman to opt not to have children; this is a rising trend, particularly in the United States. Initially, many people believed that a successful family required at least one child; therefore, not having children was considered a sign of failure (Lazzerini et al., 2020). Nevertheless, parents may regret anything for several reasons, and most of these regrets occur when a child is older (Raphael-Leff, 2018).

Every mother has a vision for what she wants her children to become as adults, and realizing this vision brings happiness and fulfillment to their lives (Lamar & Forbes, 2020). Occasionally, though, these children do not turn out as their parents had hoped and depending on the child's early adult failings, this might cause the mother to experience remorse (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). In addition, according to Arteaga et al., there are instances in which a child's behavioral issues may land them in jail or become so dependent on drugs that their future would be lost (Arteaga et al., 2010). Matley (2020) also explains maternal remorse may occur when a mother cannot support her children's financial requirements for various reasons (Matley, 2020). One of these reasons may be because her spouse does not provide enough assistance, or she lost her work and cannot care for her children as she would want (Moreira & Canavarro, 2018).

Social Media & Societal Pressure for Mothers

Society pressures women to be ideal mothers, exacerbating negative emotions such as guilt, stress, and sadness. When a woman has children, her happiness increases (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018); a mother may exhibit sadness symptoms and be generally unhappy with her life. Additionally, newborn infants need extensive care, which includes caring for the infant (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). As technology has advanced in the twenty-first century, parenthood has gotten more challenging (Fox & Hoy, 2019). Social media enables individuals to connect, communicate, and maintain contact. However, it has set several unattainable and unreasonable objectives (Lau & Lee, 2021). On social media, individuals attempt to portray their best selves. For example, women portray perfect scenarios with their children for fame or money, causing other mothers to feel competitive and envious (Fox & Hoy, 2019).

According to Moreira and Canavarro (2018), social media idealizes parenting because most television programs portray childless women as less significant than mothers, who are shown as worthy of societal respect (Erfina et al., 2019). In addition, social media fosters the perception that an entire family must include at least one child and portrays childless couples as courting rather than whole families (Kim, 2021). Also, social media gives the impression that women must be excellent mothers regardless of employment (Lau & Lee, 2021); this means they must take time out of their hectic schedules to care for their children, play with them, and ensure their safety.

Moreover, parents discuss with their children what it was like to become a parent and their everyday lives, particularly mothers. They discuss all they do as mothers and get applause from their audience. Even social media has made it easier for mothers and children to communicate, mainly as children age and become adults (Procentese et al., 2019). It has also

made it easier for others to compare how a mother cares for her child and how the child behaves, which may lead to sadness. In addition, new mothers who do not know how to care for their children may learn from older parents via the exchange of video, audio, picture, or text. Some people appreciate these women for their high-quality material and for constantly uploading images of their family, particularly their children, on social media, while others deem it superfluous (Lazard et al., 2019).

Social media may be helpful for women since they can utilize the knowledge to take care of their children, and the Internet is filled with professional advice. However, many mothers who feel obligated to give their children the most significant possible start investigating alternatives before their children's birth; this causes considerable stress for the expectant woman (Meng, 2020). Societally speaking, it is challenging to be a good mother because women who want to be ideal mothers experience guilt, anxiety, despair, and stress. When a mother's health is compromised by fatigue, she has difficulty caring for her children, cannot get a restful night's sleep, and wants to break the habit of continually caring for them. She may also develop depression, which, if left untreated, may lead to suicidal ideation (Garncarek, 2020). Society pressures a woman in every aspect of her life, such as what she eats, when she sleeps, and how she raises her child (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018).

During a period of life that is emotional, frequently solitary, and full of uncertainty, social networking sites for moms (SNSM) give women a chance to converse with other women about parenting and motherhood (Amaro et al., 2019; Strange et al., 2018). The websites offer chances for relational connection that satisfy the urge for social belonging during a vulnerable period (Cohen & Raymond, 2011). According to Chalken and Anderson (2017), many women

use websites to find practical solutions to parenting issues by utilizing the tools offered to advance their own and their child's well-being. Although this utility is advantageous, co-researchers frequently engage in social comparison to determine if they "fit" within the standards of motherhood (Amaro et al., 2019). This behavior can negatively affect mothers' opinions of their parenting styles (Coyne et al., 2017).

Mommy blogs, forums on parenting websites (e.g., babycenter.com; Cohen & Raymond, 2011), and Facebook, the most popular SNSM, have generally been the subjects of research on SNSM (Amaro et al., 2019; Edison Research, 2018). Although the communication content on each platform varies slightly, they all serve the same aim of bringing mothers together to share their parenting and mothering experiences. Compared to Internet sites generally, SNSM is also more compact, private, and enclosed areas. Many are "secret" or "private," are aadministrator-moderated, and follow predetermined regulations. Women utilize SNSM for more than just information and viewpoints. They provide social support, frequently in the form of knowledge and guidance in comments to original posts (Cohen & Raymond, 2011; Li & Feng, 2015)

Summary

Chapter two examined how a mother's satisfaction and stressors evolve as her child matures. It also examined strategies to enhance a mother's experience and how a person's social identity influences how they behave and think about individuals inside and outside their group. Finally, the literature review examined how societal duties influence the identities of individuals. In addition to examining contentment with particular areas of life, this study examined satisfaction with all domains of life. It focused on the theoretical framework, assessing maternal satisfaction and well-being, the mother's pleasure, strain, and stress elements, and how this impacts the family. The perspectives of specialists about postpartum, infants, toddlers, school

age, adolescents, early adulthood, the idealization of parenting, social media, and the accompanying pressures were also overviewed. Chapter three will discuss the study methodologies used to examine how mother satisfaction varies as children age; this will help us determine methods to enhance the maternal experience and equip clinical professionals with the knowledge necessary to assist women whose happiness with motherhood ranges from very high to extremely poor

Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

This study used a heuristic phenomenological qualitative research design. Through semi-structured interviews, the experiences of maternal satisfaction were investigated to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Heuristic processes that protect the researcher's assumptions are enlisted. The interview questions encouraged co-researchers to reflect on the fluid nature of satisfaction across the lifespan of motherhood. The recruitment process ensured that representation was diverse, and varying sampling strategies ensured an adequate pool of co-researchers was reached. The methods of collecting data in a virtual environment are clarified. The data collection and analysis of data are presented with specific detail using online conferencing and NVivo qualitative research software. Using member checking, expert reviewer, and adequate security measures ensure that the study can be replicated and that the study's credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness are protected.

Design

Using a qualitative heuristic phenomenological design, both the researcher's and co-researchers' experiences can shed light on changes in maternal satisfaction throughout the children's development (Mihalache, 2019). The goal was to better understand maternal satisfaction across all stages of a child's development and consider how maternal satisfaction transforms as children become adults. The researcher was a mother who has experienced the highs and lows of maternal satisfaction throughout the various developmental stages of her children. The motivation to conduct this study was to cultivate insight into the similarities and differences that other mothers report about the fluidity of satisfaction and environmental factors that transform maternal satisfaction over the life span of motherhood (Moustakas, 1990). The current body of

research lacked clarity on the unpredictability and mutability of maternal satisfaction considering the developmental timeframes of her children. Are there predictable patterns, notable environmental implications, or age and stage consequences of motherhood that impact satisfaction? As the researcher bracketed her own perceptions and assumptions, the authentic and unique experiences of each of the co-researcher's stories were told without influence (Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic Inquiry

The heuristic process begins with the research questions steering the study. This method aims to create a balance between self-inquiry and a course of discovery to illuminate the answers to the research questions; the researcher sought to capture the unique patterns within shared experiences and understand the wholeness of the phenomenon in a disciplined and scientific manner. The inquiry moved from whole to part and back to whole again as the researcher first engaged in self-dialogue, tacit knowledge, intuition, indwelling, and focus that stages the whole experience from the researcher's perspective. Informed questions and prompts engaged co-researchers to further the process of illumination, explication, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1990).

As part of the heuristic process, the researcher bracketed her own assumptions by journaling her reactions to the interview questions before conducting the interviews to make her reactions explicit and to draw awareness to potential tacit work (Moustakas, 1990; Polanyi, 1966). Through heuristic inquiry, the researcher looked for the underlying meanings of important human experiences through self-inquiry and dialogue with others who shared similar experiences through a semi-structured interview process (Mihalache, 2019; Polanyi, 1966). This approach was particularly suitable for this research because the study introduced new levels of insights into maternal satisfaction beyond the early childhood years. The researcher had a similar

experience to these mothers, such as experiencing different variations of maternal satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Phenomenology

A phenomenological lens respects the distinctive qualities of co-researchers' experiences and utilizes interview questions to excavate rich detail of the phenomenon of interest, maternal satisfaction (Sundler et al., 2019). This method enables the stories and perceptions of the phenomenon to be described in thick detail to learn and broaden a researcher's understanding of a phenomenon (Fuster Guillen, 2019). This approach acknowledged that through common and shared experiences as mothers, palpable themes and unique perspectives will emerge (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2018). In this context, the researcher sought to grasp insight into the fluid nature of satisfaction as mothers navigate through the development stages and environmental consequences of their children. The themes were cultivated from the co-researchers' perspectives, deriving conclusions that could be utilized to pinpoint common patterns in the phenomena under investigation (Sundler et al., 2019).

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Research Questions

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There are three research questions that steered this study. The questions provided boundaries and a keen focus on understanding maternal satisfaction from a qualitative and heuristic framework:

RQ1: How is maternal satisfaction modified over the lifespan of motherhood?

RQ2: How do mothers describe the relationship between maternal satisfaction and their identities as mothers?

RQ3: How do the development and environmental implications of childhood influence maternal satisfaction?

Setting

The primary setting for this study was online conferencing which eliminated geographic barriers. Women across the United States, who met the study criterion, were recruited and were co-researchers in virtual interviews (Schlegel et al., 2021). Benefits to virtual interviews included allowing for a diverse geographical co-researcher cohort, ease of scheduling, and limited barriers to access, such as transportation to the interview. The drawbacks to virtual interviews included less analysis of body language and limiting co-researchers to those who have access to a computer and know how to connect to a virtual interview (Ames et al., 2019). The researcher allowed face-to-face interviews if the co-researcher preferred this method.

Participants

The co-researchers were drawn from broad efforts to enlist mothers within the United States to create rich deep, and profound meaning that illuminates the experiences of the co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990). The co-researchers were mothers who had grown children, namely children who were over the age of 25. Mothers were not limited by age, and the researcher wanted to incorporate a diverse geographic makeup, including race and culture. During the study, the researcher recruited 15-20 co-researchers to participate in an open-ended, semi-structured interview to capture the deep descriptive experiences of the co-researchers.

Procedures

The first step was to complete the training requirements through Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and receive permission to implement the research process. The researcher started recruiting individuals who met the study's eligibility guidelines by distributing information through local communication sources and social media outlets. Fifteen to twenty

co-researchers were recruited for the study. Three sampling methods guided the recruitment process: purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling. Purposeful sampling seeks to find potential co-researchers with common characteristics important to the study. Finding co-researchers who are mothers of adult children and who are willing to speak about maternal satisfaction steered the sampling efforts (Suri, 2011). Snowball sampling was also used to find co-researchers through referrals or word of mouth. Individuals who inquired about participating in the study or who reviewed the recruitment materials likely knew other mothers who would be willing to participate. As information is disseminated and shared, more mothers heard about the study, increasing the pool of potential co-researchers. Convenience sampling is where co-researchers are recruited because they are easily accessible and available to engage in the interview process (Emerson, 2015).

Once co-researchers inquired about participating in the study, communication via phone or video conferencing was used to review the informed consent document and clarify any questions the co-researchers had before the interview began. When the informed consent document was signed and returned to the researcher, a time and date for a face-to-face interview or video interview using Zoom was scheduled. After the interview, each co-researcher member checked her transcript as part of the respondent validation process to manage the misinterpretation of views and self-reporting behavior (Yin, 2015). Interview transcripts were coded for themes and patterns in NVivo and an expert reviewer added a level of triangulation to confirm the soundness of the themes and conclusions. The results were reported as well as implications and contributions to the field of counseling. Recommendations for further study were offered.

