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Motherhood as Contested Ideological Terrain: Essentialist and Queer Discourses of Motherhood at Play in Female–Female Co-mothers’ Talk

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Abstract

Framed by relational dialectics theory (Baxter), this investigation considered the meaning(s) of motherhood in female–female co-motherhood. Analysis identified two competing discourses: (1) discourse of essential motherhood (DEM) and (2) discourse of queer motherhood (DQM). Speakers’ invocation of the DEM reinscribes the mainstream US cultural discourse that children can have only one authentic (i.e., biological) mother, whereas invocation of the DQM denaturalizes the DEM’s presumptions of authentic motherhood as biological, interrupts monomaternality, destabilizes the patriarch, and troubles the equation of biological with moral motherhood. Whereas interpenetrations of the DEM and DQM were typically sites of adversarial discursive struggle, in a few instances, the DEM and DQM rose above their antagonistic relationship, combining to create new meanings of motherhood.

Keywords: Relational Dialectics Theory, Female–Female Co-mothers, Ideologies of Motherhood, Essentialism, Queering Motherhood

“Motherhood continues to be a vastly contested and ideologically-laden experience. Lesbian motherhood is one of the most scrutinized and controversial of these experiences” (Hequembourg, 2007, p. 67). Two committed females co-mothering children contest mainstream US ideological assumptions about what constitutes authentic motherhood. Despite the plurality of motherhood experiences in the USA today, children are still seen as having only one real mother (Park, 2013). Authentic motherhood is viewed as stemming from a particular set of biological processes (e.g., pregnancy, birthing, lactation), which are believed to induce an irreplaceable, biologically based mother-child bond. Claims about who is and who is not a real mother carry normative weight. Motherhood practices deviating from cultural ideals are devalued and seen as damaging to children (Park). Entailing two nonheterosexual mothers (only one of whom could possibly be the biological mother), lesbian or female-female co-motherhood (hereafter co-motherhood) transgresses normative assumptions about authentic motherhood, earning co-mothers the title “inappropriate mothers”, and a position at the bottom of the US motherhood hierarchy (Padavic & Butterfield, 2011).

Despite the fact that co-motherhood is often negatively positioned in mainstream thought, co-mother families are increasingly prevalent and visible in contemporary US society. An estimated two million children are currently being raised by a lesbian or gay parent in the USA (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011). Media representations reflect these changing demographics. Television shows such as *The Fosters*, for example – which features co-mothers Lena and Steph co-parenting Steph’s biological son from a previous marriage and three children from the US foster-care system – air during today’s prime time line-up. Moreover, same-sex marriage is increasingly recognized today (at the time of writing 33 states plus the District of Columbia allow same-sex marriage). Yet, in spite of demographic shifts and increased representation in the media, co-mothers continue to experience challenges from the culture at large.

Historically, family communication scholarship has not investigated the intersection of culture and family life. Rather, family communication has traditionally privatized the study of family, viewing private relations as separate from culture and society (Baxter, 2011). Extending previous social constructionist positions (e.g., Galvin, 2006), the recent rearticulation of relational dialectics theory (RDT, Baxter) critiques this historical public/private split as a false binary, arguing that culture, society, and family are not discrete phenomena but rather are mutually influential domains. From this perspective, relating is viewed as a deeply sociocultural process with traces of cultural discourses evident in the voices of relational parties. The public is thought to interpenetrate the private. In accordance with these recent theoretical shifts in family communication, the current investigation interrogates the interpenetration of competing cultural discourses of motherhood. Framed by RDT, we examine competing cultural discourses of motherhood manifesting in co-mother conversations with families, friends, and communities.

The Intersection of Culture and Relational Life

The intersection of culture and relational life has received only limited attention in family communication to date. Galvin's (2006) introduction of the concepts of discourse dependent families and internal and external family boundary management processes propelled the study of familial external borders. Influenced by sociologists Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) approach to family as a discursive accomplishment that is (re)produced purely on the basis of discourses about family, Galvin argued that discourse-dependent families are construed as less traditional families that must rely heavily on discourse or communication to establish who members are to one another (internal boundary management) and who the unit is to outsiders (external boundary management). Despite the fact that all families, particularly those who diverge from the traditional hetero-centric, biological family norm, may be seen as discourse dependent, research to date has primarily focused on international and transracial adoptive families (see Suter, 2015, for a review) and stepfamilies (see Schrodtt, 2015) rather than lesbian and gay families.

Not only has there been limited intersectional work to date, but lesbian and gay families have not been historically studied in family communication, having mostly received attention in allied fields, such as family studies, sociology, and psychology. In fact, with the exception of West and Turner (1995), family communication scholars did not begin researching lesbian and gay families until the mid- to late-2000s. Reflecting this dearth, only 15% of the studies in the recent review of communicative scholarship on lesbian and gay families in *The Sage Handbook of Family Communication* were conducted by communication scholars (Suter, 2015). The current study seeks to redress this deficiency, contributing to other efforts (e.g., Floyd & Morman, 2014) to update family communication research to reflect more accurately the continuing evolution of the experience of family in the USA. In its efforts to diversify the family communication knowledge base, this investigation simultaneously moves away from focusing on outcomes often associated with the dominant empirical research perspective in family communication and centers instead on issues of meaning (i.e., the meaning(s) of motherhood) that are typically associated with the less dominant interpretive and critical research perspectives. Framed by Baxter's (2011) Bakhtinian-inspired rearticulation of RDT, this investigation examines the intersection of culture and the everyday lives of co-mothers.

Relational Challenges to Co-motherhood

Despite contemporary visibility of co-mothers on television and in the movies, co-mothers are subject to challenges in relational contexts. For instance, Koenig Kellas and Suter (2012) identified a set of relational challenges received by co-mothers for their normative transgressions. The challenges range from direct attacks to silence. Explicit negative evaluations (e.g., "Why would you want to have kids?" or "What about the male influence in his life?") constitute direct attacks. One mother recounted a parental response to a playdate invitation: "Well, wait a minute, what is this? Is this a *lesbian* re-

lationship because I don't want my kid around any lesbians, and if you're lesbian then my daughter is not allowed to even *speak* with your son anymore" (pp. 483–484). Silence and similar nonverbal behaviors (e.g., disinterest, ignoring) constitute nonverbal reproaches that feel similarly standoffish and exclusionary to co-mothers. As one co-mother described her partner's family's hostility when she and her partner were adopting their first child: "They wouldn't come visit ... they didn't really invite us to come visit" (p. 485).

Other scholars have cited familial issues as relational challenges (e.g., grandparents' non-acceptance of their daughter's children as full-fledged grandchildren; Gartrell et al., 1996). Others identify school as the primary source and site of challenge (Goldberg & Smith, 2014), where teachers continue to be unprepared (Kintner-Duffy, Vardell, Lower, & Cassidy, 2012) and uncomfortable interacting with co-mothers and their children (Averett & Hedge, 2012). Adolescents raised by co-mothers identify school as the foremost context for bullying and peers as the main perpetrators of bullying behaviors (van Gelderen, Gartrell, Bos, van Rooij, & Hermanns, 2012). Teachers and staff often fail to intervene when overhearing antigay remarks, sometimes even making antigay comments themselves (Berkowitz & Kivalanka, 2013).