The Researcher's Role

As a mother who has experienced challenges throughout the different developmental stages of children, not just in the post-partum period, the researcher was initially motivated to pursue this study to determine whether the situations and feelings the researcher experienced were similar or different from those of other mothers. As this study was heuristic, the researcher must engage in the phases of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher had already engaged with the research question by reaching inward and developing this proposal in line with the researcher's experiences. Next, the researcher embarked on immersion and incubation before co-researcher engagement. First, the researcher immersed themselves in the research questions and the data and incorporated the themes and queries into their everyday lives. When the researcher was satisfied with their immersion, they incubated themselves away mentally from the questions and answers and nourished them mentally for illumination. Then the researcher began illuminating the research in search of clarity and new ideas to incorporate into the study. Next, the researcher took what they had garnered from the previous processes, examined it all, and attributed meanings to the concepts found, a process in a heuristic methodology, known as explication. Finally, the researcher of the study engaged in creative synthesis, taking everything that they have realized and been enlightened by, drawing connections, and compiling the data and subsequent insights into creative material that holds meaning to the researcher of the study (Moustakas, 1990). The philosophical assumptions behind the motivation for this study were both ontological in the quest for the study of the being of a mother and epistemological in the endeavor of adding understanding to longstanding concepts of motherhood (Creswell et al., 2007). Additionally, due to the researcher's similar experiences, the researcher may be prone t

their own bias and assumptions. Therefore, the researcher will use bracketing to mitigate these potential conflicts.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews collected rich, descriptive qualitative data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The web-conferencing software Zoom recorded interviews that were not facilitated face-to-face. Verbatim transcripts were produced, and member checking ensured that the transcripts were accurate and reflected the narrative of each co-researcher (McGaha & D'Urso, 2019).

Interviews

1. How would you describe your identity before you had children?

2. Before you had children, what brought you the most life satisfaction?

    a. Before children, how would you describe your life satisfaction?

3. Describe the transformation to your identity when you became a mother.

4. How would you characterize maternal satisfaction?

5. What has brought you the most maternal satisfaction?

6. How has maternal satisfaction transformed for you over time?

7. Are there specific milestones/events/circumstances that significantly impacted your maternal satisfaction? * Tell me more (if you get just events – you want them to tell the story)

    a. Can you speak about the relationship between your children's age and development stage and your maternal satisfaction?

8. How has your level of maternal satisfaction impacted on your emotional well-being?

9. As we know, we all have low moments as a mother; can you describe the circumstances when you felt dissatisfied or had regret?

10. If you could draw a correlation between your maternal satisfaction and the developmental stages of your children, how would you characterize that relationship?

11. What would have been helpful to know as a mother of young children, adolescents, or young adults, that might have impacted satisfaction or your emotional well-being?

Empirical Support for Interview Questions

Question one was the initial question to establish a foundation of personal identity and the meaning the co-researcher associates with their identity before becoming a mother. These meanings are people's reactions when they consider who they are in a role, a social identity, or as a person (Burke & Stets, 2009; Davis et al., 2019). Questions two and 2a help provided a baseline for personal satisfaction experienced before motherhood, setting the stage for comparing satisfaction before motherhood to the satisfaction experienced throughout motherhood.

Becoming a mother is a momentous transition for a woman since it coincides with several significant personal, social, and biological changes (Laney et al., 2015). Questions three through six delivered insights regarding changing satisfaction levels during motherhood within the context of both identity theory and whole-life satisfaction theory, which assisted in comprehending the underlying satisfaction over a cumulative time and spoke to the mother's wellbeing throughout the children's development (Burke & Stets, 2009; Feldman, 2019).

Question three had further implications for exploring identity shift theory which describes the self-transformation process that results from deliberate self-presentation in a mediated situation (Carr et al., 2021). Question six prompted respondents to describe the evolution of their maternal satisfaction over time should yield similar results.

In the Séjourné et al. (2018) study, most co-researchers said motherhood increased overall life pleasure, even when facing challenges. In questions six and seven, co-researchers were

encouraged to share their experiences, including challenges, that impacted their satisfaction as mothers. Some experts define happiness as positive to negative emotions or pleasant sentiments (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Steptoe et al. (2015) distinguished three aspects of subjective well-being: evaluative wellbeing (or life satisfaction), hedonic wellbeing (sadness, anger, stress, and pain), and meaning and purposeful well-being. The eighth question addressed the literature gap on maternal satisfaction and well-being beyond the study of early postpartum well-being. The relationship between a mother and a child is crucial to the development and growth of the child. Newborns must have a close relationship with their mothers (Albanese et al., 2019; Unternaehrer et al., 2019). A child's development and growth depend on this interaction (Albanese et al., 2019). Several studies indicate that the connection should be maintained in excellent condition and never in danger (Albanese et al., 2019).

The purpose of question nine was to gather experiences of dissatisfaction and regret associated with motherhood. Although mothers do not share the same stigma as women who choose to abstain from having children, they still need to develop their identity within larger discourses about "good mothers" and "bad mothers" (Collett, 2005). The concept of good mothers is an ideology, a discourse, and a face that represents women who are capable, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and who prioritize their children over all else, as described by Hays (1998), Heisler and Ellis (2008), Moore and Abetz (2016), and others. There have been countless personal blogs where mothers reveal details about their private lives and problems (Mäkinen, 2018; Morrison, 2011; Orton-Johnson, 2017). As women transition to parenthood, they can challenge binary discourses of wonderful and terrible motherhood in online forums like Mumsnet Talk or Facebook groups, enact a maternal identity that embraces ambiguity, and eliminate the stigma associated with regret (Matley, 2020).

Question ten was intended to elicit a broad discussion of factors related to social identity theory and identity shift theory and can potentially encourage a wide-ranging discussion of maternal satisfaction over time. Question 11 was a closing question designed to capture further information that may address the theoretical frameworks and expand upon elements that helped to answer any or all of the research questions for this study.

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted using Zoom. Interviews were audio recorded with the option of video recording when using Zoom. After each interview, the researcher ensured that the audio recording was present and that no technical issues prevented the interview from being captured and transcribed. The transcript of each co-researcher's interview was downloaded into a Word document, password-protected, and stored on an external drive. The external drive was kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office.

The verbatim transcript of each co-researcher was uploaded into NVivo. Code and themes derived from the data analysis process. Data was organized into categories, assigning each category a code, making it easier to analyze and conclude (Elliott, 2018). To find themes and patterns in qualitative data, the coding procedure involved categorizing and structuring the information in a meaningful manner that illuminated shared experiences and cultivated new insight. The outcome was to generate themes that represented the descriptive details of the collective voice of the co-researchers.

Expert reviewer

An expert reviewer reviewed the data and theme development process. The reviewer was a family therapist, psychologist, or professor in a similar field to the study. The reviewer assessed the validity of the research methods and methods of data collection, as well as the

accuracy of the analysis. Additionally, the reviewer provided feedback on any additional implications or extended conclusions conceived through the review process. The review was asked to confirm the overall quality of the theme data as well as the clarity and presentation of the findings.

Theme Creation

Creating descriptive themes from interviews is essential to the qualitative research process. It involves looking for patterns, commonalities, and differences by analyzing the interview data collected. Then, based on the themes identified by NVivo coding and thematic analysis, prominent themes were identified and detailed using excerpts from the interviews (Elliott, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness ensures confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of the study (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The goal was to utilize methods of producing data that instill trustworthiness instead of concern over the data's inherent truthfulness. The study procedures were explicit, with a clear methodology for recruiting, interviewing, and data analysis. If challenges or unintended events occurred or unanticipated conclusions had been evident, those would have been made explicit in the study's results section. Care was given to facilitating a systematic process for this investigation so that it could replicated and that the findings represented a sound representation of the co-researchers' responses that add value to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Yin, 2015).

Credibility

Credibility provides the assurance that the collection and interpretation of data is appropriate and that the findings and conclusions accurately reflect and represent the phenomenon

under examination (Yin, 2015). It confirms the richness of the information gathered and the analytical abilities of the researcher to create a true picture of the phenomenon.

Credibility plays an important role in trustworthiness because it enhances the validity of the data. Respondent validation and member checking (Candela, 2019) were used to ensure that the data represented the self-told reports of the co-researchers and that they were accurately interpreted and represented in the raw data (Yin, 2015). This process was a safeguard to prevent unintended faulty assumptions and strengthen the credibility of the data (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability requires the research process to be logical and traceable and its ability to produce consistent data over time. Dependability points to the clarity in which the interview process with the co-researchers achieves adequate answers to the research questions. (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). If the same work is repeated, dependability determines whether similar results will be obtained. Having a high level of reliability enhances the validity of the findings, which is necessary for trustworthiness (Rose & Johnson, 2020). The researcher employed academically accepted data collection techniques and data analysis procedures to ensure dependability. To maintain dependability and reliability, the researcher also recorded research decisions and the procedure for gathering and analyzing data. The researcher also used objective data analysis and avoided having predetermined ideas about the study topic to reduce bias.

Confirmability is related to the researcher's ability to authenticate his or her findings and verify that they were produced from sound data analysis as opposed to bias or prejudice (Adler, 2022). This is especially important in a heuristic study as the researcher serves as the primary and co-researcher instrument. The researcher mindfully journaled and used memos as the study unfolded, offering to protect the trustworthiness and extending reflective discourse that

minimizes the impact on interpretation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Transferability

Transferability considers the possibility that the findings of this study can inform other groups, individuals, or contexts (Nassaji, 2020). The goal was not to establish truths that generalize to other settings but to answer the question of how the findings might apply to broader contexts and maintain content-specific richness. The study accrued shared and vicarious experiences through the richness and depth of the data descriptions that are a vehicle for bridging the findings to related experiences and interactions. The quality of detail allows readers to acknowledge and consider how and if the findings fit into different contextual frameworks. (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The findings of this study may be valuable by contributing to current literature on maternal and mental health and providing insights into how maternal life satisfaction can be improved.

Ethical Considerations

The rights of well-being and privacy were respected, and all research respondents were protected from any intrusion as the researcher adhered to strict ethical codes of conduct (Arifin, 2018). Further, IRB approval was obtained before beginning data collection and co-researchers completed informed consent before being interviewed. This study adhered to the established norms elucidated in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). They include respect for autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb et al., 2001). These three ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Respect and justice for individuals were shown by giving all co-researchers information about the research project since this strengthened their informed consent (Orb et al., 2001). The concept of beneficence relates to the risks and rewards of the study and was mitigated by using pseudonyms for all co-researchers and anonymizing any identifying information (Arifin, 2018).

Summary

The focus of this phenomenological heuristic study was to understand the maternal satisfaction of mothers over children's developmental stages. While conducting the research, the researcher selected 15 co-researchers who qualified for the study to participate in semi-structured, open-ended interviews to explore their perceptions of the research questions. All data was stored in line with ethical codes of conduct, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed for themes. By using these data collection methods and subsequent thematic analysis, the findings provide crucial and exciting data that can guide future research on maternal satisfaction. In addition, the study technique guaranteed the validity and reliability of the data obtained, as well as the significance and applicability of the findings. Finally, by employing heuristic techniques throughout the entire study, the findings offer a unique perspective of maternal satisfaction over children's developmental stages. Overall, these techniques and methods play a crucial role in the research process and are crucial for generating accurate and legitimate results.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

As women become mothers, they experience a profound metamorphosis of their identities. The purpose of this study was to understand how mothers' identities are anchored in the construct of a family that creates a unique collaboration between personal satisfaction while considering the developmental and environmental implications of her children (Burke & Stets, 2009; Feldman, 2019; Séjourné et al., 2018; Stahnke et al., 2020). A heuristic phenomenological approach was used to understand the experiences of mothers with maternal satisfaction across their lifespans. I conducted and analyzed 16 interviews with separate co-researchers using a semi-structured interview methodology. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: How is maternal satisfaction modified over the lifespan of motherhood?

RQ2: How do mothers describe the relationship between maternal satisfaction and their identities as mothers?

RQ3: How do the development and environmental implications of childhood influence maternal satisfaction?

Chapter 4 presents the data collected from participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. A description of the participants and the methods used to develop themes are provided. In the main section of the chapter, the study's findings are presented with details regarding how the data addressed each research question. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary and transition to Chapter 5, which presents the implications of the study's findings, recommendations, and potential future directions.

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Participants

Sixteen co-researchers participated in this study. The co-researchers were all mothers who had grown children, namely children that are over the age of 25. This inclusion criterion ensured that the mother co-researchers were knowledgeable about changes to a mother's identity and maternal satisfaction involved in the full development period of their children. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality.

Alice

Alice was a married biracial mother of two male children. Alice considered herself someone who always had a mothering instinct, and becoming a mother was natural to her. Alice's mother was very supportive, a behavior she modeled on her own children. She disclosed that motherhood was challenging due to her oldest son's mental illness and drug abuse, which affected her ability to be supportive of her youngest son. Although her eldest son was in recovery at the time of the interview, Alice reflected on motherhood as one of the most challenging events of her life. She was most proud that both of her sons were living productive lives, which made her feel satisfied about her role as a mother. Alice gave birth directly after high school and, at the time of the interview, was working on creating a new identity for herself now that her children are adults.