Legal Challenges to Co-motherhood

Challenges over co-motherhood manifest in not only relational and educational lives, but also in legal contexts. State-level co-parental recognition laws continue to be debated. Where implemented, comprehensive state parentage and adoption statutes ensure legal ties to both mothers, allow joint adoption by co-mothers, recognize co-mothers using assisted reproduction as equitable to heterosexual parents, and promote second-parent adoption and de facto parenting (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011). However, in the USA today, the female partner of a mother giving birth using donor insemination is not presumed to be a parent in 36 states (Movement Advancement Project [MAP]). In such jurisdictions, she is even considered a "legal stranger," meaning she lacks any legal recognition of her parentage. In cases of joint adoption (when both mothers simultaneously desire to adopt a child), co-mothers currently face uncertainty in 28 states; in 5 states joint adoption is effectively prohibited (MAP). Similarly, second-parent adoption (when the second mother desires to legally adopt the first mother's child without terminating the parenting rights of the first mother) is uncertain in 25 states and banned in 6 states (MAP). In short, co-mothers lack legal recognition for marriage and parenting rights across a variety of issues in at least half of the USA, thereby inhibiting many of the rights and benefits heterosexual parents enjoy. Moreover, the lack of legal recognition for co-mothers whose partners give birth has been found to impede co-mother maternal identity formation (Miller, 2012). Furthermore, gaps in legal recognition of same-sex relations undermine formal help-seeking behaviors of co-mothers experiencing intimate partner violence (Hardesty, Oswald, Khaw, & Fonseca, 2011).

Situating the Current Study

The current study seeks to extend extant research by examining the circulating discourses of motherhood animating these struggles. Multiple studies to date have examined the interplay of competing discourses surrounding adoptive families (e.g., Suter, Baxter, Seurer, & Thomas, 2014) and one study to date has applied RDT to the study of lesbian and gay familial communication processes, examining the discourses characterizing adult children's retrospective accounts of their parents' coming out to them (Breshears & Braithwaite, 2014). The present inquiry adds to the conversation by focusing on the construct of motherhood by examining the cultural discourses surrounding the presence of more than one mother, or the polymaternalism (Park, 2013), inherent in the lesbian family form. Specifically, this investigation considers the meaning(s) of motherhood in the context of co-motherhood. Given co-motherhood's deviation from normative cultural discourses of motherhood that view children as having only one authentic (i.e., biological) mother, co-motherhood represents a dialogically expansive relationship site or theoretically rich location to interrogate the multiple and competing US discourses of motherhood (Baxter, 2011).

Moreover, we explicitly chose to examine co-mothers' challenging conversations with outsiders. In a focus group context, co-mothers recalled the specifics of challenging conversations with extended family members, social network members, and strangers. These communicative episodes constitute border work or "communicative enactments in which relationships go public in a variety of ways" (Baxter, 2011, p. 155). Instances of border work are particularly suitable for dialogic scholars interested in identifying and analyzing cultural discourses because it is here that speakers render cultural discourses more transparent in constructing their relationships (Baxter). Situated at the border of public (i.e., individuals outside of the relationship) and private, border work enactments are discursive instances in which participants render their co-motherhood socially intelligible. To do so, co-mothers draw upon existing cultural discourses of motherhood. As such, analysis of border work conversations told within focus groups held potential for unearthing how meanings of motherhood emerge from the inter-textuality of competing US discourses of motherhood often unequal in power and influence.

RDT and Statement of Research Questions

RDT is centrally focused on the interplay (i.e., interpenetration) of competing world-views or viewpoints, conceptualized as discourses (Baxter, 2011). Derived from early twentieth century work on dialogism by Russian linguist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (see Holquist, 2002, for a summary), RDT construes meaning making as a discursive struggle between culturally dominant discourses (centripetal) and less dominant or marginalized cultural discourses (centrifugal). Meaning construction, therefore, involves power: Marginalized centrifugal discourses must compete against more accepted centripetal discourses for the more centered or discursively powerful posi-

tion. As such, centripetal discourses have the power to partially silence or even mute centrifugal viewpoints.

Bakhtin's (1986) dialogism maintains that meaning struggles occur in the context of an utterance, conceptualized here as a turn of talk (Baxter, 2011). In RDT, utterances are conceptualized not as revelations of participants' inner feelings or thoughts, but as analytic units wherein participants meaning in talk (Baxter, 2011). Every utterance is understood as part of a wider utterance chain where prior utterances from culture at large (distal already-spoken) and the immediate interpersonal relationship (proximal already-spoken) interpenetrate with anticipated future utterances from the culture at large (distal not-yet-spoken) and the immediate hearer (proximal not-yet-spoken).

Given our particular interest in the nexus of culture and motherhood, this study focused on the distal already-spoken and the distal not-yet-spoken sites of the utterance chain—the sites where wider cultural, rather than unique relational, discourses are most salient. We collected co-mother reports of border work in focus groups because focus groups offer a supportive narrative context for retelling difficult and often painful interactions with family, friends, and community members (Suter, 2000). We aimed first to identify the primary sociocultural discourses animating meaning making in co-mother focus group conversations about border work. The analysis focused on discourses relevant to co-mothers' meaning making of "motherhood." As such, research question one asked:

RQ1: What competing discourses, if any, animate the meaning of "motherhood" in female-female co-mother focus group conversations about border work?

Patterns of Interplay in the Discourses of Co-mothers

Beyond identifying the competing discourses present in co-mother focus group conversations about border work, we were interested in how their discursive interplay, or lack thereof, constructed meanings of motherhood. Baxter (2011) identifies two patterns of double-voiced discursive interplay: *synchronic interplay* and *discursive transformation*.

Synchronic interplay encompasses multiple discourses in a given utterance. According to Baxter (2011), this double-voiced struggle in which centripetal and centrifugal discourses compete for the dominant discursive positioning within a single utterance manifests as *negating*, *countering*, and *entertaining*. *Negating* involves a total rejection of the competing discourse. This can happen both indirectly or directly (i.e., first voicing the opposing discourse as a means to make a case for the merits of the preferred discourse). For instance, an adoptive mother might assert that authentic motherhood is more effectively defined through nonbiological criteria (e.g., emotional closeness between mother and child) rather than shared biology. In doing so, the mother voices the primacy placed on biology inherent in essential motherhood. But, she does so only to refute this view, thereby centering an opposing discourse that defines motherhood using nonbiological standards.

In *negating*, the speaker's talk alludes to no redeeming qualities of the opposing discourse and simply voices it to point out its wrongness; in *countering*, limited legitimacy is granted to the opposing discourse. Often marked by lexical cues such as "although," "however," and "but" (see Baxter, 2011, for full list), utterances marked by countering concede value in select aspects of a competing discourse. In their study of foster parents, Suter et al. (2014) found instances of countering when foster mothers noted a desire for their foster children to continue having a relationship with biological parents but ultimately cutting ties when these relationships were viewed as destructive to their foster children, therein centering a discourse of care over biology.

Finally, utterances marked by *entertaining* acknowledge that a given discourse is but one possibility among several. Entertaining is often marked by lexical cues such as "may," "might," and "could" (see Baxter, 2011, for full list). Typically concluding with a tone of discursive ambivalence, when a speaker engages in entertaining, he or she considers multiple and disparate worldviews, voicing two or more opposing discourses without privileging one. For instance, a co-mother might express indecisiveness about whether or not female-female co-motherhood should be closeted in certain contexts (e.g., education), perhaps even underscoring her ambivalence by asking for others' opinions and/or advice.

Discursive transformations manifest when speakers draw upon and combine adversarial competing discourses to form new meanings. Two forms of discursive transformation can surface in data: *hybrids* and *aesthetic moments* (Baxter, 2011). In both forms, the struggle between discourses is suspended and new meanings are created, though in slightly different ways. In *hybrids*, when opposing discourses merge, they retain their essential properties, like discursive salad dressing (Baxter). The discourses (likened to oil and vinegar) maintain their discrete properties as they mix together to form the new meaning. For example, a mother might contend that motherhood is constituted by natural, biological processes (e.g., pregnancy, breastfeeding) and by practices unrelated to biology (e.g., loving, caretaking), thereby simultaneously giving credence to biological and nonbiological constructions of motherhood. Both discourses are still clearly identifiable, but in their placement as discursive equals the utterance creates a distinct and new meaning of motherhood.

In contrast, in *aesthetic moments*, which are similar to chemical reactions (e.g., two molecules of hydrogen combine with one molecule of oxygen to create water), the meaning systems of the discourses are fundamentally reconstructed through the process of combining (Baxter, 2011, p. 139). Located in the affective, rather than rational realm, aesthetic moments are emotional interactions in which discursive struggles dissipate into a felt sense of wholeness for interactants, albeit fleeting and in the moment. As such, both an emergent meaning and an expressed emotional charge surrounding that meaning (e.g., noting a feeling of wholeness or completion) mark aesthetic utterances.

Each of these patterns of discursive interplay held great potential to shed light on the meaning(s) of "motherhood" wrought through the discursive interplay of the competing discourses of motherhood. As such, our second research question asked:

RQ2: In what ways does the interplay of competing discourses construct the meaning of “motherhood” in female–female co-mother focus group conversations about border work?

Method

Participants

Forty-four female co-parents from one Western ($n = 23$) and one Midwestern ($n = 21$) US state participated in focus group conversations. Participants were recruited in a variety of ways, including flyers posted in the communities, online social networking sites, local chapters of Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, congregations welcoming of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals, and queer faculty associations.

Participants ranged in age from 25 to 63 years ($M = 41.93$, $SD = 7.39$), and described themselves as lesbian ($n = 38$, 86.4%), bisexual ($n = 5$, 11.4%), or fluid/undecided ($n = 1$, 2.3%). Participants reported on themselves and their co-mothers who were mostly White (Participant $n = 40$, 90.9%, Co-mother $n = 39$, 88.6%) and Christian (Participant $n = 27$, 61.4%, Co-mother $n = 26$, 59.1%). Other participants identified as Black (Participant $n = 2$, Co-mother $n = 1$), Biracial (Participant $n = 1$, Co-mother $n = 1$), or Native American (Co-mother $n = 1$). In terms of religious affiliation, co-mothers also reported being Buddhist ($n = 6$), No Religion ($n = 6$), Jewish ($n = 2$), Non-practicing ($n = 2$), Atheist ($n = 1$), Agnostic ($n = 1$), and Other ($n = 2$).

Participants were well educated overall (Bachelor’s degree $n = 11$, 25%; Master’s degree $n = 19$, 43.2%, Doctorate $n = 5$, 11.4%) and well compensated (mean annual household income = \$102,142). Participants were co-raising between one and four ($M = 1.86$, $SD = .93$) children who were between 8 months and 29 years ($M = 7.57$, $SD = 6.00$). Children entered the family through donor insemination ($n = 48$, 59.26%), previous heterosexual relationship(s) ($n = 21$, 26%), foster to adoption ($n = 6$, 7.4%), adoption ($n = 5$, 6.17%), and other family relations (i.e., a nephew; $n = 1$, 1.23%). At the time of data collection, neither state legally recognized same-sex marriage or domestic partnerships. Participants described their relationships with co-mothers as partners/ life partners ($n = 16$, 36.4%), married ($n = 13$, 29.5%), committed ($n = 8$, 18.2%), civil unions ($n = 5$, 11.4%), or constituted through a commitment ceremony ($n = 1$, 2.3%).

Data Collection

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval from the universities in each state, 10 focus groups (5 focus groups in each state, with four or five participants per focus group) were held. The first and last authors moderated focus groups in their respective states. After providing informed consent and completing brief demographic questionnaires, co-mothers participated in a focus group conversation about interactions with ex-

tended family, social networks, and strangers that (in)directly challenged their motherhood experience. For instance, the first set of questions on the interview protocol asked:

Can you remember a time when someone outside your family either directly or indirectly challenged (rejected, questioned) your family form? In other words, have you ever felt like you had to justify your family to someone else? What did that look like? How did the conversation go?

The duration of each focus group was between one and two hours. At the conclusion of each group, co-mothers were thanked for their time, compensated \$20, and provided with community-specific resources for co-mother-headed families. Focus groups were digitally audio-recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist resulting in approximately 412 pages (18,689 lines) of single-spaced data. Prior to transcription, participant names were changed to pseudonyms and other identifying demographics were masked.

Data Analysis

Focus group conversations were analyzed using contrapuntal analysis, the qualitative discourse analysis method developed in tandem with RDT (Baxter, 2011). Analysis proceeded by first identifying the primary discourses inherent in the data followed by an analysis of the interplay or interpenetration of the identified discourses. A discourse is framed here as a system of meaning composed of a coherent set of themes articulating a specific (often evaluative) discursive position toward a given semantic object (Baxter; e.g., "motherhood"). Identification of primary discourses proceeded by asking the analytic question, "What is (the meaning of) motherhood?" Utterances, understood as turns at talk during the focus groups, answering this question were coded. To identify the primary discourses, four coders (the first four authors) independently identified semantic themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) or discourses (Baxter) within the five focus groups from one state, archiving the five focus groups from the second state for referential adequacy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Engaging in the verification procedure of investigator triangulation in which findings are verified by using multiple investigators (Lincoln & Guba), the four coders met to compare initial independent analyses, finding that they had identified themes and discourses with similar conceptualizations and data exemplars, but with slightly varying labels. Differences in labeling were discussed until consensus was achieved. Next, employing referential adequacy (Lincoln & Guba), the four coders verified the initial analysis, confirming that the initial analysis held for the archived five focus groups from the second state. Eight themes were identified, each of which is described in the Results section. Together these themes cohered to constitute the *discourse of essential motherhood* (DEM; four themes) and the *discourse of queer motherhood* (DQM; four themes).

Having identified and verified these two primary discourses, the meaning of "motherhood" wrought through discursive interplay was examined. The four coders inde-

pendently identified instances of interplay within the five focus groups from one state, again archiving the five focus groups from the second state for later use during referential adequacy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following Baxter's (2011) procedures for contrapuntal analysis, the coders sought to identify instances of synchronic interplay (i.e., negating, countering, and entertaining) and discursive transformation (i.e., hybrids, aesthetic moments). Discursive markers (e.g., modal auxiliaries, such as "may"; modal attributes, such as "it's possible that") served as sensitizing devices for identification of particular forms of interplay. Vital to the interplay analysis was the dialogic analytical strategy of *unfolding* in which coders considered speakers' utterances both in terms of past and anticipated responses, asking: "To what prior utterances might this utterance be a response?" and "What subsequent responses are invited by this utterance?" (Baxter, 2011, p. 161). Like the initial thematic analysis, the initial interplay analysis was verified first via investigator triangulation and second via referential adequacy (Lincoln & Guba). The four coders again met to compare initial analyses – this time their interplay analyses – discussing the minor discrepancies until consensus was achieved (investigator triangulation) and then confirming the initial interplay analysis against the archived five focus groups from the second state (referential adequacy). To further ensure the validity of the findings, during data analysis the research team maintained an analytic audit trail (Lincoln & Guba) or careful records of data analysis and analytic decisions. Moreover, the Results section includes data exemplars (Lincoln & Guba) to demonstrate the link between raw data and the analysis.