Angela

Angela is an African American single mother of three children. Although she currently lives in Texas, she was born and raised in Washington, DC. Angela became a mother when she was still a teenager, which she admitted was a struggle for her. Angela pursued a career in the military after the birth of her first child. Angela was very intentional about parenting her children differently than the parenting she received from her mother. Angela's greatest pride was seeing the wonderful individuals her children have become.

Annie

At the time of the interview, Annie was a mother of two children in their fifties. She was from Louisiana but currently lives in Texas. Annie discussed how she had to prioritize her children's needs over her own and how she enjoyed seeing her children become productive citizens of society. Annie also discussed how she and her husband tried to be better parents than the previous generation. Annie has enjoyed being a mother and has found it rewarding to see her children grow up to be good people. She parented her two children differently due to their different personalities and has found it helpful to have a supportive spouse. She also believed in celebrating victories, big or small, and was proud of the work she had done as a mother.

Becca

Becca was an African American divorced woman and mother of two daughters. Becca was an educator and considered her legacy of educational attainment as part of her motherhood identity. Becca struggled to parent her headstrong first daughter alongside her more passive second daughter. She also regretted treating her daughter as a project, pushing her to achieve and be perfect. The divorce from her husband took a considerable toll on Becca and her daughters, and teenage pregnancy caused them to reevaluate their relationship. Becca was proud of her daughters and their achievements but wished she had not pushed them so hard.

Carla

Carla was an African American single mother of one son from a rural East Texas community. She stated that she always traveled and described herself as a go-getter but settled into motherhood once she married and had a son. Her whole identity revolved around being a mother to her son, which continued even after the demise of her marriage. She credited her positive co-parenting relationship with her ex-husband as part of the reason she could be such a caring mother.

Now that her son is an adult, Carla is pursuing more activities that are personally enjoyable to her. She described motherhood as an easy experience because she passed on the love and support that she received from her parents. Carla is most proud of her son's graduation from college and his starting a career.

Cassy

Cassy was a divorced mother of two daughters from the Midwest but currently resides in Texas. She was a published author and credited her children with providing creative material for her work. Cassy experienced much stress and exhaustion while raising her newborn daughter and again with her second child. Cassy discussed her experience of sacrificing her own growth to ensure her children could thrive and how she taught them a solid work ethic. She also discussed a low moment where she felt dissatisfied and depressed, but her children still felt her presence and support. She encouraged them to go out-of-state for school and find their own identities and passions. Cassy found it fulfilling that her daughters grew into caring, smart individuals.

Daisy

Daisy was a white married mother of three children. She was originally from the midwestern United States but resided in Texas at the time of the interview. Daisy considered herself someone who was always mothering, as she was the neighborhood babysitter. Even now, Daisy described children as being naturally drawn to her. Daisy married young and had a difficult pregnancy with her first child. She gave birth to her daughter soon after she had her son. Navigating a divorce made parenting difficult but Daisy was determined to give her children a stable upbringing. She remarried and has also parented stepchildren. Daisy was proud that her children were productive members of society.

Diana

Diana was a divorced White woman from Virginia who was a mother to six children. Diana parented stepchildren from her first marriage even after her husband passed away. She then remarried and had more children. Diana described herself as a free spirit but wanted many children. Diana said her children have taught her much about herself and life. Her identity shifted as she parented her children through various challenges, including divorce and allegations of abuse. Although she loved being a mother, she admitted that it was a very tough journey, and continues to be challenging. Although her relationship with more than one child was strained, she considered herself a success.

Emily

Emily was a married white woman from Texas with two children. She struggled to find her identity as a mother and wife and had a strong support system of friends and family. Emily eventually found her identity in motherhood, and her children have informed many of her decisions. She was more anxious with her son than her daughter, but she knew she had to handle her emotional struggles to be her best mother. She found different stages of motherhood to be difficult but also rewarding. Emily found satisfaction in being a mother as her children grew older and achieved their own successes.

Gail

Gail is a divorced White college professor and administrator with five children. Gail lived in southeast Texas but hails from a background of variable locations due to her father being in the military. Gail discussed never having formed a true identity but felt that being a mother only would be detrimental to her well-being. Gail discussed that having marital troubles early was a turning point in her development as a person and mother, especially since all her children were born

together closely. Gail became a more supportive and less strict parent than her own parents. Although she felt a great deal of guilt about her role as a mother, her children often praised her for her support and constant presence in their lives. Gail was also very proud that all her children became productive societal citizens.

Layla

Layla was a married mother of three, two sons and one daughter. Layla was White, but all of her children are of mixed White and African American race. Layla became a mother at a young age and was very close with her first son. The age gaps between her children caused her to parent them differently due to her life circumstances. Layla was purposeful in parenting differently than her strict upbringing. Layla was a single parent before remarrying but was grateful she had a supportive family to care for her children. Layla admitted that things could have been worse, but she was just happy that her children grew up to be good people.

Melissa

Melissa was a divorced mother of one child and a retired educator. She always felt a strong sense of responsibility and motherhood, even before she gave birth to her daughter. After her mother's death, she felt an even stronger need to be present and supportive of her daughter. She also mothered her siblings, nieces, and nephews, adapting her mothering style to the age and personality of each child. Melissa was a mother who has raised thousands of children through public education and has experienced the satisfaction of seeing her daughter grow up and advocate for herself. She also experienced the challenge of mothering other children in traumatic situations and is now taking better care of her emotional well-being.

Sheila

Sheila was an African American mother of three children. Sheila stated that she has always been a nurturer and giver to others, and becoming a mother was something she always wanted to do. Sheila stated that she was very attached to her first son to the point where she was overprotective. She was also overprotective with her middle child, but more permissive with her youngest, which was often brought to her attention by her older children. Sheila said she devoted herself to motherhood and was happy with her children's accomplishments. Although she still worries about her children, at the time of the interview, she was at a stage where she could do things for herself and not worry about providing for her children.

Tammy

Tammy was a divorced African American mother of two daughters. Tammy admitted putting her needs on hold to prioritize her daughters and was satisfied with how they grew up. She regretted not continuing her education while raising her daughters but was happy that she was involved in their activities. Tammy enjoyed being a mother and grandmother and was proud of her children for becoming productive citizens. At the time of the interview, she described reclaiming her identity and time for herself since her children were grown.

Trish

Trish was a married Mexican American woman with five children. Trish became a mother very early in her marriage and struggled with having so many children close in age but credited her husband with supporting her. Trish learned to parent her children differently because they all had individual needs and personalities. Trish credited her culture's strong familial ties with providing a supportive environment for her children. Trish was still very close to her children and was proud they were all productive and successful.

Vicky

Vicky was a married White woman from Virginia and a mother of five children. Vicky was a very young mother and stated that she did not have an opportunity to create an identity before having children. Vicky wanted to parent her children in a more stable manner than she experienced as a child, and she considered this her greatest success as a mother. Although Vicky's children were adults, she was still participating in a caretaking role, but for her husband's parents. Vicky believed this continual need to be someone's caregiver inhibited her ability to develop an identity for herself that was outside of someone else's needs. Vicky was proud that her children were good people but would not take any credit for their good choices or successes.

Results

This section presents the study's findings. First, the data analysis steps used to extract themes from the co-researchers' interviews are described. Second, evidence is provided from the interviews supporting the answers to the study's three research questions.

Theme Development

A six-phase data analysis procedure was used to analyze the data from the participants' semi-structured interviews, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) guide. Phase One was familiarization, during which the transcripts of the interview data were read multiple times. This allowed general impressions regarding the depth and content of the co-researchers' answers to be ascertained. During this phase, each co-researcher's responses were scrutinized for any personally identifiable information in the transcripts. No personally identifiable information was present in the transcripts. Consequently, there was no need to redact information.

In Phase Two, *a priori* codes were applied to the transcripts. During *a priori* coding, researchers develop codes based on their literature review to apply to the data. *A priori* codes were

generated based on the study's conceptual framework, which contained identity theory, identity

shift theory, and whole life satisfaction theory. Identity theory posits that individuals have different

identities based on their different societal roles (Davis et al., 2019). *A priori* codes based on

identity theory included *wife*, *mother,* and *career person*. Identity shift theory implies that a

woman's identity changes when they become a mother (Carr et al., 2021). *A priori* codes based on

identity theory included *shift* and *change.* Whole life satisfaction theory hypothesizes that

individuals are satisfied with their lives when they perceive that they have achieved their intended

life goals (Rosengren et al., 2021). *A priori* codes based on whole life satisfaction theory included

satisfaction and *goals.* A description of the *a priori* codes used in this study is shown in Table 1.

Table 2

A Priori Codes Used in this Study

Theoretical basis	*A priori* code	Number of codes assigned
Identity Theory (ID-T)	Mother, mom	268
Identity Theory	Wife	19
Identity Theory	Career person	19
Identity Shift Theory (IS-T)	Shift	10
Identity Shift Theory	Change	98
Whole Life Satisfaction (WLS)	Goals	20
Whole Life Satisfaction	Satisfaction	179

An account of the a priori code assignments is shown in Table 1. The three *a priori* codes

corresponding to constructs from identity theory were applied to the data 306 times. *Mother* or

mom appeared in the data 268 times, the code *wife* appeared 19 times, and the code *career person*

appeared 19 times. The two codes corresponding to identity shift theory were applied 108 times.

The codes *shift* and *change* were applied 10 and 98 times, respectively. Finally, the codes *goal* and

satisfaction, which were derived from whole life satisfaction theory, were applied 20 and 179 times, respectively.

Phase Three was the pattern recognition phase. During this phase, similar text segments were grouped to develop codes to show the patterns in the data. In this phase, all excerpts from each *a priori* code were examined, and pattern recognition was used to group similar text segments within codes. In this phase, the data was analyzed for the co-researchers' identities not anticipated by my *a priori* codes. The grouping of codes into categories is shown in Table 2.

Table 3

Categorization of Codes

Category	Subcategory	Codes	Number of co-researchers
C1. Mothers may not have formed their identities prior to motherhood	ID-T	Unprepared	10
	ID-T	Caregiver	6
	ID-T	Identity Unformed	6
C2. For some mothers, the transition to motherhood formed their identities.	IS-T	Less Individuality	9
	IS-T	Grew into Motherhood	12
	ID-T	Motherhood Became Identity	9
	ID-T	Academic, Career-Oriented	7
	IS-T	Young mother	5
C3. The transition to motherhood was challenging for some mothers.	IS-T	Fearful, Scared, Anxiety	6
	IS-T	Couldn't Relate to Friends	2
	IS-T, ID-T	Tried to Maintain Individuality	1
C4. Mothers' experiences influenced their maternal identities.	ID-T, IS-T	Shaped by Observation	3
	ID-T	Maternal Intuition	5
	ID-T	Different From Own Parents	6
	IS-T	Different For Each Child	6
C5. Mothers equate maternal satisfaction with life satisfaction.	WLS	Children Become Competent	12
	WLS	Spend Time with Children	3
	WLS	No Regrets	8
	WLS	Did Best She Could	8
	ID-T	Children Self-Representation	1

	WLS	Milestones	7	
	ID-T, WLS	Evaluate Worth as a Mother	8	
	WLS	Fulfillment	7	
C6. Some mothers struggled with maternal satisfaction at different stages.	WLS	Unseen, Unappreciated	3	
	WLS	Regrets Mistakes	3	
	WLS	Long Road	3	
	WLS	Depression, Low Self-Esteem	4	
	WLS	Trouble with Children	7	
	WLS	Dark Times, Places	4	
C7. Mothers change their identity after their children are grown.	IS-T	Regained Herself	10	
	ID-T	No Change in Identity	2	
C8. Mothers experience challenges at different developmental stages.	WLS	Young Children	7	
	WLS	Sibling Position	11	
	WLS	Babies	6	
	WLS	Adult	10	
	WLS	Adolescent	11	

As shown in Table 2, eight categories were developed based on the codes. Category C1 was based on identity theory and describes how the co-researchers' identities had not fully formed prior to becoming mothers. Categories C2, C3, and C4 were based on identity theory and identity shift theory. Category C2 describes how the co-researchers' identities were formed by becoming mothers. Category C3 shows that the co-researchers' transition to motherhood was challenging, and category C4 shows that the co-researchers' experiences influenced their maternal identities. Category C5, derived from identity shift theory and whole life satisfaction theory, shows that the co-researchers equated maternal satisfaction with life satisfaction. Categories C6 and C6 were developed based on whole life satisfaction theory. Category C6 shows that the co-researchers struggled with maternal satisfaction at different stages, and category C8 indicates that the mothers experienced challenges at different developmental stages of their children. Finally, category C7

describes how the co-researchers' identities changed after their children were grown. These categories are used in phase five to develop themes.