The Discourses of Essential Motherhood (DEM) and Queer Motherhood (DQM)

Research question one asked, "What competing discourses, if any, animate the meaning of 'motherhood' in female–female co-mother focus group conversations about border work?" The results of the contrapuntal analysis revealed two competing discourses of motherhood animating co-mother focus group conversations about border work: (1) *DEM* and (2) *DQM*.

Overall, the *DEM* represents a preexistent (i.e., distal already-spoken) and culturally dominant view of motherhood by framing motherhood through the following tenets: (1) biological ties render mother–child relationships real and legitimate, (2) a child can have only one real mother, (3) a father's presence is natural, normal, and necessary, and (4) biological motherhood equals moral motherhood. Acting in response to the *DEM*, the *DQM* serves as a rejoinder by framing co-motherhood through the following tenets: (1) biological ties are not needed to render mother–child relationships real and legitimate, (2) a child can have more than one real mother, (3) a father's presence is not essential for raising well-adjusted children, and (4) nonbiological motherhood also equals moral motherhood. Each of the tenets emerged consistently in the data. Below an overview of each discourse is followed by the contrastive themes of the *DEM* and the *DQM*, organized in terms of dueling concerns over (de)naturalizing biology, (mono/poly)maternalism, the family patriarch, and (im)moral motherhood.

The first primary discourse identified, the DEM, reinscribes the centripetal cultural ideology of essential motherhood. Essential motherhood, referred to as the “quintessential” form of motherhood, is rooted in a biological, singular, heteropatriarchal view of motherhood, and remains positioned as the universal, idealized prototype to which all US women should be held accountable (Hequembourg, 2007). Given its culturally normative and taken-for-granted status, essential motherhood often remains unexamined and invisible, engendering it ideological power. Co-mothers’ talk often explicitly introduced the DEM through the reported speech (Voloshinov, 1986) of others, personifying the DEM by either directly quoting (direct reported speech) or paraphrasing (indirect reported speech), and sometimes even reenacting the performative aspects of others’ talk.

The second primary discourse, the DQM, directly competes with the DEM. The effect of the centrifugal DQM is to problematize the more centered or centripetal DEM circulating in US culture. Co-mothers’ invocation of the DQM opposes the fundamental assumptions of the centripetal DEM. The DQM positions nonbiological co-motherhood as a viable, fit, moral form of motherhood. Whereas the DEM was typically voiced through the reported speech of others, the DQM manifested through the co-mothers’ own discursive moves. The discursive manifestations of the DEM and DQM in co-mother talk are reviewed below.

(De)naturalizing Biology

Naturalizing biology (DEM). The DEM defines authentic motherhood biologically. Like biological normativity, which views blood relations as the most genuine, normal, and sociologically preferred (Suter et al., 2014), the DEM rests on the formula: *real mother = biological mother*. Accordingly, nonbiological paths to motherhood are devalued and rendered suspect by the DEM. Nonbiological co-mothers are viewed as unreal, inauthentic, and invalid. For instance, Kendra, a nonbiological mother, recounts her experience with a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) nurse after the emergency birth and hospital stay of her son. Even though the NICU nurse had allowed the biological mother to hold their newborn son from his first day, when Kendra asked to hold him on his third day “the nurse said I couldn’t, and I asked why not, and she said ‘cause I wasn’t family.’” (FG9, 665–667)¹ Invoking the DEM’s definition of real mother as biological mother, the biological mother was allowed to hold the child from day one, but the nonbiological mother was not granted the same right. Similarly, Tia describes how her father-in-law’s discourse and symbolic behaviors drew upon the DEM’s view of authentic grand/parenthood as biological, which in turn inauthenticated his grandparenthood to his nonbiologically related granddaughter:

We were down near his work and we decided to stop by with the kids. We went in and he didn’t introduce our daughter as his granddaughter. He said “This is my daughter and my grandson. He introduced his daughter and his biological grandson.” But just said “This is Tia and her daughter Jennifer [nonbiologically related granddaughter].” Didn’t acknowledge ... his relationship with her ... We

go into his office and there's only pictures of our son ... There's not pictures of ... our daughter. (FG5, 401-445)

Tia's father-in-law's decision to neither label nor publicly display photos of his nonbiological granddaughter both discursively (Galvin, 2006) and symbolically (Suter, Daas, & Bergen, 2008) demonstrate that he does not view his nonbiological granddaughter as an authentic grandchild. Representing the DEM characteristic that motherhood, and by extension grandparenthood, is biologically based, Tia's father-in-law claims his daughter's biological son as his grandson, but not his nonbiological granddaughter.

Denaturalizing biology (DQM). The DQM denaturalizes the DEM's presumption that motherhood is a natural, essential, biologically based phenomenon. The DQM asserts that authentic motherhood sits outside of biological ties, as Cath explained, "[I] just took the responsibility on with none of the protections or rights or whatever" (FG5, 643-645). The DQM unmasks the biological privilege inherent in the DEM and criticizes individuals who dismiss nonbiologically based motherhood and grandparenthood.

The DQM argues that nonbiological criteria, such as putting a child's needs paramount, more effectively define authenticity as compared to biological relatedness. For instance, Shawn, a co-mother who is not biologically related to her children, told a story about how her mother, for whom "anything that's not biological ... is not logical" (FG2, 1034-1035), denied the authenticity of both Shawn's nonbiological motherhood and her own nonbiological grandmotherhood. After failed attempts to schedule a Christmas celebration excluding her grandchildren, Shawn's mother demonstrated her resentment of their presence by showering Shawn and her co-mother with expensive gifts, but only giving the children "pieces of crap from Goodwill" (FG2, 1047-1048). The following year, invoking the DQM, Shawn excluded her mother from the Christmas celebration, explaining how:

We had a nice little Christmas, the four of us, excluding anyone in my biological family ... It's a privilege to share a holiday with a child. And you have to earn that privilege, so, yeah, you don't make the cut, you don't make the cut ... If it's our biological family, that sucks. (FG2, 917-1078)

Voicing the DQM, Shawn argues that despite the biological connectedness between Shawn and her mother, her mother's past behavior provided grounds for exclusion. Denaturalizing biological motherhood, Shawn asserts that spending time with a child is an earned privilege, not a biologically inherent right. In doing so, Shawn decenters the DEM's view that (grand)motherhood is defined solely on biological grounds.

Mono/Polymaternalism

Embracing monomaternalism (DEM). The DEM indexes monomaternalism's claim that "children must have *one and only one* mother" (Park, 2013, p. 3, italics in original). The

nonbiological co-mother, therefore, is positioned as redundant at best, problematic at worst. A biological mother is already accounted for; the nonbiological mother is unneeded. Her redundancy confuses outsiders (e.g., “Oh no, you’re not her mom, I met her mom already” [FG1, 94]) and often ignites a discursive search for the authentic biological mother (e.g., “Then who’s the real mom?” [FG5, 886]). As exemplified in the data exemplar below, nonbiological co-mothers are not immune from internalizing the idea that authentic motherhood is singular. Raised in a culture where the idea of monomaternality reigns supreme, mothers often managed feelings as described below:

I have this internalized guilt ... because if I wasn’t there, their family would be normal, because he’s [son] biologically related to my partner ... I’m the outsider person making his family different. (FG9, 1412–1417)

The nonbiological co-mother has internalized the DEM’s view that motherhood is a solo enterprise. Positioning herself as the outsider, she blames herself; for, if she was not present, her son would be mothered solely by his biological mother, in effect, rendering his family “normal.”

Interrupting monomaternality (DQM). The DQM interrupts the DEM’s monomaternality contention (Park, 2013) that motherhood is occupied by one woman. In the DQM, the nonbiological mother is not viewed as unneeded repeat; rather, she is seen as an authentic mother whose presence augments familial life. For instance, one co-mother narrated how her son’s Spanish teacher helped him modify the standard parent valentine greeting “Mi Mama” and “Mi Papa.” Her son “got him his own heart that said, ‘Mi Mama,’ ‘Mi Mama’” (FG9, 1499–1500). Repetition of the term “Mi Mama” interrupts the DEM’s view of the second mother as unnecessary repeat. Additionally, in the DQM, the second mother does not confuse outsiders. Adults compare her to similar family forms that provide children with two mothers, such as adoption where children have a biological and an adoptive mother. Children’s peers not only understand, but celebrate the second mother’s presence (e.g., “You have two moms ... you are so lucky, I wish I had two moms” [FG5, 1045–1046]), in effect, undermining the DEM’s view that nonbiological co-motherhood threatens a child’s well-being.

(De)stabilizing the Family Patriarch

Upholding the family patriarch (DEM). The DEM positions the father as the indispensable, dominant parent. Mirroring patriarchy’s hierarchy of familial gender relations (Park, 2013), the DEM views family forms lacking a father as deficient and harmful to children. In the context of co-motherhood, the nonbiological co-mother is seen as usurping the role of the patriarch, depriving the child a biological father. This absence is viewed as engendering a sense of peer inadequacy. Aligned with this perspective, one participant recounted a statement from a letter from her best friend since the fifth grade:

"I cannot watch this, I don't want to be a part of it and I'm going to end communication with you." ... In her letter she said "I cannot imagine my life without my dad. And I think it's very unfair that you are going to have a child without a dad." (FG1, 304-339)

Echoing the DEM, the friend positions the biological father as an irreplaceable relationship in noting the absence of a father as "very unfair." The friend contends that failing to provide the child a father is so reprehensible that she can no longer stand to remain in their longstanding friendship. Similarly, Becky's friend ended a longtime friendship wherein the women had previously thought of each other as sisters, were godparents to each other's children, raising the children as cousins. After Becky disclosed that she and her partner were now co-mothering Becky's children from her previous marriage, her friend announced that, "it's not appropriate for the children" (FG8, 113-114), telling Becky to "find a good man, and bring them up the way they should be" (FG8, 149-152). Only then could the two resume their friendship and return to raising their children together as cousins.

Destabilizing the family patriarch (DQM). The DQM challenges the DEM's heteropatriarchal presumption that biological fathers are essential for raising well-adjusted children. Within the discursive worldview of the DQM, the nonbiological co-mother is viewed as a suitable replacement for the heterosexual, biological father. She can enact the role of the traditional father (e.g., "She definitely assumes more of a traditional father figure role model. She is the breadwinner right now. She does a lot more roughhousing with them than I would ever do" [FG4, 1299-1303]). She can provide the requisite love, education, and morals to ensure a child's success in life (e.g., "It doesn't necessarily depend on male or female and that's what studies are beginning to show" [FG3, 254-256]). In fact, in some legal jurisdictions, she can replace the father on the child's birth certificate as exemplified in the following exchange:

[Virginia: What does it say on the birth certificate? Cath: Mother and mother?] Tia: It says mother and mother ... Whoever gave birth is the first mother ... It just actually alternates on ours because the first kid's hers, biologically hers, and then mine, and then biologically hers. (FG5, 1937-1952)

In such instances, the nonbiological co-mother replaces the father on a particularly powerful US Government document. Inclusion on a child's legal birth certificate establishes fundamental legal rights (albeit still purely symbolic in many legal jurisdictions), from the moment of the child's birth. In sum, whether through her role enactment, love and guidance, or legal codification, the nonbiological mother destabilizes the family patriarch, offering a fit replacement.

(Im)Moral (Non)Biological Motherhood

Moral biological motherhood (DEM). The DEM reinscribes the hierarchal relations of appropriate motherhood (Padavic & Butterfield, 2011). Positioned atop the motherhood

hierarchy, biological motherhood by married, heterosexual women represents the most moral form of motherhood. Nonbiological co-motherhood, on the other hand, positioned at the bottom of the motherhood hierarchy, is viewed as morally reprehensible, as one older woman responded after learning that the women were co-mothers, "that is just so wrong, that is morally wrong, that's reprehensible, how dare you" (FG3, 1062–1065). This sense of co-motherhood as immoral emerged consistently in the data. Medical procedures (e.g., anonymous sperm donation) were often negatively characterized as evidenced below:

"Your uncle was talking about sperm donors and how one day, you know, your son could meet his spouse and get married" ... I'm like, "You need to just get her to stop talking like that ... it sounds like what we've done is ... horrible, we have this mutant creature that we've created." (FG1, 1340–1369)

In this instance and others like it, anonymous sperm donation and/or other forms of child-bearing are depicted as immoral, unnatural, and even dangerous.

Troubling moral biological motherhood (DQM). Voicing the DQM troubles biological motherhood's position at the top of the motherhood hierarchy (Padavic & Butterfield, 2011) countering that, like biological motherhood, nonbiological co-motherhood is moral and positively impacts children. For instance, Toni describes the inclusivity of the welcoming church that she, her co-mother, and children attend. The religious institutional affirmation by this community nurtures her children's sense of security and acceptance:

The bottom line is we all love our kids, we all want the best for our kids, we're all doing the best for our kids, and we're all willing to embrace one another and our differences. And I love raising my kids in that environment because they, they feel secure, they feel accepted, they feel their family is accepted, nobody is telling them that their moms are wrong or sinners. (FG2, 1381–1388)

The welcoming congregation's inclusivity, exemplified above, embodies the DQM. This inclusivity in turn positively impacts children's well-being, allowing children to see their families through the lens of the DQM, as moral and ethical.

In a similar situation, Josie troubled her in-law's religious contention that her co-motherhood constituted a sin by invoking the DQM-based view of co-motherhood as moral and a positive influence for children:

We want to raise a child with love and in loving situation with wonderful moral background and education, and all the things that you would equip a child with to go through life. And so a two, a two-parent, loving family is what does that. (FG3, 248–253)

Here, Josie positions her parenting as moral in that she and her partner will provide her child with a strong, moral background through love. Moral motherhood shifts from a state of privilege granted to biological mothers and into one focused on positive child outcomes.

Summary of discourses. Overall, the DEM characterizes motherhood, by its nature, as inherently biological, requiring only one female, and in effect providing the child an irreplaceable father. Together, these aspects render biological motherhood as the most morally upright form of motherhood, located at the apex of the motherhood hierarchy. The DQM serves as a response to the DEM by unhinging motherhood from biology, expanding the mother category to be inclusive of nonbiological co-mothers. In the DQM, nonbiological co-mothers are not viewed as lesser mothers. Rather, they are seen as a valuable addition to the family and as a moral and fit replacement for the biological father. Having discussed the two competing discourses of motherhood animating co-mother conversations about border work, in this next section, we discuss the discursive interplay of the DEM and the DQM.