Phase Four was the constant-comparative phase, during which the responses from all co-researchers were read in the order of interview questions to further solidify codes. During this phase, the co-researchers' responses to each interview question (IQ) were read. That is, all responses to IQ1 were read, then IQ2, and so on until all IQs had been exhausted. This allowed for the examination of the data across participants and helped solidify the relationships between categories and codes. In Phase Five, the data was organized into themes. The categories were organized according to my research questions to develop themes. During this phase, the categories were refined to ensure they were descriptive and addressed themes and research questions. The organization of the categories into themes is shown in Table 3.

Table 4

Organization of Research Questions, Themes and Categories

RQ	Theme	Categories
	Theme 1: Mothers' satisfaction with life is derived from their satisfaction as mothers.	C5. Mothers equate maternal satisfaction with life satisfaction.
RQ1	Theme 2: Mothers experience challenges with maternal satisfaction at different childhood developmental stages.	C3. The transition to motherhood was challenging for some mothers. C6. Some mothers struggled with maternal satisfaction at different stages.
RQ2	Theme 3: Motherhood influenced the formation of the co-researchers' identities.	C1. Mothers may not have formed their identities before motherhood. C2. For some mothers, the transition to motherhood formed their identities. C4. Mothers' experiences influenced their maternal identities.

		C7. Mothers change their identity after their children are grown.
RQ3	Theme 4: Mothers' experiences influenced their identities as mothers and maternal satisfaction.	C8. Mothers experience challenges at different developmental stages.

Four themes were extracted from the categories and codes, as shown in Table 3. RQ1 was addressed through Themes 1 and 2. Theme 1, extracted from category C5, described that mothers' satisfaction with life is derived from their satisfaction as mothers. Categories C3 and C6 formed Theme 2, which shows that mothers experience challenges with maternal satisfaction at different childhood developmental stages. Theme 3 shows that motherhood influenced the formation of the co-researchers' identities; this theme was assigned to RQ2 and was formed from categories C1, C2, and C4. Finally, Theme 4 describes how the mothers' experiences influenced their identities as mothers and maternal satisfaction. Theme 4 was assigned to RQ3 and was formed from categories C7 and C8. After the categories were assigned to themes and themes were assigned to research questions, the data and data analysis were examined holistically to ensure that the logical meaning had been extracted to answer each research question.

RQ1: Maternal Satisfaction Modified Over Lifespan

The aim of RQ1 was to examine how maternal satisfaction is modified over the lifespan of motherhood. Analysis of the co-researchers' interviews revealed two themes associated with this research question. In Theme 1, the co-researchers revealed that their satisfaction with life was derived from their satisfaction as mothers. In Theme 2, the co-researchers described experiencing challenges with maternal satisfaction at different childhood developmental stages.

Many of the co-researchers equated whole-life satisfaction with maternal satisfaction. A tenet of the whole life satisfaction theory is the notion that the attainment of an individual's goals

results in the derivation of life satisfaction (Rosengren et al., 2021). The co-researchers interviewed

in this study described satisfaction with their lives as consistent with attaining their goals as a

mother. For instance, 11 co-researchers described satisfaction with their children growing to

become productive citizens in society. The co-researchers' descriptions of their satisfaction

regarding the competence of their children are shown in Table 4.

Table 5

Co-Researchers' Maternal Satisfaction

Co-researcher	Excerpt from interview
Alice	"I don't think that there's any greater joy than I've ever had, than watching my children become self-sufficient, competent adults."
Angela	"God trusts me with these three awesome humans. He trusted me to raise them and bring them up. When I see them out, doing things and accomplishing things, it makes me happy because it's like, okay, you taught them something."
Becca	"I'm happy watching them achieve educational success. Motherhood, right? Watching them achieve success, educational success."
Carla	"I am fortunate that it still turned out we still raised a great child that has been able to live past all that, and still be a good citizen and still want to do positive things. So that's important to me."
Cassy	"I'm happy seeing them have their own lives and making their own decisions. Seeing them make wise decisions, because we've taught them and showed them how to live, how to carry themselves, and how to be productive citizens."
Diana	"I'm extremely satisfied with her watching her grow and, you know, develop and she's on her own."
Melissa	"It's satisfying because, at the same time, you get to see them grow. They're good people.
Sheila	"They're just enjoying life, they're living life. I mean, they have their challenges, of course, but just being, you know, a part of their experiences, being there to see their joys being there when they've had their lows."
Tammy	"I'm happy to see them grow up and prosper and become something themselves."
Trish	"We're very, very proud of the kids that we've raised. And there always is a stroke of the ego when other people let us know that we've got great kids."
Vicky	"Just watching the children grow and become successful adults. It always brought satisfaction.

As shown in Table 4, the co-researchers described their own satisfaction with life as being derived from material satisfaction. The co-researchers exuded pride when they spoke about their children. For instance, Alice said, "I don't think that there's any greater joy than I've ever had than watching my children become self-sufficient, competent adults." She went on to further explain that she derived satisfaction with being a mother across the developmental cycle of her cycle. She said, "I loved encouraging my kids to be different and walk their path and not worry about what other people are doing or what's the cool thing to be or do." Cassy described her satisfaction with being a mother, noting how rewarding she found her role. She explained, "I taught them how to be kind, understanding, and have empathy for other people. To see that in both of them is very, very rewarding because my mom taught me to show love to everybody." For Cassy, watching her children grow up to be empathetic, kind human beings is rewarding and brings her satisfaction. Like Cassy, Diana also derives pleasure from seeing her children thrive. She said, "Watching them act lovingly and kind. When I see them out in public, they're respectful, and they're positive parts of society. I'm most satisfied now that they are more independent because they're doing what they want to do." These quotations are representative of the other co-researchers' sentiments. The co-researchers described their life satisfaction as being inextricably linked to maternal satisfaction.

The co-researchers described not only life satisfaction but also fulfillment. For example, Annie said: "It's very fulfilling, actually, I'm not going to lie, I have great kids. I really do. It's very fulfilling to see the young women that they've become, and now they're very caring, gentle, warm, smart, creative individuals, and I'm very proud of that." Annie described fulfillment and satisfaction with being a mother to women who have grown up to be successful and happy. Cassy, like Annie, found fulfillment and joy in being a mother. She described, "I truly have enjoyed being a mother." Diana shared similar thoughts. She explained, "I believe my satisfaction of being a mom

was, well, I loved it. I adored it more than anything in life." Alice shared that her emotional well-being was linked to her success and satisfaction as a mother. She described, "When you feel when I feel like I have done a good job as a mother, I think it absolutely directly impacts my emotional well-being. I think the higher satisfaction that I have with motherhood, the better my emotional state has been." Thus, based on the co-researchers' experiences, mothers derive satisfaction from the fulfillment associated with being a mother.

The co-researchers' satisfaction with motherhood and with life was evidenced by their lack of regret with becoming mothers. Eight of the co-researchers described having no regrets associated with motherhood. The co-researchers' descriptions of this idea are shown in Table 5.

Table 6

The Co-researchers Expressed Having no Regrets with Motherhood

Co-researcher	Excerpt from interview
Alice	"No. I can honestly say that I have no regrets. My husband and I, we lost five children between our boys. The only regret I have is that I couldn't see the five kids we lost."
Angela	"I feel like each one of my children came to me at a time when I needed them and they helped me. So, I can't say I have regret. There's no regret at all. No, I'd say I have satisfaction. I've had some hard times, and I was down but I wouldn't say I was ever dissatisfied."
Becca	"I did invest so much. I'm on the other side of I don't regret that investment at all."
Carla	"I wouldn't trade it for anything. Now wouldn't at all. It's been beautiful."
Cassy	"Dissatisfied, maybe. But regrets? No."
Diana	"I didn't regret it. I was just extremely scared about how it was going to work."
Tammy	"I don't regret being a stay-at-home mom, and doing all those things that I did with my daughter standing up late making sure projects was done, or getting them ready to chaperone a field trip."

As shown in Table 5, the co-researchers described being satisfied with their choice to become mothers, expressing no regrets. Alice explained, "I can honestly say that I have no regrets." Alice

expressed satisfaction with being a mother, highlighting her wish for more children. Angela, like Alice, had no regrets, noting, "I feel like each of my children came to me at a time when I needed them and they helped me." Alice believed that her children helped her develop as a person and a mother, promoting her satisfaction.

Some co-researchers acknowledged that they did experience some challenges with motherhood. Diana recounted being scared about becoming a mother. She said, "I was just extremely scared about how it was going to work." While Diana expressed trepidation about becoming a mother, other co-researchers described being dissatisfied at times, but not in general. For instance, Cassy said, "Dissatisfied, maybe. But regrets? No." Thus, based on the co-researchers interviewed in this study, mothers reviewing their lives generally describe themselves as satisfied, fulfilled, and having no regrets.

Theme 2: Mothers Experience Temporary Challenges with Maternal Satisfaction

Within the general experience of whole-life satisfaction, the co-researchers did describe experiencing challenges with maternal satisfaction at different times in their lifecycles as mothers. The co-researchers descriptions of their challenges with maternal satisfaction are shown in Table 6.

Table 7

The Co-Researchers Expressed Challenges with Maternal Satisfaction

Co-researcher	Excerpt from interview
Alice	"There were still a lot of feelings of just complete and total and utter despair. Because there was no way to win. I was going to lose one child to drugs and I was going to get a phone call. He was dead, he had overdosed. Or I was going to use my youngest child because he was so angry and bitter."
Angela	"I cried the entire 20 minutes home. I cried. I cried. I cried. I thought, 'I've got this baby. I don't know what I'm going to do.' It was like a dark cloud over me, and I was just crying, crying, crying. So, I felt so sad. Like, I'm not going to mess this baby up."
Annie	"It was scary. I was terrified. Because I could potentially just ruin this child's life."
Becca	"At some times, I have been very unhappy. Because sometimes I feel like I invested and have had times where I have felt like, they don't get it. I feel unappreciated, or taken advantage of, or taken for granted."
Emily	"Initially, it was a lot of fear. This is not in my plan. I don't think I can do it. I just don't want to do it."
Layla	"I felt incapable of handling, like what was going to happen So, when I first found out, I was pregnant, I was very scared."
Trish	"When I found out I was pregnant with Lauren, Adam was only three months old. And it shocked me at first. I cried for the remaining pregnancy time."

Some co-researchers found the transition to motherhood challenging in various ways. Some co-researchers described being fearful, scared, and having anxiety related to becoming a mother. For instance, Angela described a deep sadness derived from trepidation when she became a mother. She recounted:

When I had her, by the time my mom picked us up to drive from the hospital to the house, for that entire trip, it was probably about 20 minutes, I cried the entire 20 minutes home. I cried. I cried. I cried. I thought, 'I've got this baby. I don't know what I'm going to do.' It was like a dark cloud over me, and I was just crying, crying, crying. So, I felt so sad. Like, I'm not going to mess this baby up.

Angela described challenges with her transition to motherhood, explaining her sadness when she had her first child. Annie expressed a similar fear after having her first child. She said, "I remember giving birth. It was scary. I was terrified. Because I was like, you could, potentially just ruin this child's life." While Annie and Angela described fear and trepidation, Alice described feeling helpless at times during her motherhood. Alice described, "I went on every field trip. I said yes to everything because I was trying to make up for all the time that couldn't be there. But it wasn't enough. I felt 100% helpless." Alice described challenges with gaining affection and appreciation from her younger son after having to spend a considerable amount of time and effort helping her older son through drug abuse. She described feeling helpless to gain his affection, despite concerted efforts to participate in his activities. Thus, some of the co-researchers described temporary challenges with maternal satisfaction, particularly during the transition to motherhood.

Some co-researchers expressed challenges related to satisfaction regarding their personal identities after they became mothers. Diana found that after she became a mother, she couldn't relate to friends from her youth. She described:

I still wanted to be 20, even though I was 36. But I still wanted to be that cool person and go hang out with the girls. Hanging out with the girls turned into two times a year instead of every week. I still loved them, and we were still cool. When we got back together, everything was great. But they just knew I didn't have the time for a relationship with them. I remember at one point, I felt like I wasn't even interested in being friends with them anymore.

Diana, who was a young mother, described longing for her youth, wanting to maintain the same relationships with her friends. However, due to her motherhood, she didn't have time to devote to her childhood relationships, and, at times, she didn't have the same interests as her friends. This led

to feelings of loneliness and isolation, which temporarily impacted her maternal and whole-life satisfaction.