The Interplay of the Discourses of Essential and Queer Motherhood

Research question two asked, "In what ways does the interplay of competing discourses construct the meaning of 'motherhood' in female-female co-mother focus group conversations about border work?" The two competing discourses of motherhood, the DEM and the DQM, manifested a high degree of semantic contact or significant amount of polemic struggle (e.g., negating, countering, hybrids). Two overarching forms of interplay were identified: synchronic interplay and discursive transformation.

Synchronic Interplay

Synchronic interplay was the predominant form of interplay in this data-set. The synchronic interplay of the DEM and the DQM featured two primary patterns: negating and countering.

Negating. Negating, the more prevalent of the two patterns of synchronic interplay, typically manifested as the DQM negating the DEM. Co-mothers first voiced the competing DEM only to discredit its constituent elements as a means of ultimately asserting the superiority of the DQM. For example, Kendra recounts her mother's reaction after learning that Kendra and her partner were planning to have a second child. Kendra's mother immediately asked Kendra:

"Why don't you have it this time?" ... I'm like, "I don't want to!" It's a big perk of Lesbianism, "I don't have to have the kid." Uh ... [group chuckle] it was a big, big selling point for me ... I really wanted the kid without getting pregnant, so this is good. (FG9, 416-424)

This statement highlights the DEM in that Kendra's mother wants Kendra to be the birth mother of her future grandchildren, therein placing the importance on biological connection. Kendra refutes the DEM with the DQM by arguing that she does not need to have a biological connection to be a mother, and in fact, she views the option

of not having a baby as a positive attribute of being partnered with a woman, therein positioning the DQM as ideal.

Countering. Countering, the slightly less polemic or adversarial pattern of synchronic interplay, typically manifested as the co-mothers' calling upon the DQM to counter the DEM. Whereas in both negating and countering patterns, utterances ultimately sided with the DQM, the manner in which this was accomplished differed. As exemplified above, in the negating pattern, the DQM totally rejected the competing DEM. The DEM was only voiced as a means of claiming it irrelevant and the DQM superior. By contrast, in instances of countering, limited worthiness of the DEM was acknowledged before the utterance proceeded to challenge the DEM's merits and ultimately side with the DQM. Representative is Josie's countering of her religiously conservative sister-in-law's DEM-infused concerns over moral motherhood:

I understand the Biblical issues, and you and I can talk religion, we can talk Christianity all day long and we can talk scripture, but when it comes right down to it Jesus said love one another as I've loved you, and that's where I come from. (FG3, 391-396)

Josie grants legitimacy to the DEM's concerns over morality; indeed, both the DQM and the DEM include the issue of moral motherhood in their core constituent elements. But, Josie then proceeds to counter the DEM in terms of how moral motherhood is defined, linguistically marked by the use of "but." Whereas her sister-in-law's scripture-based definition of moral motherhood espouses the DEM view that nonbiological co-motherhood is morally corrupt, Josie's DQM definition of moral motherhood derives from Jesus' teachings on love. Jesus' teachings underscore a DQM-based view of moral motherhood as measured by nonbiological criteria (e.g., a mother's love, her positive impact on the child) rather than by the DEM criteria of biological relatedness. Similarly, Rana discusses difficulties she faces when individuals bring up religious concerns with her family:

They'll say something about how, you know, "they've prayed a lot about this" and, you know, and "come to this kind of conclusion" and I'll say, "You know, I also have prayed a lot about this, and come to a different conclusion, so, you know, I don't know what you want to do with that, but it seems like we might just have to agree to disagree. But it's just different for me." (FG4, 1154-1176)

Interestingly, both Rana and the individuals she speaks with utilize prayer as a means through which to understand morality. In highlighting this similarity, Rana grants credence to the importance of morality as tied to motherhood (and that religion is the source of morality), thereby acknowledging the DEM. However, she then points out that through prayer she has reached the conclusion that moral motherhood can be reached through the DQM.

Transformative Interplay

The second overarching form, nonpolemic transformative interplay, manifested when the DEM and the DQM suspended their competition and instead combined to create new meanings of motherhood wrought from the DEM–DQM intersection. Two different forms of transformative interplay surfaced: hybrids and aesthetic moments.

Hybrid. To create hybrid meanings, co-mothers moved the formerly competing DEM and the DQM beyond a polemic either/or orientation toward a both/and semantic logic. In hybrid form, the participants suspended the struggle between the DEM and the DQM, and instead mixed them together to create a new meaning of motherhood. This was exemplified in interactions between Olivia, her partner, and Olivia's father. Concerned that her father's DEM view of motherhood would preclude him from seeing nonbiological grandchildren as full-fledged grandchildren, Olivia and her partner, congruent with the DQM, denaturalized biological motherhood by making Olivia the genetic mother and her partner the gestational mother:

We harvested my eggs, artificially inseminated them, and then implanted them in my partner ... the argument was made, "But dad they are yours, because they're my eggs and so they're related to you," and that really made a difference for him. (FG3, 140–198)

Whereas a biological mother is typically considered both the genetic mother and the gestational mother, here Olivia and her partner separated the two roles: Olivia's partner enacted the role of the gestational mother and Olivia enacted the role of the genetic mother. By doing this, they created a biological connection to both mothers. In the process of satisfying the DEM requirement that motherhood be biologically based, Olivia and her partner simultaneously denaturalized biological motherhood by problematizing the conventional view of biological motherhood as only the woman who carries the child to term. Via this DEM–DQM hybrid, the co-mothers convinced Olivia's father that Olivia is also an authentic biological mother based on her contributions to their children's genetic makeup.

The second hybrid emerged when outsider remarks naturalized a biological connection between child and nonbiological mother. In the excerpt below, Laura, a nonbiological mother, describes a teacher's remarks that one of her daughters bears resemblance to Laura:

One of the teachers had made mention to me that she thought that our daughter really resembled my partner. ... but that our other daughter just really resembled me. She goes, "I don't know how that can happen, but it did, you know." (FG10, 1526–1529)

In this instance, the outsider (here the child's teacher, in other instances nurses, doctors, family friends) invokes the DEM presumption that motherhood is a natural, biologically based phenomenon by ascribing resemblance between mother and child. The discursive

sive hybridity occurs in that the DEM's biological criterion of motherhood is used to authenticate a nonbiological mother's motherhood. In this hybrid, speakers linguistically mark the discreteness of the discursive worldviews of the DEM and the DQM (in this excerpt, "I just don't know how that can happen"), reminiscent of Baxter's (2011) analogy of hybrids as oil and vinegar combining to form discursive salad dressing. Speakers recognize that like oil and vinegar, the DEM and the DQM normally are not compatible. But in this instance, like when oil and vinegar momentarily combine to create salad dressing, the biological underpinning of the DEM worldview serves to authenticate the motherhood of the nonbiological mother. Though not biologically related, the relatedness of the nonbiological mother and child is deemed so genuine that outsiders begin using tenets of the DEM to describe the mother-child relationship.

Aesthetic moment. Whereas in their hybrid form, the DEM and the DQM retained their essential properties, in the aesthetic moment, the meaning systems of the DEM and the DQM were fundamentally reconstructed through their process of combining. Moreover, located in the affective, rather than rational realm, the discursive struggles of the DEM and DQM dissipated into a felt sense of wholeness, albeit fleeting and in the moment. An aesthetic moment occurred when Dina recounted a conversation with her mother that transpired during the insemination process of her partner. Forgetting that Dina would be the child's nonbiological mother, Dina's mother wondered about the possibility of twins, something only possible if Dina were to be biologically related to the child:

She [Dina's mother] was excited about this happening and she said, "Well, you know, twins run in our family because Dina's grandma was a twin." (Group: Ohhh, Aww ... laughter) And we all kind of sat there and went, but wait. It was really, it was really nice to have her so excited about us trying. (Moderator: Not even thinking.) Dina: That it wasn't me. (Group: All talking at once. Leslie: That's so cool. Yeah, it is cool. Moderator: That is so transcendent.) Dina: Yeah, I thought that was beautiful. (FG1, 1586-1604)

In this aesthetic moment, the DEM and DQM merged to create the (im)possibility that, due to the nonbiological mother Dina's genetic makeup, the female-female couple might give birth to twins. Additionally, this reconstruction of the DEM and DQM was located in the affective realm. In real time, this aesthetic moment provided Dina a profound sense of joy and contentment. In the story realm, Dina's retelling mirrored this interactional beauty. Her retelling initially sparked an outpouring of emotion, which was then followed by a series of retellings by other mothers of similar aesthetic moments they had experienced. For example, Leslie, the nonbiological mother, retold a similar experience in which her child's pediatrician described forgetting that Leslie did not give birth to the couple's son:

Like she'll [pediatrician] say things like, "God, it is so weird, Leslie, but like, your son has some mannerisms like you and he looks like you and his eyes are the same, you know." And she's like "it's so weird because sometimes I forget that, you know, you didn't have him. I see a lot of him in you." (FG1, 1872-1882)

We recognize that Leslie's retelling has similarities to the second hybrid described above in which, invoking the DEM, speakers naturalize a biological connection between child and nonbiological mother by remarking that the child bears resemblance to the nonbiological mother. We argue, however, that stories such as Leslie's provide a useful way to understand the subtle distinctions between discursive hybrids and aesthetic moments. In contrast to the hybrid form in which speakers linguistically indicate their continued belief in the DEM and the DQM as discrete discursive worldviews, in the aesthetic moment form, speakers reference a brief moment of forgetting in which the tenets of the DEM and the DQM momentarily lose their distinct parts. Unlike the hybrid example in which the teacher notes that one child looked like the birth mother and one the co-mother, wherein both the DEM and the DQM were given credence, Leslie's pediatrician sees Leslie's son as belonging wholly to both.

The retellings of similar moments in the focus group setting provided a rich example of the performative components of the fleeting nature of aesthetic moments. Moreover, the first author, physically present to moderate the focus group, also experienced an affective charge and fleeting sense of wholeness. Her own level of emotional engagement was so intense that she spontaneously retold a narrative of a similar aesthetic moment in which her father momentarily forgot the nonbiological nature of her adoptive motherhood and questioned whether her adoptive daughter might have inherited a genetic predisposition toward sleep walking from their side of the family.

Discussion

Utilizing RDT, this study explored the meanings of "motherhood" voiced in co-mother focus group conversations about border work. Two primary discourses emerged: the DEM and the DQM. Invoking prior cultural utterances of authentic motherhood as biological, monomaterial, and hetero-patriarchal (Park, 2013), the DEM positions mothers who meet these standard as morally ideal. In direct opposition is the DQM, which widens the role of motherhood beyond the culturally privileged understandings of essential motherhood. The DQM articulates its resistance in direct response to the DEM's primary concerns with biology, monomaterialism, hetero-patriarchy, and morality. The DQM decenters the DEM by authenticating motherhood not through genetic linkage but rather through nonbiological criteria, such as emotional closeness, positivity, or love and care for a child. In denaturalizing the role of biological motherhood, the DQM validates the motherhood of the nonbiological co-mother and destabilizes the family patriarch by framing two women as competent to raise children independent of a biological father. Finally, the DQM rebuffs the DEM by positioning nonbiological motherhood as a morally upright alternative to the idealized heterosexual, biological mother. Results demonstrate continued cultural salience of the DEM as the more centered, centripetal cultural discourse of motherhood and the DQM as the more marginalized centrifugal discourse. Via countering and negating, co-mothers gave some cre-

dence to the DEM but ultimately privileged the DQM as more important than to the meaning of motherhood than the DQM.

The discursive hybridity and aesthetic moment described in the current report contributes to the emerging understandings of how transformative interplay manifests and the meanings engendered (see also Norwood, 2012). Importantly, the first hybrid evidenced not just a discursive negotiation of competing discourses, but also a non-linguistic symbolic negotiation: co-mothers used one mother's eggs and the other's uterus to have a child. The idea that meanings can be negotiated in not only discursive, but also embodied ways adds to current RDT theorizing. Moreover the embodied experiences of participants (and of the researcher in the current analysis) in identifying the aesthetic moment in this study add an additional layer of richness to the largely excluded affective component of meaning making in discourse analysis. But, given that contrapuntal analysis is a decidedly discourse-based data analytic technique raises the question as to whether the affective qualities inherent in the aesthetic moment can be satisfactorily accounted for with contrapuntal analysis.

The question is not about the process whereby a contrapuntal analyst identifies the discursive transformation foundational to the aesthetic moment. Certainly contrapuntal analysis makes quite clear how discursive transformation is identifiable. But, if aesthetic moments are located in the emotional rather than rational realm, how is the requisite affective charge and (momentary) felt sense of wholeness identified and analyzed? In the current report this was relatively easy. First, the merger of the DEM and the DQM created the (im)possibility that due to the nonbiological mother's genetic makeup, the female-female couple might give birth to twins (discursive). Second, in real time the nonbiological mother reported a felt sense of joy and wholeness (affect). Third, in the story realm (in this data-set, the retelling occurred in the context of a focus group), the retelling mirrored the aesthetic beauty of the real time interactional event, evidenced by co-mothers competing for the conversational floor to retell similar aesthetic moments (affect). Fourth, the first author's affective charge and fleeting sense of wholeness ignited her own retelling of a similar aesthetic moment when her father momentarily forgot the nonbiological nature of her adoptive motherhood (discursive and affective).

As such, in the current analysis, both the discursive transformation and affective charge were evidenced in the verbatim transcripts. But how might analysts display less verbally inflected instances? Researchers might borrow from conversational analytic practices and consider transcribing affectively charged moments in vivid detail (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984, for a guide to Jeffersonian Transcription Notation). Noting increases and decreases in volume, audible inhalations, pauses, and rising or falling pitch might provide contrapuntal analysts more evidence to account for affective charge. Additionally, researchers can attune to the affective realm during data collection and then carefully demark affective moments during transcription.

In our effort to advance family communication scholarship, we examined the culture-motherhood intersection. We selected not only a potentially dialogically expansive relationship site (co-motherhood) but also a potentially dialogically expansive

communicative episode (co-mothers' border work). At the beginning, we recognized that our selected communicative episode was ripe with dialogic potential to examine how co-mothers "speak culture" as they communicate at the borders of public and private life. What we failed to see at the outset, however, was how the prevalence of reported speech (Voloshinov, 1986) would augment the dialogic potential of the analytic texts. Whereas cultural discourses are often implicit rather than explicit in discourse, co-mothers' use of reported speech frequently rendered motherhood discourses highly visible. In answer to specific probes designed to elicit conversational specifics (e.g., "How did the conversation go?" "What did that person say to you?" "What did you say?" "How did the person respond?"), co-mothers explicitly voiced cultural discourses of motherhood via (in)direct reported speech, sometimes even reenacting performative aspects of the speech.