Summary of RQ1

In RQ1, the co-researchers' descriptions of maternal satisfaction were explored. The co-researchers described their whole-life satisfaction in the context of maternal satisfaction. That is, the participants were satisfied with the entirety of their lives so far because they were satisfied with their roles as mothers. Specifically, the co-researchers expressed whole-life satisfaction and maternal satisfaction with seeing their children become competent, productive citizens in society. During this discussion, the co-researchers used maternal satisfaction and life satisfaction interchangeably, suggesting they equated whole-life satisfaction with maternal satisfaction. The co-researchers also expressed feeling deeply fulfilled by their roles as mothers and had no regrets associated with motherhood. Despite the co-researchers' general satisfaction with motherhood, they expressed temporary challenges with maternal satisfaction at different points. Some co-researchers found the transition to motherhood challenging. Alice described challenges with satisfaction when her eldest son's drug abuse impacted her relationship with her younger son. Diana expressed challenges with whole-life satisfaction when motherhood changed her relationships with childhood friends. However, the challenges associated with maternal satisfaction were described as temporary and overshadowed the co-researchers' general satisfaction with life and motherhood.

RQ2: Relationship Between Maternal Satisfaction and Identity

The aim of RQ2 was to understand how mothers describe the relationship between maternal satisfaction and their identity as mothers. In analyzing the data, there was one theme that

represented the relationship between maternal satisfaction and identity. Theme 3 is now described and illustrates how motherhood influenced the formation of the co-researchers' identities.

Theme 3: Motherhood Influenced the Formation of the Co-Researchers' Identities

Throughout the interviews, the co-researchers how their identities changed throughout their motherhood. Three categories contributed to the development of this theme. The categories were: (a) mothers may not have formed their identities before motherhood (C1); (b) for some mothers, the transition to motherhood formed their identities (C2); and (c) mothers' experiences influenced their maternal identities (C4). These categories were formed using identity theory and identity shift theory. Each of these categories is discussed in turn.

Mothers May Not Have Formed Their Identities Before Motherhood. Six of the co-researchers described themselves as unprepared for the realities of motherhood, as shown in Table 7.

Table 8

The Co-Researchers' Identities Had Not Formed Prior to Motherhood

Co-researcher	Excerpt from interview
Angela	"I was a teenager, so I hadn't really developed a full identity quite yet."
Annie	"Before you had kids, you were still kind of trying to piece together who you are."
Becca	"I was pretty scattered. I don't think I had much of an identity."
Emily	"I had my kids in my 20s, early 30s. Looking back, I was pretty lost. It was like I was asleep. I still was running away from God at that time."
Gail	"I think my identity was probably still developing. I'm not sure exactly who I was before I had kids."
Layla	"I don't think I knew. I was so young. I was 20 when I got pregnant and 21 when I had him. I did not know what my identity was without my firstborn."

As shown in Table 7, the co-researchers generally believed their identities had not fully formed prior to motherhood. Six co-researchers believed that they had not fully formed their identities before becoming mothers. For example, Angela described, "I was a teenager, so I hadn't really developed a full identity quite yet." Angela, a young mother, believed her identity hadn't fully formed before she had her children. Becca also described herself as lacking an identity prior to having children. She said, "I was pretty scattered. I don't think I had much of an identity." She described herself as scattered, not having a solidified direction in her life. Like Becca, Emily described herself as lost. Emily explained, "So, I had my kids in my 20s, early 30s. Looking back, I was pretty lost. I had a lot of fluidity as I tried to balance who I was as a person." Emily described herself as lost as she tried to find her identity between her roles as her own person, a wife, and as a mother. Gail perhaps most descriptively addressed her identity before motherhood, saying:

> I'm not sure exactly who I was before I had kids, but I know that if you had to ask me what I wanted and liked to do, I was majoring in English. I like to read a lot of books. I kind of kept to myself. I like to go for walks and hang out. But I don't know, I was so young. I don't know that I had much of an identity.

Emily reflects that she didn't have a solid identity prior to having children. While she enjoyed reading and academics, she did not describe herself as an academic but rather as not having much of an identity. As such, the co-researchers describe a lack of identity or an incompletely formed identity prior to motherhood.

Other co-researchers found the transition to motherhood difficult. Diana further explained, "Well, my transition was definitely a shocker. I didn't realize how tired I was going to be. I was exhausted. The transition was extreme. I had no idea the amount of work and the amount of stress and how tired I would be." Diana described her early motherhood experiences as exhausting and

stressful, recalling that she was unprepared for these realities. Layla also described being scared

and unprepared for motherhood. She said, "I felt incapable of handling what was going to happen.

So, when I first found out I was pregnant, I was very scared." Like Diana, Layla was fearful of the

transition to motherhood, not really understanding the depth of what motherhood entailed. Alice

had a similar experience, recalling, "I wasn't unaware of what went into being a mother. I wouldn't

say I was prepared for motherhood." Cassy also found that she "didn't know what was involved."

Thus, some of the co-researchers described feeling unprepared for motherhood, which contributed

to a difficult transition.

The Transition to Motherhood Formed the Co-researchers' Identities. Many of the co-

researchers described their identities as being formed by motherhood. The co-researchers' thoughts

regarding the transition to motherhood are shown in Table 8.

Table 9

Co-Researchers' Transitions to Motherhood Formed Their Identities

Co-researcher	Excerpt from interview
Alice	"My whole life had become being a mother, being a wife."
Angela	"I became more loving and caring, more nurturing because, before that, my attitude was a little bad. But my daughter, you know, she calmed down, she made me realize, you know, I have to take care of her. And there are things I got to do, so I can take care of her."
Annie	"My whole life had become being a mother, being a wife."
Becca	"When I had my firstborn, I was like, oh, man, I have a purpose. So, I don't think I had much of one before."
Carla	"I was always so hands-on. I was always the face that you saw when parents were involved. You just turn into that person. You turn into your child's person. You kind of lose what it is you're into."
Diana	"I didn't have children until I was 26. But when I did, everything stopped."
Gail	"I settled into who I was with my kids, and the kids started sort of defining me even to this day."
Layla	"It made me a much more responsible person. I don't think that I would have done that without him. I don't think I would have been able to do that without my son. I don't know if, internally, I would have had that drive to do

	it. It was hard, definitely. But it gave me a purpose, right? It gave me some direction."
Trish	"I became more protective. I felt like I always had to kind of speak for her. But as a parent, it's a whole different aspect that you become that child's advocate."

The co-researchers described their identities as changing after they became mothers. For instance, Alice described herself as having a solid identity prior to motherhood, saying, "I really felt very well aware of who I was growing up. I was a trendsetter." However, after she became a mother, she struggled to find her individuality and, perhaps, her identity. Alice recalled, "My whole life had become being a mother, being a wife." In becoming a mother and a wife, her identity shifted. Carla also experienced an identity from being strong and independent to embracing her role as a mother. In describing herself before motherhood, she said, "I've always just been pretty independent." However, after she had her children, she defined herself in terms of her children and her role as a mother. She described the shift, saying, "I was always so hands-on. I was always the face that you saw when parents were involved. You just turn into that person. You turn into your child's person. You kind of lose what it is you're into." Like Alice, Carla described a shift from being independent and alone to being a mother. Angela described the essence of this shift, saying:

> I became more loving and caring, more nurturing because, before that, my attitude was a
>
> little bad. But my daughter, you know, she calmed me down, she made me realize, you
>
> know, I have to take care of her. And there are things I got to do, so I can take care of her.

Angela described the shift in her identity as a shift toward a warmer, more nurturing person and mother. When her daughter was born, she realized that she had to change to effectively care for her

child. Therefore, for these co-researchers, the transition to mother allowed for the formation of their identities.

Other co-researchers defined themselves based on their roles as mothers. For example, Gail said, "I settled into who I was with my kids, and the kids started sort of defining me even to this day." Gail, like other co-researchers, defined her identity as a mother, highlighting that her children defined her. Diana also found that her life changed when she had children. She described, "I didn't have children until I was 26. But when I did, everything stopped." Facets of Diana's old identity and life "stopped" when she had children, forming a new identity that revolved around motherhood. The co-researchers, however, expressed satisfaction with their choice of motherhood and their identities as mothers. Emily revealed, "I'm very proud, very proud, and very satisfied with being a mom. It's interesting these questions. I get wrapped up. In this, as far as maternal satisfaction, it runs parallel with my own personal satisfaction. Thus, based on the co-researchers interviewed in this study, mothers experience a shift in identity during their transition to mother that influences their personal and maternal satisfaction.

Mothers' Experiences Influenced Their Identities. The final category contributing to Theme 3 is that mothers' experiences influence their identities. The co-researchers' descriptions of their experiences are shown in Table 9.

Table 10

The Co-Researchers' Experiences Influenced Their Identities

Co-researcher	Excerpt from interview
Alice	"I will, have always been a caregiver. I really enjoyed helping others. Being able to, whether it was standing up for the kid at school who was being bullied or coming to the aid of our neighbors who were elderly and if someone just needed somebody to help them around the house sometimes. I really enjoyed doing things like that."
Daisy	"I was responsible for caring for my younger siblings. I was called up in the middle of the night to take care of my baby brother because my mom was really ill. So, I had a lot of responsibility at a very young age."
Melissa	"I think even before I had my daughter, I felt like I was already a mother because I had two younger siblings."
Sheila	"I have always been a very passionate individual. I'm kind of the mother and type. Even before I had kids very young, I had to take care of my younger siblings, because I was primarily raised in a single-parent household. So, I've always had kind of like, I guess you could say that Mother, nurturing spirit about myself. So honestly, having kids just fostered it even more."
Tammy	"I looked after my mom and family members that needed help or whatever because I was single and didn't have any kids at the time."

Some co-researchers reported being in caregiving roles prior to becoming mothers. Their experiences with caregiving influenced their identities as mothers. For instance, Alice explained that motherhood was natural for her, due to her role as a caregiver. She described:

I have always been a caregiver. I really enjoyed helping others. Being able to, whether it was standing up for the kid at school who was being bullied or coming to the aid of our neighbors who were elderly and if someone just needed somebody to help them around the house sometimes. I really enjoyed doing things like that. Our family was very poor. And I don't recall our parents ever asking us to help with bills or helping out with others. We just did it. You just saw that something needed to be done, and so you did it because you wanted people around you to be cared for. So, I think caring for others was probably what brought me the most joy.

Alice finds her identity as a mother to be intrinsic, based on her experiences being a caregiver for her family. She described herself as caring and enjoying helpful others, which influenced her transition to motherhood. Daisy, like Alice, was a caregiver at a young age. She described, "I was responsible for caring for my younger siblings. I was called up in the middle of the night to take care of my baby brother because my mom was really ill. So, I had a lot of responsibility at a very young age." Daisy took on the responsibility of caring for younger siblings when her mother was ill, with this experience influencing her transition to motherhood. Thus, some of the co-researchers effectively experienced parenthood prior to becoming parents.

Other co-researchers also described being parents before they had children. Melissa described herself as a mother before she gave birth to her first child. She said, "I think even before I had my daughter, I felt like I was already a mother because I had two younger siblings." Sheila, like Alice, described herself as a natural caregiver. She said:

> I have always been a very passionate individual. I'm kind of the mothering type. Even before I had kids very young, I had to take care of my younger siblings, because I was primarily raised in a single-parent household. So, I've always had kind of like, I guess you could say that Mother, nurturing spirit about myself. So honestly, having kids just fostered it even more.

Sheila described herself as a mother prior to becoming a parent. She indicated that she had a "nurturing spirit" that was enhanced when she had children. She further explained, "I'm going to say, just being a giver, being able to empower others. That's my thing." Other co-researchers expressed similar thoughts regarding their roles as caregivers for parents and siblings prior to becoming mothers. Tammy described herself as a caregiver for her family. She said, "I looked after my mom and family members that needed help or whatever because I was single and didn't have

any kids at the time." Thus, many mothers have experience with caregiving, a role central to motherhood, prior to becoming mothers. These experiences, based on the co-researchers in this study, influenced their identities as mothers.

Many co-researchers expressed forming their maternal identities based on their parents' parenting styles and influences. For instance, Alice explained, "I promised myself when I had children because my parents were yellers and screamers; I promised myself when I had kids, I would never be a yeller and a screamer." Alice formed her identity as a permissive mother based on her parents' parenting behaviors, wanting to give her children a different experience than she had as a child. As a child, Angela felt singled out by her parents because she was female. Consequently, she aimed to treat her sons and daughters equally and fairly. She described, "I've always made a conscious effort not to make a difference between my kids based on gender because of the way I was raised." Becca also modeled her parenting behaviors based on her experiences as a child. She said, "Being a mother at that point, or just being present for my daughter because my parents weren't present for me." Becca aimed to be an involved and present mother due to her experiences in childhood. She, like other co-researchers, described the influence of her parents on her own maternal identity.

Summary of RQ2

The aim of RQ2 was to understand how mothers describe the relationship between maternal satisfaction and their identity as mothers. In the course of their interviews, the co-researchers described their identities as mothers. For most co-researchers, their identities shifted when they became mothers. Some co-researchers described their identities as not having fully formed before they became mothers. Others described an identity shift from being strong, independent women to embracing their identities as mothers and the dependency of their identities on their children. The

co-researchers generally described motherhood as solidifying their identities, whether established or newly formed. The co-researchers described their identities as mothers as being shaped by their experiences. Some explained their roles as caregivers in their youth, which influenced the depth of their maternal identities. In RQ3, the co-researchers and I explored the implications of childhood development and the co-researchers' environments on their maternal satisfaction.

RQ3: Implications of Childhood Development and Environment on Satisfaction

The aim of RQ3 was to understand how the development and environmental implications of childhood influence maternal satisfaction. This research question was addressed by Theme 4, which ascertained that mothers' experiences influenced their identities and maternal satisfaction.

Theme 4: Mothers' Experiences Influenced Maternal Identity and Satisfaction

Two categories contributed to the development of this theme. The first category was that maternal satisfaction differs based on the children's developmental stages. In this discussion, the co-researchers described their satisfaction when their children were infants, young children, adolescents, and adults. The second category describes mothers as shifting their identities again now that their children are adults, perhaps indicating contentment with their roles as mothers.

Developmental Stages. The co-researchers each described different developmental stages as challenging or satisfying. Each developmental stage will be presented. First, the co-researchers described their experiences when their children were babies. Some co-researchers described this developmental stage as easy, whereas others described it as difficult. The co-researchers' descriptions of the infant developmental stage are described in Table 10.

Table 11

Co-Researchers' Descriptions of the Infant Developmental Stage

Co-Researcher	Excerpt from interview
Alice	"I really loved them when they were babies, but I love seeing their own little personalities grow and develop."
Annie	"It was very stressful. It was very stressful in the beginning, because they couldn't communicate when they could communicate, and you know, kind of walk and I could help them become more autonomous
Emily	"I was scared and didn't know what to do. Nursing was a hassle. I made it through with support and determination. From infancy to toddler to them going into elementary school was hard."
Gail	"When they were young, it was so hard. I don't even remember."
Angela	"I feel like the baby, toddler ages were easier. They were the easiest to me."

Annie found the infant stage to be the toughest developmental stage because infants aren't able to communicate their needs. She described the infant stage as "very stressful in the beginning because they couldn't communicate." Annie found that she had difficulty interpreting what her child wanted from their girls. She further explained, "I had to interpret their cries and their whines, or when they were hurting. It was difficult because you didn't really know what was going on. I think the most challenging for me, and I think probably the most frustrating phase." While Annie found non-verbal communication with her newborn to be challenging, Emily expressed difficulty with newborns, in particular nursing. She said, "I was scared and didn't know what to do. Nursing was a hassle. I made it through with support and determination. From infancy to toddler to them going into elementary school was hard." Emily was scared when her first child was an infant, as she didn't have the experience to understand the process of parenting an infant. Gail also found the infant stage to be challenging. She said, "When they were young, it was so hard. I don't even remember." Gail found the infant stage so difficulty, she couldn't remember all her experiences. As such, for some co-researchers, the infant stage was challenging.

These experiences, however, were not ubiquitous, as other co-researchers, like Alice and Angela, found the infant stage to be one of the easier developmental stages. Alice said, "I really loved them when they were babies, but I love seeing their own little personalities grow and develop." Alice enjoyed the infant stage because her children were in the process of continuous learning and development, which she found satisfying. Angela found the infant stage to be the easiest, saying, "I feel like the baby, toddler ages were easier. They were the easiest to me." Therefore, while some co-researchers were challenged by their children's infant stages, others found this stage to be less difficult than subsequent developmental stages.

The co-researchers also expressed different opinions regarding the ease of difficulty associated with raising young children. The opinions of the co-researchers regarding the young childhood developmental stage are described in Table 11.

Table 12

Co-Researchers' Perceptions of the Young Childhood Stage

Co-Researcher	Excerpt from interview
Angela	"I feel like that the younger to I have to give more guidance. That was harder for me."
Carla	"I think it's obvious when they're younger, they listen to you more. You have a little bit more control. I don't know if that's the right word. But you can tell them something and that's it. You know, there's no questions back."
Alice	"It's just really, it's, you know, when they're younger, and they're developing their sense of humor, and they're just so funny."
Diana	"My satisfaction was happiest or most elevated when they were younger. It was when the kids were available. And I had all of the kids at the table and I just felt the most satisfied."
Gail	"So, school-aged, that was probably the easier timeframe because kids that age tend to be a bit more agreeable. School age, I was the most satisfied.
Annie	"It was challenging all throughout, and there were all different phases. Elementary school and middle school were the hardest. I think they say that was the worst phase for them.
Trish	"It was just very, very stressful to me because I always had to be prepared and not having the ability to just say, come on, let's run. It would mean that I would have to pack up half my house, take my kids and run. So, it was very stressful when they were small."

Alice, Diana, and Carla derived satisfaction from their children during the young childhood stage. Alice said, "It's just really, it's, you know, when they're younger, and they're developing their sense of humor, and they're just so funny." Alice enjoyed the early childhood stage because she found the children to be humorous when they were young. Diana described herself as the "most satisfied" when her children were young, and she was able to spend time with them all together. Diana said, "My satisfaction was happiest or most elevated when they were younger. It was when the kids were available. And I had all of the kids at the table, and I just felt the most satisfied." Diana enjoyed times when she was able to have all the children sitting at the dinner table and when she was able to interact with them. Like Diana, Gail described herself as most satisfied when her children were school-aged. Gail said, "So, school-aged, that was probably the easier timeframe because kids that age tend to be a bit more agreeable. School age, I was the most satisfied." Gail enjoyed the childhood years because she found the children agreeable at that stage. In particular, the co-researchers derived satisfaction from having the children at home and being able to communicate with them without conflict.

While some co-researchers enjoyed the childhood years, others, like Annie and Trish, found this age challenging due to the immense amount of supervision the children needed. Annie said, "It was challenging all throughout, and there were all different phases. Elementary school and middle school were the hardest. I think they say that was the worst phase for them." Annie found the childhood and middle school stages to be difficult, likely because the children were argumentative at that stage. Angela found early childhood hard as well. She said, "I feel like that the younger two I have to give more guidance. That was harder for me." Angela was challenged when her children required constant supervision and guidance, which characterized the early childhood years. Trish

found the early childhood years difficult because of the inherent inflexibility of this time. She said,

"It was just very, very stressful to me because I always had to be prepared and not having the

ability to just say, come on, let's run." Trish disliked the process of packing her family into the care

to run small errands. Therefore, like the infant stage, some mothers found the young childhood

stage satisfying, while others found it challenging.

Most co-researchers found the adolescent stage to be challenging in terms of their

satisfaction with motherhood. The opinions of the co-researchers regarding the adolescent stage of

development are shown in Table 12.

Table 13

Co-Researchers' Perceptions of the Adolescence Stage

Co-Researcher	Excerpt from interview
Alice	"During that time period between like around that age like 15 to 17, that was a time period that it was very hard."
Angela	"The preteen and teenage years were the most difficult for me, because I don't want to give them too much to where I'm over them and trying to make every decision for them. It might not always allow me what I wanted to do, or what I thought they should be doing."
Annie	"The transition into womanhood, a little bit, with cycles and your body changing and all of that, it was just really awkward. And they say that was their ugly space."
Becca	"Those teen years and preteen years, I was very dissatisfied. I remember going through a rough patch with my oldest because she's always been so strong-willed."
Carla	"Emotionally, it was tough because this isn't the type. This isn't the child that I had five years ago. The things that he would say, the attitudes, the questioning back, it was emotional because that's not what I was used to."
Gail	"That age from about 14 to 22 was hell and I was dissatisfied. It was difficult. So, I'd say that's the worst is teenagers, junior high teenagers."
Vicky	"With that age, you have to choose your battles. Because they are growing, they're trying to figure out who they're going to be. I feel like, you just have to do all you can do is instill in them to the best of your ability."

The co-researchers generally found the adolescent stage to be challenging, as shown in Table 8.

Becca described being dissatisfied at this age due to challenges associated with her teenage

daughter. Becca said, "Those teen years and preteen years, I was very dissatisfied. I remember going through a rough patch with my oldest because she's always been so strong-willed." Becca's daughter was a strong and independent adolescent who challenged her mother. Becca found these years to be difficult and unsatisfying. Carla explained that she experienced emotional challenges when her son was an adolescent. She said, "Emotionally, it was tough because this isn't the type. This isn't the child that I had five years ago. The things that he would say, the attitude, the questioning back, it was emotional because that's not what I was used to." Carla's son changed significantly during his teenage years, becoming more emotional. His emotional challenges influenced the emotions of his mother and Carla's emotional challenges mirrored her son's new emotionality. Gail also described being dissatisfied when her children were in junior high and high school. She said, "That age from about 14 to 22 was hell and I was dissatisfied. It was difficult." Gail found her children to be difficult when they were teenagers and early adults, describing her life as "hell." Based on the co-researchers' experiences, the children's challenges manifested in challenges for their parents, some of whom expressed less maternal satisfaction compared to earlier ages.

Some co-researchers offered explanations regarding why the teenage years were difficult. Angela found it difficult to parent her teenage children because she was unsure of how much to parent them and how much to allow them independence. She said, "The preteen and teenage years were the most difficult for me because I don't want to give them too much to where I'm over them and trying to make every decision for them. It might not always allow me what I wanted to do, or what I thought they should be doing." Angela strived to allow her children to be independent but struggled when she viewed her children as making the wrong decisions. Annie found her children's hormonal changes to be challenging. She explained, "The transition into womanhood, a little bit,

with cycles and your body changing and all of that, it was just really awkward. And they say that was their ugly space." Annie described her daughter as changing emotionally due to hormones, which she found "awkward" and "ugly." The mother co-researchers indicated that they were challenged by different aspects of their children's adolescent development.

The co-researchers also explained their maternal satisfaction now that their children were grown adults. Like all other developmental stages, some co-researchers expressed enjoying this stage of their children's development, while others found it challenging. The co-researchers' perceptions of the adult stage are described in Table 13.

Table 14

Co-Researchers' Perceptions of the Adult Stage

Co-Researcher	Excerpt from interview
Sheila	"The minute they came home for those holidays and weekends, you know, that worry and went back up. I did have to do a lot of praying and keep them covered, you know, 'God cover my children,' 'wrap a hedge of protection around them.' And so, I had to understand that if I'm praying, I can't be worrying."
Alice	"But then then they get older, and you can laugh with them as an adult."
Angela	"She is completely an independent adult. To me, that's the easiest time. I would definitely say the adults are the easiest. So, kind of seeing it come full circle."
Annie	"When your kids get older and are adults, they can do more things on their own, then I think the pressure lightens up a little bit."
Carla	"But now that he is a young adult, that transition has been nice. I can look at him and say, wow, he's an adult. He's even talking and his conversation is like an adult."
Diana	"I wish they were not so busy with their own families. I could make Thanksgiving dinner and I knew everyone would be at the table."
Trish	"That's when she left, but I still think she's here. But I'm very satisfied with how I was with her with her mom."

Sheila expressed greater amounts of worry and anxiety now that her children are grown, which she described as challenging for her emotionally. She further explained, "He'll stay out all

night. I will literally get up at three, four o'clock in the morning. I'm calling and dialing and texting his phone because I'm constantly worrying about him. Then, he doesn't answer, it's worse." Sheila appears to miss the accountability that her children had when they were young and adolescents. As adults, they're not obligated to check-in with their mother, which is challenging for Sheila. Diana also finds the adulthood stage challenging, as her children have their own families. She said, "I wish they were not so busy with their own families. I could make Thanksgiving dinner, and I knew everyone would be at the table." Diana expressed a longing for the days when she could have all of her children in the same house and sitting at the same table. She received less attention from her children as adults than she desired and found this stage to be challenging. For Sheila and Diana, their children's transition to adulthood has been emotionally challenging.