As a whole, RDT reworks dominant assumptions in family communication studies and the concept of border work is no exception. This study augments recent RDT investigations (e.g., Suter et al., 2014) representative of an emergent critical family communication perspective, which has been recently characterized by its explicit focus on power, critique of the public-private binary, and turn toward resistance, critique, and transformation (Suter, *in press*). Attention to border work in the current investigation illuminates each of these three aspects. Here, border work highlights the power dimensions embedded in seemingly mundane co-mother conversations with others. Furthermore, the politicized nature of family communication is quite evident in this study. Competing perspectives related to (de)naturalizing biology, (mono/poly)maternalism, the family patriarch, and (im)morality of motherhood animate co-mother conversations with families, friends, and community members. Border work illuminates the interrelationship between everyday co-motherhood interactions and larger, macro-level socio-cultural issues, which in effect deconstructs the public/private binary long presumed in family communication studies (Baxter, 2011). By extension, acceptance of the socio-cultural aspects of family communication recognizes that these practices can both reify oppressive normative practices (e.g., the "father knows best" dynamic in family dinnertime narratives; Ochs & Taylor, 1995), and resist, critique, or possibly even transform existing arrangements in not only private, but also public spheres.

While currently the most undertheorized aspect of the emergent critical family communication perspective, the transformative potential provides a promising direction for future empirical and theoretical work. For instance, the current study makes it clear that communicative challenges faced by co-mothers do not take place in a vacuum, but rather take place within social and legal contexts that often do not recognize both co-mothers as legal parents. As such, given the current lack of second-parent recognition laws in the majority of states, future work might examine how legal discourses surrounding parentage uphold or rebuff cultural discourses of parenting. Study results demonstrated how voicing the DQM helps create authenticity for co-motherhood in immediate interactions with outsiders. Future research might also examine if and how calling upon these same discourses may instantiate policy change. Notably, co-mothers

preferred a functional approach to defining family rather than a structural approach. The changing nature of family mandates reconsidering definitions of family not just intellectually but also sociopolitically. As definitions of family change, it is imperative that laws and policies reflect the needs of all family forms.

Study results suggest several additional possibilities for future research. Given that reported speech rendered cultural discourses more explicit than might have occurred otherwise, future data collection measures might elicit reported speech to similarly highlight interpenetrating cultural discourses (see above for exemplar probing questions for interview protocols). Second, future research might consider how the DQM (re)articulates itself in other forms of polymaternalism, such as adoptive, step, and polygynous motherhood. By its nature, adoptive motherhood encompasses both a birth mother and an adoptive mother. Step motherhood necessitates a mother and a step-mother. Polygynous motherhood involves multiple mothers and one father. Like female-female co-motherhood, adoptive, step, and polygynous forms of motherhood interrupt monomaternalism (Park, 2013). Recognition of this key similarity, however, runs the risk of ignoring important differences between these polymaternal motherhood forms. For instance, whereas female-female co-mothers by definition sit outside the hetero-patriarchal family system, polygamous families inevitably embrace the hetero-patriarchy in their version of polymaternalism. Future RDT-based inquiries might investigate how the DQM articulates similarly and/or differently in variant forms of polymaternal families. In addition, when calling upon the DQM, co-mothers in the current study paralleled ideas from Hays' (1996) explication of the discourse of intensive mothering when co-mothers authenticated their motherhood using nonbiological criteria (e.g., putting a child's needs above the mother's needs). The discourse of intensive mothering positions the mother as a fundamentally selfless and all-intensive being who is willing to give full investment and effort to her children. It is here that the DQM's tenet of (de)naturalizing biology seemingly draws from the discourse of intensive mothering, where effort, not biology, authenticates motherhood. However, the DQM and the discourse of intensive motherhood diverge. In the DQM co-mother effort authenticates nonbiological motherhood where in the discourse of intensive motherhood effort is the benchmark upon which good mothers are measured. Such inquiries might unearth alternate radiants of meaning of the DQM.

In addition to noting these avenues of future research, it is equally important to give credence to the potential of the current study's usefulness beyond the discipline. The prevalence of interplay demonstrates that the DEM and the DQM are not always dichotomous. Alternate meanings of motherhood created by the DEM and DQM's discursive interpenetrations might be used beyond the discipline to facilitate greater mainstream understandings of other variants of contemporary co-motherhood (e.g., adoptive, step, and polygynous).

In positioning the studied co-mother utterances within the wider US culture, it is important to note that the majority of mothers were of relatively high income and educational status. Co-mother narratives voiced by women with lower socioeconomic status

and/or education levels may construct motherhood differently. Economic and educational privilege might empower calling upon the centrifugal DQM discourse. Future research might investigate how differing backgrounds inflect voicings of the centripetal DEM or centrifugal DQM.

Finally, future work might explore discursive border work of male–male co-fathers. While both lesbian and gay families remain understudied in family communication, when researched, the focus has been on female–female rather than male–male families (Suter & Strasser, 2013). In effect, discourses of fatherhood, and in particular co-fatherhood, remain relatively unexplored. Evidence suggests that cultural discourses surrounding lesbian and gay family forms differ in important ways (Suter & Strasser). Future studies might unpack how meaning-making processes of co-motherhood and co-fatherhood differ in culturally and theoretically significant ways.

As inflected in the current study, RDT provides a strong theoretical foundation for focusing on discursive power (see also: Baxter, Norwood, Asbury, & Scharp, 2014; Suter et al., 2014). True to a dialogic conception of power, power was located in circulating cultural discourses of motherhood. Concerns about discourses of motherhood usurped concerns about co-mother subjectivity. Reflecting dialogism's worries over discursive closure (Deetz, 2001), the current inquiry problematized conceptions of motherhood as a natural state, reimagining motherhood as historicized and politicized. Reclaiming conflicts and tensions inherent in modern US motherhood, this investigation broke down the reifications and objectifications inherent in the stagnant DEM, recovering the creativity and generativity of struggling, disparate voices at play in today's motherhood, evidenced by the discovery of new meanings of motherhood emerging from the discursive transformation of the newly co-mingled DEM and DQM.

While the micro–macro link has been championed in other areas of the discipline (e.g., language and social interaction (viz., Moerman, 1990), family communication's contribution has been largely neglected. Reconceptualizing family communication as embedded within broader sociocultural systems and discourses addresses the characterization of family communication studies as unconcerned with matters of the public sphere (cf. Baxter & Asbury, 2015). Additionally, recognition of this public–private interface potentiates disciplinary cross-fertilizations between family communication and more macro-oriented sub-fields, such as culture and communication, organizational communication, critical rhetorical studies, and communication ethics (cf. Baxter & Asbury). Family communication's study of micro-level familial processes promises to enhance other areas of the discipline given its potential to unpack how culture and society interpenetrate familial interactions, processes, and practices.

Note

- [1] FG9 refers to the transcript of focus group number nine and 665–667 refers to the specific lines in the transcript. This citation practice is employed throughout the manuscript.

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