The other co-researchers generally expressed satisfaction with their children being grown adults. Annie and Angela found the adult stage to be the easiest, and both expressed joy with seeing their children be successful. Annie said, "When your kids get older and are adults, they can do more things on their own, then I think the pressure lightens up a little bit." Annie found the adult stage to be less pressure than earlier developmental stages, as her children were now independent. Annie also enjoyed her children's independence as adults. She said, "She is completely an independent adult. To me, that's the easiest time. I would definitely say the adults are the easiest. So, kind of seeing it come full circle." For Annie, the adult stage has been the easiest, and she has enjoyed watching her children grow to be independent. Trish reiterated these thoughts but added that she is very satisfied with her adult children, and therefore, she's satisfied with herself as a mother. These findings indicate that some mothers derive maternal satisfaction and whole-life satisfaction from the success of their children, which is particularly evident in adulthood. In summary, each co-researcher expressed a different opinion about the ease or

difficulty of the infant, young childhood, adolescent, and adult developmental stages. As such, the co-researchers expressed different levels of satisfaction with different developmental stages.

Mothers Experience a Second Identity Shift. An inclusion criterion for participation in this study was that the co-researchers had adult children. Now that the co-researchers' children are grown, many co-researchers described a second identity shift. For example, Alice said,

> As I got older, I felt like I could get back to what I was, more of who the real me was. But then it was trying to remember who that was. I have art supplies in my car. I have them at my house. I have them at my job. I've just kind of started doing a little of that. Dancing again, trying to get my body to loosen up so I can dance without hurting myself. But getting back to exercising and getting back to eating right. I've always loved to cook.

Alice describes herself as rediscovering who she was prior to motherhood. As such, she indicates an identity shift after her children were grown. Annie also indicated a rediscovery of herself. She said, "I am rediscovering who I was. I just make sure I listen to my inner child a lot more." Becca similarly expressed having to find out who is now that her children were grown. She described, "On the other side of everything when they're all off doing their own thing, it's a matter of me now having to come back and try to find what that will be for me." Thus, the co-researchers, having fulfilled their roles as mothers, are open to exploring their own identities encompassing the motherhood experience.

Summary of RQ3

The aim of RQ3 was to explore maternal satisfaction during different childhood developmental stages. The maternal co-researchers discussed their satisfaction at the infant, young child, adolescent, and adult stages. Each co-researcher had unique perspectives regarding each developmental stage, some describing the infant stage as easy, whereas others described it as

challenging. Most co-researchers experienced challenges with their adolescent children, with some co-researchers expressing sadness and dissatisfaction during this stage. The co-researchers generally find satisfaction with their adult children, which connects back to RQ1. Moreover, since the co-researchers' children were grown, many expressed a shift in identity back to themselves, rediscovering their previous identities.

Heuristic Reflection

My experience as a mother began years ago with the entry of my stepdaughter into my life. A few years later, I became a mother to my biological daughter. The struggle to find myself as a mother and person motivated the purpose of this study. The challenges that I faced with the developmental changes of both daughters compounded my inability to discover and maintain some sense of personal balance. Their constant need for a different version of me, along with my own personal evolution, prompted much angst and desire to find out if others had a similar experience. I wanted to know if other mothers felt the fluctuation of highs and lows that I have experienced. During the interviews, I found similarities and differences that have influenced me to delve deeper into how my own development and satisfaction continue to evolve.

Even though I have been a mother for years, I still struggle with maternal satisfaction and the development of my identity. When the interviews began, there was an expectation of hearing stories from women who have experienced similar feelings about their satisfaction and how they view themselves. From most of the stories, I felt validated by the struggles that I experienced in my personal and professional life. I heard from women who also struggled with being a person as well as a mother and sometimes a spouse. There was a great sense of validation as other women told their stories that mirrored my own. I would nod and give expressions that I was listening to the

stories when I really wanted to reach out and hug the co-researcher. It was most important to hear that there were others who have navigated the troubled waters of motherhood.

I could personally relate to the feeling that my needs fell behind those of my children. The co-researchers were from different generations and backgrounds; however, they all felt the pressure to conform to denying their own needs for their children. I connected with the feeling that this was an expectation of mothers everywhere, even if it should not be. All of them assured me that there would be a time when my children did not need me as much and I could devote more time to myself. Like many of the co-researchers, I have found that as my children got older, their needs changed as much as mine. I have been able to pour into myself and my own development while still being present for my daughters. These stories gave me hope that I would eventually gain more of my old identity or even a new one that incorporated my maternal journey.

Although I was not looking for it, I found that the relationships with spouses, significant others, and co-parents greatly affected the co-researchers' and how they viewed themselves. I have also questioned my ability and satisfaction with being a mother based on my relationship with my husband. Like many of the co-researchers, the support (or lack thereof) greatly contributed to my own experience and how I parented my children. I want them to see and model healthy relationships, which was also a sentiment I heard repeatedly in the interviews. Before hearing this from the co-researchers, I had not truly explored how my marital relationship affected my maternal satisfaction or how I viewed myself as a mother.

One stark difference between me and the co-researchers was the transition to motherhood and how it affected my identity. Many of the co-researchers stated that they did not truly have an identity or purpose before becoming a mother. Many confirmed that being a mother gave them a stronger identity with a more defined purpose; however, this was not the case for me. I knew who I

was and relished my independence and ability to sustain myself. I had a clearly defined purpose in life and supposed that I could just weave a child into what I was already doing. That assumption was a grave mistake, which was also evidenced in the stories about how a small child caused great upheaval in the lives of the co-researchers. When I heard accounts of how co-researchers felt that they needed to push their own needs aside for their children, this resonated deeply with me. It was during these discussions that I was finally able to verbalize that I lost my own independence to cater to the dependence of another. This was the antithesis of all that I stood for, and it did not matter that it was my child for whom I gave up myself.

There were some accounts of co-researchers who stated that they were able to gain more time for themselves as their children grew older, especially after the children left home. Although the worry never ceases, there seemed to be a sense of relief and validation that the children were reared well enough to be self-sufficient. I have experienced this as my oldest daughter graduated from high school and moved out of the house. Like my co-researchers, I know that she is a capable individual and can do well on her own, but I still worry for her. The need to mother her differently is a new stage in our relationship, and I now have some reference points from the interviews. The same applies to my youngest as she leaves behind her toddler years and moves into a stage where she does not need constant attention.

During the interviews, I became increasingly aware of co-researchers who seemed to be telling an edited story. There were statements that clearly indicated they were not completely satisfied with their experience, but they struggled to voice that dissatisfaction. When asked about regrets, they would quickly say that they did not regret becoming a mother but there was some regret or dissatisfaction about specific events or reactions to circumstances. I suspect some of this is because many of these women grew up during an era where the goal of a woman was to get

married, have children, and make no complaints about the experience. This was indicated a few times by the older mothers and seemed to decrease with those born into different generations. Even so, there was an obvious discomfort with discussing any negative feelings about motherhood or children. I had to remember that it is still very taboo to express dissatisfaction with motherhood.

One of the biggest challenges that I faced was ensuring that I did not influence the answers of the co-researchers. When discussing dissatisfaction, I wanted to hear more about how the women were not happy being a mother or would have made a different decision. I did not hear this from any of the interviews, and it became very frustrating for me. I was tempted many times to directly ask if the co-researchers regretted becoming mothers; however, I did not ask any of them the question. I wanted them to be able to discuss any dissatisfaction through an organic conversation led by the co-researcher rather than me seeking a specific answer. I had to recognize that though I shared similar experiences with the co-researchers, their experiences would not completely mirror my own. There have been times when I have been dissatisfied with being a mother, and I assumed that I would hear similar sentiments.

I began journaling to express my thoughts and feelings about the research and the knowledge that I was gaining. I found that while I was very appreciative of the co-researchers who were willing to share their stories, I was angry because I still felt alone in my dissatisfaction with motherhood. The journaling assisted with identifying any behaviors that may have influenced when or why I asked questions. I took a few days away from the interviews to reflect on my feelings and decide on a new course of action with the interviews. I taped the interview protocol questions to the sides of my monitors to ensure that I was asking each question verbatim and without any alterations. I was also intentional in asking if there were additional feelings or experiences that they

wanted to share, all of them shared that they were grateful to have the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

The journaling exercise was beneficial as it served as an outlet for my own reactions, thoughts, and feelings. The words I wrote spoke to some of my deepest pain and angst about my own maternal satisfaction, and I was relieved that only I would ever see those pages. I wondered if any of the co-researchers ever felt the same way. If they did, they would not likely share their unfiltered thoughts with a stranger. It was this realization that gave me insight into my relationship with these women. I wanted them to feel safe enough to share their stories that would impart some mystical knowledge to make the maternal journey easier or more manageable. What I learned is that whether the experiences are written down, kept private or spoken during an interview, each mother develops her own identity and forms her own level and scale of satisfaction with the experience. There is no checklist of right or wrong answers, but only what is known at the moment. This statement is the last thing written in my journal.

Motherhood satisfaction and identity development are personal journeys. Although we shared many similarities, we also shared many differences. These variations make up the story that we tell ourselves and others about who we are as people and mothers. They weave into the stories we tell our children and influence how they create their own stories. The co-researchers continue to weave a story as mothers, grandmothers, and parental figures to a variety of people. They have given me knowledge, guidance, and most of all, hope for a smoother transition into what promises to be the hardest journey of my life.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how mothers' identities are anchored in the construct of a family that creates a unique collaboration between personal satisfaction while considering the developmental and environmental implications of her children. The purpose was explored with three research questions. The aim of RQ1 was to examine how maternal satisfaction is modified over the lifespan of motherhood. The co-researchers equated maternal satisfaction with whole-life satisfaction, finding they were satisfied as mothers now that their children were grown, productive individuals. The co-researchers described challenges with the transition to motherhood but generally described themselves to be satisfied. The aim of RQ2 was to understand how mothers describe the relationship between maternal satisfaction and their identity as mothers. Analysis of the co-researchers' interviews indicated that the co-researchers shifted identities when they became mothers. In RQ3, the co-researchers' perceptions of different childhood developmental stages were explored. The co-researchers described themselves as satisfied during some stages but dissatisfied with others. Thus, the findings of this study indicate that women shift to new identities when they become mothers, and mothers may equate maternal satisfaction with whole-life satisfaction. For the co-researchers, contentment with their children's outcomes inspired both maternal satisfaction and whole-life satisfaction. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the study's findings by placing them into the context of the academic literature. Chapter 5 will also include a discussion of the study's implications and limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Overview

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the perceptions of mothers regarding satisfaction and the influences on satisfaction across the lifespan of motherhood. Chapter Five presents an in-depth analysis of the research findings, discussing their implications considering relevant literature and theory. This chapter explores mothers' unique perspectives and experiences regarding satisfaction and the influences on satisfaction throughout the various stages of motherhood. The aim is to shed light on the fundamental essence of the mothering experience by examining the intersection of satisfaction theories and identity theories. The chapter is organized into six sections to comprehensively understand the research findings. Chapter Five will provide an overview of the chapter, a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings and the implications considering the relevant literature and theory, an implications section, an outline of the study delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

In this section, a summary of the findings is provided, organized by research question. First, the co-researchers' experiences with maternal satisfaction are described, as indicated by RQ1. The subsequent discussion explores the relationship between maternal satisfaction and identity (RQ2) and how maternal satisfaction changed over the co-researchers' experiences with their children's development (RQ3).

RQ1: How is Maternal Satisfaction Modified Over the Lifespan of Motherhood?

Responses to RQ1 gave insightful descriptions of maternal happiness and its relationship to overall life satisfaction. The co-researchers experienced a sense of fulfillment and pleasure with their duties as mothers, connecting maternal satisfaction with overall happiness. They took great

pleasure in seeing their children develop into capable and contributing members of society. The co-researchers used the terms "maternal satisfaction" and "life satisfaction" interchangeably, implying their happiness with motherhood extended throughout their lives. Notably, none had regrets about parenting, indicating a deep sense of fulfillment. Although they had brief problems at various moments, such as during the transition to motherhood or when their children encountered issues, these obstacles did not overwhelm their overall contentment with life and motherhood.

RQ2: How do Mothers Describe the Relationship Between Maternal Satisfaction and Her Identity as a Mother?

Concerning RQ2, the co-researchers examined the complex relationship between maternal happiness and their maternal identities. Participants described a transition in their identities once they became mothers, with several remarking that their identities had not fully developed prior to parenthood. Motherhood reinforced their identities, whether they were pre-existing or newly developed. The co-researchers underlined the transformational nature of motherhood, in which strong, independent women embraced their maternal identities as well as the inevitable dependency that comes with it. The co-researchers acknowledged that their experiences as mothers, including their duties as caregivers, influenced the depth of their maternal identities. Thus, motherhood solidified the co-researchers' identities, which largely surrounded being mothers.

RQ3: How do the Development and Environmental Implications of Childhood Influence Maternal Satisfaction?

In response to RQ3, the co-researchers investigated maternal satisfaction at various phases of childhood development. The participants' perceptions on pleasure varied over the newborn, young child, teenage, and adult stages. While some people considered the baby stage to be quite easy, others found it to be difficult. Adolescents were more likely to face difficulties, with several

co-researchers expressing despair and unhappiness during this stage. However, the co-researchers reported general pleasure with their adult offspring, which is consistent with the findings of RQ1. Many of the co-researchers described a transformation in identity as their children grew and became more independent, rediscovering and reconnecting with their former selves beyond motherhood.

Overall, the findings highlight the co-researchers' general satisfaction with motherhood and its influence on their overall life satisfaction. They perceive maternal satisfaction as an integral component of their identities and experience both the transformative nature of motherhood and the challenges associated with different developmental stages. These insights provide valuable contributions to understanding the complex interplay between maternal satisfaction, identity formation, and the lifelong journey of motherhood.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm and corroborate previous research in several ways. Firstly, the study aligns with previous research that highlights the strong connection between maternal satisfaction and overall life satisfaction (Stahnke et al., 2020). Specifically, the study's co-researchers experienced great joy and contentment with their motherhood responsibilities, correlating maternal satisfaction with overall happiness. This study lends credence to the idea that parenting has a significant impact on a woman's happiness and overall well-being. Second, the current study is consistent with earlier research on motherhood's transforming nature and its impact on maternal identity (Brenning & Soenens, 2017). The co-researchers in the current study described a transition in their identities as they became mothers, with parenthood consolidating and shaping their sense of self. This research contributes to the previous literature by providing additional evidence of motherhood's tremendous impact on identity formation. Third, the study's

findings are consistent with previous research on maternal satisfaction hurdles and transitory difficulties (Séjourné et al., 2018). While the co-researchers generally expressed satisfaction with motherhood, they also acknowledged temporary challenges at different stages, such as motherhood or adolescence. Specifically, Séjourné et al. (2018) found that becoming a mother boosted overall life satisfaction, despite difficulties. Although parental difficulties can affect children and are considered a public health issue, this study revealed a lack of empirical information on general maternal burnout and its associated characteristics (Séjourné et al., 2018). This finding corroborates previous research highlighting maternal satisfaction's complex and multifaceted nature.

In various areas, this study differs from and expands on past studies. The study expands on earlier work by investigating the association between mother happiness and identity formation (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019; Oyarzún-Farías et al., 2021). The findings shed light on how parenthood shapes and solidifies maternal identities, allowing a better understanding of the relationship between satisfaction and identity. Specifically, in the current study, participants spoke of a change in their identities after becoming moms, with several noting that their identities had not fully formed before becoming parents. Whether their identities were already formed or had just emerged, becoming mothers strengthened them. The co-researchers also emphasized how parenthood is a transformative experience that allows strong, independent women to embrace both their maternal identities and the inescapable dependency that comes with them. Dissimilarly, according to Laney et al. (2015), who cited a grounded theory of motherhood, the transition from woman to mother causes many women to lose their sense of self. Women regard childbirth as defining their identity because of self-loss (Laney et al., 2015).

The current study also expands on past studies by assessing maternal happiness at various phases of childhood development. The findings of this study enrich the understanding of the challenges and joys that mothers face as their children develop by investigating the co-researchers' satisfaction at various stages. For instance, the mothers who participated in the study felt a sense of satisfaction and pleasure in carrying out their motherly responsibilities, establishing a link between maternal satisfaction and general happiness. They relished watching their kids grow into capable adults who can contribute to society. Similarly, one of a woman's life's most gratifying experiences, according to Brenning and Soenens (2017), is having children. Nevertheless, research on the connection between parenting and happiness has produced various results. Research shows that becoming a mother is linked to better happiness (Brenning & Soenens, 2017). Some situations are more likely to lead to this kind of inequality in women's wellbeing during the adjustment to motherhood.

The novel contribution of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of mothers' perceptions regarding satisfaction and the influences on satisfaction throughout the lifespan of motherhood. The study gives new light on the essential core of mothering by merging ideas of satisfaction and identity by providing insightful insights into the unique alliance between personal fulfillment and considering the environmental and developmental implications of one's children. For example, the participants' perceptions of satisfaction varied over the newborn, young child, teenage, and adult stages. While some people considered the baby stage to be quite easy, others found it to be difficult. Adolescents were more likely to face difficulties, with several co-researchers expressing despair and unhappiness during this stage. Additionally, evidence on women's satisfaction with and perceptions of the quality of maternal care can be used to determine what other aspects of care in developing nations need to be improved in order to meet long-term

demand, make significant changes in how women behave when they need care, and pinpoint obstacles that can and should be removed (Wells et al., 2022). This comprehensive viewpoint adds to the current research by elucidating the complexities and nuances of maternal satisfaction.

The findings of this study align with the theoretical frameworks of identity theory, identity shift theory, and whole life satisfaction theory. To begin, identity theory sheds light on the essential role of motherhood in creating a woman's self-concept and how motherhood can become an integral part of her identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). The testimonies of the co-researchers illustrate the importance of motherhood in their lives, with motherhood entwined with their general life pleasure. Motherhood is viewed as a central and transformational identity, influencing the co-researchers' responsibilities in society, connections with their children, and sense of purpose in life, according to the findings of the study (Davis et al., 2019). Second, identity shift theory sheds light on how parenthood might cause identity shifts and alterations in women. Becoming a mother causes substantial personal, social, and biological changes in women, influencing how they perceive themselves and their interactions with others (Laney et al., 2015). The findings of the study also support the idea that motherhood causes a process of self-reconstruction and self-evaluation, resulting in changes in self-identity and attitudes of parenthood. The experiences of the co-researchers show the complicated interplay between their pre-existing identities and their newly adopted maternal identities, highlighting the transforming effect of motherhood on self-concept.

Finally, the whole life satisfaction theory is represented in the co-researchers' accounts of overall life satisfaction, which is heavily impacted by their contentment with motherhood (Rosengren et al., 2021). The co-researchers get gratification from watching their children grow into capable and useful members of society, and this sense of success contributes to their overall life satisfaction. Despite problems at various phases of parenting, the co-researchers express

general contentment with their roles as moms, supporting the premise that fulfilling desired life goals adds to overall well-being. The research provides a comprehensive and insightful analysis of mothers' experiences and perceptions of pleasure across the lifespan of motherhood by anchoring the study in these theoretical frameworks. The convergence of facts and theoretical frameworks adds to a better understanding of the nature of motherhood and its impact on the lives of women.

Implications

The empirical implications of this study provide vital insights into mothers' experiences and satisfaction levels as they progress through the stages of parenthood. The data suggest that maternal satisfaction extends beyond specific times or problems, indicating overall happiness with life and parenting. By examining the individual experiences and problems faced by mothers at various phases of their children's development, this empirical evidence adds depth and subtlety to the current literature (Stahnke et al., 2020). It adds to the understanding of the complexities of maternal happiness and emphasizes the necessity for a holistic strategy to supporting mothers' well-being throughout their motherhood journey (Sihto & Mustomäki, 2021).

This study's practical implications are substantial for numerous parties involved in supporting and increasing maternal well-being. The findings of this study can help counselors, clergy, administrators, teachers, parents, and others who work with mothers. Understanding the significance of maternal satisfaction for overall life satisfaction can inform Counselors and clergy who regularly counsel mothers can use the study's findings to inform interventions unique to mothers' experiences. For instance, such interventions may differ depending on the age of the mother's child, as suggested by the findings associated with RQ3. Administrators and teachers reading this study may be better informed on how children's developmental characteristics uniquely influence their mothers' identities and satisfaction, which may inform their interactions

with the mothers. Finally, the study's findings may provide context and insight for parents reading the study regarding their own thoughts and feelings. Recognizing the difficulties that mothers confront at various phases of their children's development might help influence the development of targeted interventions and support systems (Sihto & Mustosmäki, 2021). Furthermore, the findings underline the importance of creating surroundings and societal institutions that recognize and support women' different roles and identities, allowing them to handle the intricacies of parenting while feeling fulfilled personally.

Christian Worldview Considerations

Though the topic is secular in nature, it is crucial to recognize that the Christian worldview provides distinct perspectives on motherhood, identity, and fulfillment. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of parenting as a God-given responsibility and the possibility of spiritual fulfillment in the maternal experience. It can also highlight how the Christian worldview values sacrificial love, selflessness, and the importance of connections in building maternal identity and happiness. Incorporating these concerns could create a complete view that recognizes the confluence between faith and mothers' experiences in terms of satisfaction and identity.

Delimitations and Limitations

The co-researchers were drawn from broad efforts to enlist mothers within the United States with the goal of creating rich deep, and profound meaning that illuminates the experiences of the co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990). The co-researchers were delimited to mothers who have grown children, namely children who are over the age of 25. Mothers were not limited by age.

There are a few limitations to this study that should be considered. First, despite efforts to assure diverse representation and an appropriate pool of participant co-researchers, there is a possible sample bias. Recruitment proceeded through social media and through the researcher's

personal and professional network. Consequently, the sample was limited to those who viewed the research flier. Therefore, the recruitment approach and sampling strategies may not fully capture the diversity of mother satisfaction experiences and viewpoints, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the researcher's personal experiences as a mother may inject bias into the data's interpretation and analysis. This bias is inherent to the heuristic phenomenological approach of the study. To mitigate researcher bias, bracketing procedures were utilized whereby the researcher worked to set aside preconceived notions regarding the research topic. However, there is still a possibility that subjectivity may have an impact on the study's findings. Furthermore, because the study focuses on maternal happiness in the context of parenthood, it may limit awareness of external factors and larger influences on satisfaction, potentially narrowing the scope of the findings. Specifically, it may be possible that the co-researchers overestimated or underestimated their happiness at certain developmental stages of their children due to the study addressing these experiences in hindsight. Although it is confined to the perspectives of the participant co-researchers, the use of semi-structured interviews provides rich and detailed insights (Moustakas, 1990). The study's use of online data collection through virtual communication platforms, as well as the use of heuristic inquiry and phenomenology, enables a thorough understanding of the fluid nature of satisfaction in connection to children's developmental phases. These limitations provide important insights into maternal satisfaction and lay the groundwork for future research and treatments aimed at improving maternal well-being and understanding the intricacies of satisfaction in the setting of parenthood (Schlegel et al., 2021).

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Future Research**</div>

Several recommendations and directions for future research can be made in light of the study's findings, limits, and delimitations. To begin, longitudinal studies would provide a more

complete knowledge of mother happiness by analyzing its evolution and variations over time (Séjourné et al., 2018). Researchers can gain insights into the long-term effects on maternal well-being by investigating patterns and trajectories of satisfaction across different stages of parenthood. Furthermore, comparative studies involving varied demographics and cultural contexts might help us better understand maternal pleasure. Examining how satisfaction differs across cultural, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds would also allow for the identification of contextual elements that influence satisfaction and the development of targeted remedies (Webb et al., 2017). Further studies can seek to measure the influence of fathers' involvement on the dynamic of maternal satisfaction. Understanding the role of fathers in mediating maternal satisfaction would provide a more thorough knowledge of family dynamics and how they relate to maternal satisfaction. Investigating the interaction of maternal and paternal roles and their impact on satisfaction could provide useful insights for family treatments and support systems. It is also critical to evaluate how elements such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and other identities connect with maternal satisfaction when doing research. Understanding the specific experiences of women from underprivileged or underrepresented backgrounds will aid in the identification of inequities and the development of focused interventions to improve their well-being (Eccles et al., 1993; Luthar & Ciciolla, 2016).

Furthermore, future research could design and carry out intervention studies aimed at increasing maternal satisfaction. Investigating the efficacy of different therapies, such as support groups, mindfulness-based programs, or parenting interventions, would provide evidence-based techniques to increase maternal well-being (Stahnke et al., 2020). Furthermore, combining qualitative and quantitative measures would provide a more comprehensive knowledge of maternal satisfaction as quantitative metrics may provide larger insights and enable statistical analysis,

whereas qualitative approaches may reflect the depth and complexities of individual experiences (Stahnke et al., 2020).

Summary

Chapter 5 opened with a summary of the findings for each of the posed research questions. The chapter then contained a discussion of the study's findings, placing the findings in the context of the existing academic literature. The implications of the study were next described. The study's delimitations and limitations were reviewed, which allowed for a discussion of future avenues for research.

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